

Webbing: Neighborhood Network Model

Gabriela Estrada - University of California Global Food Initiative Fellowship

Introduction

Community gardens have been used in efforts to promote healthy eating and accessibility to food in many low income neighborhoods. This trend has recently reached the attention of people who aim to create food hubs in urban settings. The aim of said gardens is to promote the role of public health and improving the quality of life, as well as different opportunities to organize around other issues and build social capital, popular education and healthy communities initiatives by utilizing the community gardens as a center in the community.

This community garden trend is very present in San Diego, and its proving to be quite effective in different neighborhoods throughout the area, specially Southeast San Diego. These efforts have been fueled by initiatives like the AB 551, which allows landowners in metropolitan areas to receive tax incentives for putting land to agriculture use (ucanr.edu).

Through community garden initiatives, cities have enacted policies for interim land and complimentary water use, improved access to produce, elevated public consciousness about public health, created culturally appropriate educational and training materials, and strengthened community building skills (Twiss, Dickson, Duma, Kleinman, Paulsen, Rilveria, 2003). These type of garden initiatives are most effective when material and communicated utilizing culture-specific elements and community members (Farquhar, Wiggibs, 2005).

Oceanview Growing Grounds aims to facilitate all those initiatives, however, it also aims to produce a system where there is a community-university partnership and networking efforts focusing on food waste reduction, recovery and community building. The emphasis of this project is to create social innovation and build community connections.



Project Goals

Goals for this project included:

- Gaining further community engagement in order to facilitate community based food-network.
- Identify community webbers that would facilitate the communication and an emphasis around the issues of food waste and sustainable systems.
- Create authentic demand for bio-dimentional learning through popular education.
- Tap on institutional resources in order to create a consciousness base and aid community members in becoming capable of making a change in their community.

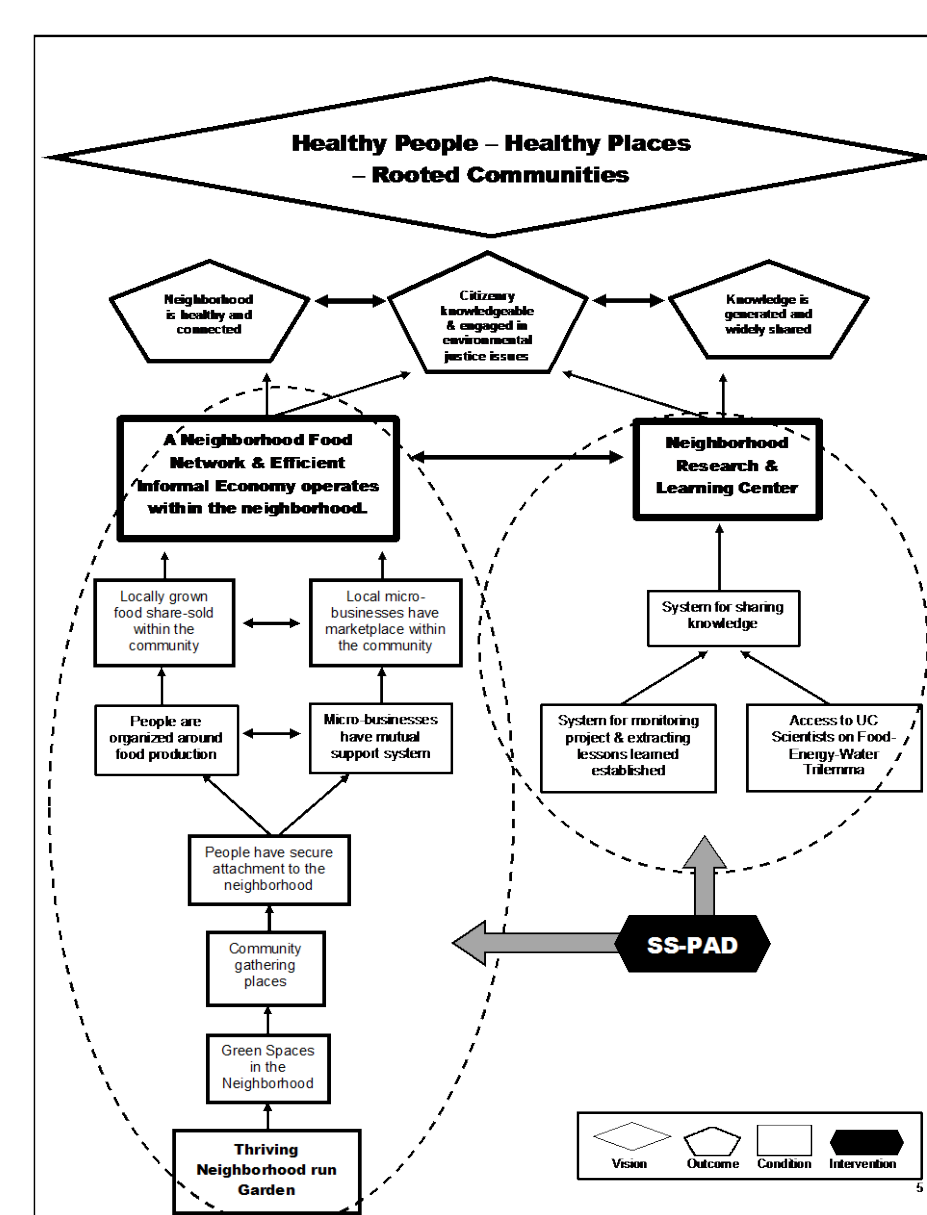
Materials and Methods

Participant Observation, Interviews and Archival Analysis

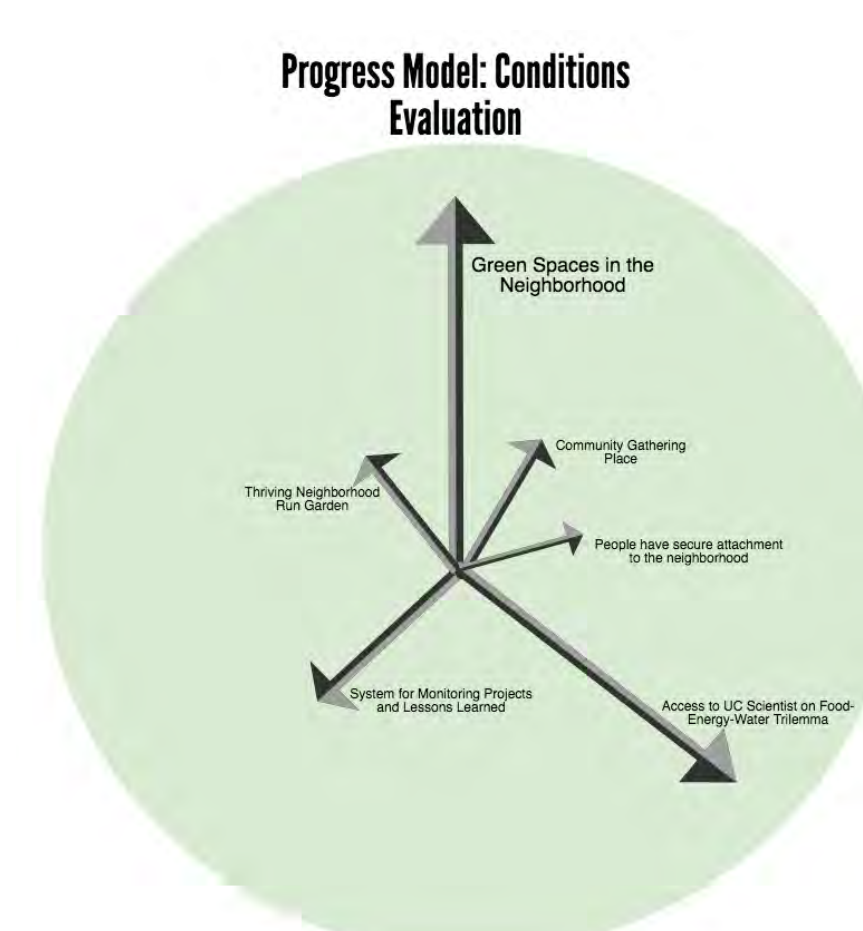
- I participated in gardening activities every Saturday from 9am-12pm and every Wends from 3pm-4pm for planning meetings for the duration of this project. I was interested in getting to know the community, the active participants and the people involved.
- My method of choice was participant observation because I wanted to make the community members feel comfortable around me and because my aim with this project was not to simply gather data in an intrusive way, but rather facilitate any sort of information flow that might have been needed, such as creating a new flyer in order to reach more of the community, or through projects that would both facilitate community engagement and sustainable ways of producing food.
 - These projects did not work out due to miscommunication and problems with logistics.
- I also conducted semi-formal interviews aiming to discover why they had joined the garden, why they thought other people were not active, among other questions.
- I had access to archival data from when the garden was still "breaking ground" the list was long and consisted of mostly gardeners who were interested in having their own plot to grow food.

Results and Outcomes

- The community building through the garden proved to be a challenge because of different factors regarding the history of the space and the neighborhood. Historically there had been a lot of gang related violence and different outside entities coming in and out, which has led to community members be weary of different organizations coming in; because they believe they are not there to stay.
 - Due to this distrust of outside groups the garden has created a task force of garden members whose aim is to go out in the community and educate community members about the garden and the work that we aim to do.
 - Further development needs to happen in this area since the model of the garden has recently changed.
- South East San Diego is an area with a traditionally underserved population. Up until 5 years, the population was mostly African American, but it has recently changed to a more Latino neighborhood. Garden members illustrate that this change in population has caused trouble.
- During the course of this research I worked on different aspects of community building such as flyer making, looking at how we can integrate different members of the community into the community garden, and integrating the children in the social media aspect of our reach. Since they are an important part of the population that we could have an impact on.
 - Three of the children that had been active participants seemed interested, but only one decided to actually take over the Instagram page, she enjoys it and wants her friends to start participating.
- Through the AB551 initiative the garden has been able to build connections from different institutions, such as UC San Diego and the land owner as well as different institutional resources. Along with this, some of the local establishments have donated plants and material for new garden beds, which could potentially create a system of togetherness among residents and non-residential entities in the community.



Model courtesy of William T. Oswald, Ph.D.



Conclusions

The theory of Social Ecology explains that present ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems and that unless these social problems are solved the ecological problems will persist" (Murray, 2003). It is using this ideology that partnerships like the one that UCSD and OVG are attempting to create are so important. In this model there is a flow of information toward people in the community that do not traditionally have access to it. Partnerships like these allow for accessibility to science and knowledge that can aid in creating a more sustainable system, as well as accessibility to healthy food for residents. This partnership aims to emphasize social innovation and community building through issues of food.

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Future Goals

Future goals include:

- Creating a Food Trade System that will incorporate more community members in order to create a network among them.
- Incorporating Youth Leadership Programs.
- Democratize science.
- Further expand the authentic demand for a partnership and community engagement.
- Create rooted communities.

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Acknowledgements

Dr. Keith Pezzoli for the opportunity to connect and learn from people that changed my views on community centered research and work.

Community Members that I've met through this community garden project, for allowing to feel like I belonged and letting me be part of their stories and journey towards a more sustainable system.