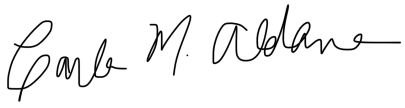
Ethnographic Study on Community Leaders' Perception on Environmental Issues in Waukegan, Illinois

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Abstract

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Waukegan, Illinois is located north of Chicago and has a population of 87,700 people, with 55.4% being Hispanic or Latino, and 17.3% being African American (Census, 2018). Waukegan is racially and ethnically diverse community generally seen as a low-income commu8nity as well (Census, 2018). Through the long history of environmental justice problems such as Johns Manville asbestos disposal into the lake, the coal-fired power plant, the various Superfund sites, as well as Ethylene Oxide from factories (Link, 2019, NAACP, n.d,), it is necessary to understand how community leaders are approaching and solving the issues. In this study, I conducted an ethnography by interviewing community leaders in Waukegan who are providing resources and plans to improve the environmental conditions in Waukegan. I also engaged in participant observations at public meetings and events in Waukegan to fully understand what is being discussed in the community concerning the environment. After coding process, findings included understanding Latinx communities, knowing what community organizing includes, as well as how to work with local government or national organizations when solving environmental issues. The issues leaders are most concerned about are recognizable in other fields that work with Latinx populations as well as justice communities.

Introduction

Waukegan, Illinois is located north of Chicago and has a population of 87,700 people, with 55.4% being Hispanic or Latino, and 17.3% being African American (Census, 2018). Surrounding cities in the county such as Lake Forest, and Evanston have majority white populations, with minority groups only making up around 12-25% of the population (Census, 2018). Waukegan is located along Lake Michigan and was a thriving city with many businesses since 1890's when the Sugar refinery opened (Link, 2009). In the 1890's, Waukegan became one of the largest agricultural hubs in the US because of the harbor and access to water. Around that time, large industries such as Johns Manville, an asbestos plant, started to settle along the lakefront because of its easy accessibility for the harbor and railroads (Link, 2009). Today, Waukegan has become an ethically and racially diverse city with high Hispanic population (Census, 2018). Many of the industries went bankrupt due to changes in economy which has changed the demographics as well as the sociopolitical climate within the area. There are continuous contributions among the municipal government as well as other organizations to create plans to help create a thriving community that will create a better quality of life among residents.

There are several plans such as the Comprehensive Land Use plan, that will be proposed to follow a 10-20-year path of consolidating downtown and growth of local businesses. Additionally, The Lakefront Master Plan was proposed in 2003 to help make the lakefront more accessible as well as boost tourism in the area by having a beautiful, well-kept area (Lakefront Master Plan, n.d). These plans are in place to boost local businesses as well as economy (Plan my Wauk, 2019). The 2003 plan was very general, and the main purpose was to begin discussion on how to provide resources for businesses and others. Since then, Waukegan Main Street and Greater Waukegan Development Coalition were established to help with plans (Greater Waukegan…, n.d, Waukegan Main, n.d).

There are many environmental issues in Waukegan including the coal-fired power plant, ethylene oxide emissions from Medline, or factories such as the silicone plant that exploded in May 2019 due to malfunctions (Waukegan Silicone Plant, 2019). The power plant is located along the lakeshore and the factories are located on the outskirts of town. Waukegan has a total of three superfund sites, while surrounding communities have at most, one site. Necessary resources are needed among residents to fully understand their quality of life is not at par to surrounding communities. Being a minority and low-socioeconomic status community should mean people must advocate and educate on issues that need to change. Providing a safe environment with adequate air, water, and greenspaces should be the priority for residents and community leaders.

Environmental issues in Waukegan, IL

Waukegan, IL had various major environmental degradations throughout the years. It became a central hub for industrialization with various factories such as Johns-Manville, NRG Energy, Outboard Marine Corp moving in beginning 1900's (explained in detail below Link, 2009). Waukegan, being located on one of the Great Lakes, has advantages in importing/exporting goods to other locations around the US because of its easy access to waterways and the railroad system. One of the main reasons why Waukegan became one of the largest cities in the US over 150 years ago (Osling). Urbanization began in 1980's which caused factories and companies to move away from Waukegan, which left many environmental damages such as PCBs in the lake (Link, 2009).

Robert Bullard, explained environmental racism in his book *Confronting Environmental Racism Voices from the Grassroots* as "any policy, practice or directive that differently affects or disadvantages, whether intended or unintended, groups or communities based on race." (Bullard, 1999). I would like to emphasize how the definition includes how unintentional effects

on a community can be caused through way of living in the community itself. The importance of communication between various groups is essential in order to resolve these issues.

Environmental racism occurs and that is why federal laws such as the Environmental Justice 2014 Act and National Environmental Protection Act were passed to ensure public conversations are implemented. The conversations, word-choice, and education on the benefits and implications to avoid environmental racism with projects is the beginning of the environmental movement and provide resources for environmental justice communities. (Bailey et. al, 2018). Listed below are current environmental hazards in Waukegan with a brief explanation.

Coal-fired Power Plant

Waukegan, Illinois currently has the only coal-fired power plant in Lake County, IL. 15% of Lake County residents have respiratory diseases, due to particulate matter and coal ash that is in the air. Organizations such as Clean Power Lake County (CPLC), which is a nonprofit organization that started to advocate for clean water and air, have taken the initiative to fight against the plant to remove it and switch Waukegan's energy supply to clean power such as solar panels or wind energy. Organizations have also initiated lobbying in local/state government as well as providing education programs such as EcoAmbassadors on renewable energy. CPLC will go to Springfield, IL to ask state capitol to pass laws such as Clean Energy Jobs Act. Decision making process to switch to renewable energy in government is a slow process due to the history of coal dependency and lobbying in our government system (Mittlefehldt, 2018; Finley-Brook, 2016; Augustine, 2019). Research enforces what the positive impacts of renewable energy are and how it will help prevent human health implications and the economic benefit (Sattler, 2018). Waukegan's coal-fired power plant, Edison International, is listed as the #12 top environmental justice offenders' that disproportionately affect low income people of color due to coal ash, location, and overall knowledge of power plant (NAACP, n.d). A corporate environmental justice performance (CEJP) was used to measure how a facilities'

pollution impacts low-income people as well as people of color. Edison International had the worst CEJP score compared to other 58 companies from this study (NAACP, n.d). Five of the seven Edison facilities are located in the Chicago area and also had low scores in the CEJP. This study also established how the Midwest is most vulnerable for low scoring CEJP plants due to population density, minority communities, as well as GDP among these states.

Superfund sites

Waukegan has a total of five superfund sites. The superfund, formally known as the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), was established by Congress in 1980 in response to national concern over toxic waste dumps (EPA Superfund, n.d). Surrounding communities have either zero or one Superfund sites which is much less to Waukegan. Top three listed below are on the National Priorities List (NPL) while the other two are being monitored but it isn't a main concern for US EPA (EPA Superfund, n.d).

1. Johns-Manville Group: asbestos disposal into Lake Michigan.
2. Outboard Marine Corp: Former outboard-boat-motor manufacturing plant, railroad ties, coal gasification, and coke plant facility. polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are the main contaminants released into Lake Michigan.
3. Yeoman Creek Landfill: Operated 1959-1969. There was no bottom liner in the landfill. Chemicals, high concentrations of metals and ammonia leached through the permeable soil. Monitoring is ongoing to ensure no drastic changes occur.
4. North Shore Gas North Plant and North Shore Gas South Plant
    a. Both of the plants are being monitored for groundwater due to contaminants from the gas plants. There is also cleanup of dense nonaqueous phased liquids.
    b. Neither of the plants are not listed on the National Priorities List (NPL) and are funded through Superfund Alternative Approach. The only

difference of not being listed on NPL is to save time and provide needed resources.

Ethylene Oxide Emissions (EtO Emissions)

Medline Industries and Vantage Specialties in Waukegan and Gurnee (next to Waukegan), use ethylene oxide to sterilize medical equipment such as scalpel blades, gowns, and chemotherapy ports (Medline, n.d). Community members are not sure how much EtO is being emitted and the health implications. Ethylene Oxide is a carcinogenic gas that produces acute effects in people who are exposed to it. These effects include headaches, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, and respiratory irritation. It is unknown if the emissions are above regulations (ATSDR, 1990). The Illinois EPA has agreed to a 90-day monitoring to determine the levels of EtO in the area (Lake County, 2018).

The various environmental issues in Waukegan have caused many environmental injustices among city residents. It is important to understand how residents and leaders have taken initiatives to create plans to mitigate pollution and overall environmental degradation. In this study, I conducted an ethnography by interviewing community leaders in Waukegan who are providing resources and plans to improve the environmental conditions in Waukegan. I also engaged in participant observations at public meetings and events in Waukegan to fully understand what is being discussed in the community concerning the environment. The purpose of the study is to understand the various perspectives among organization and leaders to understand how their experiences have shaped their efforts to make Waukegan, IL a cleaner, and thriving city.

Methods

An ethnographic approach was implemented to understand what community leaders' perceptions on environmental issues are in Waukegan. An ethnographic approach was used to have a wider range of observations to understand perspectives of Waukegan community

leaders. “The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions, as well as the nature (that is, sights, sounds) of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews.” (Reeves, 2008). The difference between interviews and ethnographies are the added component of observations that can help add a new perspective on what’s being asked or what the event is about by being a part of it. The holistic approach helped provide an understanding of different observational dimensions such as space, people involved, activities, and feelings. There is no one solution to solve an environmental issue. Understanding what community leaders are involved in as well as activities/events leaders implemented helped create a deeper understanding on the main issues of Waukegan, IL.

An ethnographic approach was the best methodology for this case study since it allowed me to gather a depth of information regarding how community leaders’ experiences through early life, work, volunteer etc, and what helped them to advocate and implement plans/resources for Waukegan. The community leaders selected for interviews were from my own personal connections. I have either worked with these individuals in the past or know each of them through another personal connection. Interviewees are community leaders whose organization focuses to improve the environment in Waukegan for residents. Can be through beautification of parks or creating a thriving central business district and lakefront that becomes a tourist attraction. More potential interviewee names were collected through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is effective in potentially finding other interviewees from initial sampling connections and gain other perspectives that have not been discussed. Interviews helped me recognize what community leaders are planning and implementing in the community to resolve environmental issues. Interviewees ranged from nonprofit organizations, to those that work in Lake County Sheriff’s office, and someone that was running for State representative. Interviewees gave their consent to use real names and positions. The main purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding how the person’s experiences throughout life have

shaped what they are doing for their community and how it affects them personally and those around them.

I also asked each interviewee if there are any potential events I should attend. Potential events to attend depended on what will happen during December 11th-January 10th. The events included a city council meeting, Holiday Wauk (sponsored by local businesses), and Ray Bradbury Donation Ceremony. I also looked for livestreams of meetings, town halls, or even rallies that are organized by community members, but was limited during the timeframe. Observations during these events was to understand interactions and resident's participation and to know what initiatives have been implemented. Field notes were taken from my perspective of the event.

Interviews were conducted through video calls, and in person depending on time and distance from Waukegan, IL. Transcribing and coding the interviews was the next step and analyzing the data to find conclusions/results. Coding will be open-end coding where I identified themes from all interviews.

The process of open-end coding was going through each interview and making a note or tag every few lines on the topic at hand. After all the coding, taking each of the coding to see what common themes arise and how do the fit into environmental issues that will help establish the themes from fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011).

Results

This section outlines data collected from six interviewees and three different events where ethnographic fieldnotes were taken. Observations included the interactions between me and others during the different settings. Background of interviewees ranged from those working in nonprofits (2 persons), working with local government (3 persons), and one person working on their PhD. Three of the interviewees (Catherine Game, Anthony Vega, and Diana Burdette) did

not grow up in Waukegan, but currently work within the area. Themes identified derived from open coding and what interviewees spoke about the most.

Six interviewees

- Celeste Flores: Clean Power Lake County and Faith in Place
- Catherine Game: Executive Director of Brushwood Center in Riverwoods
- Edgar Sandoval: PhD Candidate in Geography at University of Washington in Seattle
- Anthony Vega: Chief of Staff of Lake County Sheriff
- Julio Guzman : Legislative Affairs for Lake County Sheriff
- Diana Burdette: Running for Illinois State Representative

Three Events

- Holiday Wauk
- City Council Meeting
- Ray Bradbury Museum Opening

Themes

- Latinx Community Characteristics
- Community Organizing
- Working within Local Government/ Large Organization

Codes/Themes

Latinx Mentality	**Community Organizing**	**Local Government**
First-Generation	Time management	Waukegan mayors
Resilience and perseverance	Goals orient with community needs	Priorities elsewhere or within environmental issues
Latina women expectations	Working with other organizations	Other organization priorities

Celeste Flores is the co-director of Clean Power Lake County and the Lake County Events Coordinator for Faith in Place. She grew up in Park City, located next to Waukegan, but went to the catholic church in Waukegan since she has family in the area. Her parents are immigrants from Mexico, and she is a first-generation, Latina, college graduate. After graduation, she moved back to Waukegan working with an AmeriCorps program for a year. After that, she became the youth minister at Most Blessed Trinity Parish, one of the catholic churches in Waukegan for some time. She started off volunteering with Clean Power Lake County during this time, but through connections, she was encouraged to apply as the Events Coordinator for Clean Power Lake County, and later became a co-director (Flores, personal communication.

Catherine Game has limited experiences in Waukegan itself, but has worked throughout the area, specifically within Chicago and Milwaukee during her graduate program. Her dad grew up in Chicago but moved to Michigan when she was young due to her grandparents retiring and wanting to leave the city. She continued her studies at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and moved to Chicago partly because she was drawn to the place with her husband, but also because of job availability. She has worked with the Chicago Department of Environment and then became the Executive Director of Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods in Riverwoods, IL (Game, personal communication). The non-profit organization mission statement is, “to promote the importance of nature for nurturing personal and community wellbeing, cultivating creativity, and inspiring learning. (Brushwood Center, n.d)”

Edgar Sandoval is a PhD candidate in Geography at University of Washington in Seattle. Eddy grew up in Waukegan, also from immigrant parents. He has worked with Clean Power Lake County as a volunteer and that is how he met Celeste Flores, Anthony Vega, and the Burdette family. He graduated from Dartmouth College with a BA in Geography. His current research is based off of “how scholars can theorize mobility through the experiences of migrant

communities navigating the material, social, and political configurations of post-industrial suburbs." (Sandoval, personal communication)

Anthony Vega is the Chief of Staff to the Lake County Sherriff. The office spaces are located in Waukegan, along with the Lake County Jail. Vega was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. Vega graduated from Bellarmine University with B.A in Political Science and went onto graduate school for law and policy. After that, he began working with Sierra Club to help with the transportation campaign. That is where he started to learn more about Chicago area from the policy side and learning how transportation sector elements such as highways, may affect marginalized groups the most. The Lake County Sheriff John Idleberg was running for sheriff at the time and asked Vega to be his chief of staff specifically because he is not in the police forces. He was able to bring in a different perspective on government knowledge, as well as environmental work that he has "fallen into." (Vega, personal communication).

Julio Guzman is the legislative affairs liaison for the Office of the Sheriff of Lake County. He went to school in Waukegan. His mother is from Texas and his father is from Mexico. He went through the public-school system and went to college and majored in Environmental Geography. He was involved in Clean Power Lake County for a while. In the past, he would volunteer and help people mobilize and learn about the coal plant in Waukegan, as well as other environmental issues such as equity. He was looking for a job and Anthony Vega offered a position for him on the Legislative Affairs team. Not only does Guzman have experience in government work as a campaign organizer with Sierra Club but is also passionate about helping people practice their rights in our democratic world (Guzman, personal communication).

Diana Burdette is currently running for State Representative in Illinois. She grew up in Palm Springs, California. She moved to the Chicago area for college where she met her husband. They moved to Waukegan where her husband went back to school, and the couple later had two children. Diana started to get sick with inability to eat foods, weakness in muscles, and respiratory issues as well. Her children as well were having similar symptoms. She did not

understand the real reason for her condition and has gone to doctors to try to figure out how to get better. When she moved out of the area, she started to feel better and began gaining weight once again. The EtO issue was brought up through social media and that is when she started to ask questions on how to remove it, how to receive information, and also compensation for all the health issues occurring. Diana reached out to local municipalities and various organizations, but there was no response. That is when she decided to run as state representative to bring awareness of the issue, but also solve the issue itself so that no other family goes through what she had to suffer for several years (Burdette, personal communication).

The backgrounds of each interviewee are important in order to understand how they view Waukegan and the issues occurring in the area. When asked about their experiences in Waukegan or more specifically what is a memory or story that connects them to the area, the answer varied that Waukegan is a “hidden gem”. The diversity that the city offers is one of a kind where people can seek out their culture and learn about others. That also helped bring in more participation from different generations when organizing events. An example would be the worldwide climate strike in September 2019, high schoolers took it for themselves to organize the strike at the public high school. They even made news with how well planned the strike was as well as how many students participated that day.

The rest of this section outlines the three main themes from interviewees and fieldnotes. Table 1 shows the different codes found within each theme and will be explained in detail with quotes and observations.

Latinx Communities

Five out of the six interviewees are Latino and come from a family of immigrants. It is important to note because of how community leaders grew up can influence their actions in the future.

Celeste Flores talked a lot about having the “immigrant mentality” can not only bring about resilience among community members, but it can also hinder their actions and participation because of time issues. I come from a family of immigrants as well and I was able to create a connection or deeper level of understanding with the interviewees when they talked about immigrants. The “immigrant mentality” as Celeste Flores talked about is about resilience when faced with various challenges.

> *“Waukegan has always been historically an immigrant community and the community is always looking to survive and I think you know; immigrants are really great at adapting and surviving and we can definitely see that.” Celeste Flores*

When faced with problems from other colleagues, Celeste had to choose to either defend her identity of being a first generation, Latina, college graduate or choose to keep her job and take any criticisms along the way.

> *“Me aguanto, you know that kind of immigrant mentality. I will just show them that I am better. Even when I talk to my parents I'm like, paso esto, me dijieron esto. they are like, ‘oh pues si ya sabes como son los guerros and son racistas. y tu nomas tienes que hacer tu trabajo mejor.’ which is all bs. We shouldn't have to fight or show that we are better or worse or work 2 times harder but that is what your parents think so that is what you grew up thinking too.”*

> ***Translation:*** *I’ll put up with it. You know that kind of immigrant mentality. I will just show them that I am better. Even when I talk to my parents, I’m like ‘this happened, they told me this, and they are like, ‘oh well you know how white people are, and they are racist. You just have to work harder.’ which is all bs. We shouldn't have to fight or show that we are better or worse or work 2 times harder but that is what your parents think so that is what you grew up thinking too.”*

Flores shows her frustration of being complacent with current job situations. Having to work two times harder than everyone around her takes a toll on her mentally, as well as understanding own capabilities’ without being apologetic. Latino immigrants choose to leave their native lands

in order to pursue a greater quality of life and will be complacent with the hardships because that is what we are taught. Anthony Vega mentioned that Waukegan is not only a hub for culture, music, and the arts, but it also has an immigrant character which makes it a unique city in Lake County.

Latinos in the area are busy with work. Some people have several jobs to help bring the necessitates to their families. The information that they know about the area can be limiting because of the constant moving and lack of time. Catherine Game explained how when given the opportunity and time, the Latinx community is excited to learn about their environment and how to be involved. She explained how Brushwood put up a festival over the summer geared towards learning more about the Latinx culture. Speakers were translated in English and Spanish for everyone to understand. There was authentic Latino food as well as a space for people to enjoy nature. Game said that the feedback they received after was amazing. Not only were people content with the event and outdoor space, but they felt welcomed and excited. Both the children and the parents were able to gain knowledge of the environment, as well as feel a sense of belonging which is what human beings want.

The excitement that Game mentioned is what I was able to experience during the events. Waukegan residents will come together when an issue or concern arises. When I went to a city council meeting on January 6th, 2020, I primarily went because Celeste Flores told me this was the meeting that decided if the city takes the resolutions for the Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA). There were around 40-50 people in the room. Half of them were African Americans that represented the Black Abolition Minds organization in Waukegan. The audience time after the board went through their agenda was primarily people from the organization speaking up about the death of a loved one due to police brutality. A large group went up to support the person that was talking and showing their concerns and frustrations of the lack of care from the Waukegan government. Someone spoke up bout they are still fighting the same fight their grandparents had to fight. “it doesn’t make sense, fighting some fight from our grandparents time.” He said as

he was choking up and having a difficult time sharing his thoughts without tearing up. “it isn’t safe to live in Waukegan.” Many in the audience and behind the speakers kept repeating, “No Justice, No Peace.” Even those like myself that were not aware of such brutality, but really wanted to express my condolences for the friends and family of the boy that died by repeating the chant as well as show our condolences. Four of the audience time members represented CPLC. Diana Burdette’s first comment when at the podium was, “No Justice, No Peace.” And shared her frustrations and condolences. When talking about CPLC, those around the podium were respectful and were intently listening. You can tell by their gaze and silent when Burdette was speaking. They were also mumbling about how great this accomplishment is and also the importance. Rita Mayfield (current state representative), a representative from Faith in Place, and Diana Ortiz also spoke about their gratitude towards the council in supporting CEJA.

The reason why I shared this story from the city council meeting was because though each person had a different story, different goal, and from different backgrounds even, they came together to support one another and have a sense of understanding that the issues in Waukegan are interconnected and there is no one issue at a bigger priority. People were excited and passionate about wanting a safe community and will help each other out or at least build a sense of understanding with one another to help better the community. Another example would be how Waukeganites have gathered to donate or start a Ray Bradbury Museum. During their grand opening in January, 2020, representatives from Waukegan Park District, Waukegan Fire Department, Mayor Cunningham, and a few aldermen were present. Even a young woman from California decided to move to Waukegan to help create a museum that will portray Waukegan and Bradbury’s works in an effective manner. The room was packed with 40 people in a small room with plans on how the museum will look like if they received the right amount of donations.

People were standing in the back and local newspaper was also present. The woman that came from California primarily came because as an early age, she fell in love with Ray

Bradbury's works. Throughout her years and multiple visits to Waukegan, she said she learned how passionate the community is about literature and keeping the stories and places portrayed in Bradbury's works the same as before since he is a pride to Waukegan. The excitement and love for Waukegan is shown among all residents from white to people of color. Even through the challenges of being first-generation, people of color, graduating students tend to come back to Waukegan not just because stay close to family, but because they want to see changes and believe they can make such changes.

Waukeganites that decided to go to college sometimes decide they want to return home to help change the image of Waukegan. Eddy focus for his graduate program involves looking at Waukegan migrant communities have mobilized from a social, political, and economic standpoint during the post-industrial era. He said he wanted to focus in Waukegan since he saw the value of his community and wanted to support by having further understanding on the environmental issues. Flores explained her motive to come back to Waukegan was not only to support her family and her brother, but because there was a job available for her in the first place. Going through college was a hardship for some of the interviewees. As first-generation college students, interviewees had to seek outside resources other than their families which predominantly worked as unskilled laborers.

*"Being a Latina first generation, I think it definitely helped in the last five years grown a lot to who I am professionally and what I am capable of. But unfortunately, sometimes you don't realize the power you have, or the authority you have and I think especially the Latina woman, we are raised to be very humble. We are raised to follow what the men in the family say. Not speak up, not try to cover a lot of attention. I definitely had all of those [be]cause *laughs* and you know at the time when I was working with the Sierra Club, one of my very first instances I had a, what we say a super volunteer with Sierra Club, told me to my face that I was hired because I was Latina and spoke Spanish and that I was not going to be successful." Celeste Flores*

Due to the Latino culture, females sometimes do not understand what they are capable of and are stuck in a bubble of a stay-at-home woman supporting the males of the family. Flores had to go through those cultural struggles that people sometimes put labels on her or don't acknowledge her skills because of it. The labels of being Latinx, first-generation college graduate, and gender/sexuality can be obstacles that the interviewees had to overcome in order to do what they are doing today.

Since Waukegan has a large Latinx community, the community leaders understand that the value of time for people. Some people, as Celeste mentioned, would work two or three jobs to support their families. Understanding the community needs, time, and resources will help create programs adequate for people.

Coordinating Program

Throughout their experiences, community leaders have learned how to coordinate events or programs adequate for the community. Understanding the community as well as their needs is needed to know how to mobilize and educate the public. Though each of the interviewees had different goals and types of programs, the general consensus was communication is key to accomplish goals.

> *"Also knowing how to do authentic community engagement with partners in that is really important to ask in our programming if we work. I think we are in Ryerson woods. We are not in Waukegan. We are not in Highwood. We are not in these communities. So, we have to be really thoughtful, careful listeners to the community and to listen to what the community needs and wants and the strengths that already exists in these amazing places." Catherine Game*

Catherine Game talked about how it's essential to know what current ongoing projects in the area are before beginning a new one. Assessing the area of community needs is the first

step before pursuing a project. Each community has different needs as well as different resources.

> *We are a small organization. Where will we have the most impact and be able to partner most effectively Places like Stevenson High School already have a lot of resources and a lot of investment in the area, in a high-income area. Or do we focus in areas where we can really help build up a community? And we are very aware to the whole white savior complex and not feeding that. That is where we have to take it back to our community partners and ask them what do you want and how can we help." Catherine Game*

Game and Flores explained how within the Waukegan/Chicago area, there is so many programs, some might be under resourced, but are working to help their communities, but each program is very valid and have amazing qualities. She then explained how in Waukegan, a lady is running an after-school program called COOL. There isn't much funding, but people like the founder of COOL work really hard to make their program continue to run to help educate the kids.

When planning events to inform and mobilize the community of Waukegan on environmental issues, community leaders must ensure time is not wasted for the community. Time is precious for the community as well as having straightforward involvement that make them feel like they belong in the organizations. Guzman explained that the main reason why he volunteered with CPLC was because at the time, the small accomplishments made him feel successful and that he was helping the community. He felt that as volunteers, you need to feel you have a role that is important and see tangible outcomes to continue participating and advocating.

The sense of belonging in organizations is a motivator for people such as Guzman and Flores. Flores mentioned how the younger generations have taken the initiative to participate to create the changes they want to see in their community.

"*We are gonna come back and we are going to fight this. And I think we are seeing this across the board. You see Waukegan students come back and help set STEM programs over the summer. All of my interns have been from Waukegan and working on environmental issues. We have Waukegan to College which is another organization locally which kind of focus on education for first generation students. I think you are seeing a lot of this and I think what is needed is." Celeste Flores*

The participation seen from various generations is what keeps organizations such as CPLC motivated to continue to work since they feel "there is hope." (Game). Seeing the younger generations participate and feel they can do something for the community is empowering for the leaders and organizations in such group. Not only are they building safe places for people but are creating motivated leaders along the way.

Especially the Latino community to come together with your African American community and decide what we need in this community and what are those next steps. With the generations that were born here because I think we know that we were raised in a way to think that we can become anything and never said that we can't but I think a part of us is always well, we should be able to have a better life. And we are not content with that kind of sticking to the status quo like what our parents have been like, " you should be thankful that you here." but no! I was born here like I have the same rights as everyone else." Flores

Another important aspect interviewee mentioned would be creating a space for people. Catherine Game kept mentioning providing a space for people is important. Creating the time to seek out resources or learn about current issues in the community. Time is valuable and should not be "wasted" for community members.

The community leaders explained how it was important to assess goals every once in a while, to make the adequate changes for such goals. CPLC used to be community organizing events. After a while, the shift turned to a big picture, change of legislature to create the changes that the community wanted.

"We have been just volunteer run for the last few years and Dulce Ortiz and myself have been co-chairs and have been working more behind the scenes. More big

picture legislation, rather than community organizing. So, before, we would have beach cleanups, we had rallies, we had Dia de los Muertos event. We had all these things because we had a full time person to work on that at one point, … [then] Looking, organize at a power map, and resources, we just decided that it would be more beneficial for us to do state work than by working with an administration that did not want to communicate with us at that time." Celeste Flores

The changes were what the organization believed they needed. And they have gotten so much support from Rita Mayfield, Diana Burdette, community members, but it has also steered people away from participating like they used to. Guzman was a volunteer very passionate about CPLC, but eased way from it due to life and seeing the goals have changed. I used to participate a lot more when it was community organizing as well. I would see Guzman at those rallies very excited to educate the community on issues. Now, I believe both of us have become busy with other things and might not be heavily involved in the legislative side of the operations but will support since it is important for our community. The slow process of seeing the benchmarks is part of the changes that need to occur according to Vega. Working with the local government will take some time to see changes in the community. Flores agrees that it does take a long time to see legislative changes, but it shouldn't be that way when environmental justice communities are suffering due to inequity issues. The slow progress is detrimental to people's health which is why local government involvement is important to understand to take action and coordinate changes.

Working in Local Government/ National Organizations

It is important to note that five out of six interviewees, as well as events attended had connections with the local government. Anthony Vega and Julio Guzman currently work with the government, whereas Catherine Game worked for Chicago government before. Diana Burdette is currently running as State Representative for Illinois. Environmental work is tied in with working alongside local government, and even state level to help environmental justice

communities such as Waukegan. Then involvement in government is essential for development of environmental programs and initiatives for the communities (citation).

Catherine Game worked with the Chicago government from 2011-2013. At first, she was in the department in charge of recycling program in Chicago. When Mayor Rahm Emmanuel came into office, he eliminated the Department of Environmental Protection. A department that was 122 people, turned into one person, Catherine Game. Her new position was called Officer of Sustainability. It was difficult for her to pursue projects and start initiatives because of the lack of help of others in the government, as well as economic help.

> *"Rahm Emanuel eliminated the department of environment in Chicago, so which was 120 people and so pretty much everybody was either sent to other departments and the work was absorbed within other departments or some programs went away. And the network resource program was hit the hardest which are the programs with nature focused just completely lost funding or was taken over by a nonprofit organization. I continued on for about a year working with, well they created a new position as officer of sustainability which is really, it was an important position, but when you compare one person to 120 people in a department, there is no way you couldn't create the same amount of impact." Catherine Game*

People are such a valuable resource when planning and organizing environmental resources for the community. When the changed occurred, the reliance on nonprofit organizations taking over projects and trying to outreach to the audience. Financial resources decreased in the change of government which is why it is important to know where each mayor or elected official believes in when providing resources for the environment and the community.

Mayor Cunningham is the mayor for Waukegan. He was elected in 2017. Catherine Game recently talked to the mayor to see how to go about implementing and supporting programs for the community. The strategic planning is to help community partners provide more programming to reach the families. The connection with working alongside Waukegan Park District, Lake County Nature Explorers, as well as the local government is because Mayor

Cunningham has seen the need to have connections to provide for the community, even though it took some time to get this type of initiative. I had several encounters with Mayor Cunningham during winter break. During the Holiday Wauk, a monthly local businesses night event, I saw him walking around to the main areas where people should have been gathered. The people that were there were shaking hands with him. Most of the people were high school students from the Tri-M music honor society and he did have a quick conversation with us. He was excited to learn that I was a college student and urges students to come back to Waukegan when they graduate. That way we can create the needed changes to support the community we come from. He was in a bit of a rush to go to the next location but shook my hand and left while waving to everyone he saw.

Mayor Cunningham was also at the Ray Bradbury opening and of course the city council meeting. His demeanor changed depending on each of the activities. During the Ray Bradbury museum, he kept congratulating people for how we love our town and the amazing support we get from the community. He gave the opening remarks and explained how important Ray Bradbury is to our community and those that read his works. There were several other aldermen in the room. The museum must have importance for the community, but also build a stronger relationship and bond between government and the people. If not, not that many people that represented different sectors of government would have showed up such as the Waukegan Fire Department, Waukegan Park District, several aldermen, greater Waukegan coalition, or the state representative, Rita Mayfield.

During the city council meeting, Mayor Cunningham was a lot more serious. He went through his agenda as quickly as possible. There were a few people such as the presentation of Waukegan Proud Award that was given to a Marine. Everyone in the room applauded and the government officials took time to take a picture and say a few words of how proud they are of the Waukeganite. There were people there trying to inform the council of the continuous police brutality that was going on. The room was filled with people from Clean Power Lake County, but

also friends and family of Avion that died through police brutality. The Mayor alongside the aldermen were very calm. They were sitting at the front with microphones and were listening to the audience speak. There were times when I looked up and few people, including the mayor, were distracted with their phones and not really listening to the people speak. In the end, Mayor Cunningham took the opportunity to say his condolences and how him as a black man as well, understands how heart-breaking the situation is. He took his time while speaking. “I need you to show out when there is no crisis. That is who you are” said Mayor Cunningham. As for the resolutions passed for Clean Energy Jobs Act, people such as Diana Burdette, Diana Ortiz, and Edgar Sandoval were present. This was before I interviewed them so seeing them in their element with other supporters made me realize how passionate and close nit the community is. These CPLC members were sitting together holding signs that said, “Clean Air NOW, or Clean Energy for ALL.” Different generations were present and wanted to have the full support from the government to move forward. In a Facebook post on CPLC page, it wrote:

> *"The passage of the Clean Energy Jobs Act resolution is a good first step towards the right direction,” said Dulce Ortiz, co-chair of Clean Power Lake County. “We are hopeful and look forward to continuing working with the Waukegan City Council and administration to achieve our shared vision—to build a sustainable community that promotes the healthy development of all Lake County communities, specifically those most vulnerable, by addressing environmental justice, practicing participatory democracy, advancing self-determination, and empowering people of color. " Clean Power Lake County Facebook Post on January 6, 2020.*

CPLC understands they need the support of Waukegan City Council and administration in order to achieve what they have been fighting for years. The frustrations that Celeste Flores mentioned about our current government system is that there is a lack of regard towards environmental justice initiatives to protect communities across the U.S. The lack of representation within the government system can elongate the needed changes to protect community members.

"I'm always telling people we just need to fucking burn this system down. It doesn't work for us. It's not set up for us. Why are we trying to work within it? What are we changing? I think that a lot of people are like, 'well, we go in and change stuff and bring other people in' and I just don't see that happening fast enough. I'm not a very patient person. But I think that locally really having leadership that comes together and puts aside our egos, [can help us] decide what we want and actually talking how we are moving Waukegan forward." Flores

Celeste, alongside some of the other people, have expressed the importance to have constant communication from various partners to determine what the community needs and for various stakeholders, such as nonprofits and municipalities, come together to achieve common interests. This might mean that power mapping officials is needed to know how councilmen are persuaded or influenced. Thankfully, in the last few years, Mayor Cunningham has now been opened to partaking in the environmental movement.

"[When] the new mayor that came in 2017, he made it pretty clear that the environment was not gonna be something he was going to prioritize. Looking, organize at a power map, and resources, we just decided that it would be more beneficial for us to do state work than by working with an administration that did not want to communicate with us at that time. That has changed now. We meet with his staff with the regular basis and trying to see how we can work together." Flores

Another interesting fact that I learned when interviewing leaders was the fact that 3/6 of them worked for Sierra Club for some time. Though it was a valuable time for all them since they were able to learn more about community organizing and environmental advocacy, it caused some disruptions among CPLC on what the community actually needs. When DACA was being discussed in the federal government in potentially removing it, it caused many residents in Waukegan to feel uncomfortable of the current presidential situation since it meant there is uncertainty on what the future will be like. Rallies were going on all around the Chicago

area. Discussion in moving the regularly scheduled meetings of CPLC was being determined, but the organizer at the time didn't believe it was necessary.

> *Here's this big organization with a lot of bureaucracy and hierarchy but for me that was it. I was like, " look. when one of my volunteers is speaking out and you don't get it, like you should not even be a part of this group. So you should leave CPLC. So on top of that I was like, you should leave your position because volunteers have different roles within sierra club. Flores*

It became one of the main reasons CPCL decided to not work with Sierra Club and focus on bringing legislative changes in the state. Sometimes large organizations that are recognized nationally will not be able to provide the needs of the community as well as the local organization. After that, Flores reflected that the board changed in CPLC in order to fully take initiative in changing the structure of the organization and the goals. Adapting is a skill community leader must have and know how to change to strive towards their goals.

Community leaders have a wide spread of experiences which have led them to certain environmental injustices. As listed in the introduction, leaders understand that EtO, coal ash and byproducts affecting water and air, and the various superfund sites. Another takeaway was the importance of communication between stakeholders on the injustices occurring, as well as government's role in solving the issues. People such as Diana Burdette began running for State Representative because of the lack of care of information the government is providing to protect communities. Her health was jeopardized because of factories emitting high amounts of ethylene oxide. She had a loss of appetite, began losing weight at a drastic pace, as well as respiratory problems, and numbness throughout her body. All of the various environmental injustices occurring in Waukegan are interconnected. The lack of communication, fully understanding community needs, as well as public participation with local government are all issues the community leaders brought up that are necessary to accomplish their goals and projects.

I think we can fix all of these injustices but if we still have a planet that we are not taking care of, we are gonna continue to be sick. So I think that's why we have to fight them all together and see how we can actually live in a world that actually prioritizes those that are most vulnerable to these issues. That is really hard in the environmental movement.

Discussion

After the interviews, it was important to note that it was essential to understand 1) Latinx leaders and communities' mindset, 2) how to mobilize and organize the community according to needs and 3) how does the local government's role affect environmental justice initiatives/movement? The community leaders expressed the importance of these three goals/themes in order to create a strategy that will for them and the community.

Latinx leaders in different fields also experience difficulties managing white spaces to advocate for their communities while working. One study used Yosso's (2015) framework to understand leaders' perspectives and motives in their leadership style and actions. There are three different steps: 1) know the historical context of the community, 2) understand the sociopolitical context and 3) know the histories they lived and experienced. Each one of the interviewees understood what Waukegan has been like and how that has shaped the socioeconomic political of the area. Working in areas that are known to have large groups of marginalized people (Rodela, 2019). Community leaders understand what Waukegan means to them, but also what others perceive the community. Celeste Flores mentioned several times the types of comments students her age perceived Waukegan as "dangerous" or just associate it with full of Mexicans and bad people. This frustrated her since it isn't true for her. Julio Guzman mentioned how Waukegan has many cultural pockets and involvement and people are willing to come out and help, but the perspective Waukegan gives outwards differs to what is going on within the city. Waukegan has been a place where migrants settled into since 1634 (Link, 2009).

Since Waukegan became a location for industrialization, sugar refineries, steel plants, asbestos, and other industries began in Waukegan with the help of immigrants (Link, 2009). The immigrant mentality is rooted in Waukegan's history, as well as each individuals' experiences that was exemplified above. Yosso's framework digs deeper in understanding the various standpoints to leader's actions can be through understanding the area in which they are helping, and also their own knowledge.

Understanding what community organizing entails and how to create appropriate plan is essential when one is a leader. Even in various fields, Warren and Mapp (2011) used the image of a tree to explain the root and branches of where to begin when organizing and mobilizing in an area. Each one of the interviewees explained the importance of community organizing begin with defining who is the community they want to represent. A community, according to Warren are groups of people with shared history, culture, and identity. Waukegan is a community with marginalized groups such as Latinx and African American, but it is also a place where immigrants since the 1600's have settled. Today, it is generally known to be a community with various Hispanic backgrounds and have the immigrant mentality that Flores talked about. Even in other career fields, Latinx communities recognize the importance of parent/family engagement (Rodela, 2019). Organizations such as Brushwood Center and CPLC have planned events that involve the education between a child and family members on the importance of the environment and environmental justice initiative. This community is also what Brushwood Center wants to understand more and engage to provide more resources that they

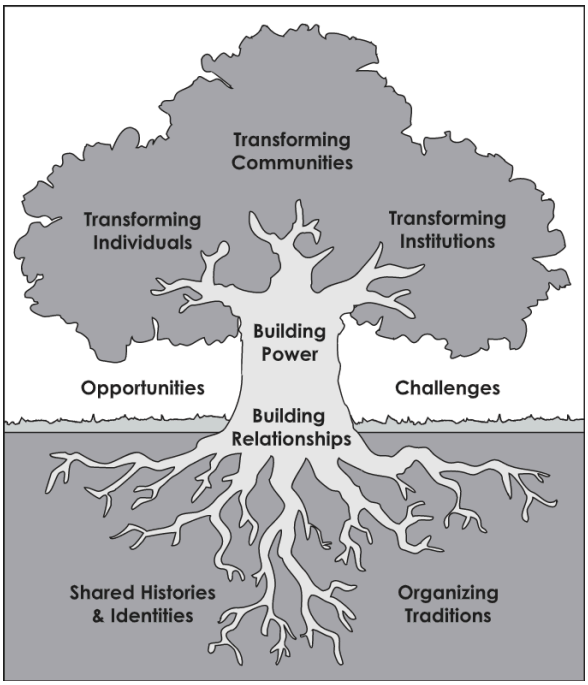


Figure 1- How community organizing works (Warren, 2011).

need. Warren also explained the importance of political education based on our history of civil rights organizing. "One of the distinctive features of the civil rights organizing tradition, which has become an integral part of many modern community organizing groups, is political education (Warren, 2011)." Modern organizing needs to include political action and how to engage and educate from the public perspective, but also educate the government and what issues need to be prioritized. CPLC in the past few years decided to put their energy towards legislative changes statewide which was successful from their perspective. The Clean Energy Jobs Act was passed in Waukegan, working with other environmental justice communities, and even working with various senators across IL to bring needed changes towards these communities. The changes have helped CPLC involve other people such as nonprofit organizations, other environmental justice communities, as well as the local government.

Local government involvement in sustainability is essential in order to bring out the needed changes the community and leaders strive for. It is important to understand the community needs, but it is also important to know the standpoints of the local government. Sustainability development rises when solutions are economic efficiency and market driven. E-government, or communications between government and citizens helps create trust and constant communication on what the government prioritizes. Waukegan municipalities have taken extra care on what environmental initiatives they will help. In the past, the local government took other matters as the priority over environmental problems that have caused health issues in Waukegan.

Celeste Flores is a very passionate person when talking about the environmental justice issues that are occurring in Waukegan. She will always keep me posted of events and livestreams happening and will text me information on how I can continue to be involved even with how far Allegheny is from Waukegan. Every time I saw her, she will hug me and say hi to me with a smile on her face and introduce me to other people in the community. After that, whenever I saw the interviewees outside of their normal work office, they will still say hi and

want to make me feel included and welcomed. Which I did. I truly believe one of the main reasons that makes Waukegan so unique is that the community members and leaders really want to work with other people and encourage others to achieve their goals. Though I am just a college student, they still encourage me to dream bigger and want me to help advocate in our community while using the skills that I have.

I have lived in Waukegan for 18 years and being able to understand what is going on in my community from a different standpoint of wanting to understand what is going on in Waukegan has changed my view. Waukegan is special in the sense that there are many people like Flores, Vega, and Game that want to provide resources for the public and create changes in sociopolitical climate in Waukegan. If this study was done differently, going to environmental community events in Waukegan would be helpful as well as conducting more interviews from different organizations to have a full scope of understanding. This will allow for more analysis on how people react towards such events planned and what is being prioritized in the community. The community leaders need to understand what the public needs are, so a survey or further interviews would be beneficial to know what the understanding of environmental issues are from the communities' perspectives. That way, leaders will know how to adjust their agendas and goals to fit what is the level of understanding and prioritization is.

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