

**Restoring waterways, but for whom?  
Environmental justice, human rights, and the unhoused**

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Restoration projects involving urban waterways are becoming more common, and this project asks, are they advancing environmental justice goals, or simply reinforcing the status quo in built environments? Urban waterway projects have sought to revitalize watersheds for both ecosystems and people, and some have explicitly engaged environmental justice. Still, key populations remain underserved, so more explicit attention to public goals is necessary. This paper explores environmental justice in waterway restoration projects with a targeted focus on one of the most marginalized populations in society, the unhoused.

We identify ways that watershed restoration projects are advancing goals for convivial public space, yet at the same time, falling short of their potential to cultivate equitable access. We examine case study project achievements that lie at the intersection of the unhoused, urban waterways, and greenspace, to see how projects have unfolded in several locations. With reference to specific examples, located in the US and beyond, case studies help illustrate the complexity of the policy context within which these efforts occur. The paper concludes with several observations about: green gentrification, issue framing, the policy process, hostile landscape architecture, resistance, and community-based participatory design; several questions for further exploration are laid out.

References

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### Authors Biography:

**Sharon Moran** is an associate professor in the Department of Environmental Studies at SUNY—Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York. Her research focuses on the human dimensions of water issues; recent projects have explored topics including water and sanitation justice, policies for septic system management, composting toilet adoption, and equitable water access. She has taught courses on topics including environmental policy and sustainable enterprise. Funders including the National Science Foundation, the NY Department of Environmental Conservation, and Sea Grant have supported her research.

**Richard Smardon** is a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus with the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. He has taught courses and conducted greenway research both with landscape architecture and environmental studies at the College for over 36 years before retiring. He has published ten books and over 272 publications including editing Selected Papers from the 6th Fábos Conference on Landscape and Greenway Planning: Adapting to Expanding and Contracting Cities from MPDI Press and Revitalizing Urban Waterway Communities: Streams of Environmental Justice with Earthscan/Routledge with co-authors Sharon Moran and April Baptiste.

**Jean Yang** is an assistant professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at SUNY—Environmental Science and Forestry. Her award-winning designs in Southern California and beyond have been recognized by organizations including the Sustainable Communities Division Awards for Excellence in Sustainability from the APA in 2021, and the ASLA Southern California Honor Award for an Upper LA Rivers and Tributaries Plan. She acknowledges that community-led processes don't just create new parks, they invariably lead to other projects and deeper community discourse, which can also help fight gentrification.