

Contextualising the Islamic Fundamentals in the Contemporary Concepts of Sustainability, Livability and Quality of Life in the Built Environment

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Abstract: Islam is a regulatory religion. It prescribes fundamental principles to every spectrum of human life including the built environment. Sustainability, livability and quality of life have become catch terms in the built environment field nowadays. Despite their well formulated objectives, these concepts are not free from criticisms for their inconsistencies, ambiguities, vagueness and lacked basis. Viewing these three concepts concurrently gives rise to the observations that the concepts are overlapped and difficult to measure as there is no 'one-size fits all' indicators. Thus, the paper aims to address their shortcomings by contextualising these three concepts within the ambit of Islam. Subsequently, the interpretation of these terms from various scholars and organizations is analysed using content analysis. Their commonalities and differences are identified and discussed within the realm of the built environment. Consequently, these findings on commonalities and differences among sustainability, livability and quality of life and their conceptual reviews are being put into the context of religion that is in this case, Islam. An Islamic conceptual model is finally proposed with regard to these three concepts; relating them to the idea of the Islamic built environment and the value of life.

Key words: Religion · Islam · Built environment · Sustainability · Livability · Quality of life

INTRODUCTION

Conceptual review of the terms sustainability, livability and quality of life in the context of the built environment revealed that they are inter-related and to a certain extent they are overlapped. By definition, they seemed to be able to stand alone, but looking into their conceptual ideas especially indicators used to measure them, the commonalities become obvious. As a result of vagueness, ambiguities and inconsistencies, there are in the words of [1] (p.493); a wide variety of definitions and interpretations that are skewed towards institutional and group prerogatives rather than compounding the essence of the concept of sustainability. This is also evident in the concepts of livability and quality of life when [2] (p.9) opined that the Mercer Index is meant for expatriates and the Economist Intelligence Unit ranking is intended for business and job attraction. In this regard, [1] categorized the definitions of sustainability into three major groups as shown in the Tables 1:

In the light of the above categorization of the definitions of sustainability, the authors would like to attract the attention to the ideological version (Table 2)

where disrespect to divine providence has been admittedly to be a source of environmental crisis that gives rise to the needs of spiritual revival. The eco-theology ideology which is led by churches and congregations is not a surprise as religious beliefs and traditions used to be a source of reference to human dealings with the natural environment in the era of pre-Stockholm [3, 1].

Thus, it is the aim of the paper to contextualize these three concepts together within the ambit of religion that is Islam in this case. It is believed that current environmental crisis is a result of unvalued-based science and scientific thinking over a period of time. The Judeo-Christian religious traditions were specifically singled out by environmental groups as one of the major instruments enhancing the destruction of the natural environment through teaching man's domination over nature [1] (p.508) instead of just a trustee on earth [4, 5, 6, 7, 8].

Interpretations of Sustainability, Livability and Quality of Life: A study on various interpretations of these three terms constitutes a conceptual review and identification

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the Institutional Version of Sustainability

| Institution | Drivers | Solution Epicenter | Solution Platform | Instruments (Leadership) |
|-------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| WCED | Political consensus | Sustainable growth | Nation-state | Governments and international |
| IIED | Rural development | Primary environmental care (PEC) | Communities | National and international NGOs |
| WBCSD | Business interest | Eco-efficiency | Business and industry | Corporate leadership |

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of the Ideological Version of Sustainability

| Ideology | Liberation Theory | Source of the Environmental Crisis | Solution Epicenter | Leadership Center |
|---------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Eco-theology | Liberation theology | Disrespect to divine providence | Spiritual revival | Churches and congregations |
| Eco-feminism | Radical feminism | Male-centered (andocentric) | Gynocentric value | Women's movement |
| Eco-socialism | Marxism | Capitalism | Social egalitarianism | Labor movement |

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of the Academic Version of Sustainability

| Academic Discipline | Drivers (Epistemological Orientation) | Source of Environmental Crisis | Solutions Epicenter | Instruments (Mechanism of Solutions) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Environmental economics | Economic reductionism | Undervaluing of ecological goods | Internalization of externalities | Market instrument |
| Deep ecology | Ecological reductionism | Human domination over nature | Reverence and respect for nature | Biocentric egalitarianism |
| Social ecology | Reductionist-holistic | Domination of people and nature | Co-evolution of nature and humanity | Rethinking of the social hierarchy |

Table 4: Interpretations of Sustainability, Livability and Quality of Life

| Sustainability | Livability | Quality of life |
|---|--|---|
| "... to respond to five broad requirements: 1) integration of conservation and development, 2) satisfaction of basic human needs, 3) achievement of equality and social justice, 4) provision of social self-determination and cultural diversity, 5) Maintenance of ecological integrity". [9] | "...an urban system that contributes to the physical, social and mental wellbeing and personal development of all its inhabitants[...]delightful and desirable urban spaces that offer and reflect cultural and sacred enrichment[...]key principles are equity, dignity, accessibility, participation and empowerment" [10] | "a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships and their relationships to the salient features in the environment" [11] |
| "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". [12] | "...the ability of a centre to maintain and improve its viability and vitality" [13] | "...as encompassing personal development, healthy lifestyle, access and freedom to acquire knowledge and to enjoy living standards that exceed the basic needs and individual psychology" [14] |
| "...the lessons of ecology can and should be applied to economic processes". [15] | "...the attributes of a community that affect its suitability for human living" [16] | "...goodness of life and being able to live successfully and happily within the environment" [17] |
| "Sustainability requires at least a constant stock of natural capital construed as the set of all environmental assets". [18] | "...often instead referring to quality of life but it drew out various contours of human-environment interactions" [19] | "...a complex composition[...]there is neither an agreed upon definition nor a standard form of measurement" [20] |
| "Any form of positive change which does not erode the ecological, social or political system upon which a society is dependent". [21] | "...the quality of life as experienced by the residents of a neighbourhood within an urban area" [22] | "...a multi-faceted concept[...]defies precise definition[...]difficult to differentiate between quality of life, wellbeing, satisfaction, happiness" [23] |
| "... the ability of a system to sustain the livelihood of the people who depend on that system for an indefinite period". [24] | "...a path to sustainable development the city should be livable in terms of all the social, economical and physical aspects after it meets the needs of its ecological sustainability" [25] | "...multifaceted concept used by a variety of disciplines and at different spatial levels[...]relates to happiness, life satisfaction and needs satisfaction approaches" [26] |
| "Improving the quality of human life while living with the carrying capacity of supporting eco systems". [27] | "...require a locally-focused approach rather than having a 'one-size fits all' arrangement" [28] | "...notions of well-being focusing on individual, society, place or city" [29] |
| "Sustainability is the fundamental root metaphor that can oppose the notion of continued exponential material growth". [30] | "...include an array of different issues that are underpinned by a common set of guiding principles such as accessibility and inclusiveness" [31] | "...the degree of excellence or satisfactory character of life physical and psychological" [32] |

Table 4: Continued

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| “...to express the concept of the need to make constant economic growth coexist with the preservation of the environment while at the same time maintaining social justice”. [33] | “...one where those elements have been preserved or renewed which have always been an integral part of people friendly places” [34] | “the quality of built environment is consistently cited as a multi-faceted concept that has beneficial effects on everyday life[...]raise questions about the complex nature of the association between quality of the built environment and quality of life” [35] |
| General observation | | |
| -towards human goodness | -towards human goodness | -towards human goodness |
| -eco-development is the ultimate aim | -place oriented | -state of human well-being |
| -balance between environment, social and economy in development | -could be either path to sustainable development or synonymous to quality of life | -multi-faceted concept |
| -measured based on set of indicators | - measured based on set of indicators that may | -could be ultimate aim to the concepts of sustainability and livability that signify value of life |
| -not free from criticisms i.e. oxymoron | varies between places, planning scale and objective | - measured based on set of indicators |

of commonalities and differences before putting them together in the context of Islam. Table 4 list various interpretations by Organisations and researchers upon which the authors identified their commonalities and differences via their general observations.

Implicitly, these three concepts are revolving around man as the center of discussion. These concepts are regulating and manifesting human relationship and interaction with surroundings including nature and fellow man on their own term and way of doing thing. Explicitly, these three concepts are conceptually overlapped; to a certain extent create confusions. This is evident when some scholars commented that the sustainability concept is oxymoron in nature. Indeed, the livability concept itself is on the cross-road between sustainability and quality of life when some scholars say that it is a path to sustainable development while others define it as a quality of life. The redundancies are even clearer when looking at the indicators, for instance environmental quality, safety, healthcare, education and housing used to measure each one of the concepts of one place. Furthermore, some scholars admit that it requires a locally-focused approach rather than generalizing them.

The conceptual review made and the identification of commonalities and differences among these three concepts form a basis for establishing an overarching conceptual model governing this aspect of the built environment. As Islam is a regulatory religion, its underlying principles are studied within the coexistence of these three concepts.

The Religion and Islam: In describing the concept of religion and the foundation of ethics and morality in Islam, [36] (p.1) stressed that the concept couched in the term *din*, which is generally understood to mean religion, is not the same as the concept of religion as interpreted and

understood throughout Western religious history. Recognising the different concept of religion between Islam and others, [37] (p.4) said that unlike most other major religions, Islam is a rules-based system explicitly affording detailed rules and regulations for crafting a just economic system, good governance, respect for human rights and freedom of choice.

The word ‘Islam’ is an Arabic verbal noun which is derived from the word “*s-l-m*” (س-ل-م). According to [38], it carries three basic meanings which are pure, peace and to submit. In its terminology, this word can be explained into three meanings i.e surrender, submission and peace. Surrender refers to the act of surrender of non-human creatures like rivers, mountains, hills, plants, animal in which there is no freedom of their own will. The second meaning of Islam is worshipping Allah alone without attributing any equals to Him. Man has to submit before Allah all the time on earth. This submission is called *ibadah* (worshipping) as long as it fulfills its conditions [39, 40]. The *ibadah* can be divided into two categories i.e specific and general. Specific *ibadah* refers to rituals which are prescribed in the *Quran* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet like prayers, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, reading the Quran and others. On the other hand, general *ibadah* means all actions of man from the age of puberty until his death, in so far as one fulfills certain conditions such as right intention for Allah, correct means, in line with *Shariah* (Islamic law) and others. On top of that, Islam is a manifestation of the word *Iman* (faith) which is acknowledging and believing in the Oneness of Allah (*Tawhid*). The third meaning of Islam is peace in which whoever embraces Islam will achieve a peaceful life in this world and the hereafter.

In Islam, there are two basic guides revealed by Allah to mankind which is *Al-Quran*; the speech of Allah revealed to the Prophet in Arabic and transmitted

continuously for generations and *Al-Sunnah*; the Prophet's divinely guided lifestyle which includes his acts, his sayings and his reports on his physical attributes and characters [41]. Islam in particular, refers to the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad. As the final teaching that ends the calling of prophets before him and by this, Allah will only accept Islam which appropriating this last teaching. This fact is clearly stated in the last Quranic verse revealed in Ali-'Imran: 85; "And whoever desires other than Islam as religion - never will it be accepted from him and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers" and His verse in Ali 'Imran: 19: "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam."

Sustainability, Livability and Quality of Life in the Context of Islam: Apparently, there is a meeting point between religion and contemporary matters. This is evident enough through literatures when many scholars believed that technical solutions have not been resulting in satisfactory outcomes in addressing environmental crisis[...]religions have been getting more recognized to define proper environmental ethics [5] (p.609). [6] (p.41) asserted that talking about development without considering the spiritual side of people is meaningless; development must preserve the essence of our humanity. [7] (p. 91) commented that the definitions of sustainability are not comprehensive enough to cover the many important factors which include the spiritual and cultural dimensions of man and knowledge, meanwhile [8] (p.46) claimed that a characteristic of the modern industrialized world is that it places total separation between science and religion[...]foreign to the Islamic tradition. [42] purported that modern science and technology led to the separation of facts from values and this has resulted in destructive consequences for humanity that have arisen from some scientific discoveries.

[43] (p.4) claimed that conflict between religion and science was virtually unknown in Islamic intellectual history[...]the harmony between the two is epitomized in the life and work of the brilliant ninth-century Muslim scholars. Thus, [44] and [45] believed that Islam offers a broad based moral agenda for sustainable development and the issue deserves to be explored extensively in face of the present crises of development and environmental degradation. [46] (p.150) asserted that the religion or the Quran represents the source of Islamic education[...]to link every human activity or behavior with ideal moral value. This value and ethics-based argumentation has been chosen by significant number of scholars as the

basis of their conceptualization[...]to the extent some of them portrayed science and scientific thinking as the major culprits of the environmental crisis [1] (p.512).

The above relationship between religion and contemporary matter is self-explanatory, thus a measurement of the level of Islamicity is worth mentioning. A research done by [37] formulated Islamicity Index comprising of four sub-indices that are related to economics, legal and governance, human and political rights and international relations. The researchers admitted that they missed out the first area of study that is "the relation of man to God and the deeds of man according to the principles of human responsibility in Islam" from the Islamicity Index as they believed that it is "best left to theologians". The study was conducted on 208 countries; Islamic (attested by membership in the Organisation of Islamic Conference) and non-Islamic countries. The result showed that New Zealand scored the highest rank overall in Islamicity Index while Malaysia got first place among the 54 OIC countries. As far as the OIC countries is concerned, this result is not surprising as Islam has been endorsed as the religion of the Federation in the Malaysian Federal Constitution Article 3 thus facilitates government efforts towards Islamisation. Indeed, the Prime Minister of Malaysia had recently launched Malaysian Shari'ah Index on February 10, 2015 to reiterate the Islamisation process in its governance. The index is measuring eight sectors namely economy, society, politic, culture, health, law, education, infrastructure and environment within the context of *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of Islamic laws) that is preservation of faith, self, intellect, lineage and wealth. This index will be used to measure the performance of all government departments in the future.

A Conceptual Model of Islamic Built Environment: The following diagram illustrates a conceptual model of the Islamic built environment embracing the concepts of sustainability, livability and quality of life.

In operating the above model of the Islamic built environment, the objectives of the Islamic law that is protection of faith, self, intellect, lineage and wealth in its hierarchical order must be preserved according to its priorities i.e. the Essentials, the Complementaries and the Desirables.

Socially, human beings are collective in nature consisting of males and females, tribes and nations for them to know each other but the best among them is the most pious to his Creator, Allah the Almighty (Al-Quran, 49:13). This serves as an underlying principle of the

Islamic social construct, not only the relationship between man and man but also man and the environment. Human beings is among the creations of Allah other than flora, fauna, soil, water, light and air (Al-Quran, 6:38). As such, what would be apt and needed by His creations are provided in due balance and proportion (Al-Quran, 54:49). The natural resources have been made as sustenance to mankind (Al-Quran, 7:10). Its consumption always relates to economic activities. In this regard, resources must be used in an ethical manner respecting them as Allah's creation entrusted to mankind as the trustee (Al-Quran, 6:165) not owner of the earth (Al-Quran, 20:6). Consequently, mankind is strongly reminded on the negative impact that they will receive resulting from their mischievous doings on this earth (Al-Quran, 30:41).

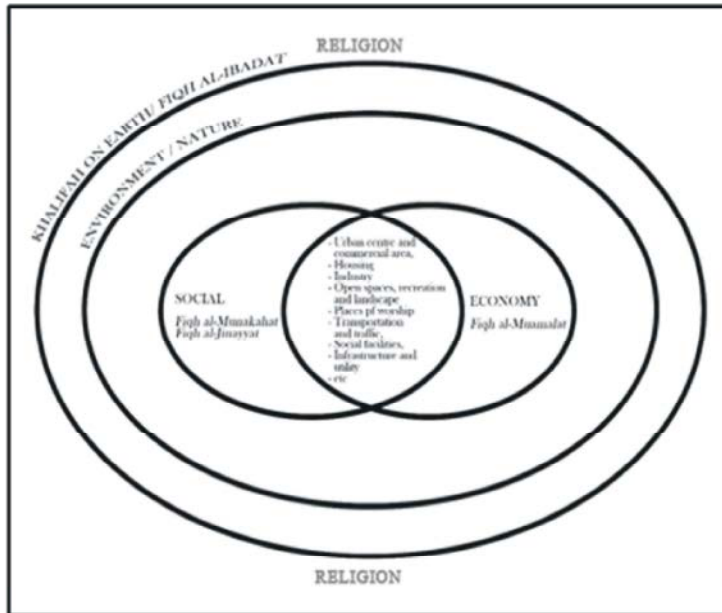
Submittedly, human social and economic activities happen within a spatial planning of the built environment. In so doing, the earth is a testing ground of our role as the vicegerent (*khalifah*) submitting ourselves to Allah the Almighty by adhering to His teachings socially, economically and environmentally. This is in consonance with the concept of a city in Islam termed as '*madinah*' deriving from the word *din* (religion). Simply put, a city or *madinah* in Arabic is a place where religion is upheld and practiced in all branches of human activities. This can be further understood from the prayer read by Mawlayldris al-Azhar in the opening of Faz city in Morroco [47] (p.6), "Oh my lord, you know that I don't intend by building this city to gain pride of show off, nor do I intend hypocrisy or reputation or arrogance but I want you to be worshipped in it, your laws, limits and the principles of your Quran and the guidance of your Prophet to be upheld in it as long as the word exist". In short, a city in Islam is a place to manifest the four significations of *din* notably indebtedness, submissiveness, judicious power and natural inclination that are practicable possibilities only in organized society [36] (p.2). In fact, the Companion Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas had narrated that the Messenger of Allah once said that: "Four things contribute to happiness are righteous wife, spacious home, righteous neighbor and comfortable means of transport [48] (p.29).

Apart from physical planning, the spirituality content embodied in the religion is equally important. Islam regulates human conducts by developing Muslims' personality gradually from an individual as embodied in the teaching of *fiqh ibadah* (Islamic personal law) and then evolves into the family institution under the purview of *fiqh munakahat* (Islamic family law), eventually into *fiqh muamalat* (Islamic transaction law) that governs

human interactions or dealings. Other than the individual, the family and communal aspects, Islam prescribes punishment for wrongdoings committed under the essence of *fiqh jinayat* (Islamic criminal law). Prior to that, Islam placed strong emphasis on faith (*iman*) that is believe in Allah, *Malaikat*, Messenger, Al-Quran, the Day of Judgement and Divine Creed before submission of oneself to Allah through commendable practices and deeds. In term of practices, Muslims are governed by the five tenets of Islam notably pronouncement of *shahadah*, the five times daily prayers, charity, fasting and the pilgrimage. It is in these six tenets of faith and five tenets of Islam that mould Muslims their spirituality, courage and practices. On top of that Islam also propagates the concept of *ihsan* whereby Muslims are urged to do good deeds as if Allah is looking at him though he is not able to see Allah physically but Allah's existence is felt. This is how Islam educates its followers spiritually and in practice in the pursuit of value of life via adherence and attainment of its religious teachings. In this respect, [43] views that individuals are the active agents of change that will cause subsequent change in society. In doing so, the individuals will have to change what is within themselves; soul and mind guided by Quran and Sunnah.

CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual review of the terms sustainability, livability and quality of life within the ambit of the built environment disclosed an interesting finding especially on their variety of interpretations which are inclined towards their respective organizations' objectives. Surprisingly, religious and value-based built environment as practiced in the era of pre-Stockholm have gained momentum again nowadays when many scholars viewed that technical solutions have not been resulting in satisfactory outcomes in addressing environmental crisis. Some of them even portrayed unvalued-based science and scientific thinking as the major culprits of the environmental crisis. While admitting that the measurement of the sustainability, livability and quality of life level is necessary and there are no such 'one size fits all' indicators, the authors believe that there must be an overarching conceptual model set upon to minimize the discrepancies. Stemming from the Prophetic reports that are said "Whoever Allah wants him goodness, make it understand religion" and "The essence of the religion of Islam is giving good counsel", the authors proposed a conceptual model of the Islamic built environment (Fig. 1) and its operationalisation (Fig. 2).

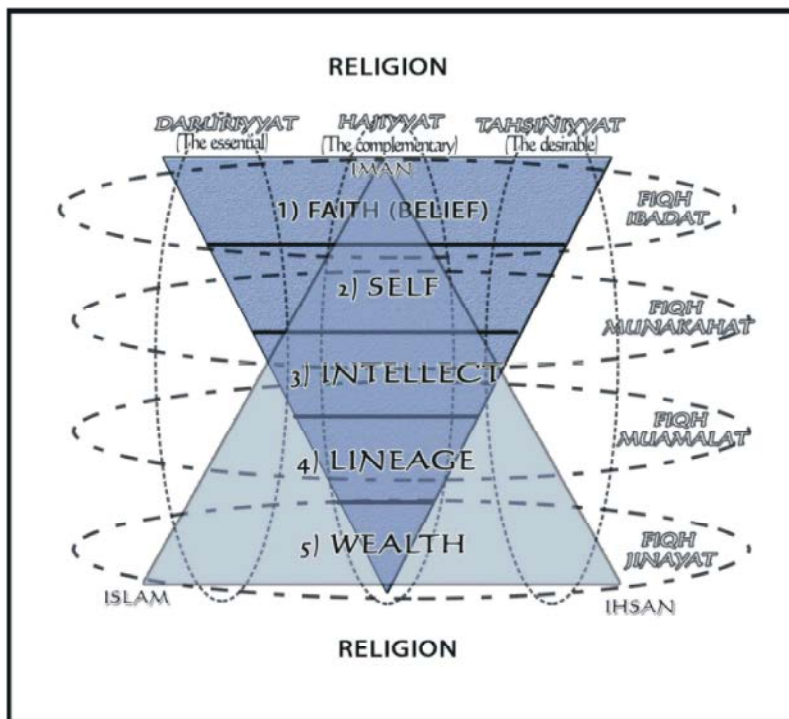


1-And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.(Surah Al-'An'am : 165)

2-To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and what is under the soil. (Surah Taha : 6)

3- ...This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion.But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Surah Al-Maidah : 3)

Fig. 1: A Conceptual Model of the Islamic Built Environment



Daruriyyat : Absolute requirements to the survival and spiritual well-being of individuals, to the extent that their destruction or collapse would precipitate chaos and the demise of normal order in society.

Hajiyyat : Benefits that seek to remove severity and hardship in cases where such severity and hardship do not pose a threat to the very survival of normal order.

Tahsiniyyah : Seek to attain refinement and perfection in the customs and conduct of the people at all levels.

Fiqh Ibadat (Islamic Personal Law): Relationship between man and his creator by performing worships which the creator obligate them on specific time, in particular places and in exact pattern.

Fiqh Munakahat(Islamic Family Law): Relationship between man and his family.

Fiqh Muamalat (Islamic Transaction Law) : Relationship between man and his society

Fiqh Jinayat (Islamic Criminal Law): A set of rules by Allah related to wrongdoings and crimes.

Fig. 2: A Religious Framework of the Islamic Built Environment

Nonetheless, these conceptualizations rely heavily on the objectives of Islamic laws that are protection of faith, self, intellect, lineage and wealth in hierarchical order. They are the pivot points around which the most binding individual and societal obligations revolve. The five major objectives are critical to the welfare of all human societies

regardless of religion, because the erosion of even a single one of them threatens the continued existence of the society as a whole. Indeed, Islam is a religion of humane rationales and practical objectives requiring intelligent followers with sound understanding to implement them for the good of all mankind.

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