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“Are urban areas healthy?”

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“All cities are mad: but the madness is gallant. All cities are beautiful, but the beauty is grim.” Christopher Morley’s quote provides a great insight into urban areas around the world. Our concrete buildings manifest the human condition’s wanting to push the limitations of beauty. Yet a crucial part of those buildings is their orientation to the people that live in and near them. Each city is laid out differently and places a certain mold of a view of society, community, and personal vantage points. Yet with obvious shifts appearing because of the introduction of certain beliefs in partnership with a heavy investment in economics, a discourse of where healthy places lie seems to be commonplace.

## HEALTH

As defined by Websters' dictionary “the condition of being well or free from disease.” Specifically with urban health, an inclusion of physical health should be noted (diseases and their spread) and mental health (effects from community, increased diagnosis, isolation, stress). I will also include a healthy government/political system. I describe a healthy system as one that allows citizens rule of law, fair elections. I also include the efficiency of how governments react and plan passed legislation to benefit its citizens or in some cases, hurt its citizens.

## URBAN AREAS

In 2010, the census bureau's rural-urban classification is a delineation of geographical areas. Urban areas are densely developed territories and include residential, commercial, and other non-residential land uses. The distinction must be made because I focus on urban areas, specifically cities, suburbs, and the recent introduction of exurbs. I ultimately want to include a greater metropolitan area of a city, to allow a full perspective of different types of city dwellers.

## METHODOLOGY

The ideas of health and urban areas should be in close conjunction with one another. Urban areas differentiate between countries due to certain ideas being promoted through media (such as the American dream or soviet bloc housing). A takeaway from certain ideas such as these gives an important tap into how services are also distributed among the people. Certain areas/neighborhoods may be a constant zone of wealth, grown upon over generations. Yet, for the same city, the more impoverished sides of the community will also have a predicament from a lack of resources which can be seen in the wealthy communities. It is also important to note the

The argument should be governmental and political in nature and how those systems affect the population it serves. It serves to note that within every study, the effects of policy and planning have encompassed several demographics, expanding from infants to an elderly population. Some governments are active in their decision-making, often coordinating meetings and town halls to usher in the ideas which, when finished, they believe will be heavily invested within the community. The opposing lens, unbeknownst to me, also provides information into why continuations of improving upon our government systems must happen: because its argument claims that often, the people, the voters will vote for something that is not in their best interest. This causes the dilemma of not only having to create more legislation and paperwork to undo the initial problem, including a waiting period, and sacrificing time needed for other issues.

## URBAN PLANNING

### **Healthy Urban Planning**

Although Mr. Corburn may have a vested interest in writing and marketing his own books on Urban Planning and Health, his credentials are almost overbearing when one sees he earned his PhD from MIT

and a post-Doc from Columbia (Corburn, 2021). It also helps him that he is the director of the Institute of Urban and Regional Development and Center Global Healthy Cities at the prestigious UC Berkeley (Corburn, 2021). This demonstrates his credentials with his various connections and titles, he is a proficient source. Therefore, with his expertise in the subject area, he is an adept writer whenever he voices his issues (Corburn, 2021).

Corburn states:

“Community profiles recognizes how voices into community leaders voice concerns for tribal health planning and improvement among programs, leadership and community members. The inclusion of the community voice results in high levels for support in community programs with constant engagement.” (Corburn, 2021).

This quote establishes the benefits from the community allowing voices to be heard. It has promoted their programs through leadership and engagement with information concerning health planning. When assessing the final benefits of the community it was determined essential to continue the process of community voices by the positive education and inviting sense of neighborhood improvement.

Therefore, he segues to an application of issues and concerns among the community.

After a community survey was taken, the committee and village health workers set priorities towards 4 areas: strengthen relations with police precincts, improve physical safety for children, reduce financial vulnerability, and support adults with the responsibility of children (Burton, 2017). Consideration to neighborhood context was included to support (Burton, 2017).

This quote provides community involvement will allow for the correct issues to be addressed and focused on. Through the address, one can view how community partnerships provide context for the decisions made as well. Diagnosing the actions of the community partners, it is imperative to see the connection between the addressing of issues and the people. The people strengthened their connection to the neighborhood ever more with the combination of growing relationships with local law enforcement, the safety of children, and financial troubles.

Moving to more macro-sized goals such as city ordinances and governance, it becomes clear where urban planning of the built environment can be built into. Corburn illustrates this by including more natural processes and ideas to blend in with our concrete jungles.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are pivotal when it comes to city and urban governance for planetary sustainability because of health and environmental management reasons (Corburn, 2017). Plans supporting urban forests to combat lower urban temperature, heat events and minimization of air pollution exposure are becoming increasingly popular (Corburn, 2017).

The example proves SDGs benefit the general sustainability of the planet. By connecting certain topics together such as health, environmental management and urban planning highlights that governances are important within the process of reductions of heat events and harmful exposure from the climate crisis.

When assessing the final product of the government implemented SDG it was determined to continue the process. Further assessment claims more green space created via urban forests and trees can create the desired effect of lowering urban temperatures and reduction of exposure to dangerous pollutants, which will boost the overall city health. Continuously, this ripple can then promote more outdoor activities which can spawn more economic and physiological health benefits.

Conclusively, Corburn gives his opinion over how planning can help benefit certain groups grow a favorable reputation and inclusion into society.

Corburn claims:

Slum upgrading must be manipulated to deliver health gains to urban poor (Corburn, 2017). Methods to include would be the local meanings and ‘sense of place’ through oral history, geography (Corburn, 2017). These projects have been successful in a handful of countries such as Brazil, Thailand and Pakistan (Corburn, 2017).

This example suggests that despite being impoverished, a justification for providing several services is needed. And when those services are provided, to properly serve the people, they must hold to a high standard. This example suggests that slums and informal settlements are disadvantaged from the lack of services provided, and if a service is provided, the often-poor quality of the service. An appraisal of the current situation is evident when one looks at the overall service provided in slums. Further appraisal suggests that improvement of their conditions can create long term contributions to the area from embracing local cultures, traditions and history.

### **Unhealthy Urban Planning**

Despite being an ecology major at Exeter University, he was a nominated academician at the Academy of Urbanism while being the Director for the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Healthy Urban Environments, which he has spent over 15 years with (Grant, 2021). Mr. Grant shows his interest lie within creating healthy relationships between land, food, biodiversity and other resources can help provide a healthy living environment between the community and city but also for the ecosystem of our planet as a whole. (Grant, 2021) Gauging his work experience, Mr. Grant clearly shows his knowledge by his intentions of creating sustainable cities. (Grant, 2021)

Grant paints a picture of poor urban planning from a standpoint that conveys that each city has different wants and needs, yet struggle to organize their priorities to garner healthy planning.

Grant announces:

Policy areas identified that each city made different decisions off issues facing employment, economics (affecting income and status), housing (affordability, overcrowding, living environment) coinciding with transport, environment quality, strategic planning and regeneration (Grant, 2013). Most cities within the initiative failed to grasp the nature of their built environment (Grant, 2013).

The example studies urban choices, and their awareness of the choices made dictate whether a city is capable of recognizing the issue they have and how those issues may be attended to. With continuing differences and ideas with possible land usage, having cities decide on how to use the land may be the largest issue faced when trying to accommodate the land to the community.

Undoubtedly, Grant hones in on the disagreement between urban landscaping and residents' decision over the usage.

A common issue faced by the HUP would be the number of cities that do not emphasize park improvements, allotment provision, safe road crossings, and connective cycle lanes, decreasing the overall impact of each project (Grant, 2013).

This example reveals how the HUP has focused on a specific sector within urban planning. Although some projects are useful to some individuals, other more basic degrees of life should be focused on.

Grant's exchange of views concerning the limited expansion of individual projects (such as safe road crossings and cycle lanes) show although many cities may try to move in the direction, it is implemented in certain areas, yet it struggles to expand itself to all corners of cities.

An assessment of the situation in Europe was determined to be typically unworthy of the cost of time and backlash that the example receives. The exception in east Europe highlights how many countries focus on certain sectors of their country more than others, which can lead to larger gaps of inequalities and discrepancies between the inhabitants how frequent the area.

Many of the urban development trends promoted by the market and facilitated by planning authorities have promoted unhealthy car-dependent lifestyles as an easy choice. Leading into personal health, claiming that the car is not responsible for the decrease in health would be a flagrant lie.

Grant remarks:

The car promotes many choices which exacerbate inequalities and sustainability (Grant, 2013). This has been seen from the growth in European cities integrating low-density car-based development, which impedes citizens who walk and cycle as transport. To make matters worse, 90-95% of office, retail and leisure parks are car dependent, which undermine integration of neighborhoods, capital and increases in unsustainability (Grant, 2013).

The information exemplifies how urban development with focus on cars will are a gateway to unhealthy lifestyles. The use of the land will be harmed when looking within a sustainable lens. The usage of cars also continues the burning of fossil fuels contributing to the climate crisis. In the final assessment, it can be seen to be a combination of poor planning and incorrect transportation focus, can typically lead to ruin lifestyles and future sustainability. Assessing the situation, one can see the car-centric lifestyle is danger because of the way it removes integrated neighborhoods which contain flourishing businesses, several mediums of transport and availability to several different services.

Upon examination of both sides of the argument, we can see that there is favoritism towards the careful consideration of the usage of space. And on one side, we see that in the slums, which are typically very planned out, despite not being true infrastructure approved by the government. Corburn illustrates a picture of being an important cultural enclave despite some of the conditions presented by the informal construction that comes with slums. Because of their unapproved building, it is often considered a nesting ground for disease and illness, with little to no recognition or availability to modern medicine.

Yet, on the other side, the argument, people are much more focused on the basis that cities will often lack in providing walkable cities. Urban planning decisions are often made, but often come up short or end at certain areas. Through surveys and other polls, it shows an overwhelming amount of neighborhood support for urban planning and development. Grant's presentation shows that certain areas will have designations for improved upon areas, which include areas with up-to-date standards of the buildings, bike lanes for pedestrians, and focusing on removing the necessity for cars. However, these are not steadfast throughout the city, and in some cases, the planning is rushed as over the long term, hurts citizens and pedestrians living in the area. Overall, urban planning has caused legitimate causes for improvement. However, when it seems to be restricted to certain areas, dwindling the amount of power that urban planning has over the improvement of the city. Along with slum neighborhoods, which may contain cultural power and backing, with some investment, can turn into attractive parts of the city, embracing a new side of culture to the urban landscape. As a whole, urban planning needs more focus attention and the amount of urban planning that benefits all members of a community are far and few between.

## **GOVERNMENT**

### **“Healthy” Government**

For my paper, government health can be classified via the following methods: Ensuring the security of its citizens, the prevention of the spread of infectious disease and environmental hazards, the regulation of authorities, with the encouragement of creating health within local communities. Encouragement of a healthy lifestyle within communities includes knowledge of food safety, supplying adequate local infrastructure, preparation of emergency, health services, and promoting healthy community and individual behavior.

Ana Louro specialized in her field of study, with a Ph.D. in Geographical and Territorial planning at the prestigious University of Lisbon (Louro,2021). However, her research has only been confined to the city of Lisbon, which displays her lack of worldly awareness about issues faced within the other urban and political systems (Louro,2021). However, her specifically confined research to Lisbon allows her to accurately remodel and push forward necessary urban changes within the city (Louro,2021). Researching the information, Mrs. Louro’s knowledge surrounding urban trends allows it to benefit the target population of city dwellers in a beneficial way (Louro, 2021). By evaluating her one can understand how her passion for thought-provoking research to help inform policymakers shows her qualifications in a greater light (Louro, 2021).

The government’s role, a clear description includes having democratic elections (typically for a qualified elected official) to process and present legislation that will benefit the people they serve. With the goal of processing legislation efficiently, it is utilized as a device to affect and better its target audience.

Louro's researched policies, she debated a significant and enduring impact on how development creates health and development. She defends a proposition of how Portugal individuals not only noticed increased health but collectively built a unified community of citizens who are actively involved to help better health, in this case from urban mobility.

Within the National Health Plan of 2012-2016, Lisbon mentioned that strategies to engage the public with physical activity would be to include the development of environments allowing active transport (cycle paths, pedestrian walkways and orderly public transport) to support all ages, for transport and leisure alike. (Louro, 2019)

This quote implies the push for the National Health Plan, the overall citizen will benefit from the inclusion of cycle paths, pedestrian walkways, and public transport. These paths advocate for physical health whether it be in a recreational manner or method of transport. These implications will affect certain demographics of a community, specifically benefiting low-income and elderly populations. Grading the efforts of local government, it becomes clear that the money allocated for these projects yields a long-lasting change for the city dwellers who must use them. The built environment that caters to its citizens will have the luxury to access more areas within the city. A long-term projection has a high possibility for fewer citizens to purchase vehicles and in return have healthier citizens through these paths.

Louro makes a remarkable assertion which shows how a healthy and interactive government acknowledges shortcomings and constructs plans which will service their citizens accordingly. She hammers this point further when speaking of how Portugal as built upon their 2012-2016 health plan for the following health plan destined for 2018-2025 in Lisbon.

Lisbon's initiatives include accessibility to transport for the elderly and economically vulnerable on public roads (Louro, 2019). The initiatives are excised into smaller goals such as assembling door-to-door transportation services for the disabled; improved traffic flow patterns with additional public services such as hospitals and health centers (Louro, 2019).

The quotes examine Lisbon's continued effort to better the lives of all its citizens. The Lisbon municipal government has pushed for better transportation methods and services without discrimination against certain groups. Further examination showcased how their macro-sized efforts being broken into micro-sized applications exhibit the far-reaching impact of the government. Weighing Lisbon's health plan for 2018-2025, it is clear to see that their involvement in urban health and urban regeneration is not without notice. Their given efforts towards transport and citizen health make a grand case in making decisive and hefty legislation to benefit everyone living within their cities.

Louro is not alone in her discussion as well. She is backed up by Tanja Büchert, A German specialist adviser for the Senator of Health within Bremen, Germany. She was a recent graduate with a Ph.D. and worked as an associate on the project 'AFOOT' from 2015-2021 (Büchert, 2021). Currently, she is employed within the Department of Health, specializing in the association between the built environment and active mobility, and collaborates with urban planners and health practitioners to build healthy urban environments (Büchert, 2021).

In several districts of Bremen, the construction of cycle paths built purposely for tourists boasted economic gain, yet also helped to serve the citizens as a friendly byproduct (Büchert, 2021). Another positive gain would be elevated pressure for planners to make direct structural changes from administration supporting the construction of these structures (Büchert, 2021).

The quote examines how the cycle path will have greater economic strength from the original goal of tourism. Supplementary examination found that to each the cycle path was also used for locals who used it as a mode of transport created more pushback to administrative powers within Bremen to build and select more areas to include these cycle paths in. When diagnosing the value of the location to the local Bremen community it is apparent that the decision forged a better possible economic return. The value of the path for the government exceeded expectations as it became a way for all people to access their destination, whether that be for the tourist or for the local.

When placing Büchert's argument next to that of Louro's it becomes increasingly obvious how constant government activity within current urban structures will allow for the rejuvenation of the urban environment. It makes everyday life simpler for the ordinary citizen by removing certain obstacles, such as car-dependency and all the associated costs along with promoting exercise and healthy ways of living.

Moving back towards Portugal, Louro makes a powerful case for Portugal's desire to improve overall health. She disputes how government intervention to protect its citizens is crucial when trying to reach urban health. She expands her argument to government focus on planning to health to debating the quality of government from provided efforts and their effects on health (specifically within the realm of pollution).

Documentation of prevention and inspection against smoking when using public transport has been made law (Louro, 2019). At a preventative level, the initiatives coordinated by the National Directorate and

National Health Service assembled “Cigarettes Zero” and “Cars without smoke” by Portuguese Leagues (Louro, 2019).

From this source, it can be determined that the legal framework, although not written or pushed by citizens, was successful in curbing tobacco usage. Furthermore, National Groups posted advertisements to lessen the popularity of smoking. Because of its popularity, the same effect is being done to drunk driving. The final calculation made by the National Directorate illustrates the wisdom of the previous practice. They recognized the opportunity to improve health, meanwhile also promoting the use of public transport without any worry of inhaling nasty chemicals. The decisions made by the government illuminate the meticulous attention to detail assigned to the Services provided, bolstering the initiatives to curb chances of addiction, promote sober driving and health.

### **“Unhealthy Government”**

Despite Lisbon’s unifying partition, Burton dissents the governmental policy in Australia is not as direct and comes with some unforeseen consequences or setbacks.

Paul Burton because of his over 40 years of experience. During this time, he worked as Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences and then took on the role of Head of the School for Policy Studies. He served as Acting Director of the Griffith Climate Change Response Program from 2012-2013. A critical point he makes is the planning is often theoretical and ideal, and when the plan is put into action, it often forgets certain areas (typically economy) also needed within a city. He claims that changes in economic development and cultural trajectories often show the largest gaps between the plan and outcome. He describes that throughout his research, the plans of developments may be allowed some levels of Australian legislation yet fail different regulations within a different level of legislation. The legislation will become increasingly more restrictive, allowing for slight change to happen and when a change happens, it often has a negative impact.

Burton argues that the government influence on the Gold Coast is all for appearances and less about the actual servicing of the people.

Burton states:

In short the city is happy to proclaim itself as one of the best places to live in Australia and to encourage others to visit and move here but unwilling to allow its civic leaders to venture aboard, even to Canberra (Burton, 2009). The logic of this position presents no challenge to the adolescent mind (Burton, 2009).

Burton demonstrates the narrative that the city itself would like to offer to Australian citizens as a beautiful city to explore and visit, however, it reveals the Gold Coasts inability to have its elected official to properly service them. Appraising the situation gives a clear view of some of the less attractive parts of the Gold’s Coasts government issues. The city’s process in the process of actualizing manners to revitalize and improve city life for citizens seems minimal. The changes will appear dismal from the civil leader's absence on the national scene, lowering the chances of civil leaders making an impact within their community.

Another necessary consideration is the age of the Gold Coast compared to other cities, and the key difference would be the age difference, especially against that of European cities. Burton makes note of this by using the analogy of an adolescent to further explain government issues within the city.

The Gold Coast is a ‘young’ city and is growing at a quick pace, experiencing ‘growing pains’ like that of an adolescent (Burton, 2009). With adolescents, a key aspect to their development would be the increasing conflict with authority figures, typically when restrictions are imposed leading to episodes of challenging behavior (Burton, 2009).

The quotes conjure up the notion of the Gold Coast being rebellious in nature. However, these notions are not misleading and are further exaggerated upon through advertising to other parts of Australia as ‘the most intelligent in Australia’ without any sort of truth behind the statement. When gauging the Gold Coasts behavior concerning government promotion it is evident that the city spent money on garnering interest to the city, which is a major part of allowing it growth and economic gain, yet some of the misleading titles they had given themselves do not pose a good view about some of the underlying issues within Gold Coast.

The manners in which the Gold Coast reveals itself would be through the infrastructure. Because the Gold Coast is compared to that of older European cities, the largest aspect which separates them would be the car-dependency which is evident within the Gold Coast. Burton, quarrels at the evident car reliance and its overbearing effects on the citizens.

“Queensland Transport’s [41] comparison study on the mode share for South East Queensland between 1994 and 2005 has shown that the problem of unsustainable transport is chronic within the region.”

To reiterate Burton, the study highlights that Gold Coasts growth with the automobile has made the expand at a rate where it cannot keep up. When calculating the government’s decision making, the growth of the city was not tended to that of the individual.

Burton also chimes in on how the government plans without disregard for how the land is taken up. Other government services such as public transport are only made for heavy tourist areas and disregard the average city dweller. (Burton, 2008)

To further explain, municipal government has pushed the Gold Coast to promote a car-centric ideology. The spatial designation and from government zoning laws have showcased the government’s lack of awareness and care towards the citizens who inhabit their citizens. Allowing for the shifting changes, the cities have set a process of future degeneration by poor spatial design; it is crucial to evaluate the need for improvement in the growing aspect of the city. Further evaluation of these changes will draw attention to those who are economically struggling, because of the excess costs of a car from a lack of public transportation. Therefore, it makes the government’s investment in the area a long-term failure.

Burton continues his calculated dissent of the Gold Coast by focusing on two negative variables from the Gold Coasts poor planning decision: The low-density environment being built around the city and the lack of a subway or metro system.

Burton argues:

Once outside of the city, factors of ‘urban sprawl’ cause the downfall of incorporating public transportation systems (Burton, 2008). The traffic becomes congested, cited to be worse on

weekends is from just the usual amount of local, national and international travel expressing itself as a real problem (Burton, 2008).

Zeroing in on urban issues faced in the Gold Coast and its surrounding area, the low-density area highly suggests owning a car for transport because of a weak public transportation system. Evaluating the municipal efforts, their promotion of a car-centric environment hurts all citizens, forcing citizens to change to an unsustainable method of transport will bring a long-term toll to the city's infrastructure while also lowering the quality of life to citizens.

Ms. Louro provides qualitative data to best portray Lisbon's rapid government progress. In her case, I resonate with this style of data as it provides a method to better quantify and understand that Lisbon has a sustained effort to focus and help all people regardless of status or ability. As for Mr. Burton, his constant, almost aggressive style of research paints an urgent message for better planning through the removal of car infrastructure in coordination with low-density suburbanization. Matching the energy he delivers to his paper, Australia's issues with planning is one that needs to be addressed orderly and in a thoughtful fashion. Having a government that delivers upon its promise to serve its people is becoming increasingly more evident across Europe, with Australia's Gold Coast being the outlier of the lens with a government that flopped in serving its citizens.

Conclusively, urban health engages all people, with a wide array of perspectives and ideas when those two words come to mind. At first thought, I had numerous ideas jump out at me, from the spreading of diseases, urban planning, government, economic growth and decay among some of the earliest thoughts that came to mind. This large topic could only support two lenses; anymore lenses, and it could not be geared towards what matched my idea of the paper. Deciding on urban planning and government was a risky maneuver as both lenses have a separate identity yet in several aspects, are used hand-in-hand. During the discovery of my research, I came to the realization of a change of idea towards urban health, with myself at the forefront of this novel idea. In hindsight, my realization came sooner than I knew at the time but was very much important in how I live today. Currently, as an 18-year-old high school student I do not have a car, nor do I have a driver's license. In the United States, the stereotype holds true, that once at 16, you earn the privilege of a car and all the privileges that proceed with said car. For me, this American fantasy was not the case. As I ventured through my high school years, I worked my way around this 'problem'. I invested some of the money I had hoped to buy a car with towards a bike and kept up with the timetables of the public bus. At first, I thought nothing of this decision but after this paper, I recognized it was a great investment. Riding my bicycle led me to be more active and aware of my surroundings without having to worry about the upkeep of a car, expenses, and driving through hectic traffic. Yet, it came with a caveat... that the city I live in, Sarasota, is not a thriving urban metropolis but instead is the dreaded low-density suburban car-centric nightmare which is what Mr. Burton and Mr. Grant wrote so passionately against in the paragraphs above. And it leads me to a final thought. There is a lack of safety within urban areas around the globe, with so many areas similar to the one I live in, it would be difficult to ignore the issues of poor urban planning in tandem with poor government decision-making. Finalizing my thoughts, a return to a more walkable city will not only collectively increase health but also

return livelihood to so many cities suffocated from poor urban planning and unrepresentative governments.

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