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Lab Assignment 1- Defining Sustainability

In our modern society, there is an increasing trend to lead a “sustainable lifestyle.” A rising number of people are exchanging their plastic water bottles for reusable containers, switching their grocery bags from plastic to cloth, refusing to utilize a straw at a restaurant, etc. It is undeniable that our individual ecological footprint holds an impact on the future of our environment. However, something that is less “trendy,” but arguably more important, is the larger factors/corporations that influence our society and their relationship with the environment. People’s eagerness to “go green,” at this point, only goes so far. For example, a recent study from CDP found that one hundred companies are responsible for 71% of industrial emissions. Yet if you mention regulating industry, many will criticize you for going against the wave of our capitalistic society, which has many benefits, but is slowly killing our planet- our home. It is noble to believe that I can impact the well-being of the planet by recycling or cutting down my plastic usage (which is still important), but these issues are bigger than many of us realize. I am not saying that we do not have power on an individualistic level, but I think the best way to harness this power is through voting. We can elect officials into office who have the means to regulate these corporations that are polluting the planet, who can address the issues within animal agriculture, who can encourage or even mandate green infrastructure. To me, sustainability means changing the conversation towards more drastic decision making to slow the degradation of our planet.

On a more personal level, as an aspiring landscape architect, I want to be involved in projects that ensure our survival and prosperity on this planet. I hope to take on projects that implement green infrastructure or biophilic design, allowing humans to coexist with the planet and other species that inhabit it. One of the issues in the landscape architecture community is our tendency to take on projects commissioned by the wealthy, for they have the means to do so. However, I believe that we need to include design endeavors in our projects for locations that do not have the means to commission us, for they are just as important to ensuring the survival of the planet. For example, many poorer communities lack green spaces, and these green spaces provide wildlife habitat, prevent soil erosion, absorb air pollutants, lower temperatures, promote mental health, and even stimulate the economy. Green space should not be considered a luxury; it is a necessity that must be implemented to ensure the survival of our planet. This is one of many examples of the shift in the landscape architecture community that I hope to see, and I am going to work through my career to see these changes through and see sustainability come to the forefront of our focus.