Reimagining Civic Stewardship Groups as Climate Adaptation Planners
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Abstract
Cities face unique social and ecological challenges compounded by climate change, including recovery after extreme weather events, access to fresh food and clean water, and sustainable energy generation. This work typically falls to traditionally recognized planners, which we define as academics, state actors, and board-certified professionals. Data from the US Forest Service - NYC Urban Field Station’s 2017 Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project (STEW-MAP) show that civic stewardship groups play a vital and growing role in caring for the local environment. Not unlike local governments, civic stewardship groups work to sustain and enhance socio-ecological systems. The shared efforts of stewardship combat a broad scope of urban climate impacts, as STEW-MAP responses show that groups’ roles from ecosystem degradation to human health and social policy. As local civic stewardship groups engage in acts of caretaking and claiming-making on the environment, planners have an opportunity and responsibility to engage with these groups in collaborative processes. We argue that civic stewards act in a planning capacity and should be considered essential actors as we continue to forge best practices in planning urban environments.

Methods
Data for this project come from the STEW-MAP 2017 NYC Region survey that collects information on stewardship groups’ organizational characteristics, geographic turf, and social networks.

- Of the 847 STEW-MAP respondent groups, 26 groups representing a cross-section of geographic turf size and network connectivity were identified for in-depth follow-up interviews.
- Nine of the interviewed groups illustrated distinct links to planning and climate action.
- Transcripts for these nine groups were then iteratively coded for:
  • The tactics that each group used in response to a perceived problem
  • The scale at which the group employed these tactics (e.g. neighborhood, city-wide)

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Planning role</th>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Example cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broker</td>
<td>collaborate, advocate</td>
<td>citywide</td>
<td>planner as mediator</td>
<td>Fogelson 1986; Conolly et al. 2013</td>
<td>New Yorkers For Parks; NAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>advise, neighbor</td>
<td>neighbor</td>
<td>planner as mediator</td>
<td>Forester 1999; Fischer 2000</td>
<td>Fort Greene PUPS; West 80s Nbd Assn; We Run Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer</td>
<td>provide site</td>
<td>site</td>
<td>planner as information navigator</td>
<td>Christmann 2000</td>
<td>LUNGS; Protectors of Pine Oak Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agitator</td>
<td>lawsuits, actions</td>
<td>project-based</td>
<td>planner as change agent</td>
<td>Christmann 2019; Thomas 2018</td>
<td>LUNGS; Protectors of Pine Oak Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovator</td>
<td>vision plans, tools</td>
<td>systems-level</td>
<td>planner as innovator</td>
<td>Jabareen 2015</td>
<td>Newton Creek Alliance; RIPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Learn more: nrs.fs.fed.us/STEW-MAP

Discussion
• Through these roles, stewards offer unique contributions that can be better acknowledged and leveraged by local government officials and planners to help adapt to growing climate impacts.
• When stewards get together to improve or defend the spaces they care about, they build social ties that play a key role in responding to disturbance.

Next Steps
• State planners and civic stewardship groups are well positioned to combat climate change together by identifying existing stewardship efforts, bolstering civic engagement, and sharing knowledge/data.
• Knowledge co-production for urban governance as a strategy for moving forward

Methods cited

Literature cited