Stewardship Mapping: Understanding the multi-scaled, multi-site, and multi-sectored governance of the urban environment

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Abstract

Across the globe, urban environmental stewards actively manage ecological resources by working along with and outside of government agencies and private businesses. As stewards, individuals and civic groups conserve, manage, monitor, advocate for, and educate their friends, neighbors, and representatives about a wide range of quality of life issues regarding urban resources (Fisher et al. 2012). Researchers have devised ways to understand the social and spatial interactions among actors working on environmental stewardship, drawing particular attention to the importance of network brokers as bridge organizations (Connolly et al. 2013). This paper presents the framing, methods, and results from the Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project (STEW-MAP), highlighting data collected on civic groups and volunteer stewards in New York City, to demonstrate a systematic mixed-methods approach to analyzing urban environmental stewardship engagement, turf, and networks. We argue that the stewardship system is best understood by combining quantitative survey, network, and spatial analytic methods with qualitative interview methods (Connolly et al. in press). We also show how this method is being replicated in Chicago, Baltimore, Seattle, and Philadelphia (Romolini et al. 2013; Westphal et al. 2014), with potential for further cross-site and longitudinal comparison. By developing a comprehensive understanding of environmental stewardship as a part of urban governance we increase our capacity for urban sustainability and social-ecological resilience in a rapidly urbanizing world.

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