

# Welcome

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**A** “Anthropocene” is a word that in the past I would never have used, but like I said—in the past. I would not have used it in conversations with friends, colleagues or community research partners but will now challenge myself to do so. The word combines the root “anthropo”, meaning “human” with the root “-cene”, the standard ending for “epoch” in earthly time. The word forces me to think about and feel the pain of this period of human dominance where unchecked, world-wide money-making, money spinning, unbridled economic systems threaten humanity as it heaps upon us all and generations to come, what may become irreversible ecological harm. “We are living in a time many people refer to as the Anthropocene. Humans have become the single most influential species on the planet, causing significant global warming and other changes to land, environment, water, organisms and the atmosphere.”

According to Lutz and Neis, in *Making and Moving Knowledge* (2008), the principal challenge for human-kind in the 21st century “. . . will be to achieve a truly sustainable relationship with the environment while developing socio-economic and cultural systems that ensure human rights, comfort and dignity.” Environmental justice, in practice, suggests an engagement with movements, expanding the conception of social justice and the reality of injustices, in neighborhoods, in the air, in one’s food, at the workplace, in schools or where we recreate (Schlosberg, 2013). For this issue, the scope of contributions is broad, defining environmental justice within a number of contexts. For example, a submission described particulate matter and the effects on urban environments, another author discusses issues with water quality and the work of citizen scientists. The contributors contextualized but also personalized the notions of environmental justice.

Community engaged participatory policy work is explored in this issue as one approach with the potential to inspire this change. Our policy segment tells how public policy that is participatory in nature can contribute to environmental justice. Contributors explore how issues make it to political and policy agendas and how to influence the influencers who control these agendas. We invited policy briefs and articles reflecting analysis, formulation, implementation, and policy evaluation.

Concepts are clarified for us all to understand. For example, we can understand that hot air dries out soil – the soil becomes less absorbent. So when there are heavy rains more flooding occurs. Witness the loss of lives during the perilous August, 2021 flooding of Tennessee communities. Elsewhere, United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change delivers gloom-filled, if unsurprising, news that in the coming decades we will experience 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming. But with the right priorities, avoiding further warming remains within our reach, even as the intensity of natural disasters continues to mount. “The steps are clear: To reach net-zero emissions by 2050, fossil fuel use must be curtailed as promptly as possible, though removing carbon from the atmosphere will likely be necessary to mitigate the emissions that remain. A collective sense of urgency is key.” It is evident, we cannot wait, as members of communities, as a nation, as the human population on this planet, we can’t wait for decades before we make changes in our lives.

Co-authors for this special issue considered intersections of environmental justice and racism; tackling the ugly disproportionate impacts of environmental hazards on marginalized, minoritized urban and rural communities. The damage done is exponential in effect, and as a result these same communities are disproportionately hit by the COVID 19 virus as

well as its now more contagious variants and they, our neighbors, continue to live amidst the costs of hospital bills and overdue rent payments. These are deep, serious concerns. To call attention to and to give voice to these concerns, community engaged researchers and community catalysts (people with boots on the ground fighting for equity) are undertaking action-oriented inquiry. They are asking tough questions but we ask “who is listening?” Who is engaged in critical conversations and activism out of necessity in this anthropocene era? Are we as a public listening to the research, and are we willing to act? Can we learn from the intersections of race, economic status and environmental injustices apparent in Flint, Michigan and take action when we see this happening again and again in redlined, historically segregated communities.

Can we carefully listen to the voices of incarcerated women and men to help us dismantle the systemic racism pervasive in the criminal justice system? Can we act to lift and make resounding Black, LatinX and low income voices heard to expose the environmental hazards in their communities while having less access to our legal and political systems than White wealthy communities? Can we act?

Education and action must occur on the global scale. Consider the words of the youngest Nobel Prize laureate and activist for female education, Malala Yousafzai, who told the 2021 Girls Education Day summit that improving education had to be a key part of pandemic recovery. Malala spoke to the importance of investing in education, particularly for girls who had fewer opportunities just because of their gender. “The world is facing a girls' education crisis,” she said, “. . .with more than 130 million out of school around the world and many millions more at risk of not returning after the pandemic. . .their futures are worth fighting for.” Malala and we, the editors, fear for our Afghan sisters and their families.

We are compelled to amp the UN “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs). According to the United Nations agenda for Sustainable Development “We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all

their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.” There are 17 Goals: No poverty. Zero Hunger. Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Clean Water and Sanitation; Decent Work and Economic Growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Reduced Inequalities; Sustainable Cities and Communities; Responsible Consumption and Production; Climate Action; Life Below Water; Life on Land; Peace Justice and Strong Institutions; and Partnerships for the Goals.

**Need to know more?** Please check out [United Nations Sustainable Development – 17 Goals to Transform Our World](#) ; [Trans-forming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) | [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)

It is clear our humanity stands at a critical juncture. We have entered a new geologic era called the “Anthropocene,” because we humans have caused vast ecosystem devastation disordering the planet’s climate; driving species disappearance, while generating unfathomable amounts of toxic waste and unconscionably wasting life. We have perpetuated issues of racism and injustice to people, many of whom now are refugees, fleeing from dangers of genocide. Yet we say we want systems of justice. It’s been said that justice begins where inequality ends-- and I would add that accountability is needed to reach that juncture.

***Humans have become the single most influential species on the planet, causing significant global warming and other changes to land, environment, water, organisms, and the atmosphere.***