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Urban greenspaces are an important part of city culture and vital to the health of its citizens both physically and mentally. Green spaces allow opportunities for citizens to explore natural settings that differ exponentially from the urban environment around them which creates enriching pastimes and can let them explore further interests. This is especially important for children who have the least amount of access to communities outside of the city. However, access to these kinds of opportunities are not equal across the streets. Environmental racism is a relatively new concept that society has been exploring in the last several decades and access to urban green spaces showcases the issue in full.

Environmental racism is the idea that environmental issues affect minorities at an unequal rate to how it affects others. Examples of this can be seen in placement of hog farms, dumps, and smelly industrial factories near low income neighborhoods. Oftentimes these communities lack representation in the planning committees and local government that decide the placement of many of these. Urban planning is historically done by people who come from a more privileged spot in society and have little experience with poorer communities. Now, some of that is changing successfully but that does not help these communities now and will likely not make an impact until many years down the line. Now, there are many studies and reports being completed at the moment to help figure out a plan to mitigate this issue, luckily these allow for critique and observation.

In the article “City Trails: Improving Equitable Access”, the author focused on the idea of non-linear parks, also called trails, and their relationship to citizens' health. Instead of just talking about the traditional greenspace of a park, the introduction of trails provides an angle not often talked about. Trails offer distance, something that most parks cannot. Trails can be used by runners, bikers, rollerbladers, or really any kind of non-motorized transportation one can think of. This encourages more exercise than another form of greenspace and often takes up far less space in total since only around 10 feet are required for a pathway. However many times it circles or turns makes up the rest of the surface area. This article goes on to talk about how trails can impact a community economically as well which is an important argument angle. Many people are concerned with costs and it is a great addition to the article to include the benefits. Personally, I would have preferred reading an article that brought up examples of previously underprivileged neighborhoods gaining access to greenspace and the results from that. If that sort of evidence did not exist then that could also be an addition to the article to prove that this is a huge issue.

While the article above focused on trails, it is still important to consider traditional park spaces. In his ted talk “Back to Green: Creating Parks in Urban Areas”, Michael Messner shows how diverting a small amount of money from creating a highway can create a huge greenspace area for people to enjoy. He brings examples of various cities that prioritized greenspace versus highway industrialization and the effects that come. In cities that prioritized highways all those

years ago no face inability to retain businesses, congestion issues, and general dissatisfaction while those who focused on greenspaces thrived in all the areas the formers lacked. Using a comparison situation was highly effective for me. After he showed examples of what that money could do when redirected to green space and then showed how all that could be accomplished with a fraction of highway cost it made me want to go out and encourage this in my own community. It made me relate to when Minneapolis shoved I-94 through the heart of the African-American community. If resources were directed toward greenspace then maybe that same community who is still affected today would have been able to enjoy the same access other citizens do to parks. I believe this video showed quite well how redirecting those resources now will benefit many people in the future.

The last study I will be talking about today focuses on the City of Boston and their plan to improve urban tree canopy cover. This study repeats what has already been said of marginalized communities receiving the short end of the stick in the case of urban greenery. Grow Boston Greener (GBG) is the focus of this study through their goal to create more urban forests in the city. The coalition wants to up the percentage of canopy by six percent. This study examines the realisticness of this goal by taking into account tree distribution, ecological availability, and population projections. Unfortunately, no matter the scenario tested the goal always fell short. With the city's goals, being able to meet that standard would require an insane amount of trees to be planted that would then have to grow to a huge size. One issue with this is that although they wanted to focus access increase in low-equity neighborhoods, it has been shown that these neighborhoods often have the least amount of free space to devote to such projects. Ultimately these goals need reassessing and would require further intervention than just planting trees.

All of these resources gave a varying perspective to the issue of greenspace. However, I would like to add my own. Many of the issues that involve trying to solve unequal greenspace access all circle back to unequal resource distribution. These communities are underprivileged in so many ways than just this context. To be able to solve the problem of lack of space for planting, lack of resources to care for the space, and general fear for safety in these parks requires intervention done in so many areas. It circles back to socioeconomic disparity. Being able to bring these communities into the same money bracket as others will allow better housing to be built, less attraction to illegal careers, and more free time to be able to devote to enjoying these areas. Realistically, even if a beautiful park was created in these low areas the residents would not be able to enjoy them anyway due to the reasons stated above. In order to solve this issue, beginning must happen at the bottom of this tower of disadvantages. Luckily, people are beginning to realize the reality of how deep this goes, and I truly think society is already making great strides in addressing this.

References

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