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WRITING SAMPLE

Below is an excerpt from my research paper for ENVRPOL 390: Environmental Justice, the final class in my Environmental Policy track at Northwestern. The writing sample takes portions of the introduction and conclusion of the full ten-page paper. An additional excerpt provides statistical results for context.

The Green Paradox: Environmental Gentrification in Our Cities *A National Statistical Approach and a Case Study in New York*

Urban parks and green spaces deliver so many psychological and physical benefits to the residents in their vicinity and the city at large that their value is universally accepted. It is therefore surprising at first glance that local groups like the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago are protesting new green spaces in areas that lack them.¹ The strife is caused by gentrification: one of the most challenging aspects of the free housing market and a term at the heart of the current urban dialogue. Broadly, gentrification refers to lower income renters and households being forced out of an area to accommodate wealthier residents who can afford significantly higher housing costs. Gentrification can happen for a variety of reasons, such as proximity to an urban core or, in the case of this paper, new green space beautifying a neighborhood. Families facing displacement from their own neighborhood due to a purported community benefit skyrocketing rent is a societal dysfunction. Green space is meant to serve, not displace, households like these. As a society, we must do better.

This paper investigates how to protect residents from displacement while still providing equity in green space access. Specifically, how can our cities achieve this goal manageably, without resorting to complex rent stabilization ordinances? I will propose a plan that addresses numerous aspects of the gentrification problem without limiting expansion of green space. To do this, cities must work collaboratively with neighbors before any ground is broken rather than resort to reactive policy band-aids. In this way, we must ask our civic leaders to prioritize community organizing

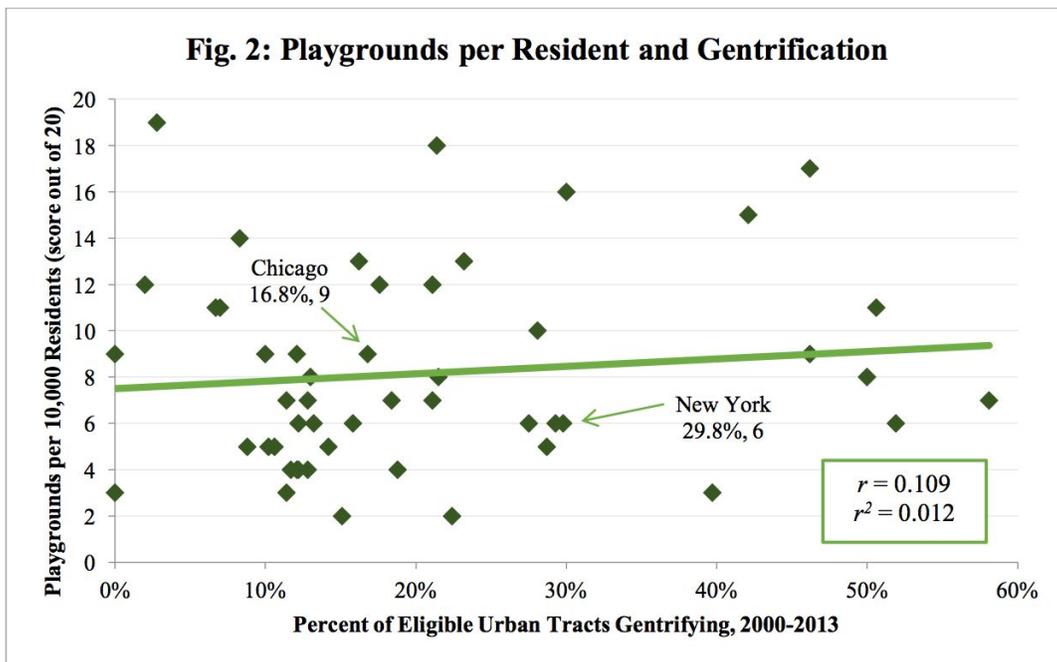
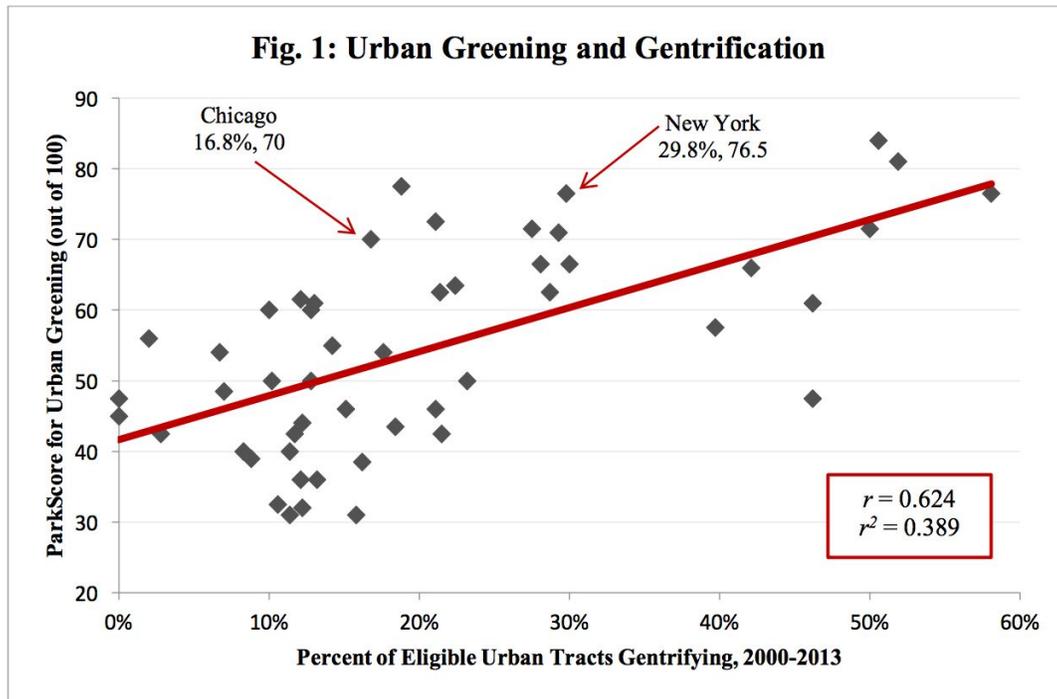
rather than dreams of grandeur or tourism revenue. This proactive, grassroots approach must be the guiding principle for greening our cities. Before diving into these recommendations, however, it is critical to consider the current state of our cities' park and open space resources.

Excerpt from the conclusion...

I draw from this analysis two conclusions: community involvement is crucial and municipal emphasis should be on practicality, not grandeur, regardless of project location. The Newtown Creek Nature Walk and the Open Space Alliance demonstrated that community involvement can create productive usage even in improbable locations.² My statistical analysis additionally shows that resources like playgrounds offer practical and valuable community space with little to no risk of rent spikes. Municipalities must prioritize these strategies for communities in need rather than pushing so-called masterpiece projects like Chelsea's High Line.

This paper began with a methodology combining The Trust for Public Land's ParkScore and the e.Republic gentrification metric to assess the correlation between urban greening and gentrification. The two data sets established that urban greening is strongly associated with gentrification. However, when examining only playground access, there was no significant correlation. It is clear that type of urban greening project is critical in determining whether gentrification will occur. This is further demonstrated by two projects in New York: the High Line and the ensuing rent spike frenzy in Chelsea and the Newtown Creek Nature Walk which had no such gentrifying effects for Greenpoint in Brooklyn.³ I identified what I believe are the two critical areas to reduce the risk of neighborhood displacement while still supplying working class and lower-income neighborhoods with green space: project practicality (like a playground or urban farm) and community engagement in the design and implementation. If cities shift policy to this approach the future will look a brighter shade of green.

The following two figures are from the statistical analysis section of my paper. Gentrification data is from a 2015 dataset by the research magazine *Governing*.⁴ Urban green space and playground data uses the 2015 ParkScore metric published by the Trust for Public Land.⁵



Endnotes

1. Vivanco, Leonor. "Marchers take to the 606 trail to protest gentrification." *Chicago Tribune*, 17 May 2016
2. Tuhus-Dubrow, Rebecca. "Pretty Park, Affordable Rent: Making Neighborhoods 'Just Green Enough.'" *Next City*, 15 July 2014
3. Solman, Paul. "Has urban revival caused a crisis of success?" *PBS NewsHour*, 1 June 2017
4. Maciag, Mike. "Gentrification in America Report." *Governing*, February 2015
5. "The Trust for Public Land Releases 2015 ParkScore® Index." *The Trust for Public Land*, May 2015