

Urban Problems in Detroit

Name:

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The largest city in Michigan state, Detroit has experienced an era of economic prosperity, and also decades of decline. Currently, authorities are trying to restore the city; however, it might seem that they do not want to pay attention to the essence of the issue: some urban problems that have led to local bankruptcy and which are still present in the center of the city. Below, several urban problems will be outlined and discussed (poverty, crime, infrastructure, pollution, and the condition of public buildings) which can serve as lessons for cities similar to Detroit to prevent the unfolding of the same scenario.

Detroit is widely known for its automotive industry, which can be considered as a fundamental reason for city's economic success. At the same time, it also has become a guarantee of present crisis: officials considered this industry as an inexhaustible gold mine and did not intend to diversify the economy of the city (Padnani, 2013). Apart from that, this urban problem is related to the inability of officials to critically assess the future situation and orientation of short-term benefits to ensure a good life for a "chosen" part of the population. As a result, Detroit has faced high levels of poverty: "according to the 2014 census, 39.3% of residents live below the poverty line" (Thompson, 2017, para. 7). Such data can be explained by the fact that Detroit's car culture has encouraged the investment of money into "highways instead of a public transportation system" (Padnani, 2013, para. 22). The root of the poverty as an urban problem lies in the fact that people do not have an opportunity to search work in nearby cities.

Unemployment and poverty might be the leading reasons for crime, which is another urban problem in Detroit. Although it did not receive the title for the "most dangerous American city," official data points at the outflow of people to other cities, with the possibility of making Detroit "a ghost town" in future decades. In 2016, the FBI Uniform Crime Report presented the

following statistics: “13,705 violent crimes - including murders, rapes, assaults, and robberies - were reported in Detroit last year” (Baldas, 2017, para. 7). The explanations provided by the local the police chief can slightly soften the disturbing data with regards to the human factor, the wrong classification, and problems with the system, which could include the duplication of a crime (Baldas, 2017). Nevertheless, even if specific errors are taken into account, the annual number of crimes is an urban issue that needs to be solved either with an attempt to improve Detroit’s economic situation or its police services.

The car culture has divided Detroit’s residents into people on whom the infrastructure is oriented because they have a car and into people who form a discriminated community because they cannot pay car insurance. According to Abdul El-Sayed (2018), one out of four people do not have a car, as they cannot afford all the related payments and insurance. At the same time, the absence of a car might pose a serious difficulty in accessing work across the city. Detroit “boasts no subway and an underfunded bus system” (El-Sayed, 2018, para. 2), and at least a quarter of the city’s population faces the conundrum of urban mobility.

Another everyday urban problem affecting all residents without exception is air pollution. Southwest Detroit is the location of Michigan’s oil refinery, and it is a reason why the city has been ranked as one of the worst places for people with asthma. The refinery alone cannot affect the whole of Detroit, but it adds its significant share to general air pollution since it is emitting such pollutants as “benzene, ethylbenzene, hydrogen sulfide gas, and formaldehyde” (Shaffer, 2017, para. 3). In addition to the obvious negative impact on health and the subsequent development of severe diseases, people find it difficult to breathe, which affects their productivity and wakefulness because the brain does not receive enough oxygen. At the same time, it is a disturbing fact that children are the most vulnerable part of the population; in

particular, this relates to African American children who “suffered 2,402 asthma attacks and missed 1,751 school days due to asthma per year” (Shaffer, 2017, para. 2). Public school buildings also might pose a problem if a child or an adult has an allergic reaction to mold. Valerie Strauss (2016, para. 2), in one of her articles, cites Lokia Wilson, a counselor in Detroit: “The odorous smell of mold and mildew hits [...] at Spain Elementary-Middle School in Detroit.” It is crucial to mention the fact that this school is not the only one with appalling conditions; Valerie Strauss has collected several stories illustrated with photographs to show that many public schools seem to be under the threat of immediate collapse. Multiplied by possible allergens, it constitutes the complex and dangerous urban problem of public buildings in poor conditions with the additional threat to children’s lives.

To conclude, Detroit has faced urban problems at the peak of its economic development due to its automotive industry. The city’s authorities did not focus on varying its sources of capital and did not encourage investing money into the urban transport system. As a result, Detroit’s residents suffer from unemployment and poverty; they are forced to walk many miles to get to work, or are prone to commit a crime. Apart from this, Detroit faces the issue of air pollution mostly due to an oil refinery, which is the source of harmful particles. In addition to that, many public school buildings are in a condition near to collapse and contain allergens (mold, for instance) which might cause an asthma attack. However, it is possible to state that most of the urban problems can be solved if officials pay attention to urban mobility, the renovation of public buildings, and the diversification of economic orientation.

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