

ABSTRACT

Community gardens foster many potential benefits, including food security, environmental stability, neighborhood beautification, and community cohesion (Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007). Social capital, commonly recognized as the sense of community, is an intangible asset fostered through civic engagement and correlated to increased quality of life (Putnam, 1993). This model tested the viability of social capital as a measurable indicator for community garden planning in conjunction with traditional agricultural criteria modified for urban agriculture in Akron, Ohio. The study identified vacant parcels in areas with fewer hubs of civic engagement in which to place community gardens as a tool for fostering social capital. In an adapted methodology, this study introduces spatial components to social capital at the neighborhood scale, drawing from the theory behind Putnam's work to measure community involvement through membership counts at individual hubs of civic engagement. Sites with greater need for social capital were identified. The principal hubs of civic engagement identified were churches, which appeared to be a limitation to the study. Further field work to identify site-specific social hubs will be required for this method of measurement to be applied in Akron and other cities. However, the basic methodology is an effective tool in site suitability analyses for community gardens and social capital.