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Green Neighbourhoods and Eco-gentrification

A Tale of Two Countries

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Preface

With momentum building for an expansion of architectural and urban design practices that respond to the environmental challenges of our time, it is worth considering the economic and social implications of what has come to be known around the world as "green" building.

In this monograph, we bring together a series of studies that delve into the details of green building practices in France and Israel and that tell a tale of two countries that deviates considerably from what first impressions might suggest. In-depth data analysis, interviews with stakeholders, and on-the-ground documentation are used to paint a portrait of green neighborhoods in both large and small cities and to shed light on the diversity of outcomes and the intricate web of interests leading to each one.

- We begin by summarizing the development of "green" building in both Israel and France, shedding light on both countries' specificities: In Israel, there is a lack of any national legislation fostering "green" building practices and, at the same time, an acute shortage of affordable housing, while in France, the prevalence of social welfare policies has produced legislation, officially promoting "green" and affordable housing.
- The second chapter points out that the target population of "green" building projects is usually the middle to upper classes and such targeting ultimately perpetuates socio-spatial inequality as well as ecological vulnerability for the poor and other socially marginal groups. We compared policy contexts and "green" building instruments in France and Israel and considered whether affordable housing and social diversity are part of green building policy and implementation. We also inquire whether green buildings foster gentrification, either inadvertently or intentionally.
- In the third chapter, we have addressed the impact of the Israeli green building certification on real estate prices. Our conclusion is that in centrally located and economically strong municipalities, this involves green certification, while in peripheral locations, such certification is not implemented, and the "green" label is mainly used to attract local residents who can afford a housing upgrade.

- We then describe how French policy promotes social diversity and the construction of "green" public social housing in the growing series of urban "eco-districts." While there is an ostensible effort to build housing that is both "green" and affordable, it turns out that in affluent and average municipalities, the share of "green" social public housing actually available to low-income groups is minimal, since most social housing is ultimately allocated to higher-income groups.
- In our concluding discussion, we explain that "green" building has yet to prove itself as a solution for the masses. The sale price of an apartment in a certified green building is significantly higher than what would be justified by either the additional construction costs required to build it or the energy and water-saving potential that can be realized by using it. The tale of two countries presented here suggests that neither the mechanisms of the market nor the proclamations of a welfare state can easily overcome this dilemma. What is needed is a new type of thinking, which can only emerge once the concept of "value" reflects not only the realities of a free-market economy but also those of a planet which turns out to be distinctly limited in its resources.

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Contents

Introduction

Under the banner of "green building", policy instruments have been developed worldwide, to reduce the energy demand and overall environmental impact of buildings. Using green rating systems and other tools, these policies have often improved the quality of the building stock – but at high cost to consumers. Studies of the added construction costs involved in achieving green certification have suggested that green apartments need not be significantly more expensive than non-green alternatives – but evidence is accumulating that the prices charged to buyers and renters of such properties are higher indeed.

In this context, the "green premium" of real estate has become an important issue in developed countries. On the one hand, reducing operating expenses through green measures is widely seen as a way to increase the long-term viability of development, as tenants benefit from lower utility bills and enjoy indirect economic benefits, such as improved indoor air quality and long-term occupant health. On the other hand, however, higher housing costs tend to perpetuate inequality, as well as ecological vulnerability for the poor and other socially marginal groups. A significant green premium can defeat the goals of sustainable development – which include socio-economic and as well as environmental dimensions (WCED 1987). There is irony in this situation, considering that while living in green housing may reduce energy related expenses, those who might benefit the most from these savings, cannot afford the initial cost of accessing them.

Contrasting approaches to green building are illustrated by France and Israel, which have both promoted the certification of green residential construction since the early 2000s. While a broad consensus has been built in both countries around the environmental benefits of green building, the same cannot be said about the need to make it affordable to a cross-section of the population. In Israel, as in many other countries, "green" real estate is primarily marketed to the upper middle-class – whereas in France, where social welfare policies are deeply ingrained, providing subsidized green housing is an official goal.

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With momentum building in both countries to expand green building, it is worth considering its economic and social implications. In recent years Israel has faced an acute shortage of affordable housing which has led to social unrest, and a major decision by the country's largest municipalities to require the implementation of the voluntary Green Building Standard in all new construction, could exacerbate the situation. France, for its part, has embarked on a large-scale initiative to build *eco-quartiers* – green residential districts in which measures enhancing socio-economic diversity are mandated alongside environmental performance criteria. Might such measures be relevant for Israel?

In this monograph, we bring together studies delving into the details of French and Israeli green building practices and tell a tale of two countries. We also describe the social aspects of 'green' building in the eco-districts of Stockholm and Copenhagen. The Scandinavian countries have a social housing policy, but 'green' building is no part of it. In-depth data analysis, interviews with stakeholders, and on-the-ground documentation are used to paint a portrait of green neighborhoods in both large and small cities, shedding light on the diversity of interest constellations and resulting outcomes.

More often than not, green initiatives are used to attract upper middle-class dwellers to previously poor neighborhoods –displacing the original residents through "green" gentrification. However, the form and scope of this eco-gentrification vary widely from one city or neighborhood to the next, depending on the political, administrative and, economic contexts.

In the Israeli cases, these dynamics reflect the increasing dominance of the private sector in residential building, following a decades-long shrinking of the welfare state. In the densely populated urban core of the country, exorbitant real estate prices mean that developers can profitably exploit the Israel Green Building Standard as a marketing tool – while in the economically depressed cities of the periphery, this is not the case and green certification is not sought.

The French way is to mandate the inclusion of subsidized housing within its *eco-quartiers*, with the declared aim of promoting a diverse 'social mix'. In Paris, however, most "public" housing is in fact intended for the middle class, and the eco-districts have primarily been located in areas where the local population is being priced out of the market – effectively forcing it out of Paris altogether. Moreover, in the one French case study which documents the establishment of green housing for the poor, social diversity turned out to be unattainable due to a lack of interest among those who can afford to live elsewhere.

In sum, this monograph brings together for the first time the evidence needed to answer a crucial question: If 'green' building does offer individual as well as societal benefits, can it be affordable to those who need it the most?

The Green Building Agenda

Over the last two decades, greenhouse gas abatement for climate protection has become a major goal in developed countries and increasing attention has been focused on how to make buildings ('whose ongoing operation consume about 40% of all energy') more efficient. "Green building" refers to "the use of environmentally preferable practices and materials in the design, location, construction, and operation of buildings. It applies to both renovation or retrofitting of buildings and construction of new ones, residential or commercial, public or private" (Commission for Environmental Cooperation 2008).

In addition to a building's design and construction (which directly affects the uses of energy, water, and materials), green building deals with environmental issues, ranging from ongoing building operation, to urban planning for reduced reliance on private cars. The introduction of neighborhood-level green building standards has further extended the scope of sustainability topics and stakeholders, including municipal authorities, whose role is on the increase.

To promote 'green' building implementation, broad spectra of policy instruments and programs have been enacted worldwide by governments and other decision-makers. In the literature on such policy tools, a distinction is generally made between regulatory, economic and informative/educational instruments (Vine et al. 2003).

Prominent among these are 'green' building rating systems and energy efficiency standards for buildings, developed around the world. The British rating system BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method), established in 1990, later served as basis for the American LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and the Australian Energy Star. These rating systems assign credits to building projects submitted for certification in categories such as energy efficiency, water use efficiency, sustainable site selection, materials and resource use, and indoor environmental quality. In recent years, a few organizations have gone beyond building-level environmental assessments, initiating

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