

**Competing for Green**  
**Neoliberalism, environmental justice, and the limits of ecological modernization**

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***Abstract***

In the last several years many of the most far-reaching environmental policies in the United States and around the world have been implemented by local and regional governments. Simultaneously, however, many argue that the last few decades have seen neoliberal economic ideology, which rejects a strong role for government in regulating business and private activities to promote social goals such as environmental protection, become entrenched at all levels of the state. At first glance it therefore seems quite unlikely that cities caught in the grips of neoliberal ideology and at the mercy of the whims of mobile investment capital would engage in government-led processes of environmental reform and ecological modernization. This paper explores this apparent tension. It is argued that rather than being contradictory, neoliberal globalization has served to encourage the rise of city sustainability programs as a form of urban entrepreneurialism. Many of these programs do offer important environmental benefits and have the potential to genuinely reduce the ecological footprint of cities. However, because they operate within the framework of neoliberalism, they are not likely to provide the panacea of green economic growth that they promise, nor adequately address issues of social and environmental justice.

*Be it resolved, today on World Environment Day 2005 in San Francisco, we the signatory Mayors have come together to write a new chapter in the history of global cooperation. We commit to promote this collaborative platform and to build an ecologically sustainable, economically dynamic, and socially equitable future for our urban citizens.*

*~ Green Cities Declaration*

*Our goal is to be the greenest city in America.*

*~ Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley*

*~ Sacramento City Councilmember Robert Fong*

In the last several years many of the most far-reaching environmental policies in the United States and around the world have been implemented by local and regional governments . This is particularly true for efforts to address climate change, reduce energy consumption, and encourage the development and growth of green businesses. Simultaneously, however, many argue that the last decade has seen neoliberal economic ideology, which rejects a strong role for government in regulating business and private activities to promote social goals such as environmental protection, become entrenched at all levels of the state. Furthermore, the increasing mobility of financial capital under globalization is often cited – by critics and politicians alike – as constraining the ability of governments to prioritize social or environmental needs over those of business. At first glance it therefore seems quite unlikely that cities caught in the grips of neoliberal ideology and at the mercy of the whims of mobile investment capital would engage in government-led processes of environmental reform.

This paper explores the apparent tension between, on the one hand, cities as sites of the progressive embrace of environmentalism and, on the other, as vanguards and victims of neoliberalism. I will argue that rather than being contradictory, neoliberal globalization has served to encourage the rise of urban sustainability programs. It has also had a significant impact on the direction and form that programs of urban greening are taking. While not the only factor in the widespread promotion and dissemination of urban greening, neoliberal globalization has

served to encourage local sustainability programs as a form of urban entrepreneurialism. Furthermore, the neoliberal context has led to programs firmly grounded on the premises of ecological modernization. The extent to which cities' sustainability programs operate within these two frameworks (urban entrepreneurialism and ecological modernization) has significant implications for the potential of urban greening to move society towards greater sustainability, environmental justice, and more effective global environmental cooperation.

### ***Looking at the local***

For academics and policy makers across the political spectrum, the “local” is becoming increasingly important, both as an analytical category and as a site of social change . More specifically, many scholars, policy-makers, and activists concerned with questions of environmental protection assert the primacy of local governments in taking concrete steps toward ecological sustainability . Particularly in the United States in the face of federal inaction on such pressing issues as climate change, local governments are seen as offering venues through which bold efforts to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions can be implemented and in which there is room for democratic participation to move society towards both environmental sustainability and social justice .

To some degree this faith in the potential of local government to promote environmental goals is well-founded. Though the extent to which cities have embraced principles of sustainability varies significantly, Portney claims that over forty major cities in the United States have invested substantial time and resources into the development of initiatives to pursue some form of sustainability.<sup>1</sup> This number, however, under represents the extent of the phenomenon.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of sustainability is notoriously evasive. Though most policies and decision-makers formally accept the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainability as meeting today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations, what this means in the context of actual policies varies significantly. As such, this paper will not attempt to define or measure sustainability, though this has been done elsewhere . Rather, the policies of cities

Nearly 800 cities around the world have joined the Cities for Climate Protection campaign of the organization Local Governments for Sustainability (commonly referred to as ICLEI because of its former name – the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), including four hundred cities and counties in the United States . Over seven hundred mayors have joined the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement . Both the United Nations (Agenda 12, Chapter 28) and the European Union have asserted that municipal governments are the most effective level at which to solve global environmental problems, and the EU has taken significant steps to promote local sustainability initiatives and intra-local cooperation to address environmental issues . In cities from Chicago, Illinois to Sacramento, California and from Christchurch, New Zealand to Seville, Spain, cities are working to reduce solid waste and promote green business, are making major improvements in energy efficiency, are creating parks and open space, and are working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, in the United States and around the world local governments are engaging in projects of significant environmental merit.

In contrast to those who highlight the transformative potential of the local, however, other scholars are skeptical of an over-emphasis on the local as a space of progressive social change. Brenner and Theodore , for example, argue that “the local” as a (supposedly) well defined, manageable scale and discursive category appeals to people because of the perceived uncontrollability of supralocal phenomenon “such as globalization, the financialization of capital, the erosion of the national state, and the intensification of interspatial competition” in the context of neoliberal globalization (p. 341). Yet despite the reassurances the idea of the local gives to people, the authors continue, the possibility of progressive change on this scale is decidedly ambiguous. A major reason for this is that enthusiasts of local politics often ignore

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who have proclaimed the goal of becoming more sustainable will be analyzed in order to see the ways that they conform to and challenge theorizations of urban entrepreneurialism under neoliberal globalization.

important questions regarding the relationship between the local and the global economy. These questions include whether the local is a site of empowerment or of increasingly constrained, interlocal competition; the extent to which cities have power to determine the paths they take or if they are largely constrained by forces beyond their jurisdiction; and if local experiments in sustainability are improving conditions and well-being of the urban population or making cities increasingly vulnerable to the whims of mobile capital. For these scholars, the move to see cities as vanguards of sustainability and social change needs to be tempered by an analysis of the structural constraints of the global economy.

### ***The rise and transformation of neoliberalism and environmental policy***

Before delving into a theoretical and empirical analysis of the relationship between cities, the environment, and neoliberalism it will be useful to look briefly at the history of environmentalism in the United States and the extent to which changes in the dominant environmental discourses and policies parallel the rise of neoliberalism. Recognizing the relationship between neoliberalism and the transformations that American environmentalism has undergone is essential because in many key ways their confluence has led to the rise and proliferation of urban greening initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

Though wilderness preservation efforts began around the turn of the twentieth century, the birth of the modern environmental movement is usually attributed to Rachel Carson's 1962 work *Silent Spring* which brought to the forefront of public consciousness the devastating ecological effects of advanced industrial society . The initial round of environmental legislation

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<sup>2</sup> The environmental movement, urban greening, and neoliberalism have had somewhat different histories in other countries. This paper, however, will just look at environmentalism and urban greening in the United States. Though this may limit the universal applicability of the arguments being made, because the U.S. has been so extremely liberalized over the course of the past thirty years, the U.S. and cities within it offer particularly clear illustrations of the relationship between environmentalism and neoliberalism.

that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Superfund, and the Endangered Species Act, responded to the environmental movement's challenge to the right of corporations to harm the health of the planet and of people in their pursuit of ever greater profits. In its original manifestation, the proponents of environmentalism were not concerned with individual lifestyle choices or promoting the consumption of "green" products. The blame for environmental devastation was placed squarely at the feet of the businesses that were dumping the unfiltered waste from their industrial production into the rivers and air. Though not challenging capitalist production per se, early environmental legislation did succeed in partially decommodifying nature and removing it from the pure sphere of the market . Furthermore, at this time the federal government was seen as the appropriate level at which environmental laws should be enacted. Local governments were assumed to be too weak and too much at the whim of local business to be able to effectively implement and enforce strict standards on corporate environmental conduct.

The federal laws that forced changes in the behavior of industry were unquestionably effective at reducing pollution, improving environmental quality, and protecting natural resources. They were also expensive. The regulations cost businesses millions of dollars in clean up and pollution control. Though from a societal perspective these costs were probably more than compensated for in improvements in public health and general well-being, from the viewpoint of individual industries, environmental regulation increased the cost of production, thereby eating into profits. Around the same time that environmental regulation was becoming a cost to business, the Keynesian-Fordist economic order that had sustained unprecedented wealth and economic growth in the United States since the end of World War II began to come apart .

As the rate of return of the previous quarter century stagnated, some businesses pointed to the high costs of environmental regulation as one source of their financial troubles .

Attempts by the Reagan administration in the 1980s and the Republican Congress in the mid-1990s to radically weaken or eliminate existing environmental laws were mostly unsuccessful. However, out of the corporate and conservative backlash did emerge a new dominant understanding of legitimate environmental protection. Instead of businesses being unequivocally required to clean up or eliminate the dirty byproducts of their production processes, cost-benefit analysis would be used to determine whether any particular environmental action was worth the burden it would place on capital. In addition, the so-called command and control policies of early environmental laws would be replaced by market-based, often voluntary arrangements between businesses and the state. The purported goal of these arrangements was to encourage environmentally responsible corporate behavior at the lowest possible cost (ibid). The re-commodification of the environment would, it was claimed, serve to protect it.

Though a detailed history of the rise of neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this paper,<sup>3</sup> a short examination of the development of neoliberalism over the past thirty years will show the parallels between this movement and the transformation of environmentalism in the United States. As a theoretical perspective neoliberalism sees unfettered markets as the best way of achieving economic growth and securing individual freedom. As a policy prescription, the goals of neoliberalism are to “purge the system of obstacles to the functioning of ‘free markets’; restrain public expenditure and any form of collective initiative; celebrate the virtues of individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency; [and] abolish or weaken social

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<sup>3</sup> See Harvey, 2005 for an excellent discussion and analysis of the rise of neoliberalism.

transfer programs while actively fostering the ‘inclusion’ of the poor and marginalized into the labor market, on the market’s terms” .

Though promoted by scholars such as Friedrich Hayek for decades, neoliberalism did not become a guiding framework for economic policies until the stagflation of the 1970s seemed to prove that Keynesianism and the highly interventionist state that it promoted were no longer able to ensure economic growth. The elections of Reagan and Thatcher initiated the first phase of neoliberalism. This “roll back” phase entailed the weakening or elimination of institutions of the Keynesian state such as social welfare and government regulation of industry. Attempts at weakening environmental protections can be seen as part of this “roll back” period. The second phase, called “roll out” neoliberalism by Peck and Tickell and of which the administrations of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair are illustrative, involved policies of active state building. During this period neoliberal policy-makers “focused on the purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, models of governance, and regulatory relations” (ibid, p. 384) based, among other things, on the primacy of the market. As such, the move towards market-based environmental regulations such as cap and trade programs, voluntary corporate pollution reduction efforts, and cost-benefit analysis fit clearly into the pro-market framework of rolled-out neoliberalism. With neoliberalism as the dominant economic ideology, the goal of the government was no longer to balance economic growth with social reproduction, but to use the powers of the state to promote the workings of the market and meet the needs of capital.

### ***Neoliberalism and the city***

Cities have been particularly impacted by the rise of neoliberalism. Indeed, a number of scholars have pointed to the importance of cities as both victims and vanguards of neoliberal

polices, and as such see cities as particularly illustrative sites for examining the specifics of “actually existing neoliberalism” . For instance, Brenner and Theodore assert, “While the processes of institutional creative destruction associated with actually existing neoliberalism are clearly transpiring at all spatial levels, it can be argued that they are occurring with particular intensity at the urban scale, within major cities and city-regions” (ibid, p. 20). Examples they offer of neoliberalism at work on the local level include the privatization of municipal services, a reliance on private social services instead of state-sponsored welfare, local workfare requirements, volunteerism and public-private partnerships, and the destruction of public housing and rent control to make room for speculative investment and gentrification.

The impact of neoliberalism on the city has emerged from two major sources, the devolution of state powers to local governments and the retrenching of the federal state as a buffer between local governments and the volatile forces of the global economy. Devolution has included the federal abandonment of the Keynesian goal of maintaining broad-based consumption through income subsidies and other financial transfers to low-income people. The death of Keynesianism has therefore left many social welfare functions to be provided (if at all) by local governments. In addition, local governments have seen a series of unfunded federal requirements to increase penalization of various sorts. Together, these create a significant financial burden for local governments and have forced them to find new ways to generate the revenue needed to pay for social services and incarceration .

At the same time, however, other changes in the structure of the global economy under neoliberalism have greatly restricted the options local governments have for generating this revenue. Since the 1980s, the elimination of legal restrictions on capital mobility combined with advances in transportation and communication technology have enabled production to be

increasingly distanced from sites of consumption. This has exacerbated the tension between the fixity of place and capital's spatial mobility and has forced cities to compete ever more fiercely to attract investment . To do so, cities have adopted policies “in which traditional local boosterism is integrated with the use of local governmental powers to try to attract external sources of funding, new direct investments or new employment sources” (ibid, p. 7). Yet despite the increased importance of local governments in “determining exactly how to address, contest, or embrace larger shifts in the global economy,” the actual options available to them have been limited by the necessity of reassuring capital that their city is a safe investment . Even progressive local governments are severely limited in their policy options because “neoliberalism ... play[s] a decisive role in constructing the ‘rules’ of interlocal competition by shaping the very metrics by which regional competitiveness, public policy, corporate performance, or social productivity are measured – value for money, the bottom line, flexibility, shareholder value, performance rating, social capital, and so on” . This makes it extremely hard to enact policies that may promote important social or environmental goals but that contradict the rules established by the neoliberal policy framework.

Harvey theorized the transformation of the city under neoliberalism as a move from managerialism to “urban entrepreneurialism” . Competition between localities to attract investment is at the heart of urban entrepreneurialism. Major competitive strategies include providing training and technological services to business to defray the costs of labor, investing in consumption-oriented developments to “enhance their position in the spatial division of consumption,” and luring global corporations through tax breaks and other incentives . The remaking of built space has been a particularly important strategy of urban entrepreneurialism. Though cities and developers have a long history of labeling undesirable areas “blight” thereby

providing justification for replacing them with more profitable uses, “the neoliberal governance of urban development has allowed ... new politicized and marketized relationships to convene around financing, constructing, destroying, and reconstructing the built environment” . Because of increased “dependence on own-source revenues, namely property tax revenues, [cities are] more dependent on those that create value: the private real-estate market. Neoliberal redevelopment policies amount to little more than property speculation and public giveaways to guide the place and pace for the speculative activity” (ibid, p. 190). This can be seen in the significant public funds have been spent to redevelop urban areas, often based on vague promises of future capital investment (Hackworth, 2007). Overall, theorists of neoliberal urban entrepreneurialism assert that as industrial cities wither, they use publicity, marketing, and highly visible redevelopment projects such as waterfront parks in an attempt to reinvent themselves as post-industrial, clean and desirable places to work and do business .

Within the context of a neoliberal global economy, this inter-urban competition to attract scarce jobs and investment is seen both as necessary and as the only “realistic” option that cities face (Hackworth, 2007). The (often fleeting) success of some cities to attract capital and spur economic growth through these efforts serves to perpetuate the embrace of urban entrepreneurialism by other cities. However, as investment capital is limited, not every city can have successful entrepreneurial policies. Furthermore, the more resources that cities invest in efforts to attract capital, the more threatening business’s ability to relocate becomes. This then exacerbates the need for cities to offer greater incentives for capital to stay. As such, “elite partnerships, mega-events, and corporate seduction become, in effect, both the only games in town *and* the basis of urban subjugation. The public subsidy of zero-sum competition at the interurban scale rests on the economic fallacy that every city can win, shored up by the political

reality that no city can afford principled noninvolvement in the game” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 46).

### *Neoliberalism and green cities*

Only a handful of authors have used the above framework to examine urban sustainability programs, and none have looked specifically at these policies in cities in the United States. After studying sustainable city programs in Britain, Australia and elsewhere these scholars argue that urban greening represents the latest form of urban entrepreneurialism, particularly in post-industrial cities where green technology and business are seen as offering a competitive advantage as traditional industries move elsewhere . While, Jonas, and Gibbs (2004), for example, use sustainability projects in Manchester and Leeds in the United Kingdom to illustrate their assertion that even if a particular government or political leader does hold a genuine commitment to environmentalism, “governing for sustainability at the urban scale is consistently undermined by place competition and the limited fiscal and political opportunities for the local state to pursue alternative economic development strategies” (p. 560). Whitehead (2002), in his examination of Stoke-On-Trent and the Black Country urban region of the UK reaches a similar conclusion. Whitehead provides an overview of the application of regulation theory to questions of ecology. He then argues that the “sustainable city” can be “understood as part of the wider *regularization* (or *normalization*) of the socio-ecological contradictions of capitalist urbanization” (p. 1184, emphasis in original). As such, “the sustainable city represents an economic space within which the social, economic and ecological contradictions of capitalism are being managed and strategically addressed” (p. 1188). He doubts, however, that this attempt at regularizing the ecological contradictions of capitalism will satisfactorily address issues of sustainability.

The above studies are worth mentioning because they usefully begin to articulate a relationship between urban greening and neoliberalism. This relationship will be further elaborated below in the context of cities in the United States. However, none of these studies offers a truly satisfying analysis of the phenomenon of the urban embrace of environmentalism. As with many studies of neoliberalism, the above authors offer a rather “monolithic and functionalist conception... of neoliberalization as an undifferentiated global behemoth, running on autopilot or guided by some invisible hand” . This kind of analysis fails to recognize the agency of people to challenge neoliberal logic even as they are forced to work within the very real structural limitations of globalization . As will be argued below, urban greening must be understood both as a form of urban entrepreneurialism *and* as importantly influenced by other logics and phenomenon, particularly transmunicipal cooperation and struggles for environmental justice. Second, existing research on urban greening as a form of urban entrepreneurialism and capitalist regulation are unsatisfactory in their dismissal of the possibility of any substantive environmental improvements emerging from urban environmental programs. In the face of growing evidence that cities are indeed taking on important environmental challenges in concrete ways, dismissing these policies because they are forms of neoliberalism is less illuminating than analyzing how neoliberalism has both enabled and constrained urban greening. Before attempting to offer a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between local sustainability initiatives and neoliberalism through case studies of four U.S. cities, two more theoretical frameworks that are crucial to understanding urban greening need to be examined. These frameworks are ecological modernization theory and environmental justice.

***Ecological modernization, justice, and green capitalism***

As mentioned above, concurrent with the rise of neoliberalism, the command and control environmental regulation of the 1970s largely gave way to market-based efforts to reduce industrial pollution. This shift was an important change in the dominant environmental discourse and with some legitimacy has been seen by many environmentalists as a roll-back of environmental protection. However, though this pro-market framework is still a crucial part of environmental regulation, it has recently been expanded in important ways. In the last few years, environmental policy discourse has shifted from a discussion of using cost-benefit analysis to determine the appropriate trade-off between the environment and the economy to the argument that there need not be a trade-off at all and that economic growth and environmental sustainability can be compatible. This argument is at the core of ecological modernization theory.

Ecological modernization theory asserts that economic growth and environmental sustainability not only *can* be, but that they increasingly *are*, compatible. Pollution is indicative of inefficiency and waste and therefore represents unnecessary costs for business. Through the proper utilization of technology, this waste can be eliminated, improving corporate profitability and helping the environment by reducing pollution, energy use, etc. . Clean, closed-loop production processes can drastically reduce the raw materials needed for production as well as the by-products discarded at the end of the line. As governments and business leaders are coming to realize this, proponents of ecological modernization assert, society is increasingly moving towards a “win-win” situation for both the economy and the environment . The emerging “decoupling or delinking of material flows from economic flows” (Mol 2002, p. 93) is showing the possibility for capitalist economic growth to eventually come in line with the carrying capacity of the planet.

According to proponents and critics alike, ecological modernization has become the dominant discourse of environmental protection and policy. Dryzek et al. argue that “ecological modernization is attractive to many environmentalists because it provides a way for their concerns to be taken seriously in a world where economics is the first concern of governments” (p. 169). By linking environmental issues to the economic imperatives of states and promoting economic growth, policies of ecological modernization can overcome the resistance of business to command and control environmental regulation and environmentalists’ frustrations with the limits of cost-benefit analysis. As such, ecological modernization discourse has been an effective strategy for bringing environmental concerns to the public policy agenda and overcoming many of the long-standing antagonisms between environmentalism and industry. Furthermore, as shall be seen, there is significant overlap between ecological modernization’s embrace of “win-win” situations for business and the environment and neoliberalism’s prioritization of economic growth and the needs of business, making ecological modernization fit well into the framework of urban entrepreneurialism.

Despite ecological modernization’s illustrious goals, many critics raise concerns about the ultimate transformative potential of environmental policies founded on the premises of ecological modernization. The most scathing critiques have come from neo-Marxists and other radical political economists. They contend that under capitalism it is impossible for states to prioritize ecological sustainability over economic imperatives. The state can and will only address environmental harms as long as doing so does not hurt the economic growth which is necessary for capitalist production and for the ongoing legitimacy of the capitalist state . According to this critique, environmentalism, including the greening of cities, can only ever be of secondary importance to other (subnational) state goals. Furthermore, more often than not the

goals of environmental protection and economic growth are not compatible, despite ecological modernization theory's assertion to the contrary. This is because the internal logic of capitalism requires continuous economic growth. As such, ever more natural resources will need to be exploited to provide the inputs necessary for expansion of the capitalist economy, and ever more inputs will lead to increased industrial pollution and waste. Even if *some* industrial practices are becoming *somewhat* greener at *some* if their stages of production, these changes are insignificant compared to the growing social and ecological problems caused by the speeding up of the capitalist "treadmill of production" .

In addition to the political economy critique, there are less predominant but equally important ethical concerns regarding ecological modernization. Though on "the one hand, ecological modernization provides a common discursive basis for a contested rapprochement between [environmentalism] and dominant forms of political-economic power ... it [also] presumes a certain kind of rationality that lessens the force of more purely moral arguments" that are the foundation of demands for environmental justice . Another major critique of ecological modernization is that it lacks a well-formulated theory of social change , tending toward a teleological depiction of technological change and the greening of industrial production that fails to explain how power and politics may determine whether or not such an outcome is achieved in any particular case.

Proponents of ecological modernization counter its neo-Marxist critics with the following arguments. Proponents insist that small changes in production processes, energy technologies, etc. can have significant cumulative environmental benefit. Though many ecological modernization theorists agree that most economic activity today takes place under the "treadmill" logic of expanding production, consumption, and environmental destruction pointed

to by critics, they claim that this does not mean that sustainability programs and the decoupling of production from resource consumption are not making significant inroads into the ecologically harmful aspects of industrial society. Fundamentally, “there is a major difference between the two perspectives in their assessments of the environmental changes that have been set into motion from the late 1980s onwards: window-dressing (neo-Marxists) versus structural changes in institutions and social practices (ecological modernization)” .

Ecological modernization theory relates to the greening of cities in a number of ways. First of all ecological modernization’s promise to marry the goals of economic growth and environmental protection can be seen as complimenting urban greening as a strategy of urban entrepreneurialism. Second, with few exceptions, cities’ sustainability programs are saturated with the discursive logic of ecological modernization. Urban greening is promoted as a “win-win” situation that saves the city, its residents, and its businesses money, will promote and attract green businesses and investment capital, *and* will help the environment. Though these are all important goals, the critiques of ecological modernization and its potential for substantive change apply also to ecological modernization at the local level.

### *Environmental justice*

Another literature that can add insight into the relationship between neoliberalism and urban greening is environmental justice. Calls for environmental justice emerged in activism and academia as the relationship between race, class, and exposure to pollution became increasingly clear . Environmental justice advocates and scholars have highlighted the maldistribution of environmental “bads” and the disproportionate burden of the dirty side of industrial society borne by poor people and people of color. Increasingly, they are also pointing to the need for an

equitable distribution of environmental “goods” such as clean water and air, adequate housing, and access to parks and open space .

This work has been important in a number of ways. First of all, it has served to make explicit the connection between the environment and social inequality that has largely been ignored by conservation-oriented environmental advocacy. As such, environmental justice discourse has been instrumental in bringing the city into the realm of environmentalism. Proponents of environmental justice have long argued that the environment cannot be seen as wilderness or wildlife habitat that is “out there” somewhere, and that environmentalism cannot focus merely on endangered species, habitat, and unspoiled wilderness to be protected for future generations.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the habitat of human beings, most of whom live in urban areas, is a critical part of the “environment” that needs to be preserved and enhanced.

Another key element of theories and arguments based on notions of environmental justice is that they largely reject the technocratic, universalized, cost-benefit framework through which environmental policies continue to operate. Theorists of environmental justice note that pollution is particular, localized, symbolic and emotional. Environmental justice discourse “highlights the racial and discriminatory aspects to the problem [and] pushes discussion far beyond the scientific evidence on, for example, health effects, cost-benefit schedules or ‘parts per billion’ to the thorny, volatile, and morally charged terrain of symbolic violence, ‘cultural imperialism’ and personalized revolt against the association of ‘pollution’ in its symbolic sense of defilement and degradation with dangerous social disorder and supposed racial impurities of certain groups in the population” . Scientific evidence and knowledge may be utilized by people promoting environmental justice, but it is of secondary importance to moral arguments and felt experience.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that from a perspective of social justice this conception of wilderness has been extremely problematic in many cases, specifically where it negates the existence of indigenous peoples within so-called wilderness areas and therefore may deny or forbid long-standing subsistence and other uses by these populations .

Questions of environmental and social justice have been raised to different degrees in different cities as they attempt to move towards sustainability. The ways that these issues are addressed is one of the significant areas where the agency of local actors within their negotiation between the global economy, local revenue generation, and social goals such as environmental protection can be seen quite clearly. Yet calls for environmental justice also highlight important limitations to policies of urban greening that operate within the frameworks of urban entrepreneurialism and ecological modernization.

### *Neoliberalism in four green cities*

In order to better understand the relationship between green cities, urban entrepreneurialism, ecological modernization, and environmental justice, it is useful to examine “actually existing” urban greening in a number of cities in the United States. Each of the four cities examined below – Chicago, Illinois; Sacramento, California; Oakland, California; and Seattle, Washington – has formally adopted a far-reaching sustainability program and has taken substantive steps towards urban greening. In addition to sharing a commitment to sustainability, the importance of neoliberalism and urban entrepreneurialism in each of their environmental programs is clear. Aside from these important similarities, however, these cases were chosen because they illustrate the different ways that green urban entrepreneurialism is playing out in particular places. Though the short analysis of each city only begins to touch on the myriad variables at play in each locality, together they help to illuminate both the possibilities and limitations of urban environmentalism embedded in discourses and practices of neoliberalism and ecological modernization.

To summarize the analysis to follow, Chicago has been the most explicit and successful city in the country at using urban greening as a form of urban entrepreneurialism, but in its

success can be seen important limitations for issues of environmental justice and social equity. Sacramento has unabashedly tried to become notable for its embrace of sustainability and to attract green venture capital. However, its efforts have paled behind the shadow of neighboring Silicon Valley, offering insights into the limits of inter-local competition in a globalized economy. Like Sacramento, Oakland has not been very successful at selling itself as a green city, despite some impressive environmental achievements. Oakland also wrestles more explicitly than other cities under examination with issues of environmental justice and the distribution of the benefits of its sustainability programs. Finally, like Chicago, Seattle has been very successful in its attempts at green urban entrepreneurialism. However, the city's promotion of transmunicipal cooperation to address climate change offers an important challenge to urban entrepreneurialism's assumed primacy of inter-local competition.

#### *Chicago – The “shining green star”*

Chicago has arguably been the most successful city in the United States at using urban greening as a form of urban entrepreneurialism. For well over a century Chicago was seen as a quintessential industrial city – dirty, dangerous, noisy, and anything but green . But over the last decade the Windy City, led by Mayor Richard M. Daley, has been transformed into a success story of urban revitalization and “one of the most beautiful cities in America” . In roughly ten years the city has planted several hundred thousand trees, built over 300 gardens and green roofs to reduce summer energy needed to cool buildings, and created over 200 acres of new parks and open spaces. Chicago's other environmental programs include a Green Permit program that expedites building permits and waives fees if developers use green techniques, the retrofitting of 15 million square feet of municipal buildings for energy efficiency , a model brownfields

redevelopment program where abandoned, blighted, or environmentally contaminated land is cleaned up and developed, and a program called Chicago Conservation Corps that trains volunteers to provide resources and expertise for community-based environmental efforts .

Chicago's self-proclaimed goal of becoming the "greenest city in America" has unabashedly been an economic as well as an environmental policy. This can be seen in the mission statement of the city's Department of the Environment. The DOE's mission is "to protect human health and the environment, improve the urban quality of life, and *promote economic development*" (ibid, emphasis added). As an economic policy, Chicago's urban greening has been quite successful. As it has transformed itself into a green city, Chicago's conference industry has boomed to over \$9 billion a year, tens of thousands of new jobs have been added to the Chicago economy, and the city's population has grown by 100,000 (Schneider, 2006). From the benefits to business of the \$145 million dollar Millennium Park to retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency, for city officials "success [is] clearly defined in economic terms—whether it's reducing the cost of city operations or increasing the tax base by attracting new businesses and the residents who will work there" . This is not to say that Mayor Daley and city officials do not have a genuine commitment to environmentalism. Rather, it is important to recognize that the discursive framework in which this concern has been successfully articulated is that of the win-win premise of ecological modernization.

Many of the programs Chicago has undertaken are archetypal examples of urban entrepreneurialism. Luxury housing in the inner city has lured professionals in from the suburbs, public-private partnerships and cooperative efforts between the city and business are the environmental policy tools of choice, and significant public investment has been used to encourage private development of high end consumption (such as the conference industry).

Again, this is not to say that Chicago's environmental accomplishments are not significant; indeed they are. Efforts to reduce the city's energy use are reducing greenhouse gas emissions as well as saving the city, its residents and its businesses money. The expansion and greening of open space provides quality of life benefits for all residents of the city.

However, the greening of Chicago also has problematic limitations that hint at problems with urban entrepreneurialism as a framework for environmental politics. One of the most important is the issue of social equity, particularly in affordable housing. One of the proclaimed success stories of Chicago's urban greening is its brownfields redevelopment program. Urban infill and reclaiming unused land can provide significant environmental benefits through providing housing that is accessible to public transportation and other city services. In Chicago, however, there is evidence that the city has used brownfields redevelopment and other urban renewal programs to destroy housing for poor residents and replace it with higher end complexes. Because there is no clear definition of what constitutes a "blighted" or "underutilized" property, public housing can often be destroyed under this rubric. Furthermore, unlike some cities Chicago does not offer a legal guarantee that those who are displaced by redevelopment will be provided with new housing. As such, Chicago's "displacement problem [is] among the worst nationwide". Furthermore, even for those who are fortunate enough to receive replacement housing, this can "expand the injustices, due to issues of displacement of families from their homes to 'better' housing and 'cleaner' environments. 'Better' housing, such as the Cabrini Green housing project ... has stripped families of their identities and their relationships in the name of improved living conditions." . One of the oft-noted features of urban entrepreneurialism is the prioritization of business needs over social issues and redistribution. Chicago, as a pronounced success in using urban greening as a tool of urban entrepreneurialism,

also illustrates this tendency. The apparent success of Chicago's sustainability program, therefore, needs to be seen within the context of the limitations of urban entrepreneurialism as a development strategy, particularly as it fails to address issues of social equity.

The success of Chicago in transforming itself from a dirty, industrial city to a green Mecca of high-end service jobs and entertainment has made "Chicago ... a global model for how a metropolis can pursue environmental goals to achieve economic success". Indeed, it offers the kind of success story that keeps the appeal of green urban entrepreneurialism alive. At least for the time being, economic growth and environmental sustainability have been impressively joined in Chicago. The re-creation of urban space in the context of global neoliberalism appears to be successful, at least as measured by the post-Keynesian context in which it is occurring. As other cities strive to match Chicago's environmental and economic success, one commentator asserted that Chicago is "the green star by which aspiring cities sail". But as with other kinds of urban entrepreneurialism, the extent to which other cities could repeat Chicago's success remains unclear.

#### *Sacramento – In the shadow of Silicon Valley*

Some of the limits to greening as a development strategy can be seen in Sacramento, California. Unlike Chicago, Sacramento has virtually no reputation as a leader in green urbanism. However, the local government is actively working to change this. Echoing precisely the language of Chicago's Mayor Daley, in late 2007 a prominent Sacramento city councilmember was quoted in the local paper as saying, "Our goal is to become the most sustainable city in America". Striving to be the "most sustainable" city clearly shows an element of competitiveness that rings of urban entrepreneurialism. Yet so far Sacramento has not been

successful at using urban greening to recreate its image or to promote significant economic growth.

In some important ways Sacramento is as sustainable as any major city that has embraced urban greening. The city has a high rate of trees per capita, bike lanes on most roads, and public transportation that is as good as nearly any in California. Furthermore, Sacramento has the second highest amount of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified office space in the country. At 4.3 million square feet Sacramento trails only Chicago in office space meeting the LEED standards for environmentally sustainable construction as set by the U.S. Green Building Council's guidelines (ibid, p. A14). Even more significant (as most of the LEED certified buildings are state government buildings and therefore not directly influenced by city policies) is the city-owned utility, SMUD. SMUD offers a host of incentives for residential and business customers to reduce their energy consumption, and for a small additional charge will provide customers with renewable energy equivalent of up to 100% of their energy usage.

Each of these accomplishments benefits the environment and the residents of the city. Sacramento's ability to maintain its utility as public in the face of the waves of privatization that accompanied the roll-out of neoliberalism in the 1990s is particularly impressive. But the urban greening goal that Sacramento is working hardest to promote shows yet another limitation of green urban entrepreneurialism. This goal is to attract green industry to the region. The Sacramento Area Trade and Commerce Organization (SACTO), a public-private partnership, is trying to promote Sacramento as *the* emerging hot spot for investment in green technology . SACTO, whose board of directors includes corporate executives, city and county politicians, and representatives from local colleges, claims that over seventy clean technology businesses already operate in the area and that the number is growing . Yet despite these claims, there is little

evidence that Sacramento will be able to achieve anywhere near the success at attracting green investment as the Silicon Valley, 120 miles to the south.

Globally, venture capital investment in green technology increased by 47% in 2007, with 84% of that investment in the United States . Cities across the country, including Sacramento, have taken note of this and are using typical tools of urban entrepreneurialism such as tax breaks and other incentives to try to attract this extremely lucrative green tech investment capital. However, it is unlikely that this will be a viable strategy for all but a very small subsection of the local governments who see green tech as a panacea for growth. More likely is that green venture capital and the emerging green technology business that it funds will continue to focus on the few places that already have the infrastructure and knowledge base for such ventures. In particular, the place that seems to be benefiting most from the explosion of green venture capital is the Silicon Valley.

California's Silicon Valley was transformed within a few decades from a largely agricultural region to the heart of the 1990s high tech boom. Though experiencing a significant economic slow-down after the dot-com crash, the region is now booming again, largely in response to the growing demand for green technology, particularly alternative energy technologies . The extent to which Silicon Valley dominates this sector is impressive. In 2007 it received about 30 percent of the total venture capital invested anywhere in the U.S. In 2006 (the last year for which numbers are available), the region received a remarkable 62 percent of California's venture capital investment in green technology, and there is no evidence that this trend is lessening . The City of San Jose, which constitutes a sizable part of the Silicon Valley, has notable sustainability goals itself, including the most aggressive greenhouse gas emission reduction goals in the nation . In true ecological modernizationist fashion, San Jose sees green

technology as the answer to environmental problems and sees itself, with significant legitimacy, as the global leader in this technology . It is unlikely that any other region will be able to compete with the head start and cumulative advantages that the Silicon Valley has in this key sector.

For cities such as Sacramento that hope to make green technology a pillar of economic growth, they are likely to be disappointed. As Sacramento is discovering, this is one of the serious limitations of urban entrepreneurialism – in the competition to be seen as the “greenest” city in the country or to attract significant investment capital, not all cities can win. As stated above, neoliberalism and urban entrepreneurialism have restricted the options available for cities, and countless local governments have built waterfront attractions, developed specialty malls that romanticize the uniqueness of their particular city, etc. Many of these projects have failed spectacularly . Though the need for local governments to attract revenue under the neoliberalization of the federal state has helped encourage urban greening as a new strategy for attracting investment, as with attempts at competitive place promotion that have gone before, not every city can win at green urban entrepreneurialism.

### *Oakland – Social justice in a greening economy*

Oakland, California offers a somewhat different take on the relationship between neoliberalism and local sustainability initiatives. This city has tried more than most to combine social and environmental justice goals with urban greening and economic growth. Though Oakland’s environmentalism tends to be overshadowed by its more eccentric neighbors San Francisco and Berkeley, the city has taken notable steps towards becoming more sustainable. Oakland’s major sustainability policy document, the Sustainable Community Development

Initiative, was approved by the Oakland city council in late 1998. The Initiative's stated goal is to incorporate sustainable practices into the city's economic development programs, its employment and adult education services, housing development and building, and city operations . The program provides voluntary guidelines for green building, strategies for reducing solid waste, plans to attract green businesses to the city, and strategies for improving energy efficiency. In each of these areas, the city has made some degree of progress . For example, Oakland has become a leader in alternative energy, receiving a greater percentage of its energy from renewable sources than any other large city in the United States .

Many of Oakland's environmental efforts are tied to economic development. Though this has included high-end "green" condos and urban infill projects that have been challenged on distributive grounds, the city also has a number of environmental programs aimed specifically at benefiting the city's low income population. Oakland's long history of social and environmental justice activism has been instrumental in ensuring that environmental justice issues are included in the city's development programs . One example of a program that is attempting to combine economic opportunity for poor people in the city with environmental goals is the "green collar jobs" program. After significant organizing by local non-profits, in June 2007 the city council allocated \$250,000 to begin this program, the purpose of which is to train low-income youth to install solar panels, retrofit buildings for energy efficiency, and fill other technical jobs created by the greening of the economy . Similarly, in the summer of 2005, Oakland established a California Youth Energy Services (CYES) program to train local youth to provide medium-low income residents free energy conservation services and hardware. In addition to providing several young people summer jobs, the first year of the program was estimated to have saved Oakland residents \$146,530 in reduced energy bills .

Oakland's attempt to combine environmental sustainability goals with social justice priorities has the potential to challenge neoliberalism's deprioritization of issues of poverty and distribution. However, there are at least two major limitations to this effort, both of which highlight problems with the ecological modernizationist framework under which Oakland's environmental programs operate. The first limitation emerges when there is tension between economic priorities and calls for environmental justice. The second reflects the limited transformative potential of ecological modernization.

As a city with relatively high unemployment, a higher than average crime rate, and social services that have been significantly weakened by the retrenchment of the welfare state, economic growth is understandably a top priority for Oakland leaders. However, in some key instances there are notable tensions between Oakland's attempt to spur economic growth and its proclaimed commitment to issues of social and environmental justice. For example, a top priority of city officials and local business is to expand shipping traffic through the Maritime Port of Oakland. However, environmental justice advocates have raised significant concerns regarding the health impacts of port expansion on poor communities located near the facilities. Though port policy continues to be debated in Oakland, so far the city's prioritization of port growth illuminates a concern mentioned by critics of ecological modernization, namely that even if governments are genuinely interested in finding ways to marry economic growth and environmental protection, if the two are in conflict economic priorities will trump environmental and social concerns.

The promotion of "green collar jobs" is another example of the limits of ecological modernization. The idea that people who have limited job skills and education should receive training to install solar panels, etc. holds at least two important assumptions that need to be

critically examined. The first assumption is that proponents of ecological modernization are correct and a widespread greening of the economy will occur. The second is that this training will lead to a noteworthy improvement in the economic well-being of the country's poor . Right now a widespread greening of the economy, though in no way assured, seems like a possibility. As such, making sure that people from disadvantaged groups will be able to fill jobs that may be created because of this change is laudable. However, like ecological modernization more broadly, the transformative potential of green collar jobs may be quite limited. There is little reason to believe that without more radical state intervention in terms of minimum wage, the provision of benefits, etc. that these jobs will prove adequate to raise people out of poverty. If the increasing polarization of the U.S. economy over the past decades is any indication, the well-paying jobs of a greener economy will be held by those who hold them now – people with access to the advanced skills and education most in demand by the high-tech economy. Yet despite this, in the context of neoliberalism's exacerbation of inequality and urban entrepreneurialism's replacement of the Keynesian welfare functions of the local state, investment in green collar jobs seems to be one of the more progressive policies on the table.

### *Seattle – Cooperation and competition*

Like Chicago, Seattle is near the top of virtually every list of green cities in the United States . However, rather than being another fairly clear-cut example of green urban entrepreneurialism, Seattle offers an important complication to seeing urban greening through the lens of neoliberalism. The case of Seattle is important because the city has both embraced many tenets of green urban entrepreneurialism *and* through its efforts to address climate change challenges the primacy of interurban competition.

Though in the late 1970s Seattle launched energy and water conservation programs, it was not until 1994 that the city's comprehensive sustainability plan, *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, was adopted . According to Portney's examination of urban sustainability initiatives, Seattle's "plan represents a sustainability effort that is about as well-developed and coordinated as found in any U.S. city" (Portney, 2003, p. 194 – 195). Elements of the plan emphasize land use, housing and development, utilities and energy use, and internal government operations (ibid). In 2000 the mayor of Seattle, Greg Nickels, created the Office of Sustainability and the Environment in order to better "manage for the linkages between the city's long-term economic, environmental, and social health" .

Climate change is an important focus of much of Seattle's work toward sustainability. In September 2006 the mayor released a \$37 million "Climate Action Plan" that included "expanded transit service, and improved and new bicycling and pedestrian facilities. It include[d] money to convert to more climate-friendly vehicles and equipment throughout the City, [and] to start a new business partnership devoted to climate protection" . Furthermore, the city's Climate Protection Program is working to promote voluntary efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the multinational corporations that are based in Seattle including Starbucks, Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), and Microsoft. In addition to its widely publicized efforts to address climate change, the Seattle government also has a substantial urban forestry program, a policy of promoting green building, and wetland and drinking water restoration and protection programs, all of which focus on making the city a green, attractive place for people to live .

If the ongoing stability of Seattle housing prices is any indication, the city has been quite successful in attracting high-end labor and consumers. Furthermore, Seattle is working to use its green image to boost its already lucrative tourist industry. Illustrative of these efforts is the

Seattle Convention and Visitors Bureau recent invention of the term “metronatural.” The Bureau is promoting this as Seattle’s new “brand name,” and is using the term on its tourist brochures, website, and other advertising materials. The dictionary-style definition of metronatural on the Bureau’s website defines it as: “*adj.* – 1: having the characteristics of a world-class metropolis within wild, beautiful, natural surroundings; 2: A blending of clear skies and expansive water with a fast-paced city life. – *n.* 3: one who respects the environment and lives a balanced lifestyle of urban and natural experiences. 4: Seattle” . It is hard to think of a clearer articulation of green urban entrepreneurialism.

Seattle’s public-private partnerships, attempts to appeal to upper middle class employees, and efforts to sell the city as a desirable site for tourism and high-end (green) consumption can clearly be seen through the lens of neoliberalism. Yet Seattle also offers an important challenge to any overly generalized correlation between urban greening and competitive urban entrepreneurialism. This challenge comes from Seattle’s leadership in promoting transmunicipal, cooperative efforts to address climate change. Led by Mayor Nickels, Seattle has been the most prominent city in the country in calling for cities to work together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The most notable achievement in this regard has been the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, a project started by Nickels through which cities commit to meeting the greenhouse gas reduction goals of the Kyoto Protocol. In the three years since its creation the agreement has grown to over 700 signatories from all 50 states and Puerto Rico. To help insure that the agreement leads to actual greenhouse gas reductions, in 2007 Seattle sponsored a major meeting for cities to share policy ideas and best practices and to coordinate efforts to push for federal action on climate change. As it continues to gain momentum, Seattle’s effort to promote transmunicipal cooperation to this issue is likely to have a significant impact on cumulative U.S.

greenhouse gas emissions, and perhaps on federal climate change policy. It also highlights the extent to which urban greening may be a phenomenon that challenges – as well as operates within – the competitive framework of neoliberalism.

It is useful to look at Seattle's climate change efforts as part of a broader movement towards global, transmunicipal cooperation on environmental issues. A small group of theorists has recently begun to examine urban sustainability initiatives from a perspective that rejects the primacy of interlocal competition and the impact of neoliberalism on cities. Instead, they stress the importance of the rise of transmunicipal networks, global cooperation, and global civil society in the promotion and embrace of local environmentalism . According to these scholars, transmunicipal networks are promoting global, interurban cooperation by providing forums through which municipal governments can share policy tools, technical knowledge, and discursive understandings of environmental problems and appropriate solutions.<sup>5</sup> The rise of these networks is given as evidence of a new kind of global cooperation in which subnational governments and global civil society are increasingly important to international environmental policy.

Harriet Bulkeley in particular challenges the competitive premise of urban entrepreneurialism. She claims that participants in ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection program are "*not* driven primarily by responses to economic globalisation and consequent state restructuring" (Bulkeley, 2005, p. 893, emphasis added). Transmunicipal networks and the inter-city cooperation they entail, she argues, are a key force in the dissemination of urban sustainability programs. Furthermore, through these networks cities can resist the competitive pressures of the neoliberal global economy and "empower themselves relative to ... mobile

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<sup>5</sup> See Hajer, 1995 for a discussion of the importance of discursive understanding of environmental problems in the formulation of environmental policy prescriptions.

financial capital” (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002, cited in Bulkeley, 2005, p. 894). In this view, it is not the competitive nature of the global economy that leads local governments to support urban greening as a strategy of entrepreneurialism. Rather, local sustainability initiatives – particularly to the extent that they are tied to international, transmunicipal networks – can be a site of resistance to neoliberalism.

The challenge Bulkeley and others give to analyses that see neoliberalism as *the* driving force in the proliferation of urban sustainability initiatives is compelling. However, dismissing the impact that the neoliberal globalized economy has on cities is equally problematic. Rather, what this body of work can provide is the beginning of a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between competitive urban entrepreneurialism and transmunicipal cooperation. As the case of Seattle demonstrates, both tendencies may be at play simultaneously. How they interact, and the limitations and possibilities for sustainability that this implies, needs to be more thoroughly examined and theorized.

#### *Case study conclusions*

The brief discussion of each city offered above can only begin to touch on the complexity of political, economic, and social forces that are at play in each locality. Furthermore, the above analyses do not come close to presenting a comprehensive discussion of everything these four cities are doing to move towards greater sustainability, the impact that neoliberalism has on these processes, or the ways that neoliberalism is being challenged through urban greening. To gain an adequate understanding of the widespread embrace of urban environmentalism that has occurred in the past few years, more in-depth, empirical research into cities, their sustainability programs, and their relationship to the global political economy needs to be undertaken. Even the brief

sketches offered above, however, help to illuminate both the importance of neoliberalism and urban entrepreneurialism in these programs and the multi-facetedness of this relationship.

### ***Conclusion – Social change in the era of neoliberalism***

One of the weaknesses in much of the scholarship on neoliberalism is to see neoliberalism as not only ubiquitous, but also monolithic. In critiquing neoliberalism's very real and problematic implications for social justice, distribution of resources and wealth, democracy, etc. many scholars implicitly reject all policies tainted with neoliberalism's dirty fingers. Unfortunately, this can lead to an unsatisfactory analysis of politics and policies that, though they are operating within the constraints of a neoliberal framework, may have important benefits to people or the planet.

In this essay I have attempted to offer a more nuanced understanding of the importance of neoliberalism, especially in its relationship to environmental policy in the United States. In particular, I have argued that the changes in environmental policy and discourse that have accompanied neoliberalism have encouraged the rise and rapid proliferation of urban sustainability initiatives in this country. These policies are important and have the potential to transform the relationship of the city to the natural world and reduce the ecological footprint of major urban areas. However, because these policies have been formulated within the context of neoliberalism, they are constrained by limitations of the market-oriented, urban entrepreneurial policy alternatives that are acceptable within the neoliberal global economy. As such the questions of social justice and equity that neoliberalism fails to answer remain equally problematic within green urban entrepreneurialism.

Furthermore, though urban sustainability projects in the United States are in many ways manifestations of “actually existing neoliberalism,” there is reason to believe that other factors also have an important influence on how and why cities embrace sustainability. Social movement pressure, growing public concern for environmental issues, and a genuine commitment by local officials to reduce their city’s environmental impact must also be considered. As Raco argues in his examination of British New Labour’s 2003 *Sustainable Communities* proposal and its implementation, urban sustainability programs are “not simply a neoliberal agenda that has been played out in a particular way. [They are] constituted from a number of rationalities, some of which can be defined as neoliberal, some of which are drawn from other intellectual, political, and ethical traditions” (p. 343). In other words, sustainability projects may be hybrids of neoliberal urban entrepreneurialism, progressive attempts to tame the destructive tendencies of capitalist production and consumption, responses to calls for environmental justice, and part of a growing transmunicipal social movement to address pressing global issues. The extent to which any one of these is the predominant driving force in a city’s adoption of sustainability needs to be determined empirically, with an eye both to the constraints created by neoliberal globalization *and* the ways that social actors maintain agency within the framework of neoliberalism to shape their social and ecological surroundings.

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