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Critique #1

Inherently, modern human development in the world removes at least some amount of greenspace from the landscape. Two eras of the history of development in the US are contrasted in the TED talk “Back to Green: Creating Parks in Urban Areas”. In the 1800s, landscape architect Fredrick Olmstead’s influence on greenspace in a few prominent urban areas seemed to exemplify an attitude of keeping greenspace in cities a priority. The Emerald Necklace in Boston and Central Park in New York City, both occupying a large amount of now very highly valued real estate are clear examples of this historical prioritization of quality greenspace for people living in the urban environment. This lies in contrast to what was seen in a lot of developing cities in the mid-20th century. Rapid development, especially large highway development prioritizing the consistent use of cars, was encouraged (and sometimes still is), often at the cost of urban trees and greenspaces. The video ends with a fairly impactful comparison of the high costs of transportation and other major developments to the relatively low costs of investing in highly beneficial urban trails and greenspaces, suggesting that some of these development funds be diverted to greenspace development.

An article focusing on equitable access to urban trails and greenspaces talks about the fact that in many cities, while quality greenspaces exist, they are not equally available to everyone. Poorer and often minority communities often have fewer of these spaces and are more densely developed (exacerbated by factors like histories of segregation, etc.), leaving less growing space for new green development. The greenspaces in these communities are also often

underserved themselves, having fewer staff and more safety concerns, leading to a lower use of the spaces than in other neighborhoods. The benefits of urban greenspaces (health, economic, social, etc.) are concentrated on the people who live and work closely to them, and as such, the improvement and creation of those spaces can be an excellent tool for reinvigorating a neighborhood. Improvement is a trend in many cities, but cost and availability of space are significant barriers. The article ends by briefly discussing the potential usefulness of crowdsourced data, collected from people's personal devices, can be a cheap and effective tool for studying use of trails and parks.

The second article, a published academic paper, uses the city of Boston as a case study, delving into whether or not increasing the overall amount, increasing quality, and achieving socioeconomic equality in urban greenspace is possible given the existing constraints of developing cities. This was a priority to address as the researchers had found that while there are a seemingly large number of tree planting initiatives, their success, especially that of addressing the inequality in canopy cover in underserved communities, is rarely assessed. They examined current socioeconomic data for the city, as well as information about population growth projections and the availability of possible planting sites, using this data to investigate a handful of scenarios and the potential for achieving the above mentioned goals.

Their key findings were that equality is almost impossible to attain with only tree planting initiatives, especially because of the lack of planting sites in the currently underserved communities. Though, many benefits can occur from small clusters of trees planted in the available space, they are not enough to fully increase city livability to what is desired. They suggest that broader urban greening initiatives should use money that could be used for tree

plantings, in places where there is not enough planting space, for alternative greening projects: “Greening alternatives, such as green roofs or walls, rain gardens, and bioswales, are pockets of nature in the city that can have similar local social and psychological benefits as trees in neighborhoods where tree planting is impossible” (Danford et al., 2014).

In urban forestry and other relevant communities, discussion of disparity in access to parks, tree canopy, and other green areas is not uncommon. These three sources, especially when viewed in tandem, provide an introduction to the topic and delve successfully into its complexities and challenges. As TED talks usually are, this one provided a clear and introductory level introduction to the potential benefits of urban greenspace and some historical context for why so many urban areas are currently lacking, though it did not touch on specifically where in cities these discrepancies are. The City Trails article also provides a clear and generally understandable to the public introduction to the socioeconomic differences associated with greenspace distribution. It gives some examples, but does not go too deeply into any particular problem or solution, though as a short article, this is not really what it seeks to do.

The third source, an academic paper, does well at delving deep into a specific topic while remaining relatively accessible to a general audience. Their research takes a successful stab into a topic where relatively little is known and certainly highlights the continual need for more research into the topic. While specific solutions for Boston are proposed, monitoring of many past and current green initiatives are clearly critical to optimizing the success of all related projects going forward. Information is needed about specific species, how to optimize money spent on green development, as well as new ideas and proposals.

One thing that none of the sources emphasize or discuss thoroughly is the looming impact of climate change (mentioned just a couple times in the two articles). This issue will certainly be relevant in cities, an already harsh environment for trees and other growing things, as temperatures warm and extreme weather events continue to escalate. Here is a glaringly obvious need for more research, as so much is not known or certain about how trees, plants, and ultimately people will respond to these changes.

References:

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- Mehl, Chris. (2018). "City Trails: Improving Equitable Access", *Headwaters Economics*.
- Messner, Mike (2013). "Back to Green:Creating Parks in Urban Areas", *TEDx*.