

## **Planning the 21st Century Urban Neighborhood: Learning from Previous Concepts**

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Abstract. In the recent past, due to the growing turmoil in urban society, many planners have realized the problems associated with neighborhood physical as well as social decline. However, the rapid pace of technological breakthroughs has nullified their efforts. This study is an investigation of the concept of the neighborhood historically in the twentieth century. It attempts to discuss the major concepts developed during the first half of the 20th century. These include the neighborhood concept developed in many traditional Arab and Muslim towns, Perry's physical neighborhood layout to produce social interaction, the Garden City concept by Howard, and the Radburn Plan, New Jersey developed by Stein and Wright. The section on the second half of the 20th century includes the English and U.S. Post-World War II New Towns, Planned Unit Developments, and the most recent concept of Neo-Traditional Developments. Based on the lessons learned from the previous neighborhood concepts, a list of urban planning principles has been suggested for planning socially sustainable urban neighborhoods in the 21st century.

### **Introduction**

The neighborhood as a basic planning unit has been widely accepted throughout the developed and developing countries. Several concepts of neighborhoods have been developed from time to time to emphasize the socio-cultural aspect within the physical framework. This paper is aimed at obtaining two objectives. The first objective is to study the neighborhood concept developed in many traditional Arab and Muslim towns and other Western neighborhood concepts and highlight the social aspects of both which have been neglected in contemporary neighborhood planning. The second objective is to present

guidelines for planning the 21st century neighborhood as a socio-spatial unit based on earlier traditional concepts.

Residential areas are as old as human civilization. Neighborhoods have existed in every civilization in one form or another and were often developed to suit the dwelling patterns and daily requirements of the citizens. Hamer argues that the earliest cities of antiquity had distinct districts where certain families and tribes lived and patronized the same markets and temples [1, p.793]. Historically, neighborhoods grew organically without plans or formal authorization and many were segregated through a deliberate delimitation of neighborhoods. In the very early neighborhoods, endogamy used to define the smallest social unit of a clan or a community, with the composite family unit-comprising husband, wife and children. These in turn were related to other communities or clans. Blood relations were traditionally stronger than either religious or economic relationship [2].

Ecological aspects had a significant impact on the pattern of communities. The neighborhoods of early cities were defined to meet urban austere economic needs. This brought a change in the motive and composition of neighborhoods. People with common economic interests began to live together for mutual benefit. Gradually, change was observed between the life of the cities and that of the villages. Common social interests and latent survival necessities determined the rise of villages whereas cities were increasingly built to suit economic interests and necessities. This resulted in the emergence of a variety of socio-economic classes. The drastic changes in urban life, both in physical and social composition brought about a change in overall social values from that experienced in rural village life.

### **The Concepts of Neighboring and Neighborhood Unit**

In order to understand the concept of neighborhood, it is essential to define the basic concepts of 'neighbor', and 'neighborhood unit' and to explore the role of neighbors in human settlements. Social scientists in the past have dealt with the issue of neighborhoods from different perspectives. Townsend defined the neighbor as "the unrelated person living in the same street or block, with whom there was a customary or prearranged contact at least once a month on average" [3]. The role of the neighbor is carved out depending on the needs and requirements of his individual needs. Close interaction between two neighbors with common interests increase social interaction, and on most occasions ends in friendship. Therefore, a social bond develops between neighbors and is clearly visible in their daily activities such as meeting in grocery stores or in mosques. The social bond between individual neighbors frames the social fabric of the society.

Neighborness is a socially defined relationship involving exchange of services, information and personal approval among individuals living near each other [4]. As such, a common social interaction is created those shapes the relationship among individuals

develops a sense of belonging and gives a framework to the neighborhood unit. On the same hand, social interaction can be seen on the local or much smaller scale to that of the city. According to Cunnigham, "it is the level of the elementary school, the walk-in convenience store, the church, and the community organization mobilized to fight crime and seek a new playground" [5]. The changes in social values created an adverse impact on neighborhoods. In the recent past, there has been a growing concern to minimize the adverse effect of the deterioration of the social values within urban neighborhoods and to its character. However, the main emphasis has been on the provision of educational, community centers, entertainment and services. This paper is an attempt to look at neighborhood as a socio-spatial unit. The historical development of the main neighborhood concepts developed during the first half of the 20th century is first discussed. This part includes the neighborhood concept developed in many Arab and Muslim towns, Perry's physical neighborhood layout to produce social interaction, the Garden City concept by Howard, and the Radburn Plan, New Jersey developed by Stein and Wright. The section on the second half of the 20th century includes the English Post-World War II New Towns, Planned Unit Developments, and the most recent concept of Neo-Traditional Developments. Based on the lessons learned from the previous neighborhood concepts, a number of planning principles will be suggested.

### Historical Background

Different socio-economic groups in many neighborhoods of medieval cities have lived side by side: the master, the laborer, and the craftsman. Likewise, craftguilds grouped people according to religious or economic interests during this period. The medieval city consisted of a grid-system pattern of neighborhoods. The streets of these neighborhoods were winding and narrow, providing protection from inclement weather and encouraging social interaction among neighborhood residents' [6]. The physical closeness of individual residential units resulted in unplanned social integration.

During the Renaissance, the era from 14th to 16th century, the idea of all socio-economic groups living together was discarded as people became more involved in class segregation, thus establishing their own identity. In an effort to establish their own identity, the powerful middle and upper classes moved outside the medieval city walls, while low income groups remained inside. This marked the beginning of segregation based on income and the foundation of today's middle and upper class neighborhoods [6].

Industrialization revolutionized human society. Technological breakthroughs in the field of science and technology changed people's daily life styles. The advent of the automobile and railroad had a major impact on the neighborhoods, transforming neighborhood patterns. Neighborhoods prior to the arrival of the automobile comprised small towns and cohesive villages that "lived on in the imaginations of moralists, poets, old men, and city planners"[7]. They were constellations of many different forces of which

size and scale were only the most visible indicators. Residents considered the automobile as a monster and many were seduced by the facility it provided in their daily activities. Its environmental impact was immense and the neighborhoods were packed with them, to the detriment of people. The car restricted the movement of pedestrians wherever they went.

In the early part of 20th century, social scientists were engaged in the study of neighborhoods. The 'neighborhood unit' approach, first conceived by Perry, was a self-conscious attempt to promulgate what he considered to be 'good' design, and to incorporate which was the best social thought of the modern era into a physical design, that would promote the health, safety and well-being of people living in urban residential areas [8]. According to White and White, the neighborhood unit formula, although couched primarily in spatial terms, represented an important offshoot of turn-of-the-century reformist thought, which viewed the incipient urban life styles of the era with considerable consternation [9].

More approaches were later developed to explain the spatial patterns of neighborhoods, among which were the traditional approach and sub-cultural approach. These approaches consist of spatial sociological and economic models. Bailey developed the economic model to identify variables that are used to describe and predict changes in a neighborhood [10]. This model, which was later extended, assumes that a household's decision to move is a function of family circumstances (size, income and job location) and relative housing prices. This model provides a framework to analyze neighborhood change. People's perception of a neighborhood and the value people place on living there may later change as a result of changes in the quality of public services, the characteristics of people moving into the area, or changes in surrounding neighborhoods that may be expected to spill over into their neighborhood.

However, the literature on sub-cultures shows that there are social and institutional neighborhood characteristics (such as relationship with friends, neighbors, and religious centers, neighborhood and community organizations) that strongly affect the behavior of residents. The literature on subculture emphasizes the effects of social networks on people's behavior in the dynamics of neighborhood change. One can conclude from an analysis of the literature on neighborhoods that many structural forces were behind neighborhood decline. Some of these forces are economics, politics, ethnic polarization and socio-cultural changes, among others.

The most recent physical planning strategy for improving the sense of community is known as 'neo-traditional town planning'. Unlike residential or commercial development which refers to a single development type, this strategy focuses on several different design concepts, all patterned after the small towns of the pre-World War II United States [11]. In general, neo-traditional towns are tightly clustered villages featuring narrow streets, front porches, and a seamless mix of residential, commercial, and civic structures all within easy walking distance of each other.

Jacobs and Donald argued that livings, working and shopping opportunities, as well as public, spiritual, and recreational activities, are required to be in reasonably close proximity to each other to create healthy and vital neighborhood [12]. Public institutions - from schools and religious institutions to libraries and museums - not only provide important services to residents, but they can also provide neighborhoods with a source of identity and community pride.

In 1987, Moudon advocates a newer concept in physical planning what she terms "woonerff": streets where vehicles and pedestrians use the same space, but where pedestrians have the right-of-way. Planners eliminate the separation between street and sidewalks and allow traffic and children to use the same space without hazard to each other, through a careful combination of paving, street furniture, and plantings. A study of streets that were converted into woonerffs in Hanover, Germany, found an increase in social interaction on the streets after modifications were based on the woonerff concept [13].

The above section has addressed the main points regarding the historical development of the neighborhood concepts. The next section will discuss the main neighborhood concepts in the first half of the 20th century.

### **Neighborhoods in the First Half of 20th Century**

Neighborhood concepts that have been developed in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century attempted to address the social and cultural problems faced in neighborhood planning. Some of the major concepts are discussed below under the framework of traditional pattern of neighborhoods. They are:



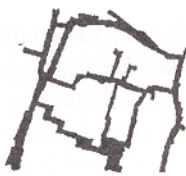

1. The Traditional Neighborhood in Arab and Muslim towns;
2. Clarence Perry's concept of Neighborhood;
3. The Garden City concept; and
4. The Radburn Plan.

#### **The Traditional Neighborhood in Arab and Muslim Towns**

The traditional societies of many developing countries gained considerable success in maintaining local identity, matching with their socio-economic characteristics. Two traditional neighborhood examples, which have existed in many traditional parts of the Arab and Muslim towns, are presented here. They are the concept of Al-Housh and Al-Hara (Fig. 1).

Al-Housh as a traditional urban system characterizes the traditional fabric of many cities in the western region of Saudi Arabia. Al-Housh is deemed to be a planning unit on both the physical and social levels. On the physical level, the Al-Housh urban system comprised of open courtyards connected by a main street. The courtyard protected by a

gate and provided access to the houses surrounding it from all sides. On the socio-cultural level, Al Hussayen pointed out that Al-Housh occupants were characterized by homogenous social groups based on kin, occupational, or ethnic ground [14]. The open courtyard heightens the social relations between residences as it provides a common space where people meet together and share social events (weddings, death, etc.), children play safely and woman gather in a certain corners. Al-Housh also provides a protection for its residents where the gate is closed at night and any stranger will be carefully under observation. The gated Housh has developed a sense of common control among Al-Housh residents.

Characteristics	AL HARA	AI HOUSH
The small urban enclaves	 <p><b>Ally ways:</b> Close ended paths ramified from the Hara</p>	 <p><b>Courtyard:</b> An open space ramified from local street and protected by a gate</p>
Aggregated unit	 <p><b>Al Darb:</b> The aggregation of Al Hara and alley ways</p>	 <p><b>Local Path:</b> The aggregation of courtyards ramified from one path</p>
Population	800-1200	600-1000
No. of houses	15-60 units	25-40 units

Source: [15].

Fig. 1. Physical characteristics of Al-Hara and Al-Housh in traditional Arab and Muslim towns.

Likewise, Al-Hara is a basic planning unit or urban enclave in traditional urban fabrics of many Arab and Muslim towns. It provides a well-defined physical environment for a homogenous community. The physical features of Al-Hara could be described as a narrow and relatively short path (2-6 m wide and some 50-150 m long) could be closed or open ended. It comprises of a limited number of plots and dwelling units (15-60 units) together with essential services and some close-ended alleyways ramified from the Al-Hara providing some private spaces. The other end could be closed and protected by a gate [16]. Al-Hara has a limited number of residences and provides a sense of identity and local control over its environment. The configuration of Al-Hara and alleyways constitutes what is known as Al Darb. The essence of Al Darb was its capacity for defense, which is attributed to its limited accessibility.

Abu-Lughod summaries the functional elements of the traditional "Islamic" urban form [17]. They are local autonomy, self-management, a highly rationalized and uniform land use, and proximity of religious and public buildings. Such features can be observed in Al-Housh and Al-Hara. In addition to the above, two important requirements have been highlighted by Abu-Lughod in the traditional "Islamic" city. The first requirement is that the entire city was built at the same time and the second is that the city was functionally integrated with the rest of the society and the cities in other parts of the extensive empire. The spatial structure of the traditional neighborhood in Arab and Muslim towns produced a physical proximity between neighborhood residents that in turn produced a socio-spatial unit.

### **Perry's Concept of Neighborhood**

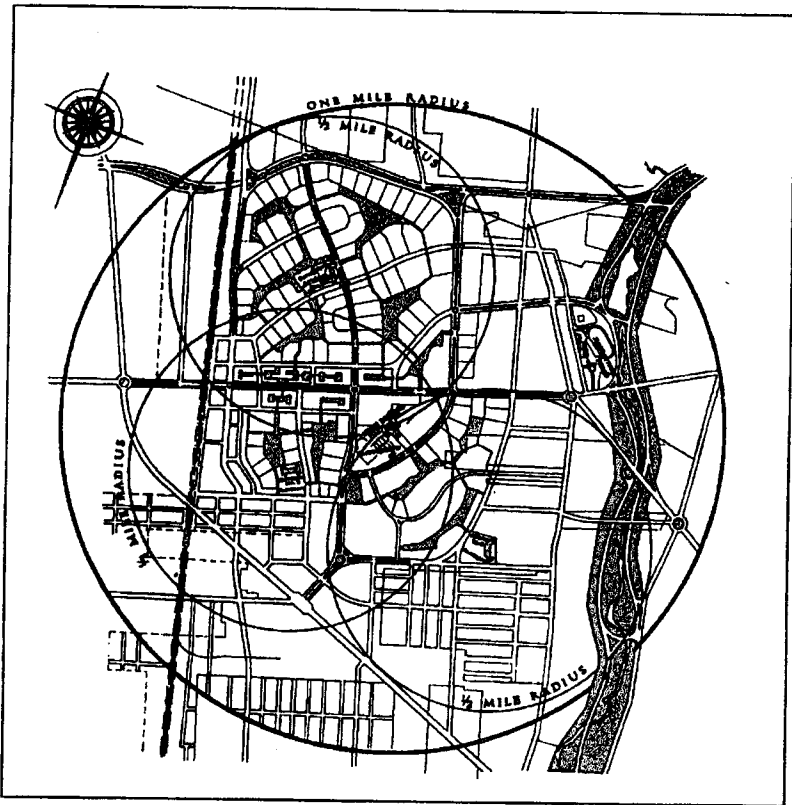
In the late 19th century and the early 20th century, efforts were being made to restore the physical as well as social attributes of the neighborhood. The efforts made by Clarence Perry in this regard were commendable. His neighborhood concept was based upon six planning elements. They were schools, boundaries, open spaces, institutional buildings, retail districts, and internal street layout [18].

His main goal was to produce social interaction, and the physical layout was the means of achieving it. The suburban movement, due to social and economic changes with the help of wide networks of transportation, both road and rail followed his concept. Perry's concept and the suburban movement to some extent were successful in providing a traditional outlook to the concept of neighborhood planning with emphasis on the social aspect.

### **The Garden City Concept**

The Garden City concept was developed by a British court reporter Ebenezer Howard in 1892 [2]. The two major variables in the Garden city concept were the quantity of housing (or population) and the number of jobs. In addition to these two variables, the





Source: [21].

Fig. 3. Radburn plan 1929: General plan showing three school-centered neighborhood.

### Neighborhoods in the Second Half of the 20th Century

#### The English and U.S. post-world war II new towns

The neighborhood concept of the British post-world war II new towns/suburbs centered around community buildings, schools, shopping centers, open space for social interaction, and use of wide green open spaces as boundaries. The Planners considered the new towns as an identifiable unit and constructed neighborhoods based on the services that could make each area relatively self-contained for day-to-day needs. In doing so, they hoped to attain neighborhood 'balance' by providing better services in terms of social needs.

The early 1950s neighborhoods did not stress social benefits and were later invalidated. Mumford believed that the idea of the British new towns was accepted in principle but not in practice [22]. These new towns differed in: location of shopping centers, location of open spaces and neighborhood size in relation to school size [23].

Despite the rejection of the neighborhood structure of British towns, planners retained three basic elements of the neighborhood concept, namely:

1. Size, as related to school catchment area, walking facilities, and service considerations.
2. Location of facilities to serve overlapping residential catchment areas to replace the centralized service of the neighborhood, and to form a flexible rather than a rigid structure.
3. A city layout which favors the subdivision of large units into smaller ones [24].

During the second half of this century, following World War II, suburbs in the United States were built at an unprecedented rate. However, they were criticized for their limited transportation choices, their lack of low-income housing, inefficient use of land and infrastructure services, and its deprivation of a sense of community among neighborhood inhabitants [24]. The major criticism of this concept was its separation of residential land uses from other land uses [11]. The purpose with which the British new towns and the American suburbs were planned, failed to achieve the desired character of a socio-spatial unit.

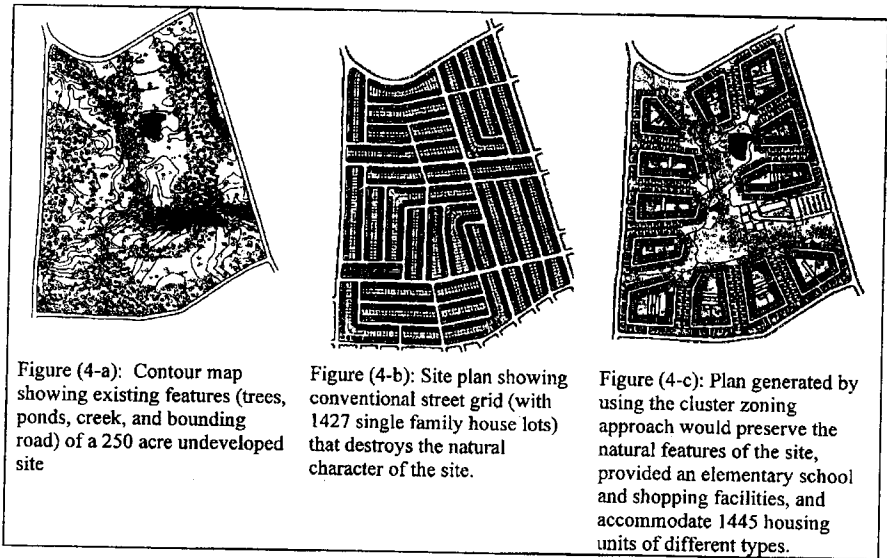
### **Planned Unit Development**

In response to the drawbacks of suburban developments, the concept of 'planned unit development' (PUD) was formulated. 'The planned unit developments' were designed to incorporate all the major characteristics of 'traditional' neighborhoods. The Urban Land Institute identifies four basic characteristics of the planned unit development, namely:

1. Dwelling units are clustered to allow for open spaces.
2. Much or all of the housing is multi-family.
3. Residential densities are higher than in typical suburbs.
4. It allows for the possibility of mixed commercial and industrial land uses [25].

Planned unit development range in size from about 30 homes to over five thousand. The creation of a typical PUD involves subdividing the land into self-contained units linked by collector streets, and the establishment of an architectural theme with a matching entrance off the collector (Fig. 4). Some PUDs also feature an amenity area that serves as a focal point [26].

However, the physical environment in these PUDs served more the needs of the automobile than those of the pedestrian. The wide roadways, large parking lots, and pavements for car use restrained the free movement of pedestrians. PUDs did not satisfy the expectations of the social scientists and gave rise to Neo-Traditional developments (NTD).



Source: [27].

Fig. 4. Planned unit development (PUD).

### Neo-traditional Developments

The most recent phenomenon after the suburbs and the garden city is the concept of neo-traditional developments (NTD). The term NTD refers to five distinct types of development, each emphasizing different NTD features:

1. 'Traditional' Neighborhood Developments [28].
2. Transit oriented development or pedestrian pocket [29].
3. Hamlets [30].
4. Metropolitan Purlieus [31].
5. The revitalization of existing traditional towns[32-34].

According to Bookout, these five neo-traditional concepts share the following common characteristic [26]:

1. A mixed land use.
2. The establishment of employment and civic centers.
3. Fostering a sense of community.

religious institutions are the centers of attraction for all classes of people belonging to a particular religion or faith. In the context of the traditional "Islamic" society, for the past 1400 years, the mosque has been the focal point of social and spiritual interaction for all Muslims. It is the meeting place for all the residents of a neighborhood five times a day. The mosque enhances the social structure of the neighborhoods with frequent gatherings. Its location plays an important role and so should be accessible to all neighborhood residents.

### **Neighborhood Design**

Two of the major issues concerning social aspects that have usually been neglected in earlier attempts are the design of streets and provision of open spaces. The most recent concept of street design is the concept of Traffic Calming or the 'Woonerff' concept. This helps to achieve the free mixing of automobiles with pedestrians but gives the pedestrians the right-of-way. A study of streets that were converted to woonerffs in Hanover, Germany found an increase in social interactions on the street after the Woonerff modification [13]. The second issue is the provision for open spaces to allow future expansion. These open spaces can be categorized into two - one for future development and another for social integration. In extreme cases, they may be used to accommodate any sudden shortage of space. Therefore, the provision of open spaces will be indispensable for future development. In light of traditional neighborhoods concept in many Arab and Muslim towns, the concept of open spaces adequately fits. The open courtyard increases the social contacts between residents as it provides a common space where people meet together and share social events and where children play safely.

### **Neighborhood Services**

The location of public services plays a major role in maintaining and enhancing the social character of the neighborhood and that of the city. The amount of employment a city can generate reflects the 'degree of satisfaction' in the local community, its proximity and multi-functionality determines the intensity of interaction between the residents. Provision should be made in the design of neighborhoods to include the location and future expansion of workplaces, employment centers and commercial activities. Discussing the commercial services in the traditional neighborhoods of Arab and Muslim towns, Abu Lughod pointed that "Vital commercial functions were concentrated in a compact, often covered, pedestrian downtown specialization, and demonstrated a pattern of highly rationalized land use" [17]. Neighborhood services were located in scattered, multi-functional public buildings which were used simultaneously as schools, residence of scholars, often with a hospital attached and which served always as the focus and symbol of communal solidarity.

Another major activity center involving the growth and development of socialization

is the school. Policies should be created alongside the planning principles to restore and improve the quality and standard of local schools. This may help in developing social ties at the grass-roots level, as schools are considered to be the best agents of socialization. The educational institutions must also fulfill the requirements of local industry.

### **Public Participation**

Public participation at the early stage of neighborhood planning is the surest way to achieve the success of these activities. The authorities should involve neighborhood residents right from the beginning of the plan in order to ascertain their needs and expectations. This involvement is vital since it is the members of the general public who must live and work together in the neighborhood. Public hearings are strongly recommended where neighborhood residents have the opportunity to provide additional information and criticism concerning their neighborhood planning.

### **Conclusion**

This paper highlights the fact that throughout history there have been changes in the pattern of neighborhoods. Several attempts were made by social scientists and planners to restore traditional values and patterns of neighborhoods. This study investigated the concept of the neighborhood historically in the twentieth century. It discussed the major concepts developed during the first half of the 20th century. These included the neighborhood concept developed in many Arab and Muslim towns, Perry's physical neighborhood layout to produce social interaction, the Garden City concept by Howard, and the Radburn Plan, New Jersey developed by Stein and Wright. The section on the second half of the 20th century included the English and U.S. Post-World War II New Towns, Planned Unit Developments, and the most recent concept of Neo-Traditional Developments. A list of main urban planning principles has been suggested for planning socially sustainable urban neighborhoods in the 21st century.

The paper concludes that cultural and religious factors such as religion, neighborhood design, provision of neighborhood services and public participation constitute important principles for planning future neighborhoods. However, considering the dynamics of neighborhoods over a period of time, it is difficult to validate the various developed concepts for longer duration of time as perceptions of human beings change with time.

It is hoped that the concepts and the discussion presented in this study will promote more research on neighborhood planning and design by experts in the planning profession, theoreticians and practitioners alike.

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## تخطيط الأحياء الحضرية في القرن الحادي والعشرين: التعلم من المفاهيم السابقة لتخطيط الأحياء السكنية

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(قُدِّم للنشر في ١٣/٦/١٤١٨ هـ ؛ وقُبِّل للنشر في ٧/٦/١٤١٩ هـ)

ملخص البحث. في الماضي القريب ونظرا لزيادة الاضطراب في المجتمع الحضري فقد أدرك المخططون أهمية دراسة ظاهرة تدهور مستوى التخطيط الفيزيقي للأحياء السكنية وما يتبع ذلك عادة من مشكلات اجتماعية، ولكن سرعة التقدم التقني أسهمت في إحباط كثير من جهودهم. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء مفهوم تخطيط الأحياء تاريخيا في القرن العشرين. ويناقش البحث المفاهيم الرئيسة والتي تم تطويرها خلال النصف الأول من هذا القرن كمفهوم تخطيط الأحياء التقليدية في المدن العربية والإسلامية والتصميم الفيزيقي الهادف إلى التفاعل الاجتماعي كفكرة بري (Perry) ومفهوم المدينة الجديدة لهورد (Howard) ومخطط رادبيرن في نيوجرسي (Radburn Plan, New Jersey) والذي طوره ستين ورايت (Stein & Wright). وتعرض الورقة كذلك لتجارب تخطيط الأحياء في النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين. ويشتمل هذا القسم على تخطيط أحياء المدن الإنجليزية الجديدة بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية ومفهوم تطوير الوحدة المخططة Planned Unit Developments ومفهوم التطويرات التقليدية الحديثة Neo-Traditional Developments. واستفادة من دراسة المفاهيم السابقة يقترح البحث قائمة ببعض المبادئ التخطيطية العامة والتي تهدف تخطيط أحياء حضرية مجتمعية مستدامة في القرن الحادي والعشرين.