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Participation in Urban Agriculture Organizations in Santiago de Chile

Overview of Research

This project was born out of a passion that I've been cultivating for the past few years at Notre Dame: the creation of a sustainable and socially just food system. Our current methods of food production are far from that. Insecticides and fertilizers used on crops create large amounts of pollution; inordinate amounts of water and resources are wasted; animals are doused in antibiotics, hurting consumers; labourers around the globe work long, hard days in deplorable conditions, and the list goes on. Thankfully, the global community is slowly coming to the realization that our current methods are inadequate. One answer to these problems, proposed by many food justice advocates and taking place at stunning rates around the world is urban agriculture. I would define urban agriculture as agriculture that takes place within urban boundaries, generally small in scale, sustainably produced, and often with a social justice focus (i.e. getting healthy food to marginalized sectors of society.) My research this summer in Chile looked closely at three organizations engaged in the urban agriculture movement and how they motivate and maintain participation.

- *Vive lo verde*: Vive lo verde is primarily educational in focus. It offers classes to interested adults in creating urban gardens in their homes, and it runs a website advising people around the globe on topics related to urban agriculture.

- *The office of sustainability of the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile (PUC):* The office of sustainability at the PUC currently administers one garden and is working on creating another.
- *La Chacra:* La Chacra is part business and part non-profit. The business sells made-to-order urban gardens to private clients, and this in turn funds the organization. The organization implements gardens in schools to teach children about nutrition and sustainability.

I worked for two weeks with each organization, as a volunteer for a week and collecting data for the next week.

Findings

My survey was divided into the following parts: Reasons for participating, thoughts on the organization as a whole, and thoughts on the most effective way to engage participants. Unsurprisingly, the results varied by organization as the demographics and purposes of each were different. There were overall lessons to be drawn, however.

- **Reasons for Participating:** Students at Vive lo verde, mostly young professionals, cited concern over what they were eating and a desire to live sustainable and conscious lives. Volunteers that worked with the office of sustainability of the PUC, mostly agronomy students, discussed their love of working with the earth and the chance to practice concrete and necessary skills. Members of the team at La Chacra saw the opportunity as

beneficial career-wise and as an important way to reach out to children, the future leaders of the world.

- Thoughts on the organizations: As would be expected, most participants felt a lot of affection for the organization with which they were working. One concern across the board though was organization. I can attest to this after having worked with each organization for even a week. It was obvious that energy and good intentions abounded—but in order for these organizations to be truly effective, they will need to put much more thought into their structure and organization.
- Most effective ways to engage participants: The most popular answer to this question at every organization was social media, specifically Facebook. Apart from this, members of Vive lo verde suggested tapping into networks of sustainability clubs and universities, students at the PUC suggested hanging posters and having a table at the annual activities fair, and organizers of la Chacra discussed needing to augment connections in the education field.

Accomplishments

My research somewhat surprisingly followed my proposal exactly. I worked with all of the organizations that I proposed and gathered good data. I will mark as an accomplishment as well that all the work was carried out in Spanish. Every time I go abroad, my sense of ease in the second languages that I speak increases slightly. I've never used a second language as intensively and professionally as I did this summer, though, and I'm proud that it all went well. This was probably my biggest challenge, as daily life in Santiago is not terribly taxing.

Surprises

When I proposed to the organizations that I work in the capacity of volunteer for a week, I was expecting to be working in the garden and helping to do chores. I just wanted an opportunity to get to better know the people and the functioning of the organizations. I was very surprised that, without knowing my qualifications and right off the bat, the organizations asked for my opinions on their most challenging organizational problems. I ended up feeling like more of a consultant than a week-long foreign volunteer. For instance, I helped the office of sustainability to think through creating long term production plans, shoring up student leadership, and moving interested students from seeing a poster through becoming a regular member and potential leader. I helped La Chacra design their website, create a database of contacts, and think through how to engage customers in the broader urban agriculture movement in Santiago.

Next Steps

I am in the process of finishing my literature review currently. The next step will be to take all of my research and produce my IDS capstone paper. I'll hopefully present this paper at the Human Development Conference in February.

Conclusion

I'm so grateful for the opportunities that I had this summer—to deepen my knowledge of a subject that fascinates me, to come to know better the culture and history of Chile, to continue bettering my Spanish. It was everything that I could have asked of an abroad experience!

Thanks, Kellogg!