

Current debates on environmental in/equities Greening our urban spaces

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Abstract: *In France, unlike elsewhere the issue of environmental in/equity while informing official debates suffers from a lack of political ambition. Traditionally, environmental issues are viewed through an institutional lens, that emphasises technology and bureaucratic assessment tools and action; this dominant framework we argue stifles our thinking. We see the need for a more dynamic approach.*

In several countries and among recent research projects carried out in France, notions of environmental justice stress the need to take the local and historical into account; for this allows the inclusion of a social dimension when thinking about urban politics.

So this proposal is a call to explore other ways of thinking about 'green equity.' One way, we suggest is to focus on housing and people's experiences and attachment to place; another is to adopt a participatory rather than a structural approach to investigate social exclusion and forms of resistance other than more conventional markers of inequality (such as moving and social mobility or second home ownership, for example.)

Environmental disasters that create climate change refugees or closer to home energy rationing reveal just how intertwined the survival of our planet' is with issues of social justice. It is impossible to ignore the social inequalities that divide us in terms of how we view attitudes and behaviours towards greening our lives. We can no longer ignore the fall-out from our lifestyle on other countries and societies. That is why as well as concerns about environmental waste and damage, the debate in France is growing. It began with an obsession with health and hygiene in the 19th century and progressed onto statistical studies during the 1980s.

Official documents highlight the importance of this debate over the last decade (Johannesburg Conference in 2002; National Strategy for Sustainable Development in 2003). Research projects, conferences and seminars, all these initiatives are shaping the terms of debate¹. Yet there remains in France an absence of political ambition to tackle the topic (Theys, 2007) compared to other countries, especially Anglo-Saxon ones. This partly stems from a problem of naming and defining the terrain: what do we mean by environmental in/equity? In the past there was a tendency to concentrate on local groups of residents who raised their voices about serious environmental issues that beset them. Broader more messy definitions (Laigle and Oehler, 2004) evolved as a reaction to this and incorporate other supposedly green inequities revealing how these accumulate; for example, inheritance and property ownership in the city, access to facilities and quality of life, exposure to pollution and other urban risk factors as well as active citizenship, political activism and the ability to put pressure on politicians and hold them to account. More recent definitions tend to focus on impact and effect, such as that Pye et al offer in their European Commission report (2008) : these include discrimination in terms of how different residents' can access a green lifestyle (where social exclusion exists) and the uneven effects of environmental policies on these same residents.

Notwithstanding their value these definitions all share, except for the last one perhaps, a weakness, a reluctance to examine the mechanics at work behind the inequity that persists and contaminates contemporary urban life. Moreover they ignore possible connections between different types of social and environmental inequities or rather, they tend to grasp at different meanings of 'environmental' versus 'ecological.' How then when tackling a particular community can we disentangle the role that the environment plays in constructing discrimination in its various guises?

This prompts a whole set of questions: aren't these environmental inequities but the other side of the coin of social inequalities that cave in beneath the weight of our infrastructure (housing, transport) and pollution

¹ *Inégalités environnementales et sociales. L'environnement, facteur de cohésion urbaine ?*, Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris, Université Paris XII, mai 2005 ; *Environnement et inégalités sociales*, Université libre de Bruxelles, novembre 2005 ; theme-based session at the conference: *Justice et injustices spatiales*, Université Paris-X Nanterre, mars 2008 ; *Inégalités environnementales et risques sanitaires*, AFSSET et IEP Paris, avril 2008.

in our daily lives; and thus, show up social divisions amongst us and their historical continuity? On the other hand, aren't these social divisions really the most challenging of all in virtue of their complexity, at once economic, cultural, psychological and environmental (Emelianoff, 2006)? What is their specific make-up? How do they influence the way we engage with our changing cities? Can they inform our thinking about inequality and our options for intervening and taking action?

Our focus here is on what we consider to be the main hurdle in our attempt to outline a cultural politics of environmental injustice in France. Our aim is to review current formulations of environmental equity in the context of urban politics. It is hard to separate this out from the way our modern urban landscapes are making the transition to sustainable cityscapes. The next section takes a global perspective reviewing international and disciplinary approaches. The second section outlines an emerging French angle on the debate based on a range of observations and studies both quantitative and qualitative; many of these take on board notions of time and space. In the final section we offer further avenues for research and suggest a more cosmopolitan outlook for this field of inquiry.

1 Thinking about inequity in social and urban landscapes

Environmental justice: the local picture

Trying to place the various ways of thinking about environmental in/equity on a time-line means rewinding to the 1970s when this term was first coined; it grew out of the Civil Rights movement and the struggle for equal rights. Environmental equity as a concept appeared in this period of social and political upheaval and activism; born from the body of evidence (health risks, mortality rates) regarding the various ways in which different social and economic groups (especially Blacks, Amerindians and Hispanics) were disproportionately affected by the unequal distribution of resources (see Bullard 1983, 1990 and 1994).

On the 11th of February 1994 it became official: the US Federal Administration in the wake of these studies and the local discussions they gave rise to introduce the term of environmental equity into everyday parlance. Executive Order 12898 decreed that all federal agencies including the EPA or Environmental Protection Agency should 'identify and remedy the effects of measures that disproportionately affect the health and living conditions of the poor or those who belong to ethnic minority groups.' To this day, because of its grounding in studies that foreground regulation, this framework remains highly relevant when we consider waste storage depots and recycling sites, chemical plants, transport infrastructure (roads and airports), mainly in the context of the pollution they emit, potential or actual, as well as other risks and nuisance.

The political dimension given from the very start to issues of ethnicity and race means that to a large extent, in the US this concern for treating ethnic minorities as equals has shaped the working definition (EPA, Environmental Justice Strategy, 1995). In addition, we find this commitment to equity not only in the realm of redistributive justice, in the context of compensation and damages claims. And yet, today, the weight given to health effects is a direct outcome of the issue of toxic waste receiving far more attention in research than other topics. This commitment to equity is particularly visible in grassroots activism and restorative justice: one indicator is the Executive Order of 1994 that recognises the right to environmental 'self-determination' (see Class Action).

Most prevalent in European countries (see Kruize, 2007 in the Netherlands), especially the UK and Ireland, this working definition has moved away from racial discrimination to concentrate on social exclusion and environmental issues (Fairburn, 2008) with a specific focus on industrial polluters and clean air campaigns. Again, there is a tendency to privilege epidemiology which we find in the UK: there it is sanctioned by official bodies such as the Environmental Agency' and its report on *Poverty and Environment* (2003). Subsequently, it adopted a poverty indicator in its national policy (UK Environment Agency, 2007).

These slight differences between countries, for example in how social and ethnic divisions are measured cannot hide a common factor: the way a concern for equity among nations at the local level tends to prevail in how we think about environmental issues. Certain parallels do exist among various legal

approaches although the UK is especially known for redistributive justice that takes account of how different groups access benefits and services such as green spaces; while at the same time, coexisting side is a tradition of procedural law (participation, for instance) hovering on the margins as well as common law. We can detect the influence of economics and psychology here in the weight given to restorative justice and new thinking growing out of this (Rawls, 1973), or from the ability of citizens and neighbours to fight back as illustrated by Tiebout's (1956) 'vote with your feet' model' or Hirshman's in 1970 (*Exit, Voice, Loyalty*). Many North-American studies draw on social psychology to investigate attitudes towards risk and their manifestations (see namely Slovic, 2000); on human geography (Cutter, 1995) to explore forces at work in urban settings (Ghorra-Gobin, 2000). And most recently but quite influential, epidemiological studies highlight environmental inequities when it comes to toxic waste dumping in specific settings and indoor pollution (see the Paris AFSSET and IEP conferences on this matter, April 2008).

If we now shift to the international playing field, which are the most relevant theories and the most useful meanings of environment and equity for moving our thinking forward?

Going green: the global picture and development models

Another perspective adopts a more global less historical viewpoint; it fuses issues of place and space and pays attention to North-South relationships. A range of issues that confront developing countries are taken into account to explore environmental effects of both inequality and poverty. So by focusing on economic phenomena such as environmental dumping as a by-product of free trade policies (see Baumol and Oates, 1988) and more recent political defeats (such as the lack of regulation policies in some cases), the links between social inequalities, poverty and environmental disasters become clearer.

To begin with, let us consider the 'effects of capitalist development on the poor in green (farming land, forests) and in so-called grey or brown landscapes' (Forsyth, 2003 cited in Villalba and Zaccai, 2007, paragraph 6). There are two crucial topics, first global warming mentioned by the inter-governmental expert group's report on climate change. This reveals how in 2004 the poorest countries made up 37% of the world's population and produced 7% of CO₂ emissions compared with an equivalent of 15% / 45% for the richest nations. Next, the report also documents the very uneven repercussions of natural disasters: thus while between 1984 and 2004 the number of natural disasters to hit both rich and poor nations was fairly equal, 900 000 inhabitants suffered in the latter compared with only 75 000 among the former (Guha-Sapir et al., 2004, cited in Laurent, 2009).

This perspective like the first one outlined above takes account of social impact especially the higher price to be paid when it comes to access to clean water, encroaching deserts, biodiversity and consumerist lifestyles. Thus many on-going studies seek to measure the output of greenhouse gasses; we can cite Pye et al's work (mentioned above) which shows empirically how poor Europeans (single parent, low income or unemployed households) have a far lower carbon footprint than others. In this vein the work of Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkoviks and Bolhen (2003) illustrates the decreasing relevance of socio-demographic factors in green consumption habits. This focus on how much waste our consumerist lifestyles generate also appears in the work of Dozzi, Lennert and Wallenborn (2008) carried out in Belgium at a micro-level: they looked at energy consumption and household spending on water and food including production and delivery costs.

This alternative way of understanding what we mean by environmentalism takes account of green discrepancies and is more founded on 'rights based approaches' (Martinez-Alier, 2002) than on 'preferences-based approaches'. Converting these effects into notions of social rights and responsibilities (Emilianoff, 2006), which incorporate both cause and effect, offers some new legal pathways (Dobson, 1998): namely a more social and procedural legal framework (linked to lifestyle and citizenship) rather than merely redistributive. This is a pathway that gravitates towards local activism and grassroots initiatives and offers real possibilities of consensus-building instead of mere compensation as a remedy for misdeeds. Flipo and Gaudillière's article on green growth and technocratic utopias belongs here, revealing as we can see a far more critical take on the matter than the previous standpoint.

This strand shows itself as rich and productive as the previous one, relying heavily on debates in *Political Ecology* from economics and ecology, anthropology (Johnson, 1994), political geography, international law (Cooper and Palmer, 1995) and political science. Much of this work clearly grows out of international bodies (for example, PNUE) and climate change campaigners.

Thus beyond their common frames of reference, discrimination and social exclusion, both these perspectives differ in that the first incorporates a more epidemiological risk-focused approach; and the second, a more social or ecological analysis. The second is perhaps a more political take on rights and responsibilities. In fact, both betray quite distinct understandings of environment and equity owing to the timeframe they consider, the regulatory practices and measures they investigate (far more local in the first, and more global in the second).

So the next question is: how do these debates play out on French soil?

Placing landscape at the heart of a social and urban approach

And now, for the third way, seemingly new, adopting neither the micro, local lens of environmental equity, nor the macro, global lens of development studies. This path navigates the suburbs and regions of France, Belgium and Germany via a planning and design route: still in its infancy it held in the France of the 1980s a lot of promise.

Three features stand out; first, the issue of inequity in urban landscapes, linked to - the local economy, income distribution, property markets which leads us to consider social segregation in terms of housing and accommodation. Yet there is no single measure for these discrepancies: a lot of work aggregates these differences because clearly they do not exist in isolation from other inequalities but this remains a far from satisfactory approach. The main problem is how to integrate social and environmental factors (Charles, Emelianoff, Ghorra-Gobin, Roussel, Roussel and Scarwell, 2007), which sustainable development theories and projects fail to acknowledge. Really, this stems from a lack of sociological awareness. As a result the way these inequalities are often cumulative and get piled together means the complexity this creates in any given context is often poorly analysed and this, despite researchers and policy-makers aware how these issues affect the impact of environmental regulation in different settings.

A second feature holds that landscape, in its political, social and economic make-up is in fact the repository for these inequalities. As we shall see in the next section through several case studies certain traits leap out. This knowledge derives in French at least from statistical studies carried out by geographers and economists:

on the one hand, from lifestyle studies in various urban settings of socio-economic inequalities (de Palma, Motamedi, Picard and Waddell, 2007; Ouharon and Tovar, 2008), including the property market, for example (Faburel and Maleyre, 2007); or from studies of attitudes towards living a greener life

on the other hand, from studies of place especially urban settings that contribute to inequality as well as the impact of certain reconversion initiatives on the environment (Schmitt, 2007).

A third feature is the tendency to question the factors that lie behind certain environmental campaigns. These include:

individual responsibility; the role of central government (Diebolt et al, 2005, p.14) including historical factors that weigh more heavily, environmentally speaking in certain areas than others (Guillerme, Jigaudon and Lefort, 2004; Lefort-Prost, 2007)

issues of land ownership and equity, often inter-generational since 'these types of questions should when it comes to the environment foster debate concerning equity and fairness (Villalba, Zaccai, 2007, paragraph 3)

issues of solidarity between regions (Laganier, Villalba, Zuideau, 2002) often linked to growing awareness of heritage as a resource

Thinking about what leads people and communities to mobilise and take action it is hard to ignore the way that certain initiatives despite their laudable intentions in fact contribute to environmental inequity. For example, studies of neighbourhood (Emelianoff, 2005), heritage and conservation projects in historic towns

(Le Blanc, 2008) or even green taxation (for example, environmental bonuses) and other energy policies². These initiatives are beginning to draw inspiration from political science, urban and town planning.

The three features of this social urban strand then perhaps raise more questions than answers. The first two perspectives presented here while apparently more established than this last one, come up against some theoretical dilemmas. One of these is to do with contested meanings of inequity in an environmental context in many countries except perhaps in North America where the widespread assumption that a quality lifestyle can only be an urban one means there is more acceptance of what environmental equity consists of (see Pincetl, 2005, p.210). However, when it comes to the social urban perspective we have just described, it is clear that these meanings remain contested: for example, what do we mean by risk, social exclusion, regional differences, environmental equity, access to green spaces and natural resources? What we face is uncertainty regarding the link between social and environmental discrepancies.

Yet there is hope for some recent work in France highlights certain features and common traits that shed new light in particular, on how a historical legacy shapes our environments.

2. Environmental inequity: geographical and historical case studies

Since the 1980s a set of national government funded studies have sought to map environment change. Thus in 1986 lower income groups were proportionally four times more at risk from noise pollution (National Survey on traffic noise pollution, INRETS, 1988). Similarly, around 1990 people living on an estate in city outskirts were four times more likely to see their neighbourhood crossed by a high speed railway (cited in Thyges, 2002). More recent small-scale studies especially in France's overseas territories (in the Caribbean, Reunion Island, Guyana), the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region and the Seine-Saint-Denis département have looked at industrial pollution and the hazard of floods. These show that lower income groups tend to live closer to mining sites, chemical plants and toxic wastelands (French Institute for the Environment, IFEN, 2006; Commission for Accounting and Environmental Economics CCEE, 2008).

These results however remain partial because they emerge from residents' perceptions, fail to take environmental impact into account (as mentioned in the Introduction) and cover too broad an area. More qualitative studies have since been conducted; the national observation of 'sensitive urban zones' (ZUS), for example, shows how vulnerable these spaces are to pollution, spills and other forms of environmental damage (Choffel, 2004). However, concern for these at risk landscapes is not yet widely shared. Partly to blame is the fact that these risks are often couched in official and bureaucratic language or else the attendant risks are confined to particular neighbourhoods, or reduced to issues of housing that do not really go far enough and ignore the wider environmental picture. Yet some recent research casts a fascinating light on this matter.

Mapping history in urban contexts

Laigle (2005) advocates taking geography and landscape into account in order to make up for the way that regional differences have so often been neglected. He offers two suggestions: one is to look at specific neighbourhoods and their green settings; the other is to consider how certain urban and industrial landscapes construct environmental inequities. Laigle addresses both these prongs in a number of case studies including the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region and Lille and its suburbs. These former industrial areas have suffered the fate of many and have 'shaped a whole slew of phenomena from social conditions and urbanisation to high population density; the combination of business and industry has taken its toll on the local environment' (Laigle, 2005, p.7). This is a familiar pattern seen again and again in many policies (Agenda 21, Atlas) and one promoted by central government. It is hard not to ignore once again the link between social and environmental disparities, especially the way some urban neighbourhoods are particularly at risk from toxic waste, pollution and other hazards from nearby chemical or industrial plants.

² The ADEME calculates that the rate of energy consumption in France is two and a half times higher in 20% of poorest households than in 20% of the richest households.

On top of this come housing and health inequalities (especially in the vicinity of Roubaix) and the risk of gas and electricity shortages and rationing (see Devalière, 2008).

Some of Laigle's other case studies focus on urban settings that can contribute to environmental inequity. These fall into three categories: areas such as Lille and its outskirts with its industrial heritage, cities such as Aix-en-Provence and Toulouse known for their expanding business and housing developments, and booming cities such as Strasbourg. Laigle (2005, p.11) highlights two trends when he comments; 'the waning historical link between urban development and industrialisation has taken its toll on the social fabric of cities and on residents' quality of life posing tough challenges for economic regeneration,' and 'the dependence on economic activity and the building of new housing often puts huge pressure on our cities.'

It seems vital then to include a local and a historical perspective when trying to make sense of how landscapes evolve over time and fashion environmental inequity. History is clearly a key consideration as research on the industrial area of the Seine-Saint-Denis department between 1850 and 2000 indicates (Guillerme, Jigaudon and Lefort, 2004). This work illustrates just how significant a part decisions made by local and central government played in recent regeneration programmes and how these exacerbated social and environmental divisions between residents and neighbourhoods.

Mapping space

If we now turn to a different landscape, a coastal landscape, that of the seashore, and specifically that of the Chemin Vert area of Boulogne-sur-Mer, then we can start to think about the links between urban development and shipping, tourism, a port-based economy and housing policy, with a high proportion of green spaces (Deboudt, Deldrève, Houillon and Paris, 2008). Deboudt and colleagues draw on several disciplines (geography, urban planning and sociology) in their research on the building and construction history of this neighbourhood and its local facilities (including access to nature reserves). They carried out observation studies of Boulogne's coastline and community centres, and interviewed residents and key workers including landlords, local government staff and social workers.

Their research illustrates just how linked are social divisions based on high unemployment rates, single parent households, low income and a form of social exclusion linked to place - living far from the town centre, on a steep hill, in areas fragmented by motorways, with little access to public spaces. Yet the inhabitants of Boulogne face few natural disasters; there is little noise or traffic pollution and a wealth of amenities. Hence the city's recent attempts to promote these attributes and integrate its sea-faring history into its urban heritage. Its residents clearly experience the setting as a factor contributing to their quality of life but they are not necessarily convinced that it is a resource to be saved for future generations: indeed, they seem oblivious of the city's history or its valuable seafaring skills and trades. Moreover, the whole issue of environmental protection and policy seems low on the agenda.

The most current pressing matter is how to formulate an environmental policy that brings on board local stakeholders and looks ahead to potential hazards. Schmitt (2007), for example in a longitudinal study of soil use shows that logging in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais contributes to reforestation of the region. Yet change in these wooded landscapes while bringing greater environmental equity to the area can lead to greater social divisions in terms of how local residents access the countryside.

But Deboudt and colleagues also show how hard it is to establish a clear link between the local provision of open, public green spaces on the one hand; and their use and enjoyment by residents on the other. Thus their work beyond looking at mere facilities and how residents make use of these also brings to the fore how much we value our local landscapes. 'For residents for whom seafaring does not inform their sense of belonging, there is a paradox when we consider just how much Boulogne as a city has invested in new housing developments' (Deboudt et al., 2008, p.189) This leads us to wonder whether it wouldn't be more appropriate and useful to explore environmental inequity through a historical and geographical lens?

Environment as lived experience

Faburel and Gueymard's contribution (2008; and Gueymard, 2009) grounded in psychology and social geography brings an ethnographic dimension to the dominant quantitative approach. They explore how attached or isolated inhabitants in the Ile-de-France area feel to their neighbourhood.

Their first step was to fuse two typologies, environmental and social, drawing on statistics from the Institute for Urban and Town Planning for the area. What they noticed was an increasing link between social and environmental traits in the various Ile-de-France wards (see Table 1). These early results concern a sample of 2 750 000 inhabitants:

Environmental area	Urban and social profile			Total
	High Income	Average Income	Low Income	
High	45,53	31,49	22,98	100
Average	33,57	36,15	30,28	100
Low	17,84	32,39	49,77	100
Total	33,15	34,70	32,15	100

Table 1: *Urban and social profile of three environmental categories*

Source: Faburel and Gueymard, 2008

This breakdown reveals what the situation is like in some of the départements closest to the Parisian hub (Seine-Saint-Denis and to a less extent, the Val-de-Marne department) as well as in other urban settings home to more modest income groups where pollution and other factors have tainted the local environment (in some parts of eastern Seine et Marne). At stake here it would seem is more the gradual neglect of some neighbourhoods rather than their appeal (green spaces, running streams): this is what residents mention when interviewed in this ethnographic research on place and space.

We then selected six wards among the inner belt that surrounds Paris, gave 600 people a questionnaire to find out their views on housing, local facilities, noise pollution, building design and the siting of any nearby factory. What we found is a clear link between how satisfied people felt with their neighbourhood and their quality of life: feeling safe and secure, trusting of local councillors were important features. Yet some of their responses once again challenge standard ways of thinking about environmental issues: the most contented among them were not necessarily the most well-off but some differences did emerge between those in and out of work (unskilled workers and the retired). These findings echo those of Laurian (2008) who shows that they owe more to factors other than income differences; for example, high rates of unemployment and high proportions of residents born abroad who Laurian found living in particular wards (in the south-east and north of Paris, the Marseille area and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais).

Results from our own respondents based on their experiences and perceptions of their neighbourhoods as more or less polluted, noisy, hazardous, well-connected by public transport tally with the statistical findings mentioned earlier.

Together, these findings surveyed so far remind us that a wealth of topics and criteria offer themselves for scrutiny when researching in this field: from toxic waste, poor housing and energy rationing to contributing factors such as unemployment rates, housing, location and place (urban versus coastal settings) etc. Taking these elements into account would be a fruitful way forward for trying to understand regional differences and how residents make sense of where they live. Yet, as we demonstrate, all too often various forms of inequality are overlooked in research studies. So we urge researchers to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach; we recommend employing a historical approach as it offers a rich seam of inquiry.

Our proposal for future research seeks to contribute to on-going debates in France about, for example, what we mean by 'greenness' of a space, a notion we see mushrooming in a growing number of papers. Moreover, it is unclear to us which model of fairness and equity offers the best tool for getting at the roots of inequalities when it comes to the environment. Should we concentrate more on social groups or

individuals, structural or procedural factors? All this applies to the statistical framework, widely used nowadays especially in a sustainable development context; although cumbersome it is seen as a reliable method (CCCE, 2008) - in fact, for policy makers, as the child of technocrats, it has landed in their lap, for it offers 'the promise of applying a simple formula to complex environmental issues' (Charvolin (2003, p.9) .The same could apply to politicians and the dilemmas they face when trying to communicate effectively with potential voters about environmental hazards especially when these crop up in their own constituency; hence their apathy according to Theys (2007). Looking ahead then, what are the priorities for future research?

3. Putting environmental inequity to the test

Citizens, housing and public space

Judging from on-going intervention and evaluation studies it is clear that when it comes to measuring and accessing various facets of the environment whether in the realm of policy making, politics or business, the common currency is still a global one. Gradually, however, we are witnessing in-roads that allow for a more local and grounded viewpoint to exert its influence (Faburel, 2006); thus what we see increasingly on the ground in our cities is the wish among city dwellers to get involved and contribute to the fabric of their environment; more and more there is a wish to ensure greater social diversity and sustainability and the move in this direction partly comes from the Solidarity and Urban Regeneration Act (2000).

This kind of formal initiative means that for the foreseeable future environmental issues will play a salient role in determining local political agendas for all types of income groups, including the poorest, and their neighbourhoods. Indeed, we made the case above (2008) for thinking about environmental inequity as a form of social and regional inequality given the scope for political change on the part of residents' groups and local politicians. In this light a lot more should be made of on the one hand, how involved household dwellers and community associations can become in altering their neighbourhoods through local initiatives instead of moving to live elsewhere; and on the other hand, the scope for new regulation by local government to address the legacy of contributing factors in certain areas.

This suggestion is closely tied to one of the most obvious indicators of a healthy environment and that is quality of life in a particular place (Abelès, Charles, Jeudy and Kalaora, 2000); the notion of environmental inequity (Charles, 2008, p.151) is our preferred one especially when it comes to cities; it carries all sorts of subtle connotations we feel, linked to heritage and appreciation of a neighbourhood's unique features. Increasingly, it is how we experience our immediate neighbourhood that affects our enjoyment of life; we take location and setting into account when deciding where to live or to move to, where to shop, where and how to consume energy, how to green our households, whether to get involved in local politics or campaigns.

This way of thinking about environmental issues in fact stems from recognising how intertwined our lives are with the planet and this co-existence requires much closer collaboration between government officials, architects and town planners (Lolive and Soubeyran, 2007; Ascher, 2001). This way of thinking according to some (Latour 1999) actually foreshadows a new political dawn where we shall see a realignment between our social identities and our relationship with our surroundings, pressures from technological advances that shape our daily lives and our involvement in community based campaigns (Stengers, 1997).

So what we advocate and in fact this is what Pye et al. (2008) propose, is a much more dynamic action based approach that engages head on with different kinds of inequalities, 'differences that stem from our uneven ways of accessing the various resources on offer to us.' Let us summarise in the light of the three standpoints considered here so far. First, how is it even feasible to conceive of environmental in/equity and access, this the dominant focus of the environmental justice strand, without acknowledging these differences? Second, we looked at the impact of attitudes towards green issues and behaviours among varied income groups and how these damage the environment (the main element of the sustainable

development strand). Third, as part of our own urban and social approach to landscape, we noted how residents can disrupt and shape environmental policies on their home-turf through grassroots campaigns.

Local and community responses

Next, we want to highlight two new paths for pursuing our approach. One is to keep a close eye on what happens in terms of environmental action campaigns. Here we should pay close attention to: first, relevant social and spatial dimensions that shape a particular setting or landscape³ (to be gleaned from what makes people move in and out of neighbourhoods and any heritage factors); second, how people experience their immediate environment as risky, noisy, well-provided for in terms of open spaces and other leisure facilities (Blanc, Bridier, Cohen, Glatron and Grésillon, 2005) and how this affects their well-being (Faburel and Manola, 2008) and quality of life (Bley, Vernazza-Licht, 2006)⁴. Third, local government policies and scope for empowerment, that is for community grassroots campaigners and activists to organise and intervene (Bacqué, 2006).

Clearly, to view environmental in/equity more in terms of grassroots activism and campaigns rather than as a set of bureaucratic procedures informed by advances in technology challenges our thinking - be it notions of social justice or social responsibility. If we pursue this line of thought we can feel more hopeful about sustainable development policies taking a long term view especially when it comes to marginalised areas and opportunities for creating 'lasting resilience' (Sébastien and Brodhag, 2004) (Laganier, Villalba and Zuindeau, 2002).

A corollary to this in practical terms is shifting the way we implement these changes politically, on the ground. We already suggested above a more inter-disciplinary approach; we also need to draw on our every day lives to think about how we can lead more sustainable lifestyles - this is what should inform our research questions; the aim here we propose is really to capture 'other' geographies, for example:

- the surroundings we live in, be it our neighbourhood, ward, or county to make the local count
- the history of where we live
- the costs and benefits of where we live

A second path for pursuing our approach to environmental issues would go one step further than combining a historical perspective with a concern for social justice. This new direction would focus not on housing policy but instead on people's experiences of their living environment (Roux, 2002; Paquot, Lussault and Younès, 2007), including their perceptions of place and space, their community ties and local 'acquaintances' (Roux, op. cit.), their local knowledge of the area (Fischer, 2000), really a touchstone for an inter-disciplinary approach⁵ (Hucy, Mathieu, Mazellier, Raynaud, 2005).

What is really key here when adopting this more local people-centered approach to understand how we experience the places and spaces we function in is to remind ourselves that: 'what is at stake here is not scientific progress but to rise to the challenge of what our current way of life throws at us' (Stengers, 1997, p.98). Indeed, 'listening to people describe their daily living conditions while these may appear intolerable can in fact contribute to their well-being and quality of life' (Leplège, 1999, p.19). It is this type of approach that Corburn (2005) advocates based on work carried out in Brooklyn on how communities have organised and campaigned in the face of air pollution and lead contamination.

Isn't this an opportunity to draw from the best of what the social and human sciences have to offer in order to tackle one of our most pressing problems; that is, the point where inequality and environment coalesce (Dewey, 2003)?

³ 'Environmental inequity grows out of differences between landscapes (...) variations in their urban and natural attributes (Diebolt, Helias, Bidou and Crepey, 2005, p.11).

⁴ 'Quality of life for each and every one of us means freedom to exert agency, to get involved and reach the goals we have set ourselves and, which make sense to us' (Sen, 1993).

⁵ Contrary to Diebolt, Helias, Bidou and Crepey who reject this participatory approach criticising it for being too 'centralist' (General Inspectorate for the Environment and General Council of the Ponts and Chaussées, 2005).

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