URBAN SUSTAINABILITY: BOISE'S FUTURE?

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Introduction

The world's population has grown exponentially throughout the last century. This has led to humans using more resources as the population increases. As a result, humans need to take a step back and reevaluate how they are living. How will the choices made today affect future generations? What societal changes can be made to lower our dependence on natural resources? These are the types of questions that should be asked. Although these topics are important, the focus of this paper will be what is considered urban sustainability. In this research paper, ideas from two books will be reviewed, the first being *Can a City Be Sustainable?* by The World Watch Institute & the second, *The Sustainable City* was written by Steven Cohen. Finally, this paper will look to the future of the treasure valley and see what Boise has in store to become a sustainable city with their comprehensive plan Blueprint Boise.

Literature Review

In the book *The Sustainable City* by Steven Cohen, the author talks about sustainable urban systems in chapter two, he mentions seven different systems that play a role in how sustainable an urban city can be. The systems include energy, water, solid waste, sewage treatment, open spaces/parks, food & transportation. In contrast, The World Watch Institute includes the following systems: energy, materials, waste, food, & water in the book *Can a City Be Sustainable?* These systems are how the authors think of cities and what it takes for a city to run effectively.

The systems mentioned above all play a vital role in determining whether a city is sustainable or not. How are the terms of what is sustainable and what is not determined? Cohen describes the sustainable city as preventing damage to vital ecosystems as well as being a place that attracts people, culture and commerce (Cohen, 2018, p.4). This is a good definition but may be a little broad. The World Watch Institute alludes that the sustainable city is more than just a place that prevents damage to vital ecosystems. It is a place where there is no longer wasteful use of materials, thoughtless purchasing no longer occurs, pollution is a myth, and homelessness and hunger are a thing of the past (Gardner et al. 2016, p.7). The World Watch Institute focuses more on the social change and cultural aspect of a

sustainable city whereas Cohen thinks of it more as a whole pie that is split up into equal pieces. For this reason, I think Cohen may have a better definition but I do agree with the authors that it is very difficult to properly define what a sustainable city consists of.

Analysis & Findings

In chapter two Cohen talks about Sustainable Urban Systems and this is where he explains what each city system consists of. Cohen includes: energy, water, solid waste, sewage treatment, open spaces/ parks, food & transportation which I think are all vital systems to a sustainable city. Cohen describes sustainable energy systems as valuing the environment/ecosystems, running efficiently, using renewable sources, and being economically viable (Cohen, 2018, p.16). If a cities energy system took all of these things into account and made changes based on them the city could become sustainable. According to (Cohen, 2018) solid waste or garbage removal is a fundamental requirement of the sustainable city. This makes sense because if the waste is unable to be reused or recycled our it piles up larger and larger until the garbage is everywhere. Waste is also a hot topic among cities because there is currently not a 100% sustainable method for disposing of solid waste. One of the most important systems Cohen mentions is the transportation system. Transportation determines how people move throughout the city and how they interact. To see that The World Watch Institute doesn't include transportation in their city systems while Cohen does is surprising. Transportation often has the biggest impact on how a city is designed and essentially how efficiently it operates. In America, our city transportation is designed around the personal car which results in a lot of traffic. This is the same outcome for other countries that have developed cities based around the automobile. However, some European cities are designed more around public transportation and the pedestrian. For instance, Barcelona has developed an extensive urban mobility plan with the hope of reducing traffic by 21% (Vox, 2016). This has led them to develop what are called Superblocks. This urban design plan tries to minimize the number of cars in city centers by enforcing slower speed limits within the superblock, having underground parking, and overall giving the city centers back to the citizen. These superblocks increase foot traffic in the area which results in more

economic and cultural growth. With all of the things Cohen mentions in this chapter I think it is the best framework for a sustainable city.

Case Study

After reviewing Blueprint Boise, I do think this is a plan for a sustainable city. In the plan, one of the first few things you find is what they want Boise to be known for in the future. That includes all of the following: “environmental stewardship; a predictable development pattern; stable neighborhoods and mixed-use activity centers; being a connected community; being a community that values its culture, education, arts, and history, having a strong, diverse economy; and being a safe, healthy, caring community” (Boise City, 2018). A few of the systems Cohen mentions are directly included in this plan but I think even more are indirectly included. Under the Environmental Stewardship section, a few of the goals & policies that Boise is committed to are “preserve & enhance natural resources” as well as “promote energy conservation & alternative energy production” (Boise City, 2018). These two goals align with the energy and water systems that Cohen describes. Under A Connected Community, the plan mentions that “Boise and its partners have indicated a desire to strive for a connected Treasure Valley that provides safe and efficient facilities for pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles, and transit” (Boise City, 2018). This goal will occur by “encouraging the use of a wide range of travel options” and “promoting an overall reduction in regional traffic congestion and vehicle miles traveled” (Boise City, 2018). This push toward sustainable transportation is very necessary for Boise as one of the fastest growing cities in America. But Boise already knows that according to blueprint Boise “The city also acknowledges the important role that transportation plays in its long-term sustainability” (Boise City, 2018). As blueprint Boise aligns with Cohen’s sustainable systems this plan offers sustainable options for the city of Boise.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have looked at different systems that are all aiming to be sustainable and trying to answer the question “what is considered urban sustainability?” To answer this question, we

must include the Sustainable Urban Systems Cohen talks about but also, I think it is vital to include changes to the culture of a city. Just as important as legislation that can be passed, changing the culture of a city from an unsustainable to sustainable is necessary. Even if legislation were to pass increasing fossil fuel prices the citizens of the city have to be willing to make changes based on this legislation. That is why I think without maintaining a sustainable culture, having a sustainable city is out of the question.

References

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