

Environmental Justice

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Abstract

Environmental justice is defined as “ the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race,color,national origin,or income, with respect to the development,implementation,and enforcement of environmental laws,regulations,and policies.”The goal is for everyone to have the same degree of protection from health hazards in the environment,as well as equal access to the decisions making processes that contribute to a healthy living environment. Environmental justice research by considering emerging topics such as energy,food,drinking water,flooding,sustainability,and gender dynamics,including issues in Canada,the UK,and Eastern Europe. Additionally, the articles contribute to three research themes.Environmental justice(EJ) reaserch seeks to document and redress the disproportionate environmental burdens and benefits associated with social inequalities.In the context of intensifying social inequalities and environmental problems, there is a need to further strengthen the EJ research framework and diversify its application.

This Special Issue of the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health(IJERPH). EJ issues to extend reasearch beyond the documentation of unjust conditions and processes. Collectively, the articles highlight potentially compounding injustices and approaches being employed to achieve EJ.The article concludes with a discussion of the globalisation of the environmental justice movement, discourse, and issues, as well as with some policy implications of finding and understanding environmental justice. One unique feature of this review is its breadth and diversity, given the different approaches taken by the three coauthors.

Keyword

Environmental justice, health,sustainability, flood, social inequalities

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I. Introduction

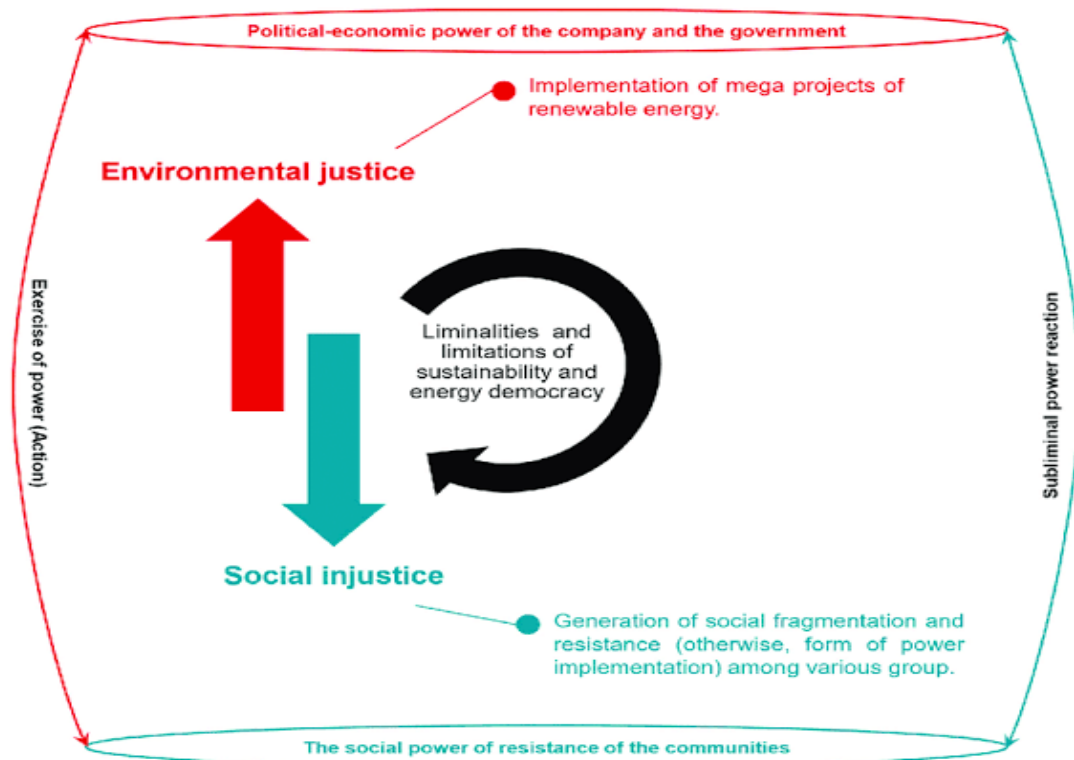
Environmental justice is an immensely important topic, as marginalized communities often face significantly worse environmental conditions than those who are of a higher socioeconomic status. Because marginalized communities have fewer resources, less time, and less political power to resist unequal environmental conditions, they will continue to have less of an influence over the environmental policies that affect them most. Marginalized communities experiencing environmental inequities are often referred to as environmental justice communities. Environmental injustices can be observed in a number of situations. These examples have changed over time as the United States has grown and modernized. During European colonization of the Americas, examples of environmental injustices included indigenous exclusion and displacement from ancestral lands. Today, examples of modern environmental injustices have expanded to include a large variety of concerns, and the list continues to grow as climate change poses new and worsening challenges. In a time of rapid economic growth and increasing industrialization and urbanization, environmental justice considerations can become of secondary concern. In India, which saw average annual GDP growth of 7% from 2008 to 2018 (International Monetary Fund Citation 2019), public policy measures have been developed in an effort to address procedural aspects of environmental justice, including ‘green benches’ in state high courts, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and public interest litigation (Government of India Citation 2010). In addition, environmental impact assessment (EIA), a process of predicting and preventing or mitigating adverse impacts of new development projects, has been a formal legal requirement in the country since 1994 (Paliwal Citation 2006).



Worsening: Make or become worse.

In many instances, the SDGs fail to combat the global economic and geopolitical systems that create gender and other injustices in the first place (O'Manique and Fourie 2016; Kopnina 2016). Although the 2030 Agenda document (Transforming Our World—TOW) speaks of transformation, we argue that it will not be possible to achieve a "win win" when the very systems which create poverty, hunger, inequalities, and unsustainable development are upheld. These win-wins are not achievable against a sustainable imaginary, given the oxymoron of 'sustainable growth' (Bartlett 1994).

As O'Neill et al. (2018) found: no countries currently meet all the needs of its populations at globally sustainable levels of resource use. As global population increases, the tendency to overshoot these boundaries will increase if rates of consumption are not reduced. The Sustainable Development Index created by Hickel (2020) evaluates the environmental sustainability of the production and consumption models of different countries. Many of those furthest along towards meeting the SDGs (e.g., Norway, UK) are amongst the worst in environmental sustainability. As such, there are in fact many potential contradictions between the SDGs and environmental justice (EJ) and the human right to a healthy environment.



States have the legal obligation to protect against violations of the human right to a healthy environment (Knox and Pejan 2018), and human rights violations arising from climate change (Knox 2009). In light of recent rulings by human rights tribunals that assert States' obligations to protect human rights that are compromised by environmental harm, Knox (2015) found that the language of the SDGs was "neither concrete nor closely linked" to these obligations. These environmental human rights are closely linked to EJ, particularly in the Global South (Adeola 2000; Agyeman et al. 2002). Although some authors point to philosophical problems underlying the human rights paradigm (Mutua 2013; Barreto 2014) and particularly related to the link between human rights and EJ (Woods 2006), the embeddedness of human rights within international policy arenas could provide impetus in support of EJ which could improve justice outcomes for both humans and non-humans.

In seeking the protection of environmental rights, progress has also been made towards recognising the rights of nature and protecting non-human species. For example, Colombia's Supreme Court recently recognised the rights of the Amazon River ecosystem (STC4360-2018). Ecocide, the large-scale and systematic destruction of nature, has been proposed for inclusion as criminal offense in international criminal courts (Higgins 2012).

We do not assume that 'sustainable development' and 'environmental justice' are synonyms given that they are concepts that arise from different schools of thought with priorities that are not always consistent. While sustainability often focuses on policy-making at multiple scales aimed at intergenerational equity (protecting the needs of future generations), EJ has tended to focus on local, present-day policies and power asymmetries that disproportionately burden particular groups (Agyeman et al 2002).

Asymmetries: Lack of equality or equivalence between parts or aspects of something.

Sustainability agendas have arisen from top-down policy processes, whereas EJ, in contrast, arises from grassroots responses to environmental racism (ibid). As Agyeman and Evans (2004) assert, justice and equity are “at best implicit” in the Brundtland report and IUCN definitions of sustainable development. The authors propose the need for ‘just sustainability’, “a balanced approach including an explicit focus on justice, equity and environment together” (Ibid, p 157).

“Transformative sustainability or just sustainability implies a paradigm shift that in turn requires that sustainability takes on a redistributive function. To do this, justice and equity must move centre stage in sustainability discourses, if we are to have any chance of a more sustainable future.” (Agyeman 2008, p 752)

‘Mainstream’ environmental justice

Although some have labeled it ‘radical environmental justice’ (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020), the most ‘mainstream’ framework of EJ is that which adheres to the four dimensions: (1) distributional justice, (2) recognitional justice, (3) procedural justice (e.g., participation, decision-making), and (4) the capabilities approach (Fraser 1995, 1998; Schlosberg 2007; Young 1990). As Schlosberg (2007) points out, justice, in political practice, is articulated and understood as a balance of numerous interlinked elements of distribution, recognition, participation, and capability.

Distributive justice

Distributive justice (DJ) focuses on the fair distribution of environmental costs and benefits, the allocation of material goods, such as resources, income, and wealth, or on the distribution of social standing. This paradigm has led to a prolific body of theoretical and empirical research. However, it has been claimed that such perspective neglects the relevance of the social structure and the institutional context in distribution patterns. Iris Young (1990) highlights the role of power, decision-making procedures, division of labour, and culture in influencing EJ. The processes construct the material maldistribution (Honneth 2001; Walzer 1983; Young 1990).

Allocation: The action or process of allocating or sharing out something.

Recognitional justice

Recognitional justice (RJ) is the recognition of, and respect for, difference. It has been underlined as a key dimension of justice (Young 1990; Fraser 1998; Schlosberg 2007; Honneth 2001; Holifield et al. 2018). According to Fraser (1995), while the ‘redistribution’ concept is tied to a vision of justice that aims to achieve social equality through a redistribution of the material necessities for existence as free subjects, in the case of ‘recognition’, the conditions for a just society are defined as the recognition of the personal dignity of all individuals. Recognition refers not only to the individual right to self-recognition (Honneth 2001), but, most importantly, to the recognition of collective identities and their particular concerns, needs, and livelihoods in relation to nature and the environment.

Procedural justice

Procedural justice (PJ) addresses the fair and equitable institutional processes of a State. In this approach, justice requires not only an understanding of unjust distribution patterns and the lack of recognition, but, mainly, an understanding of the ways in which the two are tied together in political and social processes (Cole and Foster 2001; Schlosberg 2007). When “patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalized” (Fraser 1998), participatory inequities or exclusions (Agarwal 2001) appear in institutions and decision-making processes.

As pointed by Bell and Carrick (2017), one of the reasons for the unfair distribution of environmental burdens and benefits is that the decisions that transform the environment are usually made by people who enjoy the benefits rather than the burdens. Historically, the institutions that make the decisions that affect the environmental conditions of our lives, from the local to the global, have excluded or marginalised people. Currently, gross inequalities of political authority, power and influence, remain the norm in environmental decision-making, leading to procedural environmental injustice (Bell and Carrick 2017).

Disesteem: Have a low opinion of.

The Rise of Environmental Justice

How Businesses are Creating Sustainable Solutions Future Trends and Opportunities in Environmental Justice Entrepreneurship



During the past decade, environmental justice thought has emerged as a major part of the environmental discourse. Though much has been written on the environmental justice movement (EJM), attention is focused on case studies, analyzing the spatial distribution of environmental hazards, and examining policy formulation. Despite the fact that the EJM has had profound effects on environmental research, policy making, and the environmental movement, little attention has been paid to the ideological foundations of the EJM. In essence, Why did this discourse and movement arise now? What are its antecedents?

What are its underlying principles, and how are these related to the dominant environmental discourse? This article argues that environmental justice thought represents a new paradigm—the environmental justice paradigm (EJP). The article analyzes the rise of the EJP. First, it examines the social construction of environmental problems, and then it traces the development of the major environmental paradigms, showing how the EJP evolved out of these and other bodies of thought. The article also examines the new dimensions of environmental thought that the EJP introduces and how the paradigm is changing the environmental discourse.

This article will help us understand how and why the EJP arose, and why it has had such a significant impact on the environmental movement in such a short time. The article views paradigms as social constructions; that is, they are ideological packages expressing bodies of thought that change over time. In recent years, social movement theorists have begun emphasizing and synthesizing three theoretical approaches in their work on movement formation and growth.

Paradigms: A typical example or pattern of something.

They argue that we can enhance our understanding of movement dynamics by examining the framing processes, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). This article will adopt this approach. However, before I discuss environmental paradigms further, I will briefly discuss the relationship between the social construction of discourses, framing, activism, and the emergence of social paradigms.

Environmental Justice: Social Disparities in Environmental Exposures a Health

Main feature of Environmental Justice



Environmental justice, environmental equity, and environmental racism are different phrases that describe and explain central features of the environmental justice movement, focusing on the disparate impact of hazardous waste sites and other polluting facilities located in or near distressed neighborhoods with high concentrations of ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged populations. Because the concepts and contexts associated with each of these labels are complex and multidimensional, the meaning of environmental justice and injustice has changed over time and can differ considerably. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), environmental justice seeks the equitable treatment and involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and educational levels in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental programs, laws, rules, and policies.

Racism: The belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities.

Therefore, the concept of environmental justice as a term with a more political connotation implies justice on a distributive, procedural, and precautionary level. Distributive justice requires an equitable distribution of the costs of environmental risks and of the benefits of environmental values across the demographic and geographic scales. Considerable emphasis is placed on procedural justice defined as the extent to which political decision-making processes are applied fairly and people are empowered to control and influence the decisions that affect them (e.g., higher fines for dumping waste in white versus minority communities).

The precautionary principle is based on the attitude that uncertainties in short- or long-term environmental impacts resulting from deteriorating conditions in the everyday environment where people live and work call for decision-making to keep public health from harm.

With recent distributional challenges of globalization, urbanization, and environmental degradation (e.g., ozone depletion, water security, declining biodiversity, and deforestation) as well as climate change, the environmental justice concept has moved toward a broader understanding, now including generational and international environmental justice. Generational environmental justice refers to the concept of sustainability (including global ecological integrity and global environmental justice) and the responsibility of current generations to ensure a healthy and safe environment for future generations. (“We’re only borrowing the world from our children.”) It implies avoiding environmental degradation, which brings injustice on future generations for the sake of short-term economic gains in the present.

As more environmental resources become ever scarcer, the increasing burden in hazardous environmental conditions imposed by more affluent countries on developing countries touches on an important issue of international environmental justice. Therefore, the concept of environmental justice has been taken up by many countries.

Deteriorating: To become worse.

The environmental justice movement in the USA



The Environmental Justice Movement emerged in the early 1980s in North Carolina, USA, due to a local dispute over toxic waste dumping near a neighborhood of African-American people. The movement emphasized from the beginning that environmental problems cannot be solved without unveiling the practices maintaining social injustices. Many of the traditional environmental organizations were targeted by this critique.

The North American debate on environmentalism and justice has developed via deep contradictions, which reflects the delicate historical nature of the issue. Racial and other social questions are often intentionally avoided by dedicated nature conservationists and this frames the whole tradition, initially established through the struggles for nature parks and wilderness areas. The history of the Western idea of nature is part of the history of the white middle class that had learned to appreciate the esthetic value of wilderness. Purified and thus white areas of nature therefore symbolize the areas of white power. This was made clear during the formative years of nature conservation in the USA when the indigenous First Nations were forced to leave their homelands which were overlapping with the proposed national parks of Yellowstone and Yosemite.

Environmental history in North America is rooted to the expansive colonial control over the resources of newly settled areas. The European colonization of the continent turned into a cruel genocide of the First Nations. The frontier of the settlers progressed through the wilderness and this was considered synonymous with the dawn of civilization. The colonial success was completed by the transatlantic slave trade and later immigration to urban colored by unfair divisions of welfare. Environmental justice issues turn therefore repeatedly into questions of environmental racism. The evidence telling that environmental risks tend to accumulate on ethnic minorities starkly reminds the North Americans of their violent ethnic past.

Expansive: Covering a wide area in terms of space or scope.

The historically specific sense of justice, built on the awareness of the interethnic violence behind the founding of modern North America, is present in the continuous re-articulation of social and environmental inequalities, both local and global. The environmental justice issues are accordingly dealt with in two main forums.

They are routinely taken care of by law experts in courtrooms while the critical alternatives are presented by the activist networks worrying about local–global injustices. The pragmatic lawyers and the forward-looking activists share with many Europeans the ideal of just decision making and the belief in change for the better. However, despite the common background, the practical conditions and formulations of environmental justice are different in Europe.



Routinely: As part of a regular procedure rather than for a special reason.

II. Conclusion

Environmental justice is a movement and a conceptual framework that arose from a particular set of historical circumstances – a growing environmentalism in the latter part of the twentieth century, but one that failed to address issues of social injustice. When applied to the status quo, environmental justice finds that there is an inequitable distribution of environmental benefits and hazards, and that those who already suffer social, racial, economic, and cultural discrimination bear disproportionate environmental disadvantage. In a world in which we are increasingly aware of environmental problems, the environmental justice framework provides another way of examining this set of issues and reminds us that our environmental decisions make significant impacts on people’s lives, which need to be factored into any process that aspires to be truly just.



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