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## Cultivating Common Ground? A Case Study of a Community Garden Organization in Northeast Portland, Oregon

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Cultivating Common Ground? A Case Study of a Community Garden Organization in  
Northeast Portland, Oregon

by

Bryan James Zinschlag

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science  
in  
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## Abstract

When it comes to the topic of environmental sustainability, most of us will readily agree that we face a litany of local and global environmental threats in the twenty-first century. As such, we would largely agree that the need to address climate change and other issues is urgent. Where this agreement tends to end, however, is on the question of whether this urgency is so great that we need not address issues of inequality and environmental justice when organizing sustainability efforts. Some are convinced that, because sustainability efforts are “saving the world for everyone”, so to speak, issues of environmental justice are secondary at best. On the other hand, “just sustainability” advocates argue that no such effort is truly sustainable unless it considers winners and losers from the onset. I will argue the latter and demonstrate the potential consequences of a sustainability effort that has failed thus far at engaging those who might benefit most from involvement.

This study is an exploration of the City Soil Network (CSN), a community garden organization comprised of seventeen garden sites throughout Portland, Oregon. Thirteen of these sites are in Northeast Portland, an area with a history of racial and ethnic discrimination and both inequalities and boundaries that prevail across the same lines today. A significant number of these residents are food insecure or at risk of becoming food insecure. Furthermore, recent gentrification in Northeast Portland has disproportionately displaced African Americans and members of other historically marginalized communities. As such, these groups tend to view recent neighborhood changes as a new variation on a decades old theme of injustice. Previous research

suggests that community gardens can play a role in addressing all of these problems to some degree. However, this body of research has yet to explicitly analyze the relationship between local historical context, gentrification, the conflicting rhetorics of environmental sustainability and environmental justice and outcomes for community garden organizations. This case study includes content analysis of organizational publications, participant observation from four of the CSN's garden sites in Northeast Portland. It also includes interviews with eleven members of the CSN, representing all three levels of involvement with the organization, and six interviews with representatives of community organizations that serve Northeast Portland in some capacity.

This study finds that the CSN largely consists of members of a preexisting community of sustainable agriculture enthusiasts. As such, those involved tend not to live near their garden site(s) and are distinct in a number of ways from the diverse neighborhoods that surround many of the CSN's garden sites. The organization has made very few neighborhood-level outreach efforts thus far, and those that have been made have largely been unsuccessful. Understandings expressed by both groups of interviewees help to explain why this has been the case. They also compel me to introduce the potentially adverse impact of gentrification on understandings of neighborhood socioeconomic conditions into the just sustainability debate; we need to consider that unjust sustainability can be the result of not only a lack of concern for inequality, but also a simple lack of *awareness* of it. Interviewees also provide suggestions for how the CSN or other community garden organizations might be more successful in appealing to marginalized communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

In discussions of environmental sustainability efforts, from bike lanes to farmers' markets to public transportation infrastructure development, one controversial issue has been the importance of social and environmental justice considerations. On one hand many environmental justice advocates argue that inequalities related to environmental issues, which include the distribution of both environmental "goods" and "bads" alike, should be a primary consideration of any responsible sustainability effort. A number of mainstream environmental sustainability advocates contend that the urgency of climate change and other forms of environmental degradation is such that these issues, while important, are secondary behind the purely physical aspects of the projects (e.g. reduction of carbon emissions or industrial pesticide use). Others even suggest that issues of inequality are an impediment to the urgent need for progress towards greater sustainability; these and other impediments must be cast aside in the name of our species' long-term survival. In this study I will argue that sustainability advocates, particularly those administering a community garden organization, must consider past and present inequalities in their local context and seek to address them. They can do so by directing the resources available in community garden contexts towards those who neighbors near garden sites that have the least amount of access to them.

Portland, Oregon, along with many urban areas in the United States, has and continues to struggle with poverty and food insecurity that is unequally distributed among racial and ethnic groups. Food insecurity is "the condition of having limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food" (Regional Equity Atlas 2007:72). In

2011, Multnomah county (which contains the vast majority of Portland) had an overall food insecurity rate of 16.5% and a child food insecurity rate of 24.2% (Greater Portland Pulse 2011). Poverty rates can serve as an indicator of actual, or at the very least *potential*, food insecurity. According to ACS data from 2005-2009, those racial and ethnic groups with the highest rates of poverty in Portland are Native Americans (33%), African Americans (33%) and Hispanics (27%). These rates are markedly higher than those for Asian Americans (17%) and whites (14%) (Dotterer and Krishnan 2011).

Northeast Portland has a long history of racial and ethnic discrimination and inequality. This has particularly affected the area's African American community, which has for decades endured alternating waves of disinvestment *in* their neighborhoods followed by displacement *from* them due to redevelopment projects. Recent gentrification in the area has therefore meant not only social class changes to the area, but also continued racial and ethnic changes. Longtime minority residents see gentrification not so much as a new phenomenon, but as a new configuration of the social and economic forces that have affected them for decades. The demographic integration that takes place in gentrifying areas like Northeast Portland often does not lead to genuine social integration, as historically rooted racial and ethnic boundaries prevail.

Past research suggests that, in addition to improving food security among those involved (Wakefield et al. 2007), community gardening can be a setting where people come together around food and build relationships across racial and ethnic and other differences (Firth, Maye, and Pearson 2011; Glover, Parry, and Shiness 2004). Where other activities have failed, growing food can potentially be the common interest that stimulates the exchange of information and other resources among neighbors.

Community gardening, then, has the potential to address multiple issues that are present in Northeast Portland. A case study of the City Soil Network (CSN), a community garden organization located primarily in Northeast Portland, provides the unique opportunity to explore the role that community gardening plays in a gentrifying area with wide racial and ethnic disparities and perceived boundaries between racial and ethnic groups.

The CSN (est. 2009) is a network of seventeen community garden sites, thirteen of which are located in Northeast Portland. These sites are yards surrounding homes and vacant lots that have been donated by their owners for the organization's use. Each garden site plays a role in the larger product of the CSN; garden managers and participants alike log their hours in the gardens and receive a proportionate amount of produce at a weekly, organization-wide "barter market". Their work in the gardens translates directly to the food they are compensated with (landowners also receive a number of barter shares in exchange for the garden space they donate). The CSN partners with a local church that allows the barter market to take place in their parking lot. In exchange for this space, the CSN donates the produce that remains after market-goers file through to the food pantry inside the church.

In order for the barter market to be stocked with a variety of produce throughout the growing season, each site specializes in growing certain fruits and vegetables. Among other responsibilities, a small organization-wide planning team decides which produce will be planted at each site. Garden managers make all of the other decisions regarding the planning and execution of their sites, from positioning garden beds to

recruiting garden participants. All those involved with the CSN are volunteers, at least in the sense that they are not compensated *monetarily* for their work.

The CSN's stated mission is "...to bring neighbors together to transform vacant lots into neighborhood food gardens for the purposes of education, community building and improving food security". A mission of "community building" leaves a lot of room for interpretation. We can assume that this means the CSN seeks to get individuals involved in their gardens, and interacting with each other once they are involved, but little else. Exactly who gets involved, how they come to be involved and the nature of their social interactions with each other is unclear; understanding these things will give us great insight into the role that the CSN's gardens play in the neighborhoods where they rest.

In the following chapter I will begin by posing the research questions for this case study, situate Northeast Portland in historical context and define recent demographic trends in the area. I will then review literature related to social capital, voluntary organizations and environmentalism, clarifying how they relate to the CSN and Northeast Portland throughout. After reviewing these bodies of literature I will introduce the specific methods used to answer my research questions; in doing so I will discuss both the advantages and limitations of these methods and of this case study in particular, as well as political and ethical issues that are unique to qualitative social research.

After introducing my research methods, I will present my findings. These findings are organized into two chapters, the first of which will include insights I gained as a participant observer within the CSN as well as CSN interviewee data. The second will illuminate how those involved understood the organization's mission of community

building and the extent to which they participated in neighborhood-level outreach efforts, among other things. The second findings chapter will also discuss CSN interview data but will add the perspectives of representatives of community organizations, all of which serve Northeast Portland to some extent, to the conversation. Finally, the discussion and conclusions chapter will return to the literature review with all of my findings in tow in order to contribute to the academic discourses relevant to this case study. This final chapter will also return to the discussion of the study's limitations and make recommendations for related research that may take place in the future.

Altogether, I will demonstrate that, during the period in which I collected data, the CSN was a decidedly interest-based community whose main link was enthusiasm for sustainable agriculture. As such, those involved had a much different composition than the residents of the neighborhoods around their garden sites. They also made very few efforts to engage these residents and, with the few outreach efforts they did make, struggled to pique their interest. This was despite the fact that the CSN's leadership explicitly described neighborhood-level outreach as a priority. With these and other findings in mind, this study highlights the potential negative consequences of organizations that appear exclusive, even if unintentionally, in gentrifying neighborhoods. It also contributes to the bodies of research related to unequal access to social capital and problematic tendencies of mainstream environmental sustainability efforts. Importantly, this study also provides the perspectives from professional advocates as to where community garden efforts in Northeast Portland have been unsuccessful and how they might be more successful in the future.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of this case study of the City Soil Network (CSN) is to shed light on the inclusion efforts *of* and social connections *within* the organization, as well as their implications. In other words, it explores how people come to be involved with the CSN in the first place and the nature of the interactions among those who are involved. More specifically, this study will seek to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How do those involved with the City Soil Network understand the organization's mission of community building?
2. What effort has the City Soil Network made to facilitate community building?
3. How successful has the City Soil Network been in building community?

First, findings from a case study of the CSN are only meaningful to the extent that the social context of Northeast Portland, Oregon is made clear. Connections between a number of bodies of literature will be drawn to clarify this context, including Northeast Portland's history of racial and ethnic discrimination, racial and ethnic inequality that persists today and the ongoing process of gentrification in the area. Second, literature that discusses the development of mutually beneficial social connections, much of which explicitly uses social capital terminology, will inform this study. This includes bodies of work regarding voluntary organizations in general and community garden organizations in particular. Focus is given to the different types of social capital, including efforts to facilitate their development and the implications of their development. Third, literature that discusses perspectives within the environmental movement, and how they might relate to the efforts of community gardening organizations, will also inform this study. Past research on environmentalism, which illuminates conflict between the rhetorics of

universalism and social justice, will affirm the need for further empirical investigation of community garden organizations. The relationship between these bodies of literature and the CSN, both the inclusion efforts *of* the organization and social connections *within* it, will consistently be made clear for the reader.

### **Racial and Ethnic Inequality in Oregon: From Segregation to Gentrification**

Present day racial and ethnic inequality, in Portland and beyond, is often rooted in histories of discrimination. As a long-marginalized group, the history of African Americans in the Portland area puts their current circumstances in Northeast Portland into context. This context is crucial for understanding the consequences of the CSN's inclusion efforts and social connections that develop among participants.

While a small number of African Americans, mostly railroad workers, had lived in Portland since the late nineteenth century (Gibson 2007), they first came to the Portland area in significant numbers during World War Two. Between 1940 and 1943, this population grew in number from roughly 2,500 to over 20,000. Most of the newcomers were recruited to work in the Kaiser shipyards (Urban League of Portland 2009), located on the south side of the Columbia River in Portland and on the north side in Vancouver, Washington. To accommodate these workers and their families, a large public housing project was hastily built just south of the Columbia and named Vanport City. Following the war's end a significant amount of the African American population remained in the Portland area, almost exclusively in Vanport City. They remained there until tragedy struck in 1948 (Center for Columbia River History n.d.).

On Memorial Day in 1948 a Columbia River dike collapsed and Vanport City, at the time Oregon's second largest city (behind Portland), was catastrophically flooded. Fifteen people were killed and the city was evacuated, essentially ceasing to exist from that day on (Center for Columbia River History n.d.). Many of the African Americans who evacuated sought shelter in the Albina District of inner Northeast Portland, where the city's small African American population was concentrated at the time. Banking and real estate institutions in Portland, which had long practiced racial discrimination in the form of exclusionary lending and redlining prior to the tragedy, sought to keep flood evacuees concentrated in Albina. White citizens also played a role in discrimination, organizing agreements among white homeowners not to sell their homes to people of color (Gibson 2007).

Although residents of post-flood Albina built an established community in many respects, displacement continued to come in waves. Post-World War Two redevelopment picked up steam during the 1950s, often routed through working-class communities of color throughout the United States. Gibson explains how this unfolded in Albina:

“In 1956, voters approved the construction of the Memorial Coliseum in the Eliot neighborhood, which destroyed commercial establishments and 476 homes, roughly half of them inhabited by African Americans. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 made funds available to cities across the nation to whisk suburban residents to and fro. As a result, several hundred housing units were demolished in the Eliot neighborhood to make way for Interstate 5 and Highway 99, both running north/south through Albina” (2007:11).

These and other developments pushed African Americans northwest, north and northeast away from the economic opportunity of the growing city center.



The extent to which racial and ethnic inequality has impacted the course of United States history is immense (Massey and Denton 1993). One of the clearest manifestations of this is residential segregation, which is said to serve as “the institutional apparatus that supports other racially discriminatory processes and binds them together into a coherent and uniquely effective system of racial subordination” (Massey and Denton 1993:8). The segregation that exists today in many United States cities, where nearly 100% African American or Hispanic ghettos are surrounded by nearly 100% Non-Hispanic white neighborhoods and suburbs (Massey and Denton 1993), significantly impedes the development of social connections across racial and ethnic differences. However, racial and ethnic division can prevail in the absence of pronounced residential segregation like that which exists in Detroit, Milwaukee or New York City. Such is the case in cities like Portland, Oregon, where historically African American neighborhoods have always been *relatively* diverse. In fact, the diversification of a neighborhood can itself be a source of much conflict as marginalized longtime residents may question the motives of the demographic and cultural changes they see taking place.

Gentrification refers to demographic change in urban areas that often coincides with the process of “urban renewal” or “redevelopment”. It is a process of making residential and/or commercial investments to attract middle-class individuals to an area where longtime residents are generally described as working-class (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2007). Property values in these areas are relatively low, especially considering that they tend to be in close proximity to city centers where middle-class individuals work and play. Following post-World War Two urban sprawl (also referred to as “white flight”), in which suburban development exploded along the newly built interstate highway system,

present-day gentrification takes place in the context of a return of the middle-class to United States cities. This reversal of urban sprawl, an increasing trend, often involves the incoming residents sacrificing relatively cheap suburban housing and property for the conveniences and cultural offerings of urban living. However, incoming gentrifiers are not passive consumers of urban culture but very much influence it, establishing and patronizing businesses that reflect their middle-class tastes. Some longtime residents of gentrifying neighborhoods embrace incoming businesses, housing renovations, and other changes. Others lament the fact that they lead to sharp increases in rent and housing prices. These increases can force longtime residents to leave the neighborhoods they call home; such is the case in Portland, Oregon in recent years.

While gentrification is strictly defined in terms of class differences, racial and ethnic differences are often present between longtime and incoming residents as well: “Inner-city neighborhoods are also an historic site of racial inequalities in which the homogenizing forces of racist segregation may affect real and symbolic racial differences among long-time residents in their reactions to neighborhood change” (Shaw 2005:5). Some residents in these neighborhoods have reported perceiving boundaries based somewhat more on race and ethnicity than social class (Shaw 2005). These boundaries may result in a lack of social connections across racial and ethnic differences.

By definition gentrifying neighborhoods are heterogeneous and *opportunities* for connections across racial and ethnic differences are to be expected, but by no means guaranteed. Stakeholders in gentrification efforts often refer to the potential for “social mixing” when advocating for redevelopment projects, but rarely provide evidence that similar projects have had this effect in the past (Lees 2008). Ultimately, all parties in

gentrifying neighborhoods must negotiate the boundaries that permeate the social landscape of the United States on a local level. Many neighborhoods in Northeast Portland, where the CSN's sites are largely located, are currently in the process of gentrification that is complicated by a history of racial discrimination and displacement (Gibson 2007; Shaw and Sullivan 2011; Sullivan and Shaw 2011; Sullivan 2007).

### *Mapping Recent Changes in Northeast Portland*

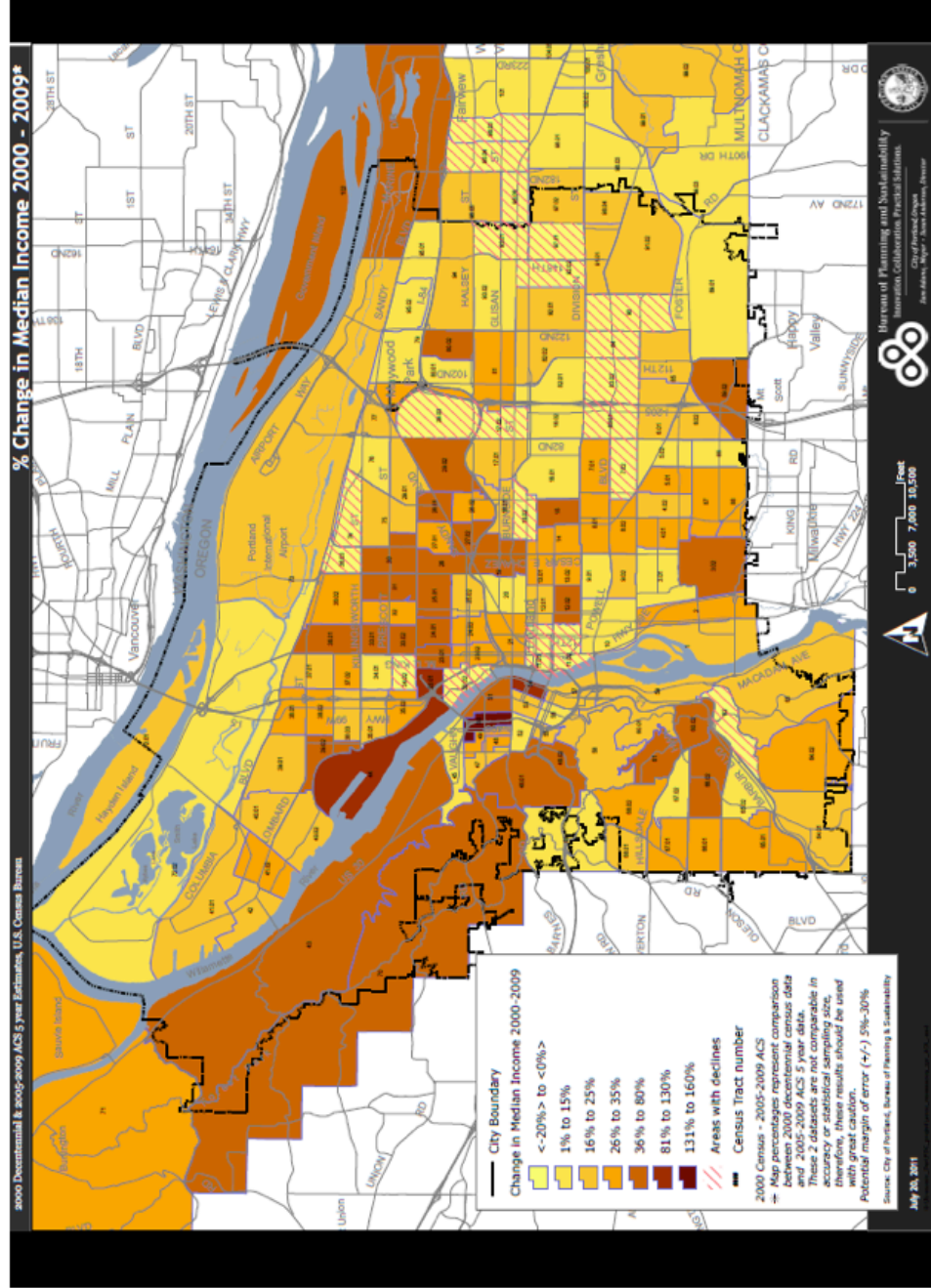
Today, working-class folks of all racial and ethnic backgrounds (but particularly African Americans) continue to be displaced from Northeast Portland. While the forces of recent displacement are distinct in some ways, they are variations on a long-standing theme. Instead of large-scale stadium or infrastructure projects, current gentrification in this area of Portland is more about middle-class folks' increasing desire to live in the city. Cultural offerings and educational and economic opportunities have led to significant growth in Portland, which increased in population by over 33% between 1990 and 2010 (United States Census Bureau 2010). The Albina district and Northeast Portland in particular, with proximity to the city center and relatively affordable housing, has seen swift changes as newcomers renovate newly purchased homes and storefronts. Increasing housing costs for renters and owners has forced working-class and poor folks away from city center; this trend has a distinct racial and ethnic pattern to it as well.

Due in part to a history of housing discrimination and disinvestment (Gibson 2007), African Americans and other minorities have been disproportionately

affected by gentrification in Northeast Portland. Figure 1 (see page 13) shows changes in median income in Portland (by census tract) from 2000-2009<sup>1</sup>. As indicated by darker shading, a majority of the census tracts in Northeast Portland saw increases of median income of at least 26% during this period. Many of them saw increases of 36% or greater, including several that contain portions of the Albina District.

1: The borders of Northeast Portland are North Williams Avenue to the east (which runs north/south in line with the Willamette River's position in the city center), East Burnside Street to the south (which lies just south of Interstate 84), 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue to the east (which lies just west of Interstate 205) and the Columbia Slough to the north.

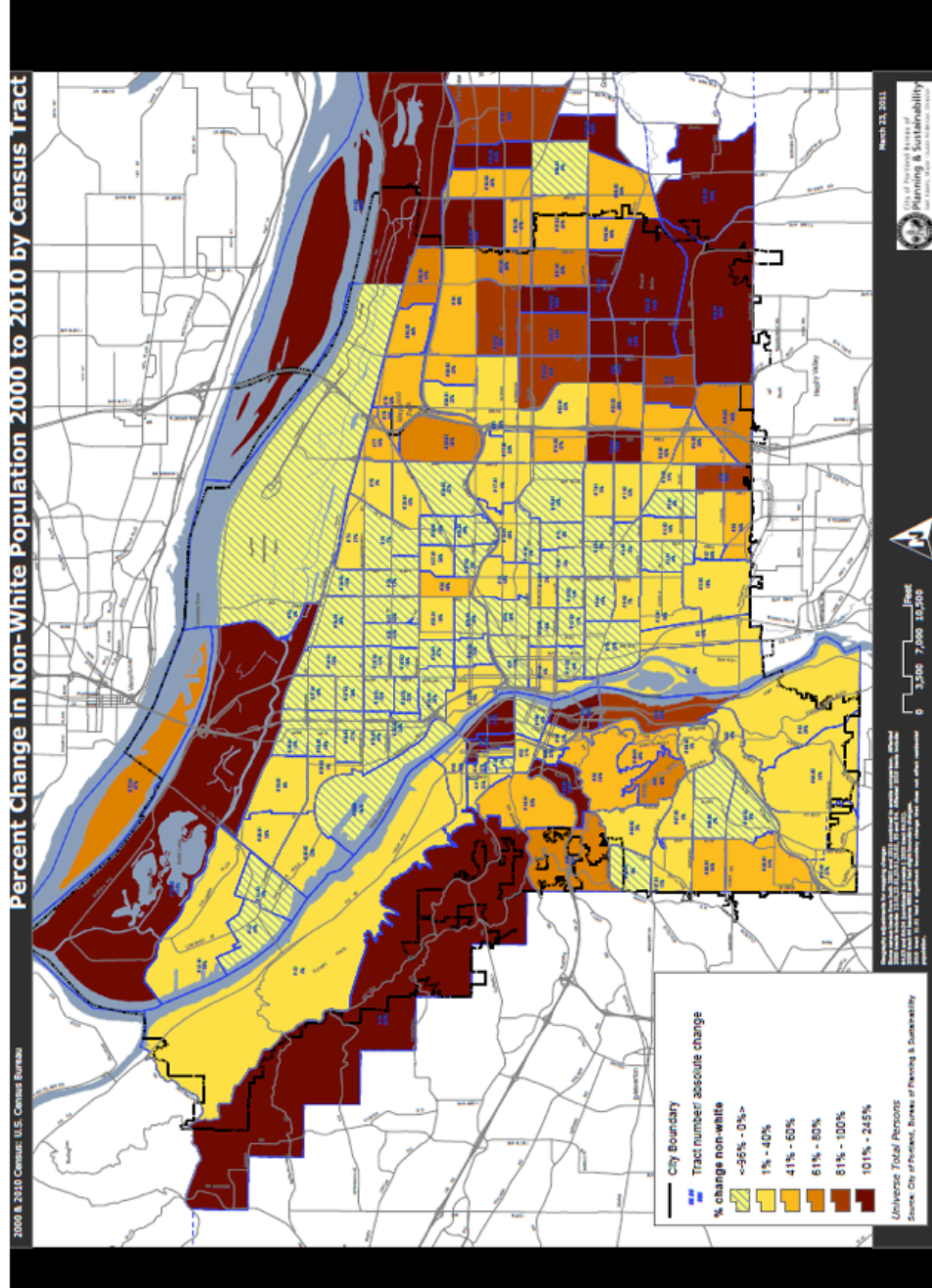
Figure 1: Median Income Change in Portland, by Census Tract (2000-2009)



Source: Dotterer and Krishnan 2011

Social class changes in Northeast Portland unmistakably coincide with racial and ethnic changes. Figure 2 (see page 14) illustrates changes in non-white population from 2000-2010, also by census tract. As indicated by lighter, striped shading, nearly every tract in Northeast Portland saw a decrease in its non-white population. All but one of the census tracts containing portions of the Albina District became whiter during this decade.

**Figure 2: Non-White Population Change in Portland, by Census Tract (2000-2010)**



Source: Dotterer and Krishnan 2011

While African Americans are the most historically rooted non-white community in this area, the population change above suggests that Hispanics, Native Americans and others may be struggling to remain in inner Northeast Portland as well. Because these other non-white populations, specifically Hispanics, have grown to significant numbers in Portland much more recently, the history of their marginalization in the city is not as extensive. However, all communities of color in the Portland area today are far behind that of whites in many measures of socioeconomic standing. As of 2010, communities of color in the Portland area earned just over half of the mean annual income of whites (\$16,635 and \$33,095 respectively), and had a 35.7% higher unemployment rate than whites. These disparities between communities of color and whites are wider in the Portland area than in many other metro areas in the United States (Curry-Stevens, Cross-Hemmer, and Coalition of Communities of Color 2010).

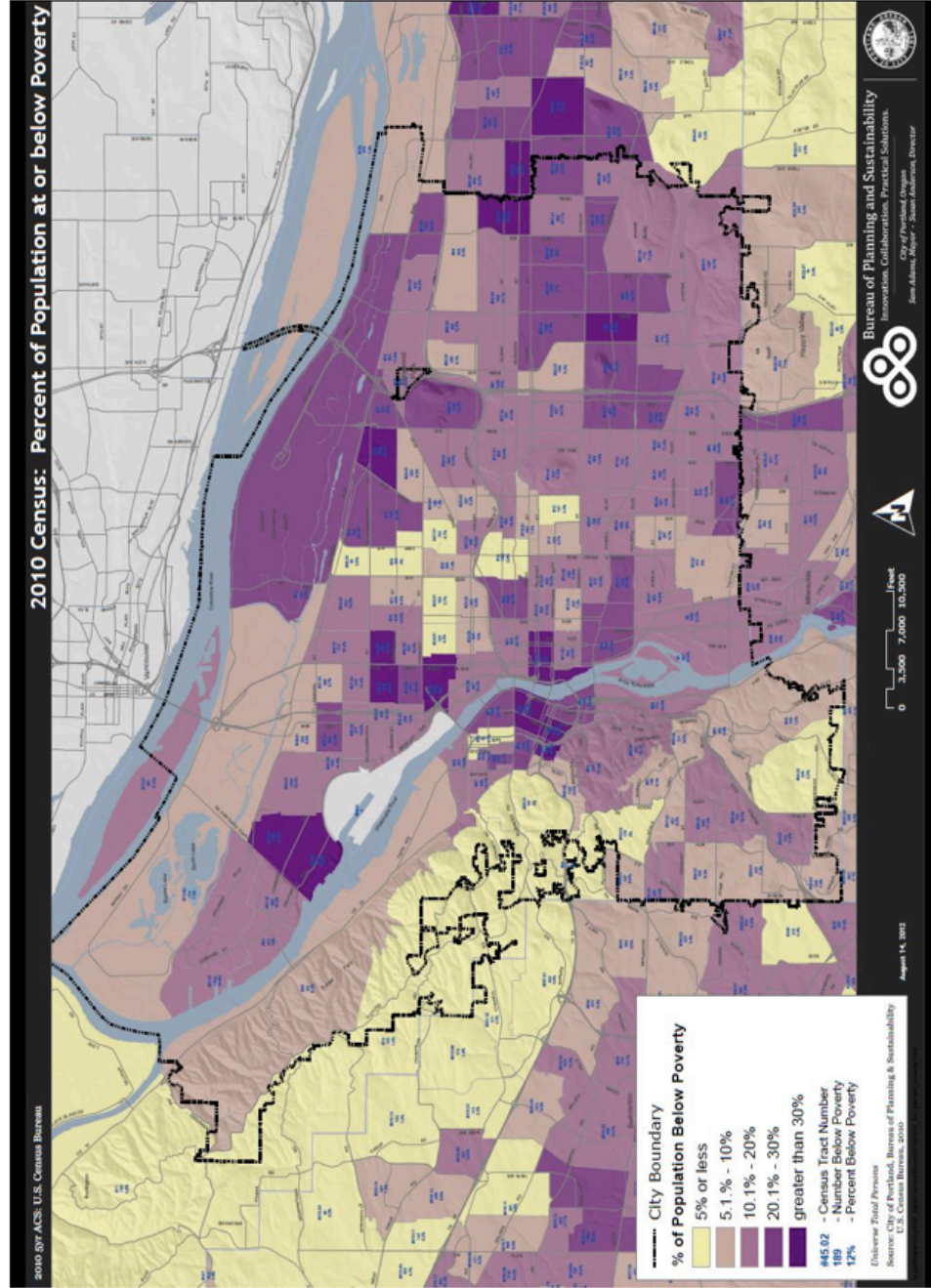
As indicated by darker shading, Figure 2 shows that non-white populations increased dramatically on the city's eastern periphery and in the adjacent city of Gresham to the east where rent and housing prices are much cheaper. The figures showing both median income and non-white population changes in Northeast Portland merely include changes beginning in 2000; while they are significant on their own, it is important to keep in mind that the coinciding trends they illustrate go back to the early 1990s (Gibson 2007).

Although both trends in the figures above are significant and well established, both racial and ethnic diversity and poverty conditions remain in Northeast Portland in significant numbers. Figure 3 (see page 16) shows rates of poverty in the Portland area in



2010, by census tract. As indicated by darker purples, a number of the census tracts in Northeast Portland had poverty rates of at least 20% and several had rates of at least 30%. Those with rates of at least 30% are located in the Albina district or in the Cully neighborhood to the east (with the Columbia Slough adjacent to the north). These impoverished areas are also among the most racially and ethnically diverse areas of the city, which speaks to the correlation between race and ethnicity and social class in the Portland area.

Figure 3: Poverty Rates in Portland, by Census Tract (2010)



Source: Dacanay 2012

“Food desert” scholarship is an increasingly popular means by which the relationship between poverty conditions and food access is discussed. A food desert is an area that lacks physical proximity to a full-service grocery store; these areas are identified with simple mapping of (usually low-income) areas and the average distance that residents in these areas have to travel to get to the nearest store. Due to the presence of a number of high-cost grocery stores in gentrifying neighborhoods of Northeast Portland (e.g. Whole Foods), traditional food desert mapping would consider them adequate in terms of food access. These sorts of areas may be described as “food mirages”, as their low-income residents cannot afford to frequent the grocery stores nearest them (Breyer and Voss-Andreae 2013). Recent analysis of Portland, which differentiated between low, medium and high-cost grocery stores, found that “81% of people in poverty in Portland reside in census tracts that are more than 1 mile from a low-cost store, representing 13% of the total population” (Breyer and Voss-Andreae 2013:134). As has been established, a significant amount of this population in poverty resides in Northeast Portland.

In many neighborhoods in Northeast Portland, demographic changes have coincided with distinct cultural changes. Branded as a “creative” and “bohemian” city (Bulick et al. 2003; Florida 2002), incoming residents have brought with them an influx of new art galleries, coffee shops and boutiques that have come to be associated with displacement by some longtime residents (Shaw and Sullivan 2011; Sullivan and Shaw 2011). Many longtime residents in these neighborhoods are African Americans, some of whom have identified not only racial and ethnic boundaries but also broader cultural or

subcultural boundaries as an explanation for why they choose not to patronize the new establishments (Shaw 2005).

Throughout its recent period of significant demographic change, Portland has also developed into a leading city in terms of sustainability. In fact, it has recently been ranked as the most sustainable city in the United States (Karlenzig and Hawken 2007). As many residents of Portland have embraced sustainability and connected it to a larger “bohemian” lifestyle, it is possible that longtime residents have come to associate sustainability efforts with other changes that they lament. Newly established community gardens, then, could be seen as amenities that are “not for them”, so to speak. Despite the universal need for nutritious food, it is important to consider residents’ perceptions of community gardens in the larger context of neighborhood changes in Northeast Portland. As community gardens are presumably a setting in which “community” is cultivated, this context of neighborhood change may influence who gets involved and who develops greater access to resources (i.e. social capital) through their involvement.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is the actual or potential access to resources that members of a social network develop through their interactions (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital networks require continued social investment and norms of reciprocity and trust that, if practiced, can lead to a variety of benefits for those in the network (Putnam 2000). These benefits may be in the form of favors repaid, perhaps with valuable and scarce information about a job opportunity or something as simple as a neighbor watching your dog when you leave town. In order for an individual to develop social capital, they “must

be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage” (Portes 1998: 7). A popular phrase comes to mind: “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know”.

Early use of the term social capital, which has been in use for over a century, sheds light on why access to the benefits of social investment came to be defined in terms of “capital”. In a study of rural communities and their efforts to support local schools, Hanifan described social capital in direct relation to more tangible, economic value:

"I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse..." (1916:130).

It is implied that, however more abstract it is than financial capital, this fundamental value of social investment should not be overlooked. While distinguishing it from financial capital, the use of the term capital also draws a parallel between the two<sup>2</sup>.

Following Hanifan and other pioneers, social scientists have developed the term through empirical research, offering new categorizations of social capital and challenging each other’s use of it. In large part due to Robert D. Putnam’s popular book “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community”, which is the extension of an eponymous journal article (Putnam 1995), the use of social capital terminology has extended beyond academia in recent years. After arguing that it is in an unfortunate decline, Putnam suggests that increased social capital development is a solution to many of the United States’ social woes (2000). These and other works from the 1990s and 2000s are criticized for being excessively celebratory in nature and making reductive, moralizing statements about social capital development (Portes 1998). For instance,

2: This provides a frequently used common ground for discourse between economists and social scientists (Portes 1998).

scholars have accused some of the term's prominent users of overlooking unequal access to social capital (Edwards and Foley 1997; Lin 2001) and its exclusionary potential (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Wall, Ferrazzi, and Schryer 1998). Portes explains that for some groups, including tightly-knit racial and ethnic groups, "...the same strong ties that bring benefits to members of a group commonly enable it to bar others from access" (Portes 1998:15). These groups can be described as possessing an exclusionary form of "bonding" social capital.

The distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital is useful for investigating contexts of perceived difference between individuals or groups and, often, the inequality that accompanies them. Bonding social capital refers to social investment and mutual benefit (actual or potential) within a network that is more or less homogeneous. Bridging social capital refers to that among people that are thought to differ in some significant way (Larsen et al. 2004; Putnam 2000). These categories of similarity and difference may include race and ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, political orientation and age, among others. Given the context of Northeast Portland, racially and ethnically bonding and bridging social capital will be the main focus for this study.

Due to the extent of the inequality that exists between many of these categories, particularly race and ethnicity, bonding social capital development among more privileged groups *may* serve to increase disparities that already exist. Members of bonding social capital networks may even actively maintain the scarcity of the valuable resources they exchange in order to maintain their advantage; this process is known as group closure (Manza 1992). Bonding social capital development among less privileged

and isolated groups, while certainly valuable, is limited in its ability to decrease disparities on its own (Wallis, Crocker, and Schechter 1998). Bridging social capital development, on the other hand, may enable the sharing of resources among individuals and across forms of difference, potentially reducing disparities between unequal groups. Research on this type of social capital often discusses the concept in terms of “inclusive solidarity between people of different backgrounds” (Titeca and Vervisch 2008:2205). Given the context of the United States, most successful community building efforts in diverse settings address the impact of racism to some extent (Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson 1997).

Although social capital is often discussed in terms of informal relationships within social networks, bridging social capital can also be used to describe relationships between formal organizations whose constituencies differ in some way. These relationships can be present in partnerships between nonprofit organizations with overlapping missions and between nonprofits and government bodies. Organizations that are embedded in their communities may serve as the vital link between these communities and other organizations (Weisinger and Salipante 2005). In terms of racially and ethnically bridging social capital, these often include social service and religious organizations that, unlike many local and state-level government bodies, have the trust of disadvantaged communities (Cnaan, Boddie, and McGrew 2006; Warren 2001). Partnering organizations that practice norms of reciprocity and trust can develop mutually beneficial relationships and exchange resources in the same way that individuals and informal groups do within a social network; ideally, these conditions then extend down to the organizations’ constituencies on a more informal level.

## **Voluntary Organizations and Diversity**

Scholars study inclusion efforts *of* and social connections *within* a variety of voluntary organizations in diverse contexts. These include nonprofit (Weisinger and Salipante 2005), civic (Moore 2006) and social movement organizations (Piatelli 2008). The solidarity that all of these types of organizations seek to build is inhibited by the presence of inequality and division in their communities. In order to achieve their goals, these organizations stand to gain significantly from the development of bridging social capital among diverse constituents. This process is often explained through the use of social capital terminology, but not exclusively; alternative phrasing includes “pluralistic diversity” (Weisinger and Salipante 2005) and “cross-difference organizing” (Piatelli 2008).

Voluntary organizations tend to be positioned for success if their constituency is a microcosm of the community in which they operate. A lack of representation within these organizations means that valuable perspectives are lost and those who hold them in the community may develop feelings of isolation (McGhee 2003). To be sure, however, diversity efforts are not simply achieved upon an organization’s initial efforts. Organizations may find that, upon inclusion of a diverse group of participants, racially and ethnically bridging social capital development may be overpowered by the strength of preexisting bonded groups (Weisinger and Salipante 2005). Racial and ethnic boundaries within communities in the United States are often daunting, even for those making a conscious effort to cross them.



Conflicts can be prevented when bridging social capital is developed among communities that previously perceived each other as separate in some significant way. In fact, civic organizations founded in the pursuit of bridging social capital networks have been identified as a preventative factor of ethnicity-based violence in the United Kingdom (Moore 2006). Voluntary organizations like these have the potential to contribute significantly to the erosion of boundaries between diverse groups of people; the nature of the twenty-first century is such that it is an understatement to describe eroding these boundaries as an imposing task. Although the results of empirical studies have been mixed, community gardening has been identified as a place where divided peoples may come together.

### **Community Gardens**

Community gardens have been described as a beneficial “third place” for participants where they can interact and enjoy a shared green space while growing their own fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers. Often, community gardens are established in places that lack public green spaces and non-commercial public spaces in general. In recent years community gardens have been proliferating in urban areas throughout the world. Along with farmers markets and food policy councils, they play a major role in the rapidly growing community food movement (McBride 2009). Research suggests that community garden participants may benefit from improved nutrition (Alaimo et al. 2008), increased physical activity (Dickinson et al. 2003), improved food security (Wakefield et al. 2007) and the development of social capital among their gardening

peers (Firth et al. 2011; Glover, Parry, and Shiness 2005; Glover 2004; Kingsley and Townsend 2006).

While the lion's share of research on community gardens is qualitative, a survey of 20 community garden organizations (representing 63 gardens) in upstate New York provides us a sketch from which to set out. This survey found that "46% of the gardens were located in low-income urban areas" (Armstrong 2000:322). Racial and ethnic minorities represented the majority of participants in approximately 30% the gardens. 87% of them entailed some sort of cooperative gardening. 33% of garden representatives claimed that their gardens lead to other neighborhood issues being addressed, while 51% claimed that participation contributed to improved attitudes of residents about their neighborhood (Armstrong 2000). Although these data are geographically specific, they suggest that the role of community gardens in surrounding neighborhoods is potentially significant.

Among the most common ways that social scientists have analyzed community gardens is through the lens of social capital, with significant discussion of bonding and bridging social capital in particular (Firth et al. 2011; Glover et al. 2005; Glover 2004; Kingsley and Townsend 2006). A comparative study of two community garden organizations in greater Nottingham, United Kingdom found differences in the development of bridging social capital between them (Firth et al. 2011). One of the organizations, located in a suburb, allowed several outside organizations to use their space. These groups did not interact much and thus did not develop a great deal of social capital. The second organization, whose garden is located in inner city Nottingham, played host to the development of racially and ethnically bridging social capital. In this

instance, food is described as uniquely effective in getting participants to identify and socialize with neighbors that they previously had not. One of its staff members suggested: “a few years ago there were barriers between the Asian and Black communities, but these have been broken down as people have joined in our food-related activities” (Firth et al. 2011:563).

Community garden participants in a diversifying urban area of Melbourne, Australia also spoke to the ability of gardening to bring together people that otherwise wouldn't have a space in which to develop social capital: “Informants noted that the gardens were a place to be more connected with the community whereas before they had felt isolated, or lived in their ‘own little world’ of ‘family and close friends’” (Kingsley and Townsend 2006:531). A case study of a community organization in a city in the Midwestern United States, which included a community garden as one of its several endeavors, had marginal success in facilitating ties across racial and ethnic lines. The organization's president commented: “We have the support of at least a portion of the Black community here”. She lamented that “the garden was still perceived by African American residents as the ‘white folks’ project” (Glover 2004:154). The primarily white core group of participants in the garden (and the organization as a whole) developed bonding social capital that, while valuable to them, appeared exclusionary to others in the neighborhood. This complicated efforts to develop racially and ethnically bridging social capital among residents (Glover 2004).

Firth et al. (2011) suggest that the ambiguity of the term “community” calls for a deeper analysis of community garden organizations. Through both a review of community garden literature and their own comparative analysis they make the

distinction between “place-based” and “interest-based” community gardens. Place-based community gardens are established and cultivated primarily by folks that live in close proximity to them. Social capital that is developed among place-based community garden participants can potentially impact their lives beyond garden activities, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods that lack public spaces for social capital development. Interest-based community gardens, on the other hand, are established and cultivated primarily by folks with preexisting interest in growing local, organic food. If necessary, individuals with this shared interest would travel from various neighborhoods in a city to a garden site to participate. They would also likely seek out the organization on their own, whereas place-based community building would require the organization to actively seek out participants in the neighborhood around the garden site.

Given the largely middle-class, white composition of the environmental sustainability movement (Guthman 2008; Slocum 2007), which sees urban agriculture as a means to address a number of pressing environmental problems, social capital developed among interest-based garden participants would likely be bonding in nature. Depending on the composition of the neighborhoods they lie within, place-based gardens may be more likely to host bridging social capital development than interest-based gardens. In terms of race and ethnicity and social class, even a moderately diverse neighborhood is likely to be more diverse than the environmental sustainability movement is at present. It would therefore provide more *potential* for bridging social capital development across these lines. To find that the CSN distinctly builds place-based or interest-based community would help us understand which type of social capital development is more likely to take place.

### **Just Sustainability: Perspectives on Sustainability and Equality**

With a broad gaze one can discuss community gardens as part of the community food movement or, more generally, the environmental movement. When discussing the environmental movement, a distinction is often made between environmental sustainability and environmental justice. In other words, this distinguishes between advocates for the health of the environment in general and advocates for people that are disproportionately and negatively impacted by the state of the environment. Environmental justice advocates fight for communities that experience the burden of environmental “bads”, such as living in highly polluted areas, and enjoy few environmental “goods”, such as access to green spaces or farmers’ markets.

Whether or not the environmental sustainability movement can successfully be aligned with the environmental justice movement is a matter of scholarly debate. Agyeman, Bullard and Evans (2002) claim that an inextricable *theoretical* link exists between environmental sustainability and environmental justice. They suggest: “A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity, are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems” (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2002:78). To describe the potential movement that this link implies, Agyeman and Evans (2003) coined the phrase “just sustainability”. A number of scholars express doubt as to whether this theoretical link between environmental sustainability and environmental justice has led to real world coalescence between the two movements. In fact, bike infrastructure development and other sustainable projects are often discussed as if they are apolitical, or even post-political. Agyeman claims that “There is a common belief among those in the

environmental sustainability movement that as they are ‘saving the world’, they are saving it for everyone *equally*, which somehow absolves them from wider discussions of equity and justice” (2008:751). This rhetoric serves to justify “fast-tracking” these projects with a lack of sufficient community engagement by governments and other developers, particularly with historically marginalized communities (Lubitow and Miller 2013).

The common belief that Agyeman mentions may help to explain why Agyeman and Clarke found that sustainability projects in the United Kingdom have “been largely unsuccessful in involving groups typically marginalized in the wider community, such as low-income groups and Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities” (2011:1774). While it is significant, a lack of concern with inequality is not the only factor that accounts for a lack of diversity in environmental sustainability efforts. Disadvantaged groups often lack the “privilege of concern” for environmental issues, as the basics like paying their bills and putting food on their tables may require all of their time and energy (Porritt and Winner 1988). This privilege of concern may be something that certain sustainability advocates take for granted, given the universal rhetoric they employ and the level playing field it implies.

The universal rhetoric that is found throughout the largely white, middle-class environmental sustainability movement may stand in the way of it joining forces with the more diverse environmental justice movement. Slocum discusses this with particular focus on the community food movement: “While the ideals of healthy food, people and land are not intrinsically white, the objectives, tendencies, strategies, the emphases and absences and the things overlooked in community food make them so” (2007:526). It is

possible that one of the significant “things overlooked” is a sufficient focus on inequality of access. Understandings that tend to be culturally specific to whiteness and white privilege are often discussed as if universal to humanity. A community garden organization that operates from such a perspective of universal benefit would likely be unconcerned with the social composition of its participants, as long as the garden yields food in a sustainable way and contributes to notions of an environmental “greater good”. They would also likely be unconcerned with the nature of the social connections developed among participants, as any benefits gained from these would be considered supplemental to the fact that participants are working the soil sustainably and producing sustainable produce.

Agyeman and Evans (2003) describe examples of just and sustainable activities by local and regional organizations in United States, including those involved with land use planning, toxic chemical use and transportation. A community garden organization that subscribes to this ethic would likely be driven to include those who stand to benefit most from growing and eating local, organic food (i.e. those experiencing food insecurity). Food insecurity is “the condition of having limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food” (Regional Equity Atlas 2007:72). In 2011, Multnomah county (in which the vast majority of Portland lies) had an overall food insecurity rate of 16.5% and a child food insecurity rate of 24.2% (Greater Portland Pulse 2011).

Needless to say, those experiencing poverty are relatively more likely to experience food insecurity at some point. Therefore poverty rates can serve as an indicator of actual, or at the very least *potential*, food insecurity. According to ACS data

from 2005-2009, those racial and ethnic groups who stand to benefit most from community gardening in Portland are Native Americans (33% poverty rate), African Americans (33%) and Hispanics (27%). Comparing these poverty rates to those for Asian Americans (17%) and whites (14%) (Dotterer and Krishnan 2011) illustrates the extent of racial and ethnic inequality that persists in the city. The fact that the CSN's mission statement includes "improving food security" suggests that the organization is aware of the presence of this inequality in Portland and seeks to address it, provided their understanding of food security is similar to the definition provided above.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I reviewed previous literature related to a number of sociological issues that are relevant a case study of the CSN. First, I drew connections between Northeast Portland's history of racial and ethnic discrimination, racial and ethnic inequality that persists today and the ongoing process of gentrification in the area. Second, I discussed the concept of social capital (and other terms that refer to this concept) as it relates to community garden and other voluntary organizations. Third, I explored perspectives within the environmental movement and how they might relate to the efforts of community gardening organizations like the CSN. Altogether, previous literature confirmed the need for further empirical investigation of community garden organizations.

With the benefits of community gardening in mind, and an awareness of the problems in Northeast Portland that community gardening can potentially alleviate, it is important to explore the inclusion efforts *of* and social connections *within* the City Soil



Network. The many benefits of participation, social or otherwise, are inaccessible to those that for whatever reason do not participate in the CSN's gardens in their neighborhoods. The following chapter will describe the methods employed to answer the research questions posed.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

One tenet of qualitative social research is that, in our complex socially constructed world, understanding larger processes often requires in-depth exploration of individual and group perspectives. Keeping perspectives in mind, qualitative researchers can investigate the “...tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations” of participants in a social setting (Marshall and Rossman 2010:91). Virtually all research concerning community gardens, inclusion efforts *of* and/or social connections *within* voluntary organizations uses qualitative methods to collect data. Researchers used interviews, participant observation or focus groups and many performed case studies that combined these methods (Firth et al. 2011; Glover et al. 2005; Glover 2004; Kingsley and Townsend 2006; Larsen et al. 2004; Moore 2006; Piatelli 2008; Weisinger and Salipante 2005). A qualitative case study may shed light on “...real, as opposed to stated organizational goals” (Marshall and Rossman 2010:91). Marshall and Rossman seem to suggest that one can identify the “real” goals of an organization, which runs counter to the constructivist paradigm within which qualitative research is generally employed. I would substitute “real” with “observed” to describe this merit of case studies.

By performing content analysis on organizational materials, I collected data to provide answers to the research questions posed. Data collected from content analysis illustrated the organization’s mission, values and other policies and practices. This content was primarily collected from the City Soil Network’s (CSN’s) website. By observing and interviewing both garden managers and participants, I acquired still more data to answer the research questions posed. Data collected from participant observation

illustrated the degree to which garden managers and participants *appeared* to facilitate community building from my perspective. Data collected from in-depth interviews with organizational staff (“planning team”) members, garden managers and participants illustrated how they understood the organization’s pursuit of building community and improving food security, as well as the role they each individually played in this pursuit.

Although the “subject” of this case study is the CSN, its “object” (Thomas 2011) is a conceptual framework that includes the context of Northeast Portland and how this context relates to food issues in the area. By interviewing representatives of community organizations that serve Northeast Portland I was able to gain insight regarding food access and the role that community gardening currently plays in improving food access. Importantly, these interviews also provided informed opinions of the role that community gardening *could* play, as well as expected obstacles to increasing this role.

The selected case is ideal for a number of reasons. The CSN has managed a growing number of community gardens in Northeast Portland since 2009, and is beginning to expand to other areas of the city. A small planning team serves as administration for the organization at large and one or more garden managers oversee each individual garden site. Most of these sites are located in diverse and demographically fluid neighborhoods, some of which have been identified as being in the process of gentrification (Shaw and Sullivan 2011; Sullivan and Shaw 2011; Sullivan 2007). Many community gardens are divided into individual plots that can be maintained by participants with little interaction with each other. This is not the case for the sites managed by the CSN, which truly require a collective effort to be maintained by those involved.

Each CSN garden site plays a role in the larger product of the organization. Garden managers and participants alike log their hours in the gardens and receive a proportionate amount of produce at a weekly, organization-wide barter market. This work trade arrangement means that, although one needs to have time available to participate, one does not need to have money to be involved at any level within the CSN. At the weekly barter market, those involved have access to a *much* larger variety of produce, which would seem to provide the potential for more nutritionally balanced and culturally appropriate selections. Provided the planning team properly rotates crops at individual garden sites, their soil would remain balanced as well; this would make for greater yields in terms of both quality and quantity. To my knowledge the CSN's model, with all its apparent benefits, is unique in terms of community garden organizations that are discussed in social science publications.

With the intention of collecting data from various perspectives within the CSN, planning team members, garden managers and participants were subjects (of my observation) and/or participants (in interviews) in this case study. In order to perform successful case study research, the researcher must have "either a prolonged or intense exposure to the phenomenon under study within its context..." (Baxter and Jack 2008:556). I gained this exposure through participant observation at CSN garden sites. Participant observation illuminated the organization's practices as I subjectively observed them. This stage of the research was valuable in that it yielded data *and* aided in my becoming familiar with interview participants. In fact, the exposure that I acquired through participant observation in the CSN may have diminished the social desirability effect in interviewees' responses (Krefting 1991).

Studying single cases with “embedded units” (Baxter and Jack 2008) or “nested elements” (Thomas 2011), in this case individual CSN garden sites, allows for within-case, between-case and cross-case analyses and makes for a thorough study. Following initial content analysis of organizational materials, I began six months of observation as a garden participant in four of the garden sites managed by the CSN in Northeast Portland, at the barter market (twelve times in a thirteen week period), at one formal potluck at the barter market manager’s home and at one informal event at a bar near the barter market site. In total, I performed 55.25 hours of participant observation within the organization.

In order to observe settings with the potential for racially and ethnically bridging social capital development, I participated in those garden sites located in the most racially diverse areas (see Table 1 on page 36). Strictly numerically speaking, residents in more diverse neighborhoods have more opportunities to build relationships across racial and ethnic lines. Because all of these areas are more than 50% white, diversity is ranked in terms of the percentage of the area that reported white as their race. The level of analysis was census block group; garden sites located near the borders of multiple block groups are described using the demographic averages for those block groups. Because the census measures race and ethnicity separately (with the options for ethnicity being “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino”) a column divides these data from the data for race. Though “Hispanic or Latino” status is not an option for race it is likely that many of those that reported “Hispanic or Latino” as their ethnicity reported “Other” or “Two or More” as their race, but potentially “white” as well.

**Table 1: Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Most Diverse CSN Garden Site Areas in Northeast Portland, by Census Block Group(s)**

Garden Site	% White	% Afr. Amer.	% Asian	% Amer. Ind./ Alask. Nat.	% Nat. Haw./ Pac. Isl.	% Other	% 2 or More	% Hisp./Lat.
Amaranth	50.3	23.0	4.0	3.0	0.7	12.1	6.9	22.1
Blackberry	52.0	13.2	6.0	2.6	0.4	20.1	5.7	30.2
Cauliflower	54.4	19.9	1.3	2.6	0.0	18.1	3.6	31.6
Dill	54.6	31.1	1.6	0.5	0.3	6.2	5.7	13.8

Source: census.gov

After establishing myself as a frequent garden participant, I performed eleven semi-structured in-depth interviews with planning team members, garden staff and fellow participants of the CSN. More specifically, I interviewed two organization-wide planning team members, five individual garden managers and four garden participants. Although some questions were developed for interviewees at specific levels of involvement within the organization (see Appendices A,B and C beginning on page 108), topics discussed across all three levels included:

- How interviewees came to be involved with the CSN
- What an “average” day in a CSN garden site entails
- What they think the CSN’s barter system offers that other community gardening models may not
- Their understanding of the CSN’s mission of “community building”
- How the organization recruits new participants
- Whether and how the CSN partners with other organizations
- Whether and how the neighborhoods around the CSN’s garden sites have benefitted from their presence
- Whether and how they have personally benefitted from involvement with the CSN

Together the interviewees reported having participated in at least seven of the thirteen CSN garden sites located in Northeast Portland, including the four sites I performed participant observation in. Interviewees also filled out a short questionnaire that provided basic information including their age, their level of education and the number of years they have lived in Portland. This questionnaire was useful at the outset of my analysis as it provided a sketch of the interviewees and enabled me to compare them to the demographics of the neighborhoods in which the CSN's garden sites rest. To ensure the confidentiality of responses to both interview questions and the short questionnaire, I coordinated meetings with all interviewees away from the garden sites.

In addition to CSN interviews, I performed semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six representatives of community organizations (representing five organizations) that serve Northeast Portland in some capacity. Three of these interviewees represented two local, African-American specific advocacy organizations; their positions were Health Equity Coordinator, Community Health Worker Organizer and Internal Program Evaluator. Another interviewee was the longtime pastor of a predominantly African-American church in Northeast Portland. In addition to being a religious leader in the community, this pastor is also considered a leader in terms of advocacy for healthy and active lifestyles in his community. Finally, two interviewees represented state-level public health advocacy organizations that serve citizens of Northeast Portland, among others in Oregon; their positions were Health Equity Coordinator and Project Manager for Healthy Eating and Active Living.

While interviews with those involved with the CSN and those with representatives of outside organizations were semi-structured, the latter were particularly

so. This is partially due to the very distinct work these interviewees do and my desire to let their perspectives come through unencumbered by structured questions. Nonetheless, I developed a small interview guide for these representatives (see Appendix D on page 114) in order to prompt discussions of:

- What specific community or communities interviewees serve in Northeast Portland
- The nature of their work with this community or communities
- Their understanding of the extent of need for greater access to healthy, affordable food in Northeast Portland
- Whether and how community gardening currently plays a significant role in increasing access to healthy, affordable food in Northeast Portland
- Whether and how the role of community gardening may play an increased role in this pursuit

### **Data Analysis**

From the onset I analyzed all collected data (content produced by the CSN, field notes from participant observation and interview transcripts) in concert through an open coding process. Simply put, open coding entails a researcher organizing data into a hierarchy of interrelated but distinct categories, or codes (Charmaz 2006). This process works well with semi-structured interview design, as interviewees often discuss similar topics but at different junctures in interviews. I began without a rigid codebook based on rigid interview questions; in doing so, I believe I more effectively gave voice to interviewees and discussed my observations of and discussions with those I gardened alongside.

The aforementioned hierarchy of codes includes relatively broad categories (“parent” codes) and smaller, more specific ones (“child” codes) within them. Throughout the coding process I consolidated, separated, promoted, demoted and



eliminated categories as I identified connections between pieces of data. This code development was aided by analytic memo writing, an informal practice of recording my evolving insights and interpretations (Marshall and Rossman 2010). My final codebook consisted of 32 codes. Generally speaking these codes informed, but did not *dictate*, the development of my findings sections and subsections.

### **Advantages and Limitations of the Study**

A main advantage of case study research is the opportunity to explore complex social processes from various perspectives and through multiple methods of data collection. Doing so allows for multiple facets of a social phenomenon, in this case the CSN, to be understood (Baxter and Jack 2008; Simons 2009). Because all data collection methods have inherent limitations, a case study seeks to minimize them by collecting information about the social phenomena of interest from as many perspectives as possible. In case study research the social context that one's case (the CSN) exists within is considered vital, and is discussed as such (Baxter and Jack 2008). This often means that, in addition to data directly related to the case, data are also collected from relevant sources outside of the specific case. All perspectives gained, whether they were within or outside of the case, played a unique role in providing answers to the research questions posed.

As with all qualitative research, a case study of the CSN is not generalizable to a larger population. It may be transferable to other settings as long as these settings share important characteristics with those of this study. Transferability is always a matter of degree, however. For instance, community garden organizations in diverse areas of other

cities may be studied with guidance from a case study of the CSN. However, the demographic composition of the Portland area distinguishes it from many other major metropolitan areas in the United States. 2010 Census data suggest that 76.3% of the Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) identifies as “Non-Hispanic white”. Among the 25 most highly populated MSAs in the United States, this is the third-highest proportion of Non-Hispanic white residents (Harvard University 2013).

When considering the unusually homogeneous racial and ethnic makeup of Portland and its surrounding area, two potential consequences come to mind. First, the lack of diversity in this area may restrict the potential development of racially or ethnically bridging social capital. Quite simply, fewer non-white peoples could mean fewer opportunities for connections between these peoples and non-Hispanic whites (or other non-white groups, for that matter). On the other hand, the empirically supported “racial threat hypothesis” suggests that lower percentages of African American residents in an area are associated with a lower degree of perceived threat among white residents. According to this hypothesis the relatively low percentage of African Americans in Portland (6.3% according to 2010 Census data) may mean low perceived threat among white residents, which in turn may be conducive to greater social capital development between the two groups (Sullivan 2006).

Despite the fact that the Portland MSA is relatively racially and ethnically homogeneous, this area is less racially and ethnically *segregated* than many large MSAs. A dissimilarity index provides segregation scores between 0 and 100 with the score representing the percentage of a particular minority population that would have to move

in order to be distributed exactly as the white population is in the same MSA. The Portland MSA has a Black-White dissimilarity score of 46, which ranks 81<sup>st</sup> out of the 102 largest MSAs in the United States. Its Hispanic-White dissimilarity score of 34.3 ranks 83<sup>rd</sup> and its Asian-White dissimilarity score of 35.8 ranks 75<sup>th</sup> (University of Michigan 2013). Contrary to its lack of diversity, the degree of spatial integration in the Portland area may provide relatively *more* potential for the development of racially and ethnically bridging social capital at the neighborhood level.

While large MSAs with demographic compositions similar to Portland's certainly exist, many more are more diverse and/or more segregated. This fact remains even when considering Northeast Portland, the most diverse "quadrant" of the city, on its own (City of Portland 2013). In particular, the African American community in many other metro areas is much larger and *much* more segregated (Massey and Denton 1993). This reality may limit the transferability of the findings of this study.

### **Political and Ethical Issues**

Qualitative research must be conducted with an understanding of the "strategic, ethical, and personal issues that do not attend quantitative approaches" (Marshall and Rossman 2010:112). The observational aspect of this case study required my frequent participation in the functions of the CSN. Other aspects entailed data collection outside of organizational functions. This reality made the issue of "revealedness" two-fold. The CSN's director, other members of the planning team and several garden managers were fully aware of my study from the onset. Participants I gardened alongside were not *necessarily* aware of my study, but if during my participation any participant suspected as

much I was by no means dishonest with them. My field notes were recorded during moments when I was able to step away from the other participants so as to avoid making them uncomfortable. I also made sure to be present whenever needed in order to be a useful garden participant. Those participants who I approached to request an interview were fully informed of my study if they were not yet aware of it.

All interview participants, from both the CSN and outside organizations, remained confidential. Those interviewed in person were provided forms of informed consent to complete; those interviewed via telephone provided verbal consent. To further ensure that I was trustworthy in the eyes of the participants I offered each of them the opportunity to review my transcript of our interview and to receive a final report of the case study. In summary, performing interviews in addition to content analysis and participant observation stood to give me credibility in the field. This sent the message that I care about letting the staff and participants speak for themselves rather than simply pontificating from my own perspective.

## **Conclusion**

This case study consists of content analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Content analysis was performed in order to make an initial sketch, if you will, of the stated goals of the CSN. The analysis of these data is limited because, as the researcher, I served as the instrument and subjectively extracted meaning. Participant observation, then, shed light on observed goals. The limitations of this method, similar to those of content analysis, involve concerns with researcher subjectivity. Finally, in-depth interviews allowed both staff and participants to speak for themselves. In honesty,

however, my role as the researcher still means that data collected from interviews was filtered through my analysis; I decided what was and was not included. Through assistance from my mentors, my peers and my own introspection I have scrutinized my decision-making process, but it is ultimately subjective.

## FINDINGS, PART ONE

In this chapter I will introduce City Soil Network (CSN) interviewees, including some basic characteristics they share and how they compare to the characteristics of the organization as a whole. Then, I will describe their reported routes to involvement with the organization; interviewees largely became aware of the CSN by searching for sustainable agricultural opportunities in Portland or through word of mouth within their social networks. Following this description I will report how interviewees understood the organization as a place for a preexisting community to convene, as well as the sorts of resources exchanged among those involved. I will then detail the expectations held by the CSN's planning team regarding neighborhood-level outreach, the actual outreach efforts made and the understandings held by interviewees that impacted these efforts. Interviewees' understandings of the socioeconomic conditions in the neighborhoods where the CSN's garden sites rest and of the organization's mission of "improving food security" explain why very little neighborhood-level outreach has taken place.

### **Description of CSN Interviewees**

The responses from a questionnaire given to CSN interviewees provide us with a helpful sketch from which to set out on analysis. Table 2 (see page 45) organizes the most relevant responses in order of interviewees' levels of involvement with the organization. First is Martha, the CSN's founder and director, followed by Ari, a planning team member who serves as barter market manager. Next are the five garden managers, followed by the four garden participants. The information in this table

establishes that CSN interviewees are of a distinct demographic in multiple respects and, for the most part, at all levels of involvement.

**Table 2: CSN Interviewee Questionnaire Data**

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Highest Level of Ed.	Home to Garden (miles)	Length Lived in Portland (years)
Martha	F	White	Bachelor's	N/A	> 10
Ari	F	White	Bachelor's	1-3	> 10
Indigo	F	2 or more	Bachelor's	1-3	< 2
Renee	F	White	Bachelor's	< 1	5-10
Samantha	F	White	Bachelor's	< 1	2-5
Frank	M	White	H.S./GED	> 3	< 2
Betty	F	White	Assoc./Certif.	> 3	< 2
Kevin	M	White	Grad./Prof.	1-3	< 2
Lily	F	White	Bachelor's	1-3	< 2
Emma	F	White	Grad./Prof.	> 3	< 2
Brady	M	2 or more	Bachelor's	> 3	2-5

Interviewees were largely female and largely reported “white” as their race or ethnicity. They were also a highly educated group; all but one of them had some sort of post-secondary degree. Only two of the interviewees lived within a mile of the main garden site they were involved with and several lived more than three miles from their main garden. Although both of the planning team members reported having lived in Portland for more than ten years, only one of the garden managers and participants reported having lived in Portland for five or more years. Finally, with the exception of the planning team members, interviewees were all between the ages of 24 and 31. Due to the small size of the organization specific ages were omitted from the above table and the findings to follow; nonetheless, such a small age range is significant.

I cannot make any legitimate claims to the *statistical* representativeness of the CSN interviewees as they relate to the larger population of the organization. However, I can say that my observations from garden sites and the barter market lead me to believe

that data collected from the interviewee questionnaire is a very accurate sketch of those involved with the CSN. In fact, in terms of race or ethnicity, the interviewees appear to be a slightly *more* diverse group than the organization as a whole (two of eleven reported “two or more”). At the weekly barter market, which tended to have between twenty and forty people in attendance, I observed almost no individuals that appeared to be non-white. Together, these questionnaire responses and observations incite some questions. First, how did the CSN come to have these particular demographics involved? Second, why is it that this demographic tends to be so distinct from that of the neighborhoods where the garden sites rest (see Table 1 on page 36)?

### **Routes to Involvement**

Many of the CSN interviewees described the organization as a meeting place and a resource pool for preexisting members of the sustainable agriculture community. Almost all of them had previous experience with a sustainable agriculture project of some sort, and several had years of experience in multiple places throughout the United States and abroad. These projects included Community Supported Agriculture projects, or CSAs. The most common model for a CSA entails members paying to receive a regularly scheduled container of organic produce from a local farm. For those who wish to become more directly involved with their food, however, many farms with CSA programs also offer produce containers through work trade arrangements. All of the interviewees that discussed their involvement with CSAs described traveling to the organic farms themselves and participating in work trades rather than exchanging money for their food.



A number of interviews also shared their experiences traveling the globe to work on organic farms through an organization called World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. “WWOOFers” exchange their service as temporary workers for room and board on or near these farms. As with CSAs, they (along with former WWOOFers) contribute to the cultivation of the food they are compensated with.

Just as several interviewees had previously sought out direct involvement with the production of their own food (via CSAs), most of them became aware of the CSN through searching for sustainable agriculture opportunities on the Internet or through word of mouth. Ari, who serves as the CSN’s barter market manager and on the planning team, elaborated on this fact after being asked how new participants come to be involved with the organization:

Word of mouth has been a big part of it. People hearing about it and looking up the website and seeing how they can get involved... we get a lot of emails from people like “Hey, I just moved here” or... “Oh, my friend knows someone that gardens over there at one of the [CSN] gardens and I thought it was really interesting...”.

Ari described most new participants as having some preexisting experience with sustainable agriculture. First, the most direct route to involvement was taken by those who became aware of the CSN by searching for these sorts of opportunities on the Internet. In fact, two of the garden managers interviewed searched online and found the organization before they even moved to Portland. All of those who found the CSN online clearly had preexisting interest in sustainable agriculture; they likely also had previous experience and were members of networks of individuals who also had such previous experience.

Second, those who became aware of the CSN through word of mouth took a more indirect route to involvement. Although this does not necessarily mean that these individuals had preexisting interest or experience in sustainable agriculture, it does mean that they had some sort of social connection with someone who did. Some of the interviewees did in fact describe hearing about the CSN through like-minded folks through participation in other activities related to sustainable agriculture. Brady, for example, who has been a garden participant at multiple sites, heard about the organization through a friend he made on a community service trip in college<sup>3</sup>. The trip entailed traveling throughout the Northwest on a bus with other students in order to volunteer at different organic farms, most of which provided produce to individuals and families in need.

### *One of Many Places to Convene*

Those who became aware of the CSN through word of mouth while participating in sustainable agricultural projects were like-minded in a way that they described as very important to them. Brady provided his understanding of what participation with the CSN means to him:

I think gardening is kind of a revolutionary step, a small step that we can take to counter so many different factors about food insecurity or food security or procuring local, organic food. So, I think that being involved in that is its own little kind of activism step. And so I think a lot of other people would share that mindset, 'cause what we're doing is pretty different, you know? So I think you could probably meet those people at a different event or something, but I think that's a commonality. That's why people are at the [CSN], 'cause they all believe that.

3: This friend went on to become a garden manager with the CSN, but was not one of the interviewees.

The like-mindedness that Brady described relates to sustainable agriculture specifically, but also to a larger sustainable lifestyle (in which food plays a significant role) that he and his peers wish to promote through their personal actions and interpersonal advocacy. He acknowledged that he likely could have met his CSN peers through another event related to sustainable agriculture or, more generally, to having a sustainable lifestyle. Had he not participated in the bus trip that led him to the organization, he may have first learned about it at a similar function. It would seem that, by describing what he is doing as “pretty different”, Brady understood the sustainable agriculture community as a subculture of sorts, or perhaps even as a counterculture to what is often understood as a markedly unsustainable mainstream society.

For this sustainability community, which Brady spoke about and which became defined more clearly throughout the case study, the CSN was a setting in which information and other resources were shared. This understanding of community was often discussed by interviewees and in conversation at the garden sites, sometimes in direct comparison to traditional notions of community (physical proximity). Samantha, manager of the Dill Garden, made such a comparison:

When you say community I think of the physical community, right? Is that sort of what you're saying? 'Cause I could say the urban agriculture community as well, what could [involvement with the CSN] help solve at that level. More resources to folks and more connections with folks.

Samantha's mention of the “urban agriculture community” indicates that she understood one of the functions of the CSN as bringing together individuals with a preexisting interest in farming the city. However, it is unclear whether the organization's focus on bringing these experienced folks together was to the exclusion of inspiring

newfound interest in sustainable agriculture. Regardless of which community or communities the CSN exists for, the fact remains that its garden sites and barter market served as a marketplace for the exchange of valuable resources among those involved. These resources tended to be of related matters, more or less, but not confined to sustainable or “urban” agriculture exclusively.

### **Resource Exchange Within the CSN**

Information and other resources were exchanged among those involved with the CSN at all of the organizational events I attended. These included regularly scheduled work parties and the weekly barter market as well as occasional workshops and potlucks. Because agricultural education is part of the CSN’s mission and a cornerstone of its work parties and workshops, it is unsurprising that information of this nature was often exchanged. Therefore, my analysis will focus on those resources that are not *directly* related to preparing soil and cultivating produce. Nonetheless, it is important to note the wealth of knowledge possessed, particularly by garden managers, regarding sustainable agricultural practices (e.g. permaculture and hugelkultur). This knowledge allows its recipients to grow healthy food cheaply and efficiently while making use of preexisting, readily available organic matter (e.g. decomposing tree stumps and logs).

Although conversations among those involved with CSN were often unrelated to *growing* food, it was not uncommon for them to be about food in some way. I often learned new and healthy ways to make use of produce once it was harvested. I was informed, for instance, that the green stems of leeks, which are usually discarded, taste similar to and are more nutritious than the white bulbs. On another occasion, while

standing in line prior to the onset of the barter market, I was privy to a lesson on making kombucha tea. This included what produce makes for tasty batches of the probiotic drink, as well as the offer for a free SCOBY (Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast), which is needed for one's first batch and then goes on to reproduce itself.

At CSN functions I was regularly made aware of other events and opportunities related to environmental sustainability generally and, often, sustainable agriculture specifically. I learned about a number of recurring consortiums and conferences related to urban ecology and sustainability in the Portland area. The information about these events came from garden managers and participants who had personally attended them. These events are generally associated with academic and nonprofit institutions in Portland and were described as great places to both learn and make fruitful connections. One particular garden participant informed me about AmeriCorps (a network of federally funded public service programs) opportunities in Portland related to sustainable agriculture. He in fact had recently been hired by AmeriCorps to serve as a youth garden educator at a local charter school that serves disadvantaged youths. Another participant described their experience working with a local organization that redevelops "brownfields", often with future agricultural and other horticultural use in mind<sup>4</sup>.

Broadening out from food-specific resources, CSN functions included a wealth of information related to leading a sustainable lifestyle more generally. For example, a number of managers and participants clued me in on the best and most affordable bike shops in the city. This information was very specific and potentially helpful for current

4: Brownfields are former industrial sites that are thought to have significant, but not irrevocable, contamination (Brebbia, Almorza Gomar, and Klapperich 2002).

or aspiring bikers; one participant recommended specific mechanics that would do great work for a fair price, and encouraged me to mention their name in order to ensure quality service. A garden manager told me about group bike ride opportunities in Portland and shared her experience participating in them. She described these free rides as a great way to get exercise, meet new people and see new areas of the city. Other participants and managers shared their outdoor experiences in the Portland area, giving advice throughout. This included recommendations of certain hiking trails and campgrounds and when is best to visit them.

Often, rather than being specific to food or a sustainable lifestyle, the resources available through participation with the CSN were more miscellaneous in nature. One participant, who I met in line at the barter market, overheard myself and another participant discussing the difficulty we had collecting high-hanging grapes at the site we had just been gardening in. This participant introduced herself and promptly offered to lend us a stepladder in order to harvest the grapes for market. The offer sparked a conversation and our new friend soon offered us the use of her ladder for any use, CSN-related or otherwise. She even gave the two of us her phone number in order to do so. Other helpful things I took from my time as a garden participant included information regarding where to find the work of local independent journalists, as well as where to see quality, cheap stand-up comedy. In conclusion, a variety of valuable information and other resources were available to myself and the other individuals who came to be involved with the CSN.

### **Neighborhood-level Outreach: Expectations vs. Observed Efforts**

In addition to welcoming new participants and managers that find them, either by searching for garden opportunities themselves or through word of mouth, the CSN's planning team seeks to ensure that folks who live near garden sites feel welcome to get involved. There are a number of ways in which a community garden organization might reach out to those in close physical proximity to their site(s). Martha, the CSN's founder and director, elaborated on the expectations she has of garden managers and apprentices (garden participants who commit to regular attendance at the onset of the growing season). In the midst of laying out these expectations, Martha alluded to how the organization's outreach efforts differ from what she would consider ideal:

When we put a garden in a neighborhood our goal is to get as many people who live within walking distance of that garden, a few block radius from the garden, to really actively engage in the garden and become part of that space... How it actually plays out is we have no outreach whatsoever... So the garden manager[s] typically will have one to three apprentices, so that's sort of the core team for each garden space. During the orientation for those positions we ask that team to do a little campaign where they're just knocking on the doors of the people that are within a few blocks of the garden, inviting them to join. And to have signage at the garden that encourages people to participate, so that neighbors know that they are welcome.

Several interviewees, at all levels of involvement, mentioned the orientation that Martha described. During this orientation, which took place in early spring, Martha and the rest of the planning team laid out their expectations for garden managers and apprentices. These included those related to outreach, as well as the layout of garden space and cultivation techniques (e.g. fortifying soil and repelling pests). As Martha claimed in the quote above, the goal of getting folks within a "few block radius" was made explicit; general strategies for neighborhood-level outreach were suggested,

including signage and door knocking. Each garden's "core team", as Martha called it, was then asked to agree on specific strategies for outreach and report their plan to the rest of those attending the orientation. According to multiple garden managers, they assumed virtually all responsibility for getting folks involved at their garden site after this orientation. In my observations and in interview responses I found that the core teams' garden plans, particularly their outreach plans, were not closely monitored or compared to the expectations that were established at the orientation.

Of the four garden sites I volunteered in, only the Cauliflower Garden had a *visible* sign near its entrance. The Dill Garden had a small sign that was rendered invisible by ivy. The Blackberry Garden had a small plywood sign that, by the time of the second work party I attended was rendered illegible by weathering. Both of these signs provided only the name of the organization and its web address. Through pictures on the organization's website and reports from interviewees I learned that several of the other CSN garden sites had large signs with dates and times for work parties and other information. At least one site even had a bulletin board with a container full of informational pamphlets and an awning to protect them from the rain. Those without signs, however, appeared indistinguishable from private-use gardens, as many CSN sites are located on the front, side and/or backyards of the homes of land donors.

In addition to signage, Martha mentioned door knocking as a specific outreach effort that she recommended the core teams employ in the neighborhoods around their garden site. Two interviewees, the co-managers of the Blackberry Garden, reported door knocking on one occasion early in the growing season. Indigo, one of these co-managers, described her experience:



The first couple weeks [my co-manager] made some cool flyers and we went and passed them out... we really didn't go super far up and down the blocks. We just really did it one day... I think the time of day that we decided to do that was not the best time of day. Nobody was really home, and I think all of us too are kind of introverts. [Our core team is] all introverted people, so trying to go knock on doors and say "Hey, there's a garden to come and hang out in, come help!", it was a funny experience. All of us were just kind of not very good at it.

Due to the discomfort that Indigo reported she and her peers felt, along with the poor rate of responses they yielded from their mid-day campaign, the Blackberry Garden's core team did not knock on doors or distribute flyers again. Representatives of other garden sites also reported making some outreach efforts early in the season and failing to maintain them thereafter. The CSN organized an event in which all garden sites hosted the season's first work party on the same day in March. This event was also advertised on the CSN website as a tool drive. Those that had gardening tools to donate could were encouraged to drop them off at the site, whether or not they wished to stay and volunteer.

Frank and Betty, co-managers at the Amaranth Garden, made and distributed flyers for the kickoff event in hopes of augmenting the website's announcements. In addition to posting a flyer up at the entrance to the garden site, they also posted and handed them out during a recreational visit to the retail-heavy Hawthorne District in Southeast Portland (roughly four miles south). Frank described the results of their efforts, both on the day of the kickoff event and during work parties thereafter:

As far as [the Amaranth Garden], we've had a few neighbors walk back there and just kind of look at it... If you were to do a radius, the people that live in that area didn't really contribute to the garden. Whether they knew about it or not, or whether they wanted to or not. I feel like it's people from all across the city who converge on these specific areas. That's where you find your peace, you know?

First, Frank expressed uncertainty as to why neighbors near the Amaranth Garden are not involved; this implies that he was unsure about the effectiveness of his and his co-manager's outreach efforts. He considered the possibility that their efforts were inadequate (relative to the organization's stated expectations), but also that folks were sufficiently welcomed to participate in the garden but chose not to. He did not comment on why, if the latter of the two scenarios is more accurate, these neighbors might not have been interested in getting involved. Second, Frank offered his understanding of why folks from throughout the city initiate and maintain their involvement with the CSN, both in the Amaranth Garden and beyond. In describing those involved as converging to "find their peace", he seemed to allude to the idea that the organization attracts those who have a preexisting passion for gardening and find it therapeutic.

Lily, a participant in the Amaranth Garden, also offered her understanding as to why the neighbors around the site are not involved. Contrary to Frank, however, she was more confident that this was due more to a lack of neighborhood-level outreach rather than a lack of interest among nearby residents:

I think the homeowner has benefitted, the people who live in the house where the space is. But I think it's pretty isolated and I don't think people really know about it. So if we're talking about just, even the block that it's on, I don't think people are really connected to it. I think the benefit of just having a garden there, improving air quality and having bees... there's that piece of it. But I don't think that the people, I don't think it's changed the neighborhood, the way that people live in the direct surrounding area.

Lily's belief that the land donor for the Amaranth Garden has benefitted from its presence is well founded. In exchange for the space they provide, land donors receive a large annual balance of barter market shares to spend throughout the season. Somewhat more subjectively, they benefit from the beautification of their green space and the

pleasure of knowing that they are putting it to an important use. Beyond these few individuals and their families, Lily expressed doubt that their neighbors are even aware of the Amaranth Garden or the CSN's existence. She mentioned the strictly environmental benefits of the garden's presence (its production of oxygen and attraction of bees), which have an impact that transcends the confines of the garden to some extent. In terms of the neighborhood as a social environment, however, Lily did not think the Amaranth Garden plays a significant role. This feeling is not unique to Lily or the Amaranth Garden; interviewees from throughout the organization reported having rarely participated in or heard about neighborhood-level outreach efforts.

### **Discussion: Understanding the Lack of Neighborhood-level Outreach**

As I will demonstrate with greater detail in the following chapter, CSN leaders claim to value and prioritize racial and ethnic and economic diversity among those involved. Despite this fact, active participants, managers and planning team members were relatively homogenous in terms of these characteristics. This discord can be linked to two themes that I identified in the data. First, interviewees had varying understandings of the socioeconomic conditions in the neighborhoods around their garden sites. Second, interviewees' understandings of what food security means informed their level of satisfaction with who had gotten involved with the organization and the benefits they reaped. These understandings informed their degree of urgency to merge the CSN's missions of building community and improving food security. Overall, garden participants' differing levels of information regarding the local neighborhood, when coupled with their equation of food security with food sovereignty, contributed to less

active outreach efforts and a sense that both the quality and quantity of those involved with the CSN was adequate.

*“They have such big lots...”: Understandings of Surrounding Neighborhoods*

Despite the changes taking place in Northeast Portland, where median income and other measures of socioeconomic status have increased significantly in recent years, poverty persists at high rates in a number of its neighborhoods. The majority of the CSN’s garden sites, including all four of those I participated in, are located in such neighborhoods. A number of CSN garden managers and participants, most of whom commute from other neighborhoods to work the soil, are under the impression that the area around their site is relatively well off. Betty, a co-manager of the Amaranth Garden, demonstrated this in an explanation for the lack of involvement among neighbors of the site:

We did get some people from the neighborhood seeing the sign and like “Oh, there’s a garden back here!” Just checking it out. So it was kind of cool, and they asked questions about what we’re doing. It was cool just to meet the neighbors right around the area. They have such big lots, most of them have some sort of garden going.

Betty mentioned the handful of neighbors who visited the Amaranth Garden after seeing a flyer for the initial work party and tool drive at the site’s entrance. Getting folks to visit is a small victory in terms of outreach efforts, even if it did not yield returning garden participants. It is unclear whether the visitors told Betty that they had their own gardens or whether she assumed so on her own; the fact that the Amaranth Garden is located in a cul-de-sac may have had an impact on her making the comment that “most of them” have green space for growing food. Still, a number of apartment buildings are just

down the road from the site and 2010 Census data shows that the garden is situated in a tract with a poverty rate between 20.1% and 30% (see Figure 3 on page 16). Although many of the neighbors in this area may have space to garden, many others likely do not.

Emma, a regular participant in the Dill Garden, conveyed an impression of the neighborhood around her site that was similar to Betty's:

I think that the [area around our garden] is actually in a nicer neighborhood overall, in terms of socioeconomic level. And I noticed that a lot of the people that are around the garden, house-wise have gardens of their own that are quite lush and extravagant as well, so in terms of the immediate area I don't see that there are a whole lot of issues... In terms of the larger Northeast Portland area I'm sure that there are gardens in areas that would be a great source of education and a food source for the people around there too.

Although Emma cast doubt on the level of need near the Dill Garden *specifically*, she described Northeast Portland as a *whole* as home to individuals and families with food security issues. Nonetheless, as with Betty, Emma's sense understanding of the socioeconomic conditions around her site was incompatible with 2010 Census data. According to this data, the Dill Garden is located in one of the handful of tracts in Northeast Portland with a poverty rate that exceeds 30% (see Figure 3 on page 16). Despite being in a relatively poor census tract, the garden is near the border to a tract with a much lower poverty rate (between 10.1-20% in 2010). The variation between different areas in Northeast may explain the inaccurate view that several interviewees had about the neighborhoods around their garden sites, not to mention the varying rates of change presently taking place. The fact that Betty, Emma and most of the other CSN interviewees lived further than a mile from their garden site may have also played a role in these inaccuracies.

*“You don’t get much more local”*: Food Security = Food Sovereignty

In addition to building community, the CSN’s mission includes “improving food security”. The degree to which someone involved with the CSN is concerned with aspect of the mission may be measured by their efforts to provide food to those in need. In other words, those who were concerned would seek to build a community of gardeners and/or food recipients that include those who are food insecure or at risk of becoming so (i.e. those in poverty). However, subjective understandings of what “food security” means must be considered before measuring concerns about it. Simply put, an individual’s understanding of food security will inform their efforts to improve it.

For the purposes of this case study, Food insecurity is “the condition of having limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food” (Regional Equity Atlas 2007:72). In the context of the CSN, anyone who is in need and receives food grown by the organization benefits from improved food security. This may include not only those who log their hours in the gardens and redeems them at the barter market, but also those who utilize the food pantry that the CSN donates produce to. This pantry is housed in a church in Northeast Portland that, in exchange for these donations, provides the CSN with space to hold the weekly barter market<sup>5</sup>. A number of interviewees, whose understanding of food security was compatible with the definition above, referred to these donations as the primary means of improving food security in Northeast Portland. For them, this part of the mission was considered relatively inapplicable to active gardeners (managers and participants). Other interviewees proved to have a more varied understanding of the food security than those within the realms of academia and public

5: According to their records, 500 of the roughly 3,000 pounds of produce that the CSN harvested in 2013 were donated to the church’s pantry.

health. Ari, planning team member and barter market manager, provided her

understanding of the term:

For me, food security has a lot to do with food sovereignty, so knowing how to grow your own food and not having to completely rely on someone else to grow it for you or having to go to the grocery store....

Ari likened food *security* to food *sovereignty*, a condition that includes but is not limited to food security. Food sovereignty is a much more holistic and therefore malleable concept; Via Campesina, an international family farm advocacy organization that originated in South America in the 1980s, first popularized the term. Advocates for food sovereignty hold that “production for local and national markets is more important than production for export from the perspectives of... local and national economic development, for addressing poverty and hunger [and] preserving rural life, economies and environments...” (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010:160). As described here, some of the goals of food sovereignty do not (and in fact *cannot*) be realized by the CSN’s activities; an urban garden network cannot “preserve rural life” and a non-monetary time bank model cannot advance “local and national economic development” as directly as, say, farmers’ markets<sup>6</sup>. Still, some of these goals can be realized and appear to be understood as such by CSN interviewees, even if they are mistakenly equated with food security.

In addition to access to nutritionally adequate and safe food, food sovereignty means having relatively more control over the production process of one’s food. In terms of CSN interviewees, this means direct, *personal* control over this process. In other

6: However, those for whom urban gardens provide greater access to local food may then send less money to the coffers of agricultural corporations.

words, they understand food sovereignty as possessing the knowledge, viable soil and equipment needed to grow their own food. As Ari described, it allows its possessor freedom from reliance on the large-scale farms that sell their products at most grocery stores. In the context of growing public distrust of multinational agricultural corporations (e.g. Monsanto), knowing exactly where one's food comes from and how it is produced is increasingly highly valued. Family farmers in developing nations and consumers in the United States share this distrust. However, the consequences of the corporatization of agriculture are located at entirely different ends of the agricultural supply chain for these groups. They are also on different levels of severity; the former is at risk of losing their livelihood, among other things, while the latter is merely at risk of threats to their (relatively good) health.

Renee, an interviewee and a manager of the Eggplant Garden, acknowledged the lack of universal consensus in terms of what food security means. In fact, she discussed food security for food pantry recipients and for active CSN gardeners in two distinct ways:

Our excess goes to a food pantry out of [the partnering church]. I guess if what you mean by food security is knowing what has happened to your food over the course of its existence, it's very food secure. You see it all. You don't get much more local.

As with many of the other interviewees, Renee initially thought of the donations to the church's food pantry as the primary means by which the CSN contributes to improving food security in Northeast Portland. Immediately following her mention of the pantry, however, she indicated a sort of dual understanding of food security. In the second dimension of this dual understanding, Renee likened food security to food



sovereignty in a manner similar to Ari. Considering that providing some of the requirements for food sovereignty (knowledge, soil and equipment) are precisely what the CSN exists to fulfill, it is unsurprising that this concept is discussed by those involved. Considering food security to be *synonymous* with food sovereignty, however, is a significant finding. Doing so creates the possibility of overlooking that many people in Northeast Portland lack access to nutritionally adequate and safe food of any kind, regardless of where it is from or how it was produced.

*“that’s really the magic...”: Comfort with Homogeneity*

As previously mentioned, the CSN primarily recruits new garden managers and participants through their website and word of mouth. Compared to producing signs and flyers and organizing door-knocking campaigns, these methods require little time and money<sup>7</sup>. Ari, planning team member and barter market manager, discussed the benefits of interested parties coming to them:

At this point, we’re feeling pretty comfortable. We would definitely take on growing more and more, but it’s much easier to have someone come to us and say “Hey, I have this plot of land. I want to have someone garden”. Or with that, having people come to us and say “Hey, I really want to garden. Is there a space for me to do it?” and just pairing them together rather than just going into the community....

Ari indicated that not only prospective garden managers and participants, but also prospective land donors actively seek the CSN out. The organization is then able to play the role of matchmaker rather than recruiter. As a small non-profit organization, time and money are scarce resources; any way to save either of these reduces the burden on CSN

7: A member of the planning team created and maintains the CSN’s website at no cost.

volunteers, most of whom work at least one other job. These self-selected and peer-selected individuals, from land donors to occasional participants, are likely to have a preexisting interest and/or experience in sustainable agriculture. The comfort expressed by Ari is then transmitted to those at other levels of involvement, as they enter their new garden site(s) with interests (and other characteristics) that are common to those alongside them. Brady, a participant at multiple garden sites, spoke to this familiarity:

It might be just a thing where we're all just comfortable. We know what it is, we know when we go and we have our little group of friends that we go there with to our one garden, and we're just comfortable in having that resource... people just get complacent, like "Oh, we have our 5 or 8 members that come each time and they're really chill, it's all good. And I can't flyer today or tomorrow 'cause I have work". Maybe the organization is just at a little plateau, where they did a really good thing, they're just sustaining what they're doing but they're not trying to take next steps to get more people involved.

Despite being one of the only interviewees that reported having volunteered at multiple garden sites, Brady describes the normal garden participant as one that works at the same site with the same small group of people. He cites busy schedules as an explanation for why his gardening peers can garden at their site but cannot also help with outreach. However, he only does so after providing his own explanation. Brady describes these core garden groups as "complacent" and the CSN as a whole as "at a little plateau". He seems to acknowledge that the organization has been successful and beneficial to those involved, but not without qualification. As of Brady's interview, which was towards the end of the CSN's fifth growing season, he describes a sense of momentum fading.

Martha, the CSN's founder and director, joined Ari and Brady in expressing comfort with who is involved with the organization and how they came to be involved.

Contrary to Brady, she did not do so with a tinge of criticism. Having volunteered with the CSN and performed several interviews, I entered my conversation with Martha aware of the fact that word of mouth was one of the primary routes to involvement. The following exchange with Martha demonstrated her thoughts about this tendency:

*Interviewer:* At least from what I've seen, there is quite a bit of just people within their own social networks, finding others that are passionate about it and getting them involved.

*Martha:* Oh, for sure. I think that's really the magic of the project too, is there is a synergy that happens when there is a group of people excited about it. It just sort of radiates out and next thing you know, we've got this massive thing.

In saying that involvement with the CSN “sort of radiates out”, Martha aptly described the word of mouth process by which several interviewees reported learning about the organization. She cast this networking phenomenon in a positive light, describing it as “the magic of the project”. Another important distinction between Martha and Brady's perspectives is that, where Brady described each garden site as a “little group of friends”, Martha described the organization as a whole as “this massive thing”. The fact that these two are involved at different levels of the organization may explain why they conceptualize the scale of the CSN differently, not to mention the rapid growth that Martha has witnessed since the organization was launched in 2009.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I provided some basic demographic information about CSN interviewees. With the help of participant observation data, I compared this information to the characteristics of those involved with the organization as a whole. I then described routes to involvement with the CSN and illustrated that interviewees largely became

aware of the organization in two ways. Many of those came to be involved by searching for sustainable agricultural opportunities in Portland. The rest found the organization through word of mouth within preexisting social networks. I outlined that interviewees understood the CSN as a place for a preexisting community to convene and shared my observations of resource exchange that took place in garden sites, at the barter market and at other events. Finally, I specified the CSN planning team's expectations for neighborhood-level outreach and contrasted it with the actual outreach efforts made. To clarify why this contrast was possible, I explored interviewees' understandings of the neighborhoods where the CSN's garden sites rest. These understandings, primarily related to nearby socioeconomic conditions and the organization's mission of "improving food security", help to explain why very little neighborhood-level outreach was observed by myself or discussed by CSN interviewees.

## FINDINGS, PART TWO

In the previous chapter I established that, relative to the stated goals of the City Soil Network's (CSN's) leaders, the organization made little effort to reach out and involve residents of the neighborhoods directly surrounding their garden sites. I also discussed some of the CSN interviewees' understandings of the socioeconomic conditions in these neighborhoods and of what food security means, as well as the impact that these understandings may have had on outreach efforts.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that the neighborhood-level outreach efforts that *have* been made, primarily by members of the planning team, have largely been fruitless. CSN interviewees and representatives of outside organizations provided their explanations as to why these efforts have been fruitless. These explanations fell into two main categories. First, interviewees described a variety of related "cultural barriers" between themselves and the neighborhood members they reached out to; several of them went further and offered strategies to overcome, or at least mitigate, these barriers. Second, interviewees from outside organizations spoke to the fact that certain populations do and do not have the "privilege of concern" required to get involved with community gardening. Following these explanations, representatives of outside organizations also elaborated on whether and how community garden organizations in Northeast Portland (including the CSN) might succeed in involving a more diverse population, particularly those individuals and families that live near the organization's garden sites.

## **Expectations of Garden Managers**

In preparation for each growing season, members of the planning team work to retain past garden managers and find new ones for those garden sites that are without a manager; the need for new managers can be due to past managers leaving the organization or new garden sites entering their first growing season. Once the managers are in place, the planning team strategically decides which fruits, vegetables and herbs will be planted at which sites. This ensures that certain plants will have an optimal growing environment (e.g., amount of sunshine) and that the weekly barter market will have a diverse bounty of produce. Finally, the planning team leads an orientation for all garden managers and apprentices (garden participants who commit to regular attendance at the onset of the growing season). At the orientation garden managers are asked to present their site plan, including their plans for neighborhood-level outreach. Ideally, garden managers assume the lion's share of the responsibility for outreach from this point forward.

## **Discussion: Understanding Fruitless Neighborhood-level Outreach Efforts**

As previously mentioned, managers at each CSN garden site take on a number of responsibilities at their sites. In my observations, garden managers effectively designed and maintained garden beds that yielded a wide variety of produce for the network to enjoy. They were also successful in getting enough garden participants to attend work parties so that, all together, they could at least complete the tasks that *had* to be completed in order for the garden to survive. Despite these successes, the responsibility that managers fulfilled least often was that of neighborhood-level outreach. This meant

that planning team members led most of the outreach efforts that took place. Therefore, most of the discussion with interviewees regarding the outcomes of neighborhood-level outreach efforts took place with planning team members and representatives of outside organizations.

*“Nobody wants to be the minority...”: Cultural Barriers to Participation*

“Cultural” barriers were the primary impediment that interviewees spoke about in terms of neighborhood-level outreach. Their understandings of what “cultural” meant varied. However, as the many dimensions of this subjective concept are interrelated, they will be discussed as such. First, an internal program evaluator at a local, health-specific African American advocacy organization mentioned a cultural barrier related to community garden participation:

I think that in my own looking at it, the way it’s structured it seems to be a much more... let’s just say the way that it works in Portland it tends to be kind of a white model, the community garden. You see a lot of people using them that are, they sort of have an alternative lifestyle, culturally. They’re interested in this, but it’s not really a deep part of the history of the African American culture in Portland.

As was the case with my observations of the CSN, this representative described community gardening in Portland (Northeast and beyond) as not only racially and ethnically specific, but also lifestyle-specific. For those who tend to be involved, sustainable agriculture is just one part of a larger sustainable and “alternative” or “bohemian” lifestyle. As has been the case in past research in other cities, the representative described the practitioners of this lifestyle as largely white.

The so-called cultural barriers discussed by interviewees also included issues of social class and race and ethnicity. Ari, the barter market manager and a member of the planning team, shared her struggles:

That's one piece of the [CSN] that I really wish we could expand on, really getting more people that are the low-income people that I think would really benefit from it, involved. That's been my biggest challenge at least, for sure. People seem interested, and they inquire a little bit, but it's really hard to get especially the people of color that live around here. They just don't have the interest in getting involved. They might come once, and maybe twice, but there is definitely a barrier there that has been pretty hard to get people involved.

Ari expressed disappointment in the fact that the CSN has been unsuccessful in engaging people of color and of low income. She also seemed to (accurately) understand these communities as overlapping quite often in Northeast Portland. Ari made two related claims about their unfortunate lack of involvement. First, the claim that "They just don't have the interest" and that "there is definitely a barrier there" suggests that the CSN's diversity problem begins with a lack of initial participation. Second, the claim that members of these communities have showed interest, and that some have even participated at garden sites once or twice, suggests that the CSN's diversity problem may *also* be an issue of retention.

Although Ari acknowledged and lamented the CSN's failure to engage communities of color and of low income, she did not propose an explanation as to why it is taking place. Martha, the organization's founder and director, shared some experiences with unsuccessful neighborhood-level outreach and added an explanation for these difficulties:

A lot of it is cultural. I hear a lot from both Latino and Black low-income families that... that's where the barter system might fall short is those families are like... well these are some sentences that I've heard: "I'm a house slave, not a



field slave”. That’s a quote from a kid. And, you know, the Latino population sort of views their parents who work in fields as sort of the low, the place they want to get away from, you know? So those are challenges that I have faced in getting those populations engaged.

Martha referred to experiences with young African Americans and Latinos, the two largest racial and ethnic minority communities in Northeast Portland. Although African Americans have deeper historical roots in this area, both communities have traumatic and complicated relationships with agricultural labor in the United States. In the case of both communities, the young people that Martha spoke with expressed distaste for the CSN and its time bank model of produce distribution. One way to interpret this distaste is that, rather than working the soil to earn food, these young people consider it preferable to work a service job and purchase their food from a traditional grocery store. In doing so they will feel they are leading a different and a better life than that of their parents and other family members who toiled in low-wage farm jobs to provide for their families.

The fact that a young African American individual told Martha that they are “a house slave, not a field slave”, does not *necessarily* indicate that they were opposed to gardening in general. Rather, they may have simply been uncomfortable with a white woman and stranger encouraging them to do so. In her explanation for the CSN’s homogeneity, Renee, a manager of the Eggplant Garden, spoke to perceived discomfort across not only racial and ethnic lines but also several dimensions of difference:

*Renee:* I think no one says to themselves, “Oh, I really want to go volunteer at this thing up the street that I’m not interested in and has a bunch of people who are not like me there”. You know?

*Interviewer:* What do you mean “not like me”?

*Renee:* That aren’t my age, that aren’t my sexuality, that aren’t my color, that aren’t my gender.

*Interviewer:* So you think that there are some boundaries there?

*Renee:* Yeah. I don't know, boundary might be too strong of a word. Nobody wants to be the minority, you know, in whatever situation. And we were founded by sort of well-educated white people, and that's kind of what we are turning out to be. And we don't really know how to deal with that. We just fall into old patterns of who we approach and who we don't approach, and sort of, because we see this as not our problem, I guess, but the problem of the other. We sort of expect the other to fix the problem.

In this exchange, Renee alluded to the fact that highly educated, young, homosexual, white females primarily maintain the Eggplant garden. This is the case despite the fact that the area around her site is just 56.16% white according to 2010 census data, making it the fifth-most diverse of the CSN's thirteen sites in Northeast Portland. Renee mentioned that the organization does not "know how to deal with" the fact that this distinct type of volunteer may make neighbors uncomfortable with getting involved. She quickly proposed an explanation for this pattern; this suggests that she may have had insights that the CSN's planning team had not yet considered or, if they had, had not acted upon.

Renee exhibited awareness of the fact that many people became involved with the organization through preexisting social networks. She also implied that these networks are demographically distinct from the neighborhoods around many of the garden sites. Her explanation for this was that those responsible for outreach efforts "expect the other to fix the problem". This phrasing implies a division between the CSN and parties that comprise "the other" and communicates a suspicion that these separate parties would be more successful with neighborhood-level outreach.

*“we don’t have time to be planting seeds...”: The Privilege of Concern*

Many of the CSN interviewees acknowledged the thorough lack of involvement of nearby neighbors of garden sites. A number of them also offered explanations for this lack of participation. Some, but not all, of these explanations aligned with those offered by representatives of outside organizations. Both groups of interviewees considered various “cultural” barriers as a significant impediment to establishing a more diverse body of community garden participants. These included barriers between folks of different races and ethnicities, social classes, lifestyle preferences and more. An additional explanation for the neighbors’ lack of involvement, offered by outside organization interviewees alone, was what can be described as the “privilege of concern”. One virtually inescapable setback of community gardening is that it takes time for those involved to reap what they sow, so to speak. Individuals and families of low-income in dire economic straights may not have this luxury of time, whether or not they would like to grow their own food.

In our interview, a pastor of a predominantly African-American church in Northeast Portland demonstrated that his congregation is not only aware of food security issues in the community, but also active in addressing them. Among other things, this church buys produce in bulk and resells it (presumably at little or no profit) to churchgoers on Sundays. In doing so these churchgoers can buy relatively cheap, nutritious food and save the time and money of an extra trip to the grocery store. When asked about community gardening in the area, this pastor explained why he felt it was not popular among communities of color in Northeast Portland:

The dominant culture, being dominant, they have the luxury of figuring out ways of how to provide. The minority culture, being the minority, is constantly trying to get a seat at the table and their needs met or heard. They're trying to survive. The two communities, one thriving, they can say, "Hey let's grow a garden, let's go out and plant. Let's take a day and leisurely spend it outdoors". The African American community is trying to survive. We have the highest unemployment, we don't have time to be planting seeds and dig a garden. I'm here trying to figure out how to get a job or where my next meal's gonna come from. And since I have such low income, instead of buying seeds, let me go buy some Top Ramen noodles.

Although the pastor specifically mentioned African Americans' economic plight later in the quote, he primarily framed inequality as a tale of "two communities". He defined these two communities using race and ethnicity with whites as the "one thriving" and the "minority culture" as the one struggling; this distinction is supported by the clear disparities in poverty rates by race and ethnicity in Portland (Dotterer and Krishnan 2011). In terms of community gardening, the pastor felt that communities of color are largely forced to eat food like Top Ramen noodles. He argues that these sorts of foods, cheap and easy to prepare, are the most conducive to marginalized individuals and families with little or no income. On the other hand, he argues that it is largely white folks who have the privilege of concern for the nutritional quality and origin of their food.

### **Recommendations of Professional Advocates**

Like her planning teammate Ari, Martha acknowledged and lamented the CSN's failure to engage communities of color and/or low income. She also suggested creating a position within the organization to address this problem:

We don't have a person or a strategy in place where we're actually, you know, as a collective, a collective community we have no... that's one of the volunteer

opportunities that is on the table for this planning committee for sure. ‘Cause we need that and it’s been a gaping hole in the project, I think. ‘Cause we really want to reach those people that would be most benefitted from this food, who might not otherwise be able to afford food... But we just don’t have the manpower to get out there and connect with those community partners that could reach the people.

Martha expressed deep dissatisfaction with the current state of the CSN’s outreach, calling it a “gaping hole in the project” and stating her desire to get those in the most need of food involved. This implies that, although she and the rest of the planning team are likely happy that the food pantry donations went to those in need, this was not the only means by which they intended to fulfill their mission of “improving food security”. It also confirmed that Martha’s understanding of the term “food security” is accurate, unlike some others involved with the organization. In hopes of achieving greater success with outreach, Martha suggested creating an outreach-specific position within the CSN and adds that this volunteer would provide the “manpower” to connect with community partners “that could reach the people”. This demonstrates a belief that other organizations in the community are better equipped to identify and reach out to food insecure individuals and families.

A number of representatives of outside organizations echoed Martha’s sentiment that the CSN would benefit greatly from forging partnerships with established community groups that serve the area. Presumably, this includes the religious, public health and other advocacy organizations that employ them. Although they have relatively different focuses, community organizations were considered much more likely to either know food insecure families and individuals or to know where to find and successfully reach out to those that they do not know. When asked how a more local and diverse group of people might get involved with community gardens in Northeast

Portland, a community health worker organizer at a local African American advocacy organization responded:

I think you have to start by having a diverse group of people running the show. Whether that means community-based organizations heading things up or just people of color actually getting out there and gardening. But I think that's where we're lacking is that most of the gardens are organized and managed by someone who is not necessarily of the demographic that they're seeking to educate, support, whatever. In that way we just fail... How we get that initial buy-in from people, whether we can get more Black farmers or fishermen, people doing agricultural work in general. It seems like an anomaly to have it happen, but it's got to be organized by us.

In stating, "it's got to be organized by us", this representative (an African American woman) suggested that simply appearing a certain way is an important factor in terms of gaining attention during outreach. This goes beyond the simple tendency for people to identify with those that look like them and speaks to the fact that, generally speaking, people who look like the CSN's leaders have not historically been the bearers of good news when knocking on the doors of African American and other minority households in Northeast Portland (e.g. notices of eviction and rent increases). Another important factor is the aforementioned traumatic relationship that African Americans have with agricultural labor. Diverse leadership could potentially mean the difference between clear disinterest ("I'm a house slave, not a field slave...") and participation. With this in mind, having partnerships with diverse organizations may gain not only the attention of residents near CSN garden sites, but also their trust.

In stating that community gardens in Northeast Portland are administered by people who are "not... of the demographic that they're seeking to educate [or] support", this representative conveyed her understanding that, much like the CSN, community garden organizations in Northeast Portland are of a distinct racial and ethnic demographic

(along with other characteristics). She was so confident that community gardening is a largely white phenomenon, in fact, that she described the idea of a community garden organization by and for African Americans as “an anomaly”.

Personal experience likely informed this representative’s perspective about whiteness and community gardening in Portland; she had recently been put in charge of a small community garden plot that her organization established in partnership with an African immigrant advocacy organization<sup>8</sup>. This representative lamented that, having been established with the specific goal of providing gardening space for Africans and African Americans, her plot still ended up being largely comprised of gardeners from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (primarily white and Southeast Asian). She claims gentrification to be the primary force behind this result:

So many of our African American families are having to move out of the area, so it makes it really difficult to find people to come and work in the gardens. Right now it’s actually a much more multicultural garden... We know that there are not a whole lot of African Americans in the area... We don’t want to be, you know, exclusionary.

The fact that an African-American advocacy organization’s own garden plot ended up being heterogeneous communicates two important points. First, this representative suggested that there simply may not be enough African Americans remaining within walking distance to be involved. Generally speaking, this suggestion is debatable; according to 2010 census data, the garden site is in an area that is 19.6% African American<sup>9</sup>. Nonetheless, it is likely that many of the individuals and families

8: This garden plot is in North rather than Northeast Portland, but is situated less than a mile west of the border between the two.

9: This demographic information was calculated at the census block group level and with the same method I used to choose CSN garden sites for participant observation (see page 35).

that her organization serves have been forced out of the area. Second, the fact that this organization allowed all willing parties to be involved speaks to the time-sensitive nature of agriculture. A community garden of any kind simply must have people participating at certain points in the growing season if it wishes to keep its plants alive. As with the CSN, this organization sends some of their harvest to a nearby food pantry. With this in mind, any group of dependable gardeners leads to a better result for those who use this food pantry compared to a garden site with no substantial harvest. This reality is important to keep in mind when considering the CSN, as it may temper some of the criticisms of their composition and outreach efforts.

*“we need to change the conversation...”: The Importance of Social Justice Framing*

In addition to stressing the need for local, diverse involvement at the leadership level, several representatives of outside organizations added specific recommendations for piquing the interests of residents around the CSN’s sites. Primarily, they spoke to the importance of framing participation in a way that members of marginalized communities would identify with and appreciate. A project manager for healthy eating and active living at a statewide public health organization provided the following insight:

The food system is pretty complicated; there is a long history of farm worker rights issues and labor laws that isn’t often portrayed in these initiatives in a way that really brings out and calls out some of these injustices... There is so much that we can do as a privileged group, and when I say that I mean people in the food movement here in Portland, most of them, not all of them of course, but many of us are from a privileged background. There is a lot that we could be doing to call out specific injustices more deliberately. Organizations of color and organizations representing vulnerable populations would get at some of these issues I think in a more meaningful way.



This representative argued that it is important for community garden leaders to discuss the discriminatory and exploitive conditions that were (and in some cases still are) all too common in agricultural labor. Her comment is distinct from those made by CSN interviewees because it sheds light on injustice on the production side of the agricultural supply chain rather than just the consumption side. She concurred that large agricultural corporations favor profits over the well being of those who consume their produce, but added that they *also* neglect those who grow, harvest and package it.

In describing what she calls Portland's "food movement", this same representative (a white woman) confirmed the widely held understanding that "many of us are from a privileged background". She added that this movement would do well to recognize and act on food injustices perpetrated not only on consumers, but also from farm to table and everywhere in between. Finally, she echoed the belief that "organizations of color" and those "representing vulnerable populations" are trusted and equipped to effectively frame the benefits of community gardening to their constituencies in this way.

Another outside organization representative was similar in emphasizing the importance of social justice framing by those community garden organizations that desire to attract those in need. This representative, a community health worker organizer at a local African American advocacy organization, suggested the following:

We need to change the conversation around what nutritious foods are. What I've found is that one of the best ways to do it is to talk about, historically, government organizations have likely never had African Americans' best interest at heart. So when you're talking about food marketing strategies, sugary beverages or junk food and whatnot, when you talk about it from a systems approach and say our government or whoever it is creating this want or this need for these foods and funneling them in. I have found that people are receptive to that, and say, "Yeah,

I should eat my own food! I don't trust those people" ... Using that platform, when I speak in that way, from a food justice and a social justice angle more people relate that way. And in the general population, that doesn't seem to be the way we disseminate information. Much of what goes on here, especially with such a small population of African Americans, those social justice issues and political views are prominent, in the forefront.

Contrary to the preceding quote, this representative focused solely the consumption side of food industry injustices. In her opinion, anyone seeking to attract African Americans in Northeast Portland to community gardens should cite highly distrusted marketing campaigns for unhealthy foods that target them specifically. Rather than the corporations themselves, this representative lays blame on the government bodies that allow these marketing strategies to persist. However, following her mention of "our government", she adds "or whoever"; this may or may not include corporations but it implies that, for effective social justice framing, unjust behavior is more important to discuss than specific organizational type.

A unique contribution that the quote above makes is the perspective that African Americans in Portland are *particularly* responsive to social justice issues. Although the African American experience with discrimination in Portland is all too comparable to that throughout the United States, it is unique in two important ways. First, the African American community comprises a very small part of the Portland area's population. Census data suggest that the Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton Metropolitan Statistical Area was only 2.9% "Black or African American" in 2010. Although the City of Portland on its own was 6.3% "Black or African American" in 2010, this is a much smaller community than that of other major United States cities (under 40,000 in total). Second, due geographical and other factors, the African American community first arrived in and

round Portland very recently compared to much of the rest of the country. This representative claims that these factors have facilitated a close-knit and socially conscious community. As such, she argues that the social justice framing of the benefits of community garden participation is especially important.

*Gardens for “Blacks only”: An Argument for Population-specific Community Gardens*

In their enthusiastic explanations for why community garden organizations stand to gain from diverse leadership, representatives of outside organizations were open to the idea that garden sites could *potentially* be a common ground for Northeast Portlanders from all different backgrounds. The backgrounds discussed most were race and ethnicity and social class; often, they were (accurately) discussed as closely correlated. A pastor of a predominantly African American church in the area had a different idea for what the most beneficial community garden setting would be for the African American community:

We get it when we talk about victims of domestic violence... if a man is subjected to domestic violence they won't let him in that shelter with those women, even though it's not listed as a *womens'* domestic violence shelter... we say that's equitable. So we say we want to have a garden for African Americans and we want the parks bureau to send people over that look like them in summertime and do classes and that. But the dominant culture says, “We don't see why you have to have one for Blacks only. Are they a special class? Why do they have to separate themselves?” Well it's the same philosophy as dealing with domestic violence. Once you mix domestic violence shelters, men and women, you have to overcome the woman who's in fear and has a phobia about men... If we can understand and take that same operating philosophy and cross it over into culture and say there is a strong need to have isolated, separated programs that are for Blacks only, we'll see that people benefit in the long run, *as a whole*, by serving this target population.

Comparing African Americans' feelings about white people to that of battered women's fear of men in domestic violence shelters speaks to the enormity of the distrust that the pastor sees among members of his community. He went on to present a hypothetical situation where an African American advocacy organization asked Portland's parks department, which currently maintains 49 community gardens throughout the city, to establish a garden site by and for their community. The city, he presumed, would be unsupportive and would ask why African Americans seek to "separate themselves". It is unclear if he has received a similar response to this or if he imagines as much due to other past experiences with city government.

The pastor agreed that greater community garden participation among African Americans would be beneficial, but did not find social integration to be a necessary component of it. In fact, he argued that they would benefit most from a "Blacks only" garden in which community members could grow food and interact in a green space free of the discomfort of interacting with whites. Not only the African American community, but also Northeast Portland "*as a whole*" would benefit from the establishment of this population-specific community garden.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I demonstrated that the neighborhood-level outreach efforts that the CSN has made have largely been fruitless. CSN interviewees and representatives of outside organizations provided their understandings of why this has been the case. Their explanations largely fell into two categories. First, interviewees from both groups described a variety of related "cultural barriers" between themselves and the nearby

residents they reached out to. A number of outside organization representatives not only acknowledged these barriers but also offered strategies to alleviate them. Second, interviewees from outside organizations spoke to the fact that certain populations do not have the privilege of concern (i.e. the time, money or energy) that most community gardeners in Northeast Portland have. Finally, representatives of outside organizations also elaborated on whether and how the CSN and other community garden organizations in Northeast Portland might succeed in involving a more diverse population, particularly those individuals and families that live in close proximity to garden sites.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This case study explored the City Soil Network (CSN) and how it operates within the context of Northeast Portland, Oregon. This area has been in the process of gentrification since the early 1990s. More recently, it has had particularly large increases in median income and decreases in non-white population in many of its neighborhoods since 2000. Despite these facts conditions of poverty and significant populations of color remain in Northeast Portland, all too often in the same neighborhoods. Longtime minority residents in these neighborhoods often associate recent gentrification with long-standing histories of marginalization and displacement. As a result, they tend to be hesitant to trust incoming residents and the organizations that these residents establish in the area. Having been established in 2009, the CSN may be subject to this hesitation. However, past research suggests that community gardens can contribute to improved food security among those involved. In some cases, they have also facilitated the development of social capital across racial and ethnic and other differences. Determining whether or not these outcomes appear to have taken place within the CSN was a primary goal of this study.

Case study research aims to collect data through multiple methods, each of which possess advantages and limitations. Data collected through content analysis of the CSN's organizational materials illustrated the organization's mission, values and other policies and practices. Data collected from participant observation illustrated the degree to which garden managers and participants *appeared* to facilitate community building, among other things, from my perspective. These methods of data collection, however, do not

allow for those involved with the CSN to share their experience in their own words.

Interviews, on the other hand, gave voice to individuals both within and outside of the organization.

Data collected from in-depth interviews with CSN planning team members, garden managers and participants illustrated how they understood the organization's pursuit of building community and improving food security, the role they each individually played in this pursuit, the successes they enjoyed and the challenges they faced. Data collected from interviews with representatives of community organizations that serve Northeast Portland provided insight regarding the state of food access in the area, the role that community gardening currently plays in improving this access, the role that it *could* play and expected obstacles to increasing this role.

The purpose of this research was to shed light on who was involved with the CSN, how they understood the organization's mission (particularly as it relates to "community building" and "improving food security") and how they went about fulfilling this mission. Community gardening is often considered to be a part of the larger environmental sustainability movement; scholars have expressed doubt as to whether this movement gives sufficient consideration to issues of inequality (i.e. environmental justice). The CSN's mission communicates a desire to build community and improve food security, but not an explicit desire to provide these resources to those who lack them the most. Considering the lack of awareness of the socioeconomic conditions in the neighborhoods around CSN garden sites, the false equation of food security with food sovereignty and other findings, I argue that the organization has failed thus far to embody the principles of just sustainability.

The following discussion of findings is organized in terms of the research questions I posed at the outset of the thesis. Strictly speaking, these findings are specific to the CSN, but may provide a degree of insight regarding the larger movement(s) that community garden organizations are a part of through discussion of previous literature.

**Research Question 1: How do those involved with the City Soil Network understand the organization's mission of community building?**

Borrowing from Firth, Maye and Pearson's important distinction (2011), the CSN proved to be a distinctly interest-based community. CSN interviewees largely reported beginning their involvement with the organization with previous experience in sustainable agriculture (CSAs, WWOOFing, etc.). Several became aware of it through networks they established during these activities, while others did so by searching for similar opportunities in the area.

As illustrated in Table 2 (page 45), CSN interviewees were of a very distinct demographic. Most indicative of an interest-based community is the fact that only two of eleven reported living within a mile of their main garden site. Additionally, they were very similar in that they were largely young, female, white, highly educated and relatively new to Portland. In my observations, I found that this was an accurate representation of the organization at a whole. Although questionnaire data fortifies the argument that the CSN is an interest-based, rather than a place-based, community, several interviewees also expressed the understanding that this is the case. In addition to its explicitly stated purposes the CSN served as a place for this community to exchange information and other resources, primarily those related to a larger sustainable lifestyle.



Because the CSN was a community of individuals who are involved with the predominantly white sustainable agriculture community, the organization had quite a different composition than that of some of the neighborhoods around its garden sites (see Table 1 on page 36). This fact appeared to have an impact on how those involved understood these neighborhoods and the resultant efforts they made in terms of neighborhood-level outreach. It also calls for discussion of the impact that the state of gentrification in Northeast Portland has on how the area is perceived by those who live elsewhere in the city.

**Research Question 2: What effort has the City Soil Network made to facilitate community building?**

In the five growing seasons since the CSN was established, the organization has seen rapid growth in terms of both its number of garden sites and its number of garden managers and participants. To this point, however, it has largely done so by soliciting involvement on its website and by reaching out to members of the preexisting social networks of those involved. For the most part, those who understood the CSN as an interest-based community expressed a high level of comfort with these being the primary routes to involvement with the organization. This may help to explain why several garden sites lacked the most basic neighborhood-level outreach efforts, such as legible signs. For residents of the neighborhoods around these sites, this lack of signage may have rendered them indistinguishable from private-use gardens of homeowners.

In terms of more proactive outreach, most of the CSN interviewees admitted to having never knocked on doors or distributed flyers in the neighborhood around their site.

This is despite the fact that, during the organization-wide spring orientation, the CSN's founder and director asked that garden managers lead their participants in such efforts. Those interviewees who did make these sorts of efforts (all garden managers) reported doing so once early in the year and being unsuccessful. Thereafter they made little or no neighborhood-level outreach efforts for the rest of the growing season.

In discussing the neighborhood-level outreach efforts made (or lack thereof) with CSN interviewees, a number of them expressed the belief that the areas around their garden sites were relatively well off, socioeconomically speaking. Their impressions were that most people "have such big lots" and that many of them likely have "lush and extravagant" gardens of their own. The most problematic part of these impressions is the large number of apartment buildings in the area, many of which have no green space at all. Another is the fact that, although many of the original lots in Northeast Portland are indeed relatively large, many have come to contain multiple dwellings as the city has grown (the newer of which are often invisible from the street). Furthermore, longtime homeowners that do own lots of original size do not necessarily have the resources to maintain gardens on them, especially considering consistently rising property taxes in the area.

The fact that Northeast Portland is in the process of rapid gentrification, coupled with the fact that those involved with the CSN tend to commute from elsewhere in the city, may help to explain the discrepancy between their impressions of the socioeconomic state of the area and reality. Apart from the garden site(s) that they commuted to (often via bicycle), many of these managers and participants have likely ventured to Northeast primarily for recreational visits to Alberta Street (see Sullivan and Shaw 2011) or one of

its other retail districts. These districts are saturated with recently renovated storefronts and altogether new buildings, both of which often house bars, restaurants, boutiques and apartments that cater to gentrifiers. The appearance of these areas may lead non-residents of Northeast Portland to believe that the entire area is affluent, especially if they recently moved to the city.

A tendency to visit specific, affluent areas of Northeast Portland does not altogether explain the tendency for CSN interviewees to have false impressions of its socioeconomic state. Another possible explanation for false impressions about the area is the simple idea that, while traveling to their garden site(s), they pay more attention to extravagantly restored Victorian homes than to other homes and apartment buildings. The fluid nature of gentrifying neighborhoods is such that certain blocks, or even individual homes within blocks, stand in stark visual contrast with their surroundings.

At various junctures throughout our conversations several CSN interviewees equated food security with food sovereignty. The task of achieving food sovereignty includes but is certainly not limited to achieving food security for one's self, family or community. Beyond access to nutritionally adequate and safe food, achieving food sovereignty requires more local economic development and environmental preservation than industrial agriculture currently provides. Individuals throughout the agricultural supply chain are subject to concern for certain aspects of food sovereignty, but for different reasons and at different levels of severity.

Early on in its use, food sovereignty discourse was largely used among farmers in developing nations and their advocates throughout the world. CSN interviewee data suggest that the use of this concept has expanded to other groups, but not without a

change in how it is understood and what aspects are emphasized. In emphasizing the freedom from reliance on grocery stores and from not knowing how your food was grown or how it was transported, CSN interviewees celebrated how the organization provided them with the aspects of food sovereignty that are applicable to their position in the agricultural supply chain. These freedoms are also realizable through local farmers' markets, but not as directly as through growing food for oneself and the other members of a relatively small collective.

Due to the understandable distrust of big agriculture and the fact that its business practices adversely affect people at all positions in the supply chain, support for local agriculture is understandable regardless of the socioeconomic status of who is giving the support or their reasons for doing so. In different ways and at different levels of severity, farm consolidation and monoculture hurts small farmers and middle class consumers alike, not to mention that it affects our entire ecosystem. Anyone who doubts the safety of the food they eat and takes steps to erase this doubt should be applauded, even if these steps do not extend beyond their personal consumption or that of their loved ones. In deemphasizing the plight of small farmers and the socioeconomic development of their poor nations, however, CSN interviewees' use of the term "food sovereignty" might be described as, at best, repurposing and, at worst, cooptation. Those who deemphasize food security issues as an aspect of food sovereignty, especially while also understanding the two terms to be synonymous, may serve to conceal the fact that food insecurity exists at significant rates in the very neighborhoods where they grow local, organic food for themselves. In other words it may obscure the fact there are people in the neighborhoods around CSN garden sites that struggle to access nutritionally adequate food of any kind,

local and organic or otherwise. This false equation may not be purposeful or insidious, but it may nonetheless distract attention from addressing food insecurity in Northeast Portland.

To be clear, the lack of awareness of need in Northeast Portland and the equation of food security with food sovereignty appear distinct from simply employing apolitical rhetoric to evade issues of inequality (Agyeman 2008; Lubitow and Miller 2013). Both CSN planning team interviewees stated clearly that engaging with low-income households and communities of color was a priority of the organization. Martha, the CSN's founder and director, added that although members of these populations are recipients of CSN produce via the church food pantry, the overriding goal is to get them involved at garden sites. Nonetheless, inconsistencies in how those involved with the CSN at different levels understand these aspects of the organization's mission suggested that it is not clearly communicated and/or followed through with. The "few block radius" goal for neighborhood involvement, which Martha and a number of other CSN interviewees mentioned, was far from realized at the point when my data collection concluded.

### **Research Question 3: How successful has the City Soil Network been in building community?**

The CSN's garden sites, barter market and other events were the settings for substantial bonding social capital development among those involved. These folks tended to be firmly entrenched in the sustainable agriculture community upon their initiation with the organization; this community tends to be homogeneous in terms of

race, ethnicity and level of education, among other characteristics. Those who first met through CSN activities could have met and exchanged resources at any number of similar functions, and there is no shortage of such functions in a notably sustainable city like Portland. Nonetheless the CSN facilitated their meeting and sharing information and other resources related to growing produce but also preserving, preparing and nutritionally optimizing it. Those involved also shared resources related to a sustainable lifestyle more generally. These included recommendations of sustainability consortiums and conferences, sustainable public service opportunities quality bike mechanics in the area. As is the case with social capital development in any setting, I also received or observed the receipt of resources of a more miscellaneous nature. These included a standing offer to borrow a ladder and recommendations of cheap and fun things to do in town. It is important to note that, because social capital entails not only actual but also *potential* access to resources, the distinctly bonding social capital development I found throughout the CSN has likely transcended the time frame in which I collected data and the physical confines of organizational functions.

This case study reaffirms the need for social capital researchers to consider the implications of unequal access to it (Edwards and Foley 1997; Lin 2001). Just as Agyeman and Clarke (2011) found within sustainability projects in the United Kingdom, “Black and minority ethnic communities” are not actively involved with the CSN. The CSN was comprised largely of individuals from populations that tend to have a wealth of access to social capital; in terms of race, ethnicity and social class this social capital tends to be of the bonding variety. Although the same can be said for non-white and/or low-income groups that live in the neighborhoods around the CSN’s garden sites, the very

important difference is that bonding social capital development among those in favorable socioeconomic positions tends to fortify their position in an increasingly unequal society. Bonding social capital development among disadvantaged groups, although it is valuable for a number of reasons, generally does not have the same effect.

Considering the racial, ethnic and social class diversity that exists in Northeast Portland, what essentially amounts to a complete lack of bridging social capital development within the CSN is problematic. Those who could benefit most from involvement lose out on the improved food security, social capital development and other benefits that the organization facilitates. Those who are involved lose out on valuable perspectives that these uninvolved neighbors possess (McGhee 2003). Ultimately these circumstances can only serve to maintain, if not widen, both the boundaries and the disparities between these groups.

Another distinct characteristic of those involved with the CSN is devotion to what Florida (2002) describes as a “bohemian” subculture, which tends to correlate with leading a sustainable lifestyle in Portland. Many members of this subculture in Portland have recently moved to the city due in part to its national reputation as a “green” city. Even if unintended, this could send the message to those who do not share such devotion to sustainability that the organization is not for them. Looking forward, future sustainability efforts in Northeast Portland could also be met with suspicion by some of its residents because of their being associated with neighborhood changes they lament. In other words, these residents may suspect that the efforts simply serve the purpose of “environmental gentrification” (Checker 2011).

As a number of CSN interviewees (including both planning team members) readily admit, the organization has made little effort in terms of neighborhood-level outreach. Individual garden site managers were expected to lead these efforts from their spring orientation onward, and even had to present plans for how they would do so, but largely failed to follow through with them. Planning team members picked up their slack but reported that most of the efforts they made were fruitless. They largely understood various cultural barriers as the explanation for their ineffectiveness; by cultural barriers they usually meant racial and ethnic barriers. Representatives of outside organizations understood community gardens in the area to be popular among white, culturally “alternative”, culturally (socioeconomically) “dominant” and “from a privileged background”. Both groups of interviewees understood these characteristics to be seen as unwelcoming by those who do not identify with these descriptions, even though this did not appear to be the CSN’s intention.

Another explanation for the CSN’s fruitless neighborhood outreach efforts, discussed only by outside organization representatives, was the “privilege of concern” (Porritt and Winner 1988). Quite simply, whether or not they feel welcomed to participate, low-income residents of Northeast Portland do not feel they have the time to be involved in community gardens or other sustainable activities. Aligning one’s actions with one’s concern for the future state of the environment is considered a privilege enjoyed only by those whose immediate needs are comfortably met. In the words of the pastor of a predominantly African American church in Northeast Portland, those without this privilege are simply “trying to survive”.



Without fail, representatives of outside organizations followed their explanations for the lack of diversity in community gardens by offering recommendations for remedying it. In terms of the cultural barriers and the privilege of concern, these interviewees stressed the importance of diverse leadership within the CSN. Increased diversity among planning team members and/or garden managers was considered imperative; without it, the representatives consistently and plainly doubted that the level of diverse involvement at the garden volunteer level would improve. They suggested that identifying with those who perform garden outreach could be the difference between outright rejection (“I’m a house slave, not a field slave”) and participation, or at least consideration. Overall, their sentiment was that diverse representation, related to outreach or not, would engender trust among non-white populations in the area. This is often the case in settings with significant racial and ethnic boundaries (Cnaan et al. 2006; Warren 2001).

Outside organization representatives also emphasized that community garden organizations frame participation in a certain way in order to pique the interests of the individuals and families they serve. The frame they recommended is one of social justice as it relates to producers and consumers in a world of industrialized agriculture. Interviewees expected unjust working conditions for food industry employees, inequality of access to healthy food and ill-willed food marketing strategies to resonate with members of marginalized communities. Northeast Portland’s African American community in particular, described as small, close-knit, socially conscious and proactive, might be more likely to get involved with the CSN or a similar organization if reminded of these injustices. Representatives suggested that advocacy organizations that serve the

area, including those that employed them, are not only trusted by residents but also well versed in social justice discourse. For both of these reasons, these interviewees confirmed the importance of partnerships between relatively new organizations like the CSN and trusted ones in the community (Weisinger and Salipante 2005).

## **Conclusion**

Community garden organizations that are interested in contributing to just sustainability need to be aware of who tends to seek out community gardening, their level of need and the level of need in the neighborhoods in which garden sites rest. They must be intentional about their outreach and seek to build relationships with embedded and trusted organizations that serve communities in need. This is especially true in regards to racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods with histories of discrimination and prevailing mistrust. Partnerships are also especially important for small nonprofits like the CSN who lack the funds to hire their own outreach-specific staff member(s) with experience and knowledge of the outreach area. Relying on self-selection and networking within preexisting, bonding social capital networks (i.e. the sustainable agriculture community) will not diminish disparities or boundaries in these neighborhoods. They may in fact widen them by appearing purposely exclusive. Social activities related to food, however culturally ubiquitous it is, should not be portrayed as a silver bullet for such salient boundaries between residents.

Not only do participants in the CSN enjoy resources in the form of soil, garden education and the produce itself, they enjoy a public (or at least pseudo-public) green space in which to develop social capital. That being said, even the bonding social capital

development within an interest-based community like that of the CSN is distinct. A prominent feature of the success stories of other community gardens is that *place-based* community development can lead to participants working together to address other issues that are specific to the neighborhoods that they share (Firth et al. 2011; Kingsley and Townsend 2006). For all the apparent benefits that the CSN's unique organizational model possesses, the facilitation of place-based community via social capital development (bridging or otherwise) is not currently one of them.

Without intentional place-based outreach, performed with the help of trusted community partners, place-based community development is unlikely to take place within the CSN. This is especially so considering the context of racial and ethnic boundaries like those present in Northeast Portland. The immediate communities around the CSN's garden sites will benefit little, if at all. Furthermore, the sight of young, white individuals commuting into diverse neighborhoods, using green space and leaving with produce may appear not only exclusive but also exploitative.

#### *Models of success: Examples of Just Sustainability In and Around Northeast Portland*

Upon broadening our focus beyond one organization, it becomes clear that not all sustainability efforts in Portland have such a specific and "traditional" participant demographic as the CSN has assembled thus far. Over the course of my research I became aware of a number of sustainability efforts by and for diverse and/or low-income populations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one outside organization representative was a pastor of a predominantly African American church in Northeast Portland. In order to provide the opportunity for its congregation to purchase healthy

food in a safe and trusted environment, this church buys produce in bulk and resells it on Sundays. Not only do members of the congregation enjoy purchasing healthy food alongside friends and family, they save time and money by saving a trip to the grocery store. Growing Gardens is another food-related effort in the Portland area that exemplifies the values of just sustainability. This nonprofit organization has two main programs: “Home Gardens” and “Youth Grow”. Home Gardens provides low-income households with free garden beds or five-gallon containers depending on how much space they have where they live. Participants also receive seeds and plant starts, compost bins, mentorship from experienced gardeners, admission to Growing Gardens workshops and a subscription to the organization’s quarterly newsletter. Youth Grow partners with schools in low-income areas to develop in-class, after-school and summer garden education programs. In 2012, Growing Gardens claims to have facilitated over 4,500 total hours of hands-on garden education (Growing Gardens 2014).

Another school-based sustainability effort in Portland is Jefferson High School’s annual sustainability fair. Since 2010, this fair has included celebrations of Jefferson students’ environmental science projects, calculations of students’ individual carbon footprints and presentations of student-led plans for the school’s garden, among other things (Jefferson High School 2014). While similar fairs have likely taken place in other schools in Portland for years, Jefferson’s is significant for a number of reasons. Jefferson is located near the eastern edge of North Portland near the border to Northeast Portland. Oregon Department of Education data for the 2013-14 academic year suggest that Jefferson was 57% Black, 16.7% white and 12.6% Hispanic. Overall the school was 83.3% non-white, the highest such rate for any public high school in Portland (Oregon

Department of Education 2014a). At 74.1%, it also has the highest rate of student eligibility for free or reduced lunch of any public high school in Portland (Oregon Department of Education 2014b)<sup>10</sup>.

These examples of participation by diverse and/or low-income populations demonstrate that not all sustainability efforts in and around Portland involve the “usual suspects”, so to speak. Despite cultural barriers and the privilege of concern, or lack thereof, these organizations have successfully gotten these underrepresented populations involved. To varying degrees, their strategies may serve as models for future outreach efforts of the CSN and other community garden organizations in the area.

#### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

As discussed in my chapter on research methods and design, certain facts about the Portland area may limit the transferability of this study to other urban areas in the United States and abroad. Compared to other large Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the United States, the Portland area has an unusually large percentage of non-Hispanic whites (76.3%) (Harvard University 2013). Even the most diverse areas around CSN garden sites, which were composed of some of the most diverse census block groups in the city, were roughly 50% white.

Despite its homogeneity, the Portland MSA is much less racially and ethnically segregated than most other MSAs in the United States. Many urban areas throughout the country have neighborhoods that are almost exclusively home to a particular

10: For 2013-14, 42.2% of all Portland Public Schools students were eligible for free or reduced lunch (Oregon Department of Education 2014b).

marginalized racial or ethnic group; residents of these areas are the victims of very thorough isolation and disinvestment (Massey and Denton 1993); as a result, distrust between racial and ethnic groups in this cities tends to be lower than relatively spatially integrated MSAs such as Portland's.

The demographic and spatial uniqueness of the Portland MSA would seem to limit the transferability of this case study to other urban areas in the United States or elsewhere. Nonetheless both groups of interviewees, but particularly the representatives of outside organizations, spoke to the distrust of whites that exists among African Americans and other non-white populations in Northeast Portland. Given the fact that this level of distrust is present in Portland one might argue that this distrust, along with the resultant difficulties the CSN faced in its (admittedly inadequate) neighborhood-level outreach, would only be magnified in more diverse and segregated urban areas (Sullivan 2006). Policy recommendations like that of the pastor, who suggested that the city of Portland establish community gardens specifically for African Americans, would stand a greater chance at being realized in these cities.

A number of future research endeavors would add to the academic discourse in ways that this case study of the CSN simply cannot. First, distributing a survey throughout the neighborhoods around the CSN's garden sites could provide representative insights related to food security issues and how residents are currently addressing them. The perspectives of professional advocates are valuable on their own, but are not the same as directly giving voice to residents. A survey could inquire about whether these residents are even aware of the existence of the CSN, other community garden organizations, farmers' markets, food pantries and other food-related resources in

and around their neighborhoods. They could follow these questions up by asking about the impressions residents have about these resources and any personal experience they have with them. After survey data are analyzed, those who had particularly positive or negative experiences might be contacted for follow-up interviews or focus groups.

A second possibility for future research is a comparative community garden study. This could be either a community of an organization with a time bank model like that of the CSN and a traditional individual plot model in the same city. It would seem that these models could influence distinct outcomes in terms of community building, improving food security and other potential goals of the respective organizations. Community garden organizations with similar models that are located in different cities may also be studied through a comparative lens. Perhaps a notably “green” city like Portland and one that lacks such a reputation would make for interesting comparison; these and other local contexts are crucial and could very well be implicated in distinct outcomes between the organizations.

My third and final recommendation for future research would be a longitudinal study of the CSN. This organization’s unique model of operation and its rapid growth are fascinating, in my opinion, and deserve further inquiry. When considering the criticisms that I (and several of those involved with the CSN) levy upon the organization, one must remember that the organization is relatively young and very restricted in terms of time, money and other resources. The CSN’s founder and director herself acknowledged the need for an outreach-specific staff position; creating such a position and/or reaching out to partner with other community organizations may lead to significant change in the composition of the organization. The fact that a multi-site time bank can provide for

greater soil condition and nutritional variety for gardeners compels me to document whether the CSN evolves or remains by and for a specific population.



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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Interview Guide for Planning Team Members**

- 1) First things first, tell me about how you came to be involved with the CSN.
  - a) How did you first hear about it?
  - b) What about the CSN interested you?
  - c) Had you been involved with gardening or farming previously in life?
  
- 2) Describe for me the role you play on the planning team and in the organization as a whole.
  
- 3) How did the CSN's barter system come into existence? What do you think it offers that other community gardening models might not?
  
- 4) The CSN's mission statement includes "community building" as one of its main goals. What is your understanding of the community that is mentioned?
  - a) Who is included in this community?
  
- 5) How does the CSN recruit new garden participants?
  - a) Are there any rules or guidelines for recruitment?
  - b) Do you play a role in recruitment?
    - i) If yes:
      - (1) Describe how you go about recruiting new participants.
        - (a) How much do you recruit within your own social network?
        - (2) Who else recruits new participants?
        - (3) How do they go about doing so?
      - ii) If no:
        - (1) Who recruits new participants?
        - (2) How do they go about doing so?
  
- 6) The CSN's mission statement also includes "improving food security" as one of its main goals. How does the organization work to achieve this?
  - a) Does this goal have an impact on how the organization goes about recruiting participants?
  
- 7) Does the CSN partner with other organizations in any way?
  - a) If yes:
    - i) What is the nature of this/these partnership(s)?
    - ii) Are there any organizations you know about that would be ideal partners?  
How would the partnering organizations benefit from working together?
  - b) If no:

- i) Are there any organizations you know about that would be ideal partners?  
How would the partnering organizations benefit from working together?
- 8) How have the neighborhoods and communities where the CSN gardens are located have benefitted from their presence?
- a) Are there any problems that you feel any of these communities have that involvement with the CSN can help to solve?



## Appendix B: Interview Guide for Garden Managers

- 1) First things first, tell me about how you came to be involved with the CSN.
  - a) How did you first hear about it?
  - b) What about the CSN interested you?
  - c) Had you been involved with gardening or farming previously in life?
- 2) Describe for me an average day working in a CSN garden.
- 3) Describe for me an average day at the barter market.
  - a) What are your thoughts about the barter system?
- 4) Did you know any of the people that you interact with at CSN functions before you got involved?
- 5) Are there folks that you have gotten to know that you probably would not have if not for the CSN? If so, why not?
  - a) Do food-related activities make it easier to identify with people that you otherwise might not identify with?
- 6) How do folks have to work together and trust each other for a garden to succeed?
- 7) Have you built relationships with others through the CSN that go beyond CSN activities? If so, how have these been beneficial?
- 8) The CSN's mission statement includes "community building" as one of its main goals. What is your understanding of the community that is mentioned?
  - a) Who is included in this community?
- 9) How does the CSN recruit new garden participants?
  - a) Are there any rules or guidelines for recruitment?
  - b) Do you play a role in recruitment?
    - i) If yes:
      - (1) Describe how you go about recruiting new participants.
        - (a) How much do you recruit within your own social network?
      - (2) Who else recruits new participants?
      - (3) How do they go about doing so?
    - ii) If no:
      - (1) Who recruits new participants?
      - (2) How do they go about doing so?
- 10) The CSN's mission statement also includes "improving food security" as one of its main goals. How does the organization work to achieve this?
  - a) Does this goal have an impact on how the organization goes about recruiting participants?

- 11) Other than access to healthy food, how have you have benefitted from involvement with the CSN?
- 12) Does the CSN partner with other organizations in any way?
  - a) If yes:
    - i) What is the nature of this/these partnership(s)?
    - ii) Are there any organizations you know about that would be ideal partners?  
How would the partnering organizations benefit from working together?
  - b) If no:
    - i) Are there any organizations you know about that would be ideal partners?  
How would the partnering organizations benefit from working together?
- 13) How has the neighborhood or community where your garden is located has benefitted from the presence of the CSN?
  - a) Are there any that problems you feel this community has that involvement with the CSN can help to solve?

### Appendix C: Interview Guide for Garden Participants

- 1) First things first, tell me about how you came to be involved with the CSN.
  - a) How did you first hear about it?
  - b) What about the CSN interested you?
  - c) Had you been involved with gardening or farming previously in life?
  
- 2) Describe for me an average day working in a CSN garden.
  
- 3) Describe for me an average day at the barter market.
  - a) What are your thoughts about the barter system?
  
- 4) Do you interact much with the others around you during CSN activities?
  - a) If yes:
    - i) Did you know any of the people that you interact with at CSN functions before you got involved?
    - ii) Are there folks that you have gotten to know that you probably would not have if not for the CSN? If so, why not?
      - (1) Do food-related activities make it easier to identify with people that you otherwise might not identify with?
    - iii) How do folks have to work together and trust each other for a garden to succeed?
    - iv) Have you built relationships with others through the CSN that go beyond CSN activities? If so, how have these been beneficial?
  - b) If no:
    - i) Do you feel as welcomed as the other folks around you during CSN activities?
    - ii) What benefits, it not social, are you involved with the CSN for?
  
- 5) The CSN's mission statement includes "community building" as one of its main goals. What is your understanding of the community that is mentioned?
  - a) Who is included in this community?
  
- 6) How does the CSN recruit new garden participants?
  - a) Are there any rules or guidelines for recruitment?
  - b) Do you play a role in recruitment?
    - i) If yes:
      - (1) Describe how you go about recruiting new participants.
        - (a) How much do you recruit within your own social network?
      - (2) Who else recruits new participants?
      - (3) How do they go about doing so?
    - ii) If no:
      - (1) Who recruits new participants?
      - (2) How do they go about doing so?

- 7) The CSN's mission statement also includes "improving food security" as one of its main goals. What do you know about how the organization works to achieve this?
  - a) Do you think this goal has an impact on how the organization goes about recruiting participants?
  
- 8) Other than access to healthy food, how have you benefitted from involvement with the CSN?
  
- 9) How has the neighborhood or community where your garden is located has benefitted from the presence of the CSN?
  - a) Are there any problems that you feel this community has that involvement with the CSN can help to solve?

**Appendix D: Interview Guide for Outside Organization Representatives**

- 1) First, I see that your organization's mission is... What specific community or communities do you primarily serve in Northeast Portland?
- 2) Is there a need among the community or communities you serve in Northeast Portland for greater access to healthy, affordable food?
  - a) If yes:
    - i) Can you tell me anything more about the extent of this need?
    - ii) What sorts of options are currently available for folks who are seeking out greater food access in Northeast Portland?
    - iii) Do you think community gardening plays, or could play, a significant role in increasing food access in Northeast Portland?
- 3) Are you familiar with any particular community garden organizations in Northeast Portland?
  - a) If so, what are your thoughts on how these particular organizations operate and the impact that they have?
  - b) (After describing the observed lack of diversity in the community food/environmental. sustainability community, lack of embeddedness in local communities)\_Do you have any ideas as to how community garden organizations in Northeast Portland might get a more local and diverse group of people involved?