

Dayle Shand (University of Pretoria)

Dayle Shand is a landscape architect with 8+ years of experience in landscape design practice. She currently lectures at the University of Pretoria and holds a ML (Prof) degree in landscape architecture, also from the University of Pretoria. In addition to lecturing in design and its applied theories, Dayle is also currently completing her PhD in landscape architecture. The topic of her investigation is on environmental justice related to local community parks. As a member of the Unit for Urban Citizenship, seated within the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria, and being passionate about building capacity in marginalised communities, Dayle is committed to taking the concept of environmental justice, and meaningful community engagement beyond the scope of her PhD into the design studio and realms of architectural practice.

From environmentalism to environmental justice: shifting perspectives in local community park provision

Long is the South African history of environmentalism. Short, its history of environmental justice. In a contemporary South Africa, where the environment has come to mean the places where people work, live and play – extending also to the urban environment; ‘nature’ is no longer the domain, only, of privileged white communities. Environmental justice advocates for the protection and equitable use of the earth’s natural resources, in ways that are beneficial to all members of society, and in particular the marginalised and oppressed. Where previously natural resources were ring-fenced only for the wealthy and white, now nature is meant for all. And yet, in urban environments – especially the most densely populated, informal, peripheral and racially marginalised communities – nature, in the form of local community parks is not equitably distributed. Moreover, the quality of those parks, which do exist, is not on a par with the facilities in more affluent communities. This is seen as a lasting legacy of the technocratic practices associated with the apartheid government, and as representative of environmental injustice. The current study thus conceptualises distributional aspects of environmental justice, in the City of Tshwane, at the city-wide scale, through spatial analysis, and at the intimate scale of the local community park, through a qualitative ethnographic process. Spanning a six-month period, data was collected through means of observation, interviews and focus groups, to provide a rich collection of narratives about people’s nearby nature. Seeking specifically the voices of the ‘Other’, the research aims to provide an alternative means of planning and provisioning public open spaces, which are representative, resilient and just. The collected narratives were coded to identify various themes related to the ‘environmentalist vs. environmental justice’ dichotomy, and act as a call to all spatial practitioners involved in designing and planning public open space in South African cities.

