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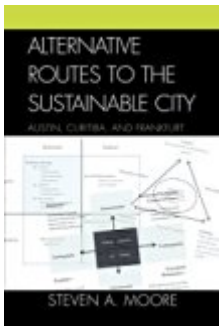
Steven A. Moore. *Alternative Routes to the Sustainable City.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. 243 pp. $34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7391-1534-3.



Reviewed by Thomas Daniels

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Sustainable cities are a hot topic, and for good reason. By the end of this decade, more people will be living in cities than in the countryside for the first time in history. Meanwhile, a host of environmental problems have gained public attention: climate change, air quality, water supplies, alternative energy and fossil fuel supplies, and population growth. The solution, according to environmentalists, is for cities to move toward the triple bottom line of sustainable environments, economies, and societies. This means protecting green spaces and natural areas, constructing energy efficient buildings, providing jobs and housing opportunities, and equitably distributing the benefits of environmental quality and economic growth.

Yet, progress toward sustainability is easier said than done. Some environmentalists advocate best practices, such as the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards created by the U.S. Green Building Council. Others call for indicators to measure progress. In *Alternative Routes to the Sustainable City*, Steven A. Moore presents a third way: the interchange between a city's dominant story line and its "counter talk." In each of the three cities he profiles, Moore explores the political, environmental, and technological issues and philosophies that have influenced the path taken toward sustainability. Moore's ultimate aim is to test the relationship between sustainability and democracy.

Moore identifies three types of political approaches. "Liberal anarchism," which emphasizes private property rights and asocial behavior and which he associates with Austin, Texas. "Liberal realism" is rule by experts, best exemplified by Curitiba, Brazil. And "liberal minimalism" is tolerant of conflict while promoting market-based decisions. A city's public discussion of environmental issues can be reformist, radical, "imaginative," or "prosaic." Reformists prefer a pragmatic, problem-solving approach; radicals are Neo-Malthusians who see the need for tight control of people to minimize consumption. The imaginative theme follows the ideas of the Brundtland report of 1987, to use natural resources and the environment in ways that leave future generations at least as well off as the current generation.[1] At the far ex-

treme are the deep ecologists who espouse the primacy of nature and reject an anthropocentric view of the environment. Finally, a city can either embrace technology as a solution leading to sustainability or adopt a skeptical and even technophobic attitude.

Austin is not a leading U.S. example of a city progressing toward sustainability. But Moore, who teaches architecture and planning at the University of Texas, knows the city's story. Yet Moore omits some key information about the city: its population growth over the past thirty to fifty years, the geographic size of the city, and how the city fits into its region. For instance, Austin has annexed thousands of acres to expand the city; additionally, Texas counties do not have zoning powers and hence it is very easy for new houses and strip malls to sprawl across the countryside.

Moore concentrates on the struggle to protect Barton Springs, an aquifer that provides drinking water to 45,000 residents, and the Edwards Aquifer. This struggle between the developers who champion private property rights and the environmentalists who cite the public's need for clean drinking water produced a major victory for sustainability. But meanwhile, Austin's population has continued to increase thanks, in large part, to the high-tech boom. As Moore notes, the city is on the verge of falling out of compliance with the federal air quality standards.

In discussing Austin (and the other two cities, Curitiba and Frankfurt, Germany), Moore could have listed the city's achievements toward sustainability and additional steps the city could or should take. In chapter 5, Moore uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis to show that Austin has done well in providing parks and open space, but not so well in its public transit (though a commuter rail system is now under construction). Austin also has a relatively low density, and is segregated between wealthy west Austin and low- to moderate-income east Austin.

Surprisingly, Moore pays little attention to the connection between the national Smart Growth movement and sustainability. In particular, Smart Growth relies on the premise that population and the economy can continue to grow and produce a higher quality and more sustainable environment. Is this realistic? And is Austin's growth smart?

Moore does make an important insight about politics in Austin. The lack of continuous political control by the sustainability supporters has weakened Austin's efforts over time. But this political roller coaster undercuts Moore's statement that Austin "takes sustainability seriously" (p. 29). Moore characterizes Austin as liberal anarchic (a reflection of its frontier heritage), economically rational (market-driven), and technophilic (as one would expect in a high-tech boomtown). The counter story line is based on progressive populism, green romanticism, and clean technology.

Moore's discussion of "The Miracle of Curitiba," in chapter 3, is the highlight of the book, and I would assign it to master's level students in environmental planning. Moore makes a strong case that Brazil's (and perhaps the world's) most ecological city has largely been the result of technocratic planning that started under a military dictatorship. Jaime Lerner, the renowned former mayor, was initially appointed as head of the Urban Planning and Research Institute of Curitiba, which had real power to plan. Land use decisions drove transit bus investment. The center of the city remained economically strong, and density decreased gradually along transit corridors moving away from the city center. Moreover, development and infrastructure investment decisions were made incrementally and pragmatically, based on what Moore refers to as "abductive reasoning" (p. 112).

Curitiba gained fame for sustainability while its population grew from 500,000 in 1965 to 2.4 million in the late 1990s (p. 83). The city has a high density of 102.5 people per hectare (more

than 40 people per acre [p. 194]) and a heavy use of public buses, but only a small amount of green space per person. The city has been able to attract a considerable amount of foreign investment, which has helped to provide jobs for a growing population. Moore uses GIS to point out a key shortcoming that has been overlooked by other commentators, namely, the spread of informal, low-income settlements (***favelas***) just outside the city limits of Curitiba (p. 175).

Frankfurt is Germany's financial capital. Moore characterizes the city's story as progressive capitalism: politically tolerant, in favor of ecological modernization, and embracing technological progress. He takes the construction of the Commerzbank tower in the 1990s as the event that united economic, social, and environmental sustainability in Frankfurt. The tower was proposed in the early 1990s at a time when the political left and environmentalists (a so-called red/green coalition) governed the city. The coalition was in favor of the tower and ensured through a building code that the tower was built to green standards. Commerzbank went along with the code.

Since 1995, the banking interests have controlled the city government. Frankfurt scores well on green space per person, having even more than Austin does. Its transit system of buses, commuter trains, and subway is more diverse than Curitiba's and has nearly as heavy ridership. And Frankfurt is nearly four times more densely settled than Austin. As Moore notes, "greater density generally supports social equity" (p. 171).

Moore's overall contention is that there are many ways for a city to make progress toward sustainability. Curitiba appears to have made the most progress toward sustainability by minimizing citizen input; although Austin is far more democratic, the political process has somewhat stymied progress toward sustainability. Frankfurt appears to be dominated by the financial industry, while being politically tolerant. So Moore's attempt to prove that the most democratic political system will produce the most sustainable city remains moot.

The three main achievements that Moore points to are: Austin's watershed zoning, Curitiba's infrastructure, and Frankfurt's eco-skyscraper. Each, he argues, were the result of incremental and pragmatic planning. Perhaps more important are the attitudes toward zoning in the three cities. Austin and its environs have mostly weak zoning, resulting in leapfrog development. Curitiba has strong zoning, which has produced concentric growth; and Frankfurt also has strong zoning combined with ample park space. How cities use zoning is a crucial reflection of their political philosophy and dominant story line, which in turn influences the path they choose toward sustainability.

Alternative Routes to the Sustainable City largely presents a philosophical analysis of city efforts toward sustainability. The writing is often dense, and the book could have been edited down by a quarter. A more journalistic approach would have made the ideas in the book clearer in telling the stories of each city. Still, Moore's ideas are stimulating, and the book will be of interest to Ph.D. students and professors in urban environmental planning.

Note

[1]. World Commission on Environment and Development, ***Our Common Future*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

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