

## Engaging Chicago Residents in Climate Change Action: Results From Rapid Ethnographic Inquiry

Lynne M. Westphal and Jennifer Hirsch

### Abstract

Addressing climate change requires action at all levels of society, from neighborhood to international levels. Using Rapid Ethnography rooted in Asset Based Community Development theory, we investigated climate-friendly attitudes and behaviors in two Chicago neighborhoods in order to assist the City with implementation of its Climate Action Plan. Our research suggests a means to effectively engage urban residents at the household and neighborhood level: understand the issues of importance in each neighborhood, assess the ways these are related to climate change mitigation or adaptation actions, and engage residents from this perspective, meeting mutually compatible goals. This builds upon the concept of co-benefits, but puts the neighborhood concerns rather than climate change issues in the lead in order to meet multiple goals. Rapid ethnography is a method well-suited to develop these understandings. It allows quick but in-depth insights into the attitudes, behaviors, goals, and aspirations of a neighborhood or other groups of people.

### Keywords

Climate change; co-benefits; social assets; asset based community development.

Copyright 2010 by the authors. All rights reserved. This work is licensed to the public under the Creative Commons Attribution License. Cities and the Environment is produced by the Urban Ecology Program, Department of Biology, Seaver College, Loyola Marymount University in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service. Published by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress). <http://catejournal.org>

Westphal, L.M. and J.L. Hirsch. 2010. Engaging Chicago residents in climate change action: Results from rapid ethnographic inquiry. Cities and the Environment. 3(1):article 13. <http://escholarship.bc.edu/cate/vol3/iss1/13>. 16 p.

## INTRODUCTION

Effectively addressing climate change requires action at all levels of society, from neighborhoods to national and international levels. In the U.S., municipalities have been in the lead on climate change (Kousky and Schneider 2003), creating climate action plans to guide climate change mitigation and adaptation activity at local and regional levels. Over 1,000 have joined the U. S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement (U.S. Conference of Mayors, no date). Chicago is no exception. The Chicago Climate Action Plan aims to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions to 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 and to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 (City of Chicago Department of Environment 2008). The Plan has five mitigation and adaptation strategies:

1. Energy Efficient Buildings
2. Clean & Renewable Energy Sources
3. Improved Transportation Options
4. Reduced Waste & Industrial Pollution
5. Adaptation (includes managing heat, preserving and planting trees, managing stormwater).

Successful implementation of the Chicago Climate Action Plan and other municipal climate action plans requires effective engagement of residents. To inform and guide these efforts, Chicago's Department of Environment partnered with The Field Museum's division of Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo), Northwestern University's Science of Networks in Communities (SONIC) Lab<sup>1</sup>, and the USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station to investigate current beliefs and neighborhood level practices in Chicago that are directly related to climate change, or are potentially aligned with climate change actions. Finding these current practices can help implementation of the Climate Action Plan by suggesting goals and outcomes that are mutually beneficial to the city and the neighborhoods.

Research to date on municipal efforts in climate change focus on cross scale issues (Tompkins and Adger 2004; Adger et al. 2005; Betsill and Bulkeley 2006) or on municipal level planning for climate change and barriers thereto (Betsill 2001; Kousky and Schneider 2003; Robinson and Gore 2005; Mukheibir and Ziervogel 2007; Roberts 2008; Wheeler 2008). Several authors have noted barriers to climate change planning, including lack of human and financial resources (Betsill 2001; Robinson and Gore 2005), lack of understanding of climate change science (Roberts 2008), and perception of the issue as global rather than local (Betsill 2001; Roberts 2008). Wheeler (2008) reviews U.S. municipal climate action plans, finding them in general to be weak and unevenly implemented.

The climate change literature talks about ancillary and co-benefits. Ancillary benefits are outcomes that are not direct goals of a project while co-benefits are planned outcomes from a project that meet multiple goals (Hourcade et al. 2001; Kousky and Schneider 2003). Co-benefits of climate change mitigation activities can include improved air quality (Anuan et al. 2006), reduced erosion from afforestation (Plantinga and Wu 2003), and meeting sustainable development goals (Swart et al. 2003). Cities often cited municipal-level co-benefits, like reduced cost to operate city buildings, as additional, or even primary, justification for conducting climate mitigation efforts (Betsill 2001; Kousky and Schneider 2003).

The co-benefits analysis can be taken a step further by assessing when and where community-led projects may also meet climate change goals. That is, while most of the co-benefits and ancillary benefits discussed in the climate change literature start with climate change and then consider other potential positive impacts, it is also possible to start from the non-climate change goals and look at how climate change needs may also be met. This small, but potentially significant, change in perspective for

---

<sup>1</sup> Social network data will be discussed in separate papers.

addressing climate change may improve success in implementing programs, especially at local levels. An example is the *New Allies for Nature and Culture* research project conducted by The Field Museum in partnership with numerous local organizations which explored the potential for meeting both environmental and social justice goals through strategic local partnerships (Hirsch 2008). This research identified several areas of common interest and concern between social justice and environmental groups, including youth development, economic development, health and food, and arts/creative practices. Their findings augment previous lists of potential connecting nodes or co-benefits such as concerns about toxics, land use planning, and waste disposal (Hirsch 2008). These suggest community-based issues with which climate change actions may be successfully linked.

## **Theoretical Grounding**

The research was grounded in the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) perspective (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Mathie and Cunningham 2003). ABCD grew from Kretzman and McKnight's studies of successful local level development efforts, finding that needs-only assessments were often not successful in engendering positive change. What they found worked more consistently were approaches that rooted community development activities in an understanding of the community's strengths, or assets, rather than focusing solely on needs or weaknesses. Assets are strengths and skills, large and small, embedded in a community, and can take many forms, from construction skills, to available time, to networking skills, to cooking, art, or other creative skills.

The Field Museum has extended work by Kretzmann and McKnight integrating the identification of social assets with an examination of socio-ecological assets, or conservation-compatible practices and beliefs (del Campo and Wali 2007). This approach allows development of typologies of group-based practices that link social and ecological processes and examines the variety of cultural models that structure how different social groups in the region understand their relationships and interactions with nature.

ABCD theory frames our inquiry effectively. Because we were looking for what people were currently doing that was climate friendly, we were inherently looking for strengths – for climate change assets – in the communities. Our report to the City focuses on these assets as potential points of entry and connection between City and neighborhood goals. It is in this theoretical context that we conducted our research to understand climate-friendly actions in Chicago communities in order to inform the implementation of the Chicago Climate Action Plan.

## **METHODS**

We used rapid ethnographic research methods (Scrimshaw and Gleason 1992; Beebe 2001) including interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and a variety of creative activities, such as directed drawing exercises. Rapid ethnography differs from traditional ethnography in several key ways (Beebe 2001). First, it is closely aligned with Participatory Action Research (Reason 1994; Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008) and therefore the goal is to have the research be a part of community based action on important issues. Rapid ethnography is also much faster, more intensive in its data collection, than traditional ethnography, taking place in a matter of several weeks or months. Conducted with large research teams (in this study, with two to three principle investigators and a team of six to eight interns) rather than small teams or solo researchers, large amounts of data are collected and analyzed in a relatively short period of time. However, this timeframe imposes limits on the depth to which certain aspects of an issue or community can be explored. Still, rapid ethnography provides the benefits of ethnographic research to policy- and decision-makers in a timely and efficient manner (Beebe 2001).

We chose communities for this study to cover diverse racial and class demographics and to provide geographic representation of the city. Two communities are presented here – South Chicago and North Kenwood Oakland/Bronzeville (described below). The South Chicago study was the pilot phase of this project. Research in additional communities is underway; by the end of the study seven to ten communities will have been engaged, reflecting the geographic and cultural diversity of Chicago’s population (reports for each neighborhood can be found at The Field Museum website, Field Museum 2011).

The research was collaborative with key community partners, who were paid a stipend for their work on the project. Their participation ranged from connecting the research team to people and organizations in each community, to helping facilitate focus group sessions, to informing the study design and data analysis. These groups helped to turn the research into action by building awareness of climate change issues and connecting organizations to relevant city agencies and each other.

Interviews began with a series of open-ended questions about the interviewee’s history and impressions of the community, and, if they represented an organization, about the organization’s history, mission, and priorities. We asked research participants in both communities to tell us about their own environmentally-friendly practices and ones they have seen around the community. After the pilot phase in South Chicago, we added questions and approaches to broaden the sample and collect more information focused specifically on climate change. We added a second part of the interview, asking questions like “What are three words that come to mind when you hear ‘climate change?’” and to rank the Chicago Climate Action Plan strategies in order of importance to their lives and community. We added rapid interviews at bus and rail stops, a farmer’s market, parks, cafes, and other community hubs to broaden the sample. These rapid interviews used the interview guide questions focused on climate change and the Chicago Climate Action Plan.

Focus groups with residents and key leaders of community, environmental, and civic organizations in each community followed a similar interview protocol as the individual interviews. However, we were able to add some creative practices to the focus groups, including drawing, photo elicitation and documentation, and storytelling exercises (in some cases we were able to use these creative methods in individual interviews as well).

Participant-observation of community events provided additional data about the context within which the City of Chicago would be working to engage residents on climate change issues. Researchers attended a variety of local events including a farmer’s market and community meetings. They also observed day-to-day use of outdoor spaces like neighborhood parks and boulevards<sup>2</sup>.

Field researchers took field notes during interviews and focus groups that were completed after the event; interviews were not recorded. Notes on participant observation sessions were written after the event. Each intern was trained in the field note protocol, and was initially accompanied by senior personnel when in the field. The field interns and a lead researcher coded notes using Atlas TI. The research team discussed field notes and findings regularly, with weekly meetings added in the North Kenwood-Oakland segment of the research. These sessions provided a primary reliability check, with the team delving into preliminary findings, suggesting alternative explanations, and planning additional reviews of the data to confirm, modify, or refute initial interpretations. Because our data is captured in field notes, reported comments in this paper are paraphrases, not direct quotes, unless quotation marks are used.

---

<sup>2</sup> Chicago’s boulevards often have very wide green lawns with trees and other plantings between the lanes. Some residents use these spaces for picnics, sports and other public uses.

## The Research Neighborhoods

Communities were selected to represent the range of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods. South Chicago is in a large industrial area on the city's far southeast side. For about 100 years, steel mill and other industrial jobs drew a racially diverse population to the community. Since the collapse of the steel industry in the United States in the 1980s, South Chicago has become economically homogenous with low- to moderate- income residents. However, the community is racially and ethnically diverse, with large Latino and African American populations and white residents of Eastern European heritage in reducing numbers (City of Chicago Community Area Census Profile). In the 2000 census, 12 percent of South Chicago's population was below the poverty line, and the median family income was just over \$30,000 (City of Chicago Community Area Census Profile). Industry is not the only influence in this neighborhood. South Chicago is in the Calumet region of Chicago and Northwest Indiana where heavy industry and transportation are intermixed with remnant wetland, dune and swale, and woodland natural areas (Westphal et al. 2005). Local residents have worked and advocated for both economic and ecological restoration for decades. South Chicago has a strong sense of community identity and takes pride in its self-sufficiency.

North Kenwood-Oakland is a south-side neighborhood close to Chicago's downtown. Our research focused on North Kenwood-Oakland, but to understand North Kenwood-Oakland one must understand the larger Bronzeville community of which it is a part. During the time of restrictive covenant-enforced segregation, North Kenwood-Oakland and Bronzeville were home to African American doctors and lawyers, musicians and artists, trades people, and politicians. Bronzeville's vibrancy as a cultural focal area has faded over the decades for a number of reasons, including greater housing opportunities elsewhere for middle- and upper-class African Americans, the concentration of public housing in the neighborhood, and public works projects including the building of highways through the neighborhood (Chicago Community Fact Book Consortium 1995; Patillo 2003). Starting in the 1990s, there has been a strong interest within Chicago's African American community in returning the neighborhood to the vibrancy of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s (Patillo 2003; Hyra 2006). North Kenwood-Oakland shares Bronzeville's strong sense of community history, and supports Bronzeville's efforts to market itself as a destination neighborhood for African American culture and heritage. This interest in presenting the strengths of African American culture to the wider population is one contributing factor in North Kenwood-Oakland's often-expressed concern with image, appearance, and visual indicators of respectability: there is an emphasis on tidiness and meeting shared norms of appropriate behavior and style (Patillo 2003). While North Kenwood-Oakland is racially homogeneous (over 96% African American in the 2000 census), it is economically heterogeneous, with a median income in 2000 of \$21,949, up from \$9,391 in 1990, but over 16% of North Kenwood/Oakland residents earned incomes at or above \$60,000 in 2000. Some of this is due to in-migration of middle- and upper-middle class African Americans.

The politics of neighborhood change in North Kenwood-Oakland is occurring not only at the level of city bureaucrats and developers who wield electoral or financial power, but also among residents – new and old, formally educated and not, owners and renters, rich and poor – who vie for the ability to name what is acceptable and what is not, who should stay and who should go (Patillo 2003 p.4).

Research in South Chicago was conducted over a period of approximately four months in early 2009 and included 11 community events, four focus groups and 37 interviews. In North Kenwood-Oakland/Bronzeville, research was conducted over four months in the summer and fall of 2009 and included 38 community events, meetings, and other instances of public activity; six focus groups; 60 interviews; and 31 rapid interviews.

## RESULTS

### South Chicago Respondents and Climate Change

There were 205 research participants in South Chicago who were interviewed one on one, in focus groups, or at events. Our research participants were Latino (52%), African American (21%) and white (26%; one person was counted as “other”) and were 46% male, 54% female. The proportions are not an exact match for South Chicago’s diverse population, but are sufficiently close to be confident discussing the general views of South Chicago residents who are active in their community. One ramification of our methods is that we reached many fewer community residents who do not participate in some way in local activities. We did not collect income data in South Chicago, but as we networked through community based organizations that provided services to residents in need, we are confident that our South Chicago participants reflected the low-income and working class population of the community.

South Chicago is still transitioning away from heavy industry that defined the region after World War II until the 1980s, as described by one community resident:

“The USX steel mill’s 500-plus acres [site]...was a focal point of the community and the backbone of the Southeast Side of Chicago. As much as we hate the pollution it left and the hardest, dirtiest work in the city, it was what community life depended on. The people of South Chicago, and especially The Bush [a neighborhood in South Chicago], are hardcore, blue collar workers because of the steel mills. Work and live hard. The transition into a non-industrial world has been very difficult for this community.”

South Chicago residents related that environmental issues had been a part of community life for a long time. One resident expressed a commonly held view that “we need to comport ourselves well with regards to the environment.” In South Chicago, residents expressed a fairly widespread general awareness of, and interest in, environmental issues and in climate change (Figure 1). They saw climate change as a personal issue that affected their community and their daily lives. South Chicago’s large immigrant population saw climate change both in Chicago and in their communities of origin:

There [my previous home in Mexico] it was eternal springtime, but now my friends and family members are all having to buy winter coats because it is cold in the valley.



**Figure 1.** Focus group participants were asked to draw pictures in response to the question, “What does climate change, global warming, or the environment look like to you?” An 8 year old drew this picture that shows “On the left side of the picture it is normal. On the right it is red because it is bad. There was a big wave that came and hurt everyone. On the bottom right there is a skeleton because they could not run away. The people on the left could run away because they were ready.”

Of the five Chicago Climate Action Plan mitigation and adaptation strategies (see Introduction), energy efficiency, transportation, and waste issues were most important to the South Chicago residents we spoke with. The cost savings offered by energy efficiency and improved transportation were important to residents, while waste and pollution are locally relevant issues because of the many landfills located near the South Chicago community and the history and continued presence of heavy industry in the area:

“I’ve had younger friends who have passed away, and I attribute it to the fact that they were working in an environment that was fairly unhealthy. [...] There was a...large factory that used to spit out not bad air, but, actually grease. You would see the grease in the streets, melted. [...] I went to City Hall to complain about stuff like that, and nothing was done. But now, finally, people are beginning to realize that the environment is very important. [...] We talk a lot about the warming of the earth...but I think we should place more emphasis on purifying the air that our people are living in.”

South Chicago residents reported valuing and sometimes advocating for and actively restoring, local ecologically important places like wetlands and waterways. In one focus group, JD<sup>3</sup>, a long time resident, expressed caring about the local environment, as described in our field notes:

For JD, it's all about the scenic beauty of the Calumet region. The environment is "a treasure" here, and it is right in "our backyard." There are so many opportunities for outdoor recreation. It is surprising to some, but many of the natural areas in the Calumet region are "undisturbed." They are pristine, and appear as they did "100 years ago." She was born in the area, her parents worked in the mills, she attended Bowen High School, and feels a connection to the area... Protecting natural places is a part of her vision for the area.

Local students are involved in the group CIMBY, or Calumet Is My Back Yard. They were involved in ecological rehabilitation in an area where heavy industry and natural areas are tightly intermixed. From the field notes:

The Southeast Chicago Development Commission is sponsoring the student stewardship that Washington High School is involved in to create this prairie marsh along this industrial corridor. Students will continue to clean the area of garbage and debris. They will also be planting trees, bushes, and prairie plant species. To help minimize soil erosion the students have created natural filters along the drainage ditch by lining the area with willow cuttings to divert the water. The students also created rock shelters for the new plants to maintain water during the dry season and help prevent wind erosion.

The students said of these activities: “It was very important to our community, because it could affect the land in which we all live in. That's why we all as a team helped the community be a better place to live.” And “What I learned from my experience in the CIMBY project is to appreciate nature and to take more care of it.”

Gardening, at home or in community gardens, was important in South Chicago. Gardens provided food, but also provided places for teaching and community building activities. For example, a neighborhood in South Chicago – The Bush – has a community garden that created a Young Ambassador program. Under the mentorship of the lead gardener, young people from the neighborhood visit elders, those with limited mobility, and others, as well as attending community events focused on organizing and

---

<sup>3</sup> Initials are anonymized.

healthy lifestyles. The Bush Garden organizer indicated he saw positive impacts in increased pride, self-respect, and development of leadership potential among the youth ambassadors.

Recycling, either at the household level (use of rags instead of paper towels) or in activities like collection of scrap metal were important to South Chicago residents, but their participation in mainstream recycling of bottles and cans was only just getting underway through a project of a local community based organization. Community based organizations in South Chicago built on the interest in recycling and in creative practices, including one project creating murals from reused materials (Figure 2). However, recycling and reusing materials and items were not universally seen as a positive thing. A community leader in South Chicago told us that the African-American youth she worked with are not very interested in recycling or re-using old products. She said that they equate these concepts with “used,” and the youth tend to feel that such reuse indicates that they “aren’t good enough to get new stuff.”



**Figure 2.** Creative reuse of materials was evident in several public art displays, including this collage that used plastic bottles in a Day of the Dead piece.

While there was strong interest in and behaviors supportive of environmentally-friendly actions in South Chicago, there was also a suspicion of “green” efforts in the neighborhood. This suspicion had several roots. Some South Chicago residents indicated that they did not feel that the City fully understood their community, as evidenced by advocating the use of rain barrels when many neighborhood homes do not have gutters. Other visible changes also raised concerns, such as “affordable” energy efficient homes built by a local Community Development Organization that were too expensive for many current South Chicago residents. South Chicago residents were also wary of the City generally, and green initiatives specifically, because of one or two highly salient events, including support from parts of the City government for a landfill expansion proposal that promised eventual redevelopment of the landfill site as a park. The proposal was promoted as creating park space, not as a landfill expansion. Many South Chicago residents saw this as duplicitous and a violation of Chicago’s moratorium on new landfills. Some expressed cynicism about conservation: “Does having your gas and electric shut off count as energy conservation?”

Also in contrast to the generally widespread feelings that climate change was an important issue, there were indications that the technical details of climate change were not always understood. For example, one respondent mentioned the hole in the ozone, and she thought the climate was warming because the space shuttle was breaking through the atmosphere.

South Chicago residents cited several key issues of importance in their neighborhood that, while not directly related to climate change, may nonetheless offer an opportunity for providing co-benefits—helping the City meet its climate change goals while also helping the neighborhood meet its goals. These



include protection of the natural areas in and around their community, interest in affordable housing, economic development, youth development activities, healthy food and lifestyles, community heritage, and self-sufficiency.

South Chicago residents were vocal about a shared sense of community, of neighbors helping neighbors, and about valuing the diversity of the community. Even when acknowledging that there were tensions, our research participants returned to the sense of community. As one resident put it “every time there is a fire...neighbors throughout the Southeast [side of Chicago] rally together for the surviving families.”

### **North Kenwood-Oakland/Bronzeville Respondents and Climate Change**

The research participants in North Kenwood-Oakland were reasonably representative of the community demographics. Our research participants were nearly all African American (reflective of the community), represented all age ranges (even representation across the decades from 18-over 60), home owners and renters (31% and 69% respectively), long term residents and newcomers (30% lived in the neighborhood less than 5 years, 22% for more than 30 years, the rest were in-between), male and female (47% and 56% respectively). People were reticent to tell us income, but of those who did share this information, there is a range from unemployed to upper income. The one potentially significant difference in our sample and the general population of North Kenwood Oakland was a larger number of people with advanced degrees (29%). This is likely a reflection of our process of working through community based organizations, and the leaders of these organizations—people who are likely to have an advanced degree—are included in our participant group.

During our research, when we asked participants about climate change, we found that a number of mostly working class and low-income participants did not recognize the phrase as a reference to human-caused changes in global climate. Rather, they understood it as referring simply to seasonal changes in weather. Some participants talked about leaves changing color and other examples of fluctuations and changes in weather. In more than half of these instances, when the phrase “global warming” was offered as an alternative, it elicited recognition that we were actually asking about anthropogenic climate change.

North Kenwood/Oakland respondents indicated that energy efficiency, waste reduction, and improved transportation were the most important of the mitigation and adaptation strategies in the Chicago Climate Action Plan. When asked what three words came to mind when they hear “climate change,” respondents often spoke of the weather (hot, cold, snow, summer, winter, atmosphere, etc.) or words that reflect an issue distant from Chicago (polar bears, oceans, icebergs, Antarctica; Figure 3). Other responses indicated uncertainty and fear (confused, help, danger). Al Gore was the only person mentioned by name. Almost no one talked about specific, major, negative consequences of climate change for the Chicago region.

Like some residents of South Chicago, the space shuttle was implicated by some as responsible for climate change, and for this and other reasons, respondents expressed some frustration that government and big business were seen as the primary cause of climate change while individuals are the ones expected to make changes to address it. For example, one participant expressed that government and business knew for years the impacts meat production had on the climate, but did nothing because it was against their interests. Others, though, especially community based organizations in North Kenwood-Oakland, saw climate change as an opportunity to align City initiatives with their own plans and activities, and as a potential means to get resources for their programs.



**Figure 3.** Word cloud of North Kenwood-Oakland residents responses to the question “What three words come to mind when you hear “climate change?”.

Counterbalancing the generally lower levels of awareness and interest in climate change were several key local residents and community based organizations who were very concerned about climate change and were active in mitigation and adaptation efforts. A prime example is an architect who built a nearly off-the-grid home complete with root cellar, vegetable gardens, solar hot water, and geothermal HVAC (Figure 4). This homeowner showcases his “Hybrid House” to people from the neighborhood and outside the community, providing tours and lessons in reducing the carbon footprint of a home. Also counterbalancing the general low levels of information and concern were some North Kenwood-Oakland residents who associated climate change with small changes around their homes, like the noise of walnuts falling from trees occurring earlier and earlier in the summer.



**Figure 4.** Hybrid House, a nearly off the grid home built by a resident of North Kenwood-Oakland. The owner gives tours of the home to educate others about sustainable living in a city.

North Kenwood-Oakland residents mentioned several culturally-based issues that may impede some climate change-friendly actions. Some African American adults expressed ambivalent feelings about gardening, especially in public spaces, in part because they perceived a social stigma attached to the practice: the suggestion that they were poor and need to grow their own food to get by, or references to the history of slavery. For example, a school administrator reported that parents complained about a gardening program, saying they did not want their children taught “slave practices.”

Another example of ambivalence about climate-friendly actions was a story related to us several times:

The woman of the house made the mistake of hanging clothes on a line... I think everybody within two blocks was down at her house telling her to take those sorts of clothes off the line! “Where do you think you are?” And I’m sure she’s got a dryer in the house, but she thought she was going to get some clothes dried on a line and get the fresh open air... This is just not that kind of community.

During a community meeting where we shared our research results, the story was clarified to add that the offending neighbor was drying clothes *in the front yard in plain view of the street* but that drying clothes on the line in the backyard would be acceptable. However, several apartment complexes and Chicago Public Housing limit or ban the use of clothes lines. The assumption in North Kenwood-Oakland is that residents have dryers, and the community norms do not support a “country” activity like drying clothes on a clothes line – no matter how “green” it might be.

Other issues of broad interest to North Kenwood-Oakland/Bronzeville residents that may represent opportunities to link climate action to community co-benefits included mixed-income housing, economic development, economic literacy, youth development, racial heritage, neighborhood beautification, community-building across class lines, and transportation. One North Kenwood Oakland Community Leader said:

“The point is to learn, how does one community start and scale out. Because the best impact starts with individuals on a small level and grows out. But there has to be economic opportunity to do this: to start something and move it out rather than have something come in the other way...”

An arts leader wondered about the opportunities to combine creative, artistic expression with creating green infrastructure:

“I would love to see a design competition for water systems...to have artistic ways for the water to travel down into a semi/permeable source on the ground or an actual rain barrel. So if off the side of this building we have all of these zigzag things, ...have something that goes down and around...[or] bath tubs on the side of the building, but just crazy, way out...”

These indicate the potential to link climate change with existing interests and creativity within the community to further both community and city goals.

## DISCUSSION

Our study contributes to the existing literature on municipalities and climate change in several ways. It is focused on *implementation* of a climate action plan rather than the *development* of a plan, or the means by which the need for a plan are sold at the municipal governmental level. It expands the look at multi-scalar issues in climate change mitigation and adaptation by investigating at the finest possible level: actions at the neighborhood and individual level, and the linkages between these actions and the goals of neighborhood, community, and municipal governmental organizations. And while climate

change is typically discussed in terms of threats and weaknesses, we investigated climate change assets and strengths in the form of existing climate-friendly behaviors and attitudes upon which continued mitigation and adaptation successes can be built.

South Chicago and North Kenwood-Oakland/Bronzeville have a number of assets upon which they can build to contribute to mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. Each community has several strong Community Based Organizations that engage residents in achieving locally-identified goals. Gardens, while not universally accepted in both communities, were nonetheless important and highly visible in both. The Hybrid House (Figure 3), recycling efforts, and engaged school principals are additional examples of assets these communities can build upon to address climate change. Agencies and NGOs can support and highlight these as demonstration sites and projects to increase the visibility of climate-friendly actions.

Along with specific assets, both South Chicago and North Kenwood-Oakland shared interests in youth development, economic development, affordable housing, and heritage, although these were sometimes expressed differently in the two communities. This echoed the shared interests of the *New Allies* project where youth development and economic development were also identified as important areas of connection between social justice organizations and environmental organizations (Hirsch 2008). Together, these assets and the goals of each community provide fertile ground for climate change partnerships with the City government and others. For example, youth development programs aimed at developing green job skills would meet both community and climate change goals.

The issues identified by residents in South Chicago and North Kenwood-Oakland are also closely related to those identified as important in sustainable development circles (one key difference is that communicable diseases and other critical health issues were not raised by our sample). Swart et al. (2003) address the need to integrate the objectives of sustainable development with the objectives of climate change action. This integration, they say, can be achieved in part through creating projects with true co-benefits (not ancillary outcomes). We add an assessment of socio-cultural assets and their relationship to environmental issues to this perspective. This subtle shift can accomplish several important outcomes: 1) it grounds climate change actions in community defined goals, thereby reducing the potential for co-opting of local concerns by outside forces, 2) it frames the issue in the context of strengths and therefore achievable outcomes, and 3) it increases the likelihood of sustained action and compliance. This builds on findings to date that co-benefits are key to municipal-level action on climate change (Betsill 2001; Kousky and Schneider 2003; Robinson and Gore 2005).

In order to ground climate change projects in a community's goals and build on existing assets, an outside organization must know what these are and must gain access and trust within the community. Rapid ethnography can help on both counts. Through this method, agencies and others interested in partnering with a community can learn about that community in a fairly short timeframe. This approach, rooted as it is in action research, can also help build new connections and lay the groundwork for trust between entities that had not worked together in the past, or may have negative perceptions of each other. Rapid ethnography can also help to address one of the issues Adger et al. (2005) suggest is critical in evaluating the effectiveness of adaptation strategies: equity. Climate change will have uneven distributional effects, and the approaches to addressing its impacts can have similarly uneven impacts and unintended consequences. Rapid ethnography can be a useful approach to mitigate these potential negative outcomes.

We also uncovered some obstacles to implementation of some climate friendly behaviors. Chief among these are actions that run counter to sense of self or community, and misinformation. Misinformation about climate change was evident in a number of ways, most clearly in the idea that the leading cause of climate change is the space shuttle "poking holes" in the ozone layer and thereby letting

in more of the sun's heat. This concept showed up in both communities more than once. While it is erroneous, it nonetheless indicates that people have been thinking about the environment, and that earlier messages about the importance of preserving the stratospheric ozone layer did register with many people.

In our data, situations where climate-friendly behaviors conflicted with sense of self and community and against respectability emerged primarily in the African American community. The need to present a respectable image is well established in the literature on post-civil rights era Black life in America, and Patillo confirms its prevalence as an issue in North Kenwood-Oakland (Patillo 2003). Mark Anthony Neal (2010) quotes historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham on respectability:

...respectability demanded that every individual in the black community assume responsibility for behavioral, self-regulation and self-improvement along moral, educational, and economic lines. The goal was to distance oneself as far as possible from images perpetuated by racist stereotypes.

South Chicago youth who felt that reuse of items indicated they were not worthy of new things, North Kenwood-Oakland parents who felt that gardening reflected "slave practices," and that drying clothes on the line breaks norms of respectability are each examples of climate-friendly practices that trespass against important images of self worth and community respectability. Agencies and NGOs wishing to encourage climate friendly practices can look for alternate climate-friendly actions to encourage and support, and/or could work to destigmatize actions and behaviors that may currently challenge strongly held community norms. Wheeler (2008) suggests the need for social marketing campaigns to increase awareness of climate change and to change behaviors that exacerbate climate change, campaigns similar to the anti-smoking campaigns begun in the 1970s. Such campaigns could potentially be effective over time in changing stigmas attached to reuse of items, or in what reflects respectability to the wider community. Important, too, is changing institutional barriers, like the restrictions against the use of clothes lines even inside an apartment, that may stand in the way of instituting small but meaningful climate-friendly actions.

Overall, our research activities included a diverse cross-section of the community and yielded key insights into community values, environmental knowledge and interests, community education and activism, and potential communication and partnership strategies for Chicago Climate Action Plan implementation. However, there is a limitation to the data: we approached this research through trusted community organizations, which means that the residents we spoke to were linked to these organizations, albeit to differing degrees. Thus, the findings do not necessarily reflect the perspectives and behaviors of residents who do not interact with formal organizations. However, the process for interpreting data collected through rapid ethnography is to consider it within a broader framework of research and knowledge. Data from this project were analyzed within the context of The Field Museum's applied anthropological research in the Chicago region over the past twelve years, much of which has focused on identifying and analyzing connections between environmental and social issues in underserved communities throughout the city.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, climate change clearly mattered to many of the people we spoke with, and mattered in many ways, not just as a cost savings issue but tied to heritage, caring for the environment generally, and concerns about future generations.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Addressing climate change requires action at all levels of society, from neighborhood to international levels. Our research suggests a means to effectively engage urban residents at the household and neighborhood level: understand the issues of importance in each neighborhood, assess the ways these are

related to climate change mitigation or adaptation actions, and engage residents from this perspective, meeting mutually compatible goals. This builds upon the concept of co-benefits, but puts the neighborhood concerns rather than climate change issues in the lead in order to meet multiple goals. Rapid ethnography is a method well-suited to develop these understandings. It allows quick but in-depth insights into the attitudes, behaviors, goals, and aspirations of a neighborhood or other groups of people.

Chicago's Department of Environment and others involved in implementation of the Chicago Climate Action Plan recognize the need for many actors at multiple levels to make progress towards achieving its goals. They are interested in connecting in meaningful and effective ways at the neighborhood level (and beyond) so that climate action becomes an integral part of community efforts to improve quality of life. Thankfully, many urban residents agree. As one South Chicago resident put it "Global warming is in our hands" (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Drawing by an 11-year old South Chicago focus group participant.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, they much improved the paper. Our thanks, too, to the interns who helped gather such rich and informative data. But most importantly, our thanks to the residents of South Chicago and North Kenwood Oakland for sharing with us their views and insights on climate change issues in their neighborhoods.

## LITERATURE CITED

- Adger, W. N., N. W. Arnell, and E. L. Tompkins. 2005. Successful adaptation to climate change across scales. *Global Environmental Change*. 15:77-86.
- Anuan, K., J. Fang, T. Hu, H. M. Seip, and H. Vennemo. 2006. Climate change and air quality—measures with co-benefits in China. *Environ. Sci. Technol.* 40(16):4822–4829.

- Beebe, J. 2001. Rapid Assessment Process: An Introduction. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press. 199 pp.
- Betsill, M. M. 2001. Mitigating climate change in US cities: Opportunities and obstacles. *Local Environments*. 6(4):393-406.
- Betsill M. M. and H. Bulkeley. 2006. Cities and the multilevel governance of global climate change. *Global Governance*. 12:141-159.
- Chicago Community Fact Book Consortium. 1995. Local Community Fact Book Chicago Metropolitan Area 1990. Chicago: University of Illinois. 494 pp.
- City of Chicago Community Area Census Profiles.  
[www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/zlup/supp\\_info/community\\_area\\_2000censusprofiles.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/zlup/supp_info/community_area_2000censusprofiles.html) (accessed 06/05/2010).
- City of Chicago Department of Environment. 2008. Chicago Climate Action Plan. 56 pp.  
[www.chicagoclimataction.org](http://www.chicagoclimataction.org) (accessed 11/03/2010).
- del Campo, H. and A. Wali 2007. Journey through Calumet. [www.fieldmuseum.org/calumet/](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/calumet/) (accessed 11/03/2010).
- Field Museum. 2011. Engaging Chicago's Diverse Communities in the Chicago Climate Action Plan. [www.fieldmuseum.org/ccuc/ccuc\\_sites/Climate\\_Action/climate\\_action.htm](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/ccuc/ccuc_sites/Climate_Action/climate_action.htm). (accessed 11/05/2010)
- Hirsch, J. 2008. New allies for nature and culture: Exploring common ground for a just and sustainable Chicago region. *Environmental Justice*. 1(4):189-194.
- Hourcade, J.C., P. Shukla, L. Cifuentes, D. Davis, J. Edmonds, B. Fisher, E. Fortin, A. Golub, O. Hohmeyer, A. Krupnick, S. Kverndokk, R. Loulou, R. Richels, H. Segenovic, and K. Yamaji. 2001. "Global, Regional, and National Costs and Ancillary Benefits of Mitigation." pp 499-560. In: Metz, et al. (Eds.). *Climate Change 2001: Mitigation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyra, D.S. 2006. Racial uplift? Intra-racial class conflict and the economic revitalization of Harlem and Bronzeville. *City & Community* 5(1):71-92.
- Kousky, C. and S.H. Schneider. 2003. Global climate policy: will cities lead the way? *Climate Policy*. 3:359-372.
- Kretzmann, J. P. and J. L. McKnight. 1993. Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets. Evanston, IL, Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University.
- Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. 2003. From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*. 13(5):474 - 486.
- Mukheibir, P. and G. Ziervogel. 2007. Developing a municipal adaptation plan (MAP) for climate change: the city of Cape Town. *Environment and Urbanization* 19(1):143-158.
- Neal, M. A. 2010. The Making of 'New' Black Men. *The New Black Magazine*. Tuesday, April 13, 2010. <http://thenewblackmagazine.com/view.aspx?index=2286> (accessed 10/26/2010).



- Ozanne, J. L. and B. Saatcioglu. 2008. "Participatory Action Research." *Journal of Consumer Research*. 35(3):423-439.
- Patillo, M. 2003. Negotiating Blackness, for richer or for poorer. *Ethnography*. 4(1):61-93.
- Plantinga, A. J. and J. Wu. 2003. Co-benefits from carbon sequestration in forests: Evaluating reductions in agricultural externalities from an afforestation policy in Wisconsin. *Land Economics*. 79(1):74-85.
- Reason, P. 1994. Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry. In Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications Inc. Thousand Oaks, CA p. 324-339.
- Roberts, D. 2008. Thinking globally, acting locally: Institutionalizing climate change at the local government level in Durban, South Africa. *Environment and Urbanization*. V202(2):521-537. DOI: 10.1177/0956247808096126
- Robinson P. J. and C. D. Gore. 2005. Barriers to Canadian municipal response to climate change. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*. 14(1):102-120.
- Scrimshaw, N.S. and G. R. Gleason. 1992. RAP : Rapid assessment procedures; qualitative methodologies for planning and evaluation of health related programmes. Boston MA, International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries.
- Swart, R. J. Robison, and S. Cohen. 2003. Climate change and sustainable development: Expanding the options. *Climate Policy*. 3S1 S19-S40.
- Tompkins E. L. and W. N. Adger. 2004. Does adaptive management of natural resources enhance resilience to climate change? *Ecology and Society*. 9(2):10 (<http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss2/art10/> accessed 02/07/2011).
- U.S. Conference of Mayors. No date. <http://www.usmayors.org/climateprotection/revised/>. (accessed 05/03/2010).
- Westphal, L. M., J. M. Levensgood, A. Wali, D. Soucek, and D. F. Stotz. 2005. Brownfield redevelopment: A hidden opportunity for conservation biology. P. 21-26. In Bergston, D.N. (Tech. Ed.). *Policies for managing urban growth and landscape: A key to conservation in the 21st Century*. Gen. Tech. Rep. NC-265. St. Paul, MN, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, North Central Research Station. 51 pp.
- Wheeler, S. M. 2008. State and municipal climate change plans: The first generation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 74(4):481-496.
- Lynne M. Westphal, USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station, Evanston, IL*  
[lwestphal@fs.fed.us](mailto:lwestphal@fs.fed.us)
- Jennifer Hirsch, The Field Museum, 1400 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605-2496*  
[jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org)