

Review: Civic Ecology: Adaptation and Transformation from the Ground Up
by Marianne Krasny and Keith G. Tidball

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Civic ecology is described by Marianne Krasny and Keith Tidball as a “diverse set of community environmental stewardship practices, but also to a framework for understanding the role these practices play in larger social-ecological systems” (p. xvi). The authors are uniquely positioned to investigate civic ecology processes. Krasny is Professor of Natural Resources and Director of Cornell University's Civic Ecology Lab. Tidball is Senior Extension Associate in the Department of Natural Resources and Associate Director of the Civic Ecology Lab and also serves as state coordinator for the New York Extension Disaster Education.

Civic ecology, the authors argue, differs from other “ecologies” as it “focuses on hands-on stewardship practices that integrate civic and environmental values” (p. xvii). Although the concept of civic ecology is reported in the research literature on civic participation and planning, the authors distinguish their use of civic ecology by examining “people acting as stewards,” which has the potential for restoring nature in communities affected by crime, poverty, pollution, and general environmental degradation (Krasny & Tidball, 2015, p. xviii). Since it utilizes a social-ecological framework, civic ecology also examines the intersections of environmental stewardship with governments, organizations, organisms, and the physical environment (Krasny & Tidball, 2015, p. xviii). One of the foundations of civic ecology rests with the assumption that humans are not only a part of nature in terms of having the innate ability to care for nonhumans and their habitats, but derive a variety of benefits from nature (p. 6, 8).

Krasny and Tidball offer ten principles that characterize the civic ecology process (p. 5-12). These principles range from the idea that civic ecology practices recreate community (Principle 3) to the role of policymakers in civic ecology (Principle 10). The Principles and case studies of communities impacted by natural disasters (e.g. Hurricane Katrina, Mitch and Sandy), pesticide abuse that threatened native dragonflies in the Niiharu Satoyama region of Japan, tree planting initiatives, development of community gardens, and habitat restoration (e.g., Los Angeles River; Oyster restoration in the Long Island estuary) are the foundation of understanding the civic ecology process and how individuals shape their communities. As a theoretical base, the authors link several influential environmental philosophies to civic ecology, such as biologist Edward O. Wilson's (1984) *biophilia*, or the propensity of humans “to focus on life and lifelike processes” (p.1), Aldo Leopold's *land ethic*, and Arne Naess' *conservation ethic*. Connecting these particular philosophies to civic ecology allow the authors to link the affinity humans have with the natural world and to explain how the many facets of environmental stewardship manifest within community.

Krasny and Tidball claim that while civic ecology differs in philosophy and scope from civic environmentalism, citizen science, environmental justice, civic recreation, and urban ecological stewardship, the concept shares commonalities with these areas (p. xix-xxi). One might speculate, however, that citizen science and environmental justice are more than “commonalities” and are especially germane to civic ecology. For example, citizen science as a “form of science developed and enacted by citizens themselves” and created outside of formal institutions at a community level (Irwin, 1995) plays an essential role in stewardship, as the gathering of scientific data about local conditions is crucial to modifying policies and seeking new solutions. Environmental justice too, or the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (Environmental Protection Agency, 2012), connects to civic ecology especially in communities that bear a disproportionate burden of pollution and waste. These communities may also suffer from a disproportionate level of knowledge regarding hazards in their communities. Street science, not mentioned by the authors, also has connections with civic ecology through its emphasis on local knowledge and participatory-action research (Corburn, 2005).

If one is to offer additional criticism of this often inspirational text, it is with the following: long term community-wide projects such as the TreePeople's Citizen Forester training program, which began in 1974 in Los Angeles, are not mentioned in the text. In addition, discussion of *ecopsychology*, attributed to Theodore Roszak (1992) as a means to “see the needs of the planet and person as a continuum” (p. 14) would have furthered the authors' discussion. Lastly, Krasny and Tidball claim that civic ecology “shifts the focus from power, individual rights, advocacy, and planning to people acting as stewards of their environment and the community through such practices as allotment gardening, tree planting, and restoring watersheds” (p. xviii). Readers may question the author's claim here. Are power, rights, advocacy, and planning incompatible with “people acting as stewards”? Are these actions mutually exclusive? They suggest tidal shifts in power relations. For example, civic ecology Principle 9, which states that civic ecology processes are “embedded in cycles of chaos and renewal, which in turn are nested in social-ecological systems” (Krasny & Tidball, p. 5) is reminiscent of Foucault's (2000) notion of power relations, where “the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions” (p. 343). Principle 1 “civic ecology practices emerge in broken places” (p.4) and Principle 6, “civic ecology fosters well being” (p.8), suggests power relations, and perhaps even empowerment, which do not exist in a vacuum, but within a complex web of social interactions.

Even with its shortcomings, *Civic ecology: Adaptation and transformation from the ground up* remains an important contribution to the literature of community studies, environmental policy, and environmental sociology. Researchers – both students and faculty – will find the principles of civic ecology important guideposts. Now more than ever, with pressing environmental problems facing communities, stories of social action and stewardship are critical to redefining citizenship and ultimately, the relationship between humans and nature.

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