

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY – THE SUBTOPIA WAY: MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

BY EHMELI DZIFA AMENGOR.

DECEMBER, 2021.



Background Study of Cultural Sustainability¹ and Urban Development

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural ORGANISATION (UNESCO), under the United Nations, has committed to its mandate to ensure full participation in achieving the UNITED NATIONS, AGENDA 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals outlined. Cultural sustainability has been identified as the fourth pillar of the sustainability perspectives which includes economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Even though cultural sustainability has been the latest to be identified and added by researchers and some policymakers, it by no means undermines its significance and importance in the list. In fact, culture has been part of human existence since the emergence of ancient civilizations like the Romans empire, the ancient African empires like (old Mali, old Ghana Songhai empire and the old Ethiopian empires), European civilization as well as the ancient Egyptian Civilizations which is known to be the first of the world's civilizations. All these civilizations, especially their economic cities could not thrive on the economy, alone without the mention of their rich culture and creative arts. Considering this, it is very important now as it was in the ancient days to include cultural dimension as an important aspect of sustainability in the current discussions of achieving the agenda 2030.

In response to this call, UNESCO has outlined major strategies to help tackle this mandate. They include policy advice, technical assistance, capacity building and experiences – in relation to education. Development, culture, and communication have been outlined at the newly ended 3rd UNESCO creative cities network summit held in Beijing on 17th September 2021, chaired by Audrey Azingley, Director Gen of UNESCO- (UNESCO, UCCN report, 2021). Sustainable cities as a topic of concern cannot be overlooked if such conferences, growth, industrialization, and migration are in the picture. Considering this, Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality education and lifelong learning (SDG 4) and Sustainable Development Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG

¹ United Nations educational, scientific, and cultural organisation, (Unesco), UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), Creative, cultural, and creative industries (CCI).

11) remain in the spotlight. Issues of safety, affordable and quality housing, good public transportation, resilient cities, urban migration, and peaceful and violent free communities should be addressed. It is estimated that by 2050, cities will host 2.5 billion people in addition to the current 3.9 billion population globally. (UNESCO, UCCN 2021 report).

UNESCO is credited as the leading organisation that effectively implements the new urban agenda and the agenda 2030 and hence promotes city development. To help achieve the sustainable cities agenda, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) argued that technology, innovation, education, culture, and creativity, arts will be the main tools to be utilised to realize this goal. Leveraging culture and creativity will ensure sustainable urban development coupled with inclusive growth (SDG 11). The UCCN functions as a “laboratory of ideas and innovative experiences intended to capitalize on the full potential of culture and creativity for sustainable urban development”². According to the UCCN reports in 2021, e.g., Gothenburg was named among the top creative cities in the world, in the literature category under arts.

The diverse Cultural and Creative Industry in Stockholm has also not relented in its quest to contribute to national and regional growth through revenue. According to reports by Invest Stockholm, the Culture and Creative Industries (CCI), generated more revenue than the food industries, which is enormous. In detail, the CCI in 2018 turned in 217 billion SEK. (Invest Stockholm, CCI, report, 2021) This means more sales, employability, harnessing talents and skills, industry innovation, and tourism among others.

Cultural and Creative Industries

The Cultural and Creative Industry (CCI) has been credited as a viable profession, therefore, misconceptions about it just as merely passion-driven or hobby oriented is being gradually wiped off. Considering the table below. In this regard, many organisations have identified with it to run it as a formalised business and social entrepreneurial venture accordingly with all the needed technicalities it deserves. It provided about 13.5 % of employment in 2010. with total revenue of 35 % in the same year (CCI report, 2021). An example of creative organisations contributing to this advancement is Subtopia located at Botkyrka municipality in Stockholm South. The formalisation and advancement of CCI in furtherance have also shed more light on the growing industry.

Industry group Companies	Turnover change 2010-2018
Fashion	+40%
Audio-visual	+54%
Advertising	+32%
Literature & press	-6%
Stage art	+81%
Picture & Form	+61%
Architecture	+103%
Literary and artistic works	+20%
Cultural heritage	-11%

Table 1: Development of the Creative & Cultural industries, change in turnover between 2010-2018. (Extract, from the Stockholm CCI report 2021.)

² <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/content/reporting-monitoring>

The thriving of CCI and organisations like Subtopia at Botkyrka in the Stockholm region can also be linked to various factors. Arts and creativity thrive on freedom, so do the practitioners. The CCI 2021 reports argue that most migrants possess diverse creative and cultural backgrounds and expertise. People of Botkyrka leverage the cross-ethnic platform created by Subtopia to integrate their diverse ethnicities, cultures and arts and creativity.

Furthermore, people with diverse cultural and creative ideas are usually able to find like-minded people in open places, share interests, form relations, build trust, and proceed to do business. An example of such a creative space is Kulturehuset which is a trailblazer in Stockholm City. Likewise, Subtopia on a municipality level provides shelter for creative ideas to be nurtured into a variable and thriving businesses. The Stockholm CCI report (2021), further states that the technological and educational advancements in Sweden also have created a fertile ground for CCI to thrive. The Swedish policies place a premium on educating minds and so do Subtopia. Subtopia has identified that for creatives to thrive, there is a need for education and training to take place. Hence Klump was instituted to take up the mandate within the organisation to give formal business training such as organising workshops for start-ups. According to the CCI report, (2021) Stockholm is richly furnished with technology, talent and tolerance making it a fertile ground to nurture CCI. Similarly, Subtopia also provides fertile grounds to harness creative minds who are mostly immigrants living in the segregated community through training and logistics. Subtopia further provides social cohesion because of networking among the various clients or businesses through e.g., Klump and other activities.

Considering the pointers mentioned above, CCI as well as Subtopia to a large extent are considered to have been furnished with the fertile grounds to thrive in Stockholm to operate. It is worthy of mention that together they have also served as a catalyst in addition to the rigid laws to check violence and further maintain peace in the areas by engaging the youth in creative endeavours. This ensures another dimension of SDG11, which is peaceful cities and free of violence



Figure 1. Photos of art in the Botkyrka municipality

Considering these grounds that have been levelled, Subtopia together with its partners have the mandate to be the forerunners in the Botkyrka municipality.

BACKGROUND STUDY OF BOTKYRKA MUNICIPALITY (and the triad of its social sustainability).

This description of Botkyrka is centred around the triad of social sustainability of the community (Sherazi, and Kevani, 2019), and how they have impacted the success of creative and cultural activities in the community and being part of the Stockholm region development plan.

Botkyrka Municipality is noted to be the fifth largest municipality located twenty minutes away from Stockholm City. It comprises of suburbs such as Alby, Fittja, Hallunda -Norsborg, Tullinge, Tumba and Vårsta -Grödinge. Botkyrka Municipality's inhabitants are mostly immigrants from multiple ethnic, and socio-cultural backgrounds. The municipality to a larger degree can be described as segregated due to its diverse cultural backgrounds being totally different from the mainstream Swedish lifestyle and culture. The population numbers about 93000 inhabitants. (www.Botkyrka.varbi.com). The population of Botkyrka Municipality can be described as youthful and vibrant who are formally unemployed but highly talented. On the other hand, this talented youthful population can fit into the CCI and impact their personal lives and that of the municipality in general. The Municipality's rich Cultural backgrounds and creative activities earned it the title of being the first municipality to embrace and promote activities and projects through the flagship event" Experience Botkyrka ". Botkyrka can be described as having a comparatively strong social connection among the inhabitants. This is in connection to its multiple cultural backgrounds and further enhanced by the activities of Subtopia. Being part of the Stockholm Region, certain indicators can be pointed to as factors that have also contributed to laying the foundations for the success of socio-cultural and creative activities of the municipality which Subtopia is responsible for of them.

Neighbourhood. This aspect of the community also indicates its characteristic of being part of the Stockholm region development. It further contributes to the thriving aspect of cultural and creative activities of the municipality. These features include the variety of the land use of the municipality pointing towards the socio-economic activities such as the presence of shopping centres like the Alby Centrum. City projects like train stations, railways, trains, streets, and buses enhance commuting within and between the municipality and Stockholm. The presence of people frequenting the use of these facilities creates a sense of security within the neighbourhood. Additionally, they also help to reduce segregation from Stockholm since the developmental plans and projects for the region also cover the municipality. Furthermore, social developments like housing plans (apartments), police stations, libraries, cultural centres, open spaces, and public parks among others also part of the benefits the community derives from national or regional developmental plans. The presence of these amenities which forms part of the general city developments also promotes social justice for the inhabitants since the community is served with their part of the national cake. This enhances sociocultural activities like what Subtopia engages in to take place.

Neighbouring. According to (Sherazi, and Kevani, 2019), neighbouring describes the *networking qualities, the social capital, and the bond of a community*. Botkyrka prides itself on a strong socio-bond from multiple cultures who are interested in sharing their space and cultures among themselves. This feature contributes to the social well-being of a city or community and its development. As a result, this increases the attractiveness of the community for patrons, inhabitants, and visitors to engage in social activities. Additionally, the social quality of life in Botkyrka municipality is promoted. A sense of attachment and connection among inhabitants is promoted. It creates a fertile ground for socio-cultural projects and activities organised by organisations like Subtopia to thrive. The safety and social bond of a community are aspects of a sound community.

Subtopia's Impacts on Sustainable Community Development – SDG 11 in Botkyrka.

Similarly, in addition to the above qualities of Botkyrka municipality it has served as fertile grounds for formalised Organizational activities to further promote development in the municipality as an entity. This section of the paper has identified and highlighted some ways that Subtopia is contributing to SDG 11 and community development in Botkyrka. Taking up the challenge, Subtopia together with other partners in the "Experience Botkyrka" identified various SDGs to integrate in their business as a cultural creative hub and a social enterprise. (Subtopia challenge document). The goal is to achieve value addition. These goals include,

SDG 3, Good health, and well-being.

SDG 5, Gender equality.

SDG 8, Decent work, and economic growth

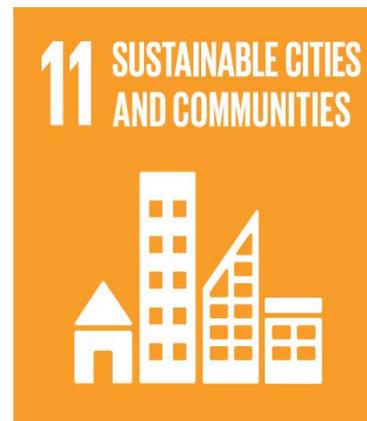
SDG10, Reduced Inequalities

SDG11, Sustainable Cities and communities

SDG 12, Responsible production, and Consumption

SDG15, Life on land

Others such as SDG 4, Quality education and lifelong learning and SDG17, partnership for goals can as well be linked to their objectives.



Subtopia, identifying **SDG 11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities) as part of its targets to impact the community and social development has by way integrated into its organisational policies, business models, full participation of activities of the subdivisions such as Klump and DIT (Do It Together) and collaborating with other partners such as Fanzingo. By the full integration of sustainability into the organisation's technical tools, processes, and structures, it can be argued that Subtopia has built on the foundation of the triad of the social fabric of Botkyrka (discussed above) and is fully committed to further advance and strengthen the community and further "make the world a better place". (www.subtopia.se). Art, business, culture, and social engagements serve as catalysts to achieve the impact the organisations seek. This will further be grouped into four main areas with the help of the partners. The areas include, economic, ecologically, culturally, and socially sustainable aspects.

Economically, one of the ways the municipality, and the inhabitants are greatly impacted by the organisation is through KLUMP. People with ideas are recruited and given the best tools in terms of training to equip them with better ways of doing business. By extension, these recruits who turn into business owners generate revenue to run their businesses, take care of themselves, and their families and live above the national poverty line. They also contribute their taxes to the government of the municipality which forms parts of the revenue used for the development of the community.

On a municipality level, Subtopia falls under the UNESCO city development plan and its activities are in line with Stockholm 2050 agenda, they impress on the financial policymakers to allocate budgets, and to invest funds or grants in the organisation and the businesses of the starts ups. CCI has been discovered to generate more revenue in 2018 than the food industry, (CCI report, 2021). Therefore, it is important for the budget to cover the businesses which will enable the owners to implement better ways of doing business, employ more workers, and generate more sales and services to gain more income. (Grodach, 2011)

Ecologically, one of the pillars of the community and city developments is the green spaces that should be available to contribute to making every community sustainable. Parks and gardens are essential for the beautification of every community. In essence the health of the community. The greens help to cleanse the air of any carbon dioxide particles making it clean for respiration. Also, engaging a business like Boodla which is an offspring of Subtopia, the green areas of the Botkyrka municipality are maintained and used for beauty, food production and protecting biological species. By ensuring that this aspect of sustainable cities outlined in SDG 11 is achieved, inequality in settlements in this case between an immigrant community like Botkyrka and Swedish habitats is reduced, making the residence habitable to meet the national city standards.

Furthermore, these green areas also serve as good open places for outdoor events like the circus, picnics, music, or art shows among others which brings us to culture.

Culturally, Botkyrka by virtue of its diverse population has a perfect cocktail of cultural blends. It is not surprising that it's been noted as the first municipality that accepted and promoted arts and culture activities which gave birth to "Experience Botkyrka". Subtopia, therefore, plays a vital role by creating good conditions to foster the display of these various cultures. They come in a form of belief systems, symbols, and ways of life of the people, that can further be depicted by music, paintings, sculptures, and folklore among many ([www. Subtopia .se](http://www.Subtopia.se)). The circus is one of the ways of showcasing such. Grodch (2011), argues that most cultural symbols are translated in a form of artistic painting, they are usually displayed on old, abandoned buildings as graffiti or murals. These

paintings also attract visitors to the site and by so doing prevent the building from being pulled down or vandalized.

With respect to such, Subtopia helps to preserve not only the cultural heritage of these diverse ethnicities but also helps preserve some of these paintings and old buildings alike. It preserves the cultural heritage of the society and attracts local and regional tourism. Subtopia also provides a platform for diverse ethnicities to share their various cultures and beliefs thereby ensuring that they are preservers across generations and different people.

Socially. Subtopia through outdoor programmes and events further provides a platform for social cohesion. Through the activities by DIT in the community, social cohesion, networking, skills, and talents harnessing among young adults and immigrants. These events further provide the inhabitants especially, the youth to seize the opportunity to engage in these activities. They embrace the idea of identifying the community as their own. And further coming together to promote its image during such activities leads to the social belongingness of the people of Botkyrka. One of the subgoals of SDG 11 is creating resilient and strong neighbourhoods. Through Subtopia partnered with DIT, such activities, give the young adults a place of attachment and expression and thereby encouraging strong social bonds and social identifications, which goes on to strengthen the social unity within the municipality. Furthermore, Subtopia provides the opportunity for people to showcase and harness talents, especially among the unemployed youth. This instils a sense of relevance in their persona and community level, promoting inclusion and intersectionality which reduces inequality, and segregation between the immigrant community in the municipality and the Swedish people. Grodach, (2011), argues that places like community centres promote peer relations and “fellowship”.

Also, by engaging idle but talented people and young adults in activities, these people can channel their energies, and frustrations into better productivity. The possibility of community and street violence can further be reduced. These people when groomed and maintained can be a source of positive influence on their peers. From a broader perspective, they can be community icons who can champion the course of Subtopia, recruit more people, provide a place of social belonging for these recruits, provide mentorship for them, and subsequently improve their lives and” make the world a better place “as Subtopia strives to achieve.

Suggestions for consideration to further achieve a sustainable Botkyrka Community.

Finally, this section of the discussion seeks to suggest other ways that the organisations can implement as tops to further achieve SDG 11 on the community level.

These include the organisation, considering adopting awareness creation of UNESCO, and themed activities on the municipality or local level. Considering the cultural and creative businesses and activities that fall directly under UNESCO and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Consider nominating Goodwill a

ambassadors among the youth in the municipality to further promote the SDG agenda of the organisation. This will further lift the image of the municipality on a regional and national level

regardless of it being known as an immigrant and segregated community. An example of Youth Ambassadors is BTS (Behind the Scenes boys' band) - South Korea; Wiyaala- Unicef Ghana and Dark Suburb – Ghana.

Consider having “Creative SDG Theme Challenges” by the young adults as part of awareness creation and engaging the community members in SDGs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has sought to mainly discuss **SDG 11**, Sustainable City, and Communities in relation to the impacts of Subtopia and its activities in Botkyrka municipality. It also engaged in discussing the role and contribution of the United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organization UNESCO), Unesco Creative Cities Network (UCCN) and Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) in terms of how these organisations and phenomena form the foundation of the culture and creativity on which Subtopia is built.

References

- Grodach, C. 2011. Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighborhoods, Artists, and Cultural Economy. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 31 74–85.
- Shirazi, M. Reza, and Ramin Keivani. (2019). “The Triad of Social Sustainability: Defining and Measuring Social Sustainability of Urban Neighbourhoods.” *Urban Research & Practice*, 12, pp. 1–24
- Cities, Culture, Creativity: Leveraging Culture & Creativity for Sustainable Urban Development & Inclusive Growth. 2021. UNESCO, World bank group.
- Creative and Cultural Industries in Stockholm. <https://www.investstockholm.com/news/stockholm-creative-and-cultural-industries-report/>

Acknowledgement.

My sincere gratitude goes to Ann-Sofie Koping of Sodertorns University, Sweden for her tireless support and supervision when I was writing this paper.

Paper. Ehmeli Dzifa Amengor

(Master student. Leadership for Sustainable Development, Sociology)

Photography. Ehmeli Dzifa Amengor

Email..... Missamengor54@gmail.com

Stockholm, Sweden.

