The social dimension of the urban village: A comparison of models for sustainable urban development

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The paper explores the social dimension of the urban village debate, by examining recent ideas on the desirable social characteristics of sustainable urban development. Three recent examples of the debate on urban sustainability are analysed: the report of the British government's Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*; the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Initiative, based in Manchester; and the scheme for the Greenwich Millennium Village, in London. Based on a study of their respective publications, a comparison is made of general principles, social objectives, and built-form proposals. These are evaluated in the light of sociological theories of changes in the nature of communities, and three distinct types of community are identified: traditional, modern, and postmodern. The long-term pattern of social and cultural change is found to be markedly at variance with the stated aims of the three examples, and the question of how this might affect the outcome of urban village projects is considered.
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Introduction

This paper considers the social dimension of the urban village debate, by examining recent ideas on the desirable social characteristics of sustainable urban development. It is argued that this debate contains an implicit set of social objectives or aspirations, which are rarely spelled out in detail but are seen in frequent allusions to social concepts of 'village' and 'community' life. Three recent examples of urban sustainability arguments – the report of the Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*; the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Initiative; and the scheme for the Greenwich Millennium Village, currently under construction – are analysed and compared. The meaning and value of their social concepts and aspirations is then evaluated in the light of sociological theory and research, which consistently shows a long-term pattern of change contrary to the published proposals. The question

is asked if this fatally undermines the proposals, or if the social aspirations for sustainable urban development and the urban village could lead to successful developments.[1]

Social sustainability

Sustainable urban development has been proposed as a revalidation of urban living, in contrast with the geographically dispersed city and the high levels of personal mobility that have increasingly become the norm. Urban sustainability is commonly interpreted to mean increased residential densities, a more intense mixing of social groups and functional activities, and reduced spatial mobility. For this concept to work, people will have to accept the idea of living closer together, and in close proximity to a variety of

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[1]The paper draws substantially on work presented at the conference *IAPS 16: Metropolis 2000 – Which Perspectives? Cities, Social Life and Sustainable Development*, and published in Moser, G. *et al*. (eds) (2003) *People, Places and Sustainability.* Göttingen: Hogrefe & Huber.

different people in more heterogeneous neighbourhoods. This will mean significant social change, and behind it is an implicit notion of 'social sustainability', a pattern of social relations within the city that is more sustainable than current patterns. Such a notion is therefore both a critique of the social condition of the city today and a proposal for a more harmonious way of life in the future.

The social critique of the city is a reaction against the consequences of dispersal, segregation, and exclusion. Cities have become more dispersed, with the continuing expansion of suburbs, outward migration to small towns and villages, and (especially in the USA) the emergence of new peripheral settlements or 'edge cities', creating the extensive urbanised region of 'Megalopolis' (Gottman, 1961) or the 'anti-city' (Mumford, 1961, p. 575). The dispersal of urban populations has been highly selective, with the broad consequence that the inner and outer areas of the city have become socially polarised. The migrants to and settlers in the peripheral areas have tended to be better educated, of higher income, and white. The older, inner city areas have thus seen a growing concentration of low-income groups and, in some areas, disadvantaged ethnic minorities. The growing impoverishment of the inner areas has led to increased welfare dependency, crime, and disorder.

As a result of these migration and settlement patterns, many cities have suffered a loss of investment in new employment, the building stock and infrastructure, and a loss of income from residential and business taxes. In the USA, a 'doughnut effect' has been described whereby the older city core is 'hollowed out' while the suburbs and peripheral areas grow and prosper. Some cities have fared relatively better, becoming centres of financial services in the global business economy, attracting major investment in new office districts. Yet this in turn has tended to emphasise the social polarisation of the central areas of the city, with highly visible distinctions between well-paid professionals in the 'new economy' and a ghettoised underclass (Sassen, 1994).

The social patterns of contemporary urbanisation – increased segregation, polarisation, and ghettoisation – are widely taken as negative indicators of sustainability. If the sustainable city has to be denser and more diverse, as is generally argued on environmental grounds, then it follows that social segregation and dispersal would have to be checked and reversed, implying that people will be living closer together in socially heterogeneous districts. Since, on the face of it, this is the exact opposite of current social trends, then the social implications of sustainable urban development proposals have to be tested – will people accept living in such conditions, and will they willingly choose to do so? This is a major dilemma for the advocates for urban sustainability, which challenges the social viability of the environmentally sustainable city.

Proposals for sustainable urban development

There are many proposals for more sustainable patterns of urban development in current circulation, emanating from policy makers, academics, consultants, and practitioners. In order to explore the social content of these proposals, I have selected three recent examples, which represent different levels of ambition and generality:

- *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (TAUR) is the report of a Task Force appointed by the UK government in 1998 to 'identify causes of urban decline … and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods'. Chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside (the architect Richard Rogers), it published its findings and recommendations in June 1999 (Urban Task Force, 1999). The report was intended to inform a national debate on the future of cities.
- The *Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood Initiative* (SUNI) was established in Manchester in 1996 by the urban regeneration consultants URBED, with the support of the Department of the Environment's Environmental Action Fund. It grew out of URBED's work on the regeneration of Hulme, a 1960s deck-access housing estate that had fallen into physical and social decline, and which was mostly demolished. The aim of SUNI was 'to provide a focus for research, training, promotion and technical assistance related to principles that will make cities more sustainable', and its main vehicle has been a newsletter, *SUNdial*, with a related website (www.urbed.co.uk/sun). It also intends to encourage a wide debate about appropriate

forms of development at the neighbourhood level (see Rudlin and Falk, 1998).

- *Greenwich Millennium Village* (GMV) is a current development project that forms part of the regeneration of the Greenwich peninsular in London, site of the Millennium Dome. A competition was launched in 1997 by English Partnerships for an innovative residential and mixed development, and won by a consortium including the architects Ralph Erskine and Hunt Thompson. The project started on site in December 1999, and had its first residents in 2001. It is intended to be innovative on several fronts, and to offer a 'model' for other similar developments.

The three examples are compared in Table 1, which summarises their general principles, social objectives, and built-form proposals. The comparison here is based on the literature generated by the three organisations, and not on a study of built examples. Even though SUNI and GMV have led to built projects, it is still very early to identify patterns of social relations or the emergence of stable social characteristics. The analysis of their literature will be valuable as a preliminary stage in evaluating the schemes themselves. It also seems particularly appropriate in the case of these three proposals, each of which claims the status of a 'model' for others to emulate. Taking the three headings in turn, we can see a strong consensus about both the ends and means of sustainable urban development.[2]

General principles

The three examples support the general aim of countering trends towards the 'dispersed city'. All three refer to the need to attract or encourage people to live in the city, people who would otherwise have chosen to move to the suburbs. Many more people can now choose where they live, so SUNI and GMV intend to create new 'models' of sustainable urban living that will persuade them that a high-density neighbour-

[2]It should be noted that there are overlaps of interests and personnel between the three examples cited, and this must be expected to reinforce the consensus between them. For example, Lord Rogers chaired the Urban Task Force and his firm was involved with the masterplan for the Greenwich Peninsula; Countryside Properties is a member of the consortium building GMV and its chairman, Alan Cherry, was a member of the Task Force; and there are cross-cutting relationships involving common sponsors and supporters, such as English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation.

hood in the city is at least as attractive as a low-density suburb. For GMV, this amounts to 'reinventing' a pattern of urban living – the 'classic urban village' – that has been successful in the past. TAUR pitches its appeal to higher social and political aspirations, with its reference to 'a new equilibrium between cities, society and nature', but all three examples invoke similar lofty ideals. They clearly see themselves as leading a movement, in tones that sometimes verge on the messianic.

Social objectives

A common notion of 'community' informs the three examples, with three main components: stability, diversity, and integration. They aim to create places where people will want to stay, in order to reduce residential mobility and create a more stable local population. They want to see a diverse local population, referring in particular to a variety of ethnic groups, age groups, and social classes (gender diversity, presumably, being taken for granted). All three refer to a desire for social integration within this diverse population, and SUNI and GMV emphasise the importance of a 'sense of community' – feelings of belonging, shared identity, and social responsibility.

Built-form proposals

To achieve these challenging demographic and social objectives, the three examples offer very similar design solutions, based on higher densities, mixed uses, and 'traditional' urban forms. The case for higher densities stems mainly from the wider environmental arguments for the 'compact city', but this is seen as socially desirable too, as a means of encouraging social interaction with neighbours. The case for mixed uses is mainly economic, to do with creating a varied local economy, but again it is thought of as having social benefits, for example, by providing a high level of neighbourhood services. If more of people's needs can be met locally, then they might travel less and have more local social contact. The case for 'traditional' urban forms has become the conventional wisdom of urban design, as seen, for example, in the American 'New Urbanism' movement (Calthorpe, 1993; Katz, 1994). The main forms proposed are terraced houses, with some low-rise apartment blocks, facing onto conventional streets, and arranged around shared semi-private garden courts. This is a variation of the 'urban block' or perimeter

Table 1 Comparison of three contemporary proposals for sustainable urban development

Scheme	Towards an urban renaissance	Sustainable urban neighbourhood initiative	Greenwich millennium village
General principles	• To counter depopulation and social segregation/polarisation	• To create new models for sustainable urban living, including social and economic sustainability, to rival the suburbs	• To provide a model for sustainable urban living
	• To persuade people to move back to the city	• To attract people back to live in cities, persuade others not to leave	• 'Meeting the aspirations of people who would otherwise go to the suburbs'
	• To create a 'new equilibrium between cities, society, and nature'	• To bring about re-urbanisation	• To 'reinvent the classic urban village for the 21st century'
Social objectives	• Social well-being	• Balance/mix of social classes and age groups	• Residential neighbourhood with a 'profound sense of community'
	• Social integration	• Form a close community	• Social mix and social cohesion
	• Ethnic/cultural diversity	• Local economic opportunity	• A place 'where people will go on wanting to be, indefinitely'
	• Mixed communities	• 'Feeling of community', shared responsibility	
	• Social stability	• Resident involvement in design and management	
Built-form proposals	• Compact urban form, with traditional streets	• High-density neighbourhoods	(i) High density, low to medium rise
	• Higher densities, around transport hubs	• Mix of uses and tenures	(ii) Mixed uses
	• Mixed uses at all levels	• Urban blocks, with permeable street pattern	(iii) Mixed tenures (owned, rented, shared, flexible)
	• Mixed tenures and income groups	• 'Balanced incremental development'	(iv) Intermingling of different tenures ('mixed integration')
	• Creating 'mixed use and integrated Urban neighbourhoods'		(v) Flexible/adaptable internal layouts
Referents	• Waterfront, Leeds	• Hulme, Manchester	• Hampstead, Highgate, Wimbledon, Putney (London)
	• Clerkenwell, London	• Crown Street, Glasgow	• Traditional London garden squares
	• GMV, London		
	• Barcelona		

development pattern, which is seen to provide a strong hierarchy of space, clearly differentiating public and private areas. It is also intended to make the street into a public space that people will use socially, rather than just a space for motor vehicles. GMV invites comparison with London garden squares of the 18th and 19th centuries, but in fact their designs invert the pattern of these squares: instead of the fronts of houses facing onto a square with a central garden, the 'square' is actually a courtyard enclosed by the backs of terraces and apartment blocks. A better example might have been the Berlage plan for Amsterdam South, from the early 20th century, but possibly this would mean little to their potential purchasers. It was also a pattern widely used in Berlin's IBA project in the 1980s

(Clelland, 1984; Clelland, 1987; Internationale Bauausstellung, 1989).

GMV goes further than the other two examples in exploring the implications of social mix, by proposing that a wide variety of tenure choices should be available within the same housing stock – what they call 'mixed integration'. This is intended to create a situation where the tenure (and therefore the cost) of a dwelling should be effectively 'invisible', with the idea of reducing the potential stigma of living in low-cost housing. At this stage of the project, the 'pepper-potting' approach to tenure mix is still a hypothetical idea, and the reality has to be negotiated with housing developers, including social housing providers. In practice, there will still be identifiable blocks of

owner-occupied and rented housing, as well as 'integrated' developments.[3] One commentator has pointed out that the first two phases of the project, which comprise mainly high-cost apartments in one block and low- to medium-cost houses and flats in another area, are separated by a 'moat': 'They have assigned two different architects to design two different blocks … They may as well be called Them and Us.'(Niesewand, 2000). Although this is a rather exaggerated description of the differences, it does point out the difficulties of achieving the type of tenure mix they see as desirable. GMV also promotes the concept of flexible or adaptable dwellings, as a way of encouraging people not to move when their housing needs change. This takes the form of one or two sliding walls in some dwellings, so that rooms can be combined or separated as needed; and the use of steel frames and dry linings, making the relocation of walls easier than with load-bearing masonry construction. Even DIY alterations will be encouraged, supported through the community web site.

All three examples make reference to places and projects that they consider support their case for high-density urban living. Perhaps the least convincing references are those called up by TAUR: Barcelona is regularly cited as a civilised and habitable city that has achieved some successful regeneration, but as it comes from an entirely different tradition of urbanism its direct relevance to British cities is questionable. Leeds waterfront and Clerkenwell are both good examples of the 'loft living' pattern of re-urbanisation, and while both areas show a degree of social mix, close examination of each area reveals highly differentiated housing types and segregated social groups. SUNI refers principally to Hulme, Manchester, where it originated. In fact, the key reference is their own demonstration project, the *Homes for Change* development, which comprises 75 apartments, $1500\,m^2$ of workspaces, theatre, gallery, café, shop, and workshop. While admitting that this was a costly 'one-off', SUNI still hopes that it will 'provide a model and an inspiration for urban communities elsewhere' (URBED, 1996). Like TAUR, SUNI also encourages the idea that British cities should look more to European urban models, and less to the USA. GMV's references to Hampstead and

[3]Interview with Jeremy Dodd, for Greenwich Millennium Village, 3 August 2000.

Table 2 Concepts of sustainable urban development

Environmental sustainability	Economic sustainability	Social sustainability
• Low energy	• Local jobs	• Higher residential densities
• Low pollution	• Home-based working	• Local social system
• Low mobility	• Mixed uses and activities	• Social mix plus social integration
'Compact city'	Compact economy='village'	Compact society='community'

Putney as 'classic urban villages' seem to be much more about marketing than realistic comparisons, but it could be interpreted as suggesting that such places are reasonably typical of London.

Sustainable urban development, as advocated by the three examples considered here, combines three distinct concepts, set out in Table 2. The basic principles of environmental sustainability, based on less mobility, lower energy consumption, and reduced pollution, have given rise to the notion of the 'compact city', an alternative to the 'dispersed city' or Megalopolis. A concept of economic sustainability, based on a re-invigorated local economy with mixed activities and more local employment, suggests the idea of a 'compact economy', for which the (traditional) village economy is a model. The third concept, that of social sustainability, combining high densities, social mix, and social integration, implies a more 'compact society' or community-based way of life. These three concepts, although logically distinct, are represented as highly interdependent. All three imply reference to physical, economic, and social conditions of the past, the 'traditional' patterns of human settlement prior to the industrial age. The archetype from which they all stem is the ancient village – physically compact, economically localised, and socially self-contained.

Given the centrality of this idea of tradition in all three proposals, and in particular their shared commitment to the traditional 'village' and 'community' as models for the present day, we have to ask what these ideas mean today and how far they can be realised. What does sociological theory and research tell us about the village and the community, and their place in contemporary social life?

Village and community

The 'village' and the 'community' have rapidly become the preferred terms of reference for new developments and regeneration schemes among town planners, architects and urban designers, as well as in the real estate industry and the political discourse of urban development. As symbolic referents, both 'village' and 'community' stake a claim to continuity between the social and physical frameworks of a pre-industrial, rural past (communal and locally based), and present-day urban living. Community is represented as a benign and desirable form of social relations through which people can live closer together, in dense settlement patterns, within a socially heterogeneous and integrated group. The physical and functional base for the community is provided by the 'urban village', which is almost the universal model for sustainable urban development (Urban Villages Forum, 1992; see also the recent critique by Biddulph, 2000). The three examples cited, while they are important and influential, are far from alone in their adherence to these ideas.

Concepts like village and community are heavily laden with moral and emotive connotations of an older, natural social order. For Mumford (1938, p. 286), 'The village remains the essential root from which fresh urban shoots from time to time thrust upward: its form and content persist long after more differentiated urban types have flourished and disappeared.' More recently, Dickens has commented that 'The dominant and recurring image of the country has been that of a timeless and wholly natural social and environmental order' (Dickens, 2000, p. 162). Sociologists have long argued that these historic forms have been eroded in contemporary urban life. While village and community live on in the collective imagination, the present reality is evidently very different from the past. This apparent contradiction between sociological analysis and cultural representations of the city raises important questions about the meaning and relevance of these concepts. Does it make any sense to design and build 'villages' for 'community life' in the 21st century city? Are such ideas simply romantic and anachronistic, or can they be re-interpreted in a relevant and contemporary way?

The concepts of village and community can be examined against theories and evidence of social and geographical change to test their validity as models. Classical sociological theory held to an essentially developmental or evolutionary view of society in which there was progress from a condition of 'community' (Gemeinschaft), where social relations were predominantly local, all-embracing and prescribed, to one of 'association' (Gesellschaft), where social relations became geographically dispersed, partial and voluntary. This implies the secular decline of community as a form of social relations to a point where it has little or no significance in contemporary life. The underlying processes, seen in the writings of Marx, Tönnies, Simmel, and others, are the triumvirate of industrialisation, urbanisation, and modernisation. Industrialisation represents change in the economy, the transition from a pre-industrial feudal or peasant economy to a capitalist economic system based on monetary exchange, industrial manufacture, and wage labour. Urbanisation is the spatial dimension of change, from a rural population living predominantly in villages and small towns to an urbanised population living in large towns and cities. Modernisation is the cultural dimension of change, from traditional social structures and practices based on a long established social and moral consensus, represented for example by a dominant church, to a more open society in which change is actively sought, conflicting ideas and values flourish, and the individual is liberated from the constraints of his/her origins. As Western societies have become more industrial, urban, and modern, so community has become much less important than formerly: fewer people are members of close-knit, local communities; less of their social relationships are confined to these communities; and shorter periods of their lives are spent in such communities.

There is not enough space to do justice to the deep tradition of sociological research on the community and its fate in modern society, but it deserves some attention here. A summary can be presented in three propositions: the death of community; escape from community; and community as resistance.

The death of community

From the evolutionary or developmental model of change over time, still an important perspective in sociology, community is understood to be in secular decline. Modern social and economic

conditions, particularly high levels of physical mobility and the rapid pace of change, militate against the maintenance of long-term social relationships grounded in a local area. Park, Burgess and others in Chicago described the formation of 'natural areas' in the expanding city, as successive waves of migrants settled in downtown neighbourhoods (Park *et al*, 1925). However, even the ghettos and slums, with their strong ethnic and national identities (Little Italy, Chinatown), evidenced the decay of community bonds compared with the largely rural origins of the migrants (Zorbaugh, 1929). The Chicago sociologists emphasised the negative attributes of urban life – isolation, anonymity, anomie, and social disorder. The 'community studies' literature of the 1950s and 1960s also reflected a sense of loss and regret over the decline of community. In London's East End, Young and Willmott (1957) charted the breakdown of working class community life. Similarly, the decline of the small town community was recorded in a series of American studies. This perspective was epitomised in the title of Stein's (1964) survey of the field, *Eclipse of Community*, which painted a picture of moral decline in society as a whole. The 'mass society' thesis, which saw modern society as comprised of isolated individuals with no community roots, grew out of such studies (Kornhauser, 1960).

Escape from community

A related perspective is that of differentiation in space. Faced with the freedom and opportunities offered by modern, industrial, and urban society, large numbers of people chose to leave their original community. Usually, this meant moving from the country to the city, and this gave rise to Redfield's (1947) notion of the 'rural–urban continuum'. His concept of 'folk society', characterised as 'small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group solidarity', was contrasted with urban society, which Wirth (1938) had earlier defined as large, dense, and heterogeneous. In Frankenberg's (1966) analysis, the rural type was characterised by community, status, close-knit social networks, localism, and integration, while the urban type was characterised by association, contract, loose-knit networks, cosmopolitanism, and alienation. Some research challenged this simple polarisation, pointing to the apparent survival or emergence of communities in urban areas, and among rural to urban migrants. Gans (1962), for example,

identified a group of 'ethnic villagers', with strong local community relationships. Research on ethnic minority settlement in British cities found a similar pattern (Rex and Moore, 1967). However, both rural and urban communities have been seen as restrictive and limiting environments, from which those with aspirations for social mobility and personal development tend to escape. Richard Hoggart's (1958) *The Uses of Literacy* placed his own liberation from a working class community background in the context of this societal pattern of change, as did Marshall Berman (1983) in chronicling his personal escape from the Bronx.

Community as resistance

A more recent perspective on community, especially in cities, has interpreted local social relations as a basis for political mobilisation and resistance to domination. Castells's analysis of urban social movements, for example, saw them as a spatial manifestation of resistance, equivalent to class struggle in the workplace, and many such movements sprang up in the 1960s and 1970s to resist urban renewal or redevelopment (Castells, 1977, 1983). The Greater London Council's *Community Areas Policy* of the early 1980s was intended to protect working class 'communities' against the expansion of central area land uses into the surrounding ring of older neighbourhoods (Greater London Council, 1985). At Coin Street, on the South Bank, a long conflict between local groups and property developers resulted in a dramatic success for the 'community', which gained control of several development sites for low-cost housing and other locally orientated uses (Brindley *et al*, 1996; Brindley, 2000). The social base of these movements is complex and diverse, but the common factor is that social solidarity is no longer intrinsic but contingent, forged in resistance to an external threat.

Taking these three perspectives together, they appear to show the traditional community as a marginal social phenomenon in contemporary society. In secular decline, abandoned by those who can leave, and only activated by external threat, the historic form of community appears no longer to have a positive role in contemporary society. However, we can also identify an alternative, modern form of 'community', in which the local still has significance but in the context of wider social opportunities. Community can be reinterpreted as one of many different types of

social relationship in which people may choose to participate. Instead of the all-embracing Gemeinschaft or folk society, community can be seen as one part of a wider set of social relations. This view was advanced by Stacey (1960) in her studies of Banbury, using the concept of the 'local social system'. From social network theory, she drew a distinction between the local social system of an area, which might be very limited or even non-existent, and the set of social relationships of any individual resident. The local social system is thus a variable, and any one local area may have several, overlapping, such systems. She concluded that, while the 'traditional community' has little relevance in modern society, many people retain significant links to local social systems. Where the traditional community was born out of necessity, providing mutual support in adversity, this modern form of community is partial and elective, an aspect of the social freedom offered by the city.

The village in the mind

If community can be said to have been modernised, this is equally true of the traditional village. The isolated rural village of the past has become incorporated within metropolitan urban networks, with the increase in commuting and the demand for second and retirement homes in rural areas. This was shown in research by Pahl (1970), who found a variety of diverse and often conflicting social groups in villages in south-east England. Remnants of an old, agricultural community existed alongside different groups of newcomers to the village, some of whom came with a preconceived 'village-in-the-mind', including their own notion of the rural community. While villages may still be in the countryside – often highly manicured and protected – they are no longer rural in a sociological sense. Newby (1979) showed how the village and the countryside had become sites of intense conflict between, on the one hand, the economic needs of agribusiness and local employment and, on the other hand, the desire to preserve a traditional rural landscape. This suggests that the village has become more a focus of local identity, at a symbolic level, and less a centre of local social relations.

The same could be said of the 'urban village', a term that has been used both to describe established areas of cities (Gans, 1962) and to prescribe a type of contemporary development (Urban Villages Forum, 1992). In *The Village in the City*, Taylor (1973) stressed the value of local identity in the contemporary city. He acknowledged that the closed, isolated community of the past had become an anachronism, yet a sense of local identity still appeared to be an important factor in people's lives. The 'classic' urban villages were perhaps the artists' colonies of the Left Bank and Montmartre in Paris, Greenwich Village and SoHo in New York (as described, for example, by Jacobs, 1962), or Hampstead and Highgate in London, all places of local identity for cosmopolitan elites. Other such areas are regularly 'discovered' and colonised by new *avant gardes*, London's Clerkenwell having experienced this in recent years. However, Taylor also pointed to the 'ordinary red-brick suburbs', where most urban residents live. In his own home area of the London Borough of Lewisham, for example, he claimed to identify 27 'urban villages', which were clearly recognised by their residents – places like Grove Park, Brockley, Telegraph Hill, and Ladywell. Through such urban villages, people living in cities could enjoy both the local identity and social relationships of a 'home area', and the wider social, economic, and cultural opportunities of the metropolis.

Place and identity

But what is the social basis of this identity? It appears to result from increasing fragmentation and segregation, the opposite of the traditional community. Increased residential mobility has generally led to increased social segregation. In the USA, there is marked segregation of black and white groups, while in European cities social class is normally the main differentiating factor, conditioned by family type and stage in the family cycle (Savage and Warde, 1993). One example is so-called 'gentrification', the phenomenon of middle-class groups moving back from the suburbs to the inner areas of cities (Smith and Williams, 1986; Smith, 1996). While many cities have experienced some reverse migration or 're-urbanisation', the evidence suggests that it is particular groups within the middle class, and only a small minority of these, who have started to make this move. In the 1970s, gentrification generally involved the re-occupation by the middle class of Georgian and Victorian family housing in the inner cities, much of which had previously been converted into flats or let as

rooms (Hamnett and Randolph, 1988). Starting in the 1980s, a new middle-class group, made up of single people and childless working couples in highly paid service occupations (known as 'yuppies' and 'dinkies'), formed something of a vanguard in the settlement of older industrial and commercial areas of cities, and created an expanding market for the so-called 'loft' conversions (Zukin, 1988) and new apartment blocks.

In Britain, this process has spread from London to many provincial cities, such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds. The former industrial city of Leeds, for example, is prospering as a major centre of financial and legal services. A substantial demand for city centre apartments has emerged, especially in converted factories and warehouses on the riverside. *City Living*, a promotional magazine for a Leeds development company, is in no doubt about who is expected to buy these (K. W. Linfoot, May 2000):

> 'Apartments are back in a big way, and the most opulent and fashionable are loft apartments. The boom in city living has made them must-haves for the young and successful who like to live in the centre – at the most exclusive of addresses … they are the first choice for high flying professionals who work long hours and do not want the hassle of maintaining a large property.'

Savage and Warde (1993) suggest that the colonisation of a new urban area, with a distinctive built form and aesthetic character, contributes to the formation of a social identity for an expanding, but still marginal, group. The unconventional and novel aspects of inner areas for middle-class living appear to match the self-image of the new professional households. Similarly, particular urban neighbourhoods have come to represent, and reinforce, the identities of a variety of ethnic and sexual minorities in many cities.

Along with social fragmentation has come a strong connection between place and social identity. For Harvey (1989), the reassertion of 'place-identity' is a characteristic feature of the postmodern city, a backlash against the dramatically accelerated pace of change. He compares reactions to the surge of 'space–time compression' with the impact of rapid modernisation at the beginning of the 20th century. On the one hand, we see an enthusiasm for the excitement,

stimulus, and potential for change, while on the other hand there is a renewed 'search for solid moorings in a shifting world' (Harvey, 1989, p. 302). Place is something to which social identity can be attached and where a sense of security can be constructed. The aesthetics of place create particular, local meanings, so there is a demand for those qualities that make places distinctive and give them a unique symbolic value. For many, this leads 'to a reversion to images of a lost past' (Harvey, 1989, p. 286), a desire for symbols of continuity and stability. Since there is a limited supply of the 'authentic' past, this demand is met through what Baudrillard has called 'simulacra' (Poster, 1988). The technical capacity to replicate material objects from the past, often indistinguishable from the originals, means that 'the past' can be offered up as just another commodity, a consumer choice for a contemporary 'lifestyle'.

To make consumer choices, however, you first have to be a 'consumer', with a reasonable income and purchasing power. For the poor and vulnerable, with little or no choice of housing or location, the association between place and identity is a strongly negative property, imposed on them by the wider society. It has become apparent that the housing system has, especially over recent years, created marginal and residual locations with a concentration of the very poorest; usually, these are the least popular council estates from the period of large-scale mass housing production (Power, 1987; Forrest and Murie, 1988). The identity and poor reputation of such estates has become a source of stigma for their residents, which can deny them access to credit and jobs. In some respects, they are the contemporary equivalent of what the Chicago School called 'zones of transition', and which emerged in British cities during the 1960s, especially in areas blighted by slum clearance (Rex and Moore, 1967). At that time, such non-communities were mainly found in old, privately rented housing, but today they are the residualised council estates.

Faced with the problems of such estates, including a high turnover of tenants and high levels of crime and vandalism, policy-makers have looked for ways to create more 'sustainable communities'. David Page, for example, has proposed that housing associations, in their new role as the main providers of social rented housing, should learn from the processes that created residualised council estates. He advocates using tenant

allocations to create a planned social mix, so that estates are less socially segregated and more like the population in the surrounding area, helping them to settle down and 'knit into stable communities'. Page acknowledges that this would be conscious 'social engineering', but argues that it would be better than the unforeseen social consequences of past allocation and management policies (Page, 1993, 1994). The same point is taken up by the IPPR report, *Housing United*, which suggests that 'areas with high concentrations of very poor and vulnerable people are unlikely to work', and sees mixed income areas as offering 'a sustainable future for communities' (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2000). However, as Goodchild and Cole (2001) point out, sustainable in this context appears to mean little more than 'stable', or not causing overt problems. From a review of recent surveys of mixed-tenure housing estates, they conclude that social balance and the mixed neighbourhood offer few practical benefits to tenants. This has been the case since at least the 1950s when such policies were applied to 'mixed development' urban council estates (Scoffham, 1986) and the settlement of new town estates (Blowers, 1973). Social mix or balance may appear to be a characteristic of the traditional community, but it does not guarantee the development of community sentiment, which is more likely to unite people of similar social characteristics. In the model developed here, all three types of community – traditional, modern, and postmodern – are characterised more by social uniformity than variety. In a modern society, where sub-groups reflect a high degree of self-selection, communities are bound to be more homogeneous than society as a whole. Postmodern society has become yet more fractured and more based on individual choice. In that sense, the residualised council estates are the victims of postmodernity and consumer culture. The language of community building has become a moral code for policies intended to manage the resulting inequities and social conflicts.

Community today

To summarise, the changing characteristics of community are set out in Table 3, comparing traditional, modern, and postmodern conceptions.

From the traditional community, epitomised by the rural village, where close social ties were born of necessity, we have seen the development of a modern form of community, whose archetype is the 'housing estate', with a much greater freedom of choice in social relations. More recently a third, postmodern, conception of community seems to have emerged, reflecting deeply felt needs for emotional, psychic, or 'ontological' security in a fragmented and chaotic social environment. This is a community of 'lifestyle choice', where social bonds are inconsequential but image and identity are all. This is the force behind the production of new kinds of distinctive urban places, from waterside lofts to reproduction villages. However, those who lack consumption choices also lack a choice of identity, and increasingly find themselves in the least desirable, stigmatised housing estates.

Village and community in the three proposals

What does this brief review of sociological theory and evidence on the village and community tell us about the three proposals for sustainable urban development? It is self-evident that the traditional village has almost ceased to exist in the more developed parts of the world, and even the most isolated settlements are increasingly drawn into global networks. Equally, the traditional community has long since given way to modern and postmodern forms of community life, where local social bonds and place attachments are weaker or non-existent, but place identity plays an important part in locational choices. In the light

Table 3 Changing characteristics of 'community'

Type of community	Traditional community	Modern community	Postmodern community
Archetype	Rural village	Housing estate	Stylised image
Properties	• Immanent • Necessary • Moral • Close-knit	• Selective • Voluntary • Conditional • Loose-knit	• Illusory • Spontaneous • Lifestyle choice • Unravelled
Social principle	Social status	Social networks	Social identities

of this analysis, the advocates of sustainable development and the urban village appear to be looking to the past for models of human survival today. If we take their language at face value, this is not just the relatively recent past, but almost to the primal origins of human settlement. What is proposed looks less like an adaptation of current ways of life, and more like a renunciation of many aspects of the contemporary world – a return to Dickens's 'natural social and environmental order'. What people are being asked to give up are many of the presumed benefits or advances that modernisation has provided – on the one hand, physical and technical benefits like spacious dwellings, and the freedom to travel by car; and on the other hand, socially valued gains like greater privacy, segregation, and differentiation from people they regard as different, alien, or inferior. The social aspects are perhaps the most controversial, as spatial segregation and physical differentiation run counter to values of equality and fairness. Yet these are the values promoted and supported by the housing market, which offers ever more finely differentiated products, with strong physical boundaries separating one class of dwelling from another. Gated communities may still be rare in British cities, but high levels of physical security characterise recent urban developments in places like Leeds and Clerkenwell, so often cited as 'good' examples of sustainable urban living.

The arguments for social sustainability and the urban village advanced by proposals like the three examples studied make strong moral claims, but they contradict a number of powerful, established trends. For example:

- they run counter to the trend towards increasing social differentiation and segregation, which is a secular characteristic of industrial urbanisation;
- they contradict the development of a consumer economy, with its increasing differentiation of products and individualisation of consumers; and
- they deny the emergence of a postmodern culture, with increasingly fragmented patterns of social relations and arbitrary lifestyle choices.

By grouping together social and environmental arguments, proponents of the urban village appear to be weakening, not strengthening, their case. The idea of a 'compact city', with its emphasis on reduced energy consumption and efficient public transport, could make a contribution to environmental sustainability, but this need not imply substantial increases in residential densities or artificially created 'communities'. As Biddulph (2000) has pointed out, the 'village' is not the only model for more sustainable urban living. The promoters of sustainable urban development appear to be offering what amounts to radical social reform (the revival of the traditional community) as part of their case for reducing pollution and energy consumption, but in fact propose only unrealistic and unachievable social aspirations. However, it would be premature to conclude that particular urban village developments will either fail or succeed. SUNI can claim one, apparently successful, scheme; GMV is still under construction and apparently selling well to a variety of buyers, but it will be some time before the social mix of the new 'village' is apparent. The critique offered here, derived from published concepts and proposals, and based on urban and social theory, suggests two conclusions, in the form of hypotheses.

The first hypothesis is that residential developments based on the model of the urban village and promoting a local community will find a successful niche in the urban property market, on a limited scale. They can be expected to have a 'lifestyle choice' appeal, not least to people who are convinced by the arguments for more sustainable urban development. A small number of such schemes will therefore be seen to succeed, and this will give encouragement to their supporters. The second hypothesis is that some of these schemes will be less successful. The risk with such developments, which are attracting high levels of effective state subsidy, is that of losing sight of local market conditions. This could easily lead to the overprovision of high density, mixed developments in particular localities, which would become difficult to sell. This could result in, for example, an increase in the proportion of social rented housing in a development, effectively turning it into a social housing estate. A process could follow that mirrors the fate of socially mixed, high-density urban housing in the 1950s and 1960s, strongly promoted by architects and planners on what appeared to be sound theoretical grounds, but which in practice only housed people on lower incomes and turned into the residualised housing estates discussed earlier.

These twin hypotheses may look like a hedged bet, but they support the need for continuing research into the urban village and sustainable urban development. As their promoters acknowledge, today most people have a high degree of choice of where they live, and they have to be persuaded to choose urban living instead of the suburbs. We need to see who is persuaded, in particular cases, and what sort of social conditions result. Through such research, we may discover more about the real prospects for the future of urban living, rather than having to rely on the enthusiastic hype of converts and proselytisers.

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