

Globalization, Environmental Justice, and Research Policy: Connecting the Dots in California's Inland Valley

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The greater Los Angeles area is infamous for its poor air quality, which historically has been the product of geography, climate, a large population now approaching 20 million inhabitants, and an inefficient transportation system focused almost exclusively on the automobile. Globalization has magnified these conditions by moving the increased volume of goods now produced at foreign sites across the Pacific Rim through the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (largest in the United States) and to inland logistics sites for sorting and shipping to destinations across the country. The added air quality burden of diesel emissions from the trucking and rail activities at these logistics sites in southern California's Inland Valley (approximately 50 km east of Los Angeles) is disproportionately visited on the adjacent communities of predominantly low income and Latino residents. The health consequences of these exposures are well documented, and in some cases lethal.

Action to address this injustice has principally been organized by the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAIEJ), based in Jurupa Valley. While CCAIEJ has had some success in delaying or stopping additional warehouse complexes, the global logistics industry responds by moving to nearby cities where the local population is less aware of the issues, thus manifesting a problem familiar to EJ activists where political success in one locale becomes a burden elsewhere. As part of a strategy to respond to this mobility of global players, CCAIEJ has recently partnered with students and faculty at the Claremont Colleges (also located in the Inland Valley). Our collaborative research work began with a "Toxic Tour" across the Inland Valley organized by CCAIEJ that permitted students to see firsthand the disastrous effects that Goods Movement was having on residential communities in the region. Later, two members of the CCAIEJ staff provided two weeks of student training in classes on environmental justice and feminist research methods.

After observing the local health impacts of goods movement, reading about the global problem of the unequal distribution of pollution, and receiving community mobilization training, the students collaborated with CCAIEJ to conduct policy research, oral histories, and community engagement. This partnership aimed to address the problem of corporate mobility by expanding CCAIEJ's scope to nearby communities. In terms of research policy, the project raises the issue of recognizing faculty who work outside the conventional incentive system that rewards the teaching of strictly academic content in a classroom setting, and producing peer reviewed publication of interest to a small number (at most) of academic colleagues.