CONNECTING ENVIRONMENTALISM TO DEMOCRACY THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

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How does participating in environmental stewardship (like helping to plant a million trees) strengthen the roots of democracy?

Who participates in volunteer stewardship in our nation’s cities?

Are these types of activities related to other kinds of environmental and civic participation?

How does the organizational structure of the activity relate to the nature of civic participation?
Studying Urban Initiatives

- Aim to plant trees and increase the canopy
- Involves Public/private partnerships
  - NYC and NY Restoration Project: Million Trees NYC
  - DC and Casey Trees
  - Philadelphia and Pennsylvania Horticulturalist Society: Plant One Million Campaign
- Explicit role for citizen volunteers to plant the trees and steward them in different capacities
Varied Organizational Structures

- Central coordination in New York City
- NGO Management through Casey Trees and citizen foresters in DC
- Indigenous structure of local groups in Philadelphia
Studying Volunteer Stewardship

- In person survey of volunteers
- Random selection from among the eligible adult volunteers in NYC (Philadelphia and Washington DC)
- Response rate was very high
  - 92.7% in NYC
  - 98.7% in DC
  - ?? in Philadelphia
- Follow-up telephone interview with stratified sample
Geography of Survey Respondents (Home Zip Codes)
## Comparison of Civic Engagement for Survey Respondents and National Sample Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic Action</th>
<th>Percent of Philly Stewards</th>
<th>Percent D.C. Stewards</th>
<th>Percent NYC Steward</th>
<th>Percent US Pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted an elected government representative</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a public, town, community board, or school meeting</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a protest</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12.8%*</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted the Media to Express Views</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave a speech</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held or ran for public office</td>
<td>2.4%*</td>
<td>1%*</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in political discussion on the Internet</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for a political party</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates NOT statistically significant.
What Comes First??

- Excluding voting and religious activities, environmental stewardship precedes the development of democratic citizenship

- There is a reciprocal relationship between stewardship and civic engagement

- Those who were active stewards for longer have also been more civically engaged for longer
“It’s always been important to me because I feel better, I feel healthier. I feel like I contribute something....I grew up on the Lower East Side where so many buildings were burned out or abandoned ...that’s why I got involved with community gardens. So, that’s where it all started” (Maria, 52 years-old).
Digging in the Dirt Strengthens the Roots of Democracy

• In an era of financial strain, these hybrid arrangements are playing a significant role in re-greening urban areas.

• Environmental stewardship serves as a gateway into democratic practice
  • Environmental stewardship and civic engagement are deeply intertwined—in terms of individuals personal identities and associational lives.

• Organizational form of mobilizing structure may contribute to longer term differences in both civic participation and environmental outcomes (urban tree canopy etc.)
Selected Resources

http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415723633/


