THE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN TREE PLANTING[1]

by Richard G. Ames

Study of the aggressive tree planting program of Oakland, California has provided key insights into the sociology of urban tree plantings (Cole 1979). In many cases sociological factors may be more important than biological factors in determining tree survival and well-being.

In recognition of social factors and the need for community involvement, the Oakland Tree Task Force (OTTF) was formed under the leadership of a community group called the Oakland Citizens' Committee for Urban Renewal (OCCUR). The goal of the OTTF was to make tree planting a cooperative venture with the community, stressing citizen participation to the greatest degree possible. After eight months when initial funding from CETA and the California Department of Forestry ran out, several OTTF staff members incorporated to form a second organization called the Oakland Neighborhood Tree Organizing Program (ON TOP). Currently both groups are still viable and are continuing their tree planting activities. To follow the pattern and effectiveness of involving the community, the Forest Service sought a sociologist. This report describes some of the insights gained from the first year of study.

Need for community participation

The first question one must ask is: Why does it take a community-based group to plant urban trees? Why not simply have the Public Works Department drill some holes with a power auger and plant trees in an assembly-line fashion? The answer, documented from several diverse vantage points, is that it simply does not work in many settings. The crucial issue is public acceptance of the trees.

Ever since the social unrest of the 1960s, for example, Watts and Newark, it has become apparent to sociologists, and urban planners generally, that one does not force externally conceived goals or programs on people, especially inner-city residents. Inner-city programs have to have grassroots support to survive. The ability to subvert programs which lack grassroots support is enormous. For example, in Oakland's Model Cities program, it was decided that trees would be nice and 2,000 of them were planted in West Oakland. Two years later few were still standing.

Types of citizen participation

Citizen participation in the Oakland tree planting programs occurs at several levels. First there is citizen participation in the goals and operation of the two tree planting groups. Periodic public meetings have been held some of which combined a business meeting with presentations or forums on topics of interst to tree-oriented persons. These public meetings, which were attended by a variety of people representing civic groups, the public service sector, and academic people, served to legitimize the goals and activities of the group.

A second area of citizen participation was in the neighborhoods. Members of the Tree Task Force and ON TOP spent a great deal of time with the community residents gaining their enthusiasm for the trees, debating over the species selection, and in determining the placement of each tree to be planted. Sometimes problems were encountered in gaining citizen participation. To overcome the problem of partial commitment, it was found helpful to have each family sign a petition requesting the trees. Husband-wife disagreements which arose over trees could be reduced by having both sign the petition. Problems of lack of participation in the plantings could be reduced by holding the plantings during mid-day on Saturdays, and also by providing music, food, and entertainment. Neighborhood sponsored lunches brought out many who otherwise would not have become involved in the plantings. Hence, a variety of activities allows a wide range of participation

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and hence a broad basis of support.

A third area of citizen participation was in volunteer effort. The people who showed up for tree plantings include a wide range of persons from other citizen organizations, activists, concerned members of public service agencies such as the Parks and Recreation Department, the California Department of Forestry, the U.S. Forest Service, persons from colleges and universities in the area, and occasionally visitors to the United States and State and other government officials. Based upon the year's observation and study, the concerned members of public service agencies and employed professionals appear to provide the most solid and enduring basis of support for the tree planting program. Future similar urban tree planting programs should facilitate the volunteer efforts of this segment of society.

For school-age children, the approach to gain involvement was multi-faceted. One of the approaches to children was through the schools. Poster contests were sponsored for Arbor Day. School assemblies were scheduled for tree plantings, such as the planting of a "Black Forest" (Black Acacias and Black Locust) in the school yard of a school which had been identified as a possible source of vandalism. Another approach was to appoint the potential vandals of the neighborhood to oversee the trees and protect them from vandalism; i.e., co-optation. Children were encouraged to name their trees and were asked to pledge themselves to water and maintain the trees.

The most difficult group to gain participation and support from was the older teenagers. Older teenagers frequently walked by the planting activities to "check-out the scene" and then left. One means to encourage their participation being tried by the ON TOP group is to pay the older teenagers to dig the holes for the trees.

For the adults of the neighborhood, an emphasis was placed on having them take a personal interest in the trees rather than viewing them as impersonal city trees. This effort at personalization was very important for inner-city residents, many of whom live in an "absentee landlord milieu." Mechanisms used to structure identification included such things as placing tags on the trees saying: *I am a new babe in the woods* and *I belong to* _____.

A fourth area of citizen participation was corporate participation. Corporate participation was the most difficult to recruit, but once the plantings were underway, and the program was seen as having a degree of legitimacy, corporations became willing participants.

After initial frustrations in gaining corporate sponsorship of the plantings, the OTTF came to the conclusion that corporate sponsorship was crucial to the success of their program. From a sociologist's perspective, corporate sponsorship appears crucial for the following reasons. First, corporate participation identifies to the community residents that somebody is interested in them. That the perception of being forgotten is important is attested to in the McCone Commission Report on the Watts riots — disinterest and neglect was identified as one of the key issues as a cause of the riot. Hence, to have nationally known companies such as Clorox and ARCO as well as local companies such as Dreyer's Ice Cream and Leslie Mayne, Associates, urban tree consultants, send money and representatives to one's neighborhood is an enormous boost to a person's sense of worth and self-esteem.

A second reason corporate participation is sociologically important is that it helps to define a comprehensive sense of "community." Communities are seen by the residents in the larger context of interacting units which may be quite dissimilar but which are essential, all of them, to the functioning of the community.

If these are the reasons I can see, as a sociologist, for corporate participation, what are the motivating factors for corporations to participate? To begin, the tree planting project appears to have been an important outlet for contributors to be "good corporate citizens." Not only are trees worthwhile in themselves, but they are "safe" investments. Unlike many things that corporations do, there is little opportunity for the "gift" to be seen as self-serving. Trees last — they are enduring monuments to their contributors. Also, if trees are good for one's mental health (Starkey 1979), as has been argued in a recent issue of the *Journal of Arboriculture*, planting the

trees was recognized by the corporate contributors as being good for the social health of the community. For example, the North Oakland-Emeryville Rotary was very pleased at their sponsored planting that many of the residents were meeting each other for the first time. Sociologically, common goals plus working together to achieve these goals promote social organization. That the plantings produce nascent social organization is shown by the spin-offs from the plantings: neighborhood gardens have been planned, clean-up, paint-up sessions have been held, and neighborhood protection units have been formed. Related findings have been reported by Lewis in his research on urban gardening (Lewis, 1976).

Despite the fact that the neighbors could see little self-serving motives to corporate participation, the corporations were sensitive to the subtleties of the situation. Planting trees was seen as a way of demonstrating to City Hall their "corporate responsibility." "Brownie points" could be earned which might stand them in good stead later.

Additionally, the tree plantings gave the corporations one of the few opportunities for their corporate executives to become known in the community. For professionals to meet other professions there are civic organizations, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and others. But, how many institutional ways are there for executives to meet the general population residents of a community? And, what better way to meet them than to be seen helping the community? In the words of one executive: "I got in and dug, planted some trees, listened to rock music, drank some beer, and had a good ole time." Through such participation, the contributors could become less faceless philanthropists, and more personalities with positive identities for the community-at-large.

Impacts of community participation

The most important impact of community participation in the tree planting program is tree survival. Based on evidence limited to one year's data, it appears that most of the trees planted by the OTTF and ON TOP group are surviving well, perhaps at a higher rate than trees planted by city work crews; empirical evidence on survival rates will require another year of evaluation. Of the trees that have been damaged, most of the damage is mild. Periodic site revisitations and interviews with the residents have shown that people are caring for their trees, they are watering them, and they are re-staking trees and trying to repair damage or seeking help for damaged trees. Tree survival has to be the "bottom line" in assessing the tree planting program, for it does not matter how many trees were planted if none survives.

There are other impacts of community participation in the tree plantings as well. One very important outcome of the community effort is that it allows the residents to gain a sense of social identity in "public social space" (Lewis 1976). For inner-city residents the lack of a public social identity is very serious. An activity which permits people to become known in their community in a positive way is a valuable contribution to the community.

Another impact of the community participation in the tree planting is that it enhances a "proprietary sense of territoriality" (Lewis 1976). Few professionals, as homeowners, can understand the image problems people have in areas where almost every house is owned by an absentee landlord. There is no sense of the community belonging to them. By personalizing the street trees, and making the residents feel involved with the trees, one is enhancing a feeling that the neighborhood is theirs.

Finally, consider how we judge our own personal success. If one examines this question for a few minutes the answer is clear: success is the ability to create, to mold or change our surroundings, to leave a lasting change on our world. People with power can change the world, they can make the world into their own image, they can leave lasting monuments to their existence. Powerful people, and success is power, do things that affect other people. Consider, by contrast, the plight of the inner-city resident. All the forces of change come into him from outside. Powerlessness is the resultant state. Powerlessness reduces people's self-image because powerlessness is the antithesis of the American image of success. But, when communi-

ty residents plant trees to beautify their neighborhoods, they create, molding their surroundings in relatively permanent ways, create public images for themselves in their neighborhoods, and, in short, participate in the very things society says are important.

Conclusion

The impacts of community participation in an urban tree planting program appear to go far beyond the central, and successful, objective of enhancing tree survival. One impact appears to be an enhancement of a sense of community among the residents as evidenced by the organization and goals developed as a result of the plantings such as community gardens, clean-up parties, and neighborhood protection organizations. Another impact is that it allows the neighbors to become known to each other in terms of public competencies and activities. Additionally, for inner-city residents especially, it allows a basis for identifying with the trees and hence identifying with the territory as theirs. Finally, psychologically, the tree plantings allow the residents of the community mastery and control over their environment, part of the core values of success in American life.

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CONTRIBUTED ABSTRACT

Major foliage fungus diseases of the seven major tree genera by *Robert L. Tate.*

Foliage fungus diseases of shade trees were classified symptomatically in five categories: 1) leaf spots, 2) leaf blights, 3) powdery mildews, 4) sooty molds, and 5) blisters. Seven genera of trees have been selected for this study. Each comprises more than 5% of the total and together account for 82% of all trees planted in the Northeastern United States. Each genus was then further divided into its most widely planted species and/or clones to facilitate a more accurate analysis of specific diseases. *Acer,* the most frequently planted genus (37% of the total) had the highest number of leaf-spotting diseases. However, none of these was considered to be serious when compared to the leaf blights. *Gleditsia,* the next most frequently planted genus (11% of the total) was least affected by foliage diseases although one serious leaf-spotting fungus was noted. Foliage diseases do not appear to mar the tree. *Quercus* (9% of the total) and *Platanus* (6% of the total) are the genera most seriously affected by various leaf blights and powdery mildews. Leaf spots are of secondary importance. *Tilia* (8% of the total), while most seriously affected by a leaf blight, has been occasionally subjected to serious attacks by powdery mildew. *Fraxinus* (6% of the total) is affected by two major leaf-spotting diseases, one of which is extensive on younger trees. *Malus* (5% of the total) is most seriously affected by apple scab, a leaf blight. Powdery mildew is sometimes considered to be a major foliage disease.

Foliage diseases of shade trees do not rank in the same order of importance as do stem or root diseases because they rarely express themselves in complete defoliation. However, the overall effects of foliage diseases on tree vigor and survival may be much greater than has been realized. More effort should be put into measuring those effects. *Department of Horticulture and Forestry, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.*