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Los Angeles' Riparian Renaissance: Rethinking the Geographies of Gentrification through Green City-Wide Infrastructure Projects

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Abstract

The neoliberal restructuring of global cities has allowed larger scales of investment that has catalyzed and enlarged gentrification processes. The impacts of gentrification today have the potential to transcend individual communities and affect the whole city. Building on the "rent gap" theory, I examine the reasons and ways capital is injected in capital-deficient neighborhoods, and how the inflow of capital affects the spatial scales in which the process of gentrification is occurring today. While there are studies on the impacts local green infrastructure-spending and greening initiatives can have on neighborhood gentrification, we know less about how large, arterial green infrastructure projects contribute to a city-wide understanding of gentrification. This thesis extends existing work on gentrification by using a case study of a 51-mile long green-infrastructure project that aims to revitalize the Los Angeles River. I focus on understanding the spatial scales at which processes of gentrification operate, through analyzing historic and current patterns of real estate speculation. By using historic home ownership loan corporation (HOLC) spatial data regarding where areas were restricted for loans, and modern turnover in acquisition of residential, industrial, and commercial properties, I study the impact the Los Angeles River has had on changing real estate speculation patterns along the Los Angeles River and its potential for future investment. As investors and developers start seeing spatial investment opportunities that transcend just a singular neighborhood, this research aims to further an emerging conversation on how city-wide green infrastructure projects can contribute to the theoretical conversation about the spatial patterns of gentrification in 21st-century global cities. The Los Angeles River offers hypotheses to be explored that green city-wide infrastructure projects can produce new forms of real estate speculation and acquisition, therefore contributing to a much larger discussion on the enlarging fiscal, spatial, and social processes of gentrification.

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city-wide understa Green Gentrification and the Unintended Consequences of Climate Action. The Yellow Vests movement in France and protests in Chile against metro fare increases showed that national climate actions, when designed without a consideration for equity, can have unintended consequences. This can happen in cities, too. These kinds of unintended consequences are called "green gentrification"—when investments in sustainable infrastructure and initiatives in a city push out and price out lower-income residents. Unaddressed, these barriers can limit climate action and policies from reaching their full potential. The Metrocable in Colombia. Phtoo by Philipp Alexander/Flickr. Avoiding Green Gentrification and Tackling Climate Change and Inequality Simultaneously. Los Angeles. Gentrification and Displacement. Policy Map. Gentrification: a process of neighborhood change that includes economic change in a historically disinvested neighborhood —by means of real estate investment and new higher-income residents moving in - as well as demographic change - not only in terms of income level, but also in terms of changes in the education level or racial make-up of residents. Urban renewal: Left behind in central city neighborhoods, low-income households and communities of color bore the brunt of highway system expansion and urban renewal programs, which resulted in the mass clearance of homes, businesses, and neighborhood institutions, and set the stage for widespread public and private disinvestment in the decades that followed.