TH10.50.08 Bottom-up Sustainability and Activism

Expertise and Ignorance: Opposition to Shale Gas Development Decisions
Presenter: Yasminah Beebeejaun, University College London (y.beebeejaun@ucl.ac.uk)
Authors: Yasminah Beebeejaun, University College London

Whilst the idea of public participation within planning decisions continues to hold a normative status, the reality of public opposition to development has often been treated with hostility within the literature. This paper focuses on a key aspect for the dismissal of public viewpoints, that of expert forms of knowledge. Whilst there are strong arguments lay forms of knowledge can be missed within decision-making if communities are insufficiently involved, a tacit consensus remains that "expert" forms of knowledge lie within the hands of planners, the state more widely, and development interests. No where is this more clearly demonstrated than in the controversy over shale gas extraction or 'fracking' where public opposition is often cast as "rational ignorance" that can be overcome through public education programmes.
This paper considers how expertise becomes politically constructed expertise within debates. I draw upon archival qualitative fieldwork conducted in Pennsylvania, USA, that challenges the lay/ expert divide within oil and gas development. The paper concludes that, in this case, expertise is blurred and lies outside the state, encompassing the knowledge and experiences of diverse communities.

New Evidence on Ethnicity-Based Environmental Inequity in Southern California
Presenter: Yushim Kim, Arizona State University (ykim@asu.edu)
Authors: Yushim Kim, Arizona State University; Yongwan Chun, University of Texas Dallas; Heather Campbell, Claremont Graduate University

More than three decades have passed since the famous United Church of Christ report generated broader attention to environmental inequity among environmental scholars, advocates, practitioners, and the public. Since then, a substantial amount of empirical evidence on environmental injustice in the US has been accumulated. At the same time, various limitations of EJ analyses (e.g., measurements, unit of analysis, etc.) have been well documented. In this paper, we reassessed environmental risk disparity in Los Angeles County, using California's recent environmental screening data (released in October 2014) and spatial regression models. The results show that at some levels there is environmental injustice with respect to Hispanic ethnicity and risk disparity, but the association between the proportion of the Hispanic population and environmental risks is curvilinear rather than linear. The curvilinearity finding suggests that in some areas it may be erroneous for environmental injustice analysis to be performed based on assumptions of linearity (as is most common). Further, it implies that mixed communities may experience higher environmental risks when compared to communities with high levels of racial or ethnic minorities. This observation leads to a speculative explanation. With a substantial increase in the Hispanic population in California, concomitant increases in power may better protect communities with high percentages of Hispanics from environmental risks. Regardless, this analysis provides empirical evidence for a heretofore unidentified potential problem in the EJ research: the assumption of a linear relationship between environmental risks and minority status.

Non-Profit Environmental Justice Advocacy and Sustainable Community Development in Latino America

Presenter: Armando Xavier Mejia, California St Univ-Long Beach (armando.mejia@csulb.edu)
Authors: Mariela Fernandez, Clemson University; Armando Xavier Mejia, California State University, Long Beach

Current research on environmental justice advocacy is limited in its coverage of Latino community concerns. This paper seeks to address this research limitation through a comparative qualitative analysis of environmental justice advocacy and organizing in two majority-Latino communities in metropolitan Los Angeles and Chicago. Two questions guide this paper: what role do non-profit advocacy groups play in challenging environmental inequalities and bringing about just and sustainable community development in Latino urban and suburban communities? And, what factors facilitate the success of non-profit environmental justice advocacy in majority-working class Latinos/as? To answer these and other aspects of the research, we rely on data collected via interviews with activists employed in two non-profit environmental justice advocacy groups as well as information gathered from historical documents, participant observation of community events and organizational meetings.
Our research has revealed three key factors are critical in advancing environmental justice in majority-Latino communities. First. Environmental justice education is vital. Second. Providing residents with fundamental knowledge about urban planning and the urban policy-making process significantly enhances their understanding of environmental inequalities and the need to address them. And, Third. Non-profit organizations are most effective when they develop partnerships with local public officials. We believe our project offers an important contribution to current research on urban and suburban environmental justice organizing in Latino communities, and provides insights from the case studies that help us understand the social and political forces that make it possible for Latino communities to develop in a more just and sustainable manner.

Community Perceptions of Changes in Flood Risk Management Strategies: The Case of a Densely Urbanized Watershed in San Juan, Puerto Rico

Presenter: Luis Santiago, University of Puerto Rico (luis.santiago47@upr.edu)
Authors: Luis Santiago, University of Puerto Rico; David Flores, US Forest Service; Maria Castello, University of Puerto Rico

A proposal by the US Army Corps of Engineers to channelize sections of the Rio Piedras watershed in San Juan, Puerto Rico has shed light on alternative risk management strategies. Top down, technical or engineered solutions to deal with flood control such as channelization are increasingly unaffordable. Our interest is to explore how community leaders' frame the concept of risk, particularly due to flooding, and solutions within the context of the current financial crisis. The Rio Piedras watershed is of particular interest given its high population density and its history of interventions that led to the burial of river segments with cement canals.
We will interview community leaders using semi-structured interviews to assess the broader idea of what makes San Juan livable, and the role that flooding risk management plays in defining livability. Their perception of bottom-up approaches for flood control, including the role of green infrastructure, is of particular interest given the infeasibility of current engineered measures and the history of short term local coping strategies. We will frame the research using hygienic versus green city imaginaries to explore to what extent community leaders adhere to hygienic visions of the city or advocate transitioning

towards strategies more closely aligned with ecological processes and functions. Data will be gathered by means of in-person interviews with community leaders in the San Juan area; our goal is to interview 30 leaders. Research results will help inform current efforts to engage communities in thinking about alternative solutions to channelization and other urban flood management measures. The documentation of bottom up, ecologically sensitive approaches may become a key component of flood control management strategies given the current financial situation experienced by the Island.