

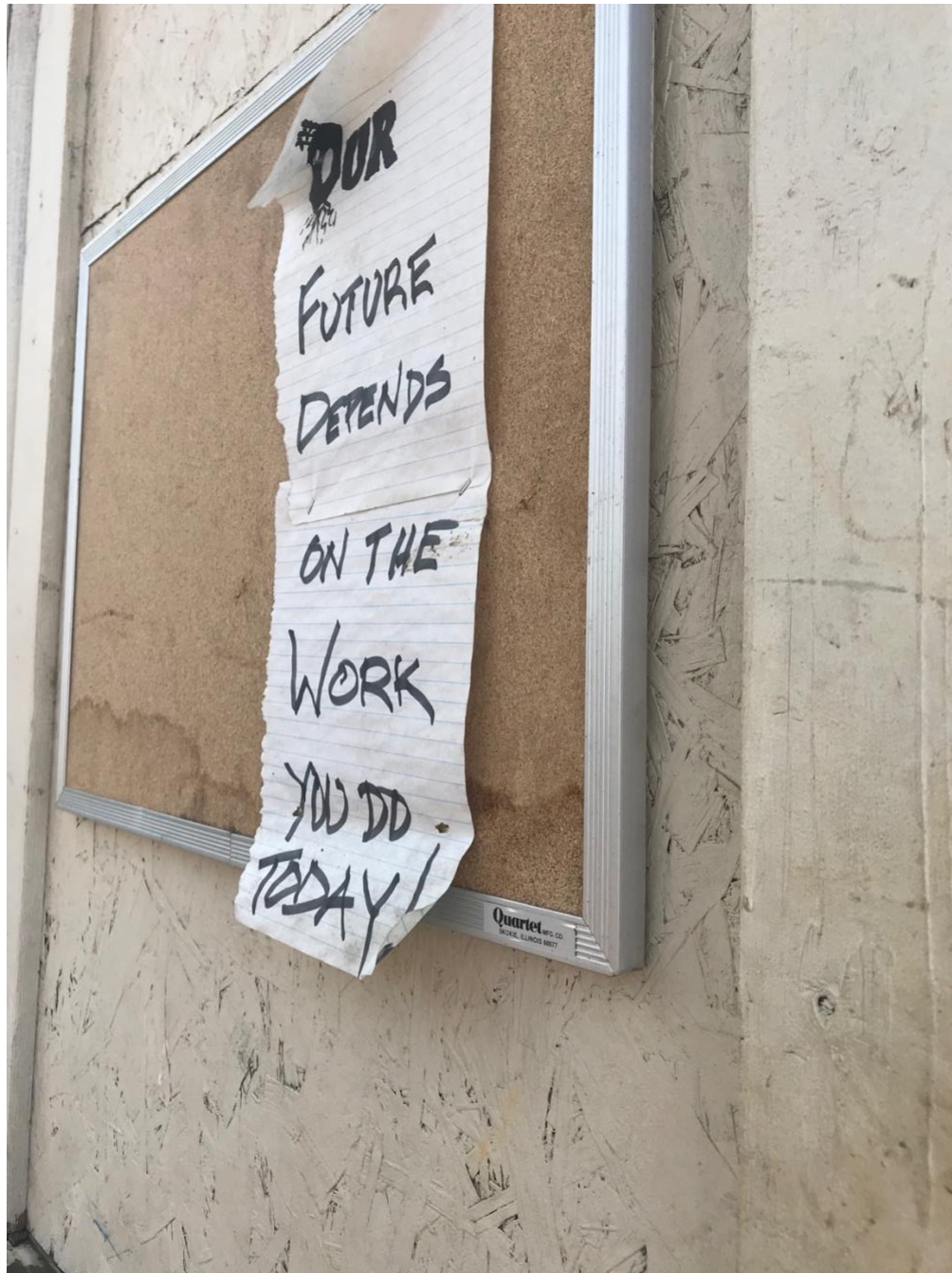
*For privacy of the organization, mentions of names and specific location have been redacted

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ENGL 4040

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Ethnographic Report: [REDACTED] – Opelika Community Garden



Observation Details

For this ethnographic report, I visited the Opelika Community Garden space on September 12th at 8:00 a.m. to observe a class as they interacted in the Community Garden space. During this visit, I also spoke with [REDACTED] (executive director), [REDACTED] (marketing manager), and two student interns about the culture of [REDACTED] (the organization) and projects that [REDACTED] is supporting. Attached are double-entry field notes, pictures of the site, scans of the website (artifact), and a scan of interview notes that I took while speaking with [REDACTED] (program director).

History and Organization

In 2012, [REDACTED] began as a small garden project at [REDACTED] elementary school to get students moving and expose them to applied science. When a student suggested that the produce from the garden be donated to the East Alabama Food Bank, the [REDACTED] (directors) saw the impact that an educational gardening program could have on students and their community. They sought to expand the program, and within three years, [REDACTED] had six school gardening programs in Opelika. The [REDACTED] decided that exposure to community gardening and the needs of their area was not enough, so they began involving high school students from the [REDACTED], as well. The program's main focus has transitioned from experiential learning (though this is still a large part of the program's current operations) to community food awareness, and [REDACTED] (the program) continues to expand their reach within their community every season.

They aim to meet local needs for hunger relief, education reform, and beautification of their city by encouraging civic engagement through community gardening projects. Their goal for the organization as a whole is to give a wide variety of opportunities to get involved so that everyone has a chance to find something they are passionate about within the [REDACTED] program.

Specifically, the goal for the particular public writing project that we discussed was to make permanent informational installations in the space that are accessible to all age groups and make their website more accessible and inviting. We wanted to pursue this project in order to give community members a better idea of what [REDACTED] (the organization) is and what their impact is on the community, as well as giving educational materials for anyone experiencing [REDACTED] projects.

Artifact Analysis

[REDACTED] has a website that was a good resource for getting information about the organization's mission and vision as well as projects and programs through which [REDACTED] is serving their community. Their homepage has information about "Second Saturdays" at the Community Garden as well as their 2013 gardening school with Opelika schools, listing details about each project to welcome users to the page. The School Gardens, Community Garden, and [REDACTED] Corporate Partners pages are readily accessible with short blurbs about each section, a picture for each, and a link to read more. One of the most important features of [REDACTED]' homepage is their Mission Statement and Vision Statement. I believe that the vision and mission statement should be included closer to the top of the page so that users encounter them immediately when opening the website; however, I do believe that having their upcoming and recent events at the top of the page is a sound idea.

This website provides a general overview of what [REDACTED] is and what they do, but I feel that this webpage could benefit from including a calendar and including more project statistics for completed projects (i.e. number of people served, number of students and faculty taught, amount of food production occurring each year, etc.). The website also has not been updated since 2014, but their semester intern said that part of her project was to update the design of this website. We decided that the piece that would be most helpful for me to assist with my knowledge of rhetoric and audience would be editing the website blurbs. We planned to update one another on our respective projects so that we could combine both of our projects. I appreciate the simplicity of their website and feel that it works well because of its accessibility for a large public, but I feel that with these updates, more people would come out to the garden to rent plots and participate in community events because they would have an explicit idea of the impact they could have through the organization and specific dates, times, and locations for community events.

Needs Identification

Through speaking with [REDACTED] (the directors), as well as Auburn student interns for [REDACTED], we were able to identify two main areas of need. Essentially, [REDACTED] wants a way to give their community a better idea of what exactly they do. I believe that the most pertinent and permanent solution to this is going to be making informational installations to place with each of [REDACTED]' projects. In order to educate community members and partners about each project [REDACTED] is involved in, as well as illustrating the impact of those projects through statistics or infographics, [REDACTED] needs these signs as a tangible representation of their work. Examples of some of the areas we discussed making informational installations for are the goats, chickens, community garden, farmer's market, and new aquaponics systems. [REDACTED] (The director)

and I discussed National Parks signs as an example of what we hoped to create – something that both children and adults alike can get something out of regardless of their previous expertise.

The other potential project that we identified was the website update. Once the information has been collected and drafted for the informational installations, we might combine efforts and put this information on the updated website, as well.

Engaging the Public

Addressing the above needs would put ██████ in a better position to engage with their local community, both in spreading awareness of their projects and impact and reaching out more accessibly to involve community members in their efforts. Currently, ██████ has wonderful community outreach programs, and these updated informational projects would only expand that outreach ability. ██████ engages the public through their community garden, school gardens (particularly with ██████), farmer’s markets, and donations to the East Alabama Food Bank. Each of these projects aims to get their community involved in meeting the needs of their area, and this concept of civic engagement and lifelong learning permeates everything that they do.

With the ██████ (partner school), ██████ welcomes students in small groups to work in the garden on various projects, one being growing their own produce and having a student farmer’s market at the end of the season. These students are gaining important problem-solving skills as well as the freedom to learn outside the confines of a rigid school structure. The community garden space is located between two of the most food insecure neighborhoods in Lee County, so their physical proximity to those neighborhoods also aids in their engagement with the community they serve.

██████ works diligently to engage with their community, and I believe that with the addition of these projects, they could engage more effectively and on a broader scale. I will keep in mind the mission of the program and the goals of civic engagement and lifelong learning that ██████ (the director) and I identified as we proceed with this public writing project.

Double-Entry Field Notes

Observations	Reflections
<p>Involves Auburn students as well as community partners (Opelika City Schools, specifically [REDACTED]).</p>	<p>I feel that the involvement of a wide range of age groups and experience, as well as differing motivations for being in the space is a healthy way to maintain diversity and a flow of original ideas. I think that the space can only benefit from having diverse perspectives and encouraging community involvement through its accessibility.</p>
<p>Have initial stages of aquaponics system.</p>	<p>I am incredibly excited about the aquaponics system, as it is an up-and-coming method for more sustainable farming practices that is available right here in our own community. I think this has large potential for educational opportunities as well as environmental impact for [REDACTED] and the larger community they serve.</p>
<p>Relaxed atmosphere for people who work there and people who come to visit the space.</p>	<p>This atmosphere is welcoming and encouraging, and I think that this is largely beneficial for the success of the program.</p>
<p>Agriculture and education majors are typically the people who come out to the [REDACTED] community garden, and they tend to do temporary projects.</p>	<p>After talking with [REDACTED] (director) about this, we discussed how he truly appreciates the work that many students come in to do, but he also wants more long-term projects that leave a lasting impact on the space. That's why he is so excited about this project. I am encouraged by the ideas that I could leave a lasting impact through this project.</p>
<p>[REDACTED] serves the Carver-Jeter community in Opelika (location).</p>	<p>These are two neighborhoods in Opelika who are some of the most food-insecure areas in Lee County, and [REDACTED]' location is paramount to help directly benefit these communities.</p>

<p>Have community garden, greenhouse, aquaponics system, goats, chickens, and farmer's market, plus school gardens and involvement in spaces around Opelika area (i.e. [REDACTED]).</p>	<p>There are so many projects that they are involved with – there is something for everyone who wants to get involved. Also, they have a wide-reaching impact on their community, which I think people need to know more about.</p>
<p>Have weekly classes with students from the [REDACTED] (the alternative school in Opelika) to work on individual projects and gardening, then they have a student farmer's market.</p>	<p>This is an awesome initiative and I think the main purpose of the community garden space. These classes give students practical skills that they can take beyond the scope of gardening, but also that they can use to successfully garden on their own and have the ability to grow their own food, which is super cool. It also gets students out of the classroom for a while to get experiential learning.</p>
<p>They donate all excess produce to the Food Bank of East Alabama.</p>	<p>This directly benefits the Opelika community and is a way to help others while also reducing waste. I love this, and apparently it was a second grade class' idea!</p>

Site Pictures – Community Garden Site at [REDACTED] Opelika, AL (September 12th, 2019)











School Gardens

Opelika City School gardens showcase produce and ornamental plants, serving as outdoor classrooms for K-8 school children.

[Read More](#)



Community Garden

The Community Garden sits across from the Cultural Arts Center on [redacted] Residents and businesses may lease plots and everyone is invited to our mid-monthly Saturday gatherings.

[Read More](#)



Corporate Partners

We are thankful for our corporate sponsors and encourage your patronage of those businesses that support our community.

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[redacted] promotes gardening in service of locally identified needs.

OUR VISION

As an effort in localism, [redacted] seeks to model an approach to civic engagement that relies on local capital and capacity to address local needs. School reform, hunger relief and city beautification are not specific to any one city but every city has the potential to leverage the learning potential of gardens in service of community need.



Scan of Interview Notes:
(redacted because of privacy for organization)