

CANADIAN JOURNAL of URBAN RESEARCH

REVUE CANADIENNE de RECHERCHE URBAINE

BOOK REVIEW

Marianne E. Krasny (ed)

Grassroots to Global: Broader Impacts of Civic Ecology

Comstock Publishing Associates, Cornell University Press, 2018.

ISBN: 987-1-5017-2197-7

In *Grassroots to Global: Broader Impacts of Civic Ecology*, Marianne E. Krasny and colleagues add rich detail to the study of civic ecology practices. Initially proposed by Krasny and Tidball (2012 and 2015), civic ecology practices are “local environmental stewardship actions to enhance green infrastructure and community-wellbeing in cities and other human-dominated systems.” As global-scale ecological problems cast a growing shadow over the recent profusion of local environmental stewardship actions, the book’s contributors pose a timely question: “in what ways do small-scale civic ecology practices—milkweed planting for monarch butterflies in Chicago, tree planting in Detroit, community gardening in the Bronx, or litter cleanups in Bangalore and Tehran—make a difference beyond the small spaces that they immediately transform?” In an intentionally transdisciplinary design, Krasny invited a team of twenty-five practitioner-scholars to trace the pathways that urban-based civic ecology practices make this difference (or not) in different contexts.

What makes this volume more than a celebration of local environmentalism is its focus on broader impacts of environmental stewardship, even tackling the notable task of understanding the titular link from “Grassroots to Global.” The book’s structure, its major analytical contribution, sorts the chapters into one of three transformational pathways: culture-building, knowledge-building and movement-building. Through the shaping of norms, production of new information and supporting collective action, stewards, their neighbors, members of their social networks and civil society institutions with which they interact are all “impacted.” As cities take on increasing ecological and political significance, understanding the processes by which urban activists channel their energies to wider spheres of engagement—such as through community expectations for behaviour that spread across social networks, citizen knowledge that influences policy, and social movement campaigns that defend ecosystems at different scales—is of critical importance.

The chapters deepen our understanding of the broader impacts of local stewardship practice, but when it comes to the spread of those impacts from grassroots to global there is still much to learn. In particular, a synthesis based on the lessons from the individual case studies would really push the conversation forward. While it’s clear that “determining the right configuration of geographic, symbolic, and governance scale is critical to expanding the influence of civic ecology practices,” much could be gained by evaluating the different mechanisms for scaling out local environmental stewardship through norms, knowledge and movements, especially by assessing and comparing their relative reach and effectiveness. For instance, why is it that some examples of civic ecology practice demonstrate neighborhood reach in their impacts whereas others are able to

Canadian Journal of Urban Research, Summer 2019, Volume 28, Issue 1, pages 88-89.

Copyright © 2019 by the Institute of Urban Studies.

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

ISSN: 2371-0292

go national? What are the conditions of possibility for civic ecology practice to have global impacts, and what might those look like? Here the discussion would also benefit from a comparative analysis between the three different pathways to identify the trade-offs between them. In particular, do culture- and knowledge-building sometimes detract from movement-building, and if so why and how? Although this book contributes to a good foundation for continuing this conversation, more critical work and new analytical tools are needed that explore the specific principles through which local efforts of ecological change-making can scale up and out, while at the same time reflexively critiquing the limits to those efforts and how their celebration may even come at the expense of broadening their impacts.

Other authors coming to *Grassroots to Global* looking for inspiration—Karney's own stated motivation in putting the book together—are sure to find it. But if we as scholar-practitioners continue to hold civic ecology practices as a much-needed source of change in a globalized world with local-to-global problems, the inspiration from this book will be to carry the analysis forward.

Evan Bowness, PhD Candidate
Centre for Sustainable Food Systems
University of British Columbia