

# Chapter 20

## (In)Justice in Urban Greening and Green Gentrification



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### 20.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with the argument that the association of urban redevelopment with greening creates a paradox (Anguelovski et al., 2018) and examines the production of inequalities as a result of greening projects. Even while greening certainly provides economic, ecological, health, and social benefits to many (Immergluck & Balan, 2018; Baró et al., 2014; Triguero-Mas et al., 2017; Gascon et al., 2016; Wolch et al., 2014; Connolly et al., 2013; Anguelovski, 2014; Wachsmuth & Angelo, 2018), it may create new and deeper vulnerabilities for historically marginalized residents – working-class groups, minorities, and immigrants – even in the many cases where interventions are meant to redress historic inequalities in the provision of parks or green spaces (Landry & Chakraborty, 2009; Heynen et al., 2006b; Hastings, 2007; Park & Pellow, 2011; Dahmann et al., 2010; Grove et al., 2018).

During design and implementation, many greening projects – parks, gardens, greenways, green climate-resilience infrastructure, cleaned-up waterfronts – tend to remain indeed blind to social vulnerabilities (Pearsall & Pierce, 2010) and new affordability issues (Pearsall, 2010; Checker, 2011), and can create what is known as green gentrification: new or intensified urban socio-spatial inequities produced by urban greening agendas and interventions (Gould & Lewis, 2017; Anguelovski et al., 2019, 2022). We refer here to projects such as the Boston Rose Kennedy Greenway, the New York High Line, the Philadelphia Rail Park, or the redeveloped waterfront in Bayview Hunters Point, San Francisco (Pearsall, 2018a; Loughran, 2014; Dillon, 2014).

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There are indeed many cases of urban greening and neighborhood redevelopment where real estate developers leverage rezoning ordinances and tax incentives to redevelop vacant land, which they transform into high-end residences adjacent to green spaces (Bunce, 2009; Immergluck, 2009; Quastel, 2009; Dillon, 2014). Urban greening inequalities are thus particularly acute because of what can be defined as “green gaps” upon which municipalities, private investors, and privileged residents capture a “green rent” through new commercial and residential investments (Anguelovski et al., 2018). The term “green gap,” builds on Smith’s rent gap (Smith, 1987) and extends the concept of an environmental rent gap (Bryson, 2013) to describe how those urban stakeholders find new potential “green rents” from greening projects, couching them under discourses of win-win benefits and public goods for all.

As a result, as I show in this chapter, urban greening interventions targeting lower-income, minority, and immigrant neighborhoods risk being increasingly associated with a GreenLULU or green Locally Unwanted Land Use (Anguelovski, 2016) by socially vulnerable groups because they create enclaves of green privilege for upper-class and racialized privileged residents rather than secured public goods. Such interventions are illustrative of broader and newer trends of urban environmental injustices and are evidence of the “uneven and often debilitating and damaging socio-natural relations of power work together through the urbanization of nature,” as political ecological and ecological economists have previously argued (Anguelovski & Martínez-Alier, 2014, p 168; Heynen et al., 2006a). In response, faced with this new green space paradox (Faber & Kimelberg, 2014), marginalized residents and activists are organizing to contest the social effects of greening projects as a central part of efforts to create a just green city (Pearsall & Anguelovski, 2016; Connolly, 2018a).

In the body of this chapter, mostly drawing from established research in North America while bringing in some examples from European and global South cities, I analyze historic inequities in access to urban green amenities and green infrastructure; distill growing trends over green gentrification in different contexts; and examine civic responses to them. I close this chapter with a broader discussion around the need to repoliticize urban greening practices.

## **20.2 A Historic Lack of Equitable “Access” to Green Space and Amenities**

Research on the spatial distribution of green space in cities has found that working-class and immigrant inner-city neighborhoods tend to more often have access to under-maintained, lower quality, less numerous, and smaller parks and public gardens in comparison with more affluent and white neighborhoods (Heynen et al., 2006b; Dahmann et al., 2010; Pham et al., 2012; Wolch et al., 2005; Boone et al., 2009; Connolly & Anguelovski, 2021). In contrast, wealthier and white

communities are in a position of environmental privileges (Park & Pellow, 2011) through the greater presence of nearby parks, coasts, and other open spaces in their area (Landry & Chakraborty, 2009; Heynen et al., 2006b; Hastings, 2007). For example, a 2018 study found that US cities with higher median incomes and lower percentages of Latino and Non-Hispanic Black residents have higher ParkScores [quality park systems] than others (Rigolon et al., 2018).

Such inequalities in access to green space are often explained by uneven urban development, unfair urban planning decisions and regulations, and ensuing inequitable housing tenure (Perkins et al., 2004; Rigolon & Németh, 2018a). In the case of the US, urban neighborhood associations have historically played an active role in promoting new green infrastructure like tree planting. In Milwaukee, for example, these associations were influential in leveraging reforestation program funding towards owner-occupied (i.e., higher-income) urban neighborhoods (Perkins et al., 2004). Similarly, in early XXth century America, those same associations put in place restrictive covenants and fought for segregation ordinances to reserve properties for white homeowners, which then brought a disproportionate share of trees in cities like Baltimore to higher-income white neighborhoods (Boone et al., 2010). These dynamics were sometimes formally officially codified in city policy, as in Austin, TX, where early city plans revealed the creation of separate black spaces in areas that were underserved with parks (Busch, 2017).

However, the historic association between social groups and greening is not always linear. Postwar segregation practices in the United States, which mostly saw whites moving out of city centers, meant that Black residents who moved to formerly white neighborhoods inherited many central city green spaces. In cities like Baltimore, these spaces were often underfunded and included mostly smaller and more crowded parks (Boone et al., 2009). Despite this unequal legacy many city newcomers inherited, communities of color began organizing in the 1980s for the creation of many new green spaces in historically non-white neighborhoods (Anguelovski, 2014). Given this complex, non-linear history, green space distributional inequities – and fights against them – must be clearly connected with long-term exclusionary processes embedded both in the political economy of development and in the (re)creation of urban nature.

In addition, not all groups hold a positive connection to nature and green spaces. Many residents of color associate green space with a traumatic history of disinvestment, racial violence and lynching, and exclusion (Finney, 2014; Brownlow, 2006). For instance, parks might feel more insecure than smaller and closer pocket urban gardens when those larger spaces are in high-crime areas (Anguelovski, 2014). In other cases, such as Los Angeles, Latino residents face ethno-racial and nativist exclusion in parks linked to the predominance of white park users, a lack of minorities in adjacent neighborhoods, fears of aggression, and direct discrimination (Byrne, 2012). Here, the combination of socio-environmental and cultural history creates oppressive and unsafe experiences, anxiety and chronic stress, socio-spatial segregation, and overall poor access to protective green spaces for immigrant, minority and working-class residents.

Another form of exclusion faced by historically marginalized groups emerges when green space planners and designers are unable or unwilling to address issues related to residents' perception, interactions, and use of green spaces (Checker, 2011; Kabisch & Haase, 2014; Haase et al., 2017). Indeed, from a procedural justice standpoint (Schlosberg, 2007), when parks are being designed, if local residents are not involved and incorporated into decisions, their needs, languages, identities, and uses are more likely to be overlooked in the final "product" (Kabisch & Haase, 2014; Byrne, 2012). In contrast, if green spaces can be co-designed and co-production with residents, this process can help them feel more recognized and strengthen their attachment to place and their individual and group identity (Anguelovski, 2014; Scannell & Gifford, 2010), with greater opportunity for strong interpersonal relations (Kabisch & Haase, 2014; Connolly et al., 2013). This is the case of the Parc del Centre de Nou Barris in Barcelona, in which residents' mobilization around the initial park development and design and their ongoing use and community building practices in the park have created strong relational wellbeing for children and families (Del Pulgar et al. 2020).

### 20.3 Emerging Concerns Over Green Gentrification

Urban green inequalities are not only historical. Since the late 2000s, new studies have examined the social and racial impact of new or restored environmental amenities such as parks, gardens, greenways, or playgrounds (Dooling, 2009; Hagerman, 2007; Quastel, 2009; Tretter, 2013) (Hagerman, 2007), or the clean-up and redevelopment of hazardous or contaminated sites into green and more livable neighborhoods (Gould & Lewis, 2017; Pearsall & Pierce, 2010; Pearsall, 2013; Curran & Hamilton, 2012; Dillon, 2014) – that is green gentrification. Most recently, green infrastructure built to address climate threats and impacts has also been shown to be providing greater security to more privileged, gentrifying and White residents rather than Latinos and Black residents, as exemplified in the case of Philadelphia (Shokry et al., 2020). In other cases of climate infrastructure, such as the Medellín Green Belt, new projects can erase residents' long-term green practices and lead to socio-cultural losses of vernacular uses of green space and traditional relationships to nature within "marginal" or informal land.

Overall, much of the green gentrification scholarship has focused on exposing the relationship between the creation or restoration of urban environmental amenities, subsequent demographic changes, and real estate price increases. The core argument is here that new green infrastructure enhances the desirability of a neighborhood – even before their construction – and eventually contributes to increases in property values (Conway et al., 2010; Sander & Polasky, 2009; Immergluck, 2009) and high-end housing constructions. In New York, for instance, the restoration of the Marcus Garvey Park (Harlem) has been accompanied by luxury condominium developments priced well above the historic average (Checker, 2011) benefiting developers and upper-class residents. In Atlanta, housing values have

increased by 18% and 27% between 2011 and 2015 for homes located within 0.8 km of the Atlanta’s Beltline greenbelt project (Immergluck & Balan, 2018). All in all, the widely agreed-upon conclusion (except in a few studies, see Eckerd, 2011) is that greener neighborhoods in large cities become pricier for vulnerable residents eventually unable to capture the benefits of environmental clean-up, restoration, and green space creation (Checker, 2011; Gould & Lewis, 2017).

Furthermore, understanding the unfolding of green gentrification beyond a few North American or European countries (Pearsall, 2018b), where much of the green gentrification research is situated, leads to insightful findings on urban greening practices in the context of the global smart, sustainable, and resilient city planning orthodoxy (Connolly, 2018a). As cities increasingly sell urban greening (and resilience) as an international brand, the equity implications of land use projects deployed for instance to address “climate resilience” issues – such as flooding in New Orleans or Jakarta or sea level rise in Boston or Manila – and other environmental risks are coming to light. They also reveal the importance of understanding the diverse manifestations of social vulnerability and risk in planning for climate resilience (Connolly, 2018b). As the construction of a green belt in Medellin reveals, thousands of rural migrants escaping the armed conflict have been affected by new large-scale green infrastructure which further illegalizes their land “occupation” and uses, while, at the same time, overlooking other illegal land practices by wealthier residents and real estate developers benefiting from “landscapes of pleasure and privilege”.

In other words, green gentrification research contributes to exposing the relationship between environmental change and gentrification, and its implications for residential segregation and economic development dynamics. It reveals that questions of urban greening, secured access over time, and urban equity are all but part of the same equation for socially vulnerable groups and that the green paradox is more alive than ever (Fig. 20.1).

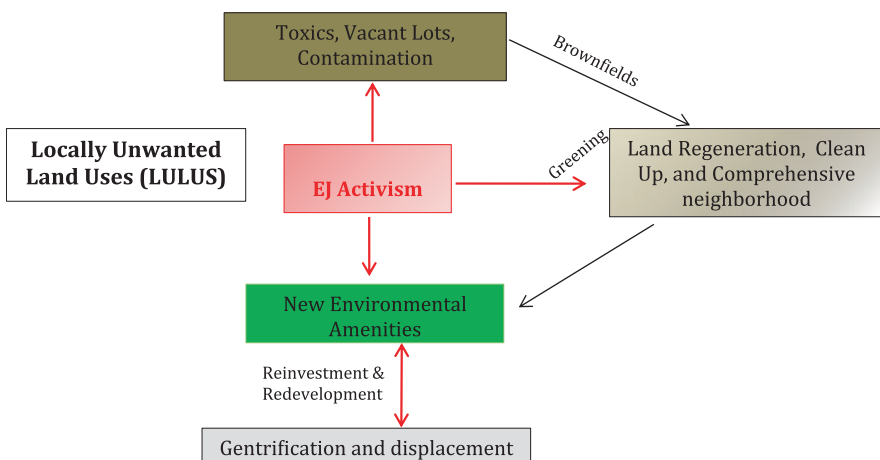


Fig. 20.1 Fighting multiple urban environmental agendas

## 20.4 Activists vs Green Gentrification

In response to concerns over green gentrification, community activists are organizing at the neighborhood or city level to contest the uneven social impacts of urban greening interventions and to what Martínez-Alier and myself previously called “undeterred processes of development, growth, and speculation” (Anguelovski & Martínez-Alier, 2014, p. 172). While some of the resistance relies on the strategies and tactics of traditional environmental justice movements and illustrates ecological distribution conflicts (Pearsall & Anguelovski, 2016; Anguelovski & Martínez-Alier, 2014), it also demonstrates classic dynamics of collective action at the neighborhood level (Schuetze & Chelleri, 2015; Pearsall, 2013; Tretter, 2013); community organizing through an alliance between EJ groups and community development organizations (Scally, 2012), and direct action tactics (Anguelovski, 2015; Rosol, 2013). In Seoul, for example, stakeholders involved in the planning of a Green Corridor to be part of the city’s “Urban Renaissance Master Plan” articulated a vocal opposition against the proposal’s top-down approach and lack of concern for traditional small-scale urbanization patterns (Schuetze & Chelleri, 2015). In addition, resistance to green gentrification includes leveraging environmental policies and regulations (Sandberg, 2014; Pearsall, 2013), participating actively in neighborhood planning exercises, and building alliances with progressive gentrifiers (Curran & Hamilton, 2012). Tactics also include advocating for complementary policy tools to ensure the right to housing (Thompson, 2015; Wolch et al., 2014; Ngom et al., 2016).

One of the most commented-upon frames of community resistance has been the “Just Green Enough” strategy (Curran & Hamilton, 2012; Wolch et al., 2014), through which residents, such as those in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, have mobilized for the clean-up of contamination and the incorporation of the neighborhood industrial fabric into redevelopment schemes. Yet, some recent research point at the gentrification potential of re-industrialization strategies (Checker, *in press*). In general, the long-term ability of “green compromises” to fulfill equity goals remains uncertain and contested (Faber & Kimelberg, 2014). Much attention needs to be placed on risks of cooptation, demotivation over time, and competing goals and conflicts between social organizations and environmental groups (Checker, 2011). Many activists indeed face the risks that their anti-green gentrification grievances might be used by planners and developers to justify siting urban greening interventions in more privileged and white neighborhoods, away from immigrant, working-class, or minority areas.

As well, there are important questions about the lack of true commitment or ability of traditional environmental movements to push for green equity, as many park nonprofits, for instance, consider that it is not “their business” (Rigolon & Németh, 2018b). While many environmental groups articulate a no- (or neutral) growth agenda (Layzer, 2015), urban greening (and green gentrification) does occur in the context of urban growth politics. Given the inherent impact of greening on urban growth, it is not clear whether mainstream environmental movements advocating

for urban sustainability are ready to go back on their growth positions and put environmental equity at the center of their advocacy. And, as we have pointed out before, historically, environmental movements and EJ movements have not been allies (Pellow & Brulle, 2005; Anguelovski & Martínez-Alier, 2014). In our 2014 piece, Martínez-Alier and myself already called for possible bridges and alliances between the different varieties of environmentalism, including the Cult of Wilderness (and pristine nature), the Gospel of Eco-Efficiency (in the context of smart growth and sustainability planning), and the Mantra of Environmental Justice and environmentalism of the poor more broadly, in ways that could protect urban territories, defend place-making and identities, and strengthen the right to stay of historically marginalized groups (Anguelovski & Martínez-Alier, 2014).

In return, the role of municipal decision-makers and public agencies in addressing or preventing inequities in greening cannot be left aside: There is still room for cities to offer transformational green interventions that both respond to deep climate agendas and ensure housing equity and anti-displacement. Several municipalities are indeed putting tools in place that ensure a greater right to housing access and affordability, including rent control in Berlin, housing cooperatives in Germany, community land trust in the US, inclusionary zoning in Spain, or social housing construction in France, and that also promotes more inclusive greening practices (Oscilowicz et al., 2022). Figure 20.2 summarizes and analyzes some of community-led or municipality-led green equity tools.

## 20.5 Conclusion: Reinserting the Political in Planning for Greener Cities

In this chapter, I have shown that some residents face the double circumstance of (a) having historically been excluded from large and quality green spaces (Heynen et al., 2006b) and (b), today, seeing their neighborhoods becoming grabbed, “greened,” and rebranded as livable, sustainable, low-carbon, resilient, and/or green at their (future) expense in the context of a new green planning orthodoxy (Davidson & Iveson, 2015). More broadly, the green space paradox makes the clean-up of industrial centers a zero-sum equation where with every gain for a few comes potential losses for (many) others. In view of these questions, reasserting the political into urban greening as a strand of the sustainability agenda is of great urgency, as political ecologists call for (Swyngedouw, 2007).

First, the need to bring the political back into municipal urban greening comes from the urgency to demystify the claim that urban greening is a public good for all. Rather, greening will have a mix of social and ecological effects requiring a deeper analysis of the conditions and pathways through which green projects can help to bring about “just sustainabilities” (Agyeman, 2013). As greening becomes a communication and selling tool for cities, it is indeed increasingly monetized and financialized and can create speculation and rent capture. Many cities indeed actively



Tool	Definition	Strengths	Limitations	Example
Policy or Planning tool				
Rent Control	Regulations that support renters in obtaining, maintaining, and keeping affordable housing.  Traditionally a government regulation that places a ceiling on rent for designated units.	Reduces burden from housing costs on renters allowing them to remain in their homes and gain benefit from economic development in their neighborhood  Supports mixed-income communities	Some real estate economists warn that limiting rent to below market rates will cause over-consumption of controlled apartments and therefore create counterproductive results by constraining housing supply	In Vienna, Austria, limited-Profit Housing Associations are subsidized housing indirectly controlled by the municipality. These units are developed by private developers through a city-regulated process and protected by the Limited-Profit Housing Act which sets parameters for setting fair rent prices and managing repairs and quality.
Inclusionary Zoning	Planning ordinance in which developers set aside a given share of new housing to be affordable for people with low to moderate incomes.  Tends to range from 8-12% of units set aside in US cities to 30% or more in Europe (up to 56% in the city of Nantes in France)	Creates Mixed Income Communities  Utilizes private developer funds	Difficult to enforce with complex requirements and a lack of uniform oversight for developers  Reliance on the private market makes IZ policies more suitable to cities with a high demand for housing, they may be less successful in cities with less competitive real-estate markets.	In 2005 the city of Atlanta, GA began construction of the Atlanta BeltLine. In order to mitigate dramatic rises in housing prices around the BeltLine. The city of Atlanta developed the BeltLine Overlay District (roughly ½ mile of the BeltLine Corridor) where standalone or mixed-used multi-unit buildings, with at least 10 units must include 15 percent affordable units.
Defense of Single Family Homes	'Single-Family Home' is the housing typology of a detached unit intended for a single household. Single-family home land use policies, such as Single-Family Home zoning designation prevent communities from building any type of housing in a given area aside from a single-family home.	Creates less dense cities and therefore facilitates a different feel of urban life.  Preserves smaller, more affordable homes that in many cases hold cultural significance to communities  Deters the conversion of smaller homes into multi-housing condo complexes, which tend to be built for gentrifying residents	Single-family zoning means less housing, and less housing supply may lead to more expensive housing	When land in the La Bajada neighborhood of West Dallas, TX began attracting real estate investment, neighborhood organizations became concerned that the character of the neighborhood, a largely Hispanic neighborhood of small single-family cottage style homes, would be lost to development. The neighborhood was approved as a Neighborhood Stabilization Overlay (NSO) meaning the only type of development that can be built within the area are single family homes, that are no taller than 27 feet and facilities that support the community.
Community-driven initiatives				
Formal Recognition of Right to Stay or Return	Formal recognition of the right to stay or right to return policies have been campaigns led by community activists designed to ensure that the original residents and those with long-term connections to gentrifying neighborhoods are able to receive affordable housing within their communities. These strategies include assistance to renters, home buyers, and existing homeowners provided by municipal agencies.	Formally recognize the importance of honoring generational and emotional connection to place.	Does not address the challenge residents will face as they continue to live in their changing neighborhoods.	The NNE Neighborhood Housing Strategy in Portland, OR includes loan assistance for home repair, down payment assistance for first time homebuyers, and the creation of new affordable housing for black residents who have been impacted by redlining, racial zoning, and eminent domain.
Community Land Trusts	Community Land Trusts are non-profit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community control and ownership of land.	Guarantees affordable units to members of the Trust for generations.  Trusts typically aid tenants to avoid foreclosure by providing technical and real estate assistance	Some groups voiced concern that residents of CLT units are limited for addressing inter-generational wealth gaps (especially between whites and residents of color) due to the inability to sell their homes for full equity.	The Atlanta Land Trust (ALT) has accumulated land in targeted areas of Atlanta, including near the BeltLine, to make them permanently affordable. They are also actively engaged with tenants/members to help them maintain their mortgage payments. ALT is also involved in creating a strong environment for CLT development by promoting congruous public policy, by engaging the community and by fundraising.

Fig. 20.2 Strategies for green equity

brand themselves as being the most livable green city to attract investment and creative class residents in the current trend of competitive urbanism (Garcia Lamarca et al., 2021). New analysis needs to shed light on how urban greening contributes to invisibilizing the environmental and social practices of long-term residents, by rebranding neighborhoods and cities as green, smart, and resilient; by flattening their historical and ecological landscapes; and by erasing their sense of belonging



and combined relationship to their neighborhood and to the local nature. Green gentrification does indeed operate both through physical displacement and through social, cultural, and mental displacement and dispossession.

Here, the political ecology literature on land grabbing, green frontier-driven value capture, and accumulation by green dispossession (Safransky, 2014, 2016) highlights the process of (community) losses and (private, concentrated) green wealth capture. In the future, unpacking financial actors, their intermediaries, and economic beneficiaries – both in the global North and South – is an important next step for green gentrification research. New financial instruments and tools – from green bonds to property-assessed clean energy programs – are indeed being mobilized to fund urban greening, in many cases connecting future green urban development to future value and resource creation (Knuth, 2016; Garcia Lamarca & Ullstrom, 2022).

In sum, this chapter on urban greening as both “underrepresented” asset and unwanted greenLULU in historically marginalized neighborhoods aims at repoliticizing current discourses and practices around the green city, and the associated claims that greening brings win-win benefits to everyone in the city. It calls for greater alliances between varieties of environmentalism and for transformational planning practice, whereby racial and social equity would be at the center of greening projects rather than an afterthought or abstract goal flagged in urban plans and interventions. This transformation would allow urban greening to move from being a green privilege and utopia to an environmental good for all.

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