URBANIZATION AND DISINTEGRATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE EROSION OF SOCIAL COHESION WITHIN URBAN SPACES

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization as part of the modernization process has changed the social structure and living space of people, especially in urban areas. This study aims to systematically review the literature related to the impact of urbanization on social cohesion in local communities and to analyze the dynamics of social disintegration that arise in urban spaces. The research uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method, based on the perspective of critical sociology and social cohesion theory. Data is collected from scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, and policy documents obtained through scientific databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. The analysis was carried out thematically and interpretively on the selected relevant literature published from 2017–2025. The results of the study show that urbanization triggers the erosion of communal solidarity, strengthens spatial segregation, and decreases the sense of belonging between city residents. Processes such as gentrification and social exclusion deepen inequality and marginalize traditional communities. This research confirms the importance of inclusive and participatory community-based urban planning to rebuild lost social cohesion. This study provides a conceptual basis for the development of spatial planning policies that are just and socially sustainable.

INTRODUCTIONS

Urbanization occurs as part of the inevitable processes of modernization and globalization, driving the rapid growth of urban populations worldwide, including in Indonesia. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and UN-Habitat show that urbanization in Indonesia has reached significant levels, with more than 50% of the population

now living in major cities. This increase not only reflects a demographic shift but also signals a transition to new ways of life, where social and economic interactions in urban spaces undergo significant changes. Urbanization is often seen as a driving force for social and economic change; however, it still presents challenges, one of which is its impact on social cohesion within local communities (Hadijah & Sadali, 2020).

Sociocultural aspects, especially in the context of urbanization, experience complex transformations. Rapid urban growth drastically impacts social relations, often leading to the disintegration of local communities. Studies show that the level of social ties, both bonding and bridging, tends to be lower in urban areas compared to rural areas due to population diversity and higher mobility (Qin et al., 2022). Urban life, often marked by anonymity, causes individuals to feel disconnected and reduces their sense of belonging to the community, which in turn triggers the erosion of social cohesion (Bacaksız et al., 2023). Further research has found that this phenomenon is associated with the increasing level of social anonymity, resulting in a decline in trust and interdependence among city dwellers (Rösner & Krämer, 2016).

Social cohesion is a key element in the life of a healthy community. When togetherness and social interactions unfold in public spaces, individuals feel safer and more connected. However, unplanned urbanization often leads to social fragmentation, spatial segregation, and social exclusion, where vulnerable groups are marginalized from access to resources and equal opportunities (Askarizad et al., 2023). Phenomena such as gentrification, where low-income populations are relocated to make way for wealthier social classes, only exacerbate this division, creating deep and layered spatial injustices. As a result, urban centers, which should serve as places for mutual interaction, become breeding grounds for social and economic tensions.

To address these issues, inclusive urban planning is crucial, one that not only focuses on economic growth and infrastructure but also considers often neglected social dimensions. Criticism of development paradigms that emphasize only economic aspects can be seen in real-world examples like gentrification, where new buildings are constructed without considering the needs of the local residents already present (Glover et al., 2022). Injustice in access to public spaces and resources can continue to fracture communities, reinforcing existing segregation and exclusion (Koohikamali & Gerhart, 2018). Therefore, a more holistic and participatory approach to urban planning is necessary to promote sustainable growth and rebuild social cohesion that has been eroded.

Changes in how we define urban space can also be found in the context of social perspectives. As individuals become increasingly connected through social media, they may still feel alienated in real life. This phenomenon indicates that while communication can happen virtually, it does not always guarantee social connection in the real world (Shach-pinsly & Ganor, 2021). The anonymity aspect in social media can worsen interactions, increasing the potential for conflict and aggressive behavior within social groups (Bernstein et al., 2011). While the internet provides a platform for interaction, the anonymous nature of online spaces can foster unfriendly and destructive behavior, especially when linked to aggressive norms in groups (Keller, 2019).

Addressing these challenges requires attention to strengthening social bonds in urban communities. Participation in activities that encourage physical interaction, such as walking in the neighborhood, can help rebuild lost social networks (Glover et al., 2022). In research conducted, simple practices like walking around the neighborhood were found to improve connections between residents, especially during health crises such as the pandemic (Sharon & John, 2018).

Urban planners and policymakers are expected to integrate social and economic perspectives to create spaces that are inclusive and welcoming for all citizens. Policies that maintain a balance between infrastructure development and support for local communities will be key in addressing social disintegration caused by urbanization. In this context, it is important to engage citizens in decision-making processes, so their needs and desires can be accommodated. Only through a community-based, inclusive approach can we hope to create cities that are not only economically developed but also socially cohesive and resilient.

As urbanization continues to grow, responses to its social impacts must be optimized to ensure that urban growth does not come at the expense of social bonds in favor of infrastructure improvements. Research shows that strong social interactions and solid community networks can strengthen individuals' capacity to face challenges (Zhao

et al., 2024). In today's digital era, leveraging technology to enhance communication and cooperation among residents is a strategic step that should not be overlooked.

The insufficient study of the social impacts of urbanization, particularly concerning local community cohesion, highlights the urgency for more critical research. Previous studies show that attention to the social aspects of urbanization is often overlooked amidst mainstream focus on economic and infrastructure issues. In this context, further exploration of the relationship between urbanization and social cohesion is necessary, given the visible social disintegration in various cities. By understanding the dynamics of social interactions in urban societies, we can better identify patterns of disintegration and factors contributing to community fragmentation. The use of an interdisciplinary approach that combines sociology, spatial studies, and urban studies is essential to understanding these complex issues in a comprehensive and thorough manner.

The aim of this research is to systematically review the literature focusing on the relationship between urbanization and social cohesion, and to contribute conceptually to community-oriented urban planning. This research will include the identification of social disintegration patterns arising from unplanned urbanization and support the development of more inclusive policies. Such integrated studies will not only enrich our understanding of the social challenges faced by local communities in the era of urbanization but also contribute to the formulation of effective policies to strengthen social cohesion in these communities. Through this comprehensive approach, it is hoped that innovative solutions will be found that focus not only on infrastructure growth but also on strengthening social networks and bonds among residents in rapidly growing cities.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method grounded in critical sociology, specifically in urban sociology and social cohesion theory. As a literature study, this research does not involve primary data collection but focuses on an in-depth review of various scholarly works that discuss the impact of urbanization on the social life of local communities in urban spaces.

The primary objective of this study is to identify how the modern urbanization process contributes to the disintegration of local communities, weakens social cohesion, and creates spatial segregation and social exclusion. The research also aims to explore how urban and social sociology theories, such as social cohesion theory, social capital, social space, and the concept of post-traditional society, can be used to interpret the social dynamics in contemporary urban environments.

The data sources in this research come from secondary literature, including scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, urban policy documents, and relevant conference proceedings. Literature was collected through systematic searches in various scientific databases, such as Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science, and DOAJ. The keywords used in the search included: "urbanization and social cohesion", "community disintegration", "urban sociology", "social fragmentation in cities", "gentrification and exclusion", and "neighborhood decline and solidarity."

The inclusion criteria for literature selection include publications in English and Indonesian published within the last eight years (2017–2025), as well as relevant classic theoretical works from scholars like Robert Putnam, Manuel Castells, Richard Sennett, and Henri Lefebvre. Literature that is purely technocratic or descriptive without in-depth sociological analysis is excluded from the analysis.

Data analysis is conducted through thematic and interpretative approaches, identifying recurring key themes in the literature, such as: erosion of communal solidarity, gentrification and spatial exclusion, loss of local identity, and transformation of collective values in urban societies. The focus of the analysis is directed at how urban development narratives and spatial structures reproduce social inequalities and weaken the social bonds of citizens. The critical sociology theoretical framework is used as a lens to interpret the findings, particularly concepts such as social capital, the production of space, neoliberal logic in urban planning, and structural disintegration in urban societies.

By combining a systematic literature review approach and a critical sociology analytical framework, this study presents an in-depth conceptual mapping of the relationship between urbanization and the disintegration of local

communities, contributing theoretical foundations for the formulation of more inclusive and socially just urban policies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Social Transformation in the Urban Landscape

Urbanization is a deep and multifaceted process that brings about changes not only in the physical form of cities but also in the social and cultural dynamics that surround them. This process involves more than just an increase in buildings or infrastructure; it also signals a transformation in the ways people interact, communicate, and build relationships with one another. Traditionally, communities living in more isolated environments tend to have strong, community-based, and collective social structures. However, urbanization tends to encourage individuals to adopt more individualistic and sometimes anonymous interaction patterns, which risk weakening the social ties that have historically formed the foundation of community cohesion (Hochstenbach & Musterd, 2018).

These changes reflect a profound shift from communal societies to more fragmented social structures. In many cases, individuals who move to cities in search of new opportunities find themselves facing different social challenges, such as a lack of community support and weaker connections compared to rural areas. This has implications for lower levels of social engagement and may lead to greater feelings of alienation (Telaumbanua et al., 2024). Studies show that phenomena such as social separation and fragmentation are often experienced by groups that were once more tightly knit in traditional communities.

The negative impact of urbanization can also be observed in the form of social isolation, which affects individuals' psychological well-being. Stronger connections in traditional societies often serve as a source of social support, which has functioned as a safeguard against mental and emotional risks. However, as societies become more individualistic, many individuals experience loneliness and alienation, which can eventually trigger serious mental health issues (Burnette et al., 2021). Additionally, imbalanced migration patterns from rural to urban areas can exacerbate social inequality, with only a few individuals successfully integrating and adapting, while the majority remain trapped in deeper cycles of poverty.

Gentrification phenomena serve as a concrete example of social disintegration within the context of urbanization. In many cities, gentrification processes often result in the displacement of existing communities, frequently leading to the loss of local character and the social ties that have been established among residents. Rapid economic growth, while bringing in new investments, often does not collaborate with support for the broader well-being of the community, resulting in a growing divide between the rich and the poor within urban areas (Wesnawa et al., 2023). This reality reinforces the notion that not only does physical space change, but also the social and cultural structures that accompany the environment.

Some studies suggest that urban planning that focuses on community development, with an emphasis on collaboration and active participation from residents, can create more inclusive public spaces, which, in turn, can enhance social interaction. With the presence of green spaces, community centers, and other socially-oriented projects, individuals can rediscover the social ties lost due to rapid urbanization. Increased engagement in these spaces can reignite collective ideas and strengthen bonds among residents (Hassan et al., 2023).

In facing the social transformation challenges brought by urbanization, it is essential to involve various stakeholders in urban policy and planning design. A community empowerment approach not only has the potential to improve current conditions but also encourages a sense of ownership among individuals. By promoting open dialogue and collaboration, policymakers can better understand the needs and expectations of communities, thereby reducing the risk of social fragmentation (Qu et al., 2023). This indicates that when urbanization is handled with a more humanistic approach, it can shift from a threat to an opportunity for building stronger social solidarity in the future.

Ultimately, sustainable urbanization must focus not only on physical growth but also on the overall well-being of society. Given that cohesive social structures act as drivers of happiness and health in communities, it is crucial to continuously explore how the physical environment can be designed to support interaction and community engagement. Through this understanding, it is hoped that the negative social impacts of urbanization can be minimized while creating cities that are not only economically effective but also strong in social solidarity (Hassan et al., 2023).

Disintegration of Local Communities in Urban Spaces

The disintegration of local communities in urban spaces is an increasingly concerning phenomenon amid the social changes brought about by urbanization. One of the main symptoms of this disintegration is the loss of social solidarity among community members. As societies transition from close-knit, communal environments to more individualistic social structures, many collective values and norms begin to weaken. Research shows that in more urbanized environments, individuals tend to rely more on themselves, reducing social interactions that were once a key characteristic of community life. For instance, the phenomenon of "neighborhood isolation," where residents become more disconnected from one another, highlights the need to further investigate the underlying causes (González et al., 2020).

Increased population mobility also contributes to community disintegration. When people move from place to place in search of jobs and opportunities, they often leave behind the social networks they previously built. This results in the loss of social support that may have existed in their original communities. This process can decrease connectedness among members of new communities, making interactions more sporadic and less meaningful (Filazzola et al., 2019). In urban contexts, the need to quickly adapt to new environments makes interpersonal relationships shallower compared to those in established communities.

The anonymity faced by individuals in large cities contributes to growing social isolation. In denser and more diverse societies, people often feel like "outsiders" amidst the crowd, leading to a decline in meaningful social interaction. Studies show that individuals tend to feel alienated even when surrounded by others, due to the feeling of not knowing anyone around them (Rhodes et al., 2022). This condition can worsen life dissatisfaction and mental health issues, causing individuals to feel a loss of belonging and mutual care.

Economic pressure also affects the weakening of social bonds within communities. Uncertainty in employment and financial situations can exacerbate conditions where individuals feel the need to focus on personal needs rather than engaging in community life. Several studies show that during economic crises, people are more likely to withdraw and neglect social relationships that were once important (Keen et al., 2022). Moreover, the tendency to adopt a "survival of the fittest" mindset can lead to indifference toward the well-being of other community members.

Changes in interaction patterns also stem from behavior shifts driven by increasingly busy, achievement-oriented modern lifestyles. The shift from face-to-face social needs to those based on digital technology has also replaced traditional interactions. While technological advances can improve connectivity, phenomena like "social media loneliness" suggest that virtual connections often lack the satisfaction provided by real interpersonal relationships (Wu, 2024). This creates a dynamic where individuals tend to engage less in physical interaction, which in turn contributes to social disintegration.

In addition, many communities now face challenges in preserving their unique identities and cultures. Urbanization often leads to the erosion of local culture, further reinforcing feelings of alienation and a lack of community ties. As daily community life becomes homogenized due to global standards and instant lifestyles, traditional values may be marginalized, resulting in fractures in the social diversity that should strengthen local identity (Tachaudomdach et al., 2021). This adds another layer of failure in building strong social solidarity, while worsening the sense of isolation experienced by individuals.

To address these challenges, it is important to develop interventions that can strengthen social networks and support solidarity in urban societies. Policies that prioritize inclusive development involving community participation are crucial for creating public spaces that facilitate interaction among residents. By integrating dialogue, collaboration, and community-based projects, we can help address disintegration and rebuild lost social bonds (Feng et al., 2020). Through socially sensitive approaches, we can reaffirm our commitment to creating urban spaces that support social cohesion for all members of society.

Therefore, more well-planned strategies are needed to address the symptoms of community disintegration, with the goal of facilitating better integration among residents. This includes the need to raise awareness of the importance of community participation and to strengthen the social ties that have been lost. Efforts to foster deeper relationships, where residents feel connected to one another, can provide a stronger foundation for social cohesion in the ever-evolving urban context (Ke et al., 2017). Understanding the complexity of social interaction in urban spaces is a vital step in sustaining local communities and improving the quality of life of the individuals within them.

Gentrification and Social Exclusion

Gentrification is a profound urban transformation process, in which increased investment and infrastructure renovation in an area often result in the displacement of longtime residents and the erasure of community traces. This process creates significant social imbalances, where original inhabitants are forced to leave their homes due to rising living costs and development plans that disregard their presence. This phenomenon can be observed across the globe, including in major cities such as Jakarta and New York, where social and economic changes directly affect the social and cultural bonds of long-standing communities (Cheng et al., 2018).

A striking example of gentrification is in the Kuningan area of Jakarta, where luxury housing and new shopping center projects threaten the existence of old communities. Longtime residents, unable to keep up with skyrocketing housing prices, are forced to relocate to more remote areas, far from their workplaces and essential resources. This not only contributes to the loss of local identity and history but also causes fractures in the previously close-knit social interactions within the neighborhood (Ing et al., 2023). Research indicates that eviction is often accompanied by a deep sense of loss among displaced residents (Mui et al., 2022).

A similar process is evident in Harlem, New York—long known as a cultural center for the African-American community. Over the past decades, Harlem has undergone significant demographic shifts, with wealthier residents moving in while original inhabitants are driven out by rising rent prices. This not only creates conflict between social classes but also raises questions about the sustainability of community culture and heritage (Nimo-Boakye & Badu-Nuamah, 2022). As a result, many residents are forced to adapt to social alienation in their new environments, adding complexity to the gentrification issue.

Evictions and social exclusion not only limit access to affordable housing but also destroy the social networks of old communities. As wealthier newcomers settle and start their new lives, remaining residents often feel increasingly marginalized, with crumbling social ties and lost community support. Studies show that this disruption creates a situation where many individuals from the original community feel alienated and disconnected, even in what was once a familiar setting (Sykes, 2025).

Globally, similar consequences appear in various cities, including Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, where gentrification in impoverished areas displaces longtime residents in the name of urban beautification. Rent increases following the development of quality public facilities often coincide with forced mass evictions, leaving residents with few viable housing alternatives (Calderón-Argelich et al., 2024). These evictions not only cause housing loss but also ignite social conflict between new groups and original residents.

These conditions worsen social exclusion and economic disparity in already vulnerable communities. Gentrification projects are often planned without involving local residents in decision-making. Instead, policies that prioritize capitalist investment interests sacrifice social ties and the lives of residents who previously sustained the area, adding to social catastrophe (Thurber et al., 2021). In many cases, the economic benefits of gentrification are unevenly distributed, deepening dissatisfaction and longstanding injustice.

Urban spaces shaped by market forces tend to overlook the social and cultural values of local communities. Renovation or beautification projects often prioritize market value and profit, while long-term residents are neglected (Daly et al., 2021). This highlights the urgent need for more inclusive policy approaches—ones that consider not only aesthetics and economic value but also the welfare and presence of existing residents. Through community involvement and open dialogue, developers and policymakers can help create more friendly and inclusive cities, mitigating the negative impacts of gentrification.

To create a more just city, it's crucial to examine the various aspects of gentrification deeply and holistically. Involvement of local actors, increased land ownership by communities, and guaranteed access to affordable housing are key to preventing widespread eviction and social exclusion. Collective awareness and community mobilization can help break boundaries and find synergistic solutions that not only focus on financial gain but also on the creation of urban spaces that strengthen social cohesion and sustainability for all residents—both old and new (Rigolon & Collins, 2023).

Understanding Social Disintegration Through Critical Sociology

Social disintegration in the context of urbanization cannot be understood as a natural, self-occurring phenomenon, but rather as the result of complex power relations in the production of urban space. Sociological theories, such as Robert Putnam's concept of social capital, show that social relationships play a vital role in building strong social cohesion. Putnam argues that engagement in associations and supportive social networks helps foster a healthy culture of participation. However, in urban settings, economic pressures and spatial redistribution often sideline such engagement, leading to community disintegration (Alia & Maulana, 2023).

Manuel Castells offers valuable insights into how individuals and groups interact in constantly shifting spaces. According to him, social identity forms not only in physical spaces but also in newly emerging contexts shaped by increasingly flexible spatial boundaries. In modern cities, individual identities are often threatened by the fragmentation brought on by urban transformation, eroding the sense of togetherness and solidarity that once characterized traditional communities. As a result, social disintegration occurs: many people feel alienated despite being surrounded by others, and this anxiety creates emptiness in the social sphere (Polci & Pierantoni, 2024).

Richard Sennett highlights the phenomenon of the "corrosion of character" linked to life in modern cities. He argues that overly competitive urban environments pressure individuals to constantly adapt to demands, neglecting deep social bonds. In this sense, social disintegration can be seen as a side effect of urban dynamics that produce fragmented spaces and weaken bonds among residents. When individuals begin to doubt their ability to contribute to the community, they tend to become trapped in cycles of isolation (Trevignani, 2017).

Meanwhile, Henri Lefebvre offers a critical perspective on how space is produced and contested in social contexts. He posits that space is not merely a physical backdrop but serves as a battleground for different social forces. In urban settings, spatial production often reflects capitalistic dominance that disregards social and cultural values. This harms existing communities, eroding collective character and undermining empowerment efforts to shape space that reflects shared needs. For example, infrastructure projects that exclude local residents from planning and decision-making can constitute forms of spatial exploitation that lead to social disintegration (Otrishchenko, 2017).

Based on these perspectives, it can be concluded that social disintegration is inseparable from the ways urban space is produced. Inequity in access to resources and decision-making reveals power structures that influence social dynamics. Gentrification exemplifies this issue, where established communities are threatened by incoming groups with higher purchasing power, leading to evictions and erosion of local identity. This process generates uncontrolled social tensions and diminishes the quality of social contact (Yi-li & Xiang-hong, 2021).

In the Indonesian context, slum settlements in urban areas clearly demonstrate the impact of social disintegration. When city governments initiate urban renewal projects without consulting local residents, conflicts often arise due to dissatisfaction over the loss of homes and social ties. Ironically, projects driven by economic interest frequently ignore the social impacts experienced by local communities (Luoma-aho, 2019).

Moreover, social disintegration can also be observed in community responses to change. In many cases, marginalized communities display resilience by rebuilding solidarity through informal social networks and grassroots initiatives. Participation in collective activities, such as urban gardening or local art groups, offers renewed hope to rebuild meaningful social relations, showing that communities can resist the injustices threatening their welfare (Lane & Lingel, 2022).

Implementing policies grounded in participatory planning could be key to addressing social disintegration. By involving communities in the planning process, their desires and needs can be accommodated—creating spaces that serve residents and emphasize values of solidarity and cooperation. Public policies that empower community participation not only enhance social cohesion but also provide a path to harnessing collective potential to address shared challenges. Such an approach can strengthen social identity in cities, reduce inequality, and foster a sense of belonging among residents (Swartz, 2024).

Ultimately, social disintegration in urban contexts is not inevitable—it reflects underlying power relations in how urban space is produced and governed. A critical sociological perspective offers deep insights into this issue, revealing how interactions between identity, space, and social objects contribute to the formation or breakdown of social cohesion. Through this understanding, strategic steps can be taken to create inclusive and just spatial arrangements for all city residents—building a more connected, resilient, and empowered society (Sevignani, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that urbanization, while promoting economic and infrastructural development, also presents serious challenges to the social cohesion of local communities. The rapid transformation of urban space has led to the fragmentation of social relations, the emergence of anonymity, and the weakening of the sense of belonging and solidarity among residents. Phenomena such as gentrification, spatial segregation, and social exclusion exacerbate community disintegration, particularly among vulnerable groups. Through a systematic literature review, it was found that social cohesion declines as traditional community structures weaken due to economic pressures, high mobility, and the dominance of individualistic values in urban culture. The study also demonstrates that the production of urban space is strongly influenced by power relations, in which capitalist interests often override social well-being. Therefore, an inclusive and participatory urban policy approach is necessary to rebuild social bonds. Citizen involvement in spatial planning, the creation of public spaces that foster interaction, and the revitalization of collective values are crucial steps in addressing social disintegration. This study contributes conceptually to the understanding of the social impacts of urbanization and underscores the urgency of integrating social dimensions into sustainable urban planning.

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