

DOES HOUSING INSECURITY INFLUENCE GREENSPACE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

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Urban political ecologists argue that built structure of cities is linked inextricably to ecological processes. Material objects like fruit trees and public parks or weed-laden alleyways can be traced to global capital networks that produce uneven and discriminatory urban natures (Heynen, Kaika, Swyngedouw, 2006). An overlooked yet persistent factor constraining access to urban nature and engagement may be involuntary neighborhood transiency, which can also be linked to remote capital networks involving U.S. housing markets.

Neoliberal policies and inputs have produced nature in the form of discreet, urban forest patches in the City of Atlanta, Georgia USA. The patches are what remains of four, former public housing projects—Leila Valley, Jonesboro North, Jonesboro South, and Thomasville Heights—razed in the early 2000s as a part of the city's public housing remake. Since then, the sites have remained vacant. However, there is no apparent community organizing for the benefit of the patches and no indication that nearby residents are aware of or interested in the ecological benefits of the properties undergoing forest succession, now owned by the city's housing authority, Atlanta Housing.

These instances of urban nature intersect with older, in-town neighborhoods, where the proportion of low-income renters is high and eviction rates are also higher than average

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(Johnson Gaither, Cross, Dobbs 2022). These characteristics contribute to higher rates of involuntary neighborhood transiency, which occurs when renters are forced or compelled to move at rates higher than average (Desmond, 2012; DeLuca, Wood, Rosenblatt, 2019). Such volatility is associated with a number of social problems such as job loss and poor school performance and may also constrain residents' ability to engage meaningfully with or advocate for neighborhood greenspaces because they move so often.

High levels of transiency in poor and predominantly Black Atlanta neighborhoods can be linked to broader market trends in the U.S. housing market. The recent U.S. mortgage foreclosure crisis resulted in a surplus of foreclosed homes owned by banks and other creditors, which were subsequently purchased by hedge funds and institutional investors. Historically, these actors had not been significant players in rental markets

but after the mortgage crises, were incentivized by government-backed securities and subsidies to expand into single-family rental markets (Raymond et al., 2018). Analysts suspect that there are high to very high proportions of such post-foreclosure, investor-owned properties in southeast Atlanta communities, like those surrounding the four forest patches. These are areas of the city with "relatively high poverty and vacancy rates and low median home values [that] tend to be African American" (Immergluck, 2013, p.ii). The preponderance of investor-owned rentals in socially marginal areas of the city increases the likelihood that low-income renters will leave their homes involuntarily, via eviction, for instance (Raymond et al., 2018). These compelled moves represent another instance in which outcomes for poor and working-class people are determined by remote, capital networks far removed from their everyday lives and challenges.