

UIUC Champaign/Urbana Area Revitalization Project

A discussion of why Champaign/Urbana lacks a Community based revitalization program

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Question Overview

- Our research focused heavily on revitalization programs in various areas, and why Champaign/Urbana does not have one.
- Revitalization programs work in correspondence with communities to address necessities that are immediate and long-term.
 - Social
 - Economic
 - Environmental
- The goal of revitalization programs is to develop a sustainable relationship with less fortunate communities through mutual learning and engagement.
 - Help organize support

Motivation behind our Group's Research

- Mike Olson
 - Graduate in Architecture
 - After a studio that involved working with HUD to develop plans for low-income housing for Native Americans, Mike hoped to increase his knowledge on community development through this research.
- Emily Smith
 - Junior in Urban Planning
 - After participating in a Habitat for Humanity project in Kentucky, Emily became focused on working with community residents to enhance the quality of life for residents of less fortunate communities
- Emily Taylor
 - Junior in Urban Planning
 - After witnessing the development of a Near West Side neighborhood, Emily took an interest in how communities work together to bring about positive changes to their infrastructure.
- JIM WEBB
 - Junior in Urban planning
 - After volunteering for ESLARP, Jim became interested in community development, and the lack of a local revitalization effort in Champaign/Urbana

Motivation behind our Group's Research

- Why not help declining urban areas?
- First hand experience with volunteering
 - ESLARP
- The benefits of Participatory Planning
 - Volunteers of all backgrounds
 - Large-Scale Neighborhood Improvements
 - Fosters relationships between institutions and individuals

Research Questions

First question: Are there any local community based organizations?

Second question: Why is there not a local CBO?

Ancillary Questions:

- a.) Have there been previous efforts?
- b.) Why did they fail?
- c.) Does Champaign/Urbana have the need for a CBO?

Data Collection Methods

- Information collected from Stacy Harwood
- Interview subjects: Len Heuman, Emily Talan, Steve Schomberg
- Websites -
<http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/overview/doc1.htm>
- Ancillary information about CBO's from readings and from previous coursework

Reflection on Data Collection

- The majority of our data was from interviews
 - Many individuals hard to get a hold of
 - Unwilling to talk?
 - Some were very gossipy, and wanted to place the blame immediately
 - However, the ones interviewed all had very good information and were willing to talk.
 - Overlapping information problems
- Other forms of data collection were difficult, it feels like much of our data is "He said, She said"

Reflection Continued

- What we learned:
 - Come with "to-the-point" questions
 - Avoid being overly broad, as subjects tend to ramble and go off topic
 - Come with a prepared mission statement of WHY you are interviewing them
 - Many people tend to hold back until they realize the true nature of the interview

Data Summary

- Some University/Community organizations in Champaign-Urbana have succeeded for short amounts of time. There have been several attempts resulting in a variety of approaches.
- To inquire into the topic we interviewed faculty/staff who have had involvement with ESLARP and local programs.
- Interviews took place with:
 - Len Heuman
 - Emily Talan
 - Steve Schomberg

Past Programs

- Urban Exchange Center
 - Grassroots level African American Center [MX Americans not involved]
- Partnership Illinois
 - Community Storefront & Library
- Community Advocacy Depot
 - African American Community Center
- Homestead Corporation
 - Housing for the Homeless
- Community Development Council
 - Community Solutions [single project]

Analysis

- Champaign-Urbana is not the ideal site for renewal:
 - Existing strong neighborhoods.
 - Lack of need-based state funding.
 - Established city planning department.
 - No faculty support.
 - Social / Ethnic diversity.
 - Champaign preoccupied with economic growth.
- East St. Louis was a community in need:
 - Poorest city in America.
 - Corrupt city council.
 - No planning department.
 - Half of the residents gone.
 - Homogeneous population.

Implications

- ESLARP is about hands-on learning.
 - Benefits are seen on both sides—students receive development experience while community members see their area revitalized.
- The model is East St. Louis is unique:
 - Total and complete vacuum.
 - Mrs. Young [local representative] lobbied for state money.
 - Informal pressure was put on the UIUC president.
 - Great publicity for the University.
- Local University involvement on a project by project basis:
 - ESLARP is a component of several classes taught at the University thus guaranteeing faculty support.
 - Faculty/Student design work by invitation.

Reflection about EOTU experience

- Opened our eyes to the wide variety of information available through interviewing University Professors.
- Realized that the University is not perfect and has a lot of people to try and please.
- University is trying to help the surrounding neighborhood but there is a lot of red tape to get through.
 - Grant money
 - Community interest
 - Promotion of the program
- We have some understanding of what the community is looking for and how the University can achieve community goals.

Reflection about what you found in relation to neighborhood planning

- Neighborhood planning cannot be successful unless you listen to the needs to the citizens
- A lot of times neighborhood planning is trial and error.
- It is a big responsibility for the University to get involved because if they do something that does not work out there will be a huge community uproar about it
- Neighborhood planning can be successful if people come together with great ideas on how to improve their towns

Conclusions

If our research continued...

- We would have researched more community members.
- We would have liked to interview students who did or still do participate in UIUC community projects.
- We would have tried to keep our interviewees more on track.
 - A lot of times the people we interviewed would go off the subject.
- We would have liked to interview the current chancellor
- We conclude that there is a way to make a difference in the revitalization of the C-U community...

STUDENTS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

- Get involved and make C-U a better community!
- Housing Action Illinois
- Working to increase and improve affordable, decent, safe and accessible housing throughout Illinois! The coalition assists organizations building affordable housing, while preserving existing affordable housing.
(312) 939-6074 www.housingactionil.org

Any Questions?

Thank you for your time!