

Evaluating Social Sustainability in Historical City Center in Turkey: Case Study of Bursa

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Abstract : This study explores the concept of social sustainability and its characteristics in terms of neighborhood (mahalle) which is a social phenomenon in Turkish urban life. As social sustainability indicators that moving away traditional themes toward multi-dimensional measures, the solutions for urban strategies may be achieved through learning lessons from historical precedents. It considers the inherent values of traditional urban forms contribute to the evolution of the city as well as the social functions of it. The study aims to measure non-tangible issues in order to evaluate social sustainability in historic urban environments and how they could contribute to the current urban planning strategies. The concept of neighborhood (mahalle) refers to a way of living that represents the organization of Turkish social and communal life rather than defining an administrative unit for the city. The distinctive physical and social features of neighborhood illustrate the link between social sustainability and historic urban environment. Instead of having a nostalgic view of past, it identifies both the failures and successes and extract lessons of traditional urban environments and adopt them to modern context. First, the study determines the aspects of social sustainability which are issued as the key themes in the literature. Then, it develops a model by describing the social features of mahalle which show consistency within the social sustainability agenda. The model is used to analyze the performance of traditional housing area in the historical city center of Bursa, Turkey whether it meets the residents' social needs and contribute collective functioning of the community. Through a questionnaire survey exercised in the historic neighborhoods, the residents are evaluated according to social sustainability criteria of neighborhood. The results derived from the factor analysis indicate that social aspects of neighborhood are social infrastructure, identity, attachment, neighborliness, safety and wellbeing. Qualitative evaluation shows the relationship between key aspects of social sustainability and demographic and socio-economic factors. The outcomes support that inherent values of neighborhood retain its importance for the sustainability of community although there must be some local arrangements for few factors with great attention not to compromise the others. The concept of neighborhood should be considered as a potential tool to support social sustainability in national political agenda and urban policies. The performance of underlying factors in historic urban environment proposes a basis for both examining and improving traditional urban areas and how it may contribute to the overall city.

Keywords : historical city center, mahalle, neighborhood, social sustainability, traditional urban environment, Turkey

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