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From Urban and Industrial Environments

Neighborhood as Refuge

Community Reconstruction, Place Remaking, and Environmental Justice in the City

By Isabelle Anguelovski

Overview

Environmental justice as studied in a variety of disciplines is most often associated with redressing disproportionate exposure to pollution, contamination, and toxic sites. In *Neighborhood as Refuge*, Isabelle Anguelovski takes a broader view of environmental justice, examining wide-ranging comprehensive efforts at neighborhood environmental revitalization that include parks, urban agriculture, fresh food markets, playgrounds, housing, and waste management. She investigates and compares three minority, low-income neighborhoods that organized to improve environmental quality and livability: Casc Antic, in Barcelona; Dudley, in the Roxbury section of Boston; and Cayo Hueso, in Havana. Despite the differing histories and political contexts of these three communities, Anguelovski finds similar patterns of activism. She shows that behind successful revitalization efforts is what she calls "bottom to bottom" networking, powered by broad coalitions of residents, community organizations, architects, artists, funders, political leaders, and at times environmental advocacy groups. Anguelovski also describes how, over time, environmental projects provide psychological benefits, serving as a way to heal a marginalized and environmentally traumatized urban neighborhood. They encourage a sense of rootedness and of attachment to place, creating safe havens that offer residents a space for recovery. They also help to bolster residents' ability to deal with the negative dynamics of discrimination and provide spaces for broader political struggles including gentrification. Drawing on the cases of Barcelona, Boston, and Havana, Anguelovski presents a new holistic framework for understanding environmental justice action in cities, with the right to a healthy community environment at its core.

About the Author

Isabelle Anguelovski is Marie Curie Fellow and Senior Researcher at the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Endorsements

"Isabelle Anguelovski's theoretically informed, empirically rich analysis of Havana, Boston, and Barcelona is a terrific addition to the fields of urban, environmental, and spatial justice. In understanding the relationship between land use and health,

Anguelovski highlights how marginalized neighborhoods overcome historical and cultural stigmas to create vibrant and healthy communities.”

—**Julie Sze**, author of *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice*, winner of the 2008 John Hope Franklin Publication Prize

“In *Neighborhood as Refuge*, Isabelle Anguelovski describes how in Boston, Barcelona, and Havana, activists built unexpected coalitions, partnerships, and networks to integrate environmental justice with community development, remake safe and healthy places, and address traumas of dislocation. Urban agriculture grew solidarity and food; organizing leveraged expertise and rebuilt identity, place attachment, and community. Students will welcome this ambitious practice study.”

—**John Forester**, Cornell University, author of *Planning in the Face of Conflict* and *The Deliberative Practitioner*

“This book carefully dissects how marginalized urban neighborhoods can be both places of refuge and sites for forging new and more just social and environmental relations. Indispensable reading for those who believe that the environmental problem is primarily lived and worked through in urban neighborhoods...and for those who do not yet know.”

—**Erik Swyngedouw**, School of Education, Environment and Development, the University of Manchester

“Using case studies and grounded theory, Anguelovski skillfully examines the interplay and relations between human and environmental health that are foregrounded during neighborhood revitalization in distressed communities. In so doing, she deepens our knowledge and existing links between policy, planning and public health literatures and develops an innovative new framework for studying place-based urban environmental justice.”

—**Julian Agyeman**, Professor of Urban + Environmental Policy + Planning, Tufts University