

CONCLUSION

A new tale for the green city?

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Urban greening is often thought of as a tool for aligning developmental and environmental goals, but it is also a tool for magnifying the city. It exposes and expands almost invisible dimensions of our hyperlocal environment. It draws our attention toward the ways that our everyday environment is conditioned and patterned by cultural, social and political preferences. Greening has become one of the strongest mechanisms for transforming these preferences from a figurative guide for action into the literal cities we inhabit. Given its rise to prominence and its ability to expose challenges in creating socially just urban environments, reflective practice requires synthesizing the tales being told through urban greening around the world. In doing so, we can begin to tell a new tale, a tale that learns from reflection.

The chapters of *The Green City and Social Injustice* expose several parallel tracks on which the race is run to comply with the idealized green city across the Global North. Along the way, some cities such as Vienna or Nantes are trying desperately—despite the pressure to attract capital that pushes them in a different direction—to hold onto a pre-globalized and more social (or socialist, in European municipalities) tradition, wherein local governments seek a healthy balance between neighborhood-based quality of life and preservation of the natural ecosystem. But also, these chapters show that some cities such as Atlanta, Dallas or Milan do not have that tradition in mind. As they undertake massive state-led postindustrial transformation, “urban problems” come to be seen as anything (and anyone) that does not fit the mold of global markets or so-called avant-garde urbanism, and greening becomes a way of masking or removing those problems. Cities like Dublin or Portland are conflicted over the extent to which they should undo a rich historic inventory of green spaces in order to accommodate development, while cities like Barcelona are turning every stone to find developed areas that can be cleared and converted into green spaces. In

places like Boston, Montréal or San Francisco there are deep social and environmental contradictions by which greening and luxury development become either juxtaposed or superposed onto one another under a logic of green, resilient urbanism and redevelopment.

Within these parallel tracks for city greening, there are several pathways through which green environmental injustices unfold. These pathways combine historic links between land use, institutionalized racism and class relations. They also express an ever-deeper expanse between the haves and have-nots, which has left urban geographies economically and politically polarized. Greening is pushing this polarization to even greater depths. It is one of the key tools for rebranding racialized neighborhoods or ghettoized concentrations of minority and low-income groups into areas of privilege for upper-class and white residents—such as occurred in neighborhoods surrounding Atlanta’s Beltline, areas of Seattle’s South Park or Amsterdam Noord. These pathways are also defined by impediments around mobilizing at a grassroots level for control over local green agendas. Such mobilizations are often focused on wresting control away from those that would stand idly by, watching as the benefits of greening initiatives flow away from residents who often pioneered local environmental initiatives, fueling their startups with blood, sweat and tears. In the tension between top-down branding and bottom-up decommodification, particularly well-illustrated by the tales of Milan, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Boston and Montréal, the branding often wins and the inequities of the city swallow up the non-monetary benefits of urban greening, leaving many to wonder what the purpose of greening was in the first place.

While cities are moving toward the green moniker on several parallel tracks and injustices are intensified along multiple pathways in the process, there are lessons to be learned from what we observe across many cities that can guide us toward a vision for equitable urban green praxis. The five sections of the book demonstrate how green injustices manifest and how they are contested in five different contexts. Each of these contexts demonstrates a different degree to which greening begins with social justice as at least a primary goal, if not *the* primary goal.

Greening injustices across five contexts

Part 1, “The social costs of glitzy green urbanism,” considered two extravagant new greening projects and two less spectacular but more extensive new green urban developments that heighten exclusivity and existing injustices. On the one hand, Milan’s so-called Gate of Green, including vertical garden luxury skyscrapers, and Valencia’s Parc Central, marketed as the city’s new green lung, both employed starchitects, global real estate developers and international competitive logics to build the cachet and glamor of new green space design and high-end housing development. On the other hand, high-profile green urbanism can also come in the form of citywide initiatives that refocus the identity of the city on

green goals. In Bristol, this manifested in the efforts to become a European Green Capital and in Amsterdam as a tech-, arts- and design-driven green transformation of Amsterdam Noord. In all four cases, speculative greening and eco-urbanism agendas brought about the privatization of green space, rising housing prices, the destruction of heritage, cultural and physical displacement and participatory processes characterized by activists as “social-washing.” Overall, these agendas have laid the groundwork for an exclusive present and future urban transformation. While this greening was driven by the city or private sector, we also saw how community organizers and activists in Milan and environmental groups in Bristol created new green spaces that embody values of responsibility, cooperation and the co-construction of urban imaginaries and fought for policy change and action to address historic racial inequality, affordability in new green developments and lack of quality green spaces for working-class communities.

In Part 2, “Compounded risks and impacts of urban greening in post-industrial environments,” we highlighted cases of areas in four American cities and one Scottish city characterized by historically toxic landscapes and working-class, often racialized, residents with ongoing and disproportionately high health risks. More recently, the extensive land decontamination underway has rapidly transformed decades of neglect and disinvestment. The newly cleaned-up areas—either in extremely close proximity to their respective city centers (West Dallas, Glasgow’s East End, Cleveland’s Detroit Shoreway) or vastly more accessible due to transit stops or new infrastructure (San Francisco’s Bayview-Hunters Point and Seattle’s South Park)—are now sites with enormous development pressure. While green and blue infrastructure development visions abound, the type of creative, smart and/or green city model that is often being pursued leaves behind, excludes or even abolishes long-term working-class and racialized residents while encouraging an influx of more affluent and whiter residents through high-end housing developments. Resistance and alternatives by mobilized vulnerable residents, however, are present especially in Dallas, Seattle, San Francisco and Cleveland, pressing for more equitable green development approaches and interventions.

Part 3, “(Re)creating unjust racialized landscapes in the green city?,” uncovers the racialized dimensions of greening in Atlanta, Washington D.C., Boston and Austin, all cities with a long history of racial and class segregation. Residents in East Boston, East Austin, Washington D.C.’s Historic Anacostia and the predominantly Black neighborhoods surrounding Atlanta’s Beltline endured neglect, disinvestment and abandonment for decades until new resilient, green, climate interventions arrived in or next to the neighborhood (East Boston waterfront, East Austin’s smart growth plan and Atlanta’s Beltline) or right across the river (Navy Yards, Washington, D.C.). In all four cases, the dominant development processes are reinforcing and retrenching racial relations while generating the political, cultural and economic displacement of Black and Latinx folk, as it is largely wealthy and white newcomers who can afford to live amidst new green amenities. This type of urban greening effect is perhaps most acute in the cities

outlined in Part 3 but is also a common strand across many cities in this book. The re-creation of racialized environments is the impetus behind a recent scholarly push to address the deeply embedded white privilege in greening through mechanisms of abolitionist values rooted in an ethics of care and healing as well as land recognition, redistribution and control by historic residents of color (Connolly and Anguelovski 2021; Ranganathan and Bratman 2019).

Through looking at neighborhoods in Montréal, Dublin, Barcelona and Philadelphia, Part 4 of this book, “The complex entanglement of greening and multiple other gentrification pressures,” illustrates how greening is intertwined and made more complex in its relationship to other urban dynamics related to food, tourism, creative industries, Opportunity Zones and the studentification of cities. Montréal’s Saint-Henri is not only being transformed by large-scale, top-down and small-scale, community-led greening interventions, but also, in its foodscape, what was once affordable, culturally loved and supportive of community needs has been replaced by expensive and gourmet options. Similarly, despite being a non-binding document, Dublin’s *Liberties Greening Strategy* has been used as a tool for the legitimization and marketing of new high-end student housing, luxury hotel development and small apartments for wealthy international IT workers, which has added another trigger to gentrification while excluding working-class residents from new (semi)-privatized greening. Meanwhile, comprehensive greening efforts throughout Barcelona are increasingly at risk of being appropriated by global tourism and corporate investments as residents are socially and physically displaced. As well, Philadelphia’s Hunting Park, a model neighborhood for equitable climate resilience planning, faces shifting and combined social and environmental risks as efforts of Latinx and Black residents to improve neighborhood environmental quality are concentrated on an Opportunity Zone, whereby new tax incentives meant to boost private development may not necessarily generate benefits for vulnerable residents. We see in this section how greening is thus one piece of a larger gentrification and displacement puzzle.

The book’s fifth and final section, “(Fragile) green justice victories and grey zones in the just green city,” demonstrates both the efforts and pitfalls of historic and present attempts to create greener and more equitable urban fabrics in American and European cities. Copenhagen, Nantes and Vienna are all known for their deep social and environmental welfare roots that decades ago centered on progressive tax and land use policies as well as the provision of large amounts of public housing and green space. While a significant stock of decommodified housing partially remains today, in recent decades it has been eroded through the neoliberal restructuring of housing systems that has come to dominate global housing development trends and through national or international competitive urbanism logics. Trade-offs between social justice, rapidly rising land prices, urban renewal and environmental innovations are exemplified by Copenhagen’s Nørrebro neighborhood. Similarly, Nantes has made huge strides in becoming a green and equitable city over the past 30 years due to an enforced commitment

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to providing significantly affordable and social housing in all new eco-developments, yet tensions exist about what type of greening is being created and who may participate and decide. Finally, despite Portland being a sustainability planning pioneer in North America, in practice the city sustains white privilege as industrial pollution, food deserts and the lack of green amenities remain a reality for most Black, Latinx and Native American populations. Yet the grassroots-led development in Portland's Cully neighborhood, the focus of the chapter, illustrates how sustainability can be reframed as an anti-poverty and climate justice strategy, with community mobilization sparking important simultaneous wins around housing, ethical and local economic opportunity and inclusive green development.

These five sections comprise a list of the basic elements that become visible when we look carefully through the magnifying glass of urban greening at city-making processes, but the tale they tell on the whole is better expressed within cross-cutting themes. In the introductory chapter of the book, we described the analytical lenses that we used as we examined the case studies. Below, we revisit these lenses in order to discern the extent to which they surfaced as thematic trends across all cases.

Green locally unwanted land uses and the formation of green privilege

One common dynamic seen in many cities demonstrates the counter-intuitive trend wherein the motivations for and ultimate effect of urban greening initiatives become suspect, rendering them green locally unwanted land uses (GreenL.U.L.U.s). In nearly all cases, there is a strand of suspicion around the alliances between municipal planners, elected officials and developers promoting a local urban "green turn" (Anguelovski et al. 2019) in order to enhance their competitive position amongst global, cosmopolitan cities. The suspicion reflects an internalized sense of a trend observed elsewhere (e.g., Heynen, Perkins and Roy 2006) that the green rents accumulated by upper-class residents and the real estate-financial complex around them come at a social cost for minorities and low-income groups. Thus, the formation of GreenL.U.L.U.s posits that green space planning, design and management intersect with cultural politics of race, class and nature, and in turn create new socio-natural identities in and around cities benefiting newcomers and investors in the form of rent capture.

Our analysis reveals that parallel tracks of urban greening and the multiple pathways through which urban green injustice unfolds generate numerous forms of GreenL.U.L.U.s. This mode of green privilege is being enacted through a *diversity of materialities* (i.e., from the conversion of vacant lots to gardens; transportation and industrial infrastructure into linear parks and other green spaces; green resilience and adaptation along climate-threatened coastlines and waterfronts). It also has several *associated environmental amenities* that become part of the green package (self-branded healthy, organic and local food stores in the

process of food gentrification; or sustainable and active transit infrastructure in transit-oriented development projects and others). As well, it occurs across a variety of *urban spatialities* (historic urban centers, post-industrial and military areas, peripheral zones, and coastlines and waterfronts). Finally, GreenL.U.L.U.s are championed by an array of institutional, physical and individual *green actors* (elected officials branding a new green city; planners and designers locating and projecting greening; investors, developers and real estate agents profiting from and financing greening; residents moving to green areas while others are pushed out; and the green infrastructure, materials, plants and broader green ecology and economy allowing greening to be spatially enacted).

Last, many of the tales—San Francisco, Dallas, Boston, Seattle and Dublin in particular—illustrate the real problem expressed by GreenL.U.L.U.s: when privileged green areas result in the production of new green inequalities, enduring environmental risks and exposure are not abated. Rather, urban greening in this circumstance leaves long-term environmental and health inequities unaddressed as new parks, greenways and other renaturing programs rise up along the polluted waterfronts or next to waste sites of American and European global cities. While it is true that gentrified residents moving to greener yet environmentally contaminated areas face environmental risks as well, their social position allows them to organize, protest and if necessary, move out more easily than marginalized residents with limited political power, income or financial assets. Early gentrifiers also tend to pave the way for and legitimize large-scale developments for upper-class groups and for a second, more acute, gentrification wave. In that process, lower-income groups are pushed away to browner, more distant landscapes (Gould and Lewis 2017).

Dispossession, displacement and the racialization of nature

Another common trend throughout the book picks up on how new aesthetics, designs and formalizations of nature codify and restrict who has access to the benefits of the green city. Beautification projects can produce what Goodling and others call houselessness (Goodling 2019) by creating visual landscapes and green spaces appealing to middle-class and white consumption and leisure practices precisely because they send a clear signal that the area is off-limits to others. In contrast, homeless encampments and environmental practices become portrayed as undesirable and criminal objects to be removed to make way for new businesses and market opportunities (Goodling 2019; Speer 2019; Dooling 2009). Here, the reuse, survival and collective appropriation of space by vulnerable groups become subjugated by a green makeover (Speer 2019; Anguelovski, Irazába and Connolly 2019). Green spaces are thus the locus of socio-spatial tensions (Dooling 2009) wherein park planners and new users shape a more manicured and normalized form of greening while other uses of the spaces—which are often the only ones vulnerable residents have access to—become ruled out and marginalized. In other cases, permitted yet temporary uses of urban spaces

for greening become washed away by new formal greening and other land uses in processes of “clashing temporalities of support and care” (Kotsila et al. 2020).

As many of the cases presented in this volume show, this sometimes quiet and creeping form of dispossession is increasingly linked to racialized uneven development and the racialization of urban nature within seemingly depoliticized and ahistorical urban green planning. Collectively, this type of greening is illustrative of settler colonialism, that is of practices of land grabbing, frontier-driven value capture, landscape manipulation and invisibilization of minority land practices and uses (Safransky 2014; Dillon 2014). Under this regime of accumulation by green dispossession, immigrant and minority practices become overlooked and pushed aside when the preferences of white culture conflict to reflect the deep history of colonial settlement and a colonizing approach to the organization of society. As greening plows through neighborhoods such as Anacostia in Washington D.C., East Boston in Boston, South Park in Seattle, Bayview-Hunters Point in San Francisco and in different racialized contexts such as Ciutat Vella, Barcelona, or Nørrebro, Copenhagen, local histories of the racial settlement are obscured by racial amnesia that strips from the public consciousness an awareness of the deeper legacies and impacts of environmental and social inequities (Tuck 2009) in the communities where green projects are taking place. Put simply, greening is not race-neutral and can evict alternative narratives, practices and identities for the benefit of new, whiter residents and cultural uses.

The cases presented in *The Green City and Social Injustice* broadly point toward race and racism as the primary and ultimate predictor and indicator of unequal green inequities (Mohai and Saha 2015; Pulido 2017). In many of the neighborhoods examined, racism—and here race-based environmental inequalities—is produced and reproduced over time, and calls for the exposure of pervasive and malleable racialized processes and racialized inequities in regard to urban greening (Anguelovski et al. 2019; Connolly and Anguelovski 2021). In Europe, this process is embodied in the isolation, ghettoization, territorial stigmatization, advanced marginality and increased legal targeting of immigrants along a race-class axis (Wacquant 2014). In the U.S., many minorities and immigrants have a conflicted relationship with nature because natural spaces have not always been integrated, welcoming and safe amenities for them, especially cognizant of racist discourses and practices that have excluded them (Park and Pellow 2011; Rigolon and Németh 2018). In short, we take from our observations a sense of the entanglement of urban greening, segregation and exclusion and white privilege and supremacy as nature becomes increasingly an expression of white culture in gentrifying neighborhoods of North America and Europe.

Banking on nature

Finally, a thread that is woven throughout most of our cases involves the ways in which urban nature is packaged and presented to enable its possible monetization and mobilization for finance capital. Most overtly, there are many examples

wherein city governments justify greening within policy processes primarily based upon an expectation of financial return on investment. This approach sets aside the usual impetus of environmental and social benefits and forces greening down a path wherein monetized returns can be assured, while concern for equity is neglected. This process—the financialization of urban greening—undergirds much of what drives the injustices observed above.

In our 21 tales of urban greening, we show how planning for and investment in various forms of greening work to cordon off space so it can be more easily packaged and monetized within a sustainable, smart, resilient city narrative (Connolly 2018). Eventually, the accumulated effect of this cordoning is the production of injustices for residents who are themselves ignored within the hegemony of urban greening and the financialization of nature around it. Such a process is particularly visible in the cases of Dublin, Milan, Valencia, Austin, Seattle and Portland where a network of investors and real estate stakeholders come together to fund large-scale yet increasingly exclusive greening, often to justify and legitimize their real estate operations. In this process, urban nature is a product and a resource tamed, transformed, re-created, financed and regulated within a dominant market-centered ideology (Castree 2008; Knuth 2016) of economic development that (only) highlights all the gains and values harnessed via greening for a few, excluding the effects on the many. As Marcuse (2009) reminds us, this reinforces a system wherein, “The law locks up the man or woman who steals a goose from off the common, but leaves the greater villain loose who steals the common from the goose.”

This is a thread of increasing importance within urban greening because new financial instruments and tools—the recent emergence of green bonds as a particular example—are being widely utilized by planners and developers alike. In many cases the result is to lock green urban development into a logic and practice of future monetary value creation under the guise of “doing good” (Knuth, 2016; Garcia-Lamarca and Ullstrom, 2020). Thus, the chapters here help us unpack how emerging strategies of urban “green grabbing” (Fairhead, Leach and Scoones 2012) operate within the broader context of green capitalism (Prudham 2009; Wallis 2010). This process is characterized by a systemic attempt to “solve” economic and ecological crises through integrating ecological conditions—in this case greenspaces—into the circuits of capital accumulation, towards new and supposedly sustainable growth trajectories (Anguelovski et al. 2019).

A new tale for the green city

The Green City and Social Injustice endeavors toward a deep engagement with the ways in which urban greening amplifies injustices without ignoring the many social, health and environmental benefits that also come with greening. Rather, it directs us toward the need to generate a new storyline for green cities. This storyline must develop outside of the growth of green privilege built on the back of racialized and financialized models of urban greening. It must value all people’s

right to a healthy environment before some people's desire for monetary gain. In our view, this new tale of the green city comes about through an antisubordination, intersectional and relational approach.

An *antisubordination* mode of planning forces a reflection on effect rather than intent. If the effect is to reinforce or exacerbate existing social inequalities, the result is undesirable regardless of intent. Green planners can no longer only operate on good intent; instead, antisubordination green planning requires ongoing reflection, adjustment and collaboration. In Washington D.C., for example, organizers of the proposed 11th Street Bridge greening initiative try to account for historic racism, property market effects and gentrification. Importantly, the initiative is evolving over time and continues to change and grow as perceived and observable effects of initial interventions become clear. Following principles of reparative and preventative justice, antisubordination greening calls for three deep changes: (1) the questioning of experiences of domination, racial stratification and oppression and of the institutions that sustain them; (2) the construction of emancipatory spaces and geographical formations that can secure land, resources and safe access to nature for marginalized groups; (3) and the creation of new institutional arrangements, practices and policies that such groups can control.

An *intersectional* mode of greening embraces the complexity of ways in which injustices are reproduced across race, ethnicity, gender, class and identity. This new pathway for urban greening embraces green space creation that embodies values of responsibility, duty-sharing and the co-construction of urban imaginaries. Recognizing the multi-faceted and intersectional network of outcomes in urban social and environmental justice that result from greening, this new pathway calls for planners and policymakers to prioritize anti-displacement tools related to appropriate and affordable housing provision and maintenance in conjunction with green (re)development tools in order to achieve a green and just city. Here, green planners have a particularly important role to play in placing housing rights and justice at the center of—and not as an adjunct to—new greening projects. In the previous chapter, we explored how different municipalities have engaged with combinations of both anti-displacement and equitable urban greening tools, in both the North American and the European contexts, in order to address green inequalities that have surfaced as a result of post-industrial redevelopment, unregulated real estate speculation, unjust racialized landscapes and neighborhood gentrification pressures. In that chapter and the 50 policy tools highlighted in an accompanying report, we emphasized participatory community involvement, regulation of neoliberalized housing markets, further financial support for affordable and social housing programming, among others.

A *relational* mode of urban greening turns the focus away from high-profile mega-projects designed to grab the attention of global competitors, and toward the everyday lives of every resident in the city. It seeks out greening agendas that meet the simple needs of people with basic demands in order to allow for socio-cultural growth amongst residents. It helps ensure that working parents

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have places of communal support for childcare as we see in cities like Barcelona, while also building grassroots efforts to steward the local environment from a desire to make an area more livable, as we see in cities like Philadelphia. Here, we highlight the role of planners in valuing multiple formal and informal uses for green space and the role of marginalized or invisibilized groups in occupying green spaces. Without such spatial occupation and claim, risks of socio-cultural displacement are rampant.

Taken together, antisubordination, intersectional and relational modes of greening add up to a radical new praxis capable of rewriting the tale of the green city. This book has demonstrated that in many cases, greening is highly associated with the displaceability of residents or susceptibility to exclusion from neighborhood and housing resources, but also points to a more radical potential that is always present and championed, even if not by those with the greatest resources. The leap is not so great to realize this potential.

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