

Urban Form and Social Sustainability: Planning for Happy, Cohesive and ‘Vital’ Communities?

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the relationship between urban form and the *social* sustainability of communities. After defining and justifying our interpretation of ‘social sustainability’, we report on operational performance measures for the different aspects, based on household questionnaire surveys. By linking these data to measures of urban form and of neighbourhood socio-demographics, we show the general patterns characteristic of existing British cities. The broad story suggests that there is a trade-off between the greater accessibility of more compact forms and the apparently more socially stable and cohesive suburbs. However, it is clear that both demographics and the socio-economic dimension of poverty-affluence cut across this and may account for much of the latter pattern. Interesting differences between different criteria of social sustainability also emerge, with social interaction being greatest in medium density forms for example. The implications for planning future new or remodelled ‘sustainable’ neighbourhoods are then discussed.

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