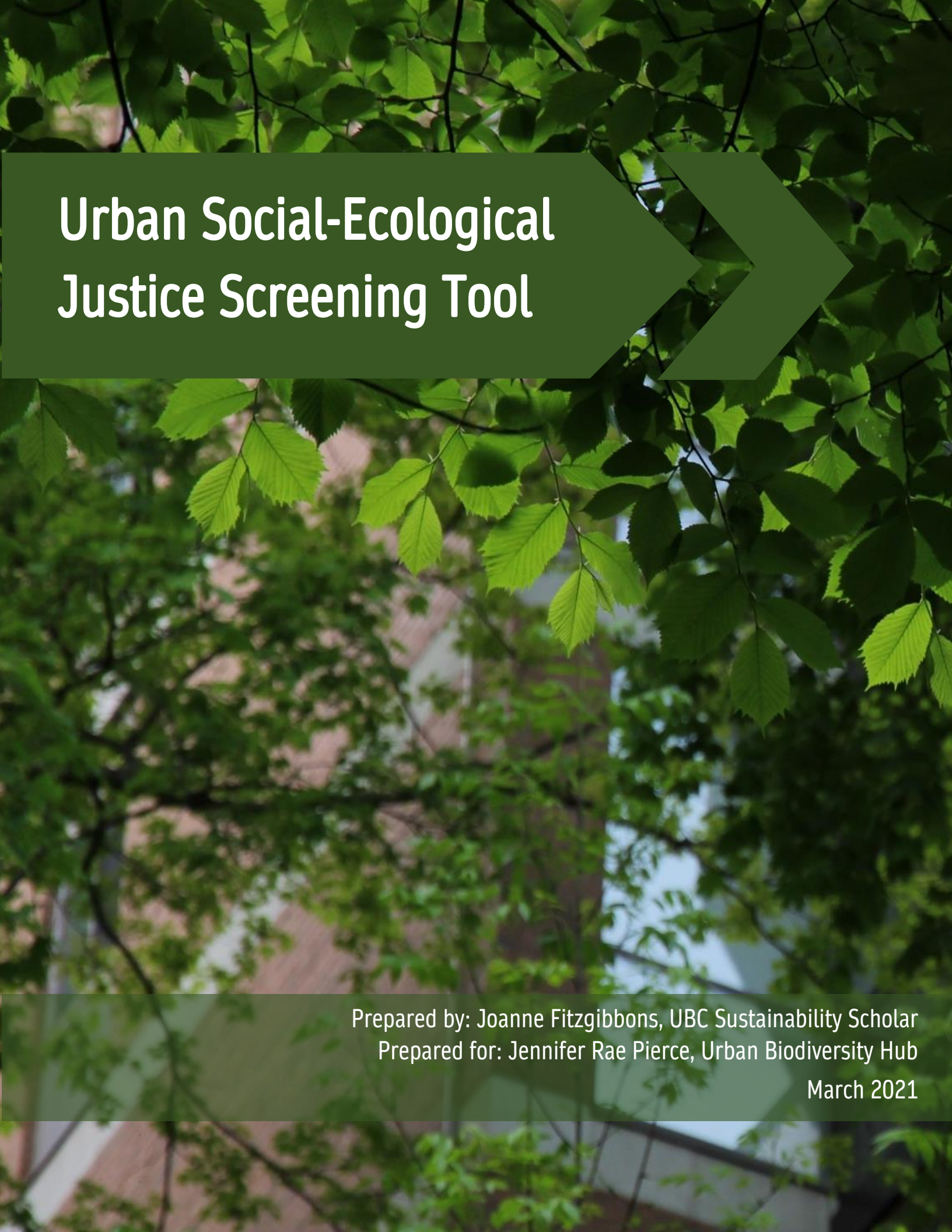

Urban Social-Ecological Justice Screening Tool

Prepared by: Joanne Fitzgibbons, UBC Sustainability Scholar
Prepared for: Jennifer Rae Pierce, Urban Biodiversity Hub

March 2021

Acknowledgements

I (the author, Jo Fitzgibbons) am an uninvited guest, grateful to be living and working on the traditional, ancestral, unceded and occupied territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations.

Any discussion about planning for land and life must critically engage with the ongoing history of colonialism and systemic oppression of First Nations, who have been the traditional stewards of these systems for thousands of years in the land known now as Canada.

I would like to personally thank my mentor Jennifer Pierce, who has taken on this project with great enthusiasm, embraced its ever-evolving scope, and been fully engaged despite juggling several other important commitments. Thanks also to the fellow researchers in this space at UBC and beyond, with whom we have had enriching conversations about justice and biodiversity, and whose perspectives have helped to inform this work. Last but not least, thanks sincerely to the UBC librarians who worked with me to understand and meet the standards of methodological rigour expected of scoping reviews.

It has been a great pleasure to work for the Urban Biodiversity Hub as a Sustainability Scholar and I look forward to maintaining a lasting connection with this organization.

Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organisations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability across the region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of Urban Biodiversity Hub (www.ubhub.org). The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Urban Biodiversity Hub or the University of British Columbia.

Suggested citation

Fitzgibbons, J. and Pierce, J.R. (2021) *Urban Social-Ecological Justice Screening Tool.* Urban Biodiversity Hub. Retrieved from www.ubhub.org

Introduction

Planning has a long history of trying to connect “town and country”, bringing nature’s benefits to people. In so doing, it has often created and reinforced patterns of segregation and injustice, and reshaped ecosystems to suit human needs. As science increasingly draws attention to the consequences of these actions, planning practice is turning toward a more ecological vision for cities. Nature-based solutions, ecosystem services or nature’s benefits, stream daylighting, pollinator gardening, urban greening, biophilic cities, stewardship, and rewilding are all words that exemplify this shift that you can expect to find in urban strategies and policy documents today.

At the same time, we know that creating and restoring “nature” in cities can bring unexpected consequences. For example, urban greening efforts can trigger “green gentrification” and price low-income residents out of their homes. Plants and animals are not safe from these concerns, either: even efforts that aim to support biodiversity can unintentionally lead creatures to harm by way of vehicle strikes, disease transmission, or ecological traps.

Creating and restoring biodiversity in cities is a good goal to reach toward, but we must pay attention to how these efforts might impact justice, for both people and nature.

The goal of this toolkit is to help you do just that: find opportunities to advance justice and urban biodiversity together.

About this tool

This tool explains how justice for people and nature can be integrated into urban biodiversity efforts. Justice is complex and can be understood in many different ways, so herein we have described five forms of justice. By analyzing your biodiversity plan or program according to each of these five forms, we hope that you will discover opportunities to transform your plan into a strategy that incorporates justice for all beings in a comprehensive way.

You can use this tool to:

- Understand each of the five forms of justice and discover examples of each in the context of urban biodiversity
- Identify ways to advance each form of justice (do's and don'ts)
- Self-assess your efforts through questions that help you identify areas of improvement

When applying this tool, we encourage you to adjust it to suit your local conditions. We also hope that the tool will highlight opportunities to correct any strategies that may reinforce existing patterns of injustice (even if unintentional) in advance.

How to apply this tool

The toolkit is divided into five sections, one for each form of justice. In each section, there are guiding questions for self-assessment and fillable text-boxes so that you can use this document as a worksheet. You can use the questions to improve a plan as you see fit, or to analyze a plan.

Recognitional Justice

Recognitional justice is all about avoiding humiliation, misrepresentation, and disrespect. Promoting recognitional justice means taking steps to enable people to participate fully in the social world, regardless of their culture, gender, race, or class.

Example problem: People without stable housing may sleep in public green and natural spaces. City government will often try to deliberately exclude unhoused people from using these areas because their presence may cause other residents to feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Example solution: To promote recognitional justice, we should recognize unhoused people as legitimate users of public space, and avoid making design choices that make it hard for them to use these areas. Planning and public engagement can be an opportunity to share information about the experience of unhoused people in parks, try to reduce stigma, and better provide services that unhoused people need to feel safe and cared for.

Do's:

- Do acknowledge and appreciate the identities of oppressed groups.
- Do speak the truth about how and why marginalized groups are oppressed.
- Do find and dismantle biased practices within our institutions.

Don'ts:

- Don't speak on behalf of (or over) oppressed groups that we don't belong to.
- Don't spread misinformation or stereotypes.
- Don't disrespect people because of their position in life.

Questions to consider to achieve recognitional justice...

1	"Equity-seeking groups are those that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination and actively seek social justice and reparation."[1] What equity-seeking groups are relevant for your context? What unique experiences or history might they have with this topic? *Scenario: Throughout history, LGBTQ2S+ or "queer" people have experienced surveillance and violence in public parks. Planning for new or restored parks and green spaces should consult with LGBTQ2S+ people to understand how to make these spaces safer for them.*
2	Why are some people in your city oppressed, i.e. what is the history and what are current practices that undermine some people? Will this initiative be reinforcing these historic patterns? How can it work to correct them instead? How can this plan be used to "own up" to historical acts of oppression (i.e. truth and reconciliation)? *Scenario: Many neighbourhoods in the United States are racially segregated because of historical "redlining" practices, i.e. denying Black residents mortgages, public services, and housing in particular neighbourhoods. New plans have an opportunity to tell the truth about how city governments were involved in these practices.*
3	What perspectives are represented on the planning team? How might it inform the way this plan gets written? How might this plan look different if somebody else wrote it? *Scenario: Planners might assume that new natural areas are universally welcomed, but low-income residents may worry about being "priced out" of their home.*

[1] Verbatim definition by Canada Council for the Arts. Retrieved from: https://canadacouncil.ca/glossary

Distributive justice

Distributive justice is all about addressing spatialized and material inequalities.

Example problem: Informal settlements are often left out of public servicing and residents live without access to running water, sanitation, accessible transportation networks or safe green spaces.

Example solution: Planners can work with residents in informal settlements to find ways of improving their living conditions without displacing them – for example, by finding greening opportunities that benefit the community as well as biodiversity, such as community food gardens.

Do's:

- Do "raise the floor" by planning for additional resources for communities that were historically left out, or that have less now.
- Do redistribute resources that are currently allocated inequitably. For example, if a wealthy neighbourhood receives a lot of park maintenance funding, re-allocate some of that funding to a park in a less well-off neighbourhood.

Don'ts:

- Don't plan to add infrastructure, green space or programs without ensuring that the programs will improve marginalized neighbourhoods.
- Don't reinforce existing inequalities. For example, large or biodiverse natural areas are often in wealthy areas, so planning conservation around these areas can unintentionally reproduce those inequalities.

Questions to consider to achieve distributive justice...

4	What are the existing material and spatial inequalities for your context? Include a map, chart, or otherwise communicate these in the plan. *Scenario: In many cities, lower-income people and higher-income people live in different neighbourhoods. In lower-income neighbourhoods there may be fewer trees and green spaces. A plan could include a map that shows tree canopy overlapped with income by neighbourhood to demonstrate this inequality.*
5	How will you ensure that this plan benefits people equitably? How will you ensure resources go to those that need them most? Is there an opportunity for this plan to help correct inequalities, or issue reparations for past harm done? *Scenario: Per the previous example, if lower-income neighbourhoods have fewer trees, a plan could prioritize placing greenways, green infrastructure or similar amenities in those neighbourhoods. However, see the next question for an example of how this can go wrong.*
6	How might actions or programs you write into this plan (directly or indirectly) harm a particular group? What are some actions you can include to minimize harm? *Scenario: A new planned greenway could trigger gentrification. Anti-displacement housing policies can be implemented so that low-income people can enjoy the new green amenity without being priced out of their home.*

Procedural justice

Procedural justice is about being meaningfully invited and welcomed to participate in all phases of decision-making and planning, and to know that participation will influence outcomes.

Example problem: People who have experienced oppression by government may not feel comfortable speaking to government officials.

Example solution: Partner with grassroots community leaders and facilitators from those communities who can help oppressed residents feel safe and heard. These leaders can also teach government staff about how to improve public engagement to be more fair and inclusive.

Do's:

- Do collaborate with traditional stewards of the land when making decisions about that land or anybody's ability to thrive on it.
- Do have a way of reporting back to the community to explain how their engagement influenced the final plan or outcomes.
- Do build trust with communities that have been hurt by top-down decision-making. Address their barriers to participation – for example, by compensating them for their time and effort.

Don'ts:

- Don't use "one size fits all" approaches to public consultation.
- Don't tokenize marginalized residents, i.e. flatter them during engagement and then not follow through on their requests or suggestions.

Questions to consider to achieve procedural justice...

7	Are the marginalized people identified in Question A being specifically invited to help build the plan? Might they face any barriers that would make it hard for them to participate? What support can be provided to address those barriers? *Scenario: Informal or undocumented residents may have been identified as an equity-seeking group. Some members of these communities may not trust government because they are concerned about being scrutinized or not seen as legitimate. Working with grassroots community organizers from target communities can be one way of reaching people who may not want to speak directly to government officials.*
8	How will you report back to people who participate in public engagement? How will you clarify the impact of their contributions? *Scenario: A plan might partner with an organization that works with immigrants in order to reach and consult people who are not fluent in the official language. Planners can send a "What We Heard" document containing a summary of what they heard in public engagement. They may work with the partner organization to translate and distribute this information back to participants, so they know how their voices have impacted the plan.*
9	When this plan has been implemented, how will you measure whether it has been successful for marginalized communities? What is the plan for monitoring and evaluation? How can you include justice considerations as a metric for success? *Scenario: Work with marginalized communities to determine what outcomes they would like to see the plan deliver. Incorporate metrics for those outcomes in your strategy for reporting back to council and to the community.*

Ecological justice

Ecological justice deals with the wellbeing and fair treatment of nonhuman life (i.e. plants and animals), land, and Earth.

Example problem: A river running through the centre of the city once supported a vibrant ecosystem of frogs, fish, and insects. With increasing urbanization, runoff from nearby streets has polluted the river and pushed these creatures out.

Example solution: A “rights of nature” approach could grant legal rights or personhood to the river. The wellbeing impacts caused by urbanization could then be legally seen as mistreatment or abuse, and actions that harm the river can be brought to court.

Do’s:

- While environmental plans generally design infrastructure carefully so as to minimize disruption to ecosystems, do also consider the rights and wellbeing of individual organisms, and word communications carefully to encourage the consideration of all beings in a respectful manner.
- When creating or restoring natural areas, do pay attention to the surroundings and circumstances. Consider sensitive seasons such as nesting periods or migration times. Provide guidance for workers on how to react respectfully to wildlife disturbed during work.

Don’ts:

- Don’t create habitat improvements or plan for “access to nature” or other goals that may accidentally put plants and animals at risk to things like disease transmission, negative human-wildlife interactions, or vehicle strikes.
- Don’t allow mitigation actions to replace harm-reduction measures.

Questions to consider to achieve ecological justice...

10	Is the idea of "rights for nature" fundamental to this plan? How might the idea of nature having "rights" influence the way biodiversity is planned for? *Scenario: Curridabat, Costa Rica gives legal citizenship to pollinators in their "Sweet City" plan. As legal persons, these creatures have certain rights, and also cannot be owned.*
11	How might proposed changes to infrastructure or programs impact the ability of plants and wildlife to be well and safe? What are the foreseeable risks and how can they be mitigated? *Scenario: Creating new habitat in human-dominated areas can encourage some animals to return to the area. Enabling those animals to be safe and well may mean ensuring they have safe passage over busy roads, or that they are cared for during development works.*
12	Does the monitoring and evaluation strategy for the plan include some way of measuring ecological impacts, or the wellbeing of plants and animals? *Scenario: A biodiversity or related plan could include many actions to create or restore natural areas. Baseline data could be collected about the number and health of species that currently visit those areas. In the future, a similar assessment can be conducted to determine how the intervention has supported various species.*

Relational justice

Relational justice is about respecting and maintaining the opportunity to have a sustainable, fulfilling relationship with nature.

Example problem: Cities often provide parks and natural areas with leisure and recreation uses in mind. They may prohibit other ways of being in the space, such as foraging for food or medicine, or designing the space in a way that restricts alternate uses.

Example solution: Consider creating areas that enable or uplift many different ways of being in natural areas, such as conducting sacred practices or foraging. Call attention to alternatives using signage, naming, or other markers to support a variety of activities.

Do's:

- Do enable stewardship and direct exposure to natural areas so that residents have an opportunity to build a relationship and understanding of plants, animals and ecosystems.
- Do make space for diverse perspectives on urban nature and our relationship to it.

Don'ts:

- Don't reinforce only the dominant ways of accessing or relating to plants, animals and ecosystems (e.g. recreation, but not foraging or medicinal uses).
- Don't promote or plan for a single vision of urban nature and our relationship to it, when fulfillment looks different for everyone.

Questions to consider to achieve relational justice...

13	What kinds of relationships with nature are you planning for? Are there any kinds of relationships that you might be leaving out, or preventing? *Scenario: In many cities, "Parks and Recreation" are one department. Planning for parks as recreational spaces may limit the kinds of wildlife that can exist there. On the other hand, planning protected areas for wildlife can limit the kinds of activities that are allowed there – for example, by prohibiting foraging, hunting, or ceremonies.*
14	How might peoples' relationships to *each other* or their communities be mediated by their relationship with nature? How can your plan support those existing relationships, or help people form new communities around nature? *Scenario: Neighbourhood stewardship efforts or nature-focused festivals can foster a sense of community and bring people together.*
15	How might peoples' relationships with nature be harmed or helped by proposed actions in this plan? How will you minimize that harm and try to protect peoples' relationships with nature? *Scenario: Putting up a fence might keep people from trampling on a delicate ecosystem. In so doing, this might prevent local people from foraging for traditional uses. The best solution would be to collaborate with local groups to find a solution that protects the sensitive area and also allows them to continue foraging.*

Further reading

Readings on multiple forms of justice

Anguelovski, I., Brand, A. L., Connolly, J. J. T., Corbera, E., Kotsila, P., Steil, J., … Argüelles Ramos, L. (2020). Expanding the Boundaries of Justice in Urban Greening Scholarship: Toward an Emancipatory, Antisubordination, Intersectional, and Relational Approach. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *110*(6), 1743–1769. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2020.1740579

Langemeyer, J., & Connolly, J. J. T. (2020). Weaving notions of justice into urban ecosystem services research and practice. *ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE & POLICY*, *109*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2020.03.021

Schell, C. J., Dyson, K., Fuentes, T. L., Roches, S. Des, Harris, N. C., Miller, D. S., … Lambert, M. R. (2020). The ecological and evolutionary consequences of systemic racism in urban environments. *Science*, *369*(6509). https://doi.org/10.1126/SCIENCE.AAY4497

Schlosberg, D. (2007). *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199286294.001.0001

Recognitional justice

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Young, I. M. (2001). Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *9*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9760.00115

Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-Socialist' age. *New Left Review*, (212), 68–93. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470756119.ch54

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus : critical reflections on the postsocialist condition*. Routledge. Retrieved from https://books.google.ca/books/about/Justice_Interruptus.html?id=sKGqCIlP_QIC&redir_esc=y

Distributive justice

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. *Harvard University Press*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2

See also the readings on multiple forms of justice.

Procedural justice

Cooke, B., & Kothari, U. (2001). Participation: the new tyranny? London: Zed Books.

Healey, P. (1998b). Collaborative planning in a stakeholder society. Town Planning Review, 69(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.69.1.h651u2327m86326p

Schlosberg, D. (1995). Communicative Action in Practice: Intersubjectivity and New Social Movements. *Political Studies*, *43*(203), 291–311. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1995.tb01713.x

Miller, D. (1999). Social Justice and Environmental Goods. In A. Dobson (Ed.), Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Ecological justice

Baxter, B. (2004). *A theory of ecological justice*. *A Theory of Ecological Justice*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203458495

Naess, A. (1972). The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement. A Summary. *Inquiry*, *16* (September), 95–100. Retrieved from: https://openairphilosophy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/OAP_Naess_Shallow_and_the_Deep.pdf

Okansen, M. (1997). The Moral Value of Biodiversity. *Amibo*, *26*(8), 541–545. Retrieved from: www.jstor.org/stable/4314663

Wallach, A. D., Bekoff, M., Batavia, C., Nelson, M. P., & Ramp, D. (2018). Summoning compassion to address the challenges of conservation. *Conservation Biology*, *32*(6), 1255–1265. https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13126

Relational justice

Yaka, Ö. (2018). Rethinking Justice: Struggles For Environmental Commons and the Notion of Socio-Ecological Justice. Antipode, 51(1), 353–372. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12422

Chan, K. M. A., Gould, R. K., & Pascual, U. (2018). Editorial overview: Relational values: what are they, and what's the fuss about? *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *35*(December), A1–A7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2018.11.003

Levine, J., Muthukrishna, M., Chan, K. M. A., & Satterfield, T. (2017). Sea otters, social justice, and ecosystem-service perceptions in Clayoquot Sound, Canada. *Conservation Biology*, *31*(2), 343–352. https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12795

Photo credit

Cover, pages 1-3, and page 10: Joanne Fitzgibbons, author.

Page 4: "Pride Flags - Scott Circle, DC", Creator: Ted Eytan. CC BY-SA 4.0 Retrieved from: https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/image/pride-flags-scott-circle-dc.png

Page 6: "Rocinha Favela Closeup", Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 Retrieved from: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/1_rocinha_favela_closeup.JPG

Page 8: "Open dialogue on what people want as priorities for their communities in Kigali, Rwanda", Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 3.0. Retrieved from: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a2/Open_dialogue_on_what_people_want_as_priorities_for_their_communities_in_Kigali%2C_Rwanda.JPG

Page 12: "Children Creek Nature Play", by nicolehols on Pixabay. Public Domain Certification. Retrieved from: https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2017/01/23/09/29/children-2001869_1280.jpg