



SESYNC Feedbacks

News from the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT | Environmental Justice + Green Space

SESYNC Research: Not All Parks Are Created Equal

Historically, environmental justice initiatives focused on urban parks have evaluated where those green spaces are located and who has access to them. But, according to SESYNC researcher Jeffrey Clark, "Just because there is a park, doesn't mean it necessarily has the features that that community values or needs."

In fact, making park access truly equitable means ensuring residents get the best use and value from the green spaces available to them.

Generally, parks departments know a lot about who they serve, explained fellow SESYNC researcher Charles Nilon. "So, they know a lot about who lives within say a 10-minute walk to the park or a half-hour walk to the park," he said. "That's information that's really important, and it's a really important part of park planning. But the sort of broader picture of how people use those parks, what resources are there, those really need to be explored because those are probably an equally important part."

Nilon—Professor Emeritus of Fisheries and Wildlife, in the University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources—added, "The question of how cities provide parks to people is really complex. It's something that really needs to be considered when we think about what access means."

Part of ensuring equal access is recognizing that parks provide more than just physical benefits to city residents.

“When you see the uses of parks during times like the COVID pandemic, we know that they can be really valuable for more than just recreation—they can have cultural importance, they can be good for mental health,” explained Clark, Senior Manager of Applied Climate Research at Natural Areas Conservancy. “If we are going by [parks’] presence/absence only, we’re leaving a lot of people out from some of the benefits as planners that we really try to push,” he said.

Despite parks’ unique features impacting residents’ physical, mental, and social well-being, urban planners and municipalities seldom consider these attributes when trying to develop plans for addressing environmental inequities. [Read more.](#)

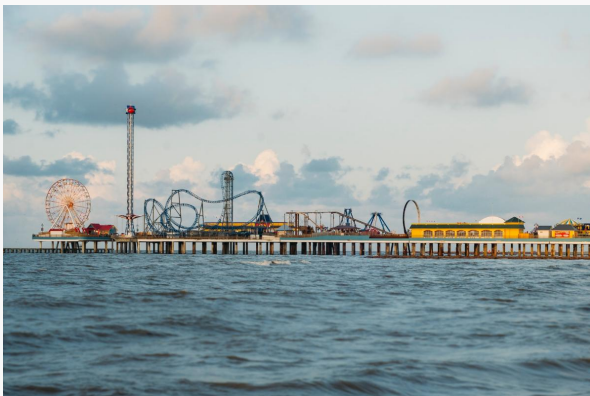
RESOURCES | Environmental Justice Collection

Check out some of our SESYNC resources below on various topics related to [environmental justice](#).

Redlining and Tree Cover Lesson: Measuring Environmental Inequality in Baltimore

This lesson is a simplified, web-based exploration of the residual effects of redlining on neighborhood tree cover and species diversity in the city of Baltimore. Using online databases for redlining maps and tree surveys, learners will explore contrasting neighborhoods in Baltimore. These analyses will help them

to better understand how historical inequality endures to this day. They will also show how cities may implement proactive measures to increase environmental equality across a metropolitan area. If these resources are available for your city, instructors may adapt this lesson to explore redlining and tree cover correlations in your region. [Learn more.](#)



Coastal Resilience Lesson: Seawalls, Mangroves, and Environmental Justice

This lesson provides two contrasting case studies to demonstrate two American cities' responses to sea-level rises due to climate change. First is Galveston, Texas, a large Gulf-Coast city with high poverty rates and extreme vulnerability to sea level rise, filled with hardscape. Next is Sanibel Island, a

Florida Gulf-Coast barrier island with wealthy homeowners that has a history of natural preservation and remediation. After learning about different resilience strategies, participants will consider the differences in environmental justice between the sites and write a preliminary grant proposal. [Learn more.](#)

Participatory Futures Planning Lesson: Reducing Environmental Inequality

As a form of stakeholder engagement, participatory futures planning helps give less-empowered groups—such as the poor, women, and children—an

opportunity to engage in vision- and decision-making alongside more empowered managers, businesses, and policy makers. In this lesson, learners will design and implement a participatory futures planning session with chosen members of their communities. The goal of this exercise is to identify marginalized stakeholders, invite and facilitate their visions of future socio-environmental improvement, and present their insights to local managers. [Learn more.](#)



Green Infrastructure Lesson: Urban Stormwater, Policy, and Justice

This lesson centers on research by [Hoover et al. \(2021\)](#) that reveals how environmental justice considerations are rarely built into city plans for building green infrastructure. This lesson challenges learners to integrate hydrology, public policy, and environmental justice into policy that can

meet goals set by the Environmental Protection Agency and ensure equitable planning. [Learn more.](#)

Urban Gardens and Environmental Injustices

This seminar explains the environmental injustices in garden spaces, summarizes methods used to address the barriers to tackling contamination, followed by more detailed recommendations of how researchers can collaboratively work with communities and resist oppressive systems of risk. [Learn more.](#)



Case Study: Doomed to Drown? Infrastructure Governance and Environmental Justice in Bangladesh

The independent modules of this case study are designed to introduce students to basic principles of systems thinking and socio-ecological systems (SES) by identifying the relationships, interdependencies, and feedbacks between the various elements of delta SES. They will then integrate their training through system-thinking based exercises such as causal loop diagramming and a role-playing game. Through the modules, students will explore feedbacks and emergent properties arising from agricultural land transformation related to large-scale infrastructure development in coastal Bangladesh, and the associated hydrological, geomorphological, social, and economic impacts. [Learn more.](#)

Sustainable Agriculture Lesson: Community Gardens – Justice, Safety, and Climate Solutions

This lesson synthesizes the socio-environmental challenges and benefits of community gardens with the call for cities to designate more community garden space in planning for climate change, resilience, food security and sovereignty, and community integration. This lesson takes the form of a town hall meeting with city officials and residents weighing in on policy choices that will affect the gardens and the city's climate resilience. [Learn more.](#)



Integrating Social and Equity Dynamics into Ecological Studies Lesson: The Landfill Case Study

This lesson illuminates a specific case study focused on the interface between communities and their environmental conditions: in this case, the municipal landfill. Here, the landfill serves as a frame for investigating how cultural practices and social inequality lead to

marginal living environments, which disproportionately affect the poor and people of color. [Learn more.](#)

CONTACT US | We Want To Hear From You!

We'd like to hear from you! Do you have updates or outcomes tied to your SESYNC research that would make for an interesting research spotlight? Are you looking for a resource on a topic that we haven't covered yet? Do you want to share an idea? Contact us at communications@sesync.org.

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