SOCIALY-CONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPES

Evolving Governing Structures to Sustain Community Gardens

Honors Thesis
Presented to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Landscape Studies Program of Cornell University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Research Honors Program

by
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ABSTRACT

Communication and interaction are fundamental characteristics in the evolution of humanity. Towns and cities arise out of these necessities. Many people come together to build communities in order to form bonds. In the metropolitan setting where space is extremely limited, shared community gardens become the quintessential example of places that people use to reconnect with their physical surroundings and build social value. In more rural locations, people intentionally design shared spaces, yearning to rekindle communal living integral in urban environments. Cohousing developments are such places, which are founded upon the kinship ideal. Community gardens and cohousing developments are two disparate landscapes that exhibit the human need to connect. Physical layout comes secondary in these socially-constructed places; they are vehicles for cultivating strong relationships between people of shared values.

To better understand this phenomenon, this thesis will specifically explore three community gardens - the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, La Plaza Cultural, and 6BC Botanical Garden - in order to understand placemaking in action. Ongoing strategies that helped these communities develop “place” will be outlined and critically evaluated. For consistent comparison, each garden will focus on the evolution of their governance. Cohousing developments will be as a way studied to first understand how socially-driven organizations assemble themselves. This thesis will conclude that such places, out of the desire to improve, create more organized, hierarchical governing systems over time.
[keywords: placemaking, community, social engagement, community gardens, cohousing developments]
For Mom. Thank you.
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INTRODUCTION

During the spring semester of my junior year, I had the privilege of studying abroad in Italy (2008). There I had the opportunity to take classes at a culinary school in Florence. Cooking has been a hobby of mine, but the demanding curriculum for Landscape Architecture majors at Cornell University has never allowed me to take such classes in Ithaca. Studying and traveling in Italy had been a dream of mine since childhood. My grandfather is a first generation Italian-American and I have always felt a strong desire to experience my family’s roots first-hand.

One of the courses I took focused on the "photography" of food. Entering the course, I expected it to be more of a photo shoot, where we would set up the food in a closed, controlled situation to attain the optimal image. However, and much to my surprise, on the very first day my professor accompanied us out into the field. Over the semester, we experienced the food of Florence through our personal lenses. This allowed me to absorb aspects of Florentine and Italian culture firsthand. Most of my photos were taken at open-air markets. There was something about that atmosphere that attracted me to it. I visited my local market on a daily basis, often picking up cheese or a fresh bunch of tomatoes. The vibrancy of the people there intrigued me and I could feel “real” Italian life and culture emanating from the butchers, vendors, and customers. In visiting the San Lorenzo market every day for six months, I was able to participate in a part of Italian life that a more transient tourist might never get to experience.

Now back home, I have come to realize the immense importance of the social
component of landscapes. Places come alive because of the people who use them, live in them, and care for them. I only began to notice this phenomenon when I could not speak Italian sufficiently, and I had to rely on body language. Social interaction was essential to my daily activities. In my visits to the market, I noticed people’s movements and facial expressions. With this as my only method of communication, I began to understand the market as more than simply a place to shop for groceries. For this reason, I have begun to focus on trying to understand how social dynamics develop. How does a place create its desired dynamic? Does a landscape shape the people who use it or do users alter how a landscape evolves? What are the trends in organizing social landscapes and how are they different within an urban versus rural context? Through my research, I hoped to offer insights into these questions.

For this thesis, I chose to focus my attention on landscapes that evolved into social centers over time. Three community gardens, situated in the high density neighborhood of the Lower East Side in New York City, are considered as case studies for understanding how a site develops a sense of place. Each garden followed its own unique path as users responded to the needs of its community. As a preliminary way to understand socially-constructed landscapes, I studied the cohousing development, Ecovillage at Ithaca, New York. It was used as an example for understanding a similar cooperative situation that involves consensus decision-making. The Ecovillage at Ithaca is a prominent example within the realm of cohousing developments and is studied easily due to its proximity to Cornell. The existence of designed neighborhoods demonstrates that people in less populated areas also desire higher-density, shared living spaces.

Each case study will reveal trends and patterns shaping policy and resulting in the current state of governance for each community garden. This thesis argues that the most successful and sustainable community spaces are those that have a clear delineation of power, have supportive as well as committed members, and are sufficiently funded for improvements. To maintain longevity, a place must evolve or build upon its ideals to fit the current needs of the community. In order for a place to remain viable, its users must delegate power among a few very invested individuals. However, less involved members of the community space may challenge such rigid organization.
This analysis lends itself to implications for designers of community spaces. Creative solutions balance the dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up governance within community-driven, socially and culturally inspired landscapes. Community gardens can serve as a model for successful contemporary, community-driven open spaces in urban environments.
METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted in three principal ways. First, background information concerning placemaking, the history and development of community open spaces, and the social dynamics of the Lower East Side were retrieved via printed sources. This research was discussed mostly in the introduction of this thesis. Various books were used within the other chapters if additional information was required to support the idea being examined. Well-documented online sources, such as journal articles, were also integrated to support the discussion. Authors with relevant credentials in landscape architecture and related fields were consulted.

Over thirty gardens in the Lower East Side were visited on the weekend of November 1st, 2009. Each garden was mapped and photographed by the author. Quick internet searches after the site visits revealed information that was readily available and useful for each community open space. The three gardens chosen to be studied in this thesis had been cited by the media, had clear contacts, and possessed a physical quality worth exploring. Phone interviews were conducted as a primary source for each case study. The current president of each community garden was questioned at length. Other prominent members were interviewed to add a variety of perspectives to support this research. Residents of the Ecovillage at Ithaca were interviewed. Other people, not all current residents, added their unique perspective to this discussion.

The interview process was less a question and answer session and more a conversation between the author and the interviewee. Since this thesis is a study of social
sciences, the author felt it would be effective to develop a comfortable and open dialogue with her subjects that would promote candid responses.

Each case study includes a brief chronology of the history and development of the site. Background information was found primarily on the website of each community garden or cohousing development. Their websites are updated frequently. These case studies are relatively new (younger than thirty years old) and have not been discussed at length in printed sources. Other socially-constructed landscapes cited in the text are given a brief description in the Appendix, if the reader is interested in obtaining more information about a particular place mentioned.
The Making of Places

If a group of people were asked to describe the same exact place, each person might understand it differently and would certainly represent his thoughts in a unique and personal way. An architect may draw out a plan, an English teacher can describe the place’s symbolism, and an environmentalist may envision the natural cycles occurring there (Corner within Swaffield 2002). There are an infinite number of unique responses to a single defined landscape. Each reaction is informed by the individual’s life experiences, his values, his cultural upbringing, and many other factors. How people describe their environment brings a landscape to life. The way in which people associate themselves to a space and to each other contributes to the collective description of that landscape. Some environments are determined as more transit-oriented, some natural/conservation areas, while others are used for social gatherings. Each of these examples becomes defined by how it serves communities.

Places can form out of function. We need space for living, working, and playing. In Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities, Schneekloth and Shibley describe placemaking as “the way in which all human beings transform the places they find themselves into the places where they live” (Schneekloth 1995). This definition emphasizes the idea that places develop beyond simply physical space when people begin to attach meaning to them. Tangible form contributes to how or if people can create daily encounters for interaction, forge new friendships, and maintain long-standing relation-
ships. Jan Gehl, in his book *Life Between Buildings*, analyzes social interaction in public space, reflecting that “life between buildings is potentially a self-reinforcing process… individuals and events can influence and stimulate one another” (Gehl 1987). Social interaction within spaces and physical engagement of those spaces emerge as impetus for people to become who they are potentially. A successful social landscape has the ability to function two-fold. Human needs are simple: people want to belong to a community and they want to relate to their natural surroundings (Murgeraur 1994).

People naturally create socially meaningful places. They construct these spaces out of the fundamental human need for ownership and personalization, not realizing that they are the vehicle toward a functional society (Jackson 1984). In her essay, “The Language of Landscape,” Ann Spirn supports the idea that “landscape associates people and place” (Spirn within Swaffield 2002). A dynamic connection develops between places and those who dwell there (Spirn within Swaffield 2002). Inevitably, centers of community engagement become saturated with local significance. Over time, cultural dispositions infuse these places that ultimately influence and shape how an individual engages in his experience there (Howett 1993). Such is the case with the Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia. Converted into a market eatery from an old railroad stop, it is a city landmark for local residents and it draws tourists year-round. In visiting the market, I observed and documented social life there as part of initial research for this thesis. I found that as a customer myself, I began to understand the special flavors of Philadelphia through the Amish goods and local specialties offered by the hundreds of vendors selling their fare. The bustling atmosphere gave way to an enlivened landscape (See Appendix for further information). Within a community, frequent users depend upon these particular sites for their social life. Ultimately, such places become integral to community success, epitomizing the identity of its ideals and values. A community’s “collective being” depends on these cultural centers (Hester 2006).

Sometimes making places is almost instantaneous, as in the construction of a new school, landscaping a park, or planning a downtown commercial center. These examples will not be discussed in the forthcoming chapters. Instead, this thesis focuses on those places that develop over time, continuously and repetitively. “It is the ongoing labor
of people that makes, transforms, and cares for places” (Schneekloth 1995). Placemaking is much more than simply changing, reworking, or removing materials. Social and cultural landscapes are dynamic in nature, and change drastically over time. “A place is the result of the layering of activities that constantly make and remake it” (Staeheli 162). Each decision made and every bulb planted adds to the collective acts of placemaking by the community of people involved. “Placemaking is not just about the relationship of people to their places; it also creates relationships among people in places” (Schneekloth 1995).

A Brief History of Urban Open Space Development

Urban greening is not a new idea. Since the 1890’s, city residents have organized places to garden in America (Lawson 2005). Frederick Law Olmsted worked tirelessly to develop open park systems, such as Central Park in New York City and the Emerald Necklace in Boston. He ambitiously hoped to provide every American in any type of living environment access to public green space. Before him, writers and civic leaders advocated for green space to counteract the “evils” of urbanization (Garvin 2000). Galen Cranz characterizes the type of American park created between 1850 and 1900 as a “pleasure ground” and a much needed response to the overcrowding and unsanitary conditions of the new industrialized cities (Marcus 1990). Olmsted intended open space in cities “to provide a means of escape from the cramped, confined and controlling circumstances of the streets… a sense of enlarged freedom” (Garvin 2000). “Pleasure grounds” were designated for Sunday outings and contained open lawns, undulating topography, winding pathways, naturalistic ponds, and large trees (Marcus 1990). In the case of Central Park, Olmsted and partner Calvert Vaux provided relief from the chaos of New York City, created play space, developed centers “where diverse populations could intermingle,” and impacted the city’s real estate and economic opportunities (Garvin 2000). Since the late nineteenth century, urban greening efforts have continuously built upon Olmsted’s model (Lawson 2005). Today, his agenda is widely accepted as convention.

As one might expect, modern America is radically different from Olmsted’s late
nineteenth century version. The population is now twelve times larger than when Central Park was built. In addition, economic ebb and flow, changes in social trends, and significant national events constantly shape the physical landscape (Garvin 2000). As a result, park space continuously responds to shifting user needs. Community open space projects are an alternative reaction to the traditionally-designed open space model. Throughout history, many community spaces developed out of social needs of the times. Reform Parks emerged in the early twentieth century as a way to improve the quality of life for working people in the Progressive and Social Work movements (Marcus 1990). During World War I and II, allotment gardens became popular with lower income populations as a means to grow food (Francis 1984). Factories, schools, orphanages, and even public parks offered parcels of land during difficult economic times. People supported allotment gardens with the understanding that they provided “moral and social training that would make more productive use of men, women, and children in society” (Christy 2007). During times of war, the government promoted the idea that growing vegetables and canning them was patriotic. Allotment gardens of World War I became the liberty gardens during the Great Depression that evolved into the glorified victory gardens of World War II. “Those left on the home front could do their part with hoes and rows of vegetables. Union Square Park changed its demonstration backyard garden into victory garden allotments” (Christy 2007). These spaces were temporal in nature, never permanently set aside as green space for city residents. In New York City, as these former productive spaces turned vacant, neighborhood action restored many into community gardens. As their investment deepened, people involved soon came to understand that the social benefits of community gardening made them worthy of legal permanence.

Community-Centered Spaces

In many cities across the United States, the community open space model is fast becoming a contemporary system for successfully greening urban sites. Other open spaces, such as city parks and playgrounds, include varying degrees of social elements integral to community gardens. Although many urban dwellers may go to a park to reconnect with nature, their actions tend to suggest that many actually seek social contact
“A park offers opportunities to meet or watch other people” (Marcus 1990). They are “green place[s] designed, developed, or managed by local residents for the use and enjoyment of those in the community” (Francis 1984). The Human-Environment Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois found that adding green space in cities increases use and thereby multiplies the number of residents who know each other (Francis 2006). Vegetation creates strong relationships between neighbors whereas desolation breeds alienation. People closer to green space “enjoy more social activities, have more visitors, know more of their neighbors, and have stronger feelings of belonging” (Francis 2006).

Community gardens and cohousing developments are two examples that provide local residents with a venue to partake in and contribute to their communities. Cultivating a sense of community pride is essential in constructing successful social spaces. Community gardens can evolve socially as a consequence of meeting other needs, of making holistic decisions, and of personal investment. For example, the Earth People Garden, located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, is a physical manifestation of its collective beginnings. Walkways are constructed from whatever materials people could find around their homes or salvage from another project. The garden’s embrace of the neighborhood’s Spanish heritage is evidenced in the eclectic decorations found amidst its planting beds and along its fencing (See Appendix for further information). Rather than the physical location or arrangement of objects within the space, the identity of ‘place’ results from the changing and ongoing dynamics of human use over an extended period of time.

Community spaces in suburban and rural areas develop differently from those in urban settings. Alternative forms of community making and engagement are needed (Francis 1984). The physical layout of most cohousing developments acts as a primary example of how design can promote high incidences of engagement between residents. Brian Bowen, a resident of Wild Sage Cohousing in Boulder, Colorado, calls these types of neighborhoods “machine[s] for casual interaction” (Bowen 2009). Clustering buildings is common. At both Village Homes in Davis, California and Wild Sage Cohousing in Boulder, Colorado, homes are oriented to face pedestrian and bike paths. Each pod of houses forms an envelope of communal green space (Francis 2003). (See Appendix for
Figure 1: Pedestrian streets connect homes in each pod together, promoting a walkable neighborhood and casual interaction between neighbors. Wild Sage Cohousing, Boulder, Colorado.
arise during meetings (Nolan 2008).

Ecovillage at Ithaca, New York has been developing for the past seventeen years and is located on rural West Hill, beyond the downtown center. The one hundred and seventy acre non-profit Ecovillage Cohousing Cooperative (EVI) has existed at the end of the long gravel drive Rachel Carson Way, named after the noteworthy environmental advocate. Thirty homes make up FROG (“First Residents Group”), each between nine

Figure 2: Neighborhoods in Village Homes orient houses to capture the optimal amount of sunlight. They face in toward communal greenspace, bike paths, and pedestrian walkways. Davis, California

Figure 3: The Ecovillage at Ithaca view from the sky. The FROG neighborhood is on the right and the SONG neighborhood is on the left. Ithaca, New York

further information.) Most co-housing developments share similar characteristics, including a common house containing features that private living quarters cannot accommodate. Community centers often house a large dining room and kitchen, lounge, recreational facilities, children’s spaces, and frequently a guest room, workshop and laundry room (Cohousing 2008). Shared space is a must, as daily encounters forge strong bonds, which are helpful when tough decisions
Figure 4: The pedestrian path in the FROG neighborhood.
Ecovillage at Ithaca, New York

Figure 5: A typical home’s entry off of the pedestrian path in the FROG neighborhood.
Ecovillage at Ithaca, New York
hundred and thirteen hundred square feet in a duplex set-up. The homes in this neighborhood sit very close to one another. Architectural space is built upward, rather than sprawling out. Each duplex is around twenty feet wide (Ecovillage 2009). Entries to each home face toward the central pedestrian walk, where meandering paths curve around abundantly planted gardens leading to the Common House. SONG (“Second Residents Group”) departs from FROG’s design in that duplex homes are not connected to one another. Each provides more space for families. This neighborhood supports a community garden and has a Common House as well. FROG’s layout focuses on the neighborhood, whereas the SONG configuration gives more attention to the individual home (Bokaer-Smith 2009). As opposed to SONG homes, FROG’s neighborhood design is more limiting to resident customization. “SONG’s design and build process took a much looser approach that allowed for more creativity and owner-builder participation than did FROG’s” (Walker 2005).

**Ecovillage at Ithaca: A Model for Community-Driven Governance**

Working in a community garden differs from living in a cohousing development in that people choosing to live in these types of neighborhoods tend to share a set of common core values. “What makes cohousing unique is that residents take an active role in determining what kind of a place they’ll live in, as many people did before the age of mass-produced housing. Cooperative living “reinvent[s] community” in the sense that it... adds new approaches that are proving useful in cohousing as well as the mainstream market” (Cohousing 2008). Most cohousing communities commit to group decision-making by developing policy, collectively solving problems, and reaching resolutions as a group. The success of the community hinges on forming a trusting and supportive atmosphere for positive progress in business matters. For example, the Sonora Cohousing’s mission is to seek “a diversity of backgrounds, ages and opinions, with our one
shared value being the commitment to working out our problems and finding consensus solutions that satisfy all members” (Cohousing 2008) (See Appendix for further information). Casual engagement with each other becomes a high priority, since it is integral to the neighborhood’s success. Jim Leach of Wonderland Hill Development Company, the leading builder of cohousing communities in the United States, classifies such places as “small-scale neighborhoods that provide a balance between personal privacy and a sense of community where people know and care about each other” (Wann 4).

Ecovillage at Ithaca residents not only strive for social engagement in their shared living spaces, but they feel a strong kinship toward sustainable and environmentally-friendly living. Adopted in 1994, its mission statement charges Ecovillage at Ithaca with “redesign[ing] the human habitat... We are creating a model of community... that will exemplify sustainable systems of living - systems that are not only practical in themselves, but replicable by others. The completed [Ecovillage at Ithaca vision] will demonstrate the feasibility of a design that meets basic human needs such as shelter,
food production, energy, social interaction, work, and recreation while preserving natural ecosystems” (Walker 2005). Jen Bokaer-Smith, daughter of founder Joan Bokaer, believes that living in Ecovillage at Ithaca means something different to each resident (Bokaer-Smith 2009). Some people may seek out that tight-knit community atmosphere, whereas others may want to decrease their ecological footprint. Still, other people like the idea that the neighborhood is designed around people and not cars. Shared living “simply makes sense” for other residents (Bokaer-Smith 2009). She wonders, why have thirty lawn mowers in a neighborhood when everyone can share just one or two?

However, Bokaer-Smith’s needs in cohousing living have shifted since her beginnings at the Ecovillage in 1990. Growing up in Ithaca, Bokaer-Smith became increasingly concerned with the city’s sprawl after returning home from college. As an “idealistic” young person, Jen Bokaer-Smith and her husband joined the first cohousing neighborhood because she wanted to show society that there can be a successful alternative model to the typical, “cookie-cutter” suburban development (Bokaer-Smith 2009). Today, she feels that she still upholds this ideal, but in a more flexible way to meet her family’s specific needs. She has come to call herself an atypical resident, since she does not partake in community meals, instead opting for family dinners at home. “You find your balance;” each person seeks out the aspects of the community that works for his life (Bokaer-Smith 2009).

Kim Falstick became involved in Ecovillage at Ithaca through her partner, Maurreen Bolton. Bolton attended Ithaca College, where she fell in love with the area and liked the Ecovillage idea of returning back to the land. However, this experimental community’s governing process alarmed Falstick early on in the planning process. She was involved during the time of siting the neighborhood and purchasing the land, between the late 1980’s and the early 1990’s. In her opinion, relationships felt forced. “I don’t even really know these people and I am going to have to share everything with them?… I never really got to know them during the time we were part of the process. Perhaps that was part of my disappointment. There were many who were kind and welcoming, but we never connected” (Falstick 2009). Throughout the process, Falstick and Bolton evaluated the pros and cons of living in such a situation. Ultimately, they decided not to pursue a
home in the neighborhood, although this was mainly for financial reasons. Her involvement in Ecovillage’s beginning stages helped Kim to learn about herself and her needs for a home space. Though not sorry about becoming involved in Ecovillage at Ithaca, she “wishes that they could say that it was great” (Falstick). Still today, Falstick is apprehensive about the neighborhood’s social and political success (Falstick 2009).

People, such as Falstick and Bokaer-Smith, choose to live or not to live in cohousing developments for the own personal reasons, based upon their own set of values. Generally, residents who join a mutual housing cooperative tend to desire higher social contact and active participation in their neighborhoods. In a visit to the Ecovillage at Ithaca, most people on the tour were newly married couples or couples with young families, desiring to live in the neighborhood. Many had traveled from distant parts of the country looking to join the well-established cohousing development.

The Ecovillage, as a socially-constructed landscape, developed in a different manner than community gardens in that it was designed with the intention to foster casual interaction. In community gardens, social capital is a product of other objectives. In general, people involved in cohousing organizations tend to believe that “the physical framework to a greater or lesser extent can influence the inhabitants’ social situation” (Gehl 1987). The cohousing atmosphere can occasionally amplify disagreements. Many collective living organizations adopt the consensus model for their governance. Ecovillage at Ithaca follows this type of model for conducting business. All decisions are discussed in monthly meetings, where a vote is taken and the majority wins. At Ecovillage at Ithaca’s planning meetings, Falstick described the rule-by-consensus method to be “nauseatingly fair” (Falstick 2009). Joan Bokaer desired an open forum that was free of pressure. The lack of clarity was frustrating for Falstick. For her, consensus decision-making is a “clunky kind of process” that needs direction and someone to take a leadership position (Falstick 2009). After a meeting ended, Falstick perceived that little progress had been made. “I never felt like we came to conclusions” (Falstick 2009). Over time, Falstick grew increasingly disillusioned with the process and eventually stopped attending meetings after investing two years of her time. “Learning to deal effectively with conflict is the hardest part of living in community” (Walker 2005).
Disputes happen for many different reasons. Some may be on a personal scale, whereas others are community-wide. Communication is key to resolving issues. Walker believes that people become closer friends after working through an issue with each other (Walker 2005). If both parties are able to open their minds to understand the other’s perspective, then this is entirely possible. Liz Walker believes that the group decision-making model promotes constructive conversation. After taking a leadership role, Walker felt alienated from her neighbors at times. On the other hand, Falstick appreciated Liz Walker and Joan Bokaer’s welcoming attitudes (Falstick 2009).

Ecovillage at Ithaca encountered a few obstacles in its history. For example, the building process of FROG met with many hurdles. The non-profit organization took on loans, investors threatened to pull out, residents contributed money from their own resources, and the conflict began. “Ecovillage finances were alarming” (Walker 2005). It seems that once people commit to investing their money, then every decision made for the community became all the more difficult to resolve. It is from this invested engagement that some of the most suitable decisions are reached. If everyone agreed with each other all of the time, progress would stagnate. Oftentimes a healthy level of conflict can create a necessary tension between freedom and control, which makes for a continued successful space.

Another strain on the community began when three families became the source of numerous disputes. After continually criticizing other residents, disagreeing with and blocking decisions, and diminishing community morale, other Ecovillage at Ithaca members decided to bring in two facilitators to teach conflict resolution tactics as a solution for positive change. These facilitators led sessions on simple skill-building exercises, such as “active listening” and taught the residents “healthy group dynamic principles” (Walker 2005). Following these sessions, other residents began to challenge the dysfunctional behavior of the three fathers. These families remained in the neighborhood for a little while thereafter, but they failed to alter their behaviors. Eventually, all three families decided to leave the community. “Sadly no one offered to throw a farewell party for them - a harsh reminder of how little connection they had made with others in the community” (Walker 2005).
This example demonstrates that other residents tried to take measures to keep these families and to improve the quality of life for everyone. However, it is interesting to note that Walker discusses the three men’s behavior toward others at length and does not include their perspective of the situation. She does not question as to why they began acting in this manner. It seems strange that they would suddenly start treating others unfavorably during meetings without just cause. Some information in this story seems to be missing from her retelling, which sheds light on the realities of collective decision-making. She reflects on the lessons learned from this experience: “We now emphasize how important it is to be flexible and willing to talk through differences. And we particularly highlight the role that effective communication plays at EVI” (Walker 2005). There is validity in her points. However, diversity in knowledge-base, financial and social backgrounds, among other factors, play a large role in reaching successful decisions for the community. If everyone who lives in Ecovillage at Ithaca agrees with each other all of the time, then how do they evolve as a socially-constructed and stimulated entity? People of diverse backgrounds can stimulate one another and spur creative solutions to cultivate a dynamic community. Such is the case in the community gardens of the Lower East Side, which are presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER TWO
History and Background

The New York City community gardening movement emerged as a primal way for people to find respite from the bustling metropolitan life and to connect with their neighbors through shared interests. Even a New York Times editorial, (June 7, 1961) observed that New York’s “spectacular form, although composed of an infinite number of man-designed units, is self-determined” (Jackson 1970). New York City’s community gardens, which are manifested from user need, are certainly part of its complexity. Most community gardens are filled with similar elements: individual gardening plots, seating areas, a pond, a secure entry, surrounding fencing, tool shed, eating area, and cultural artwork. The community garden movement was founded upon certain ideals: nostalgia for nature, the notion of ‘home,’ and a need for human connection in a sometimes anonymous and lonely urban center. Community gardens serve multiple purposes in the city setting. They green the city in a participatory way, connecting people to soil, animal, and plant life in areas that often lack such resources. These green spaces can become educational centers for nearby schools, and help volunteers gain practical gardening skills (Lawson 2005). Gardens in urban settings also act as democratic spaces where diverse groups of people can come together in mutual interest. The common activity of gardening provides the opportunity for neighbors to help each other in times of need (Lawson 2005). Community gardens are much more than the objects and “things” that occupy them.
Manhattan’s community gardening movement actively emerged during the early 1970’s following a period of economic blight. It is best exemplified in the gardens of the Lower East Side. “The beauty of the Lower East Side escapes all easy definitions. It is a beauty shaped by the desperate will to survive, a beauty of form and content so tightly interwoven that warp and woof, by now, are one” (Maffi 6). Throughout its variable history, the Lower East Side has endured “extreme fluctuations in population density, industrialization and deindustrialization, waves of investment and disinvestments, housing abandonment and gentrification” (Hassel 2002). The Lower East Side’s social and economic history and context helped provide the impetus for local residents to found New York City’s first community garden there in 1974. The garden was named for Liz Christy, founder of the grassroots organization the Green Guerillas.

Following World War II, the need for affordable housing increased as soldiers returned home to their young families. At the same time, new park construction was ceasing in many urban neighborhoods. Vacant land, associated with urban development, was inextricably linked to an area’s economic and social health. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the country fell into a financial crisis. Landlords and city officials began to abandon large sections of property in New York City (Brooks 2008). This metropolitan center was flirting with bankruptcy and its services were in disarray. In poorer parts of the city, whole blocks were abandoned as landlord after landlord failed to maintain their properties. The city repossessed thousands of lots and closed police and fire stations, allowing vacant houses to crumble. “People were watching their neighborhoods decline, and it was killing them,” says Jane Weissman, director of Green Thumb, an organization that provides assistance and materials to the garden, from 1984 to 1998.

“A house would come down. Maybe it was arson. Maybe it was abandoned. You would end up with land, end up with the city maintaining it, end up with garbage, rats, drug dealing and chop shops. People were devastated by what going on in their neighborhoods. There was a sense of - If we don’t do it, it’s not going to get done.”

When a society is distressed with undeveloped or abandoned properties, community gardening sometimes becomes a panacea for those individuals remaining in a neighbor-
During the 1960s, Mayor Lindsay of New York City adopted the ‘Play Lots’ program, which allocated play equipment and associated asphalt playgrounds into various neighborhoods. Block residents were not included in any design discussions for these spaces, yet all expected maintenance became their burden. The play equipment chosen met the standards of typical municipal needs: affordable and low maintenance. “In some cases, residents wondered when the “City” would come back to sweep up the litter and broken glass off the cracked asphalt or replace the safety rubber matting under the slide” (Christy 2007). Eventually these play lots fell into disrepair, illicit activities began to take place, and they became unsafe spaces for children to play. The New York City government hoped that playgrounds were a “quick fix” to assuage rioting in low income neighborhoods, instead of fighting economic and social decay at its core. During this time, many projects were postponed indefinitely and the resultant vacant lots became breeding grounds for crime and the disposal of trash (Christy 2007).

Starting in 1969, the New York City Parks Council began to investigate various possibilities for these vacant and detritus-filled spaces. They published a brochure, “A Little About Lots,” dispensing do-it-yourself guides for the greening of neighborhoods (Christy 2007). Other garden advocacy programs and groups sprang up around the city. Dress designer Molly Parnis offered cash prizes for community garden development in the ‘Dress Up Your Neighborhood Contest’. The Green Guerillas helped residents acquire leases, design and construct gardens, and identify leaders. The Environmental Action Coalition (E.A.C.) and the Council on the Environment (CENYC) sprang from the first Earth Day in 1970. E.A.C. tackled problems concerning street trees and waste while the CENYC’s Liz Christy founded the Open Space Greening Program in 1975, providing neighborhoods with “practical, how-to information regarding leasing, site evaluation, participatory design principles, and composting to help groups recycle organic wastes for conditioning the alkaline rubble to make a better soil” (Christy 2007). The Green Guerillas distributed free trees, shrubs, and plant materials, and Christy added the ‘Plant-a-Lot’ program to CENYC’s Open Space Greening Program to green these community gardens more readily. Gardeners and greening groups began to pressure the city for a
program that legitimized their efforts. With so many neighborhoods cultivating city-owned land, the city established ‘Operation Green Thumb’ in 1978. It began to lease plots for one dollar per year (Ferguson 2005).

As New York’s community gardens emerged and greened the city, they began to stabilize neighborhoods and raise property values, which created safer places to live. Ironically, these grass-roots community gardeners’ success created a threat to their gardens’ longevity. By the early 1990’s, roughly 850 gardens filled New York City’s old vacant lots and more than 70 were located in the Lower East Side (Ferguson 2005). Officials began to see these community garden lots as potential money-makers for the city. “In a 2002 memo, City Council staffers wrote, ‘The communities in which they are located have, in many cases, seen a dramatic resurgence, causing many of these abandoned lots to now have value as sites for development, such as affordable housing, or as locations to be auctioned for private development, at which point they would return to the tax rolls’” (Brooks 2008). In 1994, when Rudolph Giuliani became mayor, he bulldozed hundreds of gardens. He viewed these vacant properties as a means to help the city pay its bills by auctioning off the property. “On the one hand, some of the well-established gardens had become pillars of their communities; on the other, if temporary gardens could not be reclaimed for housing, the mayor threatened to ban any and all future gardens” (Harnik 2000). With little warning, gardeners found their spaces threatened by the city government (Brooks 2008).

Some community gardens fought by taking their cases to court. “All our organizing and the media coverage we received for our events, rallies, letter writing, and lawsuits, finally shifted the thinking from, ‘The gardens are temporary,’ to, ‘The gardens are permanent - and should be preserved forever,’” said organizer Felicia Young of Earth Celebrations. However, in
April 1998, the New York City government’s response was to liquidate all seven hundred and forty-one Green Thumb community gardens, by moving them into the jurisdiction of the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development. One hundred and fourteen gardens were put up for auction. The battle intensified. A few powerful people rose to support these community gardens. State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer won a temporary restraining order from an angry judge, putting most sales on hold. In May 1999, two non-profit organizations and New Yorker Bette Midler rescued those gardens hours before the auction. In 2002, new Mayor Michael Bloomberg agreed to restore the one hundred and ninety-eight gardens back to the New York City Parks Department or non-profit organizations. In order to sell another one hundred and fourteen gardens, the city had to conduct a “garden review process,” whereupon gardeners would be offered a substitute lot. With that settlement came peace between community gardens and the government. No new gardens were created, but the movement was successful in preserving the ones that they had developed since the early 1970’s (Brooks 2009).

Success in community gardens is based largely on the “new” notion of participatory design. In the Lower East Side, which has been historically saturated with many different immigrant groups, community gardens are wrought with cultural significance. These community-sponsored and culturally-infused open space projects “have proven to be remarkably resilient, persisting in the face of a largely non-supportive and eventually actively hostile city administration” (Hassell 2002).

**Gentrification in the Lower East Side**

Large numbers of immigrants to New York City settled in a couple of key areas in the city during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The population of the Lower East Side became increasingly dense and diverse. Living conditions deteriorated as building quality suffered and space was limited. As commerce grew, work could not be completed during the regular business day. Industry became incorporated into home life, compounding the already poor living conditions. Between the 1940’s and 1980’s, the housing stock of the Lower East Side continued to deteriorate as the strength of the garment market grew in the area. Crowding was common, which eventually led to high
crime rates during the economic problems of the early 1970’s. “The Lower East Side was regarded as one of the most undesirable places to live in the city” (Two Bridges 2004). From this low point, the area began a slow process of gentrification. Asian and Latin American immigrants largely from the Caribbean Basin succeeded European immigrants. Today, housing is generally expensive; a studio may rent for two thousand dollars monthly (Two Bridges 2004). The Lower East Side community is vital to New York City’s overall culture and history, yet it still is highly sensitive to gentrification. From 1990 to 2000, the total population of Lower East Side increased by only 1.73 percent. “Census tract 42 in the East Village and tract 26.02 in Alphabet City have experienced the most dramatic increase in total population since 1990, at 45.98 percent and 36.44 percent, respectively” (Two Bridges 2004). The area has seen relatively little loss of its white population. Native American, African American, and Hispanic populations have considerably decreased since 2000 (Two Bridges 2004). Meanwhile, New York is increasing city-wide in the number of ethnic groups. “With few exceptions, all [thirty] Census tracts indicate that the Hispanic population has dramatically declined, dropping from 32.3 percent in 1990 to 26.9 percent in 2000, displaced by a white population as the greater share of the total population in the area” (Two Bridges 2004). The Lower East Side possesses a significant population below the poverty level. In 2000, the City’s poverty rate was 21.2 percent, and only six of the thirty census tracts studied had lower poverty rates. The increase in poverty rate reported by census tracts from 1990 to 2000 is consistent with the decrease in median household income (Two Bridges 2004).

The Two Bridges Neighborhood Council recommends that conserving affordable housing can ensure that the Lower East Side neighborhoods will be able to retain their cultural identities and retain diversity in New York City. “Preserving and restoring the City’s stock of mixed-income housing is the key to making our neighborhoods more livable for our hard-working families and more attractive to new businesses that provide job
opportunities for our residents” (Two Bridges 2004).

**Three Community Gardens**

The Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, La Plaza Cultural, and 6BC Garden are presented as case studies to reveal the intricacies of their particular social dynamics. Background information is given for each garden followed by the author’s site impressions. Gardeners and leading members in each garden were interviewed to reveal each community garden’s governing structure. Brief conclusions draw upon all preceding information.

*Figure 8: Community Gardens that comprise the Lower East Side in Manhattan, New York City*
1. The Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden

Location: Northeast corner of Bowery and Houston Streets, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Background

The Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden was the first community garden in New York City. It was founded in 1973 by the woman after whom this garden is named. In the seventeenth century, this site was a part of a large farm owned by Peter Stuyvesant, the last Dutch Governor of New Amsterdam. By the 1970’s, the site was in complete decline and full of garbage, according to Donald Loggins, who was one of the garden’s six founding members and a close personal friend of Liz Christy (Loggins 2009). In 1973, Liz Christy, Donald Loggins, and their fellow Green Guerilla activists started to take over these vacant lots dotted around the Lower East Side by throwing “seed bombs” into the rubble, hoping that some seeds would germinate and bloom. These rudimentary seed grenades were fabricated out of old Christmas ornaments or water balloons “filled with pelletized time-release fertilizer and wildflower seeds” (Hassell 2002). Green Guerillas used these rudimentary devices as a way to propel their “grass-roots revolu-
tion on ‘acres of opportunity,’” which is what they called vacant lots (Hassell 2002). It has since become more of a symbolic gesture, since seeds generally have difficulty germinating in rubble and debris-filled soil. For thirty-five years, Loggins has carried on Liz Christy’s legacy by continuing to transform one of “the poorest areas of New York City into a neighborhood that families and children want to live in again” (Loggins “Bio” 2009).

At its conception, the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston garden site was filled with mattresses, oil drums, and old appliances. In telling the story of the garden’s beginnings, Christy explains that she saw a little boy playing submarine by a large refrigerator. Before he could climb into it and close the door, she rushed to pick him up and take him home to safety. She advised his mother to keep him out of these dangerous vacant lots. His mother’s responded by saying, “Why don’t you do something about it? It’s your fault. That refrigerator got dumped out there. You don’t have a house full of children. You’re only down here occasionally. You get rid of the refrigerator. It’s your responsibility” (lizchristy.org 2007). As a result, Christy proposed to the Greening Committee that they take over this thin strip of land and turn it into a garden in twenty-four hours. They collected various free plants from the ‘Wall Street Give Away’ sponsored at the time by the Parks Council. “We built a picket fence. We brought in soil and we planted this whole little strip garden, complete with a Japanese Black Pine, and Crabapple and Broom and Wisteria vines” (lizchristy.org 2007).

On April 23, 1974, the site was approved as the “Bowery-Houston Community Farm and Garden.” Rent of one dollar was paid to the City’s Office of Housing Preservation and Development. More planting occurred, including raised beds for vegetables, trees, and herbaceous perennials. The garden was recognized city-wide with the Mollie Parnis ‘Dress Up Your Neighborhood’ award. Soon, the Green Guerillas were conducting workshops on how to garden in an urban setting (Hassel 2002). Many people came to the garden for plant giveaways, either grown there or donated by larger organizations and nurseries. It became the home base for the community garden movement in New York City, where people were able to share ideas and learn how to garden successfully in a city. Liz Christy was at the heart of the movement. In 1986, members agreed to rename the garden after its founder, upon her untimely death. “In 1990, after years of un-
certainty and a ground swell of support, the local development group, the Cooper Square Committee, pledged to preserve the garden in its entirety in its renovation plans for our neighborhood” (lizchristy.org 2007). Donald Loggins noticed that Liz Christy’s influence is now taking hold abroad. Inspired by Christy, a man by the name of Richard Reynolds has started guerilla gardening in London, England. More and more cities in Europe are becoming home to seed bombs and grass-roots environmental groups. Christy was the pioneer. Loggins believes, “It’s bigger than it was and better” (Loggins 2009).

In 2000, the future of the garden became uncertain. AvalonBay Communities proposed a residential building development, called Avalon Bowery Place, adjacent to the garden. Members, including invested volunteer Penny Jones, were alarmed because the construction company would potentially destroy parts of the garden abutting the building. Through negotiations, the developer promised the garden an amount of roughly $160,000 to cover damage repair during construction and to add some new features. The agreement involved the garden’s owner, the Parks Department, AvalonBay and the volunteer gardeners with the Department of Housing and Preservation, which owned the land prior to its purchase by AvalonBay (Levin 2005). “The main thing we’re worried about at this point is that the developer wants to excavate three feet into the garden, and that will destroy half the trees,” said Elizabeth DeGaetano, a volunteer and member of the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden Committee. They were especially worried about the irreplaceable Blue Atlas Cedar and Dawn Redwood trees (Levin 2005). Penny Jones

Figure 11: The garden becomes a center for the promotion of community gardening. Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan.
disclosed that she personally went ten thousand dollars into debt, working to compro-
mise with AvalonBay (Jones 2009). She took a leave of absence from her full-time job to
water plants and to make sure that the construction company abided by its agreements

In the early seventies, mostly Hispanic people lived in the neighborhood. Then
artists began to move in and the Lower East Side became more upscale (Loggins 2009).
The Liz Christy Bowery-Houston garden’s success comes from being able to adapt to
the changing political and social dynamics of the neighborhood (Loggins 2009). When
the garden first opened, people wanted to grow vegetables because the economy was in
decline. Now, fewer vegetables are grown and there are more ornamental plants. Don-
ald gives tours to local public schools that provide children the chance to bridge the gap
between the food they eat and where it is grown. Whole Foods Market even has a plot at
Liz Christy that the owners of the market connect to a culinary course taught at the local
grocery store. At the beginning of the course, the instructor has students plant tomatoes
or some other vegetable. Some time after, they all come back and use that produce in
the food they cook in the course (Loggins 2009). Over the years, the Liz Christy Bowery-
Houston Garden has left its “hippie” reputation to become a very competitive gardening
space. Many people use their individual plots to display exotic plants and special gar-
dening techniques.
Figure 13: The main pathway running through the garden. The area beyond the tool shed is shadier due to large, established trees.
Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan.

Figure 14: This seating area is around a pond in the shaded area of the garden.
Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan
Initial Site Impressions

I entered the Houston Street entrance to find a quiet respite set apart from the crowded street. A defined gravel pathway, outlined in stone, led me through the garden to a secondary entry/exit in the fence. Alternating brick paths brought me into intimate spaces, past a tool shed that marks the center of the site. The garden itself is long and narrow; the shed registers the separation of open and shaded space, but only for the time being. Gardeners “planted a specimen orchard by Second Avenue,” which was designed by Penny Jones, longtime member and current copresident of the garden. It was voted for by members. The new area houses twenty-four trees still small in size, twenty-one of which are fruit varieties (Jones, April 2009). Although all of the planting beds are maintained by individuals, the gardens in the sheltered section were more clearly divided into individual plots than those in the open beds (Jones 2009). According to Penny Jones, the garden may entertain five hundred visitors on a summer day (Jones 2009).

Governance

The Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden has not historically had a substantial governing body. At the garden’s inception, Donald remembers that a president and vice president were elected informally (Loggins 2009). Jones had been a member for fourteen years before becoming the official president. When she started volunteering there, she remembers that the garden had few members, even though it is close to the F train stop and it sits on busy Houston Street. A high turnover rate of volunteers is the result of the large number of young, career-driven professionals living in the nearby neighborhood. Now in her fifties, Jones remembers when she was starting out in her profession. Someone might be interested and try gardening for a day or a season before withdrawing (Jones 2009). Jones’ first order of business was to clearly delineate and objectify the process for attracting new people. First, a new member must volunteer for twenty hours to accumulate “sweat equity” before he receives a key. Another twenty hours will earn
him a plot and a vote (Jones 2009).

Before Jones took a leadership role, issues surrounding “patronage” and ownership undermined the garden’s strength. The previous unofficial president was Kim Mulcahy, who “designed the garden in its most beautiful pre-construction state” (Jones, April 2009). He was deeply invested in the gardening aspect and taught Jones “everything [she] knows” (Jones, April 2009). Though he was a younger gardener than Loggins, Kim was the “designer and plantsman who put [the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden] on the map” (Jones, April 2009). In his dedication to the garden’s physical quality, he did not address disagreements between members. “The garden is like an office,” Jones explains. “All of the same characters – the drama queen, the boring people, the nasty person – all find themselves at the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden as well” (Jones 2009). New members of the garden had to know someone in order to be invited to join, and would oftentimes become entangled in ongoing fights. New members now do not need a direct connection to veteran members. Each person is free to join for his own reasons (Jones 2009).

However, the most important aspect of the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden to Jones is that it offers her the opportunity to garden in the city. She came into an activist role during the Avalon construction because she felt that it was essential to protect the garden. “I took on the chair to be sure that we would get through the rehabilitation post-construction in an even better aesthetic and gardening state than before. I intend to retire as chair as soon as the rehab is over” (Jones, April 2009).

One New York City community gardener believes that the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden “is really seen by many neighborhood residents as “their” place instead of “our place,” which is antithetical to the idea of a real community garden… and the antithesis of what a public garden space on highly valuable NYC real estate should be.” (NYC 2004). This resident gardens at the Clinton Community Garden and responded to Hemmy So’s article in The Villager called “Border war pits garden vs. developer” (So 2004). Loggins agrees that some tension exists between seasoned and novice gardeners. Some older members hope that the garden will remain the way it was thirty years ago. However, the garden exists within the dynamics of an ever-changing city.
Though still young in governance, the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden seems to have created more rules, which adds to its complexity. Penny Jones sought to reorganize the garden in such a way that would alleviate longtime social issues. She is attempting to objectify the decision-making process as a way to manage subjectivity among members. If an issue arises, Jones will be able to refer back to these rules previously agreed upon and accepted. Standardizing procedures in the garden gives parameters and direction to its members. Rules and organization will help to alleviate any disagreements that ensue.
2. La Plaza Cultural

Location: Southwest Corner of 9th Street and Avenue C, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Background

La Plaza Cultural is one of the largest community gardens in the Lower East side. Membership here is extremely high because of the garden's wide range of uses. It also attracts people of different age and ethnic backgrounds. La Plaza Cultural has become an events space that can be rented out, paid for on a sliding scale depending on the client's budget.

Founded in 1976, La Plaza Cultural was part of a group of trashed, vacant city lots. Local residents were determined to reverse the cycle of arson, drugs and abandonment in their neighborhood (Hassel 2002). The Latino group CHARAS cleaned up the lot and worked with architect Buckminster Fuller to build a “geodesic dome” in the open space (La Plaza 2009). Green Guerillas threw their famous “seed bombs” on the lawn and planted the now six massive Weeping Willows and Linden trees. By 2000, the garden also contained fifteen fruit trees (Hassel 2002). Large murals, reflecting the neighborhood’s Spanish culture, were painted on adjacent buildings. (Hassell 2002). Artist Gordon Matta-Clark helped construct La Plaza’s amphitheater, using railroad ties and materials from abandoned buildings. In the late 1980’s, portions of the community garden were transformed into a controversial soup kitchen and tent city. Local residents viewed these people as reintroducing the drug culture and disrespecting public space in their community. The site was becoming derelict and full of squatters, which compelled the city administration to propose building a senior citizen housing project there. Neighborhood members were distraught over their temporary defeat and the impending
permanent loss of the space. Thankfully, garden supporters and activists were able to remove the squatters and reclaim the garden (Hassell 2002). In court, contributors to La Plaza Cultural preserved the park as part of a landmark legal settlement in 2002 that saved many other gardens as well (La Plaza 2009). “In 2003, La Plaza was renamed after Armando Perez, a CHARAS founder and former District Leader of the Lower East Side who was brutally murdered in 1999. Armando recognized the power of gardens to bring communities together” (La Plaza 2009).

**Initial Site Impressions**

La Plaza Cultural can attract a visitor from five blocks away. An intrinsically unique space, the adventure begins at the fence. A trash artist, Rolando, was commissioned seven years ago to create a vibrant addition to the standard fence surrounding the garden. Infused with Puerto Rican culture, the trash art attached to the top of the fence draws curious visitors to the garden. La Plaza Cultural has various unique attributes. Surprises abound around every corner. The space houses sculptures, large Weeping Willow trees, a gazebo, a composting center, a performance stage, an open lawn, and the traditional meandering stone pathways around individual garden plots.

Figure 16: Trash artist Rolando created these “Winter Flower” pieces to adorn the fence around the garden. [left]
Figure 17: A piece in the sculpture garden. [top] La Plaza Cultural, Lower East Side, Manhattan
Figure 18: Fabricated out of old railroad ties and building debris, this stage area hosts a wide range of events and performances.
La Plaza Cultural, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Figure 19: Murals, covering the adjacent building, tell stories of Latino heritage.
La Plaza Cultural, Lower East Side, Manhattan
Governance

La Plaza Cultural’s organization developed out of the need to fit within Green Thumb’s bylaws, La Plaza Cultural’s own bylaws put into place years ago, and the members’ desire to qualify for non-profit status. Current executive director Sheila Garson is currently pursuing this 501-C3 title for the garden, which would allow La Plaza Cultural to be tax exempt. If this happens, people who donate money will be able to deduct the donation from their taxes. In order to qualify, the garden must have a board and an executive director. In this case, Sheila Garson’s role is that of a supervisor, delegating responsibility to other board members and committee chairs. The Board consists of seven invested members, a number reduced from nine when Garson came into the executive position. She felt that it was important to streamline the board into only those members who have the best interest of the garden at heart. Garson emphasizes that all positions are volunteer. People are extremely busy in their own lives, and meetings can only proceed if a majority is present. Therefore, Garson believed that three people besides herself would not be too difficult to round up for meetings and decision-making. Serving under the Board are committees that are formed out of members' interests. Currently, the garden has membership, landscape, performance, and parent committees that are all headed by a committee chair (Garson 2009).

Garson’s rise to the executive director position at La Plaza Cultural has been a relatively quick one. Garson is currently the manager of St. Charles Jubilee Senior Center in Brooklyn Heights. She commutes twenty minutes to the garden from her home in Brooklyn. Since a senior center is similar to a non-profit organization, she felt that she was a good fit for the executive position. Originally she became involved in the garden’s performance opportunities. Looking for outdoor theater space, she discovered that the Lower East Side had numerous community gardens. One weekend, she went with her husband to find a possible garden that could house summer plays for her then one-year-old theater company. That is when she stumbled upon La Plaza Cultural. “Gardeners had no idea how great their space was,” Garson recalls (Garson 2009). When she approached the former president, Ross Martin, about using the stage for performances, Garson also assumed the roles of events coordinator. La Plaza Cultural is primarily an
“events garden” and has hosted everything from television episodes of Law and Order and Joss Stone music videos to weddings and children’s birthday parties. It can also be “rented to people who are not members at a higher cost than members would be charged. Members can enjoy the garden for small birthday parties, barbecues and other gatherings free of charge in appreciation for the volunteer-ism and membership” (Garson, April 2009).

As a result of her relatively quick move into her position, I asked her if she felt as though she was respected. She responded by saying, “We are all working for a higher good,” in reference to the garden (Garson 2009). She mentioned it being a labor of love, which is obvious from her long commute. However, Garson has met some opposition. “The climate of La Plaza has always been contentious,” she reflects (Garson 2009). There will always be some people who disagree with her actions and those who differ in their ideas for the garden. People work in all different ways; some have difficulty collaborating, whereas others see the benefits of her work. Members may not realize the undertaking involved in the executive position. Before she came into the role, ideas were discussed at length and progress was slow.

As the events coordinator, Garson handled all of the associated paperwork. Anyone, member or not, could rent out the space. The large number of requests eventually became too much for her to handle. As the executive director, Garson put into place rules that created a more logical and organized system for processing events (Garson 2009). For example, a person can only rent out the space if he is a member. In order to become a part of La Plaza Cultural, a person “must attend a minimum of four work days a year or make up the hours and help steward the garden during [its] public hours. The annual fee is $25; a sliding scale will apply to those in need. Garden plots are awarded to members on a first come, first serve basis for an additional $25 fee” (La Plaza 2009). As a result of the high volunteer interest, Garson made crucial decisions about membership when she first assumed her position. She believes that a garden “needs to be managed like a business” in order to be successful. An objectified process is a guaranteed way in which ideas can come to fruition and problems can be solved in a civil manner. “Nothing is personal,” she explains, “It’s not because I don’t like you, but these are the
rules” (Garson 2009). From my conversation and interview with her, it is obvious to me that she is a strong businesswoman who follows through on the Board’s decisions.

In 2002, La Plaza Cultural’s Board of Directors held a retreat at the Snug Harbor Cultural center on Staten Island to address six goals: “to develop the La Plaza Cultural Vision Statement draft, identify Four Key Strategies, draft an Initial Set of Actions in support of the Four Key Strategies, modify the Committee charters and/or structure that have been proposed, identify Committee ownership for each of the Four Key Strategies, and identify Committee Actions in support of the Four Key Strategies” (Loggins 2002). Following the retreat, Alan Ando of Ando Consulting prepared a Summary Report on November 11, 2002, which encompasses the board’s collective vision and outlines the driving principles within the organizational structure of the community garden. These are the outcomes (adapted from the “DRAFT La Plaza Cultural Board of Directors Strategic Planning Retreat Summary Report”) (Ando 2002):

Principles for Change: As the board creates the next chapter in the history of La Plaza, we need to look at how we will manage the change ahead. We will use these guiding principles as leaders of the change.

- We need a Vision to help guide our decisions and actions.
- We want to help create the very things that will impact us, so that means we need to involve each other, the membership, the neighborhood and others who come to La Plaza to support the Vision.
- Leaders need to be a visible, positive presence to help us along the way.
- Change will also mean that we will have to learn new things and maybe even behave in a different way… some of us might not get it right the first time, so some forgiveness is needed… but we all understand that we may have to change.
- Change will produce anxiety in all of us, so we must take care of each other in a way that supports dignity and respect.

La Plaza Cultural Four Key Strategies and Strategy Owner

1. Financial Strategy (Finance and Fundraising Committees)
   a. Establish a multi-year budgeting and audit process
b. Establish and expand scope of fundraising

2. People Strategy (Membership, Outreach and PR Committees)
   a. Diversify and increase membership
   b. Design and implement outreach program
   c. Design and implement a public relations program

3. Programs Strategy (Arts and Events Committee)
   a. Develop programs to support membership, outreach and fundraising goals

4. Land Use Strategy (Land Use Committee) (Landscape Maintenance and Structures Committees become sub-committees of Land Use)
   a. Develop and implement a long-term land use master plan
3. 6BC Botanical Garden

Figure 20: Street view of the garden.
6BC Botanical Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan
Location: 6th Street between Avenues B & C, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Background

As is the case with many other gardens in the Lower East Side, the 6BC Botanical Garden’s beginnings were wrought with conflict between different racial groups living on 6th Street between Avenues B and C. Tensions between African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and younger White residents first led to individual plots on the site with little or no organization. Like most of the other gardens in the area, the 6BC Garden was threatened to be taken back by the city. Thankfully, the space survived by being permanently set aside for public use as part of the New York City Parks system. It has since become a member of Green Thumb. Lenny Librizzi, now Assistant Director of the Open Space Greening Program at the Council on the Environment in New York City (CENYC), has been the contact between Green Thumb and the garden for many years, beginning in the mid 1990’s (Librizzi 2009).

When Librizzi first moved to the neighborhood in 1984, the Department of General Services was the government organization concerned with legitimizing gardens and providing materials to them. The 6BC Garden started as a group of mothers on the block concerned about the dangerous nature of the vacant lot to their children. Along with greening the space, the group started a center, which involved the non-profit ‘Save the Children,’ to create after school programs for neighborhood children. Originally, the 6BC Garden was simply a mini-park for kids that housed various types of play equipment. When Katie Hogan, a teacher at a nearby school, wanted to use the garden as an edu-
cational tool, 6BC Garden started to become more of a planting garden. She developed composting on site and wanted to teach students about growing their own food (Librizzi 2009).

Presently, 6BC gardeners pride themselves on the garden’s botanical aspects as much as its role as a community garden. Their stated mission is to enhance neighborhood residents’ quality of life by “fostering a sense of environmental responsibility and appreciation... and enabling community participation in the creation of a beautiful, biodiverse green space for all to enjoy” (6BC Online 2009). Originally, the garden’s name came from its location within the Lower East Side. However, the garden’s website emphasizes alternate meanings for the B and C abbreviations. They call ‘B’ for ‘Botanical’ and ‘C’ for ‘Community.’

“We call it a botanical garden because that’s the traditional name for a garden where visitors come to learn about lots of plants from lots of places. Our garden includes hundreds of plants, native plants as well as many that were immigrants to New York and that makes our garden a lot like our community” (6BC Online 2009).

*Initial Site Impressions*

It was a sunny and warm Saturday last fall when I visited the garden. It was well-manicured and tidy when I spent time there. A straight and evenly laid brick path originates at the entrance. The plant selection includes exotic and unique vegetation. The only blemish I noticed was graffiti on the Green Thumb sign marking

![Two-story shed](image1.jpg)

*Figure 21: Two-story shed
6BC Botanical Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan*
Figure 22: Ornamental plants are bountiful in this garden. The trellis leads to the two-story shed and fish pond.
6BC Botanical Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan
Figure 23: Some plants act architectural features in the garden. This botanical garden boasts its variety of exotic and unique plant selection.
6BC Botanical Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Figure 24: The fish pond next to the two-story tool shed.
6BC Botanical Garden, Lower East Side, Manhattan
the entry. Everything in this garden is crafted with attention to detail. The garden includes a tongue-and-groove trellis, covered in verdant vines and providing copious amounts of shade. The walkway leads to a two-story “tool shed,” appearing like a small home set within the garden. The second floor of this structure is a small reading room, complete with white bead board walls and a wide range of children’s books. The porch attached to the front of this building offers lounge seating and open space for community posting boards. An adjoining pond houses red fish and aquatic plants. Two other small ponds are in other areas of the garden as well. One is sunken into the walkway and surrounded with tall, thin stones. The second destination in the garden offers an outdoor dining/ seating or study area, completely crafted from stone. When I came upon the shaded space, I found a garden user with her book bag and books spread about the large stone table. Meandering through the uniform, brick pathways, I heard murmuring from another small tool shed. Then I spied a man and woman, adorned in wide-brimmed gardening hats and dirtied gloves, happily engaged in weeding planting beds.

**Governance**

As I spoke with various past and present members of this garden, I discovered that 6BC has undergone significant physical and organizational changes since its start in the early 1980s. A six-person Board of Directors makes up the garden’s governance. The by-laws of the garden state that one Board member has to be President. Nora Keight (name has been changed to remain anonymous) currently holds that position and has been a member since 1997. The Board nominated and voted her into the position.

Keight hopes for a more diverse group of members in the future. “I do believe in the eleven to twelve years I have been involved, the group of people involved have become a more affluent group as the neighborhood has changed... I do hang signs all over the neighborhood and stress that all are welcome” (Keight 2009). Nora first became a member of the garden after moving into an apartment in the adjacent building. At that time, membership was high and the garden had already achieved non-profit status. “I felt compelled to get involved” (Keight 2009). For the past six years, the garden has tried to attract new people by holding orientations every month for new members. Currently,
there are about one hundred and fifty members and about fifteen active volunteers. Communication between people is almost entirely conducted via email.

Keight shied away from speaking with me about specific obstacles within the garden.

“I choose to focus on the fact that the Board all gets along now and has for many years. I am aware that when I was first on the board, many people were not getting along when I first involved... and it was really unfortunate and awful to deal with, but it really is not that interesting. It was just people fighting and some people were not good communicators. I am not really comfortable naming names. Several people who were amazing gardeners/organizers have since left the garden due to the fighting and inability to communicate” (Keight 2009).

Organizational kinks such as these seem to be present in most community gardens, so it is not surprising that the 6BC Garden has worked through its differences of opinion. Oftentimes, the best results come from the most difficult of disagreements.

The 6BC Botanical garden differs from the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden and La Plaza Cultural in that it focuses on one primary objective. The garden fosters a botanical theme, and in that members plant and maintain unique vegetation. Though the garden may host other activities, it does not boast the wide range of everyday activities that La Plaza Cultural possesses or have the historic presence of the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden.
CHAPTER THREE Conclusion

Reflections: Obstacles in the Interview Process

When I began researching socially-constructed landscapes, I tried to find case studies that would shed light on each other in meaningful ways. I chose to underscore my research of community gardens with Ecovillage at Ithaca. The cohousing development was intended to be used an established example that would illuminate the intricacies of group decision-making. I expected to be overlooked by members of the Lower East Side community gardens, since New Yorkers are known to follow hectic schedules. I worried that I would have to abandon this thesis topic if I was only able to speak with a limited number of gardeners. In researching cohousing developments, I predicted few would be interested in the opportunity to share their community ideals with a young college student.

I was quite surprised that my expectations held true, although in exactly the opposite manner than I had imagined. In reality, all persons with the exception of one interviewed for the three focus community gardens were very helpful and obliging. I felt that I received a candid glimpse into the social intricacies that define these communities. For instance, Donald Loggins volunteered to send me a compact disc filled with pictures of the Liz Christy Garden’s transformation throughout its existence. I embraced the opportunity to employ first-hand photography in my research paper. It was only when I inserted the disc into my computer that I found he not only included pictures, but many articles and documents he wrote and collected over the years. Loggins’s wealth of information
contributed to my research to create a richer, more substantive document. Almost everyone that I spoke with involved with the three gardens urged me to send them a final copy of my thesis and wished me the best of luck in my future career. Each and every time I concluded an interview, I felt connected to these people whom I spoke to only a couple of times. Their honesty has been enlightening for me.

I found it a greater challenge to find information about cohousing developments. I decided to study Wild Sage Cohousing of Boulder, Colorado, after researching its sister community, the Holiday Neighborhood, in 2008. After a series of emails back and forth, I was finally able to speak with a resident and architect of the development. The conversation was brief, and he provided me with succinct answers to my questions. Through the course of the conversation, I felt it inappropriate to delve into unpleasant topics. I knew from my experience interviewing community gardeners that residents in his neighborhood probably chose to keep Wild Sage Cohousing information amongst themselves. I wanted to hear the neighborhood stories of its greatest obstacles and best experiences that made the overall organization stronger. As a result, I decided not to include information concerning Wild Sage Cohousing’s governing structure, since I had not visited the neighborhood and I felt that my findings were not comprehensive enough.

When trying to research Ecovillage, I received an email response from a member two weeks after I sent my initial inquiry. She replied with:

“Questions about the village’s organization, history and policy development can be found in the book EcoVillage at Ithaca - Pioneering a Sustainable Culture written by cofounder Liz Walker. I hope this is somewhat helpful. We get many many requests like these from students, and while we want to answer each and every one, we really don’t have the staff, human resources or time available for that. I encourage you to read the book which you can get at any major bookstore, including online, and if you have any more specific questions that haven’t been covered by the book, then do get in touch again” (Greenwood 2009).

After reading this email, I began to wonder how a book could provide me with focused answers to my specific questions. I needed to interview a resident, so that I could try to
encourage him to provide a true sense of the cohousing development’s social dynamics. I assumed that a book of this nature has most likely been edited numerous times. My break came when I talked with a friend about my thesis. Maureen Bolton informed me that she and her partner had been involved in Ecovillage’s planning stages for two years. She provided me with Jen Bokaer-Smith’s contact as well as others that she knew from around town. Finally, through a series of coincidences, I was able to contact two people involved with Ecovillage.

I understand that its residents may feel that they have been over studied. However, Ecovillage is the cohousing movement’s pioneer community, especially for central New York. They must have anticipated such attention at its conception. Jen Bokaer-Smith explained to me that she calls it “research fatigue” (Bokaer-Smith 2009). When constantly inundated with interview requests, members may choose to speak with those people that offer a reciprocal agreement. Bokaer-Smith hopes that the future holds a more sustainable and symbiotic relationship between cohousing developments and researchers. She believes that Cornell University is on its way to reach this goal with Ecovillage (Bokaer-Smith 2009).

After speaking with Jen Bokaer-Smith and Kim Falstick, I believe that I have a more comprehensive understanding of the atmosphere that existed during the beginning and later periods at Ecovillage. However, my challenges in reaching other similar communities make it difficult for me to draw generalized conclusions about cohousing developments. Thus, I chose not to support my findings of the community garden case studies with superficial and insubstantial evidence from a basic understanding of the cohousing development movement. With that said, I reflected on the situations I found in the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, La Plaza Cultural, and the 6BC Botanical Garden with support from Ecovillage examples where necessary.

Much later after conducting interviews for these case studies did I come to realize the difficulties inherent in that particular way to garner information. I was ill-informed on the intricacies involved. Even in how my voice sounds over the phone or the effect of my body language on the interviewee in a person-to-person conversation contributes to the way in which he responds. Every detail must be accounted for, documented, and
standard across all interviews. If more time were available to complete this research, I would have enjoyed developing a uniform method for interviewing each person. By standardizing the questions asked, I would form a baseline way to compare each case study, which would support a stronger argument. I would also have recorded each interview and included the transcripts as an appendix.

**Findings**

Community spaces can evolve physically and socially based upon user disagreements and constructive discussions. Concerns arise from a range of topics, such as access restrictions, management practices, complicated physical layout, and differences in user needs, age, sex, or cultural background. Two people might differ in their core values concerning the community garden’s future or their individual purpose for sharing the space (Francis 2003).

Liz Christy gardener, Kim Mulcahy, says, “The funny thing about community gardening, and its no secret, is that the hardest part isn’t growing the plants – it’s getting along with other people... Everybody has different ideas of what beautiful is,” he continues. “You think there’s some base level you can agree on, like weeds don’t look nice. But in fact some people think weeds are wonderful. There’s often a lot of fighting going on. No one truly likes everybody. So you find ways to tolerate each other. You decide: what should we cooperate on, and what should we leave each other alone on? And that’s pretty good, really” (Kannapell 1995).

User disputes are often common in urban open spaces and may be a consequence of larger social problems. Controversy can result from the individual or collective misuse of the place, such as one person taking on a heavy leadership role.

As evidenced in each case study, community gardens are certainly social landscapes that have been constructed out of human interaction. They embody an evolution of one intention growing into others. In general, the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, La Plaza Cultural, and the 6BC Botanical Garden developed out of the residents’ desire to green their neighborhood. One of the primary and founding goals of all three was
to revitalize vacant lots strewn with detritus and criminal activity. Though their original intentions were certainly not lost, the community gardens studied in this thesis became richer places because of bonds formed between some people involved and because of struggles experienced along the way. An individual’s involvement in a community garden is based primarily on his level of personal interest. No one is forced to volunteer. “In order for neighbor contacts and various forms of communal activities to develop beyond a superficial level, a meaningful and common denominator must exist – a common background, common interests, or common problems” (Gehl 1987). People share gardening, greening their neighborhood, and creating a crime-free environment as prideful activities. Stewardship creates a sense of pride-in-place, which can develop stronger, tighter-knit communities.

However, when time is the only basis for comparison between gardeners, older members may feel more entitled to space because of their long investment with the garden. This was the case in the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, where Penny Jones took a leadership position in an attempt to counteract tensions between members. Since admittance to the garden was not regulated, newcomers had to align themselves in long-standing disputes. Jones objectified the membership process as one way to separate emotions from gardening.

In the three cases studied, all arrived at a similar form of government. Each garden is headed by a president and includes some form of small decision-making group and/or delegation of power. Though the first community garden in New York City, the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden is the youngest of the three gardens in terms of complex governance. Penny Jones is now the president and works toward a positive rapport between members. She is accomplishing this goal by enacting a set of standards to replace previously subjective decision-making. La Plaza Cultural works under a more advanced, efficient governance. Sheila Garson understood that the wide range of activities there called for a clear delegation of responsibilities. The 6BC Garden fits between the Liz Christy Garden and La Plaza Cultural on the path toward complex governance. The garden has yet to develop the committee system present in La Plaza Cultural, but it possesses a Board of Directors not incorporated in the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston
Cohousing developments also employ similar techniques, such as the use of sub-committees, as a successful way to delegate work. Wild Sage Cohousing, for example, uses this method as a way to tackle different aspects of a neighborhood organization. These have developed out of residents’ needs that include stewardship, process, and finance. The Process Committee, for example, facilitates meetings and communication between neighbors (Bowen 2009). Ecovillage, too, has used committees to tackle different issues. For example, after the West Hill property was purchased in 1992, a Planning Council was formed to research and plan how best to use the land (Walker 2005).

In comparing these situations, it becomes evident that all three gardens are collectively moving toward a similar structure in their governance. However, differences lie in the process by which each came to that form. It must be noted that all three gardens possess a dynamic population of gardeners that is constantly changing in size and demographic make-up. For instance, in the Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, the current structure resulted from pivotal disagreements between highly opinionated, “entitled” members, according to Jones. She felt that these strong personalities generated anxiety within the community. La Plaza Cultural evolved differently since it needed to respond to the garden’s physical needs. Sheila Garson and the Board of Directors felt it helpful to appoint different committees to handle various functions of the space. The garden houses a stage, art pieces, individual plots, structures, composting, and more that all need to be regulated effectively. A more complex organization is necessary for this garden because of its sheer size and diverse use. In the final example, the 6BC Garden came to its current organization as a direct result of neighborhood gentrification and turmoil between racial groups. Each community garden’s governance is evidence of shifting neighborhood mosaics, changes in social dynamics, resident turnover, and other relationships inherent in city environments. Each is a direct response to the evolution of its urban context.

Before I began researching these communities, I believed that each one would have some type of government structure. I wondered if the original ideals that began with
each garden would still be intact. I initially thought that more rules led to a loss of identity. I imagined that these grass-roots spaces might "sell out" and their organization might become more akin to city government. I found this theory unsubstantiated after speaking with members of each community garden studied. In fact, it seems that the opposite is true. Just as children need structure and boundaries, a garden will fail to evolve if no one takes a leadership role. Since membership in community gardens is constantly changing, a set of organizational rules by which to abide helps support continuity and success. Organizing and developing these rules helps to solidify and strengthen core values.

Community gardens studied here are markedly different from the nature of Ecovillage in that they all have evolved more complexity over time. Each garden’s story is unique, based entirely on the process. The problems tackled and obstacles encountered along the way help to form the current political structure. Though the Ecovillage is a socially-constructed landscape as well, it is of a different nature than community gardens. Instead, this cohousing development developed out of the desire to foster human interaction and live communally. Its primary goal is reinforced with physical layout, communal eating, neighborhood celebrations, and many other activities that work to strengthen and reinforce the original goal. Community gardens are different in that they are truly works in progress. Their social benefit is one of many reasons why community gardens begin. Though people may join to connect with neighbors, all three community places studied originally formed to clean up the vacant lot on the block.

*Implications for Landscape Architects*

A landscape architect involved in designing community sites can understand the evolution of social dynamics through these three case studies. The community garden model is helpful in order to learn how social engagement can be inspired in creating a space. Understanding the governing structure of these three community gardens helps to reveal that people interact with each other in an infinite number of ways. Those differences are seen in how each garden has evolved in its organization, and thus, its physical structure. The Liz Christy Bowery-Houston Garden, La Plaza Cultural, and the 6BC Botanical Garden demonstrate that both the physical nature and social aspects
of a site influence one another. Ultimately, these sites are successful if they can sustain themselves over time. Community gardens are constantly changing, growing, and evolving because they must invariably adapt as a way to endure. In the end, each offers a glimpse into the many ways that people naturally interact with one another and the resultant physical manifestation in space.

Before planning a community space, these questions and conditions should be asked by the landscape architect during his involvement:

• What is his role as the landscape architect? Perhaps he acts as more of a facilitator or programmer, who considers the community as having fluctuating dynamics.
• What are the goals of the community space? Is it about having a great design or is group involvement more important?
• If neighborhood members are involved, how are meetings conducted?
• How do people relate to one another?
• Have these relationships evolved throughout the design process?
• How can the landscape architect inspire constructive comments and produce meaningful results from meetings?
• How are differences in opinion or disagreements that arise mediated?
• During this process, the landscape architect must determine the level of involvement of the community. In which phase of the project will neighborhood residents be consulted?
• The community’s goals and aspirations for the site should be considered.

However, an interesting and slightly controversial question to ask is: when does community involvement hinder the landscape architect in creating a functional space? That answer might reveal itself after trial and error, and with experience working with different communities or neighborhood associations. Landscape architects working in community planning could potentially arrive at alternative methods for overcoming obstacles in this arena. Physical space is a reality in community gardens and a landscape architect must be sensitive to the opinions of those who will use the space. As a general rule, a landscape architect must design responsively, carefully considering the unpredictable nature and complexities inherent when working with people.
Other Relevant Socially-Constructed Landscapes

Earth People

Figure 25: Earth People Garden was constructed out of left-over materials from people’s homes. Lower East Side, Manhattan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>333-335 East 8th Street, Lower East Side, NYC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdiction</td>
<td>NYC Department of Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement Decision</td>
<td>Offer for Preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Founded</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Procedure</td>
<td>Attend a meeting, get on the waiting list, speak to contact person and work a certain number of hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>Sat 12:00-5:00pm, while people are working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>(212) 788-7927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:llibrizzi@cenyc.org">llibrizzi@cenyc.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Village Homes*

Figure 26: Bike path lanes fork.
*Village Homes, Davis, California*

Figure 27: Meeting House
*Village Homes, Davis, California*
Village Homes is a planned residential community of single family detached homes and apartments, greenbelts and open space, agricultural land, and commercial office space. The project is considered one of the first modern “green” developments. It was designed by Michael and Judy Corbett with a whole-systems, low cost approach. Over time, Village Homes has lower utility and food costs, and an enduring community fabric. The turnover rate in Village Homes is very low. When homes do go on the market, they sell at a premium price and faster than homes in nearby subdivisions.

A network of pathways and common areas ensure that residents engage with their neighbors, which has kept the crime rate comparably low (about one-tenth of the surrounding town of Davis). Since the neighborhood is pedestrian-friendly, the average number of cars per household is only 1.8 compared with 2.1 in a standard development (“Village” 2009).

Village Homes History Excerpt (Author Unknown):

“We knew from the beginning Village Homes was an experiment, and not surprisingly we’ve learned and evolved over time. The ecological planning has worked well. It feels good to live in Village Homes. We can be ecologically responsible and save energy with a minimum of effort, almost by default. Our natural drainage allows rainwater to seep back into the earth, our narrow, shaded streets stay cooler in summer, and our...
extra slab insulation and double pane windows have paid for themselves. We’ve tried a variety of ways to heat and cool our homes, with varying degrees of success, but we know for certain north/south orientation with adequate shade on the south pays off in our climate. Socially, we are striving to live in peace with one another, and mostly we succeed. In retrospect, perhaps a community half this size would have been more ideal in terms of decision-making and cohesiveness. With 220 units we can’t personally know all VH residents. Our idea of common areas has both brought neighbors together and caused some dissension. Living in such close proximity to one another with open spaces cared for jointly takes effort and sensitivity. While sometimes differences in lifestyle can be a challenge, most of us enjoy our immediate neighbors. The closest friendships have formed around similar interests (raising children, gardening, swimming, dogs, being single, etc.) rather than within Common Areas. Many residents have best friends living within the neighborhood, and we love the ease of meeting. We are all fortunate to live here and enjoy the results of Mike and Judy Corbetts’ vision and the continuing efforts and cooperation of all the residents of Village Homes” (“Village” 2008).
Sonora Cohousing

Figure 28: Architecture of Sonora Cohousing
Tuscon, Arizona

Figure 29: Pedestrian walks create places for people to chat and meet up.
Sonora Cohousing, Tuscon, Arizona
This cooperative neighborhood contains many of the typical physical features present in cohousing developments. The common facilities – the dining room, kitchen, lounge, kids’ room, laundry, craft room, guest room, and multipurpose room - are constructed out of straw-bale. Sonora Cohousing employs the consensus model for its governing structure. All decisions require every member’s consent; total agreement is rare. Residents at Sonora opted to use the consensus model because they believe that it “empowers all members of the group and requires them to be active participants in the decision-making process. Participation is a foundation of community governance. Participation in the maintenance, decisions, and social life can not be enforced but is an expected part of the community experience” (Sonora 2009).

**Mission Statement:**

“We believe that today’s neighborhoods have in large part served to isolate people from one another and encourage alienation from ourselves and our communities. Together we seek to create a neighborhood which strikes a balance between public and private—respecting individual privacy while encouraging social interaction. In pursuit of this goal, we take an active part in the ongoing management of our community. This community of adults and children is not built around an ideological principle; rather, we seek a diversity
of backgrounds, ages and opinions, with our one shared value being the commitment to working out our problems and finding consensus solutions which satisfy all members.”
Wild Sage Cohousing

Figure 30: Designed by Jim Logan Architects, the plan for Wild Sage Cohousing promotes social engagement. Homes are connected in each row and face inward toward pedestrian pathways, Boulder, Colorado.

Figure 31: Homes create centers.
Wild Sage Cohousing, Boulder, CO

Figure 32: Common House
Wild Sage Cohousing, Boulder, CO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Address</strong></th>
<th>1650 Zimia Ave, within the Holiday Neighborhood, Boulder, Colorado</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Completed</strong></td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td>1.6 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Units</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Members</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Members</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Member Residents</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>By consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.wildsagecohousing.org">www.wildsagecohousing.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:information@wildsagecohousing.org">information@wildsagecohousing.org</a></td>
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</table>
**Reading Terminal Market**

*Figure 33: The market is usually a bustling place.*
Reading Terminal Market, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Figure 34: Pennsylvanian Dutch Amish vendor*
Reading Terminal Market, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Initial Site Experience and Observations

When I entered the Reading Terminal Market, I was immediately bombarded by the smells of cinnamon buns. Most walkways between stands were filled with people strolling, those ordering food at the various stands, and large groups of tourists standing in the middle of aisles, making it difficult to navigate. Initially, I felt a sense of chaos, which was compounded by the noisiness. Organizationally, larger restaurants line the market’s walls. There is only one area for grocery-style vegetable and fruit picking. Food-court type seating is located in the center. There is a strong Amish presence at the market. Most of the bakery stands are run by Amish people, all dressed in their traditional clothing. Reading Terminal Market felt more commercialized - less of a market and more an eatery. It is a place for business people to frequent for lunch or for tourists to find local keepsakes as gifts. However, I did feel a sense of local flavor in the lack of big businesses being present. After I ordered from the Salumeria, it was hard trying to find a free seat. I ended up sitting at a bar seat, adjacent to three transit workers. To my right, an elderly African American gentleman sat reading the newspaper. He asked me to watch his coat while he bought a coffee. I venture to guess that he is a local Philadelphia residents as he moved around the market with such ease and confidence.

History and Background

William Penn, founder of Philadelphia in the late seventeenth century, incorporated an open air market into the initial development of the city. One of his first actions was
to bring farmers, fisherman, and huntsman together to trade their goods on what was then known as High Street. Soon the market began to extend west, away from the Delaware River into Market Street. As Philadelphia grew, its markets expanded as well. By the mid-nineteenth century, market sheds had become six blocks long. However, open air markets were unsanitary, noisy, and disrupted traffic flow. When, in 1859, the public voted to remove them all, two markets emerged at 12th and Market Streets. Known as the Farmer’s Market and the Franklin Street Market, these would eventually become the Reading Terminal Market. Laid out in a grid system, the market initially had twelve aisles and four avenues. After difficult times during the Depression, the market gained regional success in the 1950s when suburban housewives were delivered their groceries on the train. It came to house one of the biggest refrigeration facilities in Philadelphia, with fifty-two rooms cooled at varying temperatures. In 1985, the city’s commuter-rail system was rerouted to bypass the terminal. After several years of vacancy, the Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority renovated the Reading Terminal into a new convention center in the early 1990’s. The project could only be constructed if the Reading Terminal was restored at the same time. After some obstacles, the market today is once again a bustling, successful enterprise (Reading 2009)
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### Figures

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>&quot;Wild Sage Cohousing&quot; Online, 2009. Retrieved 16 April 2009. <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/28643872@N04/2676820683/">http://www.flickr.com/photos/28643872@N04/2676820683/</a></td>
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<td>Figure 2</td>
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<td>Figure 9</td>
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<td>Figure 12</td>
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Figure 31  “Wild Sage Cohousing” Online, 2009. Retrieved 16 April 2009.
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Figure 32  “Wild Sage Cohousing” Online, 2009. Retrieved 16 April 2009.
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