

**IHDP Open Meeting '08
16-19 October 2008, New Dehli, India**

Session Proposal

Session Sponsored by

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Session Title:

Linking Ecology and Environmental Justice in Urban Areas

Deadline for Expression of interest: December 23rd, 2007

Science for the 21st century requires an engagement between the natural and social sciences as a means of understanding the dynamic relationships between human and biophysical systems, and to identify alternative paths towards sustainability. An integrated socio-ecological approach offers an essential framework for identifying and ultimately measuring such feedback relationships, particularly in urban areas where human activity is concentrated. While significant advances have been made in the field of ecological modeling that empirically link ecological structure and function with economic processes and states, the third aspect of sustainability – the social realm – has been largely neglected or oversimplified in ecological models.

A central tenet of sustainability is that neither the benefits nor costs should be concentrated in the hands of a few; in other words, the distribution of the environmental “goods” and “bads” should be just. The environmental justice movement emerged about twenty years ago in response to the uneven distribution of hazards, such as toxic waste facilities, and the recognition that these hazards were disproportionately located in communities occupied by racial and ethnic minorities, even while controlling for income. Over the last two decades, the environmental justice movement has become a significant force in defining social and environmental issues, while scholarship on environmental justice has developed into a large scientific endeavor guided by substantiated theory and robust, replicable methods of analysis. That environmental justice should prevail stems in part from moral reasoning, but others have argued that inequitable distributions of environmental goods and bads can have compounding negative effects on ecosystems and ultimately to societies. Still others argue that the democratic access to knowledge and grassroots activism that the environmental justice movement has created has been a major factor in the reduction of toxins released into the air, water, and soil. Environmental justice, thus conceived, is fundamentally critical for ecological, social, and economic sustainability.

Ecology and environmental justice have made modest steps towards more integrated research and cross-fertilization. An increase in the focus on the concept of sustainable

cities highlights the need for better science on how cities function and can function as socioecological systems. The growing field of urban ecology also is grappling with how biophysical and social science methods and models, developed relatively independent of one another, can be brought to bear on understanding cities as human ecosystems. Philosophically, the long standing divide between the “green” (bio-centric) and “brown” (human-centric) agendas of environmentalism are beginning to break down. Sustainability science challenges the idea that environmental justice comes at the expense of ecological health and vice versa. Environmental justice, traditionally rooted in the brown agenda and the civil rights movement, increasingly recognizes the ultimate importance of the green agenda concerns, promoted by most ecologists, of interspecies and inter-generational equity to social justice.

Session Title:

Ecology and Environmental Justice for Urban Areas

Session Abstract:

This session focuses on the intersection of questions on how to deal with limited resources and ecosystem services and how to increase equity and establishing social cohesion at various levels (the second and third challenges posed in the IHDP OM 08 concept note). Scholars have recently started exploring complex links between ecology environmental justice through new integrated, collaborative, transdisciplinary and synthetic research on the dynamics of socio-ecological systems. Despite the increasing intellectual acceptance of the links between ecological and social systems, scientists are just beginning to make the empirical connections between environmental justice and ecological structure and function as both fields have devoted enormous resources to developing robust metrics and models.

This session will capitalize on these efforts and pinpoint new research, datasets and methods at the intersection of ecology and environmental justice for urban areas that help address the following overarching questions: How does the distribution of environmental inequities, measured by the uneven distribution of ecosystems services, affect the vulnerability and resilience of urban social-ecological systems to regime shifts? And in turn, how do social and ecological regime shifts affect the distribution of ecosystems services and environmental justice patterns in urban areas?

Key Words:

Ecology; Environmental Justice, Cities

Participation:

Interested researchers are asked to express their interest or submit a 250 word abstract of their proposed contribution. The abstract should outline methodologies and data sources (if applicable) and state the contribution of the paper to the body of literature on the subject. The submission should be accompanied by a CV of each author/co-author. Abstracts and CVs should be submitted by email to fragkias@asu.edu and cgboone@asu.edu

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