

Analysis of the Role of Different Housing Policies in Urban Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Singapore and Hong Kong

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Abstract:

Housing policies are pivotal to urban sustainable development. This paper takes Singapore and Hong Kong as case studies, employing literature analysis, case study, and comparative analysis to explore the impacts of distinct housing policies on urban sustainability. The research finds significant disparities between Singapore and Hong Kong in housing affordability, social segregation, and environmental impact. Singapore has effectively addressed the housing needs of the majority of its residents through a government-led public housing policy, establishing itself as a global benchmark for housing governance. In contrast, Hong Kong, constrained by limited land resources and a market-driven housing model, grapples with challenges of soaring housing prices and low affordability. Through in-depth analysis of the housing policies of Singapore and Hong Kong, this paper aims to provide cross-regional experiential references for the sustainable development of high-density cities and provides useful references for other cities in formulating and implementing housing policies. This research bears significant theoretical and practical implications

Keywords: Housing policy; Urban sustainable development; Affordability; Social segregation; Environmental impact

1. Introduction

Urban sustainable development is a crucial global agenda attracting widespread attention. Housing policy, as an essential component of urban development, exerts a profound impact on the on the achievement of this goal. According to the report by UN-Habitat 2024 Annual Report, 2.8 billion people worldwide

lack adequate housing, and over 1.1 billion reside in informal settlements and slums [1]. This not only undermines resident's quality of life but also poses formidable challenges to urban sustainability. Moreover, the formulation and implementation of housing policies are directly intertwined with a city's social structure, economic vitality, and environmental quality [2]. Singapore and Hong Kong, two globally rep-

representative high-density cities, have adopted distinctive approaches to addressing urban housing issues through their respective policies. Despite significant differences in policy frameworks, both cases offer valuable insights for investigating the relationship between housing policies and urban sustainable development. This research aims to compare the housing policies of Singapore and Hong Kong, assess their performance in terms of housing affordability, and explore the characteristics of their respective policy frameworks. Three core research questions are proposed: What are the differences between the two regions in terms of social segregation and environmental quality? How do housing policies influence social segregation and the local environment? And what policy measures can enhance environmental quality? Adopting literature analysis, case study, and comparative analysis methods, this paper examines the housing policies of Singapore and Hong Kong as well as their impacts on urban sustainable development. It systematically organizes relevant theories and existing research results, focuses on the specific housing policies and their implementation effects of the two places, and reveals the similarities and differences in their housing policies and their respective impacts on urban sustainable development.

2. Comparative Analysis of Housing Policies in Hong Kong and Singapore

2.1 Comparison of Affordability

Housing affordability serves as a key indicator of the success of urban housing policies. Singapore has significantly enhanced housing affordability through a government-led public housing policy. The Housing and Development Board (HDB) is responsible for constructing and allocating public housing, and approximately 80% of Singaporeans reside in HDB flats. These flats are affordably priced, and the government provides a suite of subsidies and loan supports, ensuring that housing remains accessible to most residents.

In contrast, Hong Kong's housing policy has evolved amid drastic macro-political and economic shifts. Constrained by scarce land resources and a highly market-oriented real estate sector, housing prices have remained persistently high. According to the *Demographia International Housing Affordability Report*, Hong Kong has been ranked among the least affordable housing markets globally for consecutive years. Skyrocketing housing prices have made it difficult for many Hong Kong residents to afford suitable housing, especially young people and low-income families.

2.2 Differences in Social Segregation

Social segregation constitutes another key impact of housing policies on a city's social structure. Singapore's housing policies have significantly transformed the country's traditional ethnic residential patterns and demographic structures. The construction of HDB flats has broken the ethnic clustering rooted in kinship and geographical connections in the past [3], effectively alleviating social segregation. HDB's flat allocation policy emphasizes ethnic and social class mixing, encouraging residents from diverse backgrounds to cohabit, thereby fostering social harmony and promoting intergroup integration.

In Hong Kong, however, the housing issue is intertwined with class stratification amid a rigid social hierarchy. Different social classes exhibit distinct housing needs. Low-income groups face substandard living conditions and rely on government support to improve their housing situations, which is a matter closely linked to the distribution of social resources and wealth. The middle class has seen their income growth lag far behind the surge in private housing prices, while high-income groups have already resolved their housing needs and view real estate primarily as an investment tool, leading them to advocate for rising housing prices [4]. This divergence of interests has exacerbated social class differentiation and segregation, undermining social harmony and restricting social mobility and residents' quality of life.

2.3 Different Environmental Impacts

Singapore, renowned as a "Garden City", integrates environmental protection and sustainable development into its public housing policy. Since 2005, Singapore has implemented the "Green Mark" certification system for green buildings, which evaluates projects across five dimensions: energy conservation, water conservation, environmental protection, indoor environmental quality, and other green features and innovations [5]. HDB's public housing designs prioritize energy conservation and environmental sustainability, integrating green building technologies to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. Additionally, the government has enhanced the city's overall environmental quality through urban planning and greening measures.

In contrast, the environmental impact of Hong Kong's housing policy is more complex. High-density urban development and limited green spaces have led to severe challenges such as air pollution and the urban heat island effect. Although the Hong Kong government has promoted green building practices and environmental protection measures, scarce land resources and the market-driven housing model have constrained the efficacy of these en-

vironmental enhancement efforts

3. Policy Recommendations

3.1 Recommendations For Hong Kong

Strengthen government coordination and precise policy implementation. Expand land supply and optimize land use policies to increase the availability of affordable housing. Introduce targeted housing purchase incentives for middle and low-income groups, with a particular focus on low-income families, disabled individuals, and households with seriously ill members. The government should fulfill its “safety net” role by providing preferential prices, tax exemptions, and trade-in programs to help these groups secure housing, thereby enhancing their sense of security, happiness, and belonging [6].

Adopt flexible and adaptive renewal strategies for the diverse needs of residents [7]. In public housing allocation, emphasize the integration of different social strata, encourage cohabitation among residents from varied backgrounds to reduce social isolation and promote social cohesion.

Promote the application of green building technologies through policies and financial support, expand urban green spaces and public spaces, and improve environmental quality.

3.2 Recommendations For Singapore

Sustain the refinement of public housing policy to ensure affordability and social equity. Amid rising housing prices, further improve the housing provident fund system, enhance the housing purchase capacity of middle and low-income families through joint contributions from multiple parties, and expand subsidy and support to achieve “housing for all”.

To address the aging and deterioration of residential areas, public housing hardware facilities are regularly upgraded through initiatives such as HDB Upgrading Program (HUP), My Home Upgrade Program (MUP), and Interim Upgrading Program (IUP). Furthermore, the Green Mark system is advanced to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions, thereby enhancing the city’s overall environmental quality.

With the increasing aging population, public housing policies must address the needs of elderly residents by providing age-appropriate housing options and community services. For example, the Housing and Development Board has launched the Community Care Housing program, which is available for residents aged 65 and above for purchase applications and leverages the resources of

the nearby Alexandra Hospital [8].

4. Conclusion

This article compares the housing policies of Singapore and Hong Kong, assessing their performance in terms of housing affordability, social segregation, and environmental impact. The research finds that Singapore, through its government-led public housing policy, has effectively enhanced housing affordability, reduced social segregation, and promoted environmental sustainability. In contrast, Hong Kong, constrained by limited land resources and a market-driven housing policy framework, is confronted with high housing costs, severe social segregation, and environmental pressure. Based on these comparisons, the article offers targeted policy recommendations for both Hong Kong and Singapore to advance urban sustainable development.

This study is not without limitations. It relies primarily on existing literature and secondary data, with a lack of primary research such as questionnaires and in-depth interviews with residents, which may limit the comprehensiveness and depth of the analysis. Future studies could verify and supplement the conclusions of this article through field research and resident feedback. Additionally, as urban development and policy dynamics evolve, future research should explore the impacts of emerging housing models and technologies on urban sustainability, providing more references for the formulation of urban housing policies.

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