UNIVERSITY OF THE PEOPLE

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The most formative experiences shaping my environmental attitudes have been witnessing firsthand the negative impacts of pollution and unsustainable development. Growing up in an industrial city with heavily contaminated soil and water due to decades of irresponsible chemical dumping was eye-opening. Seeing the health effects and ecological damage this caused made sustainability personal rather than just a vague concept. “The global population increase puts tremendous pressure on the already dwindling natural resources such as soil and freshwater” (Bayabil et al., 2022). Traveling internationally exposed me to places with abysmal air quality or rampant plastic pollution creating hazards for wildlife. It made sustainability tangible and urgent.

Equally important has been learning of promising initiatives that offer hope for improvement. Understanding how technologies like renewable energy and low-impact building materials can enable cleaner economic growth shows environmentalism need not preclude prosperity. Urban planning concepts that foster accessible public transit, walkable neighborhoods, and conservation of green spaces provide attractive lifestyle models besides just environmental benefits. So experiences of problems and solutions alike shape my attitude that protecting environmental quality should be an integral part of public policymaking and infrastructure development.

If I led my city, I would implement three strategies to increase sustainability:

1. Invest heavily in public transit and active mobility infrastructure like bike lanes and pedestrian areas to make car-free lifestyles more achievable. This reduces greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and suburban sprawl. “Every vehicle on the road releases an average of one pound of CO2 per mile driven. Compared with driving alone, taking public transportation reduces CO2 emissions by 45%, decreasing pollutants in the atmosphere and improving air quality” (Pei, 2021). I would couple investments with incentives for transit-oriented private development creating dense yet livable communities.

2. Transition of the municipal vehicle fleet, public transit vehicles, and public lighting systems to renewable electricity like solar and wind. The city should lead by example in minimizing its own fossil fuel consumption through use of technologies like electric buses and heat pumps.
3. Ramp up recycling services, organics composting programs, and education around waste reduction in households and businesses. Less landfill waste means lower methane emissions, alongside other benefits like supporting a circular economy. Convenient programs and financial incentives can change social norms and behaviors.

In shaping attitudes, seeing environmental problems directly and perceiving the promise of solutions matter. Cities hold immense potential to drive broader sustainability transitions. Public policy can encourage this via smart infrastructure, incentives guiding markets, and education shifting social conventions. Local governments are pivotal actors.

References:

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