

Addressing Sprawl

The anomaly of sprawl has been endured by urban planners for many decades now. Time has allowed us to understand the uncertainty that comes with this way of living and planning. Studies have shown that sprawl is indeed the cause of many major health, traffic, and social related issues within our communities. It originated with the moving of families from cities into rural/suburban areas. Suburbs steadily grew between the 19th and early 20th century as people sought a different way of living besides the city life. Technological advancements in transportation such as the automobile and faster trains encouraged more people to do the same. Leading us to where we stand now, where approximately one in two Americans live within a suburb. One of sprawl's biggest issues is its need for cars and roads. In the text 'Redesigning Cities' Jonathan Barnett mentions how 'Excessive commuting time takes up the part of the day that could otherwise be used for more leisurely activities or spent with family at home.' People are forced to drive long distances to get to work and other daily activities. This doesn't sound problematic until realizing the effect this has on the community as a whole. More cars and roads means higher air pollution, creating bigger traffic jams, and increasing the amount of motor vehicle crashes and pedestrian injuries. Cities continuously attempt to address this problem by building and funding more roads. However, this always backfires due to the new roads attracting more development and bringing more people i.e. more cars. This is only feeding the sprawl fire instead of putting it out. The problems only increase when taking into account the lack of public transportation. Living in the outskirts of Orlando is a prime example of this phenomenon. It's not uncommon to hop on I-4 and get stuck in hour long traffic [image 1]. There isn't really a sense of connection between people and places here. Public transportation has gained a negative social stigma, leaving those without a car handicapped in a city that runs on wheels. American's therefore are forced to live a sedentary lifestyle, which can cause a huge array of health related issues. A public health report from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention titled 'Urban Sprawl and Public Health', correlated Sprawl with health risks ranging from mental health to water quality. The report touches on physical activity and mentions that "A sedentary lifestyle is a well established risk factor for cardiovascular disease, stroke, and all-cause mortality, whereas physical activity prolongs life." Responsively, both Barnett's text and the CDC's health report touch on possible solutions for all these problems. Sprawl's over arching features include low-density land use, heavy reliance on cars, and separation of land uses. Smart Growth, the coined term for Sprawl's retaliation, contains a planning style following just the opposite of that. Smart Growth is characterized by higher density, preserved green spaces, contiguous development, less cars and road infrastructure, mixed land uses and walkable neighborhoods, a balanced transportation system and overall more organized and effective Urban Planning. Its three main elements however focus on ending outward expansion, focusing on restoration of older areas, and knitting the city together with proper public transportation to reduce the amount of vehicle trips. Portland, Oregon has been a staple in the 'Smart Growth' plan. The city has beautifully executed its program to limit growth at the metropolitan fringe, Proving that sprawl is 'curable'.

Works Cited

1. Barnett, Jonathan. "Chapters 1,5." *Redesigning Cities: Principles, Practice, Implementation*. Chicago: Planners, 2003. N. pag 23, 77-80. Print.
2. Frumkin, H. "Urban Sprawl and Public Health." *Public Health Reports* 117.3 (2002): 201-17. Web.
http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/articles/Urban_Sprawl_and_Public_Health_PHR.pdf



[Image 1]

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