

Backgrounder

Growing Insights: Urban Agriculture & Local Foods

November 4 - 30, 2013

A Public online conversation & learning experience

Webinar: IAP2

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Matthias Inc: Connecting for Innovation

Social Dynamics Theme, Growing Insights

Opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the author and not necessarily of the ALuKN

Urban Gardening ranges in scale from Balcony, Back Yard, Back 40 / Vertical 40 stories and can be plant based or plant/ animal mixed. Likewise the definition of 'local' ranges from back yard to local community to regional (see 100 mile diet). Some aspects are more contentious than others.

People can come at Urban Gardening / Local Foods as a useful strategy for many 'big reasons' - food security, energy conservation, urban planning, food justice, nutrition and family development and many others)

4 Weeks

4 Lenses

The Growing Insights: Urban Agriculture & Local Foods public online conversation and learning experience is 4 weeks, and supports participants to explore this issue through 4 lenses (themes):

- Economic
- Social Dynamics
- Planning & Governance
- Technology & Innovation



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Each theme is the focus of content and conversation for a week. Bridges between themes are made to help keep the interconnections.

The conversation and learning experience includes both content to catalyze conversation and insights, and online conversation.

Approach

Assumption

The approach is to create some Structure to the conversation, but not too tight so there's opportunity for emergence.

The content is provided using Interesting presentation styles - stories, cases, think pieces that are in Small, manageable pieces (e.g. videos ~3 minutes).

The content is intended to be catalytic not didactic.

The assumption is that content to inform and stimulate thinking PLUS diversity of peer-based conversation, respecting and valuing all contributors, encourages engagement.

This is a prototype - learnings will inform whether this approach is used, and to refine the approach for using Growing Insights with other topics.



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Why?

Why Now?

Re: The Topic, and ALuKN mandate

ALuKN mandate is to move evidence into practice (accepting multiple forms and sources of 'evidence'):

1 reason, and a reason why this topic is current, is the knowledge needs of various stakeholders. Over the last year or so, the Land Use Knowledge Network has observed the growth in interest and attention to Urban Agriculture and Local Foods in Alberta. The issue is widespread - other centres have been engaged in considering policy issues for some time (e.g. Vancouver, Toronto, other countries). Urban Agriculture is not a fad. There is an emergent community of practitioners who are at the early stages of figuring this out as a business, as a social enterprise, as a community differentiator. They needed good information; the Alberta Land-use Knowledge Network needed to supply it. An online course and discussion forum was considered as a potentially robust way of meeting both needs.

A second reason is the ALuKN mandate for developing and testing innovative ways of knowledge transfer, public participation

Urban Agriculture and Local Foods is an emerging public issue, not yet polarized, but there are a growing number of people with many reasons to be committed and concerned. This made the potential for a generative conversation.

The technology platform established by ALuKN is robust and can support a variety of vehicles, and has the capacity for complex content management and retrieval. This provided the required base for an online conversation styled after a network based MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). However the secondary technology available had not been used by the ALuKN so this provided a way to prototype existing mechanisms. This Growing Insights offering uses NING to support the online conversation component.

A summary will be produced and shared with participants for their own use. Some may choose to use it to inform public policy decisions (municipal, provincial). All resources will be maintained on the ALuKN website and distributed through regular channels such as Newsletters, Flipboard.



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Reasoning (for using the Online Conversation & Learning Opportunity approach):

Re Current Knowledge transfer methods / Policy issue characteristics and the current state of citizen disengagement, cynicism

Current Policy issues are wicked problems (at least, any policy issue worth having a public engagement process will be a wicked problem¹. These have very different characteristics compared to the historical 'tame' problems (or simple problems as Dave Snowden or Brenda Zimmerman describe), or even complicated or complex problems.

With wicked problems, 'Knowledge transfer' requires engagement, learning on the part of all stakeholders (including the convener, initiator), and respect / valuing of all perspectives, not just 'experts'. Practice-based knowledge and Lived experience are essential to successfully moving the issue to the next stage (wicked problems are not 'solved'). Successful uptake and use of the knowledge - especially in the early stages of understanding and framing the issue requires people to have been involved, learned their own assumptions and those of others. Having the opportunity to develop 2nd and 3rd loop learning by building on the emergence that can come from high quality conversation / dialogue presents both better understanding of the issue, and better framing of the issue.

Citizen disengagement, cynicism, and front line stress in organizations / systems is a product of assuming that individuals' citizens' voices are not heard, respected, visibly influence the outcome. Even where large groups of people are 'consulted', the subsequent stages of synthesis and reporting are done in a 'black box' and those consulted don't see their perspectives incorporated or influencing the result. However collaborative design, collaborative decision making is challenging in the public space. We do not have satisfactory methods for citizens to have conversations outside a small local area about major societal issues we collectively face. This requires us to learn methods that can be routinely, reliably used to evolve 'consultation' to engagement,

¹ Stanford Social Innovation Review, September 2013, 10th Anniversary Issue: *To Get to the Good, You Gotta Dance With the Wicked*. <http://www.ssireview.org>. Also, National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy *Wicked Problems and Public Policy*, www.ncchpp.ca.



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and engage large groups of people in a deeper way. So the Growing Insights approach is also a prototype, may be a stepping stone to understanding large scale collaborative design, and to expand from the limited, text based responses, some online chat used in this prototype

MOOC - Massive Open Online Course

3 kinds of MOOCs

- Network based, socially constructed knowledge development - George Siemens et al - TEKRI, Athabasca U ²
- Task based
- Content based (Harvard, Stanford) - instructivist.

More information: <http://lisahistory.net/wordpress/2012/08/three-kinds-of-moocs/>

Massive -Numbers

Open -Free, No test of prior knowledge, open content

Online -Multiple modes (video, audio, text, animation).
-Pre-recorded, live or a combination.
-Allows for Asynchronous involvement

Course -'Content' provided both by organizers and participants,
-also emergent

Where we're at now with Growing Insights: Urban Gardening & Local Foods

1 week complete

300 registrants - numbers increasing

² see blogs - <https://tekri.athabascau.ca/content/george-siemens>



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more information:

Alberta Land Use Knowledge Network - <http://landusekn.ca>
Flipboard: landusekn
Twitter

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Terri McHugh Terri McHugh <tmchugh@foothillsri.ca> - Land Use Knowledge Network
Sharon Matthias sharonjmatthias1@icloud.com - Social Dynamics theme, Growing Insights

To register and participate in the conversation:

<http://growinginsights.ca/main/authorization/signUp?>

Image sources (through Google Images)

<http://professionalgardening.com/news/city-of-edmonton-to-hold-urban-agriculture-conference-in-may>
<http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/photos/urban-farming/>
<http://eugenebackyardfarmer.com>
<http://agreenroof.com/vertical-urban-farms/mobile-edible-walls-mewu-vertical-farming/>
<http://gamelab.cis.umd.umich.edu>
http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2011/08/city_government_joining_flints.html
<http://www.treehugger.com/sustainable-product-design/mithun-architects-vertical-farm-for-seattle.html>
<http://www.treehugger.com/sustainable-product-design/vertical-diagonal-farm-from-work-ac-in-nyc.html>
http://calgaryurbanagriculture.blogspot.ca/2009_08_01_archive.html

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