The civics of urban nature: enacting hybrid landscapes
Andrew Karvonen and Ken Yocom

Abstract
Urban nature is typically managed through top-down, bureaucratic, and expert-driven approaches that tend to rationalize and simplify the interactions between humans and their surroundings. In the last few decades, there has been a significant push in cultural geography and the design disciplines to develop a relational ontology of urban nature, a perspective that emphasizes the hybrid connections between humans and nonhumans, built and unbuilt, social and natural. This perspective offers new and exciting ways of conceptualizing urban nature but it has not produced alternatives to technomanagerial governance. In other words, thinking differently about urban nature has yet to produce different ways of interacting with it. In this article, we argue that civic environmentalism offers promise for enacting a relational ontology by engaging urban residents in processes of democratic deliberation and action in the reworking of urban nature. We illustrate this approach with a case study of a community-led project to construct a pedestrian trail along an urban creek in Seattle, Washington. The example demonstrates how the concept of civic environmentalism embraces a relational perspective of urban nature while also producing generative forms of political action that provide opportunities for integrating relational thinking with deliberative forms of local environmental governance.

Keywords
Civic environmentalism, environmental governance, urban nature, relational ontology, expertise, design disciplines, Seattle, Washington

Introduction
Cultural geographers, notably those in the vibrant field of urban political ecology, have made great strides in recent years to reinterpret the role of nature in cities (see Arnold, 1996; Desfor and Keil, 2004; Gandy, 2002; Gandy, 2008; Heynen, 2006; Heynen et al., 2006; Hinchliffe, 2007; Kaika, 2005; Keil, 2003; Keil, 2005; Murdoch, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2004). Drawing on a wide range of philosophical inspirations, from neo-Marxism and Critical Theory to post-feminism, post-structuralism, and non-representational theory, these theorists have interrogated and reframed the complex interactions between nature and the built

environment. Rather than prescribing an ecocentric form of urban development or a socially sustainable argument that centers on nature's services, they urge us to embrace the ill-defined, hybrid, and cyborg character of urban nature through a perpetual "insistence on the mongrel nature of the world" (Bakker and Bridge, 2006: 16).

This work is a subset of the 'relational turn' in cultural geography that moves away from modern dichotomies between subject and object, culture and nature, built and unbuilt, artificial and natural, and instead, emphasizes the linkages, connections, and relations that knit our world of interdependent systems together. Relational thinking has a long lineage of influential thinkers, notably Leibniz and Whitehead, and is prevalent in contemporary discourses on ecology, complexity, network society, globalization, and so on (Graham and Healey, 1999; Harrison, 2007; Harvey, 1996; M. Jones, 2009; O. Jones, 2009; Latour, 2004; Murdoch, 2006). With respect to urban nature, relationality shifts the emphasis from the boundaries that define humans and nonhumans to focus on the interactions between them. Cities are understood as relational achievements rather than framed in constructivist terms as dense nodes of human culture or in realist terms as agglomerations of material consumption. Commenting on the promise of relational thinking, Latour (2004: 220) writes, "relativism would disappear with absolutism. There would remain relationalism, the common world to be built."

This notion of 'the world to be built' is a central focus of the urban design disciplines, and with respect to urban nature, involves practitioners of landscape architecture and ecological planning. These disciplines have developed a similar relational ontology to emphasize the connections that hold the world together (Howett, 1998; Meyer, 1994; Meyer, 2005; Mozingo, 1997; Ndubisi, 1997; Spirn, 1998; Spirn, 2002). However, their inspiration for a relational understanding of urban nature does not come from advances in philosophy and social theory but rather from the historical roots of landscape architecture practice, particularly the work of Frederick Law Olmsted in the nineteenth century. Olmsted was adept at combining aesthetics and natural science, form and function, the artificial and the natural on a wide range of influential projects but his nuanced approach was lost during much of the twentieth century as disciplinary specialization created a divide between those who interpreted urban nature using scientific and rational principles and those who emphasized aesthetics and experience (Howett, 1998; Mozingo, 1997). In the 1980s, a host of theorists and practitioners (many of them students of noted ecological planner Ian McHarg) revived Olmsted's vision in an attempt to replace dogmatic, deterministic, and polarized understandings of urban nature with notions of nuance, complexity, and hybridity (Hough, 1995; Johnson and Hill, 2002; Spirn, 1984; Spirn, 1998; Thomson and Steiner, 1997; Waldheim, 2006). Ndubisi sums up this new perspective, writing that "the underlying wisdom here is that we need to understand the character of the landscape not only in terms of its natural processes, but also in terms of the reciprocal relationship between people and the landscape. The important word is *relationships*" (1997: 10-11, emphasis in original).

Despite the interdisciplinary confluence of theoreticians and practitioners on the relational qualities of urban nature, there has been a surprising lack of emphasis on transforming these perspectives into new modes of political organization and civic action. In cultural geography, the term 'politics' is frequently invoked to problematize conventional notions of urban nature and this different mode of thinking is understood as a political act in itself (O. Jones, 2009). Meanwhile, the development of a constructive program of collective civic and governmental action to realize alternative futures is rarely considered. As Castree

(2003: 209) notes, "It is one thing to have a new political vocabulary, but quite another to have substantive political concepts that ground new forms of practice." Bruno Latour's (1998; 2004) prescription for a new political ecology of relationalism has been a particular target of critique. Castree (2003: 204) argues that Latour "has yet to flesh out precisely what 'politics' might mean in a world of actor-networks" and Murdoch (2006: 157) adds that "Latour's work on political ecology is strong on *reconceptulizations* of science and politics in the wake of political ecology but is weak on the specific steps that might be taken to shift scientific and political *practices* in the desired direction" (emphasis in original). Part of the problem of enacting a relational ontology is that its proponents are deeply suspicious of (or even outright hostile to) conventional understandings of human agency and governance structures. To prescribe a political framework runs the risk of repeating the same mistakes that plague existing forms of environmental management.

A new politics of urban nature is equally nascent in the design disciplines. Landscape architects and ecological planners tend to avoid radical political approaches and choose to practice within existing governance structures where they can rework urban nature on a project-by-project basis. This is not surprising since these professions already occupy a privileged position as recognized experts of urban form and development. As such, their projects serve as one-off examples of different modes of human-nature relations with the hope that policymakers and bureaucrats will translate these exemplars into revised development codes and regulations as well as 'best practices' of environmental design and management (see Bulkeley, 2006).

In short, neither theorists nor practitioners of urban nature have devised programs for *collective* action to develop and enact new socionatural assemblages. As Gandy writes, we await "a new kind of environmental politics that can respond to the co-evolutionary dynamics of social and bio-physical systems" (2006: 72-3; also see Smith, 1996). So what might this 'new kind of environmental politics' entail? How can a relational ontology of urban nature be put into action? Is it possible to modify existing modes of urban environmental governance or is it necessary to forge entirely new approaches to urban nature? Who should decide what types of relations are preferable and how can these new relations be realized?

The aim of this article is to address these questions by forwarding civic environmentalism as one promising route for enacting a relational ontology of urban nature. Civic environmentalism is most often associated with reform-based approaches of environmental management such as ecological modernization and green governance that call for incremental improvements to existing governance structures rather than their outright replacement. However, a small group of scholars who study environmental justice, sustainable community development, and deliberative democracy see the potential for civic environmentalism as a radical break from the norm via bottom-up approaches of local political deliberation and action (Agyeman, 2005; Agyeman and Angus, 2003; Agyeman and Evans, 2006; Hempel, 1999; Light, 2003; Light, 2006; Roseland, 2005; Shutkin, 2000). It is here where we see the potential for the relational ontology of urban nature as forwarded by geographers and design practitioners to be enacted. Civic environmentalism does not represent a panacea for the resolution of environmental and social conflicts but it does offer one promising avenue for transforming a relational perspective of urban nature into action by championing place-based, participatory, and generative activities aimed at changing human-nature relations.

In this paper, we begin with a brief description of the dominant approach of urban environmental management that we characterize as 'technomanagerial governance'. We then offer civic environmentalism as an alternative approach that disrupts the embedded structures of contemporary environmental management in place of inclusive democratic deliberation aimed at concrete action. We illustrate the resonance between civic environmentalism and the emerging relational ontology of urban nature through a case study of a community-based pedestrian trail project in Seattle, Washington. Based on this example, we conclude that civic environmentalism offers the potential to enact a relational ontology of urban nature while providing fertile ground for productive dialogue and collaboration between social scientists and design practitioners who study and rework human-nature relations in cities.

Technomanagerial governance of urban nature

For over a century, environmental management in the US has been dominated by technomanagerial forms of governance. The expert management of human-nature relations began with the Sanitary Movement in the late nineteenth century as public officials recognized the indelible connections between human health conditions and polluted urban environments (Corburn, 2009; Melosi, 2000). The key to improving human health in urban environments was to control and subdue nature, a strategy that reached its apogee in the Progressive Era when human-nature relations were defined by a simple formula: "Progress equals the conquest of nature by culture" (White, 1996: 121). In cities, the conquest and simplification of nature involved the development of massive infrastructure systems for water, sewage, electricity, and transportation which, in turn, created a class of technical professionals and engineers educated and trained to shape the complexities of urban nature to meet human needs. The control of nature solidified the technical professional or expert as the central agent of societal and urban progress and also contributed to the development of a bureaucratic structure of municipal governance that favored long-term, comprehensive urban planning (Schultz, 1989; Schultz and McShane, 1978). Dryzek (1997) aptly describes this as the evolution of 'administrative rationalism' whereby environmental problems were resolved through the harnessing of scientific expertise by a strong centralized governance structure, producing a decidedly top-down form of urban environmental governance with the state as primary arbiter of human-nature relations.

To many, the emergence of the environmental era in the US in the 1960s is heralded as a turning point in cultural attitudes toward human-nature relations. Rachel Carson's landmark work, *Silent Spring* (1962), is often described as the catalyst for a new conception of human-nature relations defined by limits, consequences, and ultimately, stewardship (see Lytle, 2007; Sideris and Moore, 2008). While this new perspective gradually came to dominate social and political discourses on nature, the technomanagerial form of environmental governance proved resilient. Technical experts and bureaucrats continued as the primary actors in shaping human-nonhuman relations, although their work was now supplemented with emerging scientific insights from biology and ecology. Furthermore, the reach of the federal government – the ultimate bureaucratic governor – was expanded and solidified through the introduction of 'command-and-control' legislation such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act, as well as the establishment of the US Environmental Protection Agency (Landy et al., 1994). Today, technomanagerial governance serves as the backbone of sustainable development, green governmentality, and ecological modernization, with human-nature relations defined by

acceptable pollution levels and enforcement activities of the state. Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006: 55) summarize this approach, stating, "Through a detached and powerful view from above – a 'global gaze' – nature is approached as a terrestrial infrastructure subject to state protection, management and domination." Centralized bureaucratic environmental governance guided by expertise, governance, power, and generalizable knowledge is widely accepted as the most effective way to manage nature.

Critics of technomanagerial governance have noted that the approach relies on legislation to target single pollutants, discrete sources, and single media because these are more accessible and soluble to government regulation (John, 1994). There is no adherence to a systems view of environmental pollution but rather an emphasis on addressing discrete parcels of pollution in isolation (Shutkin, 2000). Roseland (2005: 196) describes the compartmentalized approach to environmental management "as an administrative problem, to be solved by better management – understood as cutting the environment into bite-sized pieces." Relational theorists interpret this as a *topographic* rather than *topologic* perspective of nature, one that is decidedly Euclidean in character (Bingham and Thrift, 2000; Murdoch, 2006; Whatmore, 2002). The world is parsed into objects and subjects, humans and nonhumans, built and unbuilt, while failing to recognize the unavoidable connections between them. This highly structured approach to environmental governance often results in the shifting of the impacts from environmental pollution from one medium to another (e.g., air to water) or from one geographic locale to another, resulting in unintended consequences and populist protest from those affected by the unmitigated spread of pollution (Landy et al., 1994; Shutkin, 2000; Shutkin, 2005).

The failures of compartmentalized environmental management have been highlighted by a number of social groups, notably environmental justice activists. Since the 1980s, the environmental justice movement has exposed actions of systemic racial and class discrimination, critiquing technocratic environmental management by highlighting the suppressed voices of community residents adversely affected by environmental policies (Brulle, 2000; Pellow, 2002; Schlosberg, 2007). They call for more democratic forms of policy-making to shift knowledge generation from the universal realms of science, engineering, and economics to specific temporal, spatial, and material contexts. If technomanagerialism is the rational approach to environmental management, environmental justice can be understood as its emotive conscience (John, 1994; John, 2004).

Environmental justice and related social movements provide a biting critique of environmental management and the dominance of the state in governing urban nature, but these critiques often fall short of proposing and developing alternative forms of urban governance. John (1994) argues these populist forms of environmental politics are inherently anti-governmental and thus, only serve as a check on existing top-down forms of governance (also see Swyngedouw, 2009). Agyeman (2005) counters that the 1991 Principles of Environmental Justice address both protest and constructive forms of action, but concedes that the latter are typically deemphasized due to the disenfranchised role of these actors in politics and policymaking processes. He writes, "Grassroots environmental justice groups are often lacking in their ability to frame the issue, seize on political opportunities, and mobilize the political and financial resources need to be more proactive, that is, heading off problems before they arise" (Agyeman, 2005: 105-6). And even when environmental justice activities are constructive rather than reactionary, they tend to result in an upgrade or reshuffling of

existing forms of environmental management rather than a substantive reordering of human-nature relations (John, 1994).

Civic environmentalism as an alternative form of governance
One alternative to the top-down approach of technomanagerialism and the bottom-up approach of environmental justice – a questionable dichotomy in itself – is the approach of civic environmentalism. Coined by political scientist DeWitt John, the term 'civic environmentalism' describes a form of environmental governance that emerged in the US in the 1980s as the public became increasingly skeptical of the federal government to address persistent environmental pollution problems (John, 1994; John, 2004; John and Mlay, 1999; Landy et al., 1999; Sirianni and Friedland, 2001; US EPA, 1997). John (2004: 219) summarizes the approach as follows:

> Civic environmentalism is the process of custom designing answers to local environmental problems. It takes place when a critical mass of community leaders, local activists, and businesspersons work with frontline staff of federal and state agencies and perhaps with others to address local issues that they care about deeply. Civic environmentalism cannot succeed without some participation and support by government agencies, but it is essentially a bottom-up process that epitomizes reformers' aims to build a results-based sense of common purpose in environmental governance.

John's examples of successful civic environmentalism projects include the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Florida Everglades restoration, and the reduction of agricultural chemical use in Iowa, among others (John, 2004; John and Mlay, 1999). These are noteworthy projects that include "economic incentives, technical assistance, public education, and voluntary government programs, all tailored to local conditions" (John, 1994: 32) as well as collaboration between experts in business, government, universities, and nonprofit organizations. The prescribed mix of market and regulatory approaches is akin to the radical center or Third Way politics of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair in the 1990s, with environmental management shifting from the federal to state and local governments to allow for more customization of governmental solutions and increased collaboration between state and local government agencies as well as non-regulatory actors (Rubin, 2002).

John's interpretation of civic environmentalism has been criticized by scholars of urban social movements, notably environmental justice and sustainable community development, who argue that this model is merely a reframing of technomanagerial governance rather than a replacement with more radical approaches. In particular, Agyeman characterizes John's approach as 'technical reformist' due to its continued focus on existing modes of environmental governance that are top-down, bureaucratic, and expert-dominated (Agyeman, 2005; Agyeman and Angus, 2003; Agyeman and Evans, 2006). Indeed, John is at pains to define civic environmentalism as a 'complement' rather than a 'replacement' to conventional environmental governance, an evolution rather than a revolution in the management of human-nature relations (John, 1994; John, 2004).

John's critics forward more radical forms of civic environmentalism that place local residents and organizations at the center of environmental governance activities, calling for the replacement of technomanagerial forms of environmental management with local

deliberation and action. The gold standard for several proponents of this form of civic environmentalism is the Dudley Street neighborhood in Boston where in the mid-1980s, residents founded a community-based non-profit agency to simultaneously address environmental protection, economic development, and social cohesion through constructive urban development projects (Agyeman, 2005; Agyeman and Angus, 2003; Shutkin, 2000). As the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI, 2009) website states:

> DSNI's major accomplishment has been, and continues to be, organizing and empowering the residents of the Dudley Street neighborhood to create a shared vision of the neighborhood prioritizing development without displacement and bringing it to reality by creating strategic partnerships with individuals and organizations in the private, government, and nonprofit sectors.

While this description is similar to John's definition of civic environmentalism, the politics practiced by DSNI suggests that civic environmentalism can do more than reform existing modes of government and instead, create entirely new modes of collaborative problem solving at the community level, the most basic level of political organization (Dryzek, 2000; Rubin, 2002; Shutkin, 2000). Like urban social movements, civic environmentalism engages citizens at the local level but replaces protest with deliberation and action aimed at creating and maintaining more desirable conditions. In this sense, civic environmentalism is a misnomer because it is not an anthropocentric form of environmentalism but rather a *politics of urban relations* that recognizes the interdependence of social, environmental, and economic problems. From our perspective, this approach is defined by three qualities that differentiate it from both technomanagerial governance and populist protest: an emphasis on the complex hybrid relations between humans and their material surroundings, an emphasis on the local scale as the venue for reworking these relations, and a commitment to deliberative and action-oriented forms of political engagement. These qualities are described in the following paragraphs.

Like the relational ontology of urban nature described above, civic environmentalism is founded on the understanding that urban residents are embedded in their material surroundings and intertwined with their human and nonhuman neighbors. The physical world is not simply a platform for practicing environmental politics; it is co-constitutive in the practice of understanding and reorienting ecological flows (Reid and Taylor, 2003). This grounding in place leads to multifaceted relations, problems, and opportunities; it is a pluralist interpretation of urban nature that recognizes the validity of multiple perspectives and experiences. As Rubin (2002: 336) writes, "A defining characteristic of civic environmentalism is that there are many different kinds of environmental problems and different points of view."

The relational perspective of civic environmentalism is focused on the local level, a scale that is distinct from the broad purview of oversight and management as practiced by federal and state governments. It is understood that the local scale is where environmental problems are more comprehensible, accessible, and tractable; it is the operational level of environmental problem-solving (Hempel, 1999; John, 2004). In this regard, the particulars of place are championed over universal interpretations of an issue because it is at the local scale where those who are most affected can identify the most important problems. Rubin (2002:

349) makes an even simpler point, arguing that "people care passionately about what is close to them."

This emphasis on the local is particularly divisive because conventional modes of environmental governance increasingly champion the importance of the global scale while situating the local at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Luke (2009: 14) writes, "Local knowledges, vernacular technics, and civic sciences as environmental mediations….are dismissed before the privileging of international knowledge formations, transnational technical networks, and national scientific societies that embrace globality." Civic environmentalism challenges the primacy of the global as the proper scale for environmental politics and management; the local is not the *only* scale of environmental politics but it is recognized as the most significant. Relational thinkers help here by discounting the distinction between local and global and instead, interpret scale as merely longer and shorter chains of association. Thrift (2004: 59) sums up this perspective, writing, "space is no longer seen as a nested hierarchy moving from 'global' to 'local'…. what counts is connectivity." The scale-dependent perspective is thus replaced by a prioritization of connectivity across spatial scales and through political spheres.

This emphasis on the local attempts to rescue the maligned term 'community' from nostalgic and conservative interpretations; here, community is understood as the core of democratic politics (Barber, 2003). Shutkin (2000: 31) summarizes this emphasis on a local politics of place, writing, "In a civic democracy, place and community are mutually constitutive and reinforcing." Furthermore, John (2004: 238) states that "the spirit of civic environmentalism is not a concern about local insults to the environment or national outrages, but a deep, shared commitment to a physical place and to the community of people who live there." The emphasis on place and community reverberates with John Dewey's attempts to define the public through local democratic action. He (1954: 213) sums up this position, stating that "democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community" (also see Cannavò, 2007).

Localized approaches are also strategic; it is arguably the scale where new modes of political activity have the greatest chance to be realized (Dryzek, 2000). Drawing on notions of ecological, deliberative, and discursive democracy, civic environmentalists see deliberation as central to the consideration of multiple conceptions of urban nature (Barber, 2003; Dobson, 2003; Dryzek, 2000; Fischer, 2000; Luke, 2009). In this regard, Dryzek (2000: 140) writes, "Discursive democracy is better-placed than any alternative political model to enter into fruitful engagement with natural systems and so able to cope more effectively with the challenge presented to ecological crisis." Further, it holds promise for securing the legitimacy of political decisions by involving the broader public (Dryzek, 1997). There is an insistence on active citizenship as a serious vocation and a willingness to engage in political debate and decision making based not on a founding environmental ethic nor a commitment to the state but rather a responsibility stemming from their embeddedness in place (see Barber, 2003; Cannavò, 2007; Dobson, 2003; Dobson and Bell, 2006; Light, 2003; Light, 2006; Rubin, 2002; Smith and Pangsapa, 2008).

Civic environmentalism diverges from deliberative and discursive democracy because of its emphasis on materiality. Deliberation is not only comprised of social interaction but must account for and engage with the physicality of place. Further, democratic deliberation is not only a means of fleshing out the commonalities and differences between urban residents but also presents opportunities to develop generative solutions to multifaceted human-nature

problems. King (2006: 180) notes that "civic environmentalism intentionally incorporates the notion of praxis: the conjoining of social and political ideas with new social practices and technologies." To be a civic environmentalist involves recognizing and then enacting new hybrid relations in an attempt to create improved conditions for both humans and nonhumans. Politics is an active form of reworking relations rather than engagement in battles over entrenched, long-standing foundational beliefs. This emphasis on practice is particularly important to those in the design disciplines who attempt to rework human-nonhuman relations through thoughtful intervention.

Civic environmentalism does not assume that deliberation and action are simple tasks or that they can be conducted without deep disagreement and potential failure. Indeed, the politics described here are often more difficult to navigate than those of technomanagerial environmental governance or populist protest. One of the most significant challenges to civic environmentalism is the entrenchment of existing political structures. Meadowcroft (2004: 212) notes, "The adversarial political culture, legalistic regulatory approach, litigious proclivity, and deep suspicion of government found in the United States may represent insuperable barriers to the growth of this mode of governance." Furthermore, John (2004) warns that neo-liberal political actors could potentially use the novelty of civic environmentalism to dilute existing regulations or dispense with them entirely. In other words, there is a worry that extensive deliberation can replace unsatisfactory environmental politics with a relaxation of existing regulatory structures or even worse, no regulation whatsoever. These critiques represent a fundamental challenge to developing this approach to environmental governance and management; engaging in democratic deliberation does not reset the ground rules for governance, existing power geometries are still in play (Bäckstrand, 2003; Dryzek, 1997). Furthermore, there is scant empirical evidence to support the notion that a radical transformation in environmental management hierarchy and procedures will improve environmental conditions (Dryzek, 2000). Civic environmental governance comes with substantial risk and uncertainty. One of the most distinct challenges is the need for participants to look outside their deep-seated beliefs about nature, politics, and community to engage in reasoned debate with uncertain and sometimes undesirable outcomes. Thus, the politics of environmental governance and management is less about bureaucratic procedures and structures and more about experimentation, openness to unanticipated outcomes, and acceptance of uncertainty in decision-making processes (Rubin, 2002).

The centrality of citizens and their collective voice to civic environmentalism suggests a new role for the government and experts alike. In direct contrast to technomanagerial governance, "*Homo civicus* figures large, *homo bureaucratis* hardly at all" (Dryzek, 1997: 95, emphasis in original). The state assumes a background role as supporter and facilitator, providing expertise, funding, and organizational assistance. Meanwhile, professional and technical experts are used as consulting resources for reworking human-nonhuman relations. For example, practitioners of urban nature including landscape architects, ecologists, and urban planners can provide a palette of options and scenarios for how urban nature relations could potentially evolve in space and over time. Further, their expertise can be used to facilitate and mediate deliberations among stakeholders about different configurations of human-nonhuman relations, interpreting complex issues to inform rather than dominate these activities (Prugh et al., 2000; Stilgoe et al., 2006). The insight of formal experts is supplemented by the specialized or expert citizen who contributes to deliberative and problem-solving activities through localized understandings and insights into

their specific social and material surroundings (Brand and Karvonen, 2007; Karvonen and Brand, 2009). As a whole, civic environmentalism resonates with relational thinking by blurring processes of deliberation and action as well as the boundaries between expert and non-expert, public and private, citizen and government.

These three characteristics – relational ontology, local emphasis, and democratic deliberation aimed at action – make civic environmentalism distinct from conventional technomanagerial environmental governance as well as populist protest. It is not based on a dogmatic insistence on the proper roles and responsibilities of government nor an adherence to a particular environmental ethic but to the recognition that local citizens are obligated to recognize and take action based on their relational status in the local community. To illustrate how this form of civic environmentalism is practiced, we describe a case study of the conceptualization and construction of the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail in Seattle, Washington. The case study is based on empirical evidence gathered through more than a dozen semi-structured interviews with residents and government actors between 2005 and 2008, multiple site visits, and a detailed review of locally relevant literature.

Seattle's Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail
Longfellow Creek is a small, meandering waterway that flows through the heavily urbanized Delridge community in Seattle, Washington. It is one of only four waterways in the city that provides accessible habitat for migrating salmon populations, although it is a tortuous route that includes seven complete and three partial fish barriers (SPU, 2007). In the early 1900s, Longfellow Creek was the primary source of water for homesteaders and farmers living in the area. As development in the watershed increased over subsequent decades, flooding from the creek became a common occurrence and the water became polluted. In the mid-twentieth century, the municipality designated the waterway as a health hazard and local residents turned their backs to the creek recognizing it as a detriment to the community rather than an asset (City of Seattle, 2003; O'Connor, 1958). The waterway that once served as an essential resource to the community was now a blight and a threat, a familiar storyline of all urban waterways in North America.

In the 1980s, the State of Washington recognized the connection between the poor water quality of Seattle's creeks and the degraded conditions of receiving waters such as Puget Sound (City of Seattle, 1988). The local, regional, and state governments engaged in a number of technomanagerial activities to improve the ecological conditions of Longfellow Creek as well as reduce risks to human health and property by purchasing and preserving nearly 30 acres of property in the floodplain adjacent to the creek and constructing a large detention basin and highwater bypass to reduce flooding problems and protect private property next to the creek. In an attempt to restore the ecological conditions of the waterway, the City has worked to reconstruct and rehabilitate nearly a quarter of the 5-mile stream length as part of the Urban Creeks Legacy project (see City of Seattle, 2010). Rehabilitation projects were undertaken to improve drainage conditions, prevent erosion and flooding, reestablish ecological health through the construction of viable fish habitat, and improve water quality in the creek (SPU, 2007). All of these activities contribute to the municipality's contemporary reputation as a city in harmony with nature and an international leader in sustainable urban development (see Athens, 2009; Klingle, 2007; Portney, 2003; SustainLane, 2008).

In addition to these technomanagerial activities, Delridge residents engaged in voluntary activities to clean up and improve the waterway while also building community cohesion. A centerpiece of the volunteer efforts is the Longfellow Creek P-Patch, a vibrant community garden located adjacent to the creek. These activities are part of Seattle's history of active public engagement in urban development that emerged in the 1970s and continues to this day (see Diers, 2004; O'Donnell, 2004; Sanders, 2005; Yocom, 2007). Residents have targeted waterways, open spaces, and parks that provide a natural focus for volunteer intervention while also leading to self-governance and bottom-up activities that Seattleites proudly refer to as the 'Seattle Way' (see O'Neill and Gaynor, 2008).

However, another project on the waterway – the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail – departs from these voluntary and technomanagerial activities of reworking urban nature. In the mid-1990s, the municipality's Department of Planning and Development collaborated with the Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association (DNDA) to create a neighborhood plan for the community. A culmination of nearly three years of work, the plan represented a diverse array of community interests with input from neighborhood and environmental groups, businesses, educational institutions, art organizations, and individual residents. In addition to revealing the heritage of the community, the DNDA plan presented two key strategies to implement the overall vision and objectives of the community. The first was to create concentrated and connected nodes of activity to unite the residential and business community in Delridge, and the second was to integrate, conserve, and restore natural processes as the community developed in the future. Summarizing the vision of this second strategy, the document states:

> Delridge is a place where the community and natural environment are integrated. Our open space and natural areas are preserved, interconnected, well maintained, and safe – for wildlife, residents, and children and students who use these spaces as 'natural classrooms.' We, in partnership with the city, take pride in and provide the stewardship needed to help maintain this natural environment. (Delridge Planning Committee, 1999: 13)

This vision embraces and promotes the concept of community and ecological integration supported through education and stewardship undertaken by a partnership between the community and the municipality.

Following the release of the plan, two community members came up with the idea of the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail as a central element of the integrated vision for the neighborhood's future. Residents applied for and received two grants from the municipal government that emphasized the development of small pocket parks to promote intervention in multiple areas of the city while also introducing ecological goals as part of park planning processes (Dooling et al., 2006). With a total of $100,000 in government funding, the neighborhood group nurtured novel partnerships with various municipal agencies including Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, and Seattle Department of Transportation. The trail had not been a part of the technomanagerial preservation and restoration activities but made perfect sense to the community members who recognized the area as a hybrid of human and non-human activity. Community members played a central role in the development, design, and stewardship of the trail while the municipal departments provided money, expertise, and coordination. Following a civic environmentalist approach,

the community group leveraged government funding to forward their local goals while supplementing the ongoing technomanagerial and volunteer activities on the creek.

Roughly paralleling the creek, the 4.2-mile trail was completed in 2004 and has been described as a "ribbon of connection" (True, 2005) because it physically and perceptually connects the adjacent yet distinct neighborhoods of the Delridge community. Beginning at the headwaters in a restored bog at the southern boundary of the city limits, the trail follows the creek north until the waterway is channeled into an underground pipe to flow beneath Westwood Village, a large regional shopping center built in the 1950s. The trail wends its way through the shopping mall by following a virtual creek marked by signage and a water feature designed to remind shoppers of the creek flowing some 20 feet below the surface. Downstream from the shopping center, the waterway returns to the surface and the trail realigns with the channel, sometimes adjacent to the creek and other times diverted along residential streets when access to the creek is blocked by private property. In extreme cases, the trail jogs two blocks from the open channel and runs parallel down city sidewalks and busy arterials before meeting up with the creek downstream. The trail ends unceremoniously about two-thirds of a mile above its confluence with the west waterway of the Duwamish River, where the creek again plunges into a subterranean pipe for some three-quarters of a mile to traverse a knotty mess of industrial, transportation, and port infrastructure (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1 Map of Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail

The Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail is not intended to immerse visitors in undisturbed nature nor does it function as a manicured open space for local residents. Instead, it is a hybrid public landscape that exposes the multiple linkages of a developed waterway as it traverses through a dense urban fabric of commercial, residential, and industrial land use. The onus is placed on the users to interpret the hybrid landscape of constructed and unconstructed, controlled and out of control, loved and despised, natural and social. A local journalist describes the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail as "an exercise in contrasts. From lush, shady areas that quietly conjure a mountain stream, to sections that border convenience stores and the rush of traffic" (True, 2005). The trail intentionally exposes the multiple connections between creek and community, serving as a relational artifact that simultaneously forwards the social and environmental conditions of this particular place (**Figure 2**). A neighborhood volunteer (quoted in Le, 2001) notes, "We really want to capitalize on the ability of the creek [and the trail] to connect us, as a community, and remind us of our natural history".

Figure 2 The Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail in the Westwood Village Shopping Center (top left), next to the wooded channel (bottom left), and paralleling a residential street (right)

The relations between the creek and the surrounding neighborhoods are highlighted by art installations along the trail. Gateways, wayfinding signs, and environmental art pieces were designed and constructed by community members and local artists to lead visitors along the trail and reveal the connections that bind the creek and community (see **Figure 3**). These works deliberately mark this space of hybridity using an 'eco-revelatory' aesthetic that is educational, kinesthetic, tactile, and integrated in the site (see Brown et al., 1998) with the

intention of reorienting the community to what Mabey (1973) refers to as the 'unofficial countryside'; the degraded, forgotten ecological characteristics and elements of an urban or urbanizing community that are so often lost in transition. A municipal staff member notes:

> To me the wayfinding [signs] became the major objective of the trail. They provide a way for people walking in the neighborhood to orient them to the creek, and to experience what the creek and the surrounding forested space have to offer.

Figure 3 Ecorevelatory markers along the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail including wayfinding signs (left), the Salmon Bone Bridge (top right), and a gateway (bottom right)

Reflecting on environmental art as it relates to place, Lippard (1997: 286) notes that "artists can be very good at exposing the layers of emotional and aesthetic resonance in our relationships to place….A place-specific art offers tantalizing glimpses of new ways to enter everyday life." It is this everyday life that is celebrated on the trail, the continual intermingling of humans and nonhumans in a typical urban locale.

Embracing the hybrid, relational character of the creek was not only a desire of the neighborhood residents but also a pragmatic realization of what is possible in a heavily degraded and built-up landscape. A Seattle Parks and Recreation Department (SPRD) employee sums up this position, stating, "You are never going to be able to put it back to the way that it was before. You have to be realistic; you have to live in today." Another SPRD employee states, "common sense guides restoration [projects]. In an urban area, restoration is going to be a balance between the built environment and what you can achieve to create connection and bring back the [pre-existing] processes." These perspectives suggest that the most viable forms of ecological restoration or rehabilitation in developed areas require flexibility to adapt to the physical, biological, economic, political, and historical context (Yocom, 2007). It is a project that embraces the mongrel character of the urban landscape while acknowledging the complexities of intervening in the built environment. One neighborhood activist states:

> We must be realistic; we are never going to return this landscape to what it was 150 years ago before [Euro-Americans] arrived. There are too many factors now that play into the equation. What we need to set are realistic, long-term goals and seize opportunities when they arise.

Being realistic about what could be accomplished meant that the project would involve a number of compromises, sometimes enhancing ecological conditions of the waterway and other times sacrificing them. Reflecting on the environmental impacts produced by the project, a Seattle Public Utilities staff member notes:

> In some places, the trail is right beside the creek and the stormwater runoff from the trail goes right into the water. In other places, riparian zones that are crucial for salmon habitat have been removed to make way for the trail. And there are great opportunities to daylight the creek and link it to the existing floodplain but the trail goes right between them.

A neighborhood activist takes a slightly different perspective and defines the restoration philosophy of the design team as:

> An attempt to come to a fairly decent representation of what was here….but we need to understand that this is now a built environment, and there is going to constantly be disturbances....These are the things that we have to live with, and we can't exclude them.

Perhaps the most significant reason for the success of the project is that the concept of a trail as an accessible 'ribbon of connection' in the community is easy to understand. Further, the project does not negate but complements technomanagerial activities of environmental restoration while building upon the voluntary activities that were already occurring in and around the waterway. This is not to suggest that the project was without controversy. The broad idea of the trail was appreciated by most residents in Delridge but the details of the trail location and design generated disagreement and contentious debate in public meetings. A community member active in the trail planning deliberations notes:

> I was impressed when we held…community meetings that there were at least 50 people at each meeting. That was a good indication [that the community was interested in the project]. Two or three people at each meeting would be really upset, but 99% of the people there were really excited and wanted to see it happen.

Dissenters were concerned that proposed sections of the trail adjacent to the creek would destroy the natural character of existing open spaces while creating opportunities for vagrancy and criminal activity. Through open conversation and prolonged deliberation between residents, community organizations, and city officials, the final alignment was ultimately determined. Far from being a product of community consensus, the process for determining the trail's alignment revealed the diversity of opinion and appreciation for the various conceptions of the hybrid landscape as a collective resource. And the ensuing disagreements are a reminder that deliberative democracy does not guarantee consensus; some issues will always be contentious and intractable (Dryzek, 2000; King, 2006).

Through the deliberative process, community members recognized that what was important was not the trail as product but rather as process. "The story of Longfellow Creek is still being written" because the project did not end with completion of the trail but continues as the neighborhood group continues to cope with management and upkeep issues (Sykes, 2005:1). A municipal employee states that "[The creek] has and continues to both shape and change the nature of the community". This follows on the idea of democratic politics as a process rather than an end state (Light and Higgs, 1996). The trail is not an attempt to build a static form of reality but rather to initiate an active and ongoing practice of relational building, a string of temporary settlements in the urban landscape that are continually being reworked. A neighborhood activist notes that "the goals and objectives [for the restoration of Longfellow Creek] are constantly changing as [we begin] looking broader and broader." In this sense, Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail can be understood as an ongoing experiment in creating different conditions; an ever-changing shifting of the relations between urban residents and their material surroundings. This resonates with Hinchliffe's

prescription when he writes, "Rather than offering interpretations of nature, or analytical concepts, the injunction must be to join the doings, to experiment, to engage in the doings of environments, to environ them in different and better ways" (2007: 191). A resident sums up this perspective on the trail as process and argues that by continuing the work the city and community have begun, "we can foster a sense of pride in the neighborhood […]. Other neighborhoods in urbanizing areas will be able to learn from our mistakes and take advantage of our successes." The deliberative meetings and collaboration with municipal departments is what can potentially be replicated elsewhere, rather than a prescriptive package of 'best practices' or 'design guidelines'. Likewise, it has changed the way that the municipal government approaches environmental restoration and public space projects. A municipal staff member notes, "We started out with spurts of mega-projects, but none of [the current projects] are glamorous; they are all modest projects representing a steady and consistent application of effort." The trail exhibits an incremental process of reworking human/nonhuman relations in cities, one that is continuous and entails uncertain outcomes.

Conclusions
The continuing process of designing, constructing and maintaining the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail exemplifies civic environmentalism as a new approach to the politics of urban nature that integrates bottom-up, community driven initiatives with conventional technomanagerial approaches of local and regional governments. The project began with the simple idea of building a trail adjacent to an urban waterway as a way to build and strengthen community bonds. Yet, the project is unique due to the hybrid conditions of the trail alignment as well as the community and government collaboration that was central to its construction and maintenance. From its initial conception through to construction and then on to its current phase of long-term management, the trail represents an incremental process of scoping, deliberation, planning, and doing that is continually emergent. The only constant in this project is the creek itself and its indelible ties to the community.

Civic environmentalism supports the development of a relational ontology between people and their material surroundings as well as deliberative, action-oriented forms of political engagement. The success of the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail is due in large part to the wide array of actors who were willing to collaborate and compromise rather than establish ultimatums and prescribe deterministic solutions. However, translating a relational ontology of urban nature into political practice is not a simple task. As Castree (2003: 208) notes, "It remains difficult to operationalize a non-anthro-/ecocentric politics." The difficulty emerges in both the complexity of hybrid relations between local people and their local surroundings, and in the commitment required by all stakeholders to participate in deliberative and action-oriented forms of government. The challenge for technomanagerial actors is to provide space for individual residents and collective communities to define their futures and to adopt the unfamiliar roles of facilitator and collaborator. This approach to governance is not a call for smaller, less intrusive forms of government, but rather a reframing of objectives to enable local communities to take greater responsibility for their material surroundings. Meanwhile, residents need to recognize the diversity of individual opinions while engaging in deliberation, debate, and action. Rubin (2002: 348) argues that what is desperately needed is "an education in the civil treatment of divergent opinions and interests that create differences over environmental issues in the first place. That would be an education in citizenship." In this sense, citizenship is not an obligation but a duty that

engenders pride in local communities and local places with deliberation as an inquisitive process of mutual learning and problem solving leading to action. It satisfies the need to engage citizenry in activities that embrace the inherent multiplicity of divergent opinions and interests with an end goal of identifying and acting upon common ground.

Civic environmental politics involve local experiments in the reworking of urban nature. It is a generative activity that puts a relational ontology of urban nature to work to develop on-the-ground opportunities for forging new relationships between local people and local places. While there is little empirical evidence that supports such a transformation in the political structures of environmental management will result in improved ecological conditions, the case of the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail suggests the potential to develop new modes of urban environmental politics that diverge from, but work in conjunction with, technomanagerial governance approaches. Most importantly, it involves activities that link theory and practice on urban nature by forging new relationships between people and the places in which they live.

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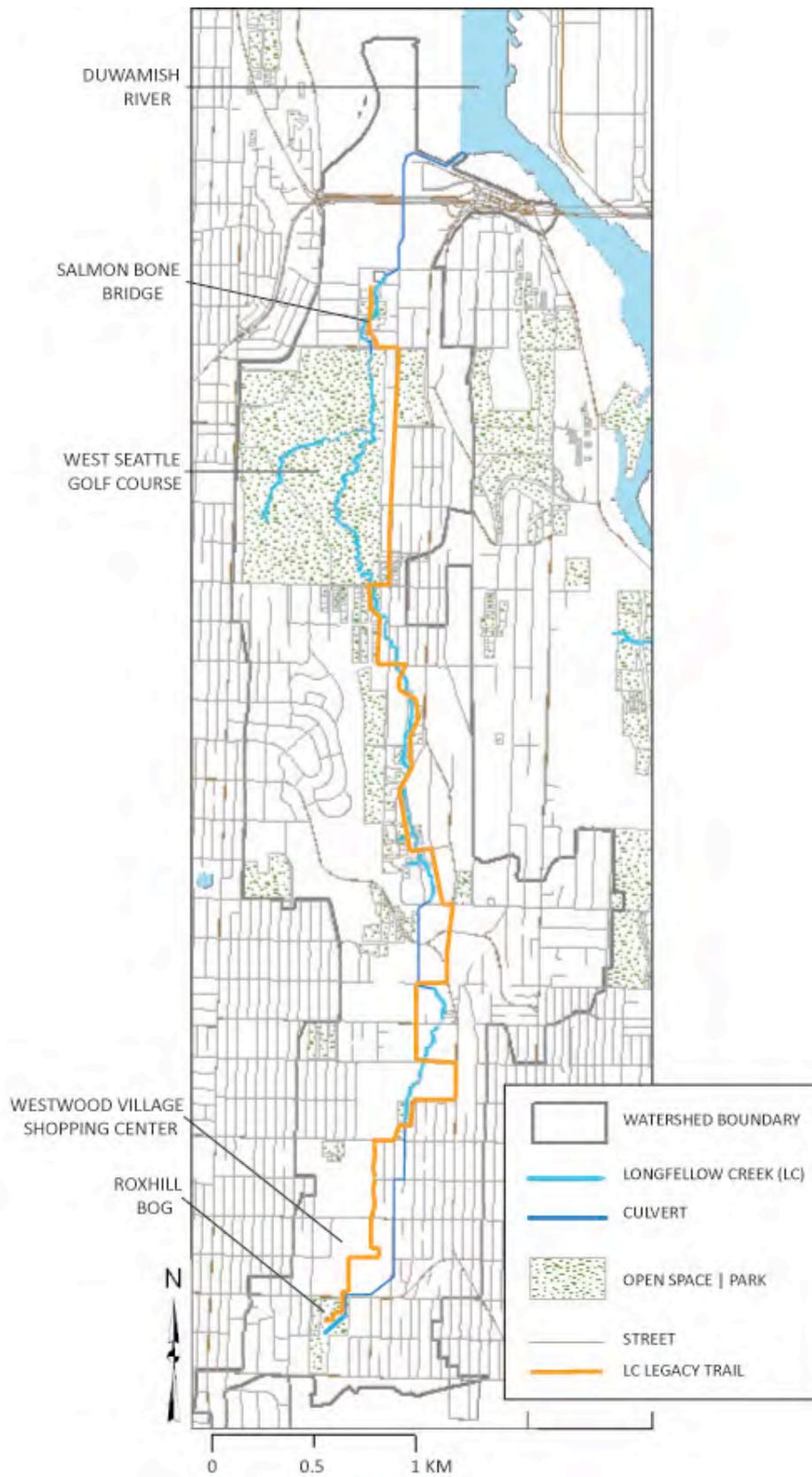
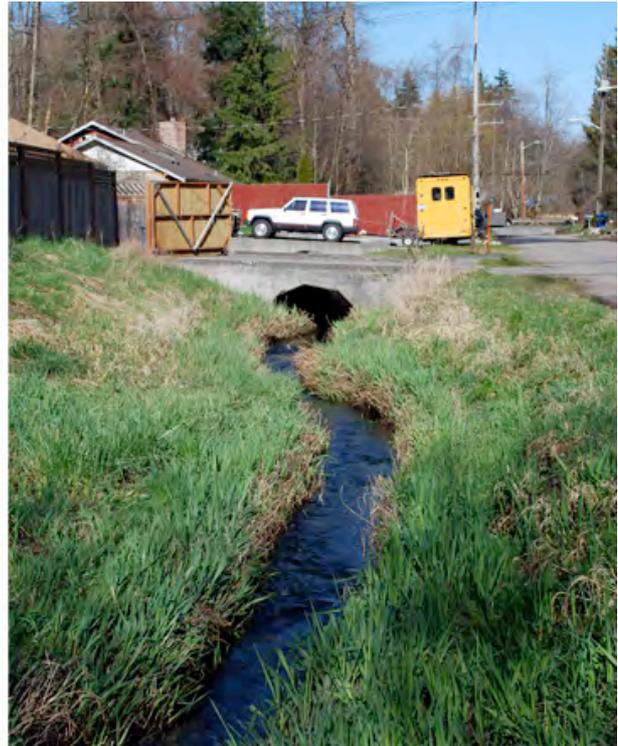**Figure 1** Map of Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail

Figure 2 The Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail in the Westwood Village Shopping Center (top left), next to the wooded channel (bottom left), and paralleling a residential street (right)
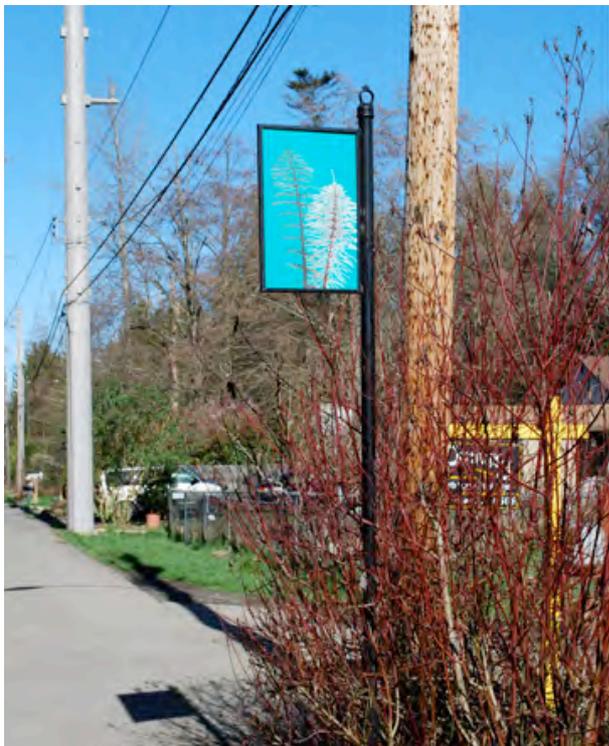

Figure 3 Ecorevelatory markers along the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail including wayfinding signs (left), the Salmon Bone Bridge (top right), and a gateway (bottom right)