

Organized Anarchy:
*a case study of the Urban Ecology Institute's
Natural Cities Program*

Senior Honors Thesis
Sociology
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I. Introduction

Perhaps every research question we come to ask is ultimately a question about ourselves and our place in the world. At least, this is my thesis story. It took six months for me to realize that my research had become a personal search. I hoped for an answer to that fundamental senior year question - *what now?* Now I realize that my search for “the perfect topic” was also my attempt to process the past four years of sociology, environmental studies, and social justice activism into a decision for my future. I wanted my thesis to ask questions and give answers that could be personally meaningful.

I was drawn to sociology and environmental studies because they made sense of all the bad things I saw in the world and put the problems into patterns and systems that were easier to deal with. I figured I could learn all the questions, and then learn all the answers. I have had the opportunity to learn about countless social and environmental problems. As for the solutions, I became active in the social justice movement on campus.

I interned this fall at a peace and justice non-profit organization and helped organize students against the war in Iraq. It was an introduction to the world of nonprofit organizations and the challenges they face. This group, which I soon found to be unique in this aspect, incorporated constant reflection about organizational goals and actions into their daily schedule and encouraged personal reflection also. This, along with a Max Weber reading for social theory class, really affected me. I was shaken to the core by Weber’s insights on the unforeseen consequences of even the most well intentioned actions. Answers and solutions didn’t seem so clear anymore; my idealism faltered. I

began to question my future in social justice.

What role could I have in social justice struggles with a background of relative privilege and education? Do I have to choose between academia and the grassroots? How can people and organizations make effective change? These were the questions I wrestled with as I searched for a thesis topic.

Then I learned about the Urban Ecology Institute when I took an environmental studies course taught by the co-founders. The UEI literature and conversations I had with the founders sparked my interest. I thought, wow, they are doing great work. They are doing *a lot* of great work. They want to integrate the legal, scientific, and social issues of urban ecological problems and find *the* solution about how to deal with them. It seemed like an organization with answers. This group had chosen a big undertaking and I was curious to learn about their approach and efficacy.

I learned that this group, based at the Boston College Law School campus in wealthy Newton, was both research institution and non-profit organization. Their dual role as both academic research institution and a non-profit organization with a link to the environmental justice movement was an initial clue as to where multiple demands could come into play. They hope to do some good in the world with community-based projects, as well as get scholarly research results.

I went into the field wondering what sort of challenges could materialize as an academic, professional organization tries to contribute to the environmental justice movement and to the struggles of impoverished, underprivileged, mainly non-white communities. My personal questions found a place at the organizational level in UEI,

specifically in the Natural Cities Program. I hope to bring not only a sociological analysis to this group, but also a perspective that will raise helpful questions and inform their organizational goals.

II. Methods

My personal interest in the research topic led me to qualitative analysis through participant observation and interviews. The participatory aspect of this research was important for me because of my own interest in the environmental justice movement. To be a non-involved observer of this group, whose goals I sympathize with, would have been nearly impossible. I decided that a project with which I am not personally engaged would be detrimental to my research process. Instead I believe that my concern and personal investment helped me to consider and explore the many stories that arose from my field observations.

Fortunately the directors showed interest in having a sociological perspective on their organization, as long as I was able to volunteer for the Natural Cities Program during the research process, and provide conclusions that could inform their goals. With this agreement, I began participant observation at the end of January.

I observed/volunteered at the UEI offices twice a week. I attended regular Natural Cities meetings and relevant sub-meetings. I kept brief notes in the field, and elaborated on them when I left the field.

As a volunteer I assisted mainly with the social survey process. This was a valuable inside look at a major process of the Natural Cities Program. With the participant observation and volunteer role, had the opportunity to see the organization operate first hand. I was a part of staff interaction, project design, and problem-solving. The participant observation lasted two months. From this field work I focused my analysis and then began interviews.

Because time in the field was busy with the organizations daily business, there was not much time for in-depth interaction with the staff. With the interviews I could explore their perceptions of the organization within the framework of my analysis. I also reviewed UEI's Natural Cities literature to further my understanding of the organization's structures, goals, and processes.

As I noted in the introduction, I was very impressed by the UEI literature. Its ambitious agenda laid out clear plans of action and gave me some initial ideas about what my analysis would be. Prior to the field work I did an extensive literature review that covered everything from social movement literature to organizational literature to environmental sociology. But an inductive approach took over as my field work began. It was the participant observation and in-depth interviews that revealed the stories behind the organizational literature.

III. The Urban Ecology Institute and the Natural Cities Program

The Urban Ecology Institute (UEI) was founded in 1998. It is a non-profit organization affiliated with Boston College that focuses on “research, education, and advocacy of urban ecosystems” (UEI literature). These areas are covered in their two projects, the educational program and the Natural Cities Program. I will focus on Natural Cities.

Urban ecology is a developing branch of environmental studies that hopes to shift the traditional dichotomy between city and environment. In this approach, the ecological systems that underlie urban areas are revealed. Cities are viewed not as inherently problematic but as an opportunity for human society to interact with ecology in positive, healthy ways. All aspects of urban life fall under urban ecology - the social, environmental, educational, political, and economic. As a discipline, urban ecology is developing rapidly. UEI is evolving quickly as well, and is in the process of staking their claim in this new movement.

UEI’s claim to the urban ecology movement is based on what they see as the crucial link between the science of urban ecology and the social change of community based action. From the very beginning of UEI, their link between the academic and nonprofit worlds was established in the organizational structure.

The founders, who had advocacy experience in the environmental justice movement, identified strongly with the values of community empowerment. As they established UEI, they partnered with the director of the environmental studies at Boston College who already was engaged in urban ecological research. UEI was founded as an

organization with non-profit status linked to an academic institution. Consequently, UEI is able to emphasize or de-emphasize its link to the university depending on the grant being applied for. But they must meet the proposal requirements for both. The agenda of the Natural Cities Program reflects this dual nature of the organization.

Natural Cities aims to protect ecologically critical sites in the Greater Boston area (UEI literature). The program is two-fold. It assists local community groups in their ongoing environmental battles by providing legal and scientific expertise. Meanwhile Natural Cities' staff is developing a data-gathering system, or set of tools, to help these and other community groups create action plans to protect such sites.

The Natural Cities team has an extensive network of partnerships and relationships with many Boston-area groups. These include other non-profits, community groups, environmental justice organizations, and government agencies. Their closest relationships are with the environmental justice communities of Chelsea and East Boston.

The environmental justice movement links environmentalism with social justice. It aims to place decision-making power in the hands of the mainly poor, non-white communities that have been proven to bear a majority of the nation's environmental hazards (Bullard). The Natural Cities Program is designed with these ideals and emphasizes the importance of their relationships with community groups as a way to support the environmental justice movement.

The set of tools is a collection of ecological, legal, and social data gathering processes. This "toolbox" is being designed to help communities identify and rank sites that are critically important both ecologically and socially. From this data, the community groups can formulate a plan of action for what they would like to do with the

environmentally-threatened site. One round of surveying was completed last year. The results were not satisfactory to the group and they are planning a second round.

Natural Cities engages in other projects to complement the research and advocacy. They are linked to a regional collaborative of urban ecology groups on the East Coast. This coalition is to share ideas and projects as the urban ecology movement develops. Because of this Natural Cities adopted a model for a community forestry program, where they help community groups do urban tree-planting. Natural Cities also engages undergraduate students in the environmental studies program in ecological research. These projects are part of Natural Cities' overall mission, to protect and restore urban ecosystems.

The multiple agendas of Natural Cities come together as they strive to balance university research and community-based action and negotiate their role as both academic and non-profit. In a sociological inquiry, this organizational framework is significant. Whatever appears in the organization and at the level of individual experiences can be traced to the larger social structure. I began my participant observation with this in mind and discovered several indications that the structure of the organization as a non-profit linked to a university does have consequences for the Natural Cities Program and the individuals involved.

IV. Ambiguity in Natural Cities

From the first day of my field work, I confused by the agenda, goals, and priorities of Natural Cities. I tried to remind myself that this was normal for an outsider. I figured that since my volunteer position gave me the opportunity to do more than observe, the organizational processes would quickly become clearer to me. After a couple weeks, I thought, I could move on to my real analysis of the organization. Yet after two months, the vagueness was still there. Several interactions with staff members indicated that the confusion was not only mine as a participant observer.

In my field work I attended regular meetings of the Natural Cities Team. These meetings usually lasted about an hour to an hour and a half. In my impression, meetings were an opportunity for the group to gather, discuss, question, solve, iron out difficulties, and come to an understanding of what was going on with the latest projects. As a participant said:

The staff meetings that we have every other week should be a point in time in which we are checking in on what we are trying to achieve, where we are and what needs to be done.

Yet it was immediately after these when my interactions with the staff revealed some feelings ambiguity about the project (field notes).

After the second meeting I attended, a staff member remarked to me, “Who knows what happens at those meetings” (field notes). One of the last meetings I observed was especially lengthy and difficult to follow. When it concluded and the meeting participants were dispersing, a member noted the bewildered look on my face. “It’s crystal clear, isn’t it?” the staff person remarked jokingly. I asked why it was so difficult

for me to understand UEI and the response I received was, “You’re not the only one.” I pushed the topic further with another staff person who responded with, “I’ve been here eight months and I don’t get it completely” (field notes).

These comments, however flippant or sarcastic they may be, showed a general lack of clarity in the organization. These examples do not mean to show that the members are completely perplexed about their jobs. Despite any ambiguity they experience, every day they make decisions, solve problems, and move forward with their projects. But my experience of confusion with the social survey, with the comments of staff and other interactions I observed in the field indicated that this was an important piece of what was happening at UEI. This was when I realized that the ambiguity itself was the emerging organizational analysis.

The interviews then provided a more in depth look at how members perceived this lack of clarity in the organization. These comments indicated that for the participants, a sense of uncertainty is linked to the structure of the project. First the fact that they are in a new and changing field came up:

Because this is new and because we’re doing it for the first time, it’s very messy...we’re building this machine as it’s flying or as it’s moving.

I think that part of that [ambiguity] is due to the fact that it’s a new program and that it’s being developed as we go along and so there is a lot of uncertainty.

The field of urban ecology touches upon many different disciplines and sectors of society, and Natural Cities attempts to keep up with all of them by covering the ecological, legal and social aspects. This means a complex arrangement that can make grasping the project difficult:

I think that what we do is complicated and it’s complicated because we work on so many different levels at once and we’re working with two specific

communities in Chelsea and East Boston, we're looking to work with two cities just outside of Boston, we're working regionally on a regional collaborative, we work at the civil society level, we work politically, there are all these different avenues and areas that we work in, I think that it's complicated. And they all connect but the connections are a web.

It would be easier if we operated on one scale and not on three different scales, you know if we weren't trying to build products. it's messy, it is messy. And it gets confusing. I get confused at times.

If we pick one or two of these aims then we can accomplish them but if we're trying to accomplish all of them at once...that inevitably is going to lead to a not-clear course... the ambiguity has driven me crazy at times.

Their goal to create standardized, theoretical models for dynamic, changing urban settings creates a sense of uncertainty as well. The tension between the theoretical and the practical adds to this confusion:

I... sometimes have problems trying to translate from the concept to the practical...sometimes there's a disconnect.

So it's, we can explain simply, we're the Urban Ecology Institute, our goal is this, we have a Natural Cities Program that does one, two, three, we have an education program that does four, five, six, and you can explain it in simple terms but when you get down to the actual implementation, it explodes in the complications, explodes...it's just big, it's just big everywhere you go, it just expands in every direction.

I think part of that [ambiguity] is....we had it written down on paper, how it's supposed to work in theory, but once you get onto the ground, sometimes the implementation is a little difficult...Being on the ground with Chelsea and doing all the work in the individual projects that I'm doing...It's hard to keep track of it all at the same time.

I think there's a distinction between the complexity of the program and the complexity of building the program... there are times when building it is very, very confusing. And there are times when building it will be confusing for the staff. .I think it's very complex to build the products at the scale that runs from the very local to the national.

While several participants expressed frustration at this lack of clarity, others felt comfortable with it. This participant was explicit about enjoying the “messiness”:

We're trying to draw the boundaries...so it's very messy. And some folks are very, very frustrated handling that. But if you're a scientist...that's the point where you feel most alive...Once the conflict is gone, once the messiness is gone...it's no longer interesting to me. Some people aren't comfortable in that messy environment.

Similarly, this participant expressed that turning the theoretical into the practical with a big project was enjoyable:

I like taking an idea and making it real. This scale, this is the biggest scale I've worked on and I think it's a pretty interesting scale.

All of the staff recognized the lack of clarity in the organization and a majority expressed varying levels of frustration about it as they made connections to the overall framework of the project. The interviews still revealed that my field observations were part of something that the staff experienced as well. My observations at UEI lead me to seek an explanation in organizational theory.

V. Organized Anarchy

It is often assumed, as I did before my field work, that organizations are situations of clear intentions, goals, and plans. Problems arise, solutions are aired, and decisions are made based on organizational goals. It is a straightforward, rational process in which organizations follow explicit criteria in their decision-making. As my set of observations from the UEI Natural Cities Program indicated, sometimes it can be a more ambiguous situation.

The concept of organizations in Cohen, March, and Olsen's "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice", and further elaborated in March and Olsen's *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* provides a theoretical framework to explore the processes I observed in the Natural Cities Program of UEI (1972, 1976). In this model ambiguity is recognized as a more frequent organizational characteristic than clarity. I will review their theory and then evaluate my field data in this framework.

Cohen et al's definition of organizations lays the groundwork for this theory. According to their analysis, organizations are situations where people, problems, solutions, and decisions come together:

Organizations can be viewed for some purposes as collections of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision makers looking for work. (Cohen et al, p. 1)

In this fluid and complex understanding of an organization, the chances for ambiguity are greater. Clarity decreases with all these variables interacting. Organized anarchy is a situation where these variables come together in a way so the conditions for decision-making are not ideal. According to Cohen et al, organized anarchy is especially

prevalent in educational organizations; their findings were based on numerous studies of university organizations. Problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation are the main properties of organized anarchy.

Preferences, or goals, are understood here as the basis of what the organization operates upon. Various characteristics of goals can be problematic - vague, inconsistent, ill-defined. In organized anarchy, goals are “described better as a loose collection of ideas than as a coherent structure” (Cohen et al, p. 1). Instead of operating upon well- defined, consistent preferences, frequently the organization makes things up as it goes along. The organization “discovers preferences through action more than it acts on the basis of preferences” (p. 1, Cohen et al).

Unclear technology refers to a situation where the organization’s processes are not understood by its members. The organization “operates on the basis of simple trial-and-error procedures, the residue of learning from the accidents of past experience, and pragmatic inventions of necessity” (p. 1, Cohen et al). Although the organization makes decisions and moves forward, the processes that somehow lead to this are not totally clear to those involved.

Fluid participation is when the membership of the organization changes frequently, or there are members whose amount of involvement varies. Preferences, technology, and participation all interact with one another. These three properties create an ambiguity that characterizes organized anarchies. In a situation of ambiguity, “the boundaries of the organization are uncertain and changing” (p. 1, Cohen et al).

Organized anarchy and its properties ultimately have consequences for organizational choices. In this setting, organizations make decisions in a process Cohen

et al describe as “the garbage can model”. In the garbage can model of organizational choice, a decision is an outcome dependent on a complex range of elements which include the problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities of the organization:

The garbage can process, as it has been observed, is one in which problems, solutions and participants move from one choice opportunity to another in such a way that the nature of the choice, the time it takes, and the problems it solves all depend on a relatively complicated intermeshing of the mix of choices available at anyone time, the mix of problems that have access to the organization, the mix of solutions looking for problems, and the outside demands on the decision makers.
(March & Olsen, p. 36)

This is not the best situation for making decisions, as Cohen et al note, “It is clear that the garbage can process does not resolve problems well,” (p. 16, Cohen et al).

I do not claim that organized anarchy describes the entirety of the Urban Ecology Institute, because my access to the organization could not provide sufficient data to determine this. My observations show that that organized anarchy operated more in some parts of Natural Cities than others. As Cohen et al describe these qualities “are characteristic of any organization in part— part of the time” (p.1, Cohen et al). It was evident from my field work that other parts of Natural Cities operate under significantly less ambiguity.

The garbage can model does not account for organizational choices that are made in a situation of clarity. I will include examples from the field data to show that not every aspect of Natural Cities had unclear goals, technology, and participation. Because the purpose of this research is to contribute not only to the organizational theory but to the organization, the examples of clarity are especially useful to note.

VI. Preferences: Academic Community and Grassroots Community

“In some ways it’s easier to be one or the other, either be a research institute or be a community-based organization... I think that it’s a little harder to inhabit the middle ground but I think it’s a very powerful and necessary type of institution... We want to be relevant and in service to people on the ground but we also want to be linked to scholarship, to theory, you know... But it’s a very difficult role to play.”

As the above quote shows, the Urban Ecology Institute created its structure as both research institution and non-profit organization. This position is based on their most fundamental goal of linking research to community action. As a leader in the emerging academic field of urban ecology, they hope to contribute to research, scholarship, and theory. They also identify strongly with the values of the environmental justice movement. A participant described the relationship between the urban ecology movement and the environmental justice movement:

...if we’re building the kind of urban ecology movement that we should, that is one that is community-based and has models that presuppose community power and community decision-making, then the movements are complementary.

Natural Cities partners with grassroots community groups to help them meet their environmental justice goals. Although the two can most certainly be complementary, the interviews revealed that the goals for academia and grassroots can be difficult to reconcile. This does not mean the two goals are inherently and always opposed to each other. It does mean that some difficulties arise. The phrase “difficult preferences’ would more accurately describe Natural Cities’ dual goal.

The participants’ articulation of organizational goals was a way to look at how these organizational preferences can be problematic. If members’ perceptions of organizational goals differ, it is reasonable to assume that this does or will present

difficulties for the group. If there are two preferences that can sometimes conflict, when it comes to particular organizational choices, one preference will have to win out over the other or there will be a complicated process of compromise. In the organization, “it is difficult to impute a set of preferences to the decision situation that satisfies the standard consistency requirements for a theory of choice” (p. 25, March and Olsen). There cannot be consistency in choice and this contributes to ambiguity.

In the interviews, it became apparent that the members do articulate goals in slightly different ways. Overall, the broader UEI goal of linking research to community action was identified:

We were able to stake out a series of goals for ourselves that involved linking urban ecology to community-based work, urban ecology research to community-based work...

So not only are we trying to solve a practical problem for communities, we're trying to enter the theoretical realm and so that's why among other things this is such an interesting problem for universities. 'Cause remember the university research mission is to create new theoretical models. The service mission is to go out and help communities, and we think in this new field of urban ecology we can do both.

The basic premise was there's this emerging understanding of cities as ecological, an emerging sense that ecological analysis of cities can have a profound effect on all of the challenges that cities have, that this can be a foundation for sustainable cities, that it can have an effect on public health, economic development, neighborhood cohesion. And there's interesting and powerful work to be done linking this notion of cities as ecosystems to social action, to tools that can make people involved in research, can link research to action in the near term.

These descriptions of UEI's goals, which were articulated by several members, were consistent with one another. The basic idea is to use scientific research of urban ecology to help communities. Another participant recognized that the mission statement of the organization had changed over time, and named multiple aims of the project:

We've had a couple mission changes. The mission now as it stands I think makes a lot of sense. It's to encourage the stewardship of the urban environment through education and through supporting community groups... to preserve urban natural resources. I can't really say what its (UEI) goals are...but the principles are to try and do our best to create stewards of the natural environment. So in some ways it's really social organizing. ..but there's also this thrust of we want to take care of the city and the ways we're going to do that is by focusing on education and by trying to connect research to advocacy.

Other participants did not discuss the goals of UEI as a whole, but addressed Natural Cities. It was in these descriptions where some of the different understandings of organizational preferences became apparent:

The role of the Natural Cities Program...has really been to fill a gap that exists in urban settings... You have things that take place at a local level and citizens that are organized and motivated and have the will to change things but... they sometimes lack technical skills that could be useful. So I think that the role of the Natural Cities Program is largely to find ways to work with community groups so that those challenges and that lack of technical knowledge isn't a hindrance...so they can continue on with their work and their goals without being hindered by a lack of technical knowledge...it's really a way of increasing the efficacy of community work in terms of environmental issues.

Here the project aims to provide skills to community groups so that the groups can achieve their chosen goals. The academic standing of Natural Cities is seen as complementary to whatever the community goals are. Similarly, this member defined the goals of the project by the opinions of community groups and the relationship of the organization to community groups:

For Natural Cities I really think that the motivating principle in our mode of operating is really to assist community groups and groups that are rooted in the community to achieve their open space or public access goals . I think the core of our philosophy is that we go into an area and we try and partner with an organization...and don't impose our worldview on that organization. We're trying to help them achieve whatever it is their worldview is...We are representing community groups and trying to help them ultimately achieve whatever is in their opinion good for their local environment...The project is to help community groups.

The project is to help community groups achieve their “worldview”. For another member, the relationship with community groups and what “they want to do” are also central preferences of Natural Cities:

Natural Cities has the goals of working with community groups to preserve urban natural resources...Our relationships with community groups...it's the crux of it really. You can't create social change without the people who live in those places and find out what they want to do and hopefully we're helping to empower them...so community groups are at the crux.

Another participant described the project goal and the role of community groups differently:

Our goal in the Natural Cities, which overall is to create sustainable green infrastructure for cities, was to come up with the way to rapidly and inexpensively involve the community and scientists and planners in a decision... There are legal tools and policy analyses that are involved in developing the community perspective of these pieces of open land.

Here, instead of the community opinion as the project goal, the idea is to “involve” the community in a decision and “develop the community perspective”. In further explaining the relationship between research aims and community plans the member saw a tension:

There's an inherent conflict there because the way we work as academics, which tends ultimately to be conservative, is perceived as elitist and slow by certain communities who feel that they develop an idea and let's just go and do it. But part of being a scholar is the idea that you recognize that just because you see reality a certain way doesn't mean it's necessarily so.. .the first idea that pops into your head may not be the best and in fact needs to be modified. . .And part of the challenge with community groups is to get them to understand that this is an evolving process, it's taken a long time to get into this mess and you can't solve it in one stroke. So there is an inherent tension but in any community process there's inherent tension...Any community-based democratic process is going to be messy and filled with conflict.

This view of the preferences for academia and community differs from the others. One of the members above described Natural Cities as an organization that tries “to help

them achieve whatever it is their worldview is”. Another saw the academic skills as being brought to the community for them to achieve their chosen goals. Here the relationship, and therefore goal, is perceived as bringing the process of scholarship to communities and “get[ing] them to understand” that process.

In the Natural Cities Program, the definitions of organizational preferences varied slightly. There were members who described organizational goals as solely what the communities decided, and others who saw the goals of academic research and processes as shaping the community perspective. The relationship to community groups showed the most variety in definition for the staff. The community group relationship either constituted the Natural Cities agenda or was a step in the agenda. Interestingly, some members felt comfortable relaying the goals of Natural Cities, but not of the Urban Ecology Institute as a whole. This speaks to the concept of goal ambiguity. These various narratives reflect how the dual preferences of the organization play out. This is an indicator of how clearly the organizational goals are playing out, and suggests that the preferences can be problematic for the staff.

It is important to note that although there was ambiguity when it came to specific Natural Cities preferences, the interviews also suggested an underlying value that the participants share. There was common clarity and purpose in the belief that environmental justice communities deserve access to the resources that UEI can provide. Overall the staff recognized that this UEI goal is to link academic research and skills to community groups’ needs. This shows that there are areas of clarity to be found in Natural Cities.

The goals that accompany Natural Cities’ dual role as research institution and

non-profit organization are related to the other properties of organized anarchy as well. I turn now to the processes of the social survey and organizational funding, which are informed by their difficult preferences for both academic research and community organizing.

VII. Technology: The Social Survey and Funding

The social survey and funding are two examples of technologies, or processes, of the Natural Cities Program. These are closely related to the preferences of the organization. The social survey is one of the data sets for the Natural Cities tool.

The stated purpose of the survey is to identify socially relevant sites by asking community people about their local environmental concerns. Natural Cities did a round of surveying a year prior to my field work, and while I was there, they were making final changes to the survey to prepare for a second round.

In the field and interviews I found that the ambiguity of the social survey was due to several factors. It was not understood technically, its purpose was seen as contradictory at times, there was doubt about whether it would satisfy its intended purpose, and there was confusion about what the Natural Cities role was with the social survey tool once it was completed.

According to my field observations, the first round of surveying did not provide Natural Cities with the amount or type of data they were hoping for. This process was difficult for the team as one participant expressed:

If something is not clear we usually hit it like a brick wall, which I think happened to some extent with the survey. It was something that should have been okay but it absolutely wasn't okay and it was very fundamentally not okay, and when that became clear it was really a blow.. It took a long time and it was stressful and people were irritated and annoyed with each other... for awhile we were all very emotionally involved in the issues.

I think the social survey in our... history... is the worst example of being in the kitchen and it's been chaos. Because we don't know anything about social surveys... There were a lot of meetings that went on for an hour about the social survey where we tried to figure out what the hell to do and we didn't know, we didn't know the answer, we didn't have any of the training to have the answer.

The organization decided to do another round of surveying with a new consultant. (The consultant model will be addressed in the next section, participation). As a volunteer I helped prepare for the second round of surveying. This work a major portion of my field experience, was characterized by confusion. I did not understand the technical aspects of surveying or the purpose behind it (field notes). I learned this was not only an outsider problem. The survey was and is an unclear technology for the Natural Cities staff. One participant summed it up with, “It’s that we’re trying to do something that we don’t know how to do”.

No full-time member of the staff was a sociologist or had much experience with surveys except for their first round of data collection. Though they had no training in the field, they did attempt to familiarize themselves with the basics of quotas, representation, and data analysis. Another staff person described the difficulty the staff had with the process:

The social survey at one point, I sat down and wrote out like thirty goals because I was like, we are totally confused. We don’t know what we’re doing.

The Natural Cities team wanted to save the data from the first round of surveying, but format it into a new survey they were using. I was asked to take the old data and “recode” it (field notes). This process involved reading respondents’ open-ended answers and deciding whether the individual was “very concerned”, “somewhat concerned”, “concerned”, or “not concerned at all”. The guidelines to determine how I should measure a person’s comments were vague. My questions were generally met with shrugs and the results were left up to my subjective interpretation. With one class in research methods, I knew that this was a questionable way to treat data. It wasn’t that the staff was careless; they did not understand the process.

Furthermore, the data was stored in a computer program that no one knew very well. For several weeks I was asked to use this database computer program that I had never before worked with (field notes). So not only was the staff engaged in an organizational process they were unfamiliar with, they were literally using a technological process that they did not fully understand.

The last sub-meeting I attended was focused on the survey (field notes). At this meeting participants expressed a general sense of uncertainty about the second round of the survey process. There were questions about the method of data collection and concern about how representativeness is compromised based on which method is chosen. No one at the meeting had answers to these questions. One member remarked that it seemed surveys were all “fluff” anyway.

Not only was social surveying unclear to the organization because they are not trained in this area, there was further uncertainty about the survey’s purpose and its future. Once after a meeting I asked a staff person how the organization knew there was a need for the Natural Cities tool, and the response was vague (field notes). In an interview, a participant wondered about the relevance of the data collected through the social surveys:

What is going to be truly useful to community groups down the road? Because we’re trying to create tools that are going to be useful for community groups. And I find that difficult because how do we know necessarily that community groups are going to want to use this tool?... the actual numbers and data that is resulting, whether that will be useful to them in the end, we have no way of knowing yet because we haven’t done it. So I don’t know, that’s the big ambiguity of working on a project...you know on sort of long term, like...I hope we’re doing the right thing, I don’t know.

Another member questioned the value of the survey:

You know sometime I think that the information that we’re providing back to the

community group is information that they may be able to get in other ways ... so sometimes I question the value added of the program...If you look at the results of the social survey from the Mystic River Watershed, there aren't a lot of surprise sites on that list. So it might be that there's an easier way...Again, I'm not a sociologist...My understanding is that [community groups] can use the social survey to help them do organizing and that's probably a valuable benefit to them. For the stated value purpose of the Natural Cities Program, which is to identify critical ecological and socially important sites, I don't know whether that's the best way to do it. I don't know whether there's another way that's just as good and less time consuming or just as good and less resource intensive.

I think that the social information is important to the extent that it helps us to identify areas where we're going to have buy-in from the community. But I don't think the social information is necessarily telling them anything new. It's coming from them; it's the sites that are of interest to them, the issues that are of interest to them. So it's not really providing them with information, but providing us with information.

This last comment reflects how the social survey process as unclear technology connects to problematic goals. In the passage immediately before this, the participant mentioned that the survey is “probably a valuable benefit to them”. Here the survey is seen as “providing us with in information”; in other words, the social data is not for the community groups but for Natural Cities. Another staff member interpreted this same issue as linked to the tension between the goals of academia and of community empowerment.

In this participant's view, there is a conflict is between getting precise, academic data for the sake of scholarship, or conducting survey research in a way that may seen as less intellectual but more beneficial for the community:

I've categorized our options in terms of where they fall between social research and social change. And we focus the organization on social change but when we're doing a survey you know, design a survey and have it be rigorous and acceptable...what we're engaging in is social research. So we're going to fall between those two, some balance in between... in terms of theory and practice we're trying to make decisions that are representative of the community...We're

not interested in social research for the sake of social research, but we're accepting the fact that maybe the best way to go about accomplishing our goal... So we have to make decisions about what we are willing to compromise... We run into conflicts.

This staff person then continued with an example of how academic goals for certain types of data could conflict with the goals for community work:

For example in designing the survey one of the very important things that was presented to u /by the consultant sociologist] was that we need to ask about people's education level because that was an important factor in their social class. And quite frankly it's not important and in terms of social change and in terms of the work of a non-profit, that's not important. We're aware that we work in low-income communities and it's not worth it in my view...you know you're in a community where they're not that well educated, the potential for them to be embarrassed or not understand why it's important that they're well-educated for them to be able to give a good answer in terms of you know are you worried about the salt pile leaking into your river, well yes, that doesn't require.. .that's not a correlation there... There are some questions that might make the survey a better survey for social research hut that are inappropriate in a community setting and ...not to belittle the people that we're interviewing or to make them feel bad about their education or their income level or you know all these factors that are obviously a challenge in these communities. We just want to know what they're thinking; we just want to learn to listen to them better. I think we have to ask that question, are we more interested in the academic research aspect or are we more interested in being a non-profit that works with communities."

The process is difficult to grasp because of the problematic preferences of the organization:

In terms of the results if you want to show the results of our study and make claims based on that, you want to be able to be respected academically then there are certain things that we need to do in order to be able to do that. I personally think it's less important, I think that when you're working in communities you have to be willing to step away from that rigor, like I was saying before, we can't pretend that we're in a laboratory and that we're able to control our environment and decide what comes in and what goes out...we're somewhere much messier you know it's not, you're not going to control the situation, we're dealing with people and no matter how you try to form it, people don't fit well under surveys. My feeling is that you know... we have to be willing to step out of that, the accepted standards for social research if we are really going to be effective in accomplishing social change because they're just not compatible. You know

social research methods are based on natural science research methods and the environments are completely different, they're so different, they're so different on every level that I think it's the wrong approach.

Here the process of data-gathering as an effective tool for social change is questioned, relating it to community development efforts on a larger scale:

I see development data that comes in... we've been collecting that same data for fifty years and it's nice data but it's not getting us anywhere... development efforts are not working that well and I think it's high time we asked why and at least open our minds to the possibility that maybe the methods are wrong, and we need to rethink them. So I think that applies here, you know, that's what we're doing. It's a different context than [a developing nation] but it's not that different.

I'm not criticizing the survey, I think we've come through a long hard process with the survey and we've come to a good solution and it's something that I think can be improved on if we learn to consider ways of improving. If we are open to other possibilities.

Another source of ambiguity for the social survey was a sense that its future processes are unclear. Members wondered what the organization's role would be with the process:

We're talking about how do we implement it... what do we do with the data and who analyzes the data and what do we do with it when we're done... Then we expand to other cities, what part of that... do we say okay you do these steps and send us the data and we analyze it, it's like.., the pathways are endless.

We need to really figure out how much of the actual implementation of these projects we're going to be doing, or whether it's just helping them devise the action plans and giving them some advice, it's sort of. .there's a line there...we need to figure out where that is.

While ambiguity was a major characteristic of the social survey, there were indicators that other parts of Natural Cities operated under more clarity. In my field work the amount of uncertainty in the survey process overshadowed the rest of the project. In meetings other aspects of Natural Cities could be briefly explained and summed up while

for the survey there hour-long meetings dedicated to it. In contrast to prior statements of uncertainty, this participant explained the other parts of the tool:

I think certainly there's value in giving them ecological information about particular sites and there's certainly value in helping them to work through the legal system that they need to work with in order to get anything done.

I think the impact that we're having is in the legal help...and the ecological information is very important as well.

The ecological research as well seems to be more straightforward and clear than the social survey process:

We've done the short term rapid ecological assessment. And then all year long we've had students doing standard assessments. . . What we did in the summer is take the derivative of each of these sites ecologically and now we're going back and doing more normal, longer-term measurements and we're going to see, did we get it right.

In interviews, the staff frequently compared Natural Cities to the educational program and the progress it has made over the last several years:

Down the road, I've seen this happen with the education program. You have these great ideas, first you try to put them on the ground, things don't make sense, things conflict with each other, but you put people in who are really dedicated and have a lot of knowledge, and you put in some money and resources and you perfect it as you go. That's what I see happening with Natural Cities.

This participant views the educational program as a project that has been perfected in a way, as compared to the Natural Cities, which is still in progress. The educational program then does not the same level of ambiguity, and can be looked at as an example of clarity. This is partly due to the fact that it began before Natural Cities because the science director brought in the framework for ecological studies that involved students:

In the trajectory of UEI, relative to growth, the education program is about two and a half years in front of the Natural Cities Program.

So while the social survey tool involves a significant degree of ambiguity, not all parts of Natural Cities or of UEI are necessarily the same. Instead the legal and ecological processes operate with more clarity, as does the educational program.

Another aspect of Natural Cities and UEI that can be considered under the technology of organized anarchy is funding. Like the organizational preferences, the staff interpreted this process in different ways. Here I asked if the Boston College link helps with funding for UEI.

Yeah, definitely. Because we can put a university name on it which gives us more credence... One of the dangers is that you don't want to be too close to the university because then they suck off fifty percent of the grant for administration costs. ...so that's why UEI sometimes does a bit of a dance... there's also benefits to not being a part of it.

At first the participant agreed, but then described a more paradoxical situation.

Another member articulated this complicated position:

I certainly see us as an independent non-profit organization...It's very important for most of our funders to see BC gives us some kind of support but not in the way of money... and it's very important for our foundations to see us as not BC because as soon as they see a university they think the university should be paying for it...so I see us as an independent but affiliated institution.

For a few participants, the funding process played a role in the structure of the Natural Cities agenda. This participant thinks that the project fits a certain mold for foundations:

The problem offending funding is you always have to be sexy, you always have to be new, and it seems that people aren't so interested in funding projects that are already successful and already working. I think we're in an interesting niche as far as urban ecology. I think that's a new enough idea and trying new things, developing fICW things. It's good for funders.

Similarly, this member sees that the project matches what foundations want. But here the project design is described more as being catered to funders:

You can say this is all the information that we've gathered, and isn't it interesting, and this is what we're going to do with it. But I do think that there are ways that we could have the same amount of impact by saying look, we're going to go to these community meetings every month, we're going to go up to Fall River, we're going to go to Chelsea, we're going to go to East Boston, we're going to find out what they're working on and we're going to help them and that's it. Period. The end. But in order to get somebody to you know to essentially pay you to do that, you have to have a program, you have to have a more well defined project as opposed to just saying, we're going to provide legal support to these community groups. I wish that we could go to a funder and say look, we're doing good work, these are the results that we're getting, we're helping community groups with x, y, and z projects, just help us to continue to provide those services and give examples of the type of work that we're doing and what it is that we want to achieve. I don't think that's the way it works in the funder's world. They obviously want to see results, because they want to see their dollars actually doing something. But I think it's equally important to be able to, and this is a little cynical, but to provide them with sort of a dog and pony show when they show up.

The funding process is part of unclear technology not so much because the process itself is ambiguous but because the staff recognizes the inconsistencies it presents in their relationship to the university and how it could conflict with what communities would like Natural Cities to do for them. The social survey was the strongest example of unclear technology at the organization. But as I noted above, it is just one part of the program, and the others seem less ambiguous for the staff.

VIII. Participation In Natural Cities

Participation in Natural Cities and operated on several levels, internally and externally. First is the level of internal participation, individuals who are in the office on a daily basis. Next is consultant participation, individuals hired outside the office to manage certain parts of the Natural Cities project. Finally there is the participation of outside groups, the partner community groups. When fluid participation is present, “the boundaries of the organization are uncertain and changing,” (Cohen et al, p. 1).

The Natural Cities project team is comprised of the UEI executive director, the UEI science director, a project coordinator, a project associate. and an AmeriCorps volunteer, which is basically an intern role.

Because they are a non-profit organization they have AmeriCorps participants who change every year. Also there are volunteers like undergraduate and law students who help with the project. According to the interview, these areas of participation, though they may be changing, do not contribute that much to ambiguity. Another source of clarity is that the main project coordinators have been consistent. However the consultant participation in Natural Cities does present difficulty. This consultant model came from the problem that such a range of expertise is needed to create these academically rigorous methods of data collection:

Because urban ecology involves so many different disciplines, it's really hard to find even a team of three people or four people who are able to do the whole thing, so what we found is that we needed consultants to help us with particular parts of the project that we didn't know how to do on our own...we have ecologists working as consultants...working on sort of pieces of the project, developing the protocols and going out and doing the rapid assessments. . . That's a challenge to try and coordinate the pieces of the project and keep all of the consultants work on schedule and on budget and things like that.

If we have to find individual consultants and pay them on an hourly basis for their time, then it seems like maybe they're less invested in the project and they might not know what the overall goals of the project are and it might not work quite so well.

What is the cost of doing it as a consultant on a consultancy type angle? It's turnover. And also, you don't get it right the first time always.

Because resources are tight, Natural Cities cannot afford to pay for expertise in each field, and a consultant model was adopted. Theoretically this model seemed to work out. In reality the staff of Natural Cities felt they were doing a fair share of the workload. In the field I learned that an individual who was no longer with the organization had designed the social survey, compiled the data from the first round of surveying and analyzed it. When the consultant was both on contract and off, the Natural Cities staff had to make decisions despite their lack of expertise with surveys:

With [the consultant], we couldn't always get in touch to ask questions...and then the contract finished and there was a lot of leftover stuff to do and it was just left hanging but [the consultant] wasn't on contract anymore, so [we] had to by and figure things out whether we could understand [the consultants] brain or not...that was such a huge frustration to me that we'd done all this work and we didn't understand what we had done. It just drove me crazy.

When the staff realized the first round data was insufficient, a sociologist was hired as a consultant to re-work the survey. Like the first consultant his participation level varied to the extent that in the field I saw it concerned the staff who were attempting to grasp understanding of the survey process and the details of accurate quotas and representation (field notes). In the field many important decisions about how to manipulate survey data were not being made by this consultant, but were being made by the NC staff (field notes). The consultant was there to okay the process but it seemed many NC hours were spent on the 'nuts and bolts' of the process. Interviews verified this:

We had two consultants that have worked on the survey design, and we'll have a third starting soon. A lot of the work from the first round of surveys fell on [names in-house staff].

This meant that the survey process was not any one person's responsibility:

There's no one person who's like, I want to see this social tool be the best thing it's gonna be. It's distributed amongst a bunch of people who don't really know what they're doing with someone who does consulting occasionally.

I think there are some problems with responsibilities in Natural Cities. In the social survey round two, responsibility is kind of spread out. So who's ultimately responsible, who's ultimately answerable?

I also learned that a volunteer who had been present for several months, but then departed, had played a significant role in the survey process. My volunteer role was also evidence of the kinds of participation that flows in and out of the project. As March and Olsen note, with fluid participation, "no single participant dominates the choice in all its phases" (p. 25, March and Olsen). Overall the fact that there were members who played roles in the survey process that had left or had varying amounts of participation created an uncertainty about the project, and contributed to organized anarchy.

Although the fluid participation around the social survey presented a challenge and the staff expressed frustration at this, they were also optimistic about ways that the consultant model could work more clearly:

I don't think it's had a tremendously negative impact, I think it's worked out you know okay to use those consultants. I think as we go forward and get involved with more cities it may be better to have sort of a more formal relationship with the sociology department

If you can carve out a discreet piece of the project for a consultant to do then that's fine, as long as they understand sort of where it fits into the whole project. But I think long term it's a better thing to have a relationship with someone in the sociology department at BC.

The best model is to have a long term relationship with a BC faculty member... a long term relationship with someone who can be a consultant but is invested

personally in you as an organization. I think if it's the right consultant and with enough experience you can get it right the first time. As long as the organization is open to learning from its mistakes, I have no problem with learning over time.

Unlike the social survey, the ecological research tool has established the type of relationship with university staff described above. The educational program has this as well. The staff of Natural Cities recognized these as good models to build upon. Once again there are examples of clarity in the organization alongside the ambiguity.

Externally there are numerous relationships with community groups and other organizations:

There's nine entities that were listed as part of the grant for the Natural Cities Project... the government institutions. ..the executive office for environmental affairs at the state level, we had two people coming in from the Massachusetts Watershed Initiative, which is now defunct due to Romney...we have people from the U.S. Forest Service, we have researchers from Tufts and from BC, and then we had NOAH, and the Chelsea Greenspace and Recreation Committee, Eagle Eye, Mystic River Watershed Association.

As was mentioned previously, the community group relationships are rooted in the belief that people from these environmental justice communities must be making decisions about their local environment. Therefore collaboration is key for the project:

In my sort of conception of the work that we do, it's all partnership, it's all collaboration. That's why it's so important, when it's not working and when a group doesn't want to sort of be partners or doesn't know how to be a partner, then it doesn't work and we can't make that happen. We can't do our work without a partner.

Like any relationship, these inter-organizational partnerships require trust building, respect, and commitment:

If you want to have a partnership with somebody you need to be honest and have an open flow of information...[The Chelsea and East Boston partnerships] are fantastic, because we meet all the time, we talk all the time, trust each other, and things work really well.

The reason this Chelsea Creek restoration project, which is sort of our central

model, is working, is because they've got all the people involved, they're good organizers, who are all close partners and best friends, and they love us and they trust us and if they want to work with lawyers, they'll only work with us.

These partnerships are also about common agendas. Relationships in the past dissolved as Natural Cities was in the process of defining their set of ecological, social, and legal tools and shaping their goals:

We were partnered with Save the Harbor, Save the Bay, a non-profit advocating for cleaning up the harbor. When I joined about two months later they dissolved that partnership, so I didn't see too much of it. From what I saw it seemed like a rather awkward collaboration to me. It didn't seem like a good way to jointly manage projects, like they had their projects, and we had our projects, and what exactly was the partnership, and they were difficult to work with.

When we first started we were still trying to find our way.. .for a period of time I represented a watershed association in Quincy that was a very interesting urban river, lots of urban environmental problems but it was the wrong group. It was a bunch of guys from the yacht club. I got out of there pretty quickly. It didn't feel right.

There are groups that we have worked with as an organization that we no longer work with because they were just difficult to deal with in terms of you know, taking credit for projects that they weren't necessarily involved in, just sort of you know organizational issues about fundraising and about who's doing what and who's responsible for what.

These relationships were also difficult to maintain when it came to funding issues and credit for projects:

When we were working with a group in Boston that was difficult in terms of sharing credit for projects, sharing, you know, planning how we were going to function as a partnership. In the non-profit world you get judged and you get funded based on what you achieve and so it's really important that when you achieve something that gets attributed to you, to your organization.

We went into some relationships early on with some non-profits in the Boston area and they turned around and I think defected on the cooperative relationship. We went, we fundraised together and they took all the money.

The interviews indicate that the participation with community groups developed

based on how well the two organizations could work together and whether or not their agendas could be complementary. There were also comments about the stability of the community group:

There's gonna be some difficulty in maintaining relationships, whether it's because there are individual personality conflicts or because there doesn't seem to be a steady and constant presence at a community group that we're interacting with.

It's easier to work with [groups where] you have someone who will answer the phone during the day and who has time to talk with you and meet with you and has resources and will be staying around.

There was also a sense that the future of these partnerships, once the tools are complete, has not yet been clarified:

We brought people into this project and I want to make sure we give them something back of real value and I think that part we still have to be careful about. We have to make sure that the pilot partners are getting something in return.

Also new, future relationships of the project have to be defined as well, in comparison with the Chelsea and East Boston partnerships:

We don't have those kinds of relationships at the other sites. They're much more go in, gather the data, do our analysis, present it to the community groups. And if they want the kind of services and relationships that we have with the Chelsea Creek Action Group, then those other groups are going to have to find ways of sharing the partnership costs. Because our ability to do what we do for Chelsea Creek doesn't come for free. We have to locate partners and work together in sharing those partnership costs.

At the level of community groups, participation in the past was fluid as relationships dissolved when the partnerships did not work out. When the Natural Cities Project was fully established, they developed strong relationships with a few Chelsea and East Boston groups who wanted to participate in the UEI agenda, and fluidity decreased. But because the goal of the project is to expand to other urban areas, this requires new

relationships and attempts at participation. Most likely as they try out partnerships, some will work and others will not, meaning that participation will continue to be fluid. Also, as the staff noted, it is difficult to find community groups that are solidly established. Many tend to be ephemeral.

Fluid participation, one of the properties of organized anarchy, is present in Natural Cities. Internally the staff has not turned over since the project began. Because of its non-profit status, the organization will continue to turn over volunteers and AmeriCorps staff.

The fluid participation is most problematic at the level of external consultants who have worked on the social survey. Because of resource constraints, Natural Cities must maintain this model. However they recognize some of the problems it created in the past. The staff also recognizes that the type of consultant relationships used in the ecological research and the educational program operate with significantly more clarity than the social survey consultants.

Fluid participation is also problematic when it comes to the partnerships with community groups. External groups were more fluid in their participation in the past. Currently the participation of these groups is steady. However the question of fluid participation in the future is a challenge as new relationships form and change. Overall, fluid participation is an aspect of organized anarchy that cannot be altered under the current structure of the organization.

IX. Conclusions

At the Urban Ecology Institute I had the opportunity to observe and interact with a well-intentioned group that is trying to make a positive impact in the world. As we learn that human beings and our social systems are linked to natural ecosystems in an extremely complex web, we realize that long term solutions to social and ecological problems must mirror this complexity. With this understanding, UEI attempts to find solutions by encompassing the boundaries of scientific, legal, and sociological disciplines, and by trying to join the academic community with the grassroots community. UEI has an inherent duality as they attempt to maintain a link between academia and community not only in goals, but in funding as well. Their agenda will always be complex and challenging.

My set of observations and interviews from the Urban Ecology Institute demonstrated how the qualities of organized anarchy operate in the Natural Cities Program. The preferences, technology, and participation of the project all involved ambiguity, some to a greater degree than others. But there were also examples of clarity in the organization. The question remains of how these results can inform the goals of this organization. Based on my research experience I would like to make some recommendations to the Natural Cities Program.

First, recognizing organized anarchy in operation at Natural Cities can initiate a valuable conversation for the staff. This analysis can provide a framework for understanding why ambiguity is a part of their project, and establish a common ground to begin discussion. Cohen, March, and Olsen recognized the practical ramifications for this theoretical perspective:

“The great advantage of trying to see garbage can phenomena together as a process is the possibility that the process can be understood, that organizational design and decision-making can take account of its existence and that, to some extent, it can be managed.” (p. 17 Cohen et al)

It is useful for organized anarchy and the garbage can model of choice to be recognized and perhaps this can help manage it. But more often than not, it is impossible to eliminate the conditions that breed ambiguity. “There is a large class of significant situations in which the preconditions of the garbage can process cannot be eliminated” (p. 17, Cohen et al). The situation of the Urban Ecology Institute and the Natural Cities Program corresponds to this analysis.

The fundamental duality of UEI as a non-profit organization linked to a university will not change because their funding is based upon this. Furthermore, their goal is to find ways to collaborate academic research with community action. This means that the staff’s experience of ambiguity when it comes to preferences and processes will most likely remain. But to recognize and reflect upon this confusion and identify some of these reasons behind it can be a useful exercise for the staff and enhance organizational efficacy.

It is likely that fluid participation in the organization will also not improve due to the structure of the organization. The consultant model which created difficulties for the staff will not be altered. In terms of the social survey, hopefully UEI will be able to establish more reliable and fruitful consultant relationships. At the level of external participation, the various relationships with community groups will continue to change as the project develops and expands, groups will join and abandon partnerships, and community groups will disintegrate. This will continue to be a challenge for Natural Cities.

Although the conditions that brought about ambiguity remain, Natural Cities and UEI makes progress. A situation of organized anarchy “does enable choices to be made and problems sometimes to be resolved even when the organization is plagued with goal ambiguity and conflict, with poorly understood problems that wander in and out of the system, with a variable environment, and with decision makers who may have other things on their minds” (p. 37, March and Olsen). Furthermore, the theory organized anarchy cannot account for the entire Natural Cities project.

There were, and will continue to be, portions of the organizational processes that are not ambiguous, where the staff makes a choice and finishes a project with clarity in goals, technology, and participation. The data showed that generally the legal and ecological tools in Natural Cities were running significantly smoother than the social survey. Also, the educational program was referred to several times as a model for organizational clarity. Basically there are things that are going well in Natural Cities, and things that are going less well. The staff recognizes that much of the ambiguity has to do with the fact they are part of a new field, they are a new organization, and there will be mistakes made and learned from. The question then is how Natural Cities can learn from these situations, and if a process exists in the group for this opportunity.

The interviews revealed that the staff has ideas about what is lacking and what could help:

There are sometimes communication difficulties. I don't think it's deliberate, I think it's the matter that we all have more work to do than is really feasible. We don't have the privilege of being able to consider collectively the decisions that get made... I guess we don't make it as much of a priority. We have weekly meetings or bi-weekly meetings of the Natural Cities program but that's happening and eight thousand other things are happening that day usually at the same time... We don't have the luxury of being able to sit down and really say, this is what I'm working on, this is what I'm wondering about, what do you think

about this. We can do that to some extent but we're often limited in how much we're able to do that.

I think part of the confusion is due to the fact that is not a lot of opportunity for frequent check-ins with each other about what we're doing and how we think the program is developing and a sort of meta-analysis of the project. Because we're all so involved in the day-to-day activities of getting the work that it's hard to step back and say, okay for the next two months this is what we need to do and this is how we need to do it and this is the division of responsibility.

These indicate that at meetings, a structured space for discussing points of confusion and issues of concern is lacking. During my field work, in the meeting agendas there was never a slot reserved for these issues. But outside of meetings, the staff expressed frustration at certain parts of the project. These issues were not brought to up at the meetings, which could be, and should be, a time for those to be resolved.

Beyond structuring in a space for the technical aspects of the project, it seems that a space for further reflection on lessons learned and organizational values would benefit Natural Cities. I learned that there are staff retreats once a year, and it would seem this is sufficient. However it seems a more frequent dialogue is needed:

I would like to have more conversations, not about the nuts and bolts of how we're going to do things, hut how are we doing in urban ecology. Because it reflects your values and your morals. It's difficult to talk about but that's central to how you're doing your work personally, and you get so few opportunities to do that, to share your values.

This relates back to the things that are working with clarity in Natural Cities. In the analysis I showed how the organizational preferences of the staff differed in some key respects but also had some fundamental similarities based on values about helping underprivileged communities. Perhaps reflecting more upon these common values can help increase organizational efficacy.

In my introduction I referred to my experience at another non-profit organization.

Its meeting structure contrasts with UEI because of the way they structure reflection into every meeting. Meetings begin with icebreakers that frequently reflect personal and organizational values. They end with a general check-in where each participant relates how they felt about the meeting's progress. The meetings lasted an average length of time. Reflection is a part of this organization's efficacy, and they strive to protect it. Perhaps one substantial way UEI could benefit is not by adding more meetings to their already busy schedule or more weekend retreats, but by simply re-structuring their meetings.

Another practice at the peace and justice non-profit organization was that whenever a project came to a close, there was a meeting designated to discuss how the entire process went. This was a space to examine the pros and cons, what went wrong and what went well. This reflection for learning lessons is extremely valuable because the group has a chance to discuss the effective and less effective aspects of the projects, recognize them, and make decisions for the future based on this. Something like this practice could also be valuable for Natural Cities. These are simple but potentially beneficial recommendations to the Urban Ecology Institute.

In my thesis project, I realized that clear answers are hard to find, in research, in an organization, or in life. Like UEI and other social movement organizations, we can find ways of looking at the world, present perspectives and make the best decisions possible based on the situation. My project itself became a reflection on the ambiguity that has characterized this year for me. The goals, processes, and participants in my life are in flux at this time of transition. These qualities are not only in organizations but can be found in most sectors of society and in our personal lives as well.

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APPENDIX A

Field Notes

January 27th 2003

—9:30 am — arrive at the Urban Ecology Institute. The offices are in the basement of the Boston College Law School. Not sure who to talk to about being there. Give a wave to Aaron Toftier. He has a desk surrounded by moveable walls. There are a few other desks set up like this in the large rectangular room. There is a conference table and a small kitchen at the end of the room. The windows are at ground level along the back wall. There is one office with a door, it is Charlie's. Aaron is speaking with someone, seems to be a young law student, about legal stuff seems to be a case and doing research on it. He greets me and asks me to wait. I look at the bulletin board and wait. The bulletin board has lots of information on env. And EJ groups in the Boston area, job openings, conferences. Etc

—9:45 am Aaron finishes his conversation and brings me in to see Sherri. Her desk is in a room across from Aaron's cubicle. This room has five others desks and they all are for the AmeriCorps VISTA people (Volunteers In Service To America). The room is brightly decorated and everyone is busy at work at their computers. Sherri and I are re-introduced. I ask if she remembers me from when I visited UEI in December and attended a Natural Cities meeting. Aaron leaves me with Sherri and returns to his desk.

I indicate to Sherri that I am available as a volunteer, to help out in whatever way I can as I conduct my participatory observation. Sherri indicates that one of the things she needs help with the social survey research. She shows me a copy of their old social survey and the data collected from it. She also shows me a copy of their new survey which they have updated to make shorter and easier to complete. She tells

Coding/Theoretical

Legal expertise

*Links to Boston environmental
environmental justice
groups and groups networking
External participation*

Non-pro/it status

Social survey as community input

me that there is a sociology professor, Paul Gray, who is helping with the survey now. Today she needs to find some statistics by using the U.S. Census website. She briefly explains that they use the social survey to hear what sites the community is concerned with. They want to make sure that they have representative sample of the communities. This is why the Census data is important.

—10:00am — 12 pm

I am given someone else's computer who is not in the office and look up statistics on Chelsea and East Boston on the U.S. Census website. I review the data that UEI collected through previous round of surveying. I compare the stats they have to the Census stats. Some of the stats UEI has are incongruent with the stats that the Census has. For example, the UEI Chelsea stats indicate that a majority of the respondents homes, but the U.S. census shows that the majority of people in Chelsea are renters. I see on Census that Spanish is a major language spoke in Chelsea. I ask Sherri if they do the survey in Spanish as well. She tells me no. they do not. She says that there are many languages spoken in these communities and it's difficult to have the survey translated. I ask how they get the surveys completed. Sherri: the last round they brought them to environmental community groups' meetings. This time they are hoping to send students they know through youth groups in these communities to go door to door and have surveys completed. Sherri mentions concern for making sure quota is representative. She is interested in community-based solutions, and mentions a book she's reading called "Whose Reality Counts".

—12:00pm There is a Natural Cities meeting held. This meeting is upstairs in the cafeteria for law students. The cafeteria is pretty busy with people studying and eating lunch, typing on laptops, etc. At the meeting, Charlie, Aaron,

Sociologist involved in survey process participation

Census stats used as descriptor of community

NC wants representative sample of community w/survey

Chelsea and East Boston: environmental justice communities

Last survey sample was owned their unrepresentative in some ways

Spanish-speaking communities immigrant populations Survey only in English

Last survey was not for general public; for environmental groups in community

NC wants representative sample of community w/survey

Sherri's EJ ideal of grassroots involvement

Sherri, and Kathleen are in attendance. Much of the discussion is about funding. Many groups and organizations are mentioned. The social survey progress is reported by Sherri and Kathleen. Question of representativeness raised and how to reach all the different neighborhoods. Charlie questions why we have to go to all the different neighborhoods. why not just get the number of surveys we need completed. I mention that for example because there are different concerns in different geographic areas of the town we should cover all the areas. At meeting Sherri and Kathleen do not speak as much as Aaron and Charlie. Everyone reports back to Charlie and he indicates whether or not that sounds good to him. He gives more updates funding issues with the group, seems to mainly address Aaron with those issues.

*Funding issues-participation
Links to Boston
environmental groups and
Environmental justice groups/
networking
NC wants representative
sample of community w/survey
Lack of knowledge on
survey process ambiguity*

Structure/hierarchy of UEI

Funding issues

—1 :30 pm Meeting is over and I return to Sherri's desk with her. She makes a comment somewhere along the lines of "Who knows what happens at those meetings."

*Ambiguity
Staff's lack of clarity on project*

February 3rd 2003

—9:30 am Arrive at UEI. I go to Sherri's desk, greet her, and put my jacket and things on the chair next to her. This has become my corner. I chat with Sherri briefly and then she tells me what she needs help with for the day and that there is a meeting that day for Natural Cities.

—9:45 am - She would like me to help explain the purpose behind the survey questions and hopes my sociology background will help. She says that this is important for the tool that they are putting together so people understand why the survey is an important step for social data for determining important ecological sites in a community. Sherri expresses her concern that although I may not know exactly what I am doing and this is boring work but that it is a big help. Sherri asks me what sociology makes of factors like race and gender in terms of environmental concern. I tell her that from what I have read, environmental concern is present in

*"The Tool"-Natural Cities project
as ecological, legal and social data
gathering process to target specific
sites in a community
Ambiguity-unclear technology
Staffing constraints-volunteer role
too much responsibility*

various races and classes and in both genders. She seems to agree. But we then agree that the representativeness is important to get as much input as possible. I mention my research interests with Natural Cities and my interest in how NC is involved with communities. I show her a copy of my then-current proposal. She looks it over and says that “Charlie does not want us to be called an environmental group. We are an environmental justice group.”

Environmental justice ideals Of UEI

I am given a computer to work at and it takes me a long time to figure out what exactly I am doing and why because I am not familiar with the survey or the project yet. I ask Sherri about what kinds of Chelsea groups NC works with and she mentions Chelsea Greenspace and groups Recreation Coalition, says it is a community group but no affirmative answer on if it is grassroots.

*Links to Boston environmental
and environmental justice
groups/networking
External participation*

—10:00 am - I type up a document with some points on what surveying can do and why getting a representative sample is important. I sit at someone else’s computer again who is not in the office yet. I still have not had a conversation with the other VISTA people in the office who sit at their desks and do their work.

—11:00 am— I finish the document and give it to Sherri. She seems to be very happy with it and thanks me. Kathleen and Sherri show me some big posterboards with maps of a site called Parkway Plaza in Chelsea that UEI is involved with. We are in a small back storage room. Sherri brings up the social survey and Paul and expresses frustration at his involvement, not getting back to her questions. She says something like “oh this is just office gossip” and Kathleen says “no, it’s not gossip. just talk”. There is not much else for me to do to help out and they send me home early

*Lack of knowledge or survey process
Unease about survey process
Unclear technology*

February 7th 2003

—9:30 am arrive at UEI. It is snowing tons.

Usual routine has become that I enter, mumble a hello to the other VISTA people, greet Sherri and we chat, then she lets me know what is going on for the day what I can do. She informs me that there is a 10:00 am meeting with Paul Gray, who is from the BC sociology department and is helping with the social survey. Sherri tells me that she is pleased because she has a lot of questions for him. Reiterates he has not replied to her questions.

*Ambiguity time/ear technology of
Unease about survey process*

—10:30 am Paul arrives late. We begin the meeting at the conference table in the UEI offices. This time Eric Strauss is in attendance as well, in addition to Sherri, Kathleen, Charlie, Aaron. Discussion begins: Purpose of survey reiterated, to be representative of the community and develop consensus around certain sites in the community. Decided that youth groups will distribute the surveys in neighborhoods. Mentioned that the education program at UEI and various environmental groups they know have links with area youth groups. Paul describes how they are taking data from the last round of surveying and re-formatting it to fit into the new survey. Recall Paul's comment something like "There's a tendency for this population to defer to experts" in regards to sure there are no leading questions in the survey. Also that "this is not a highly educated population". Group agrees that there will be a training for the surveyors. First Paul will train UEI staff and then UEI staff will train the youths to do the surveying. Everyone agrees that it's a good idea to add in a question about what are you happy about in the community. Kathleen comments that this will make Roseann happy. Roseann is the director of Chelsea Greenspace and Recreation Committee.

*Survey purpose — community's
concerns about specific sites*

*Networked with community youth
groups through their education
program*

*Perspective on community 'making
tendency.., to defer to experts... not
highly educated'*

*Links to Boston environmental
groups and environmental justice
groups networking*

February 10th 2003

—12:30 pm Natural Cities Meeting upstairs in law school cafeteria. Charlie, Aaron, Sherri, Eric in attendance. Kathleen on vacation. Charlie mentions a plan for possible moving of the

Expansion of organization

offices. Think it involves BC purchasing houses in the Newton area immediately by BC. Would much more spacious. Meeting continues like last ones. Much talk of funding, Charlie mentions Carnegie funding. Updates on relations with various groups. It is someone's birthday in the office and they bring us each cake. I pass out my proposal and everyone begins to look at it. I say that I want my research open with them. I stress that I hope my research is clear; that while **I'm** in the office, everything is data, but I don't want that to mean that they are careful around me. Aaron cracks joke about making fun of Charlie in my presence. Everyone laughs. I mention that I will be conducting interviews as well. Everyone begins to thumb through the proposal. Charlie says, "Well this is a fascinating question. . .very important. And there certainly is a role for organizations like this." Meeting continues. Sherri reports back on a Greenspace Alliance meeting. Discussion of a summer program that UEI is helping to run. They are hiring an intern. Discussion of the "collaborative".

—1:30 pm meeting ends. Not sure what I do then. Help Sherri with something?

—4:00 pm leaving office. On the way out I ask Charlie how I can get in touch with Max Kennedy for an interview. He says Max is more of a "virtual" participant at UEI through email and phone and that I'll have to email him, chances are he'll be too busy. Charlie mentions a group called Alternatives for Community and Environment that he used to work for. Says that he left them because he felt that they weren't doing things from the community up? But that now they seem to be very environmental justice oriented. He says that that would be an interesting model for an EJ study.

February 21st 2003

—9:30 am Arrive at the office. Sherri is not

Link to university/role as research be institution

Funding issues

Carnegie-a major foundation?

Communication with Boston environmental groups and environmental justice to be pretty groups/networking-external role participation

UEI recognizes role for themselves in environmental justice movement

Communication with Boston environmental groups and environmental justice groups/networking-external participation

Co-director who is a virtual participant

*UEI in comparison with other environmental justice groups
Implying that UEI not ideal to study as an organization involved in EJ?*

there yet. Basement location. Two closed offices, Charlie's and Max's. I note that have yet to see Max in the office. Rest of office is desks with partitions. Room for AmeriCorp Vista people with desks w no partitions. Windows only in partitioned room. Conference table out in the open. Small kitchen, fridge, ceo-friendly products and notes. Maps of Boston area, watersheds, and world on walls. Pictures of UEI sites, like creeks and waterfronts, pictures of students with staff. One of the first pictures I noticed when I walked into the VISTA room was a large black and white photograph print, framed, of Robert F Kennedy walking with a dog by his side, on a road out west. deserted, snow-capped mountains in the background. Newspaper clippings of small environmentalist victories, children of the education programs, their scribbled thank-you's and drawings. It seems Sherri is late. Kathleen comes into the office (her desk is outside in Aaron's area, partitioned as well). She tells me that it would be really helpful if someone in the office could be proficient at FileMaker Pro. She mentions that if I would like to look at something else regarding Parkway Plaza. I realize she was not at last meeting when I handed out my proposal. I tell her that I have changed focus and I will give her a copy of my proposal. I print one out and give it to her and tell her that I would appreciate any comments or questions.

Non-present director

Source of funding?

Ambiguity unclear technology

—10:00 am By this time Sherri arrives and puts me to work on the social survey. Now I am using FileMaker Pro and I'll be manipulating the data from the first round of social surveying. She has to find a computer first for me to work on. First I am put at the computer I usually work at. But then the VISTA person arrives whose desk it is. So she gets a key that is for getting into Max's office so she can set me up on the computer there. She has to load FileMaker Pro onto that computer. Sherri says something like, "I don't know why we have this office, it's never even used. Well, no,

non-present director/staff skepticism at his role

sometimes it is. . . “ I am all set up. Then Aaron comes in and says he needs the office for an interview he’s doing of a person coming into UEI. So I am finally set up at Aaron’s computer instead. I am instructed to familiarize myself with FileMaker Pro. Spend a couple hours trying to do this. Intermittently check email and cnn.com. Kathleen approaches me and says she has a couple points about my proposal. She points out a couple errors in my description of how Natural Cities runs. I have described her as a scientist because I was under the impression that she had experience in biology. She said no, she was not what she’d call a scientist. She says she is leaving in August and a lawyer would be filling her position. I asked her about the national model versus the work they do now with these groups. She said that the national model is what gets them more funding. She said, “There is a difference between the project and the program.”

Fluid participation
Another lawyer to be hired

Funding for big mode/project vs program
Multiple agendas

February 24th, 2003

—9:30 am Arrive and Sherri sets me up on FileMaker Pro to set up a database where they’ll transfer the old survey data and add the new survey data. I have difficulty understanding this program. Ask others for help; they are not really familiar with it either. My ‘familiarizing’ the last time did not help much. Melissa, one of the VISTAs, helps me.

Ambiguity — unclear technology
Lack of knowledge for survey process

—12:30 pm Natural Cities Meeting. Aaron, Sherri, Charlie, Eric, Kathleen in attendance. Sherri gives update summer program. A city greening project involving a forestry group. Talk of funding for the project, paying an intern. The Urban Ecology Collaborative discussed, ‘the partnership: Lots of group names interorganizational. Seem to be professional groups as well. Mystic River Watershed group mentioned. Difficult to understand relations with these groups based on the meeting talk. Discussion of Friends of Alewife group. Seems to be conflict with this

Co-project with Boston environmental group
Part of a city-wide collaborative/network participation
Link to professional environmental groups participation
Complex inter-organizational relations
Link to grassroots community group

group? Recall a comment about her being 'difficult' or 'intense'. I ask what kind of a group this is. Charlie says that is a good question. Aaron responds, grassroots community. There is an Alewife reservation and a project to help protect it. Question of what Natural Cities role is in this.

—possible conflict of interest somehow

—1:30pm Meeting ends. I continue work on FileMaker Pro setting up database through afternoon.

Natural Cities role in relation to a grassroots project

March 10th 2003

—9:30 am Arrive at office. Over the spring break received an email from Kathleen. She is writing up the survey process and would like comments on the FileMaker Pro, the database program that I and others have had much difficulty with. Assume this write-up is part of the tool process. I did not respond to email. Database is all set so Kathleen and Sherri set me up coding the responses from written answers into categories of 'not concerned', 'a little concerned', 'somewhat concerned' and 'very concerned'. Based on my interpretation of the person's written answers. This coding is being done so that the old data can still be used with the new survey set-up. I go through each record in the database and code the answers. Tedious. Check email and cnn.com for visual breaks.

Lack of communication on survey difficulties

*Subjective interpretation of community concerns through survey process
Unclear technology*

—1.00 pm Lunch break. Have lunch at the conference table, joining few VISTA people there. Have small talk with them. Overhear Charlie and Aaron discussing funding issues. "pushing for a grant" and "dealing with these guys". Mention of BC's funding. "Kennedy can get them a million".

Funding issues

Link to University/role as research institution

—1.30 pm Natural Cities Meeting in law school cafeteria. Charlie, Eric, Aaron, Sherri, Kathleen in attendance. Aaron begins meeting with a "plea for gentleness", says that everyone is extremely busy and stressed out and that understanding is necessary at this point. Charlie

and Eric talk about “pilot methodologies” that were “phase 1” of the project. Now “phase 2” is “ “modifications, adjustments, expansion”.

Abstract talk. Charlie begins to talk about writing up a big report for funders, to be presented in June at a luncheon or dinner. To report on the progress of UEJ. Kathleen says she will invite people from community groups, to get community-based feedback on Natural Cities. Tell groups about next steps based on legal scientific data NC has compiled. Charlie says something like in the past learned that it’s difficult to schedule a meeting with all of these? groups. Discussion of identifying sites to restoration — potential for ecological outcomes —vision for what site could become. Scientific data for communities. Collection of ecological data is for communities to be involved in. Aaron comments to Charlie and Eric about what step is the community involvement in, first a professional ecological assessment or first go to community groups. Unanswered. Charlie and Eric talk about “rapid assessment” and making some changes to the way it’s done. Charlie mainly refers to Eric for ‘ok’ on what he’s said. Kathleen asks how all of these new changes to rapid assessment affect the writing she’s been doing for the tool. It seems she has brought a big write-up of something to the meeting, presumably to share. She does not though. Meeting concludes. Sherri and Aaron remain for a moment with me and I ask them why I am so confused about UEI. “you’re not the only one” Aaron says. “Oh it’s crystal clear, isn’t it?” Aaron says ecologist assess site and “theoretically” the community is involved. I ask if there’s a need for a tool like this. Aaron said something like “we’re not sure”. I asked him what he does on a daily basis. He says that community groups go directly to him as a lawyer and say what they need, an appeal , comments on a site, etc. He also explains that community groups helped to create the project tool that UEI is working on. that they gave a lot input about what they need from UEI Aaron tells me to make sure I ask him when I

The big model” national project design

Report back to funders

*Report back to community groups
Community group feedback on
Natural Cities Project*

Difficult to access community groups

*Community-based research based on
Natural Cities’ model of ecological
data gathering*

*Community participation fits in
somewhere, not addressed at this
meeting
Structure hierarchy of UEI*

*Ambiguity
Lack of clarity on Natural Cities
Project*

*Inconsistent goals
“Theoretical” community involvement
Lack of clarity on project*

Legal expertise to community groups

*Community groups helped design big
model project tool*

am confused about anything.

—2:30 pm Return to office, to Sherri's desk. Ask what I can do next. I ask her why UEI is so hard to understand. She responds "I've been here eight months and I don't get it completely... because it operates on so many different levels..., it evolves inside this bubble of understanding and if you're not inside the bubble you don't get it."

*Unclear goals technology
Lack of clarity on project organization*

Structure/hierarchy of UEI

—2:45 pm Do coding for another hour and a half.

Note subjectiveness again. On certain phrases written by individuals I ask Sherri, Kathleen, or Aaron for clarification. For example a mention of a certain park, like John Doe Park. New coded survey divided into 'parks/open spaces' and 'playing fields'. My concern that what if a playing field is actually named 'John Doe Park'. In my experience there are many baseball fields named 'park'. If the person is actually concerned about the condition of a playing field but based on my limited knowledge of the community I think he/she is concerned about a green park/open space, then I am misrepresenting him/her. On some questions Sherri/Kathleen/Aaron knew the locations and were able to clarify. Several they did not know and instructed me to fill it in as a park.

*Unclear technology
Loss of validity of survey results b / c
of subjective interpretation on my part*

*Loss of validity due to carelessness?
Time constraints? Laziness? Lack of
knowledge?
Possible errors in representing
community*

March 17th 2003

—9:30am Arrive to office. Sherri informs me that she will be out of the office all next week. I am set up on a computer to continue coding. I begin to notice that there were many categories the people were mentioning that were not in the new survey and therefore could not be represented unless new categories were added. I begin a list of these.

*Community concerns that cannot be
expressed through social survey*

—11:30 am Sherri, Kathleen, and I meet briefly to discuss this and other questions I may have about survey. I suggest that some new categories be added, like general pollution',

*Certain community concerns in
regards to their environmental not*

infrastructure — sidewalks, roads', etc. Sherri and Kathleen determined this was not necessary because these would not be sites that UEI would be concerned with. No changes made to survey. I continue doing the survey coding through the afternoon.

addressed b c of organizational goals

March 17th, 2003

—9:30 am Arrive to office. I put my things next to Sherri's desk, then head to Kathleen. Greet her and ask what I can do. She asks me to work on the icebreaker and script for the training for surveyors. Kathleen tells me that the 'training for the trainers' will be held Wednesday. I tell her I can not make it. Kathleen says she's sorry I was not told ahead of time about it so I could have arranged to be there. I am instructed by Kathleen to call Paul Gray and check what he's done for the training and what I can do to help. I head to Sherri's computer desk because she is not in the office. I leave a message with Paul Gray explaining that I am helping to put together an outline script for the Wednesday training. I begin to work on the outline.

—11:00 am I ask Kathleen to review my progress. I ask Kathleen if part of the script should be the surveyors telling respondents about the local community group and UEI so that they can get involved if they'd like to. Kathleen unsure if 'VET will be publicized' in the surveying process. I say that if UEI is using the data it seems to make sense that people know that. Kathleen agrees and says I should bring this up to Aaron and Sherri. I ask about the involvement of community groups with the survey at this point in time because in my understanding the project vision is community based research but as of how it is UEI doing the research on their own through local youth groups they are in touch with. Sherri says because "we need to get them done". Says that she is pretty sure that the community groups are aware that there is a second set of surveys happening but they are not involved in data

Lack of community involvement in survey process

Organizational goals/timeline

Organizational goals timeline

collection. “I think we are rushed” she said. I asked if the project plan seems to get in the way of actually using community based involvement in terms of the survey and Kathleen thought a moment and said “yes, it seems to”. I ask Kathleen if it is better for the respondent to write in their answers alongside the surveyor. We agree there would be fewer mistakes. I mention that I think it’s better for a community person to write it in on their own.

*Project vs program project wins
sometimes resulting in “theoretical”
community involvement*

—3:00 pm Meet with Aaron and Kathleen to give update on preparation for the training. Give Aaron and Kathleen copy of the script I put together. It is a rap sheet of how the surveyor will approach respondent. Still no call back from Paul Gray so Aaron says he will call him.

participation

March 18th, 2003

Receive an email from Kathleen. She has asked Paul Gray if having respondent write it in is better. He disagrees. I write back to Kathleen to tell her I think it is more empowering for a community person to fill it out on their own versus a surveyor. She responds and disagrees, thinks that people will think it is “just another survey”.

March 21st 2003

—9:45 am Arrive. Kathleen shows me her notes from the training on Wednesday. Shows me a general timeline for the survey process she has put together. Tell me they are not surveying door to door any longer, they are going to grocery stores and other public locations. Tells me that it was taped and that I should watch it. Asks me to give suggestions on the survey wording, change it to read-out-loudable’ versus readable.

Education program involved

—10:30am I am set up in Charlie’s office—he is on vacation for the week - to watch the training video on the small camcorder. There are

VISTAs at the training, Melissa and Drew, who are involved with the youth groups who will be doing the surveying, as well as Leah who seems to head up that program. Aaron explains to them the purpose of the survey: “As an organization. we don’t go into a place and say these are the sites.. .We identify sites of concern to the community. . . rather ask them what are the sites they are concerned about. So the sites have community interest and there’s sort of a grassroots impulse to get involved. . . a mechanism for community groups to do outreach too” Note that it seems 50 is the chosen number of surveys to get back from each town.

—11:30 am At Sherri’s computer begin work on the survey wording.

—12:30 pm Meet with Aaron, Leah, Kathleen about training the youth groups. I mention to Aaron that it seems 50 is not enough to be representative of a community. He says he has to trust Paul Gray’s expertise on social surveying. Said something about it all being “fluff” anyway, that surveys can say whatever you want them to. Kathleen expressed concern about the amount of work Paul Gray is doing. That Sherri seems to have trouble with him answering her questions. Kathleen wants to know more clearly what sort of things are compromised depending on data collection — like door to door versus a grocery store. Feels Gray is not providing enough of that information for them and is just going along with whatever they decide. Says “and we are paying him all this money”. Aaron says he needs to know if people are unhappy with how the survey is going. I say the number 50 just sounds like not enough in a city of 30,000 but that it’s true Paul Gray has been doing this for a long time, and this is for a specific, narrow thing. ecological sites so perhaps it’s different. At the end of meeting I explain to them that my field research is coming to an end, a process of “disengaging” and that I am sorry I can’t be

Unclear technology
Unease with survey process/lack of clarity on project

Unclear technology
Lack of knowledge on social surveying

Funding issues

more a part of the training and surveying. I say that I will be doing interviews in the next couple weeks. Kathleen and Aaron thank me for all my help.

I finish up at the computer and Kathleen comes by to tell me to email Sherri any final comments I have for the survey. Kathleen asks about my thesis progress. I say I'm still focused on Natural Cities' places in environmental justice. She says something like "well we're not so much directly involved.., have you heard of the group Charlie founded called Alternatives for Community and Environment? That group is... but I guess urban ecology does have that social aspect...."

Comparison with other environmental justice groups

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule

1. Demographics

Name

Age

Educational history

2. Background

Can you tell me “the story” of your professional career, and about how you ended up at UEI? What sort of work experiences have you had?

If you changed jobs, why did you make the change from one job to another?

Tell me about urban ecology and why you are interested in it? How or why is it important to you? (Founders: Can you tell me about your goals and visions when you founded UEI? Have those changed? If so, how and why?)

3. UEI & Natural Cities - Goals

Describe what UET is? What are its operating principles/goals?

Describe Natural Cities to me? What are its operating principles/goals and how does this fit into LEI?

What is your role in Natural Cities? What exactly do you do for the project? Can you give some specific examples of what you’re currently working on?

4. Time and energy allocation internal participation

Can you describe to me how your time and energy is allocated at your job? Maybe use percentages to explain how your energy and time is allocated.

What do you do on a daily basis? What do you need to get done in the next week? In the next month?

Through the summer?

Are you satisfied with where your time is allocated to? Why or why not?

If you could adjust it in any way, what would you change?

Do you feel that would be possible? Why or why not?

Among your job tasks are there specific areas that you like better? Why?

Have you ever tried to arrange your job so that you can spend more time in these areas?

How did that

turn out?

5. Internal participation

Can you tell me about people in the past who have been involved in the Natural Cities Program?

Directors, associates, interns, volunteers’?

How much time did those people spend at UEI? Why did they leave?

What kind of an effect do you think the coming and going of people has on the project?

6. Community relationships — external participation

Describe the different groups that Natural Cities collaborates with?

How and when did these relationships begin?

How many are community groups? Are they what you'd call grassroots'?

How many are non-profit organizations?

What kind of relationship does UEI and Natural Cities has with environmental justice communities?

Why are these inter-organizational relationships a part of the NC project? How do they relate to the tool? How do you know they need the tool?

Have there been any groups in the past that NC was involved with and now is not? What happened?

Are there groups that NC has decided specifically not to work with? Reasons why?

What is your communication like with both types of groups? Meet regularly? Key individuals?

What kind of time and energy do these organizational relationships take?

What kinds of positive or negative effects do you think these relationships have on UEI and NC? Specific examples?

Are there any difficulties in maintaining relationships with either type of organization?

7. Other inter-organizational relationships — external participation

What sort of coalitions or collaboratives is UEI a part of? Why?

What types of other organizations are part of this?

What role does UEI/NC play in those coalitions?

What kind of time and energy do these organizational relationships take?

Have there ever been coalitions that UEI was a part of but now is not?

8. Link to university

Describe the relationship UEI and Natural Cities has with Boston College?

What kind of positive or negative effects do you think this relationship has on UEI and NC? Specific examples?

9. Funding/or UFI & Natural Cities

Describe the relationship UEI and Natural Cities has with funding foundations?

What kind of time and energy do these organizational relationships take?

What kinds of positive or negative effects do you think this has on UEI and NC? Specific examples?

Can you tell me about your role when it comes to funding at UEI? Do you write grants or proposals?

10. Perceptions of organization and work

Are you satisfied with what this organization is doing? Why or why not? Any specific examples? For example, is there anything you feel Natural Cities or UEI should be doing that it isn't? Or is there anything you feel Natural Cities or UEI should not be doing that it is? Specifics. Why or why not?

Have you tried to influence the project because of this? How did that turn out?

What sort of demands or pressures do you feel with your job? Be specific.

Any conflicting demands with your job?

How could the project and the program be conflicting? Meaning the theoretical tool and on-the-ground what Natural Cities is doing? Give specific examples.

Can you tell me about the principles or morals or guidelines that you try to follow in your life and professional career? How do these relate to UEI and NC?

11. *Compare Field Notes/Validity*

- While I spent time at UEI I noticed several occasions where people in the office joked about no one understanding the organization. Can you elaborate on this; tell me why you think these comments are made, etc. What are your thoughts on this?

- While I was working on the survey I learned that in the theoretical tool, the surveying is done by community groups. But in reality, NC is using the UEI education program's contacts with youth groups to do surveying. What are your thoughts on this?

- How do you think trying to be a research institution and a non-profit organization could be problematic? Specific examples?

My analysis has become focused on a sociological theory called organized anarchy. The theory is that every organization, to some extent, operates like an organized anarchy. This is not to say that an organization is bad or inefficient, but in social theory, this is an inescapable fact of organizations.

Organized anarchies are characterized by problematic goals, unclear technology or processes, and fluid participation. This means that it could be difficult to negotiate the various goals, that there are processes or technologies that the members of the organization don't fully understand, and that there are people who come and go with the organization or who give varying amounts of time. I think that UEI is in a difficult position as a research institution linked to a university and also a non-profit that wants to remain linked to the grassroots community. All of this contributes to a sense of ambiguity or a lack of clarity in the organization that can affect choices and decisions that are made on a daily basis.

This is not to say that nothing is accomplished despite this, organizations like UEI continue to make decisions, solve problems, and move forward on their agenda. But ambiguity plays out in many ways in organizations and I think this perspective can shed light on Natural Cities and on other organizations. and provide a space for discussion.

Does this sort of analysis help you think about UEI and specifically Natural Cities in any way? Does it make sense to you? What are your thoughts on this?