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ENGR 195A

Reflection: CAR-LESS LIVING IN ECOTOPIA’S NEW TOWNS

This paper contains my reflection of one of the diary entries entitled *Car-less Living in Ecotopia’s New Towns* in the novel *Ecotopia* written by Ernest Callenbach, an American author and editor. The first part of this paper briefly summarizes the whole diary entry. The remaining parts talk about my thoughts and views about it, applying the highlighted themes in the diary with the society that we currently live in.

Ecotopia, a decentralized society located on the southern shores of San Francisco Bay, besides being one of the most recent and emerging communities, is a car-free and eco-friendly locale (Callenbach, 25). The diary entry starts when William Weston, a top international affairs reporter from *Times-Post,* visits Ecotopia in order to assess and investigate how it is like to live in this eco-friendly community (Callenbach, 4). As soon as Weston arrives, he immediately notices several differences between Ecotopia and New York, where he is from. The most noticeable differences are the structures, types of transportation, and most importantly, Ecotopia being a car-less community (Callenbach, 5).

Owning a vehicle is prohibited in Ecotopia, making this community a car-free zone. Weston notices that one way Ecotopians get around in the community is on their bicycles. When shopping, they use bicycles with baskets installed on them to carry things that they purchase (Callenbach, 25). I think that a car-free community would be the most ideal community that many environmentalists could ever desire; however, I think that it is difficult to implement it in congested, highly-populated communities, especially if those areas are in a sprawling metropolitan setup as the San Francisco peninsula is rather than a dense setup with clusters of dwellings, business buildings, and transit hubs. Also, implementing it could take years and would probably cost billions of dollars to prepare and set up such communities. To transition a community to being a car-less community, we could start eliminating the use of gasoline-powered vehicles. This would eliminate hundreds of millions of vehicles on the road, which prevents heavy traffic, accidents, and air and noise pollution; and ultimately would save us some money from buying gasoline (Perry).

Ecotopia promotes and encourages its people to use public transportation. For long-distance travels, Ecotopia provides interurban railway transportation (Callenbach, 25). In fact, the main structure in Ecotopia is an interurban terminal, which serves as main transportation station and intersection of all roads. In addition, the structure and placement of public transportation are intelligently planned. For example, houses are built in locations that are close to the transit terminals (about half a mile radius). This prevents hassle and inconvenience from using public transportation. In addition to implementing car-lessness in our current community, I think that we could start enhancing public transportation services and by making trains, buses, and other public vehicles accessible, safe, and convenient to people (Perry). Consequently, is only fitting that we must improve them in order to better people’s experience so they realize that using public transportation is as good as using private vehicles (Perry).

One of the things that Weston likes in Ecotopia is the presence of numerous pedestrians. Bicycles paths and pedestrians rove together in the streets of Ecotopia (Callenbach, 26). Streets are all built wide, clean, and safe; which encourages people to actually use them and essentially makes them walk to travel short distances. Trees are present everywhere along walking paths and in different parks; this makes the whole experience pleasant and enjoyable. If a community is to achieve a car-less community, then streets must be bicycle and pedestrian friendly. This can ultimately encourage people to walk and use bicycles to get around inside a community (Perry).

Overall, I think that this diary entry illustrates the quintessence of a car-less community. Although there are known car-less communities around the world, like Gierthoorn in Netherlands, Vauban in Germany, Hydra in Greece, and many others, I still believe that is going to be hard to implement in, say, the city of San Jose - due to the cost of implementing a car-less community and current demand of transportation (Simpson). To start a community to be a car-less one, as a start, we could implement realistic approaches such as the use of public transportation, bicycles for short-distance travel, electric cars instead of gasoline-powered vehicles, and building pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly roads.

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