

### 11.368: Response Paper 7

Although the tools of good neighbor agreements, community indicators, online resources, and zoning reform are still to a large extent in an embryonic form, these strategies seem more concrete and tenable to me than the readings last week describing government (in)action with respect to EJ. The Kellogg and Mathur article explores an issue with which I often wrestle: what is the impact of the internet on information dissemination and community empowerment? The digital divide is real and problematic but so too are the traditional barriers to information access; I found their analysis of “information rationing” to be compelling. The case study from Cleveland was less inspiring to me, more in its scope (trained only 35 people in its first two years) than in content. Visiting their site, the Environmental Health Action Guide does seem to be a worthwhile distillation of content into understandable and navigable pages for the novice web-user, though I wonder about the added value of this resource over the printed resource that was likely more broadly accessed by the communities that they wished to target. Further, I feel that using the internet solely as a means for “information access” is superficial. Learning to build sites and share information is an equally if not more important function, particularly for community organizing.

Kee Warner’s piece is a first step in understanding the scope of community indicator projects that include measures of sustainability and environmental justice. She found just five groups, and really only one complete example, that addressed environmental justice through educational content, policy statements, and implementation content. To me this could point to either a need for further research/organizing or it could point to the fact that EJ is not compelling to indicator projects, which would surprise me. I wonder whether searching by explicit terms like “sustainability” and “environmental justice” is the best means for identifying these projects. A practitioner might instead analyze all indicator groups’ goals and see where a strategic opportunity for addressing EJ might exist. Thankfully, Warner recognizes that an internet-based methodology circumscribes her research solely to groups with access to that technology and she further notes the need for more discourse-based research.

The Illsley article describes both a case study of and typical elements contained in a Good Neighbor agreement, including information sharing, joint inspections, emergency procedures, waste/emission reductions, commitment to employ local residents, and (on the part of community) commitments not to protest or sue. It was useful to me to think concretely about what these agreements might include, though I’d like to learn more about their implementation in the U.S. Further, I wonder if there is any danger, given the common power imbalance between communities and firms, in negotiating these (however informal) bilateral agreements. Is there potential for community to be coerced? Who signs this agreement? Might it quell more radical opposition? Finally, does this really “solve” the environmental injustice? The Hillman article speaks to these concerns with respect to participatory processes more generally. His concept of “co-option” is, I think, the most insightful aspect of this piece and worth continued exploration.

Finally, the NAPA piece, from the Executive Summary seemed to be just another broad restatement of what *ought* to happen with respect to EJ. However, (in ch. 3) the historical overview and particularly APA’s acknowledgement of the problems of zoning are institutional recognitions of historical injustices and steps on the path to change. Ch. 4 notes, “there are few mandates and little guidance by state[s]...that would trigger a local environmental justice review as part of planning and zoning” (37). Responding to this, the report offers scattered suggestions for improvement.