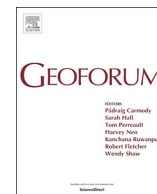




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A critical review of liveability approaches and their dimensions

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ABSTRACT

The last few decades have witnessed increasing trends in urbanization as a global phenomenon. In this regard, the concept of liveability has appeared as elementary for evaluating the degree of living standards of cities. The present review investigates a comparative critical assessment of the existing liveability approaches in urban studies. Based on the assessment, the review concludes that a gap prevails concerning liveability approaches between global cities in different parts of the world.

1. Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed rising trends in urbanization as a global phenomenon. At present, more than 55% of the world population lives in urban areas. Based on evaluations by the United Nations (2014), the share of urban population is estimated to increase by 65% by 2050. The increase could drive urban areas heading for better socio-economic prosperity and enhanced community wellbeing (World Bank Group, 2015). According to the United Nations (2014), the concentration of urbanization driven demographic shift is a prominent feature in the global cities (Mouratidis, 2018). In this regard, research on liveability and its impact on the community wellbeing are gaining significant grounds (Kytta et al., 2015). Policymakers and urban practitioners seem progressively engrossed with raising arguments favouring explanations of existing liveability practices around the globe (Ruth and Franklin, 2014). Most of them have considered the idea of liveability from an urban sustainability point of view (Zhan et al., 2018). Improving liveability through socio-economic equity and decreasing the environmental impacts of multiple urban operations, owing to the fast speed of urbanization is the main concern of this approach (Li and Weng 2007). As a result, policymakers and advocacy groups suggest liveability approaches as the elementary standard by which to assess the depth of living standards of cities across the globe.

The review presents a critical assessment of existing liveability approaches. In general, liveability is the sum of the socio-physical and socio-cultural factors that can improve and upgrade living standards of any spaces (Jomehpour, 2015); with the current crisis around CoVID-19 highlighting its centrality. The concept, as it is used today, first appeared during the 1950s in Vancouver as a strong linguistic mechanism with the Electors Action Movement (Mansour, 2016). During 1980s the

term liveability became a catchphrase in urban studies after Donald Appleyard introduced it in his book 'Liveable Streets' (Yassin, 2019). However, in 2009, the term has gained noteworthy attention as a set of guideline principal from the new Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC).

2. Existing approaches to evaluating liveability in urban studies

The paper earmarks that there are noticeable variations in the existing liveability approaches between the East and West (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Sofeska, 2017; Chen and Fazilov, 2018; Mouratidis, 2018). Scholars, especially from the American and European perspectives, explored liveability researches in the early 1990s (Barry, 2007; Rusk, 2010; Kashef, 2016; Chang, 2016; Vela, Lerma and Ikononopoulos, 2017). However, this trend has started in the East too, especially in Asian countries, during early 2000. Asian countries, mainly, China, India, Malaysia, Taiwan and Korea, are quite well researched with regards to liveability politics (Ellis and Roberts, 2016; Randhawa and Kumar, 2017; Li and Yao, 2018). Initially, they conducted research based on accessible physical amenities and facilities (Wyatt, 2009; Tilaki et al., 2014; Gough, 2015; Kashef, 2016; Xu and Guo, 2017); however, in the course of globalization and adoption of liberalization, the trend shifts towards evaluating the socio-economic impacts of rising urbanization within cities has also emerged.

The term liveability has been used as a policy approach by those involved in urban governance (Li and Yao 2018). Liveability is a holistic paradigm of human development and community well-being, which is based on the augmentation of twin physical-environmental and cultural dimensions of cities and their associated regions (Balsas, 2004; Wyatt, 2009; Jomehpour, 2015). Liveability means the ability to dwell in

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certain physical spaces, with appropriate preparedness in the cultural and environmental dimensions as its prerequisite (Tilaki et al., 2014; Onnom et al., 2018; Yassin, 2019). In most cases, various scholars/organizations derived their explanation of liveability approaches based on their perspectives and contexts of their research. Like, Clinton Liveability Agenda (1999) had defined it as a best practice that encourages communities to maintain green space, eco-friendly transportation choices and pursues regional intelligent growth policies for a sustainable future (National Research Council, 2002). Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), explanation is heavily related to well-being and can also be used in a collective context to define how well a society meets the requirements and needs of its own people (Paul and Sen, 2017). It is therefore evident that the dimensions of liveability approaches include many complex characteristics, urban patterns and forms (Farber et al. 2016). Most researchers and policy makers embrace it as self-explanatory and as a reference to the living standards or overall well-being of cities, with several international agencies forging numerous liveability approaches to understand living standards of cities (Murray, 2011; Shamsuddin, Hassan, and Bilyamin, 2012; Onnom et al., 2018; Paul and Sen, 2018).

The Global Liveability Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) publishes annual reports on liveability rankings to evaluate the living standards of various cities (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). This ranking is based on five weighted factors, namely, stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Followed by, the Mercer's Quality of Life (QoL) survey, which ranks numerous global cities in terms of their living standards (Mercer, 2018). Mercer's QoL survey delivers appropriate recommendations for 450 global cities based on ten selected and recommended socio-economic indicators. In 2018, for instance, Vienna (Austria) tops the rank across the globe followed by Zürich (Switzerland) and Auckland (New Zealand). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducts Better Life Index (BLI) to survey to measure liveability based on eleven social-environmental-economic factors. Lastly, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a public institute, initiates the liveability index for the American cities (American Association of Retired Persons, 2015). Due to the growing pace of urbanization and its association with the population growth mainly older adults, this index focuses on liveable communities based on housing quality, neighbourhood aspirations, transportation options, environmental quality, health, and economic engagements.

Based on a comparative critical assessment, three findings are evident from these works:

- First, it is explicit from the literature that each approach tends to demarcate the idea of liveability in different ways. Due to the notion of their assessment procedures, the impressions of liveability have evolved within cities (Leby and Hashim 2010). Here, the secondary and tertiary activities are more predominant features, and the impact of human activities on urban environment is a more prominent characteristic (Aziz and Hadi 2007). From socio-economic, cultural, and environmental views, urban areas, especially cities around the world, are getting more attention by researchers to explore different shades of liveability variations and the intrinsic potential for urban and social development within them (Li and Weng 2007).
- Second, it is further evident that cities are a major centre of attraction in terms of economic potentialities, community well-being and hope for the better living standard. People want to live in cities to appreciate the financial benefits with associated amenities and level of services. In this respect, the global ranking tools have touched critical issues linked to peoples' perception of liveability and the degree to which the cities meet their requirements and aspirations. Subsequently, urban governance seems to be progressively engrossed with the concept of liveability and become an innovative tool for better shaping the future of cities.
- Third, cities topping the liveability ranking, namely, Vienna,

Melbourne and Copenhagen, are characterized with by high living standard in terms of employment options, access to quality education, health and basic amenities and community-friendly transportation options. Based on a study by Zhan et al. (2018); these factors also attract migrants and aspirants for getting further urban benefits and livelihood opportunities. The comparison is not intended to underestimate the ongoing efforts of these cities to optimize the living environment for their residents and visitors but to contextualize the results of liveable city rankings.

Invariably, however, global ranking studies also provide some conflicting outcomes. For instance, in other studies, cities that are ranked positively in terms of affordable transportation options by some research may perform badly in some another category opined by another group of researches (Uysal, Perdue, and Sirgy, 2012; Giap, Thye, and Aw, 2014). The reason for this disparity is that the weighting allocated to distinct classifications, such as education, healthcare social equity may not be equal to those for urban services, housing, natural environment, and infrastructure.

The comparative assessments differ in various perspectives and contexts. The comparison is conducted not to dilute the notion of living, but to broaden its scope and conceptual boundaries to encompass the critical dimensions of liveability that form the core of residents' good perspective and satisfaction.

3. Conclusion

There are three findings to understand the review of approaches and dimensions of liveability in urban studies. The first finding reveals the existing variations of liveability approaches across the globe. Most Western cities, especially the American and European perspectives, liveability approaches have been carried out from physical aspects, especially transportation options, transit-oriented development and financial supremacies. However, later onwards, the global East has understood that apart from the physical aspects, socio-cultural dimensions are equally significant aspects for assessing liveability of any cities and regions. The second deals with the conception and dimension of liveability. Based on the empirical assessments, the paper demarcates liveability as a composite notion with many complicated features and urban patterns and forms, encompass several multifaceted extents and states of inclusive wellbeing (National Research Council, 2002). The third denotes a contemporary liveability assessment tool to understand the pattern of living standards across the globe. Based on the world ranking of cities by some global agencies, the paper has identified a few research concerns in liveability researches in the present context.

The three themes as a whole have identified a significant role of community participation and interventions of urban governance to best improve the community wellbeing. Therefore, our review underlines the need for a further examination of the dynamics of liveability potential research across cities in different parts of the world. The outcome of such studies will be able to promote exploration of good liveability potentials between cities to improve the decision-making processes for a liveable and sustainable future and to bring back social wellbeing accordingly.

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