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## **Living Space: Post-environmentalist Politics in Local Places**

Despite the efforts in moving towards consensual international environmentally friendly political management, the promises of environmental movements—which were so innovative and influential in the past decades—seem doomed to fail. Environmental theory today is facing a double crisis. On one hand, its scientific representations of the world have become contestable, because scientific methodology and results are now treated as a matter of social negotiation. On the other hand, environmental politics, by endeavoring to reach universal consensus on the base of the (claimed) incontestable evidence natural science brings forth, has lost its power of political representation. The most upsetting consequence is the de-politicization of environmental politics itself.

The post-environmentalism approach proposes an alternative understanding of environmental politics. In recent years, a number of contributions to post-environmentalism have principally criticized the weaknesses and failures of conventional environmentalism. In my view, post-environmentalism may contribute to the recognition of the political relevance of non-humans (animals, plants, bacteria, etc.) and “more-than-humans” (mechanisms, devices, procedures, etc.) in determining the fate of environmental issues through their ordinary engagement with local places.

Environmental politics have always devoted particular attention to the fate of places and territories of human and non-human activity, and can be seen as the “spatial politics” *par excellence*. The space is crossed by multiple and invisible border-walls. The home-space, the rules, the configuration of public space, the use of the land, and the arrangement of the cities corresponds to determined possibilities, prescriptions, and impediments, whose content is both geographical and socio-political. By adopting a material semiotic approach, post-environmentalism may induce a re-politicization of environmental theory by providing an innovative analysis of territorial and material environmental political practices. Indeed, an alternative reading of the order of the world—as proposed by material semiotic theory—may lead us to appreciate the polysemic and multilayered relationships occurring amongst heterogeneous agents. This will, in turn, lead us toward a creative form of environmental politics.

This possibility is represented perfectly in the innovative view of environmental politics being advanced by contemporary critical urban gardening practices, which connect global environmental concerns with local commitment. Critical urban gardening is a form of “engaged ecology” that envisages the biological occupation of abandoned or marginalized space and activates material semiotic relations. It is a globally diffusing, spontaneous, and collective process through which people forge alliances with plants, animals, bacteria, fungi, and so forth to contest the shape of the city, to propose alternative planning solutions, and to advance alternative lifestyles in the urban context. This configures a new type of civic commitment and a post-environmentalist consideration of environmental issues, particularly those related with justice.

This project intends to investigate the emerging phenomenon of critical gardening in urban contexts in relation to environmental justice issues. The project questions whether—and how—critical gardening may be an appropriate means to contrast environmental inequalities in specific contexts and may, in the long run, suggest an effective strategy for

addressing spatial injustice in the urban planning process. Through data collecting and clustering work, the analysis aims to provide a topological representation of the most pressing environmental inequalities and injustices that characterize the urban socio-environmental structure in Rome, Italy. Specifically, the appreciation of the relevance of critical urban gardening in addressing environmental injustices will be evaluated on the base of its ability to deal with the spatial manifestations of unequal access to resources, services, infrastructures, and possibilities, such as those granted by the presence and care of green spaces and nature in daily living-contexts. A comparative analysis of the environmental injustices in Rome and the actions put forward by the critical gardening movement in the city itself is provided in order to investigate the potential and the reality of critical urban gardening to counter environmental injustice.