

Book Review:

The Politics of the Urban Sustainability Concept

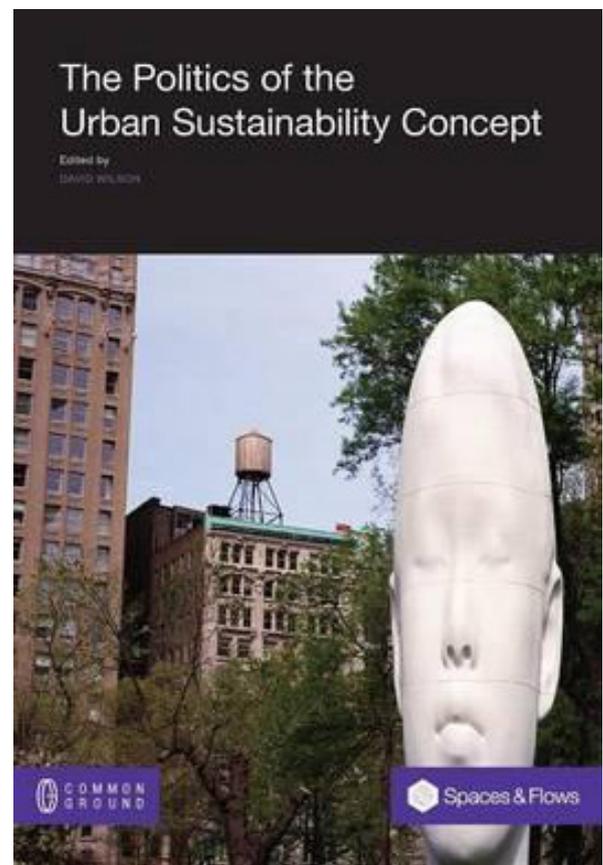
Wilson, D. (2015).

Common Ground Publishing, Illinois, USA.

177 pp.

As an academician in urban environmental planning and management, I understood that urban politics is politics in and about cities. This term refers to the diverse political structure that occurs in urban areas where there is diversity in both culture and socio-economic status. Urban politics are political science that falls into the field of urban studies, which incorporates many aspects of cities, suburbs, and urbanization. Recent trend in urban politics is in assuring sustainable urban development where political leaders, public representatives, and urban local government play the lead role in constructing any planning process which is focusing accessibility to resources, equity, facilities and poverty including working for the production and economic opportunities in order to decent guaranty of life for sustainable development. In the civilized state mechanism meanwhile of society in the global north or global south, political ideologies and political activists' whether it is democratic or another process of political institutions that initiates, approve and execute societal interventions to bring changes in society. Hence, it is obvious that the political ideology of urban local government or regional development authority plays a significant character in the politics of the sustainable urban development.

'The Politics of the Urban Sustainability Concept' is an edited book by David Wilson where eleven urban and regional planning academicians represented their views in nine individual chapters in two parts of this



book. The first part titled "Making Urban sustainability" describing it with five individual chapters and the second part of the named "Urban Sustainability and the Production of Exclusion" individual discussion within four chapters. At the end of the each chapter, detail references of the writings enclosed. After the contents pages of the book, all contributors' brief academic biography also mentioned, which reflects the contributors' academic and professional expertise of their writings.

Editor David Wilson wrote the first chapter of the book and it is entitled "Introduction: The Rise of Urban Sustainability and This book". In the discussion, he correctly mentioned that the conventional concept of urban sustainability, where justice and equity have either been obliterated or peripherally taken in these dominant accounts. Furthermore, he emphasized more on human rights, equality in access to resources and facilities, and production of economic opportunities and decent qualities of life for all ensuring sustainability. This clearly reveals that he significantly pointed out the definition of sustainability and major issues of urban politics and its sustainable development. Later part of this chapter, he described the structure of the book and mentioned brief accounts of all other chapters sequentially. As a critical reviewer, I think he could mention some more concept of sustainability, including the UN, encyclopedia, etc. definitions, although he discussed a few arguments on sustainability made by some other scholars. He might clarify the political factors and the concept of urban political government how it plays the lead role in the urban sustainability as it is the introductory chapter of this book which could expose more interest to the readers.

The second chapter of this book named 'Development Governances and the New Regionalism: Sustainable Development and Restructured Metropolitan Space' were written by Dustin Allred. In this section of the book, the author tried to explain the essence of sustainable urban and regional development regarding urban governance with some examples of city governance and concepts and thoughts of regionalism and metropolitan urban politics discourse. The researcher argued that till now compliance with the regional planning process, as with outcomes of civic regionalisms a more general, is entirely voluntary, the influence of the plan and processes on local development policies and priorities is unclear but implementing the plan and processes depend on local elites usefulness. This is why, he suggested for local development governance should able to adapt and shape both plan's implementation and meanings of

key concepts like sustainability and sustainable development. In the caption of "Sustainability, the New Regionalism, and Voluntary Governance", the writer illustrated the role in limiting the choices of local governments, forcing to adopt the market friendly neoliberal type of reform to ensure the availability of finance capital. In the caption of "Urban Politics and Discourse" section, the author explained the efficiency of the communicative and collaborative processes and politics on which the 'New Regionalism' relies and it is varied and shifting based on the needs of the growth machine. Then in the subtitle of "Urban Entrepreneurialism and the Sustainability Fix" part, the researcher opined how regional plans can serve both to highlight investment opportunities and produces consensus for the construction of symbolic spaces to mask reproduction of spatial inequality in access to public goods at the same time that they satisfy the quality of life concerns of middle-class and upper-class environmentalists. This chapter well organized and details referenced relating to the issue of discussion, though some subtopics' argument were needed to more elaboration with some examples to make a better understanding of the readers.

In the third chapter titled 'Urban Sustainability Planning: Unpacking Promise, Practice, and Parochialism' were written by Robert J. Mason. In the argument, he explained the decade of the beginning of sustainable urban planning practice when it was considered as an important issue for sustainable urban development. He tried to discuss the questions of scale and focus of sustainable thinking and streams of sustainability. In this discourse, he mentioned some major captions such as urban agriculture, urban design, form, livability and place making considering ecology and restoration of nature when we are going to design a city or metropolitan space. In this context, he also cited China and Japan cities planning recent trend considering governance and design of the city.

In the fourth chapter titled 'The Greener, the Happier? Urban Sustainability in the Knowledge City: Policies, Programs, and Practices in the German

Context' was written by Ulrik Gerhard and Edith Marquardt. In this chapter, both the authors illustrated the essence of the green city which might assure us happier i.e. life sophistications, mental and physical health access to green area/parks, water, and forest. They also cited some famous researchers statements from the 19th century what they told that time about the greenest city and sustainable urban development. Furthermore, they explained that city local government cannot ignore the importance and benefits of greener city planning and sustainable urban development. In this context, they discussed the concepts and programs in German cities. Thus, it reveals that three reasons will help people understand how sustainability develop from theory to politics, such as i) "Knowledge makes cities" ii) "living labs"; and iii) "go sustainable".

In the fifth chapter titled 'Enforcable Environment: Spaces of Policing, Sustainability, and Environmental Rhetoric' was written by Brian Jordan Jefferson. The author of this chapter tried to examine the political function of environmental debates and how the environment is constructed by city officials. He considered six policing initiatives taken by the New York Police Department. He also mentioned the current environment-centric discourses on cities of the Global North. At first, environment friendly and second, public safety to advance neoliberal growth in the city. He narrated how New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani initiated quality of life in policing campaign as one centerpiece of city administration. Then he briefly stated the history of quality of life and revitalized cities and in this context, he mentioned Lyndon Johnson's message regarding this campaign. He also cited some legal initiatives were taken in assuring the quality of life, especially "National Environmental Policy 1969" and "Brundtland Report 1969". Furthermore, he described on environmental speak and police reform linking to the quality of life. In this section, he mentioned how policing action and administration reform were taken in the course of time in the New York City administration. Moreover, he wrote a par-

ticular section on Giuliani's Quality of Life Campaign, where he discussed environmental cleansing and the police. Here author stated how Mayor Giuliani campaigned about the essence of a clean environment and the role of police administration in the context of the ever changing competitive business world. Later, he illustrated three important issues for the New York City Police Administration considering the global space of the new economy, the city center and the local community space linking to the spaces of the urban environment in policing and sustainability discourse. In the concluding remarks, he told that environmental speak has proven an exceptionally valuable resource for decision makers determined to bring urban policies in line with growth-first governance. And then he suggested for deeper investigation across urban America, neoliberal policing which relies on an elaborate staging of realities to provide the movement with rationale and a vision and how neoliberal growth governances use such tropes as "the environment" stay tuned.

In the sixth chapter titled 'Sustainability for Whom? Sustainability How?' was written by Byron Miller. The author of this chapter attempted to illustrate the most pronounced discourse sustainability in the context of whom and how. At first, he narrated the background of sustainability issue and how the UN and other national and international agencies took initiatives during the last four decades, especially 1987's Brundtland Commission report named 'Our Common Future', and UN Earth Summit Rio declaration Agenda 21. Then he discussed the debate of sustainable urban development in the name of deep green versus light green agendas or ecological modernization versus fundamental transformation or market governance versus ecological democracy, etc. Later, he cited a significant scholar Scott Campbell's statement about the campaign of green cities, urban planning and the contradictions of sustainable development and evaluated how Campbell confirmed green city ensures the sustainable growth of the cities. Furthermore, he tried

to illustrate post political technologies and status-quo ideology linking to sustainability. Especially emphasized on real and pressing issues of economic well-being, social equity and justice, and environmental degradation through depoliticized techno-managerial means and suggesting environmental activists' ought to be embraced sustainability without engaging in political conflict; tighter regulations, improved technology and changes in behaviour. In addition, he explained neo-liberalism regarded places market front and centre where he mentioned that market are not the only technologies of governance under neoliberal capitalism, but also coordinates production processes, goods marketing, availability of labours to the firms and social reproduction. He accepted that technology is more powerful under neoliberal capitalism where land and housing market strongly associated. In this context, he mentioned the technologies of markets and good design of products linking to sustainability like well designed residential developments, providing substantial aesthetic and environmental amenities. In the concluding section, he describes the possibility of sustainable urban development. Here he stated inadequate capitalist technologies of governance to achieve the economic, social and environmental goals of sustainability, which are the very core of the problem and finally he said that moving toward truly just sustainability a task that requires fundamentally questioning the existing order that requires politicization.

In the seventh chapter titled " Beyond the Urban 'Sustainability Fix': Looking for New Spaces and Discourses of Sustainability in the City" was written by Andrew E.G. Jonas. The author tried to examine the conceptual limit of sustainability through the development of this vital issue and moreover other directly and indirectly related factors in assuring urban sustainability. In the introduction, she described the concept of sustainability in a different perspective in a different period of time from the beginning of this burning issue for the development of mankind. She also mentioned that more than 50 percent of the

world's population now lives in cities and given efforts to position cities as drivers of global consumption and economic growth, sustainable development has been interpreted as posing significant challenges for urban development, planning, and governance both in the Global North and the Global South. She basically tried to explain how the grounding of the sustainable concept in the city has shaped and remolded its relationship to the politics of urban development. In the second section, the writer illustrated changing thoughts towards urban politics and power structures in terms of social relations, networks, and policies. Then mentioned some renowned think tanks, research organizations who had contributed in changing this trend of thinking. Later the author explained how international organizations took initiatives and pressurized some countries in taking actions to implement sustainable urban development plan and projects cited some examples linking this issue like Greater London and South East region of the UK. In the third subtitle section, the author explained the urban social and physical outcomes, describing the economic discourse of sustainability and cities respond to and reproduce the global trope. Then mentioned the fear of a holistic concept of sustainability may be eclipsed by a reductionist concern with physical outcomes pertaining to climate change, global warming, and pollution. Additionally, expressed that yet cities had been physical and social spaces where people not only could learn about environmental problems but also develop strategies to address these problems. The fourth subtitle described the winners and losers: the distributional dimension. Here the author opined that the sustainability concept's come upon with the local municipal authority's arena is for all time negotiated and contested and it is an important resource in processes of urban political alliance formation and coalition building across the city as well as a powerful weapon for incorporating or neutralizing popular dissent and public criticism of more controversial redevelopment projects within the city. Besides, the writer argued that

giving more focus on economic, social and physical and environmental justice issues—instead, of physical or ecological issues will be more crucial in defining the urban sustainability politics of the future. In the subtitle of reviving the sustainability concept, the researcher mentioned the environmental historians restoring nature to the centre of our understanding of how cities are made and transformed. In the concluding section argued that sustainability concept is often rendered compatible with the global trope, which resonates in mainstream discourses and practices associated with the redevelopment of the entrepreneurial city and also added to reconnect knowledge of the politics of urban development to struggles around collective consumption and environmental provision.

In the eighth chapter titled ‘Urban Sustainability, Neoliberal Urban Governance, and the Possibilities of “Greening” ’ was written by Carolina Sternberg. The author of this chapter tried to examine the possibilities and contours of the concept sustainability in the context of ascendant neoliberal governance in Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina. The researchers compared the Buenos Aires case with some selected case studies from Europe and North America cities, focusing on Latin American urban governances and argued on neoliberal governance in Buenos Aires is more than a matter of simply greening urban space and mitigating the environmental damaged caused by urban growth. In the section of the subtitle of “Greening” Cities within Neoliberal Governance Imperatives, he argued how different scholars emphasized on urban sustainability in the context of the latest form of neoliberal urban governance, particularly in entrepreneurial cities where green technology and businesses are increasingly seen as city assets that offer competitive advantages. Moreover, the researcher opined that the policies relating sustainability in Buenos Aires need to be understood in the locally specific forms in which “governing actors” assemble, interact and address the tensions between competing agendas in their drive to facilitate redevelopment and

economic growth. Then in the subtitle of “The Ascendancy of Neoliberal Urban Governance in Buenos Aires”, the investigator cited the reputation of Buenos Aires City is regarded progressiveness and social integrity in Argentina comparison to the whole South American cities. Later briefly narrated the historical background of this condition which were made it different contrasting to other Latin American cities because of some successful initiatives in several periods of times through the direct intervention of central government and international agencies. The conditions for the greening Buenos Aires segment, the author’s stated that new environmental efforts had been taken from 2010 onwards and added some initiatives, such as resource management plan, waste disposal plan, climate change action plan, reduction of CO₂, etc. which were taken by the city authority with the collaboration of central government ministries. In the caption of “facing Escalating Discontent Amidst Ongoing Revanchist Policies, the investigator explained how a failed, the corrupt and unskilled mayor was removed by the initiatives of grassroots organizations, politicians, and human rights organizations including popular collective ‘Justice for the City’”. And in the final remarks, the author viewed in such way that sustainability projects might be specific governance structured of neoliberal urban governance, but also attempts to lessen the effects of destructive rolling-out neoliberalism responses to environmental justice, claims, and heterogeneous social movements addressing imminent global issues.

In the ninth chapter titled ‘Urban Self-organization in the Global South: The Everyday Life of the Poor as a Collective Resource to Enhance the Politics of Sustainability’ was written by Eberhard Rothfuss and Rudiger Korff. Both the authors of this chapter tried to analyze how sustainability achieved and how it will measure and distributional pattern, and what and who will mobilize the whole task comparing between Global South and Global North. In the caption of the “The Dilemma: Current Sustainability in an Urbanized Global Society, the writers analyzed the success of

modernization and deep belief in planning capacities in the late 1960s and how rational it was changed through the global spread of instruments, and technical over ever widening spheres of social and political life since the late 1980s. In addition, they exposed the increasing resource distributional gap between rich and poor in using cities to accumulate capital via the latest technologies and modes of communication, continues to socio-spatial polarization, and massive uneven development. In the subtitle of the “Urbanized Society as Alternative Approach”, they explained what is urban society and its relation to cities and in this connection they distinguish three elements-urban society, non-urban society and anti-urban; and illustrated them to clarify these three issues. Furthermore, in the caption of “Cities in the Global South”, the researchers evaluated the existence of slums and squatters in the third world countries’ cities which they named complex and ironic realities because of the some negative aspects and dynamics of slums, such as-people tend to live in too crowded densities, poverty is rampant, formal waged labour is scant, and housing is overwhelmingly substandard and dilapidated. And they also mentioned that slums continue to centre where innovative and creative practices are developed, and where the ecological footprint is far below than the inhabitants of the urban as well as rural Global North though the positive aspects of slums are widely ignored. And then suggested for a non-biased approach for a realistic evaluation of the role of slums in urban sustainability. In the subtitle of “Self-organization as a Crucial Process for Urban Sustainability”, where the investigators examined how to allow for participatory inclusion in decisions for future development of cities and they opined that city inhabitants have to be recognized as citizens and achieve this policy approach self-organization is the crucial process for such transition towards real citizen participation. Later they discussed the concept, form, and process of self-organization of cities of the Global South. In the caption of “Short Empirical Lesson from a Favela in Salvador Da Bahia (Brazil)”, where

they described the situation of the city and mentioned that current urbanization rate and the gap between rich and poor, especially literacy, education, the process of exclusion, and high unemployment rates of this Brazilian city named Salvador. And in the concluding caption, the researchers recommended to give a greater emphasis to ‘bottom up’ community-led forms of action in assuring a fair and equitable sustainable development.

The review discussions of this book from the various points of argument on urban sustainability concerning political administrations and ecological balance indicate that this book gives an important message to the academicians as well as urban local government stakeholders how they should govern the city administrations and takings initiatives to change the traditional approach of modernization. The sequencing of the writings and issues were very much well organized, but in some cases discussions and examples were needed to be more illustrative. It is obvious that the writers of each chapter of this book were well expert and renowned academics which usually reflected in their writings too. Hence, the readers can get a different fragrance and ideas of sustainable urban development in the context of political organizations role and other stakeholders who are engaged to city governance and administration.

Reviewed by:

Assoc.Prof.Dr.Chaweewan Denpaiboon

*Faculty of Architecture and Planning,
Thammasat University, Thailand*