PART III
SYNERGIES OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
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14. Introduction

To create a neighbourhood takes time
(Oral source: Joe Berridge, 2007)

In striving towards a society where the demand of oil and other endless resources are more sustainable than today, actions in urban planning must take place. In the earlier part of this thesis focus has been on how a new transit system can be implemented and become a spine in a new built environment to decrease oil dependency in the transportation sector. This part of the thesis deals with a transformation of industrial land into becoming a new mixed use community with ambition to reach not just environmental sustainability but also social sustainability.

The sustainability concept is often divided into three parts; environmental, economic, and social. Also, modern city planning can be divided into three different ideologies; Everyday Urbanism, New Urbanism, and Post Urbanism. In planning Toronto Waterfront Hammarby Sjöstad has been a model. It can be seen as a New Urbanist project with a high ambition regarding environmental sustainability, but have they reached social sustainability?

Waterfront projects around the world are rough industrial areas that are transformed into new mixed communities. In order to become show cases to the world the neighbourhoods are design foremost to be attractive for new citizens and tourists and perhaps less attention is payed to everyday life of ordinary residents.

In a homogenous community where the residents have the same economic possibilities it is easier to reach environmental sustainability. But what can be seen as missing is diversity. Building today is so expensive that not everyone can afford to live or run businesses in new neighbourhoods. To a great deal we build for “the rich” so that the moving chain will give to “the poor”. The result is that people who used to work, live and use the area are pushed away on behalf of people of high-income, known as a form of gentrification.

Social sustainability is more than city planning and physical form which makes this part of the thesis an utopia moving somewhat on the edge to what planners can control.

Toronto, the most diverse city of the world, has been explained as an “accidental city”. We found during our stay that there are many proud Torontonians who have built their lives and dreams, creating not perhaps beautiful but rather inspiring communities, such as Kensington Market and the Islands, areas that are coloured by everyday life.

In order to answer my secondary question What benefits and problems will you get by weaving environmental and social sustainability together in planning a new community? I will discuss the benefits of mixing environmental ideas of Swedish planning projects with mainly Everyday urbanism in a new community at Cherry beach.
15. The social ecosystem

Suppose that we “solve” environmental sustainability by using the knowledge we have on “building green”, will it make the community all through sustainable?

No, we forgot about people!

To reach the fourth core principle set by The City of Toronto making the waterfront project become dynamic and diverse new communities for all citizens to establish a “critical mass” of people (City of Toronto, 2003, pg. 10) we need to focus more on social sustainability.

15.1 Sense of home

The importance of social sustainability is something that many planners have highlighted. Among them William McDonough who express that the social ecosystem that consists of public spaces that draw people together, is the city’s heart and soul (McDonough, 2008, pg. 62).

Many urban planners have also explained what a healthy neighbourhood should comprise, but few show a way to reach that goal. For example Christopher Alexander points out a couple of qualities in the neighbourhood such as sense of privacy and intimacy, safety from violence and theft, safety from noise from traffic and pollution in air and water, trees and gardens, places to sit, streets and public places where everyone feels at home and uniqueness of the neighbourhood. But can you design the physical space to make people “feel at home”? Or should this be reached by an open planning process in dialogue with residents, children at school and shop owners in trying to make them form the “sense of home”?

15.2 Soft infrastructure

Further, Trevor Hancock a founding member of the Canadian Green Party, urban planning and development has long been fixated on the community’s hard infrastructure (sewers, roads, electrical, gas, water). Growing concern with the environmental sustainability has led to new design and operation of this hard infrastructure to make it more “green”, including storm water and sewage management, energy and water efficiency and an emphasis on walkability and a good public transit system (Electronic source: Hancock, 2008). Concerning the hard infrastructure and ecological sustainability, Hammarby Sjöstad is a good example (see page 20).

Like William McDonough Trevor Hancock senses that a community is much more than its physical form and architecture. It requires economic activity as well as “soft infrastructure”, where people make social investments. Planning a new neighbourhood is a human process and to become socially sustainable requires that people are seen as a resource (Hancock, 2008).

15.3 The aspects of time

The built environment is the biggest and longest-lived investment that a society makes. Like Alexander also Wheeler says that in a long term, 50 or 100 years we need a healthy environment, decent housing, safe public places, uncongested roads, parks and recreational opportunities, and vibrant social interaction. If the community doesn’t live up to these criteria the result is unhealthy human and natural ecosystems, consequently an increased level of suffering. Planning is often seen as taking too long, especially in projects where focus is on public participation, but in this perspective a couple of years creating a new community is well invested time.

15.4 An increased need for public space

We move towards a more individualized society and unconsciously lack a sense of belonging, romantices medieval towns with narrow streets and lots of activity, or the street life that can be found in Asia and India. The social criticizer Robert D. Putnam uses the term “social capital” to explain features of social organization such as networks and norms for mutual benefit and how the way we act in public life is influenced by this. Putnam points out the phenomenon that the social capital is decreasing for the American middle-class, as a result of people being less participatory in organizations and voting (Putnam, 2003).

Further on, Douglas Kelbaugh at the University of Michigan also argues that place and sense of time has been changed with computers, iPods and communications that has forced us to be on 24/7.

As our society becomes more privatized and our culture more narcissistic, there is a greater need and desire to be part of something bigger than our individual selves.

Douglas Kelbaugh (Kelbaugh, 2008, pg. 40)

In this context the importance of public participatory in the planning process and the role the public space plays for interaction to increase the social capital and gain a socially sustainable and healthy community can not be stressed enough. It is widely believed that the social dimension of sustainable development should be given equal weight to environmental and economic goals.
16. Theories on urbanism

16.1 The three urbanisms

There are three ideologies on the cutting edge of contemporary urban planning; Everyday Urbanism, New Urbanism and Post Urbanism. According to Douglas Kelbaugh, depending on the designers aesthetic sensibility urban planners fit somewhere within this spectrum. It is a matter of gut-feeling and what places you as a person seek and where you feel at home; the lively backside, the attractive well-designed neighbourhood or outside the hypermodern building that makes you go wow!

According to Douglas Kelbaugh a healthy metropolis may encompass all of these urbanisms, with Everyday Urbanism taking root in informal settlement on the margins; New Urbanism infilling the downtown, commercial centres and neighbourhoods; and Post Urbanism stand for the exceptional places like the convention centre, the sports arena or airport (Mehrotra, 2005).

16.1.1 Everyday urbanism

Everyday Urbanism is its background in the French philosopher Henry Lefebvre. It builds on everyday, ordinary life and is design by default rather than by intention. It empowers disadvantaged and disenfranchised people and communities by working in the gaps and on the margins. Everyday Urbanism can be seen as somewhat over-romanticising “the ugly”. The bottom-up ideology makes it the most popular and pure rather than the ideal, with vibrant streetscapes where public markets replace chain stores and empty plots are used for garage sales. Margaret Crawford, spokeswoman for Everyday Urbanism, explained in the Michigan Debates that Everyday Urbanism is not large-scale but rather builds on the existing public space and intensifies it, makes it more softer and inhabitable. Everyday Urbanism is not intended to replace other urban designs but to work along with, or on top of or after (Mehrotra, 2005).

16.1.2 New Urbanism

The middle way New Urbanism is an organised movement that can be seen as a sentimental pastiche with faith in good design. Social behaviour is seen as something affected by physical form. A mix of land use and a mix of people should be planned for so that a sense of place will take form. Attractive environments will make people interact and create a healthy sustainable society.

16.1.3 Post urbanism

Post Urbanism displays exciting and sensational environments with hypermodern buildings, a kind of “shopping mall urbanism”. Even though over-scaled, windswept and empty of pedestrians they attract tourists and are often seen as signature buildings and unique features in the city. Post Urbanism is in some sense anti-urban, explained as more of a monologue of the architect.

16.2 Comparison of the three urbanisms

Douglas Kelbaugh argues in favour of New Urbanism as the most appropriate design theory in North America. Social sustainability should in that sense be designed. Christopher Alexander on the contrary states that “you cannot change the soul of a person by putting on lipstick, nor can you do this with architecture. You cannot make the world a better place to live in by changing the style of the buildings.” (Alexander, 2008, pg. 18), which I interpret as questioning if you can reach a social sustainability only by design. The last but not the least supporters of post urbanism ask “why do we need traditional communities in modern times at all?” as a way of questioning urbanism in general.

The backside of New Urbanism projects, such as Hammarby Sjöstad designs tidiness into public space, which makes the neighbourhood somewhat arranged, with little ability to express yourself in the public space. The “sense of home” is designed from the planner’s perspective, often top-down. It accommodates one taste in architecture, popular with developers, elected officials and the middle class (Mehrotra, 2005). The benefits of New Urbanism is that it is a controlled way to plan new neighbourhoods to become ecologically sustainable. New Urbanism areas might not be diverse communities but people who can afford tend to find the areas attractive and enjoy living there.

The benefits of Everyday Urbanism are that the activities that occur in the gaps and on the margins of a city are emphasized and the residents form their own “sense of home”. In public space different activities occur during the year. In everyday life we occupy places, sometimes re-arrange them and for example use public furniture or empty lots for new and unexpected uses like farmer’s markets. The more people feel like they can take up space in their neighbourhood the more activities will occur in public space. People attract people, and the more activities the more people.

The backside of Everyday Urbanism from the planner’s perspective is that we are not in control. Everyday Urbanism is bottom-up and uncontrolled planning without focus on design. Faith is in how residents act and participate. Everyday Urbanism can be a way of reaching a diversity of people but ecological sustainability might be harder to affect. Most often Everyday Urbanism approach is used on already existing environments and not when planning a new community like Cherry beach.

What New Urbanism planners can learn from Everyday Urbanism is to a greater extent how to involve people and let go of the thought of attractive architecture and focus more on people as an attractive element in the city.
16.3 Toronto’s level of urbanism

The City of Toronto has plans for New Urbanism mixed-use neighbourhoods in East Bayfront, West Don Lands, and Lower Don Lands, and at the FilmPort a large-scale film industry will take form (see page 18). Cherry beach is today an industrial area but also a place used by people living on the margins, for camping, recreation, etc. To find a middle way in this planning proposal some hardware must in my opinion be designed, with an Everyday Urbanism approach on top to emphasize and intensify today’s identity of Cherry beach.

16.4 Example Hoogvliet

Michael Speaks at the Californian Institute of Architecture introduces the terms used by the Dutch architects Crimson Architectural Historians; software (ideas, policies, meaning), hardware (buildings, infrastructure etc.), orgware (organization and capacity to deal with software to become hardware).

According to Speaks Everyday Urbanism only deals with software (compare with Trevor Hancock’s “soft infrastructure” on page 40). Using these three terms Crimson made a master plan for Hoogvliet outside Rotterdam that can be seen as a middle way between New Urbanism and Everyday Urbanism. Together with Felix Rottenberg they worked with the motto WiMBY! (Welcome Into My BackYard!) for six years. They set up a council, made up of all parties involved in Hoogvliet renewal. Together they have developed and realised a wide range of experimental buildings, small-scale project and ventures involving music, movies and exhibitions, emphasizing on the existing qualities and involving Hoogvliet residents. The result has been a tree collection, a graveyard for pets, a natural playground, sports fields and a Villa, initiated, built and maintained by residents of Hoogvliet (Electronic source: Wimby!).
17. Weaving environmental and social sustainability together

17.1 Participators

People seek to live in cities that are safe, exciting and fun. This puts pressure on planners to plan for the unpredictable. To reach that goal demands a flexibility, an openness for the back sides of cities and courage to let the community develop to become its own, built and rebuilt by the people who inhabit the neighbourhood, and perhaps not what was imagined and designed in the first place, an everyday approach to urbanism.

In building a new sustainable neighbourhood we (who participate) bring with us each a basket of visions, “green technology”, great design and architecture, and ideas of the process.

No matter if we live in the city or in the countryside we are all part of society, as individuals, as politicians/officials or as part of the market. Involvement and influence differ between these participators, simplified: The Individual affects Politicians who decide What – the Urban planner gives background for How – the Market Realizes - and the Individual Uses.

The municipality is rather slow machinery and the Individual is rather fast, therefore the Individual has got an increased pressure to solve the problems of environmental sustainability. But there are many traps in leading a sustainable life-style and we need to trust each other and society to share the resources and the surplus they give and have faith in the possibility to make a difference.

Stephen Wheeler express that to reach a healthy social ecology planners in particular are required to advocate on behalf of those who do not have access to power or expertise, and to fight for equity and justice (Wheeler, 2003). In that sense, good city planning moves on the edge to politics.

If politicians dare to be brave and set a high ecological goal there are technologies to make a new neighbourhood ecologically sustainable. Health of human communities is harder to grasp than natural ecology and regarding social sustainability the possibility to control or plan is limited. Even so the physical design can make it easier or more difficult for people to make social investments.

17.2 Four points of contact

I’ve found four points of contact where environmental and social sustainability should meet.

17.2.1 Diversity - Mixed use for a mix of users

Mixed use communities are places or streets where different uses are combined; residential, retail, offices, school, sports, culture, parks etc., something that the urban plan according to New Urbanism should control. A mixed used community is characterised by being lively, dynamic and versatile, a community where there is room for everyone regardless of size of wallet, age, gender, cultural background, political view or shoe size. These criteria are fundamental in socially sustainable communities.

Mixed use can also be environmentally sustainable in reference to decrease transportation since you have the ability to both live, work, play and get the service you need within close distance. A mix of housing, commercial space and industry is also more self-reliant when it comes to infrastructure since the demand for service and infrastructure is evened out over the day. At the same time re-use of energy and water is facilitated and synergy effects can be achieved (see density below).

Mixed use is desirable in many planning projects, but can be hard to achieve. Small businesses with small economic possibilities can find it hard to pay rent in newly built areas. The result can be that only luxurious businesses move in to the community, or that retail space stays empty. Striving towards mixed use, flexible design of buildings is desirable, where the first floor easily can be transformed from apartment to a shop or a café. An option is co-housing where you owe your own apartment and the residents have a common space used as a day-care centre, an ecological garden, a car repair hall or a sports facility (Electronic source: Wimby!).

When people both live and work in the neighbourhood you also gain a synergy effect, as the result is a vibrant streetscape during both day and night, consequently a place that is safe, and becomes full of “experiences”.

Optional activities in Västra Hamnen, Malmö, Sweden

Public art in Portugese town, Toronto
Diversity is also a matter of attracting people of different background and with different dreams, as Douglas Kelbaugh express it “to rub shoulder with people from all walks of life” (Kelbaugh, 2008). In able to do so a range from affordable housing to luxurious homes and a range of small private builders to large developers are desirable. Unit sizes that meet the needs of students, couples, larger families, elderly, and people of special needs must be achieved. Mixing people of different social background can be hard unless the state invest in the project to keep prizes down. Another way to reach a higher degree of affordable housing is to set a percentage that the developers have to build in each block.

17.2.2 Density and Urbanity
Benefits of living in a city are both belonging and able to be anonymous, to meet the known and the unknown in everyday life. As people we have strong links in family and friends, and weak links in neighbours and others that we bump into in here and there. In order to reach the three kingpins safe, exciting and fun you need to have enough people, moving and acting in the public space, which require a high density.

Using Industrial land such as the Port Lands is a result of seeing the backside of city sprawl and the positive possibilities to dense the city of Toronto. Concerning environmental sustainability building dense is a way of decreasing the use of cars, and maintain a public transportation system that is an attractive alternative to the car, to have a sufficient infrastructure, and service level you need a community with enough people to use the systems (read more about public transit on page 32, A Personal Rapid Transit System). According to TWRC’s Gateway to a new Canada single used, dispersed neighbourhoods, located far from downtown areas, produce nearly three times more annual greenhouse gas emissions per household than mixed-use compact neighbourhoods near the downtown core (Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, 2002).

Rahul Mehrota, at the University of Michigan, argues that it is not the actual built form but the kinetic fabric - people – that defines the ground reality of a city and the manner in which we experience a particular urban condition (Mehrotra, 2005). The social part of a sustainable community is therefore more about people intensity rather than building density. But for mixed use communities indicators of density are lacking, (Forsyth, 2003) since measuring how many people living, or numbers of dwellings does not cover the most interesting measurement, namely how many people that are staying/acting/moving in the area at different hours. An interesting approach used in Everyday Urbanism projects is “public time” opposed to public space. We can learn a lot by recognizing how we use public space differently depending on time – night and day, season, day of the week, holidays etc. (Mehrotra, 2005, pg. 32)

17.2.3 Private and Public space
In the same way as a diversity of architecture, of people or of arts in an eco-system also public space should be diverse. We use public space for different needs; for transportation, to shop, to watch people, to play, to sit in the sun, for recreation etc. Today a classical way is to divide activities in outdoor space into necessary (to work, to shop, to wait for a bus), optional (to take a walk, to sunbath) and social (involves others – to see and to be seen, to converse), presented by Jan Gehl, professor of urban design. (Gehl, 2001)

Critique towards the newly built condominiums at the Waterfront project in Toronto is that many of the optional and social activities are indoors and exclude everyone who is not owner of an apartment in the specific house.

Further Gehl promotes no walls, short distances, low speed, one level and face-to-face orientation to get visual and auditory contact (Gehl, 2001).

To reach a diversity of public space some public spaces can be designed by planners and others by the residents themselves.

17.1.4 Identity and sense of belonging
Even though Cherry beach should be strongly affected by striving for environmental sustainability the identity of the new community should not mainly be attractive architecture but over time strive to become a unique place Cherry beach, like the Islands or Kensington Market. The identity must mature over time and can not be designed today. The personal rapid transit system could contribute toward this and will help make the area unique.
Sustainability is to great extent connected to behaviour of individuals, and there is a link between urban environment, sense of belonging, and acting in your neighbourhood setting both when it comes to energy efficiency and social investments. Mixed use is of importance but a truly sustainable community is made up by its users and their everyday choices.

The former mayor in Toronto David Crombie expressed at a breakfast meeting in Toronto, 2007, the need for belonging to a community as three questions that you bring with you all your life:

Who am I?
Where do I belong?
How do I behave?

These three questions are linked to each other. In order to make people take action for their living environment people need a sense of belonging. An important part in the making of a new community is public participation. As the Hammarby Sjöstad example shows, part of this can be an information centre, a homepage, follow ups etc. Other ways of creating a sense of place can be accomplished by enhancing the cultural heritage or implementing “uniqueness”. Ideas of letting local artists or ordinary people living in Cherry beach decorate pellars on the PRT guideway is part of creating a sense of belonging and participating (see page 37, Guideway - Aesthetic design).

In an article in the Magazine by Velux, Sumeet Manchanda known from working with One Planet Living, express that information and awareness alone leads only to awareness, and not action. But once people feel like they belong, they act and once they act the choice of a sustainable life-style should be an easy one (Daylight & Architecture, 2008). This includes making public transportation, riding your bicycle, sorting your garbage and growing your own vegetables attractive.

In order to achieve an interest for sustainable choices, such as using renewable energy the profits must be shown. Focus should be on homeowners and tenants, as well as companies so that they can easily see the benefits of making “green” choices. The acceptance for changes is greater if you take part.

Further Sumeet Manchanda express that in order to achieve a sustainable community a goal should be set, but then let the market find the best way to reach that goal (Daylight & Architecture, 2008). By following this advise an urban plan can become flexible for the future and still have a high sustainable goal of low energy consumption.

In my vision Cherry beach can be planned as a new urbanism project with a high ambition regarding environmental sustainability. With less design and more emphasis on people and their everyday life, the new community will be planned with a bottom-up approach that will give people a sense of place and encourage them to act and understand why you should act in an environmentally sustainable way. The area will be open for a diversity of people with attractive public spaces as well as “ugly” backsides open for creativity of everyday life. In a mixed use community of high people intensity during day and night and over the year, and a diversity of public space, people will attract people. People acting in Cherry Beach will make the heart and soul of the community and form urbanity.

To plan with an Everyday Urbanism approach, “everyday” must be given room in the planning process. Since there are no residents at Cherry beach today and since the businesses at Port Lands are slowly going to be moved the planning process must reach out to future residents and Torontonians in general.
18. Analysis - proposal discussion

When planning a new community like Cherry beach the dialogue with the public is one of the most important parts. But in reality there are things that the result of the dialogue can affect and things that are already fixed. In case the decision makers do not elucidate what the public can affect, the people who have ideas and are engaged are given false hopes while making wish lists.

A committee made up of representatives of all parties involved should be created. The committee’s role is to decide the frame that controls what the public can affect. Within these frames there are many ideas that can take place. But it is a matter of a negotiation process, since one idea might prevent another. The dialogue and activities with Torontonians should reach as many forums as possible, focus groups, homepage, festivals, charrettes, walks, building together, camping, contests, playing and other activities that will capture everyday life and everyday dreams and hopes of new residents and businesses. What “feelings” do people wish to find at Cherry Beach? If the wish is for a new green house and a public garden, then the Cherry beach residents are to build it and later on maintain it. What activities should be planned for in the park? Where can we open a 2nd hand shop? How can a car pool be arranged? And what do the community have to provide for at different hours, “public time”? What responsibility does the inhabitants have to take for their own community?

There are already planning documents that aim at the waterfront project to become new mixed use communities for all residents. Words like vibrant, sustainable, equality, imagination, tolerance, creativity, flexibility and multicultural are used. As well as focusing on what people want Cherry beach to become the discussion can also comprise what you do not want Cherry beach to develop into. Are Torontonians hoping for a new quiet middle class community? Are condominums the best solution to make a new city part vibrant?

The benefits of weaving environmental and social sustainability in planning a new community are clear – to reach a diversity of people, people intensity, diversity of space and not the least a Cherry beach identity that goes hand-in-hand with the environment. The problems of weaving environmental and social sustainability together in planning a new community are money – you need investors who are willing to build “green” and apartments that are affordable, time – you need time in planning a new community in a bottom-up approach, engagement – you need to find both politicians, planners, and Torontonians who want to invest their engagement in the creating of Cherry beach.

The planner in this process is the trigger and conflict solver, holding the threads and weaving ideas from the public and the committee together. An open planning process takes time but is motivated by the fact that the built environment is our longest lived investment. One of the challenges in planning a new community with a bottom-up approach is that participators expect result so planners must deliver.

What feelings do people wish for at Cherry beach? Illustrations: a coffee brake at the Ship Channel (above) and autumn at the main park (below).