

Abstract

“Environmental Justice and Regional Change in the Central Valley” is an *interdisciplinary study of the social equity impacts of regionalism in environmental governance*. We systematically examine how racial minority, low-income, and immigrant communities fare in the rescaling of decision-making about regional land use, transportation, housing, water management. We examine four case studies of the relationship between environmental justice concerns and regional planning in California’s diverse social, political, and geographic landscapes of California’s Central Valley, dynamic site of much of the state’s wealth, but also the focus of many of its problems associated with growth and change. Each case is situated in Central Valley locales currently engaged in regional-scale planning: together they encompass the main types of environmental decision-making in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada regions. By using a comparative case methodology, we will identify key social, ecological, economic and political variables that shape the equity outcomes of regional planning, and can offer an analysis that is both place-based and sensitive to broader trans-local factors. The research questions are: How does regionalism affect the degree and kind of political voice accessible to typically marginalized populations? How are issues of social equity foregrounded, sidelined, or otherwise framed in regional-scale planning? How can disenfranchised communities engage with the complex scientific and technocratic knowledge associated with water, transportation, energy, waste-disposal, and land use systems? Can a community-grounded science program contribute to social equity in regional planning? We will conduct this research using a collaborative and interdisciplinary team drawn from the humanities, natural and social sciences. Collaborative and interdisciplinary research is necessitated first by the complexity of regional change, regional planning and multi-faceted dimensions of environmental justice itself. Second, the actors involved in regional planning are themselves representative of multiple disciplines and agency cultures and require matching fluency and cultural competence from the research team. Third, despite the necessity, such approaches to regional change are rare because of the complexity of integrating these disciplinary cultures. This study uses interdisciplinary methodologies to analyze and interpret the regional environmental planning process and policy outcomes relative to the goals of community organizations and environmental justice principles.