

Can a focus on environment and health help mitigate urban development problems?

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Abstract

The dominant causes of mortality in industrialized urban populations shifted dramatically during the 20th century from infectious diseases to noncommunicable diseases. The urban dimension of health has emerged strongly in research in recent years: scientific evidence now links urban operations and health and well-being with environmental sustainability. The major cities in developing countries are faced not only with the problem of intensive urbanization, but also with the lack of financial resources which could be used to improve the quality of life of their inhabitants. Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, often tops the charts as the World's most polluted city. Despite associated problems such as congestion, ill health and premature death, Macedonia's scarce resources are instead spent on controversial projects, such as 'Skopje 2014', involving creating a national identity through massive and extremely costly constructions.

The aim of this presentation is to discuss the multiple determinants of health and well-being in Skopje linked to lifestyle and behaviour as well as the interaction between human activities and the nature of urban design. The case study also covers excursions to successful environmentally oriented activities conducted in other cities to discuss the possibility of their implementation in Skopje. Considering the scale and scope of environmental problems in Skopje, it is likely that the city may be moving towards realizing the assumptions of sustainable development and trying to become a smart city by investing in up-to-date capital, including offering friendly conditions for innovative economies, and people-oriented city planning. I conclude that only brave and determined action of self-government can contribute to substantive improvement of the environmental condition and the inhabitants' quality of life.

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