

Not-So-Common Ground

Critiquing “Multicultural” Environmentalism in Seattle Urban Gardening

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Abstract

Community organizing has always been considered to be a series of trial and error. These difficulties are made more visible within movements that rely foundationally on the support and power of the common individual. The modern environmental movement embodies this ideology; however, there is an apparent disconnect between the words and actions of contemporary environmental outreach. In this thesis, I examine the ways in which environmental organizations engage with diverse communities, looking specifically at the means and discourse of community organizing. I focus on the Beacon Food Forest, an urban gardening project located in the south Seattle neighborhood of Beacon Hill, supposedly one of the “most diverse zip codes in the country.”¹ In my research, I found that the demography of the organization tended not to reflect that of the surrounding neighborhood. I discuss how such trends are the result of certain “barriers to participation,” and how the means of mitigating this lack of diversity often reinforce these barriers. Drawing from media releases, surveys, interviews, and public meetings and events, I trace how concepts of diversity and race are discussed in relation to the Beacon Hill community and the volunteer base of the organization. The successfulness of the project as defined by the satisfaction of the Beacon Hill community is analyzed within a framework of the neighborhood’s priorities with regards to the process of other similar projects. Parsing out the patterns of exclusion within this situated context, I use the case of the Beacon Food Forest as a cultural platform from which to approach the question of diversity as it pertains to the American mainstream environmental movement.

¹ Sabra Gertsch. “Census Bureau: 98118 the most diverse zip code in US.” *Komo News*, August 27, 2012.

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*The Beacon Food Forest recognizes diversity as the definition and essence of a healthy ecosystem and a healthy human community.*²

*The environmental movement has not been practicing one of the laws of nature: strength in diversity.*³

Culture – the Outlaw of the Wild Southwest

In the early months of 2012, books were removed from the library shelves and classroom desks of the Tucson Unified School District. The district's Mexican-American studies program, found in violation of House Bill 2281 (HB 2281), was systematically being dismantled, one Che Guevara poster at a time. Passed in May 2012, HB 2281 prohibits kindergarten through 12th grade classes that “promote the overthrow of the U.S. government, promote resentment toward a race or class of people, are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group, or advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.”⁴

A swell of opposition soon followed the release of these proceedings, with campaigns launched on local and national levels. Several organizations from neighboring states attempted to smuggle in⁵ some of the books banded by HB 2281, while instate protesters flocked to the internet to create online resources and forums dedicated to educating the public on the academic and social value of ethnic studies.⁶ Subsequently, the events in Arizona resulted in a national debate regarding the social and constitutional basis for including culture in classroom curriculum.⁷

The defense of Ethnic Studies in Arizona schools is not merely an academic phenomenon, but a product of the current age of rapid economic and cultural globalization. Indeed, the 21st century saw the rise of a new form of globalization, what Stuart Hall refers to as a modern “global mass culture.” In addition to serving as a “peculiar form of homogenization,” this global mass culture is shaped by the visual media and the technologies that support its transnational transmission,

² “Frequently Asked Questions,” Beacon Food Forest, accessed September, 2013, <http://beaconfoodforest.org/faq.html>.

³ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 1995), 140.

⁴ H.R. Res. 2281, Sess of 2010 (Arizona, 2010).

⁵ Laura Steiner, “Librotraficante’ Caravan Set to Smuggle Books Back Into Arizona Following Ethnic Studies Ban,” *The Huffington Post*, February 2, 2012, accessed February 21, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/31/arizona-ethnic-studies-ban-controversy_n_1243975.html.

⁶ Arizona Ethnic Studies Network, accessed February 21, 2014, <http://azethnicstudies.com/>.

⁷ Preston C. Green, III, David Brown and Sara Ney, “An Analysis of the Constitutionality of Arizona's Ethnic Studies Law,” *Rutgers L. Rec.* 39 (2011): 86-161.

technologies that are primarily concentrated in the West.⁸ Therefore, while this question of ethnicity does persist throughout Western societies (as well the rest of the world⁹), I focus on the manifestation of this question within the context of the United States, a country that lies at the center of global mass culture. What's more, matters of ethnicity and diversity are intrinsically tied into the great American myth of the "melting pot." As "God's Crucible," the United States of the early 20th century was seen as a land where differences in nationality and ethnicity would melt together into a harmonious whole.¹⁰ The metaphor was seen as a radical endorsement of diversity, a challenge to the contemporary orthodoxy inherent in a period of American history characterized by increased rates of immigration. However, diversity was merely the initial condition, the necessary "ingredients;" eventually, whatever differences existed would disappear, or at least be minimized, in an effort to create a country of people unified through a common national identity – a sort of "super-identity."¹¹

In this way, the melting pot was not so much a symbol of social mobility and unity, but a metaphor for the "Americanization" of immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. Even the language evoked a seemingly sinister process, a sort of purposeful "burning off [of] impurities."¹² The assimilative nature of the melting pot narrative has undergone much contemporary scrutiny,¹³ and recent shifts in national ideology – specifically towards a more multicultural view¹⁴ – have produced a new metaphor of American society: "the salad bowl." In this model, various cultures are juxtaposed and in proximity to one another, but do not necessarily merge into a single homogenous culture. The evolution of diversity discourse exposes us as a nation that has struggled – and will continue to struggle – to understand our complex and ever

⁸ Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," *Dangerous Liaisons*, ed. Anna McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, (Univ. Minnesota Press, 1997), 181.

⁹ Santosh C. Saha, ed., *Ethnicity and Sociopolitical Change in Africa and Other Developing Countries*, (Lexington Books, 2008).

¹⁰ Charles Hirschman, "America's Melting Pot Reconsidered." *Annual review of sociology* 9, no. 1 (1983), 397.

¹¹ Philip Gleason, "American Identity and Americanization," *Concepts of Ethnicity*, ed. William Petersen, Michael Novak, Philip Gleason, (Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 57.

¹² *Ibid*, 80.

¹³ David Michael Smith, "The American Melting Pot: A National Myth in Public and Popular Discourse." *National Identities* 14, no. 4 (2012): 387-402.

¹⁴ Multiculturalism promotes the expression of diversity in culture and industry. Policies based on this ideology encourage the celebration and incorporation of distinct cultural, ethnical, and religious characteristics into the cultural at large, including institutions, schools, businesses, etc.

shifting cultural identity.¹⁵ Why is it, then, that conversations about the “importance of diversity” arise only when such values are violently removed?

A tremendously simple answer to this question – but one that is persistent within American society¹⁶ – is that diversity invokes inclusion and tolerance, characteristics that are theoretically and morally in opposition to racism. More than an attitude or a “consciousness of kind,” racism, in the words of author George Frederick, “expresses itself in the practices, institutions, and structures that a sense of deep difference justifies or validates.”¹⁷ While racism does indeed contain its own historical trajectory, dating back to emergence of Western religious thought, the early 20th century saw the concept transformed into a standard set of beliefs. Such beliefs were based on the principle that “race determined culture,”¹⁸ such that the types of ethnic differences expressed in language, customs, and kinship networks became pigmented.¹⁹ This resulted in the establishment of racial hierarchies and discriminatory dogmas.

It wasn’t until the 1960s that such ideologies were politically and culturally contested. The decade was characterized by massive efforts of racial reform, the passage of civil rights legislation from 1964 to 1968 being of course the most prominent. In the creation of these statutes, the United States was confronted by its long tradition of denying the political and social rights to racialized immigrants, blacks, and native peoples.²⁰ They exposed the extent to which racial discourse had become codified. In 1967, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton conceptualized “institutionalized racism” as a means of describing the institutionalized processes that create and maintain racial discrimination.²¹ Standardized testing²² and the incarceration disparities between cocaine and crack cocaine²³ are some modern examples of these processes. Throughout the course of my research, I will refer to

¹⁵ Philip Gleason, “American Identity and Americanization,” *Concepts of Ethnicity*, ed. William Petersen, Michael Novak, Philip Gleason, (Harvard Univ. Press, 1982): 57-143.

¹⁶ Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, “Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of “Happy Talk,” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007): 895-914.

¹⁷ George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, (Princeton University Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁸ Dorceta E. Taylor, “Diversity and the Environmental Movement: Myth-Making and the Status of Minorities in the Field” *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy* 15 (2008), 93.

¹⁹ George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, (Princeton University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Howard Winant, *The World Is a Ghetto*, (Basic Books, 2009), 166.

²¹ Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *The Politics of Liberation in America*, (Penguin, 1967).

²² Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, ed., *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, (Brookings Institution Press, 1998).

²³ Marc Mauer and Tracy Huling, “Young Black Americans and the Criminal Justice System: Five Years Later,” (1995).

this definition, as it speaks to the ubiquity of institutionalized racism within contemporary culture, and by extension the mainstream environmental movement. What's more, it is important to remember that institutionalized racism is a product of various historical vectors, and is therefore dynamic and multiplicitous.

Efforts to compensate for this pervasive racism are now common practice in many national organizations. There exist a variety of policies that aim to encourage and ease the introduction of diversity into academic and vocational positions. Executive Order 10925, more commonly known as "affirmative action," was issued in 1961 as part of President Kennedy's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. The order promotes non-discriminatory hiring practices, requiring government contractors to take "affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin."²⁴ The policy was intended to provide historically underserved and marginalized minorities equal opportunities to those of the privileged (white) majority. In this way, affirmative action is often conflated with equality, when in reality the policy not only seeks out difference, but makes it a priority. In this case, "diverse" individuals are *funneled* into institutions that, more often than not, are attempting to meet established racial quotas.²⁵

The line between fair inclusion and tokenism can be a fine and obscure one. However, I take as a starting point that diversity is perceived as advantageous, whatever the motivation. The commitment to diversity is therefore pervasive within the contemporary rhetoric of companies and academic institutions in the United States.²⁶

Social movements are also subject to this logic. Specifically, organizations within the environmental movement consider diversity to be an integral element within the history and the future of environmentalism.²⁷ Here, I find it necessary to clarify the character of modern environmentalism. For the purpose of this research, I

²⁴ Exec. Order. No. 10925, 26 Fed. Reg. 1977, March 8, 1961.

²⁵ Adam Liptak, "Race and College Admissions, Facing a New Test by Justices" *New York Times*, October 8, 2012, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/09/us/supreme-court-to-hear-case-on-affirmative-action.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

²⁶ For example, Lewis & Clark's mission statement declares a commitment to "diversity and sustainability as dimensions of a just society." "About Lewis & Clark," Lewis & Clark College, accessed March 12, 2014, https://www.lclark.edu/about/mission_statement/.

²⁷ Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan, "Diversifying the American Environmental Movement," *Diversity and the Future of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, ed. Emily Enderle, (2007): 13-33.

will refer to Mark Dowie's definition of "fourth-wave" environmentalism. Writing at the turn of the 20th century, Dowie stated –

the central sentiment that will define the next generation [of environmentalism] is, quite simply, a sense of justice, which until very recently has been almost completely absent from the American environmental imagination. Environmental equity, that safe phrase used by the EPA officials anxious to avoid the *j*-word, will gain real meaning [...] At that point environmentalism will begin to become a truly "social" movement.²⁸

Within the framework of Dowie's mainstream environmental movement, there arises a common goal: the restoration of our so-called "environmental imagination" and the expansion of our conceptual understanding of the environment and environmentalism.²⁹ This is not to say that parties along the environmental spectrum are in constant agreement with one another. I focus on this encompassing definition to avoid a biased criticism.

Despite the dedication to a more socially aware brand of environmentalism, the practice of this fourth wave has so far failed to live up to its own ideologies. The mainstream environmental movement continues to be embarrassingly homogenous; what author Stephen Fox refers to as a "WASP preserve."³⁰ In its inability to address matters of race and ethnicity, the U.S. mainstream environmental movement continues to illicit mounting criticisms from those who feel that their voices have been stifled.³¹ What's more, diversity, when considered an action-item, has the potential to go the way of "sustainability," which is inarguably one of the most overused and vague terms of our time. Rendered in this manner, diversity begins to dull our "sociological imagination," making it more difficult to comprehend the inequalities and injustices inherent in discussions of race.³²

In my thesis, I explore the disconnect between the ways in which environmental organizations talk about diversity in the abstract and their means of engaging with diverse communities. These internal narratives of inclusion stand in

²⁸ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 1995), 207.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Stephen R. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 351.

³¹ Mireya Navarro, "In Environmental Push, Looking to Add Diversity," *New York Times*, March 9, 2009, accessed March 12, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/10/science/earth/10move.html?_r=0.

³² Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, "Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk,'" *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007), 910.

anxious opposition to claims of institutionalized racism, and illustrate how the “multiculturalism” of a community can serve as a proxy for inter-organizational diversity. I focus this analysis on the Beacon Food Forest, an urban permaculture project located in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of South Seattle. In this critical approach, I draw from interviews with members of the project’s organizing body, the Friends of the Food Forest; informal conversations; observations from within the community and survey responses. With this analysis, I demonstrate that such practices are not only the result of inefficient social organizing, but likewise speak to history of racial exclusion inherent in mainstream environmentalism. Furthermore, I consider how such trends reflect the contemporary “diversity crisis” within the United States, with the hope that this research act as a catalyst to excite open conversations.³³

I begin with an examination of the historical trajectory of minority inclusion in the mainstream environmental movement, beginning with establishment of the conservation movement. I address the contemporary criticisms regarding underrepresentation in the movement, looking specifically at the debate around political and social barriers to participation. In addition to this critique, I look at the various “reasons for diversity” developed by environmental and civil rights groups, along with the suggested means of achieving “diversification.”

This theoretical framework is then applied to the Beacon Food Forest project and the Friends of the Food Forest organization. I examine the various outreach methods employed by the group, and the language used when discussing (or evading) matters of diversity and community representation. While I recognize that diversity in general encapsulates a variety of characteristics, including socioeconomic status and gender, I choose to focus my research on racial/ethnic diversity. I believe race to be “the primary experiential lens through which difference in all its forms is experienced and understood [...] Race is always both present and absent in the diversity discourse.”³⁴ The subject of race therefore allows me to explore broader implications of exclusion and social organizing within a situated context.

I recognize that in addressing the ways in which environmental organizations discuss diversity, I too am rendering diversity into a measurable concept. I am not

³³ Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan, “Diversifying the American Environmental Movement,” *Diversity and the Future of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, ed. Emily Enderle, (2007): 13-33.

³⁴ Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, “Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of ‘Happy Talk,’” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007), 905.

speaking for the members of Beacon Hill community, nor am I assuming to know or understand their exact needs, desires, and attitudes. Rather, the goal of this research is to parse out the trends of exclusion that exist on an organizational level. I stand in solidarity with both the community and the Friends of the Food Forest, and only hope that such an analysis will contribute to the growing conversations surrounding race, equity, and cultural identity as they manifest in social and institutional spaces.

Background

Here, I find it necessary to provide a brief background of the historical trajectories and frameworks that I build upon. I trace the course of race as it comes into contact with the environmental movement at various stages throughout American history. I begin with an overview of the origins of modern environmentalism, followed by an examination of so-called “barriers to participation” and the ways in which minority communities have responded to these obstacles. I conclude with a discussion of the dominant motivations embedded in the current diversity discourses of the mainstream environmental movement.

The American Progressive Era: Roots of Modern Environmentalism

On a historical scale, the whiteness of environmental organizations represents a legacy of the movement’s origins. Arising from within the context of the American West and the Progressive Era, modern day environmentalism initially began as a conservationist effort. Primarily concerned with the management of natural resources, the movement was based on what Gifford Pinchot called “wise use.”³⁵ Pinchot, a wealthy young traveler from Connecticut, believed that America’s resources were being consumed at too rapid a rate, exacerbated by the boom in development at the turn of the 20th century. As industry pushed “farther and farther into the wilderness,” Pinchot sought to curb the tide of exploitation.³⁶ Working in concert with the rising Republican Theodore Roosevelt, Pinchot drafted early conservationist policies that appointed federal oversight of public lands. In 1905 the U.S. Forest Service was created, with Pinchot the appointed chief. The establishment

³⁵ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 1995), 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

of these national policies and agencies were critical in the era of Progressive reform, with its focus on political activism and transformation.

Emerging around the same time as Pinchot's ideology of wise use, the preservationist movement, led by the Scottish-American John Muir, opposed the utilitarian approach embedded within conservationist practice. Instead, Muir believed that wilderness had an intrinsic and spiritual value, and that such spaces needed to be protected from all resource exploitation. He too conscripted Roosevelt into his movement, eventually convincing the President to pass a bill to protect the Yosemite Valley. The establishment of these national parks represented the creation of a separate "pure" nature, one that was intrinsically inaccessible to most of humanity. Indeed, out of preservationist sentiment arose the original wilderness adventurer, a man (and they were predominately men at the time) who was willing to "sleep on the ground and carry out everything [he] carried in."³⁷

Regardless of their conflicting philosophies, both movements were concerned with recreational outdoor activities, such as fishing and gaming. These activities epitomized the Euro-American desire for natural refuge and the opportunity to experience "primitive" fraternity.³⁸ These exploits were fundamentally dominated by white, middle-class men. Early conservationist organizations like the Audubon society, established in 1896, and the Sierra Club, founded in 1982, consisted of a primarily white Anglo-Saxon membership of hunters, fishermen, and campers.³⁹ Evidently, the first spaces of preservation were not open to communities of color. Even the socially progressive Sierra Club enforced racially biased policies, with several chapters deliberately excluding blacks, Jews, and other minorities from membership. These policies never used explicitly racial language, but instead were programs of "sponsorship," whereby entry was only available through the invitation by an established member.⁴⁰ Immigrants were equally barred, under the belief that these group (specifically those emigrating from Southern Europe) relied on "old-world" hunting practices, and therefore presented a threat to the wildlife

³⁷ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 1995), 16.

³⁸ Charles Jordan and Donald Snow, "Diversification, Minorities, and the Mainstream," *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives For A New Era*, ed. Donald Snow. (Island Press, 1992), 76.

³⁹ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 1995), 15.

⁴⁰ Stephen R. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 349.

populations.⁴¹ In this way, the early conservationist and preservationist movements were both driven by racist and xenophobic inclinations. However, it is important to remember that such inclinations were a reflection of national attitudes of the time, and are not representative of the movements in and of themselves.

Barriers to Participation

While mainstream environmentalism has progressed considerably since the days of Progressive Era politics, it is important to recognize the influence such antecedents have in the shaping of the contemporary discussions of diversity and equity. Currently, the homogenous dynamic of the mainstream environmental movement is commonly interpreted as a result of minority communities' lack of environmental concern and awareness.⁴² Similarly, as the movement turned increasingly more towards scholastic and scientific expertise, education was likewise seen as a barrier to minority involvement.⁴³ Such reasoning has resulted in acquisitions of environmentalism's "elite tinge."⁴⁴

This interpretation is merely one amongst a long laundry list⁴⁵ of explanations for underrepresentation. Specifically, the focus on education as a barrier to participation situates environmentalism and activism within the confines of academia, as though the environmental experience is something learned rather than lived. In citing the exclusionary quality of "technical" and "expertise" driven strategies of environmental protection and advocacy, this theory presupposes that minorities are more inclined towards social strategies of mass action. By accepting this stereotype, the mainstream environmental movement glosses over the ubiquitous "money trail." As one Hispanic environmental leader points out:

With respect to third-world people within the U.S [...] being more prone toward the street marches than the technical approach – my God, if we had the kind of budget the National Wildlife Federation has, we too, would hire technicians, engineers, and scientists

⁴¹ Charles Jordan and Donald Snow, "Diversification, Minorities, and the Mainstream," *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*, ed. Donald Snow. (Island Press, 1992), 77.

⁴² *Ibid*, 79.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 80.

⁴⁴ Joseph E. Taylor III and Matthew Klinge, "Environmentalism's Elitist Tinge Has Roots in the Movement's History," *Grist*, March 9, 2006, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://grist.org/article/klinge/>.

⁴⁵ Charles Jordan and Donald Snow, "Diversification, Minorities, and the Mainstream," *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*, ed. Donald Snow. (Island Press, 1992), 80.

instead of marching on the streets and having to replace our shoes every few months.⁴⁶

Explanations of minority underrepresentation tend to cite present political and educational barriers. Such explanations continue to construct and reinforce the belief that environmentalists derive from a certain white “leisure class,” often forgetting historic structures of exclusion.

Minority Voices and the Rise of Environmental Justice

Up to this point, what has been lacking in the conversation and critique of such theories is the distinct voice of minority populations. Beginning in the late 20th century, several major efforts were made to address this dilemma. In 1990, a group of civil rights activists sent a letter to each of the top 10 environmental organizations (known as “the Big 10”), proclaiming that the “racism and whiteness” of the environmental movement had become its “Achilles’ heel.”⁴⁷ The letter called out mainstream environmentalism’s failure to engage with communities most affected by negative environmental trends. Hiring practices were also challenged, with the authors of the letter urging the Big 10 to hire minorities onto their staffs and boards of directors. While the 1990 letters did result in some inter-organizational changes in employment and legal rhetoric, mainstream environmental groups remained tethered to isolating practices and policies. Frustrated by this stagnation, a growing body of advocates codified their own movement under the banner of environmental justice.

The environmental justice movement formed in the 1980s during a period of activism against the improper siting of noxious facilities and improper waste management practices. Originally consisting of a primarily low-income and minority constituency, environmental justice attempts to draw together issues of environmentalism, injustice, and racism into a single frame of social change.⁴⁸ Within the United States, the movement has sought to redefine civil rights, social

⁴⁶ Joseph E. Taylor III and Matthew Klingle, “Environmentalism’s Elitist Tinge Has Roots in the Movement’s History,” *Grist*, March 9, 2006, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://grist.org/article/klingle/>.

⁴⁶ Charles Jordan and Donald Snow, “Diversification, Minorities, and the Mainstream,” *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*, ed. Donald Snow. (Island Press, 1992), 74.

⁴⁷ Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*. (Island Press, 2005), 260.

⁴⁸ Hilary Gibson-Wood and Sarah Wakefield, “‘Participation,’ White Privilege and Environmental Justice: Understanding Environmentalism Among Hispanics in Toronto,” *Antipode* 45, no. 3 (2013), 644.

justice, and human rights through direct political mediation. The passing of Executive Order 12898 (1994), commonly known as the Environmental Justice Act, demonstrated a milestone in federal intervention and social organizing. The law mandated that all federal agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency (to name a few), consider both the health and environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations.⁴⁹

Despite the theoretical holism of environmental justice, EJ organizations often struggle to rectify their ideologies within the larger framework of the environmental movement. Policies that focus on “breadbasket issues” deviate from the spiritual intangibility of the earlier environmental ideology.⁵⁰ Given this tension, many mainstream environmentalists still doubt whether or not there is enough of the fiscal and political “pie” for both minorities and the environmentalists.

Addressing Diversity Today – the Political/Moral Argument

The criticisms outlined above are not merely products of Civil Rights era liberalist thought. As the United States continues to experience major demographic shifts,⁵¹ critics urge mainstream environmentalism to develop strategies of “diversification.”⁵² The argument for diversification derives from two main motivations: the political and the moral. As I discuss above, these two motivations constitute the dominant benefits found within the contemporary literature. In “Diversifying the American Environmental Movement,” Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan argue that in order for future environmental efforts to succeed, the movement must seek to diversify and expand its constituency base. Such an effort would translate into “political wins, higher public support, more members, a larger volunteer base, richer partnerships, and more financial support.⁵³” Ultimately, Bonta and Jordan believe that diversification will result in more effective organizing and, more importantly, mass appeal and cultural relevancy.

⁴⁹ Exec. Order No. 12898, 59 Fed. Reg. 1994.

⁵⁰ Stephen R. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 324.

⁵¹ U.S. Census Bureau projections estimate that by 2050, people of color will reach 220 million, representing over half of the country’s population. Hope Yen, “Census: Whites No Longer A Majority in US by 2043,” *Associated Press*, December 12, 2012, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/census-whites-no-longer-majority-us-2043>.

⁵² Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan, “Diversifying the American Environmental Movement,” *Diversity and the Future of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, ed. Emily Enderle, (2007): 13-33.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 20.

Bonta and Jordan also touch on the moral benefits of diversification, situating this motivation within an ethical framework. Diversification is the “right thing to do [...] our moral responsibility.”⁵⁴ Developing this argument further, other critiques consider the moral motivations to stem from a universal system of natural laws. According to these laws, monocultures are vulnerable to disease and disappearance, whereas “Multi-cultures” constitute a strong network of competitive and compatible species.⁵⁵ While this metaphor is a clear oversimplification, it does reflect some popular ways in which we frame diversity.⁵⁶

Discussions surrounding diversity are by no means new in the world of mainstream environmentalism; the development of environmental justice is indicative of the movement’s expanding efforts at inclusion. Additionally, there is an increasing academic interest in the relationship between “nature” and communities of color. A growing collection of studies focus on the ways in which communities of color foster solidarity by interacting with rural and urban environments; such programs include community-based natural resource management,⁵⁷ as well as environmental rights based memberships. This method of “civil environmentalism” attempts to merge “elements of environmental stewardship with community capacity-building.”⁵⁸ Through these means, communities of color – especially those living in inner city neighborhoods – are given the tools to autonomously address local social and environmental concerns, nurturing a sense of empowerment.

Although the conversation about civic environmentalism does touch on themes of race and exclusion, these practices are not the focus on my research. Instead, I examine how environmental organizations – even those who adopt a participatory approach – remain unable to fully implement the values inherent in their mission statements. One 2004 study concerning immigrants’ perceptions of urban greenspaces found that, while many urban park beautification programs aim to appeal to specific ethnic participants, leadership of these programs tends to be

⁵⁴ Marcelo Bonta and Charles Jordan, “Diversifying the American Environmental Movement,” *Diversity and the Future of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, ed. Emily Enderle, (2007): 13-33.

⁵⁵ John Cook, “The Innovation of Diversity,” *Diversity and the Future of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, ed. Emily Enderle, (2007), 167.

⁵⁶ Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, “Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of “Happy Talk,” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007): 895-914.

⁵⁷ William F. Elmendorf and Michael Rios, “From Environmental Racism to Civic Environmentalism: Using Participation and Nature to Develop Capacity in Belmont Neighborhood of West Philadelphia,” *Partnerships for Empowerment: Participatory Research for Community-based Natural Resource Management*, ed. Carl Wilmsen et al., (Routledge, 2012): 69-103.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 70.

undertaken by white participants. This example points to a key element of contemporary outreach strategies – the ambiguity regarding intended and actual audiences of “multicultural design.”⁵⁹

On a policy level, initiations lean towards inclusion, rather than addressing anti-racist practices.⁶⁰ Coupled with this is a general tendency to shy away from racial language. Rather, “multiculturalism” has been coopted as a means of navigating around charged connotations of race and ethnicity.⁶¹ In many institutions, “Diversity talk is the small talk that avoids the ‘elephant in the room’.”⁶² Such a critique is not novel. Indeed, much of my understanding of contemporary attitudes towards diversity is drawn from a 2007 survey conducted by Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann. Bell and Hartmann’s study examined the meaning and function of diversity in everyday language, exposing the “cultural blind-spots” that limit our understanding of race’s role in society.⁶³ While there is not room here to delve deeply into the findings of their research, I point to the study in order to highlight the ways in which our culture individually and publically conceptualizes diversity. Throughout the course of my research, I consider my own results in relation to these broader implications.

Finally, I would be remiss not to touch on the importance that food plays within the theoretical and cultural framework of my research. The Beacon Food Forest is, by definition, organized around the subject of food and food culture. Such a concentration connects the project to the greater “food movement” currently trending in the United States. Beyond being the subject of myriad social campaigns, food has grown into a new media enterprise.⁶⁴ In examining the Beacon Food Forest and the Friends of the Food Forest as extensions of this food movement, I situate my analysis within a particularly salient environmental rhetoric. Moreover, it is important to recognize the role of food in this research. Bryan Walsh of *Time Magazine* put it rather nicely, claiming that “food is present in our lives in a way that

⁵⁹ Clare Rishbeth, “Ethno-cultural representations in the urban landscape,” *Journal of Urban Design* 9.3 (2004), 324.

⁶⁰ Dorceta E. Taylor, “Diversity and the Environmental Movement: Myth-Making and the Status of Minorities in the Field” *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy* 15 (2008).

⁶¹ Beenash Jafri, “Rethinking ‘Green’ Multicultural Strategies,” *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada*, ed. Julian Agyeman et al. (UCB Press, 2009), 219.

⁶² Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, “Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of ‘Happy Talk’,” *American Sociological Review* 72 (December, 2007), 905.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 896.

⁶⁴ Books such as Michael Pollen’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma* brought attention to the trajectory of food culture, while countless documentaries, including *King Corn* and *Food, Inc* exposed the current moral and political ramifications of the nation’s eating habits.

endangered species or deforestation or Arctic melting simply aren't. We buy food, we cook food (though less and less frequently), and three times a day we eat food."⁶⁵ More importantly, food is inherently cultural; it conducts culture, functioning as an edible narrative of family, faith, and history. This is especially true for ethnic minorities and first generation immigrants, as food serves as a social identifier and a mark of belonging.⁶⁶ Given the importance of food both within environmental and cultural discourses, I use a food-related project as a point of entry into the larger discussion surrounding the current dynamic of the mainstream environmental movement.

Methodology

There is an apparent gap between the language used to express the values of mainstream environmental organizations and the actual application of inclusive outreach strategies. I recognize that it is valuable to continue exploring new forms of community outreach; however, I believe that it is foremost important to tackle this matter of language, as it contributes to the construction of an internal narrative that is itself an obstacle to effective organizing.

Before the Friends of the Food Forest is able to "diversify," they must first acknowledge this internal narrative, and in doing so, reexamine their motivations and means of community engagement in relation to the needs of the neighborhood. The formation of this narrative is reliant on contemporary discourses of diversity. Therefore, in my methodology I attempt to examine *how* diversity is discussed, and how these discourses are reflected in the demographic composition of the organization. To do so, I utilize several types of analysis.

Media Analysis

In order to gain an understanding of how the goals articulated by the Friends of the Food Forest reflect multicultural values, I gathered a collection of written material, ranging from the organization's grant proposals and meeting notes, to press releases. Reading through these pieces, I noted the trends in rhetoric as it related to

⁶⁵ Bryan Walsh, "Foodies can Eclipse (and Save) the Green Movement," *Time Magazine*, February 15, 2011. <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2049255,00.html>

⁶⁶ Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity." *Social science information* 27, no. 2 (1988): 275-292.

the project and the “diversity” of the surrounding neighborhood. The majority of the media pieces were selected from English language outlets. (This reflects the general scarcity of non-English online content, and is not representative of any biases on my behalf.)

Additionally, in order to gain a sense of how the Beacon Hill neighborhood reacts to similar projects, I read email newsletters and blog posts from the local neighborhood association. This material helped construct a framework in which to situate the Beacon Food Forest as it relates to the concerns and opinions of the community.

Interviews

I conducted several interviews throughout the course of my research. Each interview was about an hour in length (see Appendix A). These consisted of a formal interview with a member of the Steering Committee and the original designer of the project, Glenn Herlihy, as well as an informal conversation with a member of the Outreach Committee (this individual asked that I not use his/her name. I will refer to him/her as “Sam” for the purposes of this research). In the case of both these interviews, supplementary feedback was provided by additional members that sat in on/joined the meeting. I wanted to understand how the various parties involved in the project contribute to the construction of the internal narrative. Therefore, the central questions that I asked each of the interview subjects addressed the current demographic dynamic of the organization, as well as the means through which they are attempting to engage with the surrounding neighborhood.

Participant Observation

A significant fraction of my data comes from participant observation. I attended several of the organization’s Saturday work parties, along with a Steering Committee meeting. Throughout these interactions, I made note of the language that was used to describe the event, such as the phrase “culturally engaging,” as well as the language of the individuals at the events. I also made note of the general attendance, including the demographic composition and apparent level of expertise of the participants. I recognize the dangers in assuming an individual’s race and ethnicity based purely on physical characteristics. Therefore, when discussing the

results of these observations, I make a point to distinguish between individuals who have identified themselves to me as “white” and those who simply appear “white.”

Surveys

To supplement this information, I administered a survey through the organization’s listservs. The survey was hosted through SurveyMonkey and consisted of 10 questions of various formats, and took an estimated 10 minutes to complete. The survey was open for over two weeks and contains several specific sections (see Appendix B). The first aimed at gathering the individual’s level of involvement with the project; the second asked about the individual’s motivations behind participating, as well as what benefits of the project they value most; finally, the survey included a series of demographic questions including zip-code, preferred language spoken at home, and the individual’s race/ethnicity. A longer version of this survey, consisting of 12 questions, was administered during a work party in mid-March.

The Beacon Hill Neighborhood and Friends of The Food Forest



“Our goal is to design, plant and grow an edible urban forest garden that inspires our community to gather together, grow our own food and rehabilitate our local ecosystem.”⁶⁷

Beacon Hill, comprised of both a Northern and Southern neighborhood, is located in southeast Seattle. Up until the mid-1900s, the area remained predominately white, especially compared to the neighboring International District, which was home to a majority population of first and second generation Asian immigrants. The eventual demographic shift was a result of several separate historical trends, the first being the systematic exodus of the white homeowners, many of whom worked for the nearby Boeing airfield, to the surrounding suburbs. Additionally, the end of World War

II and the Chinese Exclusion Act⁶⁸ helped deflate some of the racial tensions within the city, allowing for greater mobility for Asian immigrants;

Figure 1. The Beacon Hill neighborhood

⁶⁷ Beacon Food Forest. Accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.beaconfoodforest.org/>.

and finally, the gradual increase in job security allowed immigrant families to move into the newly vacated homes in Beacon Hill.⁶⁹ Today, the neighborhood has an Asian majority, with a population just over 50% consisting of communities from China, Japan, and Vietnam, among other places. Yet, the area remains rather mixed, with 20% white, 13% black, 9% Hispanic/Latino, and 7% other residents.⁷⁰ Indeed, the area is considered one of the most diverse districts in the city.⁷¹ This claim is supported by the recent census data, but is also widely known throughout the greater Seattle area.

The idea for the Beacon Food Forest was developed in 2009 by several students in a permaculture⁷² design course. One of the students, Glenn Herlihy, was at the time volunteering to restore Jefferson Reservoir Park, and found the western edge of the area to be a great space in which to locate his proposed final design. Upon completing the course, Herlihy and two of his peers formed initial Steering Committee of the Friends of the Food Forest. After holding several informal meetings with the Beacon Hill community, the committee took their proposal to the City of Seattle. In the fall of 2010, the project was awarded \$22,000 in Neighborhood Matching Funds (also known as a “Small and Simple” grant) from the Department of Neighborhoods to study neighborhood interest and to develop building schematics.

The grant is contingent on community participation; volunteers must match the funds with hours spent working on the project. Some of the early funding was used to reach out to the surrounding community. Throughout the course of the project, the organization also received an additional \$100,000 in 2011 from the city for site development; a \$5000 grant from the non-profit City Fruit in 2012 for plants and plating materials; \$12,800 in 2012 from Sustainable Path to create educational signs; and \$87,000 in the winter of 2012 from the Department of Neighbors Neighborhood Matching Fund.⁷³

⁶⁸ The Chinese Exclusion Act was a United States federal law signed in 1882 by President Arthur. It restricted the free immigration of Chinese laborers. The act went through several periods until it was repealed in 1943.

⁶⁹ Frederica Merrell and Mira Latoszek, *Seattle's Beacon Hill*, (Arcadia Publishing, 2003).

⁷⁰ “North Beacon Hill Neighborhood in Seattle, Washington,” accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/North-Beacon-Hill-Seattle-WA.html>.

⁷¹ “Seattle Parks and Recreation Census Data: A Demographic Overview of Seattle’s Communities,” Seattle Parks and Recreation, July 12, 2006, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/publications/census/2000/report.pdf>.

⁷² Permaculture is “an agricultural system or method that seeks to integrate human activity with natural surroundings so as to create highly efficient self-sustaining ecosystems.” Merriam-Webster, 2013, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/permaculture>.

⁷³ “BFF Current Funding Sources,” Beacon Food Forest, May 21, 2013.

The 7-acres that comprise the site of the food forest are owned by Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), making it the largest food forest on public land in the United States.⁷⁴ Because the project is the first of its kind on both a local and a national level, SPU had no set of standardized guidelines for development. Over the course of several meetings, various outside organizations signed on as stakeholders in the project, including the Department of Water Quality, the State Department of Health, and the Seattle Police Department. With each additional member, the list of requirements and regulations grew.

no garbage cans (the closest one is at the bus stop), no toilets, no standing compost, no pest vectors (so no ponds for water catchment, which could breed mosquitos), and no permanent structures, such as poured concrete for building. That means that at least two substantial roofed structures intended for community gathering and classroom space will somehow have to be designed without foundations.⁷⁵

In late 2011, Department of Neighbors P-Patch⁷⁶ became the “umbrella organization” for the Beacon Food Forest, making them the primary fiscal agency for the project. The Friends of the Food Forest is not a non-profit, but a “Friends of” group; this simply means that they are not legally structured like a non-profit and therefore do not receive 501(c)(3) tax exemptions. On March 6th, 2014, the volunteer organization signed the official Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Seattle P-Patch and SPU, making the Beacon Food Forest officially subject to the regulations of a P-Patch.

Results

Media Analysis

Throughout my readings, I noticed that the central discussion of the material focused on the garden and the land itself; discussions of the neighborhood were relatively secondary. When the Beacon Hill neighborhood was mentioned, it was often in relation to the larger topic of permaculture. For example, explanations of “biodiversity” commonly included references to the “cultural diversity” of the

⁷⁴ Robert Mellinger, “Nation’s largest public Food Forest takes root on Beacon Hill,” *Crosscut*, February 16th, 2012, accessed March, 2014, <http://crosscut.com/2012/02/16/agriculture/21892/Nations-largest-public-Food-Forest-takes-root-on-B/>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ P-Patch is a community gardening program developed by the City of Seattle Department of Neighbors in 1973. The non-profit oversees 81 P-Patches throughout the city. <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/>.

neighborhood. In an article for *National Geographic*, Herlihy comments that diversity of the plans species represents “our diverse community.”⁷⁷ Several pieces mention the inclusion of certain fruits and nuts from the “homelands” of the community.⁷⁸ Additionally, the food forest itself was often referred to as a community space where “all ages and ethnicities can meet.”⁷⁹ The project offered the community the opportunity for “cultural understanding and empowerment.”⁸⁰ There was recognition of potential concerns regarding access to the food forest. In another article written for *Seattle Weekly*, Herlihy states that he is worried about whether the diversity of the neighborhood is being represented in the project, admitting that there is a certain “socio-economic flaw’ built into the idea of the food forest.”⁸¹ Yet, most of the media remained relatively optimistic, tending to focus more on the future outcomes of the project rather than the current tasks and challenges. When planning was discussed, it emphasized the education and skill- building opportunities of the project.

Interviews

Interview with Site Manager and Co-Founder, Glenn Herlihy

I met with Herlihy on-site.⁸² He was joined by another volunteer who, although not on the Steering Committee, has been involved with the Beacon Food Forest almost since the beginning and is a good authority on the project. During the entirety of the interview, neither Herlihy nor the other volunteer brought up the topic of diversity, race, or ethnicity independently; I had to prompt these conversations. The question was then shifted to focus more on “affluence issues,” and how there are obvious socio-economic barriers to participating in the project. When I asked what either of them thought was the “demographic composition” of the organization, both

⁷⁷ Glenn Herlihy, comments Dan Stone, “Seattle’s Free Food Experiment,” *National Geographic*, April 29, 2013, accessed April, 2014, <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/29/seattles-free-food-experiment/>.

⁷⁸ “Beacon Food Forest,” Youtube video, posted by Armored Gadgets, June 7, 2012, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nihe9UCkZ7U>.

⁷⁹ Kristofor Husted, “Seattle’s First Urban Food Forest Will Be Open to Foragers,” *The Salt*, March 1, 2012, accessed March, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2012/02/29/147668557/seattles-first-urban-food-forest-will-be-free-to-forage>.

⁸⁰ “Beacon Food Forest,” Youtube video, posted by Armored Gadgets, June 7, 2012, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nihe9UCkZ7U>.

⁸¹ Gwendolyn Elliott Tue, “Seattle’s Ambitious Plan to Build a Food Forest for the City,” *Seattle Weekly*, March 11, 2014, accessed April 2014, <http://www.seattleweekly.com/food/951441-129/seattles-ambitious-plan-to-build-a>.

⁸² Glenn Herlihy, interviewed by author, January 7, 2014.

looked somewhat confused. I pressed further, asking them whether or not they believed the organization to be “diverse” according to their personal definition of the term. While the volunteer failed to respond, Herlihy eventually conceded a neutral response of “yeah.” He mentioned that there were certain “expectations of diversity,” and then reverted back to his original point about affluence. Economic standing, according to Herlihy, was the main factor that determined the individual’s ability to participate in the project. At one point during the interview, the volunteer made the point he didn’t really “think about race.” Additionally, he didn’t like the idea of “counting” everyone that attended the events or meetings, arguing that such practices were “divisive.”

Both individuals listed several racial and ethnic groups present in the community (here I would like to emphasize *community* and not the *organization*) including “Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Somalian.” They stated that the Friends of the Forest provide translations of their outreach material and information in all these languages. (However, through my own examination, I’ve noticed that the “translate” option on the organization’s website has not been functional for nearly two years). Herlihy further explained that the organization is attempting several approaches to engaging the community: organizing specific work parties for schools and community groups; getting local feedback on what they are planting – i.e. trying to incorporate “traditional” foods; and changing the dates and times of their meetings in order to convenience individuals with heavy work schedules. Herlihy also admitted that there are certain “demands” that need to be met in accordance with their overseeing non-profit, P-Patch. This process can prove rather challenging, as the priorities of P-Patch and the community are sometimes in opposition to one another. Unfortunately, he did could not elaborate beyond that point.

When asked about any documentation of volunteer retention, Herlihy said that while no records currently exist, he understands the need to start tracking membership. This would allow for the organization to get an idea of who within the community they are failing to engage.

Interview with Outreach Coordinator, “Sam”

Sam had expressed an interest in my research prior to our meeting.⁸³ During the course of our interview, s/he emphasized the fact that the opinions expressed did not necessarily reflect the attitude of the Friends of the Food Forest. Nonetheless,

⁸³ “Sam,” Beacon Food Forest Outreach Coordinator, interviewed by author, February 23, 2014.

Sam's comments provide valuable insight into the inner workings of the organization, especially the outreach and Steering Committees. Sam began by describing the current state of the organization, addressing the economic anxieties of the Steering Committee. Such anxieties tend to weigh on the group's decision making process. Indeed, Sam claimed that, in his/her opinion, the committee was too task-oriented, not spending enough time thinking through the possible outcomes of their actions. Additionally, tasks tended to be overly-delegated, with too many people involved in the decision making as to slow the implementation of ideas. This, according to Sam, comes from the Steering Committee's concern with the possible power-dynamics that might result out of top-heavy management. Many of the most important decisions are being made "peripherally" outside of open-meeting. Ideas are not really being "catalyzed and shared" with the rest of the group, let alone the community. In this way, the organization appears to be in "economic survival mode," making decisions merely to stay alive.

Despite these gaps in communication, the organization is trying to engage the community, hoping to increase diversity in the process. Sam mentioned that such a process signified an attempt to "sell [themselves]," pandering to an audience outside of the surrounding community. Specifically, Sam mentioned that one of the grants awarded to the organization, the large grant from the Department of Neighborhoods, requires that the Steering Committee be representative of the community.⁸⁴ This has resulted in many of the members reaching out to their acquaintances and friends who are people of color in order to gain more "representation," regardless of the experience or interest of the individual. Other barriers to community participation include a possible payment for membership, along with a commitment to a certain number of volunteer hours. In a supplementary email conversation conducted several weeks prior to the interview (see Appendix A), Sam expressed the opinion that the organization's earlier outreach efforts were not tailored enough to the groups they were attempting to connect with. As a result of this, the initial partnerships with other community organizations didn't last very long. This dispersion, Sam believes, is also another factor limiting the communities' participation in the project.

⁸⁴ The guidelines for the Department of Neighborhoods Matching Fund state that "Projects should involve as many diverse groups and individuals as possible and should reflect the demographics of [the] community, including youth, seniors, immigrants and refugees." "2014 Guidelines," Department of Neighborhoods, accessed March 12, 2014, http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/nmf/documents/NMF-Guidelines-2014_001.pdf.

Participant Observation

During my time spent with the site-planning meeting, I observed several notable trends. The first was the general composition of meeting attendees; no one appeared to be a first time participant, and most of the individuals seemed to have an extensive knowledge of the project and the organization. Indeed, most if not all of the members attending claimed to be involved in one way or another with an additional project committee (steering, outreach, funding, etc.). All the meetings are held in the Beacon Hill library, several blocks away from the project site. They are therefore open to the public. Additionally, the majority of those attending seemed to have some level of expertise related to the project, such as gardening/permaculture, landscaping and construction, as well as access to tools and other resources.

I also took note of the demographics of the meeting. It is important to state here that I did not formally ask all in attendance what race/ethnicity they identified as, and therefore can only draw my conclusions from what was observable. Based on this, I gathered that the majority of the meeting was composed of white individuals, with ages ranging from early 30s to late 50s. I noticed that over the course of the meeting, references to the Beacon Hill neighborhood and community outreach were framed in terms of “cultural” engagement. There was a consensus that the group should start moving towards conducting more classes on gardening and permaculture. Similarly, there was mention of possibly forming a “Fundraising Committee” that would be in charge of eliciting (financial) support from within the neighborhood. This was the first time that outreach was mentioned during the course of the two hour meeting.

The meeting closed with a discussion on the next round of plants that needed to be ordered for the summer planting season. Considered the “heart of the project,” I was somewhat concerned by the fact that the plant list was to be determined by so few people. Although the group did discuss the incorporation of “traditional plants,” I still find it strange that, given the significance of this stage of the project, the community was rather unrepresented in the process.

Surveys

The majority of the respondents indicated that they learned about the Beacon Food Forest from online press releases; as well as through other sources, including

an existing member/volunteer with the organization or by way of another city permaculture group.

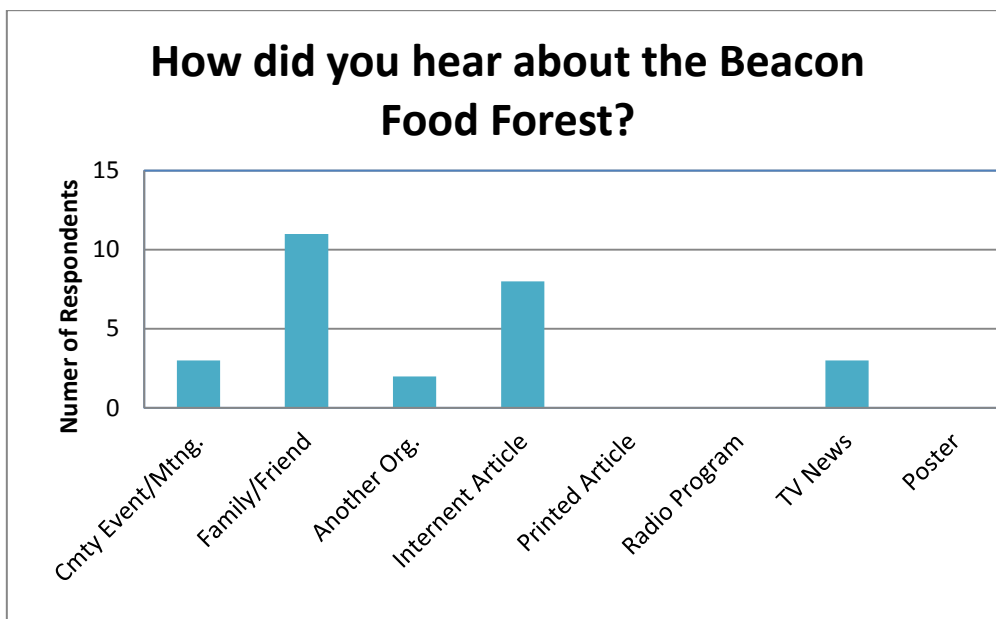


Figure 2. How the respondent learned about the project (n=23).

All individuals responded that they had attended a work party. While all found this experience to be positive (the majority of participants (19/23) stating that it was “Excellent”), once we begin to look at the participants’ experience during the other events, their overall opinion is more variable. Particularly interesting was the results for the “Steering Committee Meeting,” which 7 out of the 23 respondents had attended. Out of these individuals, 1 rated the experience as “Fair” and another chose “Poor.”

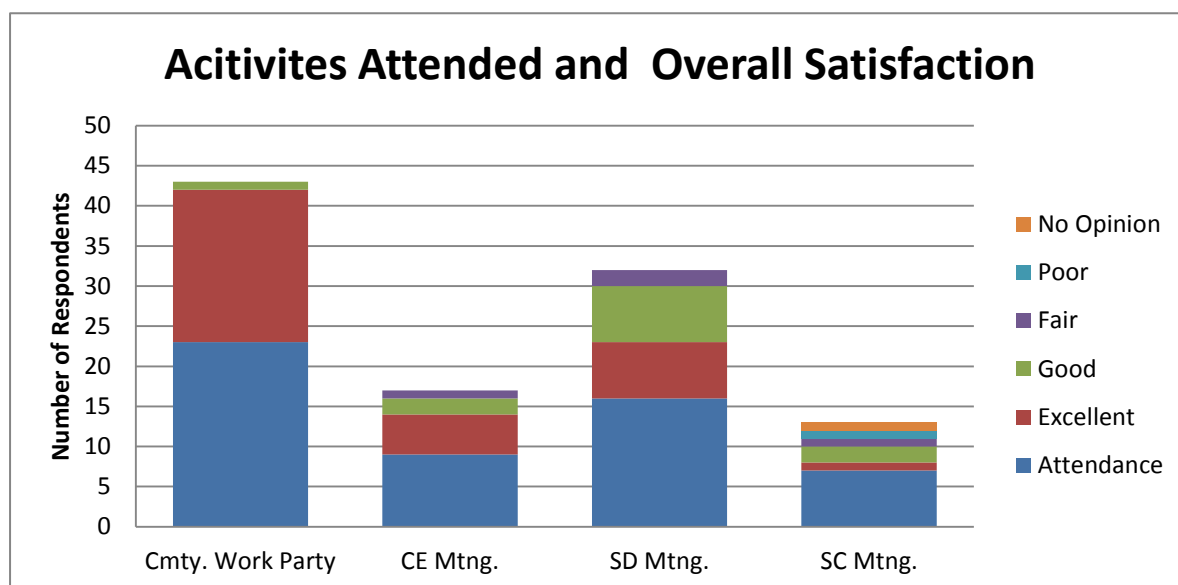


Figure 3. Activities attended by respondents and their overall satisfaction (n=23).

The number of participant hours was relatively consistent across the board. On average, the number of hours committed per month ranged between 5-12, with 40 being the highest number of hours and >1 being the lowest.

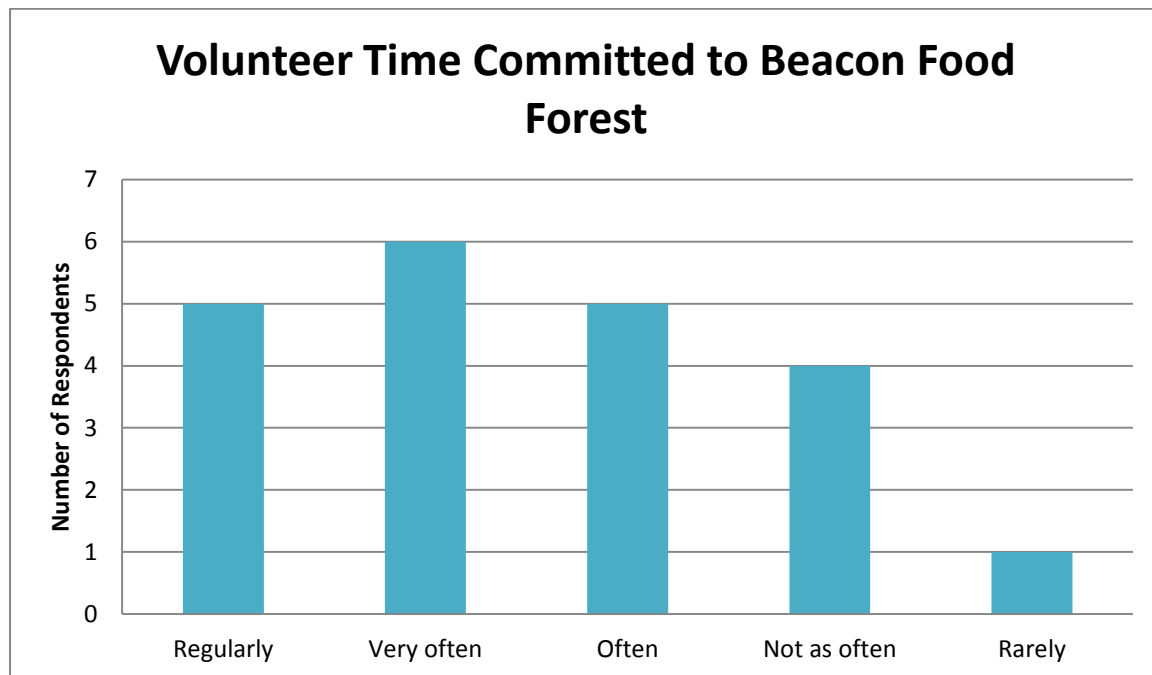


Figure 4. How often respondents participated in events and meetings (n=23).

When asked what they hoped to gain from their time spent with the Beacon Food Forest, most of the respondents emphasized education and the development of gardening and community organizing skills. The second most frequent answer was a gained “sense of community.” The idea of “community” tended to bifurcate into two separate definitions; one being the community that “shares common ground and interests,” and the other being the literal community of Beacon Hill.

When asked about their priorities, the respondents were allowed to select any many options that applied. Not surprisingly, the options related to food, gardening, and permaculture saw the most frequent selection of “Very important” and “Important.” On a more interesting note, several options were deemed “Not at all important,” including exercise, outdoor recreation, providing a food source for low-income families, and enhancing the park’s aesthetic value.

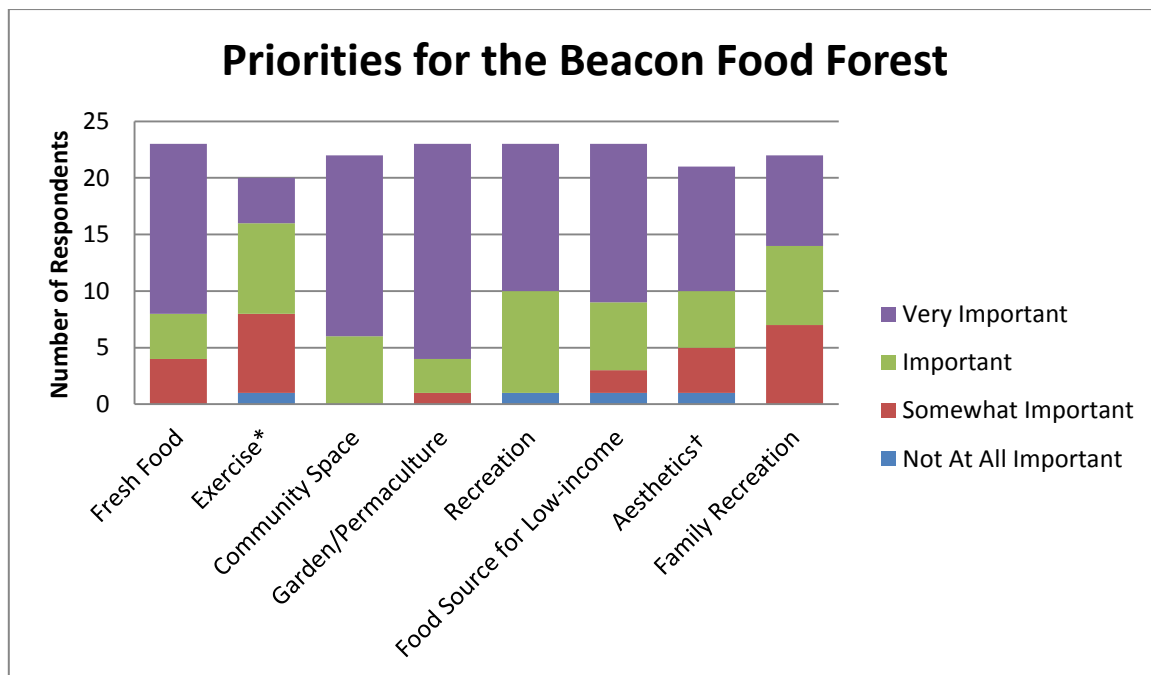


Figure 5. The respondent's main priorities for the project (n=23).

*Two individuals did not fill in this option † One Individual did not fill in this option

The survey that was passed out to volunteers at the work party included a question that asked about the participants main concerns about the Food Forest (n=9). Responses to this question tended to mention the size of the project and its rate of expansion (either taking too long or not happening fast enough). Additionally, several respondents admitted a concern about the level of access for low-come individuals and familes. "Access" in this case refered both to the food grown in the garden, as well as the ability to participate in the project.

Looking at the demographics of the resposdants, all stated that "English" was the primary language spoken in their homes. 13 of the 23 participants live in the Beacon Hill neighborhood. The majority of these individuals had only been living in the area for a relatively short amount of time (averaged between 1.5-4 years), with the longest being 22 years. Those that lived outside of the neighborhood were asked to include their zip code; these results did not produce a significant pattern. 21 respondents considered Beacon Hill to be a "racially diverse" neighborhood; one respondent did not know and another declined to answer, stating instead that "race is a social construct." Interestingly enough, the majority of the members (21/23) selected "White" as their defined racial background. One of the individuals who made this selection also commented that they were "Mixed." Only one other participant identified as non-white, selecting "African-American." Two refused to specify.

Community Narratives of Exclusion

In order to best analyze these results, I find it necessary to provide some local context using a relevant case study as a comparison. Earlier this year, the Seattle Parks Board of Commissioners approved a proposal for a mountain bike park in the Cheasty Greenspace at Mt. View; a 10 acre greenbelt⁸⁵ located less than two miles south of the Beacon Food Forest. Despite the support from the city, many community members are rather displeased with the Beacon Bike Project. During a March public comment meeting held in Beacon Hill, opponents of the project expressed concerns regarding the possible environmental implications of the trails, arguing that the land was designed as a natural area, not a bike park. In addition to land use grievances, many of the meeting attendees (at least 20 of whom were noted as being from the Beacon Hill neighborhood) had complaints that the planning was conducted without consulting the public. Indeed, according to one resident, the March meeting was the first time the residences were made aware of the project. Criticisms that a bike project “Serves a certain class” were likewise echoed by a number of speakers. What’s more, several attendees felt as though the project was a “done deal,” and therefore essentially out of the community’s hands.⁸⁶

Overall, what is evident from this example is the community’s sense of betrayal and neglect. In the end, it was the exclusory approach of the bike plan that was most vehemently critiqued. Even supporters of the project were disturbed by the backdoor planning process and the lack of community input. This reaction illustrates that, with regard to neighborhood projects, communication and inclusivity are critical. Additionally, comments responding to an online article regarding the bike project demonstrate an awareness of the potential racial bias of such projects. Such critics are quick to assert that activities like biking are pushed as social justice campaigns by “white-folks who are out of touch with what it means to be multi-cultural and/or low income.”⁸⁷

There is ultimately a great concern that the policies and processes of projects will result in the exclusion of other groups. One specific anecdotal example

⁸⁵ A greenbelt is a land use designation used in urban planning as a way to preserve areas of undeveloped, wild, or agricultural land

⁸⁶ Cheasty Mountain Bike Pilot Project, Public Meeting Minutes, March 25, 2014.

⁸⁷ Comment on Ansel Herz, “Beacon Hill Greenbelt Proposal Pits Social Justice Cyclists Against Environmentalists,” *The Stranger*, April 3, 2014, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.thestranger.com/>.

demonstrates this concern within the context of the Beacon Food Forest. In an email asking for volunteers to bring food to an upcoming February work party, one volunteer, Xiao-Yu, replied that they would gladly bring a pot of beans and hocks. In response, the facilitator of the work party requested that all food be vegetarian or vegan, as “A large part of our volunteer community doesn’t eat meat.” Although not an official “policy,” the assertion that her soup would not be eaten if it contained meat led Xiao-Yu to question the assumption that the majority of volunteer base were vegetarian and vegan. Additionally, she challenged the sense of “racism and class-ism” in the statement, believing that even an informal policy reflects “injustice, institutional racism, classism and does not reflect the needs of the broader community.” She thanked the organizer for their efforts and expressed a desire to continue the conversation, offering her cell phone number to anyone that was interested.

What followed was a series of mitigating replies from various volunteers. The initial crafter of the email attempted to diffuse the issue, stating that they meant “no offense to [her] or [her] culture” and was merely conveying the requests that she had gathered from the “larger group;” she also called for the Steering Committee to help explain this “non-policy” further (the email, which was originally hosted through the volunteer listserv, was eventually only circulated between the Steering Committee and Xiao-Yu). Several other respondents felt hurt to be called “racist or classist” in their efforts to provide food for a greater amount of people, and were confused as to how vegetarian and vegan food excluded people.

Amidst the chain of response, Xiao-Yu made a point to clarify that she did not and was not calling anyone a racist or a classist, but was rather pointing to the policy as being potentially discriminatory. She felt as though the organization’s efforts to outreach to the surrounding community was limited by the overrepresentation of certain preferences, suggesting that if the work party allowed for a wider variety of foods – specifically, Chinese BBQ pork buns – many more Chinese and African American community members would “feel welcomed and accepted” to join the work party. While a little tongue-in-cheek, Xiao-Yu’s suggestion was made in earnest, as her overall concern was addressing whether or not the organization reflected the community, not in chastising volunteers for their personal beliefs.

There is a hesitation in talking about race. In our interview, Herlihy tended to shift focus on socio-economic barriers when asked about community representation.

Similarly, the anecdote above demonstrates an inability to confront the subject of institutionalized racism without the conversation touching upon an individual's personal beliefs. As Sam pointed out in our interview, some of this miscommunication is a result of economic stresses on the Steering Committee. Under these pressures, there is a tendency to abandon certain "ethical cargo." Indeed, based on my observations at planning meetings, it appears much easier to mitigate lack of racial and ethnic representation by adapting certain practices – translating documents or giving the project "international appeal" by incorporating specific cultural plants into the planning – rather than taking the time to address a lack in diversity within the internal composition of the organization. Additionally, various practices create a false sense of community representation. Emphasizing their use of "diverse" plant species, along with the repeated reference to the project as a community space might implicate the neighborhood in the *outcome* of the project, but does not necessarily speak to the involvement of the neighborhood in the planning process. Moreover, what seems to be ignored is the possibility that the community does not *want* a food forest. As indicated by the reaction to the Beacon Bike Park, some residents feel as though the project is being "pushed" onto them under the guise of social justice. Such assumptions demonstrate how, despite good intentions, some efforts of social/environmental justice remain out of touch with the communities they serve.

What's more, the volunteer base of the organization is not necessarily committed to supporting the Beacon Hill community. Indeed, Sam mentioned that many of the members saw the project as more of a "hobby" than anything else. As with the Steering Committee, the land appears to be the primary focus. For example, when a suggestion was made that some of the P-Patch plots be donated to local organizations and schools, several members were angered by the idea that their volunteer hours had been "wasted." Sam pointed out that this example demonstrates the possible "motives" of the volunteer base. This opinion is reflected in the survey responses as well, as the main priorities of the project tended to emphasize food and education. Additionally, most of the respondents indicated that had learned about the project through an online press release or an existing volunteer. This trend demonstrates that the existing volunteer base is comprised of individuals who already have either a certain knowledge base or interest, or have access to the internet. These are limiting factors, as community members who might be engaged

in similar projects or low-income families with little to no internet access are less likely to be involved.

This was a concern expressed by Herlihy himself in our interview, as well as in other media releases. In one specific *Seattle Weekly* article, Herlihy claims that Beacon Hill neighborhood is home to a large percentage of low-income families. He recognizes that socio-economic constraints limit the amount of time an individual can contribute to volunteering with the project. The author of the piece follows Herlihy's statement by describing the renowned diversity of the neighborhood.⁸⁸ In this way, race and ethnicity are conflated with socio-economic status. While I do not disagree with the fact that such social conditions are deeply entangled with one another, bundling them together tends to mitigate potential reproaches over underrepresentation. What's more, when issues of underrepresentation are discussed, diversity is used to refer to all means of social differentiation. However, when diversity is championed in the media and inter-organizational rhetoric, there is a tendency to specifically cite "multicultural" diversity, rather than socio-economic diversity. Indeed, one Saturday work party volunteer that I spoke with noted that the organization attracts a "diverse" collection of members, pointing specifically to the several Asian-American families that had attended the event. This reflects the general habit within American society, as there is a tendency to racialize diversity.⁸⁹

Filling the Gaps

The case of the Beacon Food Forest suggests that proximity to diversity does not signify internal group diversity. However, more importantly, it demonstrates a need for the revaluation of the means of community outreach. This was not only acknowledged by Sam, but was touched on by Herlihy and the other members of the Site Developing Committee, as well as some survey respondents. In considering my own attempts to engage the Beacon Hill community, I found that the barriers touched on above inhibited my ability to interact with members of the neighborhood. In setting out to conduct community survey information for the purpose of this thesis,

⁸⁸ Gwendolyn Elliott Tue, "Seattle's Ambitious Plan to Build a Food Forest for the City," *Seattle Weekly*, March 11, 2014, accessed April 2014, <http://www.seattleweekly.com/food/951441-129/seattles-ambitious-plan-to-build-a>.

⁸⁹ Joyce M. Bell and Douglas Hartmann, "Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk'," *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007), 905.

I was wholly unprepared to interact with the key demographics of the neighborhood. Even though I was equipped with a Spanish version of my survey, how would I communicate this information in a matter of seconds to someone who, in addition to speaking a different language than me, is even more unwilling to stop because they themselves are conscious of this barrier (clearly even more than I am)?

One strategy that is currently being developed by the organization's Outreach Committee is the appointment of community liaisons. These individuals would be primarily responsible for communicating between the Friends of the Food Forest and other community groups, such as the *El Centro de la Raza*, a Latino/a community center located in Beacon Hill, as well as local high schools and the Beacon Hill Merchants Association. In addition to helping mitigate the matters of translation, the use of personalized liaisons would provide the community with a direct vein of access at the organizational level. Moreover, rather than shying away from discussions of race, this strategy examines the gaps in representation, viewing them as potential areas of growth and expansion.

Like the Friends of the Food Forest, much of mainstream environmentalism is bifurcated along the same racial and socioeconomic lines. In the current era of environmental justice, it is not simply a question of making access to healthy food easier in general, but the recognition that the processes by which such resources are made available can result in external repercussions. As an extension of our global mass culture, contemporary environmental organizations have the potential to become "prisoners" of society, lapsing into the rhetoric of exclusion and tokenism inherent in the cultural strata of our time.⁹⁰ The conversation then must grow beyond looking at intent to focus more on the tools and processes of environmentalism. In this way, the Beacon Food Forest offers us a unique opportunity to engage in real conversations about the nature and implications of diversity. The food forest provides a space – both physical and theoretical – where histories of racial exclusion can be confronted; where narratives of empowerment can be shaped by the work of many soil-stained hands.

⁹⁰ Jordan Charles and Donald Snow, "Diversification, Minorities, and the Mainstream," *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*, ed. Donald Snow. (Island Press, 1992). 77.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Email questionnaire for “Sam:”

- *Could you say a bit on your experience with the Food Forest so far - what your role has been as a volunteer and a coordinator.*
- *What are the primary ways in which outreach is conducted? What are the specific methods being used to outreach to certain ethnic/racial communities and neighborhood groups? What has the response been to these methods, how effective have they been so far?*
- *Are there any observable demographic* trends in terms of who is responding most to the outreach, attending the meetings, or volunteering to take on greater responsibilities within the organization? (Or are there any general demographic trends that you have noticed).*
*By demographic I specifically mean racial or ethnic, though within these categories any trends in gender or age are also germane to my research.
- *At a site-planning meeting I attended several weeks ago Glenn mentioned a volunteer training course that you want to lead. Could you talk a little more about what you have in mind for the training?*

Interview with Glenn Herlihy:

- *What are your outreach strategies? How have you gone about engaging with the Beacon Hill community?*
- *Have you been partnering with any community organizations or institutions on the project?*
- *Have you received any negative public comments with regards to the project? What has the public reception of the project been (both from within the surrounding neighborhood and from other organizations within the city)?*
- *In your opinion, have you been aware of any trends in volunteer demographics?*
- *Do you have a means of collecting demographic data? What are the ways the organization keeps track of who is attending events (work parties, meetings, etc.)?*

Appendix B: Surveys

Note: This is a copy of the survey administrated during the March work party. With the exception of question six, this survey resembles the SurveyMonkey version as well. For questions 1, 2, and 5, participants were able to choose multiple options from the given list.

1) How did you hear about the Beacon Food Forest? Circle answer(s) below.

Community Event/Meeting

Family/Friend

Through another organization (please list)

Internet Article/Online News Source

Printed Article/Printed News Source

Radio Program

TV/Cable News
 Saw a poster
 I have never heard of the Beacon Food Forest

2) In the past 12 months have you participated in the following activities? Please check the appropriate box below. If you participated, check your satisfaction level with the experience.

	Have You Attended		Overall Evaluation of the Experience				
	Yes	No	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Community Work Party							
Community Engagement Meeting							
Site Development Meeting							
Steering Committee Meeting							
Other (please explain below):							

3) If you checked “yes” to any of the activities listed about, how often would you say you attend that event/how much time do you dedicate to working with the Beacon Food Forest?

- Regularly/I attend all the meetings and events*
- Very often/I attend most of the meetings and events*
- Often/I dedicate as much time as I can; I try to make the meetings and events*
- Not as often/I help whenever my schedule allows me*
- Rarely/I have only participate once or twice*

Estimated hours a month you dedicate to Beacon Food Forest:

4) What do you hope to gain out of your time with the Beacon Food Forest?

5) Below is a list of commonly expressed priorities related to the Beacon Food Forest. Which of the listed priorities are most important to you?

	Not At All Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Producing fresh food				
Exercise				
Creating a community space				
Providing opportunities for gardening/Permaculture recreation				
Gardening/Outdoor recreation				

Food source for low-income families				
Making Jefferson Park and the neighborhood more attractive				
Family recreation				

6) What are some of your concerns about the Beacon Food Forest?

7) What is the main language spoken in your home?

8) Do you live in this neighborhood (Beacon Hill)? If you answered “yes,” please state the number of years you have lived in the neighborhood. If you answered “No,” please include your zip code.

9) How long have you lived in Beacon Hill/Zip Code:

10) Would you consider this neighborhood (Beacon Hill) to be a racially diverse neighborhood?*

Yes

No

Explain:

11) How would you define your racial background?

White

African American

Asian American

Hispanic/Latino, Latina

Native American

Pacific Islander

Other:

Refused to specify

Do you have anything else to say about the Beacon Food Forest?