Seeking connections with nature through community gardens

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Introduction and Background

- **What are community gardens?**
- **Why are they important?**
  - Food insecurity, food deserts, poverty, distressed vacant lots (Just Harvest, 2017; Lots to Love, 2019; M’Ikiugu, Kinoshita, & Tashiro, 2011)
  - Improved health, environmental protection and social cohesion (Corrigan, 2011; Hartwig and Mason, 2016; Mudu and Marini, 2018; Stewart et al., 2019).
  - City reinventing itself as a sustainable city
    - Climate Action Plan, Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan

![Hunger in Allegheny County (Just Harvest 2017)]
Nature and community gardens

- Humans innate need to connect with nature (Johnson, 2014).
- Nature: what is it?
Community gardens

- Quest to connect with nature
- People from diverse backgrounds
- Spaces where community gardens have been established
How are communities seeking connections with nature?

- Goals: **sustainability, consumption** (change the way we eat, seeking healthy food choices), **education, partnerships** and collaboration with different organizations

- Management practices
  - Reduction of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers—high micro biodiversity (Birol et al., 2005)
  - Pollinators, protect wildlife and flora, water mgt (Daniels & Kirkpatrick 2006)
Connections with nature through community gardens

- Gardens: hotspots for agrobiodiversity and cultural diversity (Galluzzi et al., 2010)
- Genetic diversity from gardens (Galluzzi et al., 2010 Bernholt et al., 2009)
Living laboratories: Them Living garden in Arusha

- Living laboratory for sustainable urban food production; agroforestry, green space
- Managed by women with children living with disabilities; income generation
- Milan Italy, Arusha Municipality and Nelson Mandela Africa Institute of Science and Technology
Temi living garden

- Vegetarian organic restaurant
- Native vegetables
- Education on nutrition
  - Shunning traditional foods; meat based diets and refined foods (ECHO, 2018; Chitiyo and Duram, 2017)
Zimbabwe community gardens

Economic hardships can force people to re-connect with nature through community gardens.
Conclusion

- Community gardens connect people to nature
- Opportunities for expansion:
  - PA farm Bill: devote $500,000 to urban agriculture grants; community development
  - Pittsburgh Urban Gardens and Farm tour
  - Connections between sustainability and environmental protection
    - Storm water management; green space development
- Applicable to other cities and areas
References


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Any Questions?
Population and gardens

Allegheny County Census
- School Gardens
- Community Gardens

Municipalities
Population
- 70 - 810
- 811 - 1703
- 1704 - 2769
- 2770 - 4642
- 4643 - 6771
- 6772 - 11771
- 11772 - 20313
- 20314 - 41838
- 41839 - 95000
- 95001 - 305704

Map showing the distribution of population and gardens across Allegheny County, categorized by population size and highlighted by municipality.
Discussion

- 2008 and 2016 saw the largest spike in community garden establishment
  - Grow Pittsburgh founded in 2005; Grow Pittsburgh community garden sustainability fund 2013 (Grow Pittsburgh, 2019)
  - Pittsburgh Food Policy Council 2009
  - Phipps Conservatory’s Homegrown Project has established 225 raised beds in households and underserved neighborhoods since its establishment in 2013
  - City adopt a lot program 2013/2014, 114 vacant lots transformed around city first 2 years

- Religious organizations playing an important role to address food insecurity and building relations e.g. race relations.
- South Hills: South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM): pockets of suburban poverty
- Within the city limits: proximity of organizations, more community gardens
- Gardens are highly concentrated in low-income, predominantly black neighborhoods in central Pittsburgh.
  - Central Pittsburgh had the highest population and a low median income of $36,000 to $44,000.
- These neighborhoods are less likely to have a full service grocery store nearby that offers fresh produce.
- Areas are often called food deserts but many residents use the term "food apartheid" linked to systemic racism.