Political Science 332

Term Paper

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**Necessities for Sustainable Communities**

“The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it. (Swan, Robert)” In recent years it has become clearer that individuals have dissociated themselves from confronting the issue of overusing natural capital. This natural capital is made up of all the living and non-living things upon the earth that we, humans, have been tearing down, overusing, and leading to extinction. Humans have destroyed ecosystems within every continent in the world, threatening or desolating every species within. We are creatures of the universe, yet we have been treating our world as though it is as renewable as our latest technology. Resources are being over consumed to the point where they cannot be renewed as fast as they are being eradicated. While currently some communities are seemingly prosperous and enjoying the erosion of many natural resources, there are still many communes that are already experiencing the consequences of the lack of these resources. There must be an integration of environmental, economic, and social factors to reverse the downward spiral that is currently occurring. The presence of natural capital, the involvement of economics, and the need for cultural capital are all important considerations in maintaining sustainable communities. The city of Prince George will be referenced for examples.

Natural capital refers to all the natural assets which can be valuable to use for goods or services. There is renewable natural capital, such as ecosystems, that can produce ecosystem goods. Through human use this capital depreciates over time, while non-renewable resources disappear. Once this non-renewable capital is used up there will be nothing left, such as with fossil fuels. There is only a limited supply of this natural capital. Each finite resource is not only subject to direct human deterioration but also to the pollutants that are put into the atmosphere, water, and ground. In order to protect what natural capital that remains, sustainability must be achieved. Sustainable communities are those which maintain an adequate level of environmental assets for future generations use while avoiding damage to any of these assets with their current use. They strive to live as abundantly as they can without damaging natural capital for those who will live after they’re gone. It is assumed that the world will never run out of its natural resources because when its running low, prices rise and that limits purchase of the product. This is an unrealistic savior. While purchases may be low, it is still being used up. At this point, there would still be a low amount of natural capital which effects its surrounding ecosystem by its elimination. It would also take far longer to regenerate than humans seem to have the patience for. A realistic way to reserve natural capital would be to reduce its use until it is within carrying capacity. This capacity is the amount of resources a region may use before it is unsustainable and leads to environmental degradation. Once this is found, the standard of living around the globe must be adjusted to its new level of consumption. New development should focus on improving efficiency and lowering waste instead of focusing on cheap, quantitative means. Natural goods should not be harvested faster than they are produced, and emissions limited to avoid depleting the ozone layer further. The basic need for natural capital is literally to stop using it all before it has time to regenerate. It is not more complicated than that.

The prioritization of economic growth within communities is not new. In fact, it has been justifying the steadily growing decline of natural capital in the world. Economics has been ignoring its human ecology foundation and is basing itself instead off of man-made methods and concepts. This ignorance of mainstream economics equates to the abandonment of ecological laws and the environment is paying the price. There must be an exchanged priority from economic growth to environmental quality. This does not mean economic development must end, it only encourages different ways of accomplishing it. Growth is destructive and careless to natural capital; there are definite limits to growth. Development takes into consideration the delicacy of resources, and instills improvement without desolating it. An example of shifting economic development without cost to economics can be seen in the city of Prince George. Residents here were, understandably, shocked and angry at the closing of mills which resulted in many jobs being lost. The city of Prince George, however, has been shifting itself from a manual labour city full of mill workers to a suburban, updated version with priority placed on upscaling the downtown location and increasing opportunities and events for citizens within, and surrounding, the community. The jobs opening up are more environmentally sustainable. The assumed goal of this particular city is to promote tourist activity and invite wealth to be spent at local businesses and events, thus boosting the community‘s local economics in a way that is beneficial to itself and its environment. In regard to the changes being made, in the city of Prince George, it could be beneficial for similar situated communities to introduce high taxation for using natural resources. This could prevent new companies from choosing the quick, easy way to achieve their goals. Instead they would have to consider the environment’s needs and limits in order to lower the cost of damage done to it, and their own cost for damaging it. This taxation would likely have to be internationally agreed to, unfortunately postponing any regions from taking the first step. Many communities may not be able to afford the first step. Third world countries are already experiencing the consequences of resource depletion. Most of the wealth they acquire comes from natural capital and the exigency for wealth is resulting in the elimination of the majority of their resources. Erosion, deforestation, and desertification are all products of a desperate attempt to accumulate wealth with what they have – or, rather, had. This further pushes third world countries into debt and scarcity. While there are many economic approaches advised to these countries to build them up, creating sustainable communities is present in almost every single one. It is not easy to transition from growth to development, especially when the growth is barely holding on. However, it will be beneficial in the long run to all communities, and most importantly the Earth, to make the change.

Cultural, or social, capital is a fairly new term meaning the shared knowledge, understanding, and patterns of activity by individuals. It can be described as all the social assets of a person which promote their social well-being. There is a great importance in cultural capital in regard to sustaining communities. A rise in awareness alone would create a huge impact on how individual lives are led. The increase in knowledge and informed individuals is likely to produce a drastic effort to sustain Earth’s resources. An increase of popularity for living simpler, acquiring less, and reducing the already huge sum of waste on our planet could be the push that is needed to motivate individuals to save natural capital. If all the social networks within communities were striving for the same goal of saving their planet’s resources, those who do not oblige would be looked down upon. This may seem like an intense way to achieve something. However, it is not, especially given the context of this goal, which is to save the planet. The use of cultural capital to achieve a desired end is merely putting simple biology to use. Humans are social creatures, who strive to be accepted and feel like they belong. This can be seen simply in neighborhoods. There must be a sense of solidarity and social support among neighbours, and friends. There must be interaction within these smaller communities to allow each person their own identity and a sense of belonging. To expand this need to the greater community and to prep it with a shared goal would benefit all who take part. This social capital cannot be overused, and it only grows stronger through increased size. Through trust, citizens can make their communes achieve their goals, and goals for the greater good. However, if social capital goes unused, it deteriorates at a steady, rapid rate. When this occurs it aggregates others who are part of this social cohesion, dissipating the well run system. The importance of trust within individuals for each other is incredibly important to maintain their social capital. Prince George has many small communes full of cultural capital within itself. These include relative things such as places of employment, schooling, summer camps, NGO groups, and so many more. To notice the difference a small community, such as those listed latterly, can make it may be wise to take a look at Prince George’s local university. The University of Northern British Columbia has many smaller groups within it that wish to make change, and in some cases do. There is currently a political science class entirely devoted to learning how to and actually creating a public policy. Through joint efforts between trusting students, the class recognizes a provincial, or federal, issue and creates a public policy regarding it. Each individual in the class must trust that the others will do their parts involving ethics, writing, polling, analyzing, etc. Through their trust and individual hard work, they accomplish something none of them could likely do on their own. The impact can only grow with more people involved. Joint communes around the world would absolutely be able to have a dramatic effect on saving natural capital. It must start somewhere, with someone.

It will be a long, difficult journey to save the world’s resources. The limitation of natural capital use by humans must strictly stay within carrying capacity. We must learn to respect the diverse species within our ecosystems. Taking them for granted will only weaken our own development and eventually lead to human extinction. Natural capital must no longer be there for the taking but be limited in its depletion. There are many other ways to develop communities rather than by destroying our world. Qualitative forms of development must be introduced to communities to take over the old economic growth systems. Economics must also go back to its origins by conforming to human ecology laws instead of creating its own to further advance itself. The distribution of wealth should remain in the community it was acquired in, building up local economies. Communities must be equipped to sustain themselves without help from the rest of the world; if this does not occur there will eventually be no rest of the world to help them. Sustainability must be the most admired quality for communities in order for their social capital to adopt it. As creatures of the world, we must love and nurture our environment to the best of our abilities. We, humans, are no greater than any other species among us. The only difference is that we have the cognitive ability to assume we are. Sustainable communities must respect and understand the importance of natural capital, economic involvement, and promotion of itself within cultural capital to be maintained.

**Resources**

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