YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: AN ECOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2020
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Master’s Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by Christina Sims, titled Youth Leadership Development: An Ecological Exploration and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Master’s Degree.

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Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copies of the thesis to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this thesis prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the Master’s requirement.

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Abstract
Organizational scholars have described the structure of contemporary organizations using several different models which previously have included industrial or economic frameworks. In this article, I utilized the concepts of an organizational ecosystem and Bourdieu’s forms of capital to guide a case study of the formation of a 4-H Club in an urban setting: the Barrio Santa Cruz neighborhood in Tucson, Arizona. The processes involved in the accumulation and exchange of capital between community leaders, Cooperative Extension agents, 4-H parents, and 4-H volunteers are illustrated. Recommendations for establishing and building neighborhood partnerships include promoting exchange of capital, encouraging community driven efforts, and identifying and collaborating with community volunteers.

Keywords: organizational ecosystem, urban youth development, community leadership, community development, underserved, 4-H

Introduction
An organizational ecosystem is comprised of “diverse actors and organizations which often enter into relationships and participate in exchanges based on a wide range of intentions” (Mars, Bronstein, & Lusch, 2012, p. 274). The form and function of an organizational ecosystem is based on a complex network of actors and stakeholder groups that, through various types of interactions and exchanges, foster and/or hinder innovation and change. The ecosystem metaphor is increasingly used as a conceptual framework in studies of how connectivity between inter-organizational actors emerges to facilitate and/or hinder innovation, including community development such as that which is featured in the current study (Mars & Bronstein, 2018).
The current case study utilized an organizational ecosystem framework which included interactions (mutualism, commensalism, and competition), actor types (generalist and specialist), and nestedness, to qualitatively explore the development of a new 4-H Club in an urban setting. Additionally, Bourdieu’s forms of capital (cultural, economic, human, and social), guided the analysis of the exchanges that occurred across the urban neighborhood (Bourdieu, 1986). The utilization of an organizational ecosystem framework helped elucidate the ties between the various stakeholders and forms of capital that were exchanged either in support of or in opposition to the development of a new 4-H Club in the Barrio Santa Cruz (BSC) neighborhood, a largely Hispanic, urban community in the heart of Tucson, Arizona. This generational community is unique in that it is geographically bounded by downtown Tucson and the Santa Cruz River. Additionally, the BSC neighborhood is located in an urban setting although the history and the current state of the community are rural in nature.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

One of the most important aspects of starting a new urban leadership program, such as a 4-H Club, is to make “strategic partnerships with community businesses, local government, public organizations, and individual community leaders” (Bovitz, Eppinger, Staffen, & Kelsey, 2018, para. 5). The formation of this 4-H Club involved partnerships between Barrio Santa Cruz community leaders (BSCCL), Cooperative Extension agents, Santa Cruz Ranchers (SCR) 4-H parents, and SCR 4-H volunteers. The organizational ecosystem metaphor was particularly effective in illuminating how, and to what degree, interconnectedness between these various stakeholders influenced the formation of the club.

The following four forms of capital as developed by Bourdieu (1986) also helped to guide the study: cultural, economic, human, and social. Cultural capital refers to norms and values that are innate to an individual and is often built upon from one generation to the next. Economic capital is a tangible resource that can either be monetary or non-monetary in nature. Collective education, skills, and professional/occupational experiences all comprise human capital (Becker 1964). Lastly, social capital is gained from engagement in networks and social relationships. Organizational ecosystem principles were then applied to illuminate the various ways these four forms of capital were accumulated and exchanged between stakeholders during the formation of the SCR 4-H Club.

These principles were also used to identify the stakeholders’ interaction types and specialist/generalist natures. Different interaction types between various actors and stakeholder groups helped to clarify how and to what degree exchanges of capital influenced the formation of the SCR 4-H Club. Mutualism refers to interactions and exchanges that benefit all associated actors and stakeholders in different ways (Mars et al., 2012). An interaction that benefits one
actor without having any observable effect on another is referred to as commensalism (Mars et al., 2012). Competition refers to stakeholders vying for a common resource. This can either have a positive or negative effect depending on the norms and rules of the organizational ecosystem (Mars et al., 2012).

Stakeholders were also classified as generalists or specialists based on the assets and experience that they brought to the organizational ecosystem. Community members and 4-H parents were identified as generalists because of their broad background and basic knowledge. Extension agents and specific 4-H volunteers were defined as specialists because of their expertise and specific skill set. The nestedness of an organizational ecosystem increases when generalists interact with specialists rather than other generalists (Mars et al., 2012). If a generalist withdraws from the ecosystem a replacement is often available. However, a substitution is more difficult to find for a specialist. Thus, the more nested an ecosystem is, the more resilient it becomes. Stakeholder relationships that demonstrate nestedness consist of overlapping “functions and priorities of the various actors and organizations that together comprise an ecosystem” (Mars et al., 2012, p. 275). In short, nestedness supports ecosystem resiliency through redundancy (Mars et al., 2012).

**Purpose and Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first goal was to identify the forms of capital that influence urban community development specific to youth leadership. The second goal was to develop a greater understanding of the relational structures and processes that influence the accumulation and exchange of capital throughout the youth leadership development process. Accordingly, the following two research questions were asked:
a. In what ways, if any, do various forms of capital influence the establishment and sustainability of an urban community 4-H Club?

b. What, if any, are the relational structures and processes that influence the accumulation and exchange of the various forms of capital between stakeholders involved in the formation of an urban community 4-H Club?

Methodology

I used a descriptive case study design (Yin, 2018) and collected data through semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) with study participants who performed as either generalists or specialists in the context of the BSC neighborhood ecosystem (Tables 1 and 2). For example, an Extension agent who had a specific background in youth leadership program development was considered a specialist, while a community member who was aware of the general history of the community and its overall culture was considered a generalist. While there was a scarcity of Extension agents with the knowledge and capacity to help lead the formation of the club (i.e., specialist), there were a number of community members with the relevant knowledge of history and culture of the BSC neighborhood (i.e., generalist).

The sample was purposely developed by first inviting all those individuals known to be involved in the formation of the SCR 4-H Club to participate in an interview (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2018). More specifically, these individuals were identified using an email list available from each stakeholder group: BSCCL, Extension agents, SCR 4-H parents, and SCR 4-H volunteers. Those who were active in the BSC community efforts and the new 4-H Club were notified about the opportunity to participate in this study. Thereafter, snowball sampling was used to recruit other participants, which involved interviewees referring the researcher to additional prospective informants (Creswell, 2016). SCR 4-H Club meeting minutes and club update emails were also
analyzed to extend the range and perspective of the data, as well as strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2002). Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and participants were assigned randomly generated pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The study was approved by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board prior to the initiation of data collection.

The researchers served as the primary analytical instruments, which was consistent with qualitative research (Saldaña, 2013). The data were analyzed using deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive analysis took place using a structured coded framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994) comprised of organizational ecosystem constructs (Mars, et al., 2012; Mars & Bronstein, 2018) and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1982). Inductive analysis using an open coding strategy was performed in parallel (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), which identified insights not able to be captured deductively but nonetheless relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2016). Memos were kept throughout the analytical process in order to record, organize, and track patterns and themes observed across the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Analysis began with each transcript being deductively coded to identify actor-types (i.e., generalists versus specialists) and illustrate initial patterns of interaction-types and capital exchange. Then I engaged in axial coding by looking for intercode relationships and early patterns and themes (Creswell, 2016). Subsequent rounds of analysis of the interviews both individually and collectively were conducted until the initial patterns and themes were distilled down to the final set of findings (Gelo, Braakman, & Benetka, 2008). Measures to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis were also implemented throughout the research process. These measures included triangulation across the data sources, comparison of coding between researchers, member checking, and the use of an audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Patton
The findings of this qualitative research were specific to this case study located in Pima County and the Barrio Santa Cruz neighborhood. However, enhanced trustworthiness increased the likelihood that the insights generated were transferable to other urban youth development initiatives and contexts (Patton, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Location on Map (Figure 1)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actor Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maddi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extension Agent</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extension Agent</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>SCR 4-H Parent</td>
<td>Generalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>SCR 4-H Parent &amp; BSC Community Leader</td>
<td>Generalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4-H Volunteer</td>
<td>Generalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4-H Volunteer &amp; BSC Community Leader</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4-H Volunteer &amp; BSC Community Leader</td>
<td>Generalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>BSC Community Leader</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>BSC Community Mentor</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alli</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>BSC Community Mentor</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>BSC Community Leader</td>
<td>Generalist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
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<tr>
<td>4-H Extension Agent</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCR 4-H Parent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCR 4-H Volunteer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSC Community Member/Leader</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Findings

The following findings describe the organizational ecosystem in which the SCR 4-H Club emerged with particular attention being directed at the various forms of capital that were exchanged across stakeholder groups. The analysis of the data revealed a robust nested ecosystem that supported the development of the SCR 4-H Club through the exchange of cultural, economic, human, and social capital among a diverse set of stakeholders. With respect
to interaction types, mutualism was observed to be prevalent, while predation and commensalism were absent in this ecosystem.

Social capital was displayed by all stakeholders involved and was especially important during the initial formation of the SCR 4-H Club. The establishment of trust between Extension agents, the BSC neighborhood association (BSCNA), 4-H parents, and 4-H volunteers was vital to the early momentum of the initiative. The most relevant example of this was demonstrated by a community worker who was a bridge between Extension agents and the BSC community. “Jessica”, an experienced bilingual community development volunteer stated, “My relationship with them [the urban community] has really been by their invitation. As long as that invitation remains, I am happy to be involved with them.” Jessica laid the foundation for trust building with the neighborhood by attending neighborhood meetings where both city officials and neighborhood leaders were present. When the community started looking for youth programming for the newly opened community center, Jessica took advantage of her contacts with the Cooperative Extension.

“Candice”, the co-chair of the BSCNA, was able to utilize her relationships with other neighborhood members to recruit 4-H volunteers and publicize the initiative. She also used her connections with the city to help motivate them to reopen the local community center saying, “We asked for help from Ward 1 and spoke and met in person . . . . coming together as a neighborhood is how we conquered and had one voice.” The neighborhood identified a need for youth development programming in their local community center and Candice utilized social capital to establish and strengthen a bridge between the community and the city.
A connection was seen between the concurrent exchange of social and cultural capital and the strengthening of existing relationships and formation of new ones. Examples of cultural capital were seen in statements by three different residents of the community who were invested in the 4-H Club. “Eric” commented, “We really want to keep the rural feel of this community and that is really what motivated us to start the neighborhood association.” “Don” added, “I think that a lot of the parents and grandparents in this neighborhood want their grandkids to learn about the animals that they grew up with.” Lastly, “Julie” expressed, “What motivates me is the matter of getting the 4-H kids interested again in our animals and then sharing our culture.” Social and cultural capital were found to be equally important and the expression of cultural values helped to tailor the 4-H programming specifically for the youth in this neighborhood.

The cultural capital exchanged was observed to be bi-directional in that the Cooperative Extension also played a crucial role. “William”, an Extension agent stated, “I've worked for Cooperative Extension for about four years and started in 4-H at the age of 9.” The agents involved in this case study were drawing from years of valuable experience in 4-H and had a deep understanding of the 4-H culture and how the organization functions. William’s valuable experience as an Extension agent along with his own upbringing in 4-H in an underserved community helped motivate and form his involvement with SCR 4-H.

Social capital also led to many exchanges and contributions of economic and human capital. The exchange of economic capital was observed in the form of donations, grants, use of facilities, volunteered time, and animals provided. Individuals that possessed connections, relationships with donors, or experience with grant writing were able to generate economic capital in this organizational ecosystem. “Rachel”, a 4-H volunteer stated, “I wanted to raise money for the club, so I sent out letters to local donors, businesses, and individuals I knew in
Tucson.” “Miranda”, a 4-H parent, also exchanged economic capital by allowing 4-H members to house their chickens in her coop noting that she, “loves having them [4-H members] come over here to clean their chicken coop and feed their chickens.” Another 4-H volunteer from the community made available her horses and ranch, which was vital for 4-H members to participate in livestock programming. Lastly, Rachel displayed human capital with her organizational skills, communication abilities, and promotional expertise. “Before getting into 4-H I was already organizing youth clubs and retreats for 50-100 people where I was talking and communicating with parents and organizing and promoting events”.

The exchange of these forms of capital was then analyzed through the lens of the organizational ecosystem. Specifically, the analysis focused on interaction types and ecosystem structure (i.e., nestedness). Most stakeholders were categorized as generalists, meaning that many others in the community served in like roles and exchanged similar types and amounts of capital. For example, all 4-H parents made comparable contributions of resources, time, and experience to the formation of this 4-H Club.

Other key individuals served in specialist roles based on the types of capital they were able to bring to the initiative. For instance, Eric, the neighborhood association chair, was the driving force for neighborhood development and heavily advocated for youth programming in the community center. Eric was crucial to the ecosystem in terms of establishing community trust, maintaining a vision, and supporting youth development programming. Eric had a unique set of leadership abilities and motivation for neighborhood revitalization thus his absence would have endangered the stability of the ecosystem. Generalists outnumbered specialists resulting in a favorable ratio that was characteristic of a healthy ecosystem. While specialists were valuable
in this ecosystem, too many specialists threaten overall resiliency and collapse can occur when specialists withdraw from the ecosystem.

Mutualism was demonstrated across a variety of stakeholder relationships that worked to advance the initiative. The most prominent example of such a mutualistic relationship was between Cooperative Extension and the BSCNA. The relationship originated when the BSCNA sought out youth development programming for their neighborhood community center. Jessica, a community development volunteer noted that, “One of the big things that we have been wanting to do is to activate the rec center.” Another stakeholder, William, an Extension agent commented that, “State level and state programs are very interested in expanding into urban communities and growing our presence there.” This mutualistic relationship extended beyond these two specific stakeholders and directly benefited the entire ecosystem by generating interest from 4-H parents and volunteers.

Lastly, a high degree of nestedness was observed which contributed to the sustainability and resilience of the initiative’s ecosystem. Such nestedness was made evident by the composition of the stakeholders involved (i.e., mix of generalists and specialists) and the nature of the interactions between them. For example, “Maddi”, an Extension agent, commented that, “A volunteer [a generalist] brought the opportunity of this club to us [a specialist] and we worked together to help table at the grand opening of the center and to certify volunteers.” Through analysis of 4-H Club meeting minutes and email communications it was evident that generalists interacted and exchanged capital frequently with specialists during the club chartering process, volunteer certification, and mentoring activities throughout the duration of the 4-H year.
Discussion and Recommendations

An organizational ecosystem is most likely to thrive when assembled and nested with different actor-types exchanging various forms of capital. The SCR 4-H Club continues to benefit from the accumulation and exchange of different forms of capital through largely mutualistic exchanges between various actor-types. The resulting dynamic between generalists and specialists and the diversity of capital that was subsequently exchanged bring both momentum and resiliency to the BSC 4-H Club.

Barrio Santa Cruz is a unique generational, rural-like community positioned within a surrounding urban context. Social and cultural capital were woven together concurrently as trust and relationships were formed and interactions and capital exchange between the Cooperative Extension and community members increased. These latter individuals were brought into 4-H Club leadership roles to serve as project leaders, help with recruiting members, market club information, and identify interest in the community. The community members continue to serve as a cultural bridge among different stakeholders. This crucial cultural capital was derived from lived experience on the part of both Extension agents and community members, which enabled the established and growth of the ecosystem. The depth and breadth of the lived experiences of Extension agents helped shape practice in an initiative such as this.

Additionally, specialists with specific abilities and expertise (human capital) play key roles as keystone actors. A keystone actor refers to an individual whose impact on the community is substantial and whose specific role in the community is not performed by other actors (Turner & Garibaldi, 2004).
For example, Eric, the BSCNA chair, is a keystone actor because his support of the initiative, leadership in the neighborhood, and relationships with city officials are invaluable to this initiative. Without Eric, and consistent with his keystone role, this ecosystem would likely collapse.

Lastly, economic capital has been continually sought from the 4-H community, in the form of the loan of animals, use of facilities, donation of curriculum, club tee shirts, and discounted enrollment fees. Those who are involved in community mobilization efforts are encouraged to seek all types of economic capital from non-traditional and non-monetary sources, as all forms can be of equal importance.
Our findings lead us to propose several recommendations to benefit Extension efforts in urban communities based on the findings and observations of how various forms of capital are exchanged within an ecosystem framework. Community mobilization based on youth leadership development is optimized when leaders within a community identify a need and strategically seek the various resources needed to implement a solution (i.e., BSC 4-H Club). This process brings a sense of control and ownership to the neighborhood, which over time leads to more effective recruitment of volunteers and members. Additionally, the community members’ involvement in the formation of this 4-H Club has helped the neighborhood leaders take inventory of the capital they already possess. It has also guided their accumulation of additional capital by identifying individuals and organizations who can help them bring youth development programming into their neighborhood.

Mutualistic relationships between stakeholders are found to be very beneficial and should be developed and nurtured. Crucial stakeholders should be recognized, as their absence will diminish both the efficiency and robustness of an ecosystem as well as disrupt the flow of capital. The benefit of mutualistic relationships in this ecosystem went far beyond the ties between the Cooperative Extension and BSC Neighborhood Association as shown in Figure 2. The ecosystem expanded, drawing in family members, friends, and surrounding neighborhoods. Such mutualism with Pima County Cooperative Extension also resulted in a mentoring grant being awarded and served as a model for the urban expansion of 4-H in Pima County and statewide. The establishment of the SRC 4-H club transcended the exact boundaries of the BSC neighborhood and in many cases was characterized by the exchange of cultural, economic, human and social capital between the community and outside stakeholders located across the greater Tucson metroplex.
The structure of this ecosystem proves to be nested in design, which is equally valuable. The interactions between generalists and specialists promote transfer of knowledge, cultural bridging, resource allocation, and community development. A nested structure has proved to be especially beneficial as COVID-19 disrupts programming and plans. In general, a nested structure is crucial in order to adapt when unexpected challenges threaten the ecosystem.

Thoughtful strategic mobilization should occur before the implementation of a Cooperative Extension-led community urban program. This mobilization must begin with a strong community foundation that has identified a need and is motivated to reach out to find relevant and available community resources. In the case of the SCR 4-H Club initiative, the formation of a neighborhood association has resulted in community ownership, investment, and the infrastructure necessary for implementing urban youth leadership development programming. The fact that the neighborhood took initiative to find youth programming also laid the foundation for a trusting partnership between the neighborhood and Extension agents. There are several ways to develop relationships with prospective neighborhoods that show potential for the establishment of 4-H programming. It is recommended that Extension professionals or 4-H

Figure 3

![Diagram showing the ecosystem's structure and relationships](image-url)
volunteers attend local back-to-school nights, volunteer at neighborhood events, and attend neighborhood association meetings to develop partnerships and assess neighborhood interest.

**Conclusion**

*Community-driven* youth development programming is critical to the early success of an initiative such as the Santa Cruz Ranchers 4-H Club and will likely contribute to its long-term viability. Committed neighborhood leaders must be the pillars of the mobilization effort. While these community leaders are likely to lack formal training and experience in implementing youth development programming, they understand the context, the heritage, and the needs of their community. Furthermore, neighborhood leaders bring legitimacy to the mobilization effort and will draw in other community members. As others join the initiative, economic resources can be sought to build upon a strong social, cultural, and human capital foundation.
References


