

The role of urban communities in promoting sustainable lifestyles: Shay Ben Yosef

Abstract

The aim of this review is to assist in the formulation of policy for the development of sustainable urban communities in Israel.

Communities exist in response to a human need to belong, to develop significant social connections and to influence their lifestyle. Urban communities in the 21st century are organized at diverse forms, depending on their characteristics and purposes. Communities are sometimes close-knit and sometimes amorphous, sometimes face to face and sometimes virtual. In this document, particular attention is paid to the geographic parameter of communities, which exist in an urban context, in a neighborhood or a section of a city. The purpose of the document is to review ways of generating joint interests within a geographical context, such as through leisure pursuits, joint identity (such as on the basis of religion) or on any other basis.

The document begins with a review of the characteristics of a community as a human need and the ways it emerges in an urban context. More detailed clarifications are then given concerning the reasons which drive governmental and municipal institutions to develop communities in the urban context. The reasons include raising the commitment of residents to support development and conservation of the city, involve citizens in the planning and implementation of urban projects and in the promotion of urban activities, such as education, health, personal security etc, and finally, harnessing the community to promote sustainable wellbeing and the environment.

Sustainable urban communities are seen as the key to enabling future generations to live a good life. Promotion of such communities requires professional action, which has continuity and is integrated into governmental institutions, civic society, the business sector, and most of all into the communities themselves. The paper then proposes that the capability of urban communities to promote sustainability depends on the following five foundations: the credibility of its leadership, effective use of material resources, the ability to innovate and organize, the development of social capital, connectivity and communication within the community and between the community and its surroundings and the development of a culture of sustainability.

The final part of the paper presents practical aspects of developing sustainable urban communities. It identifies the barriers and levers for generating change. The barriers include: adverse incentives, encouragement of the prevalent consumer culture, indifference to risks, privatization of public spaces and postponing impending issues. The levers for change include: transforming approaches from reliance on the system to recognition of human responsibility, moving from market and consumer norms to community relationships, open access codes, new digital media, and the role of communities in urban planning.

The paper continues with practical ways to promote sustainable urban communities, including 4 strategic options: Community Capacity building (CCB), policy planning and design,

change through social action, and change through social reform (through coalitions of change agents) and proposes 6 action principles: self reliance, community sensemaking, methods and approaches for community organizing , high quality connectivity and communication within and without the community, inclusiveness (joint space and places to change), and expanding the range of opportunities.

Finally, the document reviews key potential 'agents of change' for the promotion of sustainable urban communities.