

Book Reviews

***Human Sustainable Cities Towards the SDGs and Green, Just, Smart and Inclusive Transitions.* By Voula Mega. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2022, xxx + 303 pp. ISBN-13: 978-3-031-04840-1 (e-Book)**

Sustainability, meaning to strike a balance between the environment, economy, and society, has become a renowned keyword when discussing the future of Earth. Companies, personal lifestyles, and even cities are adapting to be sustainable due to the deterioration of environmental quality, which begins to disrupt the construct of lives and lead to a resource crisis. To provide guidance and planning reference, the UN released Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 as the most comprehensive transformational sustainability agenda to help the nations working towards sustainability. With the existence of SDGs, many cities are adapting them into their development agendas and working to implement them. Nevertheless, the progress made does not seem to be promising since there is hardly a single country on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Despite the predicaments, cities remain relentlessly transitioning to actualize advancement in the cities' quality.

In this book, Mega, who is a professional in the European Commission, reveals the sustainability transition endeavours through beautiful watercolour illustrations of several major cities worldwide: Rio de Janeiro, Berlin, Tokyo, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Dubai, Toronto, Melbourne, Valencia, Boston, Singapore, Washington, D.C., and Athens. This book was written to commemorate the valuable lessons obtained by cities during the COVID-19 pandemic and as a preparation for the Glasgow COP-26. Mega begins the book in the first chapter by asking about the prospects and drivers of change for

cities in this uncertain, complex, and full-of-crisis era.

Travelling back to 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis, which extended to the socio-economic crisis, she argues that the pandemic has unfolded the flaws of the unlimited growth model. Despite the restrictions made during the pandemic, which contributed to better environmental quality, the good progress did not sustain when the pandemic restrictions were gradually lifted. She highlighted that the pandemic has called for the urgent necessity to strengthen each sustainability pillar and awakened the cities to continue the transformation to be sustainable.

Going to the second chapter, Mega also reveals the imminent issues faced by almost all cities worldwide: natural resources and biodiversity decline. Due to the enormous need for resources to support living and production activities in the cities, the natural resources—water, soil, and clean air—faced severe deterioration and hardly regenerated themselves shortly, even with the assistance of technology. Nevertheless, these issues should not be a hindrance for cities to keep progressing because, as Mega implied on page 12, this is a “race against time”. Climate change is aggravating and continues to show its undesirable impacts on cities' lives.

In the rest of her book, Mega provides a glimpse of hope through multiple climate-conscious actions that cities can adopt. For instance, clean energy provision to decrease carbon emissions and ways to decarbonize cities; and reconstructing cities to be “car-free” to promote more walkable cities. Besides technical approaches, Mega also uses social and economic approaches, as sustainability entails the balance between these pillars. One of the interesting points is the promotion of

warm-welcoming cities amidst the growing migration issue. She pointed this out reasonably: warm-welcoming cities can ease community integration, increase social cohesion, avoid class segregation, and enable inclusive-collaborative cities, which will advantage the city's development.

The cases that Mega provides throughout the book also show that sustainable cities are not only a dream for cities in developed countries. Cities in developing countries can always adapt and adjust their sustainability agenda to their local values to increase the participation of citizens in accomplishing sustainability goals. Mega's exemplifications in "Human Sustainable Cities" are concisely pointed out and enriched by her expertise and work experience, making this book a salient guideline for the city's government, urban planners, and academics in promoting sustainable transformation in the cities.

Lastly, "Human Sustainable Cities" is an enjoyable read, not only for urban topics passionate but also for everyone who wants to understand better about cities, the places where 56% of the world's population live. Furthermore, this book also relates to anyone who studies international relations, particularly those who are focusing on the sustainability agendas of the UN. Things that add unique value to this book are that she exemplifies and aligns the majority of the sustainable actions with the UN guidelines, not only the SDGs but also the previous climate accords made by the UN.

Although many terms may sound new to readers who are not familiar with urban topics, Mega's writing is relatively easy to understand, as she always defines and explains nicely to reduce the complexity and increase the accessibility of this book. Voula Mega

invites the readers to delve deeper and feel their meaningful existence in the cities, as citizens are obviously an integral part of the development, and their participation is essential to the success of sustainability transformation. With the broad cases provided and the depth of the analysis, Mega's writing has contributed significantly to urban discourse and its integration with sustainable development, enriching the literature in this field.

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