THE POTENTIAL OF DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN ASIA: THE CASE OF SINGAPORE

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Overview

There has been much interest in the development of sustainable communities amongst governments as it is increasingly on their agenda to reduce their country's carbon footprint while still achieving economic growth. In addition, the achievement of sustainable communities is more prevalent for countries that are resource-poor and rely heavily on foreign energy imports to sustain their respective industries.

This paper looks at the potential of developing sustainable communities in Asia, particularly in Singapore. More specifically, this paper looks at the extent to which Singapore is able to develop sustainable practices while continuing to advance its economy. It will also discuss the factors in place that either promotes or hinders the development of sustainable communities. Singapore presents an interesting case study as it sheds light on the difficulties of building sustainable communities amidst a weak and/or ineffective civil society, and a political and social culture that approaches issues from a capitalist perspective, rather than a socially conscious one. The arguments made in this paper could be extended to most developed countries. It could also potentially explain why most governments are slow to invest in renewable energy given the prevalence of climate change and finite fossil energy resources.

Methods

This paper takes an innovative approach by basing the study on a historical documentation of the development of civil society in Singapore, and the government's approach to the idea of growth and progress. A historical understanding of these developments is important as they shape the political and social consciousness of the people, and the latter determines the extent to which a sustainable community can be developed. In addition, an analysis of government documents and policy statements, with particular focus on education policies, will be conducted to understand how the Singaporean government approaches the concept of growth and progress. This could potentially explain the government's commitment to developing a sustainable community.

Results

Preliminary findings show that the Singaporean government takes a capitalist approach in most of its official policies. Specifically, the government's education policies are based on a capitalist understanding of progress and growth. This could potentially hinder the development of a sustainable community in Singapore as one of the precursors for a sustainable community to develop is a strong civil society which is socially conscious of issues that extend beyond economic progress. This could further explain why Singapore does not have much plans of including renewable energy in its current energy mix yet.

Conclusion

In order for sustainable communities to develop, there has to be a strong presence of a civil society that is socially conscious of issues that extend beyond a simplistic view of economic growth. The findings so far suggest that the development of sustainable communities are slim given the high cost of energy-efficient technologies, and more importantly, the political and social culture that has developed through a strict focus on capitalism.