

Chicago, USA

The Chicago NeighborSpace land trust: preserving vacant urban land to boost biodiversity, green space, social services and food security in the city

After scoring low in a national survey on the amount of green area provided to citizens, Chicago local government, together with a community grassroots movement, rolled out an ambitious plan for the preservation of urban gardening, green space, and park development. Since 1996, the institutional Urban NEXUS' urban gardening initiatives have revamped Chicago's vacant lots to increase community, biodiversity and food security.

Urban NEXUS Case Story 2014 - 03

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The project in brief

The NeighborSpace land trust was established in 1996 by the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District and the Forest Preservation District of Cook County, as the official founding partners in collaboration with a community grassroots movement. The non-profit urban land trust funded by the City, purchases vacant urban lots and allocates them to community urban gardening and land preservation projects. Aside from property ownership and provision, NeighborSpace supports community groups through other important stewardship tasks such as insurance coverage, ensuring access to water and gardening tools. The NeighborSpace website offers an online tool lending library, online garden mapping and communication platform "Connecting Chicago's Community Gardeners CCCG", to connect and enable gardeners to exchange tips and tricks on their latest project activities.



What makes it "Urban NEXUS"?

The initiative is guided by a Board that consists of members from diverse governmental agencies, research institutions and private enterprises as well as other non-profit community initiatives. In this way an institutional NEXUS is created bridging the interests of the local government, civil society and the economic sector. In addition, the protected parcels do not only provide green open spaces to the city, but also contribute to the use of vacant land, the preservation of biodiversity in plant and animal species and secure access to healthy food in needy neighborhoods. Additionally, acquiring vacant land on behalf of the city helps to keep land speculation practices low.

Date	1996-ongoing
NEXUS Sectors	Biodiversity-Food-Social
NEXUS Innovations	Law + Policy; Institutions
Scale	City wide, 90 community garden projects (2014)
Budget	Non-profit

Urban NEXUS Definition

The Urban NEXUS is an approach to the design of sustainable urban development solutions. The approach guides stakeholders to identify and pursue possible synergies between sectors, jurisdictions, and technical domains, so as to increase institutional performance, optimize resource management, and service quality.

It counters traditional sectoral thinking, trade-offs, and divided responsibilities that often result in poorly coordinated investments, increased costs, and underutilized infrastructures and facilities. The ultimate goal of the Urban NEXUS approach is to accelerate access to services, and to increase service quality and the quality of life within our planetary boundaries.

ICLEI / GIZ 2014

Further Reading

Official project website: <http://neighbor-space.org/>

Ignaczak, N., 2013, Chicago's NeighborSpace Preserves Urban Land in the City for Community Gardens and Open Space, 10 September, Seedstock: <http://seedstock.com/2013/09/10/chicagos-neighbor-space-preserves-urban-land-in-the-city-for-community-gardens-and-open-space/>

Lockman, C., 2012, Chicago Neighborhood Gardens Grow Veggies, Community Spirit, 11 May, Illinois Partners: <http://ilfbpartners.com/chicago-neighborhood-gardens-grow-veggies-community-spirit/>

GIZ and ICLEI, 2014, Operationalizing the Urban NEXUS: towards resource efficient and integrated cities and metropolitan regions, GIZ Study: www.iclei.org/urbanexus

Scope for improvement

The NeighborSpace land trust explores a new institutional NEXUS between local governmental agencies and the grassroots movement of urban gardening while preserving and creating green open spaces in the city. However, since the gardening and preservation lots may restrict access to non-community members and are not allowed to provide traditional playground facilities, they do not fully substitute public parks in the neighborhoods they are located in.

Replication

The initiative is replicable in other cities as well, provided that enough support and interest exist for urban gardening and land preservation from both the government and civil society. The initiative works best in a city in which enough idle land is available for gardening and land preservation.

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