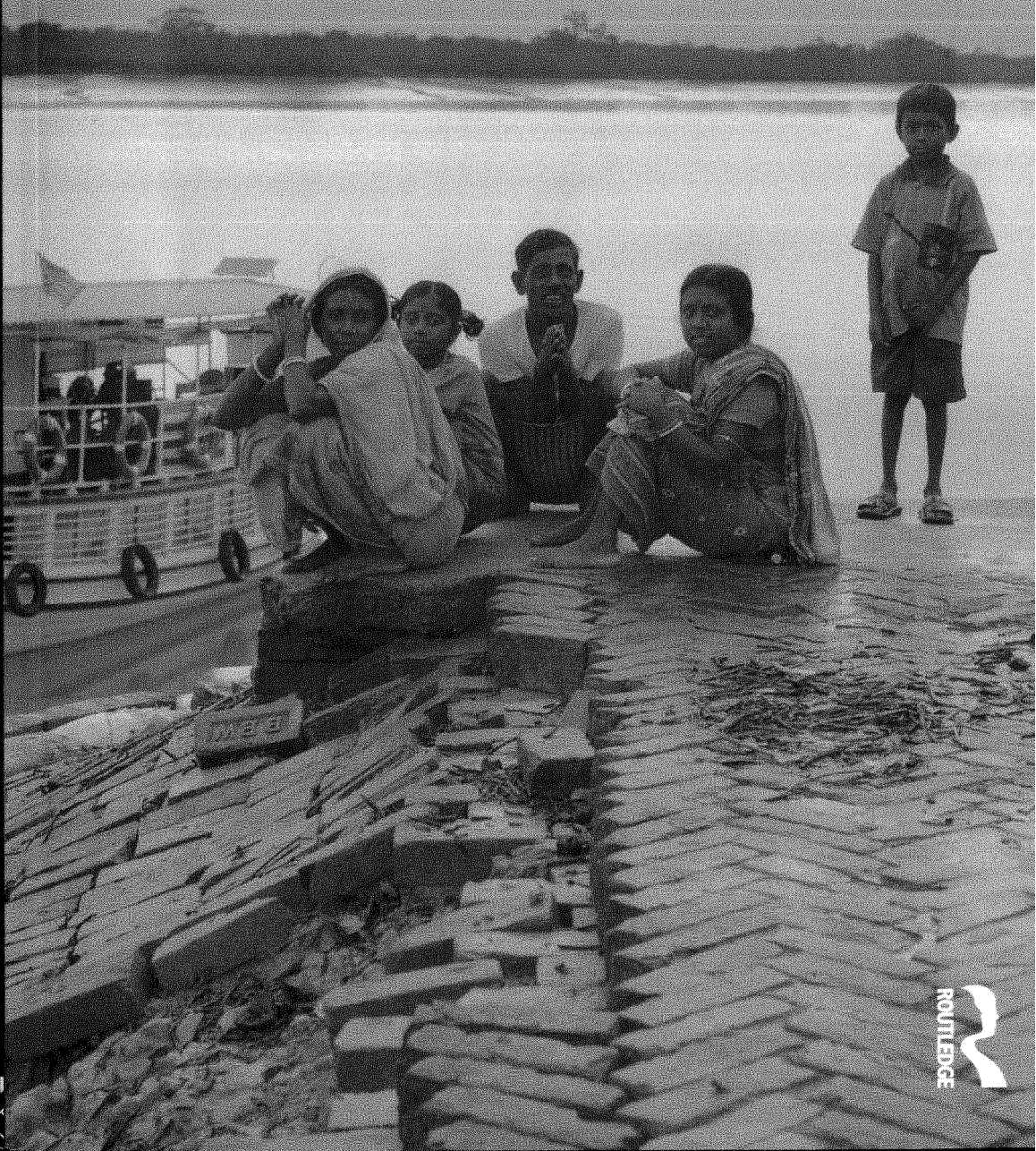


# ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY

EDITED BY HELEN KOPNINA AND  
ELEANOR SHOREMAN-OUIMET



First published 2011  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Environmental anthropology today / edited by Helen Kopnina and Eleanor Shoreman-Ouimet.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Human ecology. I. Kopnina, Helen. II. Shoreman-Ouimet, Eleanor.

GF41.E417 2011

304.2—dc22

2011004694

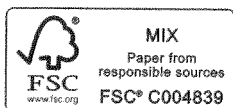
ISBN: 978-0-415-78155-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-78156-5 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-80690-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo

by Taylor & Francis Books



Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire

# LINKING CLIMATE ACTION TO LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

## A Case Study of Diverse Chicago Neighborhoods

*Jennifer Hirsch, Sarah Van Deusen Phillips, Edward  
Labenski, Christine Dunford, and Troy Peters*

'The point is to learn, how does one community start and scale out. Because the best impact starts with individuals on a small level and grows out.'

Community Leader, North Kenwood/Oakland  
neighborhood, Chicago

Over the past decade, environmental anthropologists have increasingly argued for the importance of inserting anthropological arguments into debates on climate change (Magistro 2001, Human Organization 2003, Crate and Nuttall 2009, Baer and Singer 2008). In a recent volume, *Anthropology and Climate Change: From Encounters to Actions*, Crate and Nuttall (2009) lay out at least three areas in need of new research that focus on human-environment relationships: 1) anthropology's role in exploring the cultural implications of climate change, 2) facilitating collaborative, community-based projects focused on mitigation and adaptation, and 3) developing culturally-sensitive strategies for communicating climate change to diverse audiences. However, few studies have examined climate change or climate action efforts in diverse urban areas or even in the United States (Crate 2008).

This chapter presents ongoing applied ethnographic research being led by The Field Museum's division of Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo) to understand sociocultural viewpoints on climate change in Chicago's diverse neighborhoods (The Field Museum 2009, 2010a, 2010b). This research was commissioned by the City of Chicago Department of Environment (DOE) to help them develop locally relevant communication strategies and programs for engaging diverse communities in the Chicago Climate Action Plan (CCAP). Launched by the City of Chicago in October 2008, the CCAP aims to reduce carbon emissions to 25 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050 by implementing five strategies focused on energy efficiency in buildings, clean and renewable energy, improved transportation options, waste reduction, and adaptation (City of Chicago 2008).

To date, The Field Museum has completed studies in five communities (three of which are available on the Web at: <http://fieldmuseum.org/explore/department/ecco/engaging-chicago-communities-climate-action>), and we are now in the midst of doing five more after which the project will be complete. This chapter reports on the results of our first two studies, in the South Chicago and North Kenwood-Oakland/Bronzeville (hereafter 'NKO') communities, as well as the community engagement work that has resulted from all of them.

The Field Museum's goal in undertaking this research project was to help strengthen climate action in the Chicago area by facilitating the active involvement of diverse communities. More specifically, using the research as a jumping off point for additional work with community, environmental, and government organizations (discussed in the final section of the chapter), we aim to help communities actively participate in city-led CCAP programs as well as incorporate climate action in their community-led work and lead grassroots climate action campaigns. To facilitate innovation in both, our research aims to help establish processes for collaboration and sharing of ideas. These processes should allow for a multilateral flow of information, ideas, and best practices—between the City and communities, and among communities themselves—and also result in building the capacity of community leaders to lead climate action based on their visions of what it means to be a low-carbon, sustainable city. If our projects are successful, community leaders will not only carry out CCAP strategies but will participate in long-term planning around climate action goals and strategies focused both on their specific communities and on the city and region more generally. We see this as the urban equivalent of involving local populations in the planning and management of protected areas (Introduction to this volume).

In addition to serving as an ethnography of human-environment interactions, this study addresses intersections among climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and the varied multi-stakeholder interests at the local level, which are often situated in long-standing historical, institutional, and culturally rooted values and practices (Poncelet 2004). Our research explores what climate change and climate action initiatives look like within a context of both innovative collaborations and multiple long-standing histories of distrust of efforts initiated by outside entities, including the government. It attempts to address two fundamental questions: 1) how and under what circumstances can climate change and climate action become an issue pushed forward at the local level, and 2) what will make climate change feel relevant and urgent to urban communities? Our research suggests that even in communities where climate change may not be a predominant local concern, there still exist opportunities for widespread adoption of carbon reduction strategies by promoting local quality of life benefits of climate action in areas such as environmental health, energy efficiency, food security, heritage promotion, affordable housing, youth engagement, job creation, community safety, or other locally relevant issues. Anthropology has a great deal to contribute to these debates, and to understanding how addressing key local concerns—which may or may not be directly related to climate change—and working effectively with local partners can be central to the

effectiveness of climate policy, and to generating engagement strategies that work best for policy makers and community residents alike.

The chapter has five sections. Section 1 presents The Field Museum's research methodology and approach to applied anthropology. Section 2 provides a brief introduction to the communities of South Chicago and North Kenwood/Oakland, based on our research findings. Section 3 examines findings on climate change awareness and local environmental practices and values. Section 4 explores community concerns that have the potential to link to the CCAP climate action strategies (referred to in climate change circles as 'co-benefits'). Finally, Section 5 reviews The Field Museum's on-going efforts to turn research findings into action. Throughout, we highlight the commonalities and differences in our research communities and suggest ways in which local community assets and environmental values can be built upon and enhanced by climate action. We aim to provide a specific example of the role that applied environmental anthropology can play in developing broader participatory models for democratic decision making and policy development in a complex and socially differentiated urban environment.

## **Section 1: The Field Museum's Approach To Exploring Human-Environment Interactions**

The division of Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo) is the applied science arm of The Field Museum of Natural History. Since its founding in 1995 as two separate departments (the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change [CCUC], and Environmental and Conservation Programs), the division has always viewed research as a step in a larger process of community engagement. As a respected institution embedded in Chicago's cultural fabric – and with strong connections to government agencies, area universities, and planning institutes – our work often focuses on facilitating equitable relationships between small and large organizations (Wali 2006, The Field Museum 2007). As a natural history museum with four departments focused on biological and cultural diversity—zoology, botany, geology, and anthropology—our thematic focus has always been on people and their environments.

Undergirding all of our major projects is a framework developed by CCUC's founder, environmental anthropologist Alaka Wali, termed 'Common Concerns, Different Responses.' This framework explains cultural diversity as the product of: 1) environment – the material resources available to us, 2) history – an accumulation of past actions, ideas, and values, and 3) creativity – human ingenuity that allows us to develop strategies for overcoming constraints and creating new opportunities for survival and collaboration (Wali 2006, The Field Museum 2010c). It resonates with the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) emphasized in this volume, which recognizes that humans, though capable of complex cultural achievement, are still biological organisms that exist in a complex relationship with their ecosystem and are therefore subject to processes of ecological balance (Catton & Dunlap 1980, Dunlap 1980, 1983, Dunlap & Marshall 2007). By overtly recognizing that human cultures operate within ecological systems of scarcity, we can begin to understand how groups of

people come to make sense of their place in both local and global ecological systems. Furthermore, we can encourage innovative cultural adaptations to scarcity that can mitigate some of the negative human impacts on the environment, like those that we now know result in climate change.

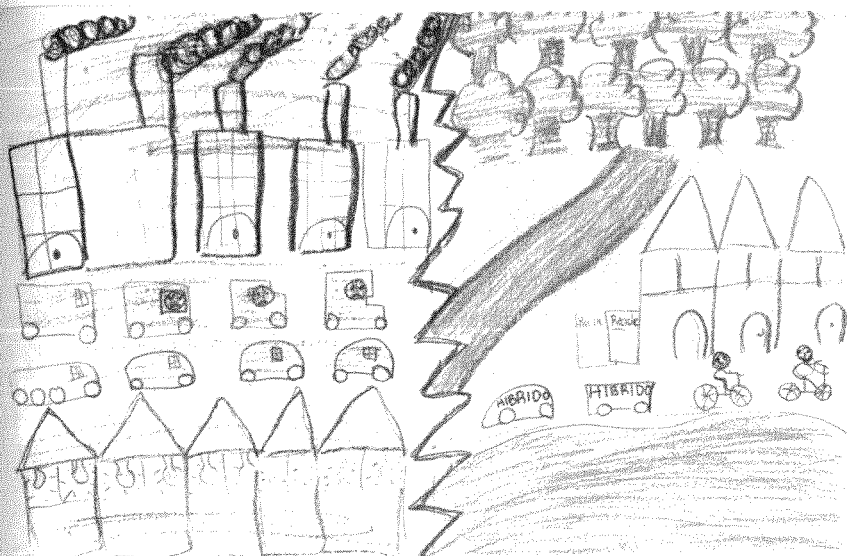
ECCo's focus on human-environment interactions has led us to undertake anthropological projects focused on place-making: examining and strengthening residents' and communities' relationship to and stewardship of the neighborhoods and regions in which they live through the nurturing of innovative collaborations between organizations focused on environmental and sociocultural issues (The Field Museum 2003, 2008). More specifically, the Common Concerns, Different Responses framework has led us to focus our research and action programs since the early 2000s on identifying:

- 1 *community concerns and understandings* that link environmental and sociocultural issues,
- 2 *community assets* that can serve as a starting point for broadening community involvement in work around these concerns,<sup>1</sup> and
- 3 *barriers* to increased participation in environmental practices and programs.

### ***Climate Action Research: Methods***

In the climate action research that is the focus of this chapter, we have conducted rapid ethnographic research, completing each study in approximately six months, with the ethnographic component lasting approximately four months. Each study is a participatory action research project (The Field Museum 2007), which in this case is conducted by a team including Field Museum anthropologists, staff from the Chicago Department of Environment, and leaders of community-based organizations in the communities being studied. Working with community organizations that have strong social capital has been key to the success of the project: in gaining rapid access to the community, capitalizing on existing community knowledge, and using the research process itself as the first step in climate action engagement to begin to build residents' and community leaders' understanding and awareness of climate change as well as their capacity to address it. Involving the DOE has also proven crucial, in ensuring that we accurately describe the CCAP and the City's goals, connect to DOE community partners, and help craft research questions and recommendations so that they can easily translate to action.

In each of the studies discussed in this chapter (South Chicago and North Kenwood/Oakland), we engaged or observed approximately 200 leaders and residents. Our research activities included the traditional ethnographic methods of interviews, focus groups, and participant-observation at community meetings and events. We also employed visual and performative methods (see examples in Figures 13.1 and 13.3), including drawing, object-based storytelling, participatory photography and photo elicitation, community mapping, and visual prompting (e.g., using photo collages of environmentally-friendly practices to prompt discussion). We find that these



**FIGURE 13.1** Drawing from a focus group in South Chicago in response to the question, 'What does climate change look like to you?' the accompanying caption reads (translated from Spanish): 'I drew something that represents the good we can do [for the environment] and the consequences of doing so, as well as of the bad we are doing and the consequences of that.'

© The Field Museum, ECCo.

methods draw out local understandings about climate change and environment in creative ways, and thus help us access information and ideas that might not come forth using traditional research methods. For example, in South Chicago we conducted a focus group with Latino residents in which we asked participants to draw what climate change looks like to them. Some of our approaches (and interdisciplinary methods) have been influenced by our role as a natural history museum with a strong focus on material life. Two examples include 1) focus groups that use objects to prompt discussion and 2) home interviews in which we take photographs of participants interacting with objects and spaces that represent their environmentally-friendly practices.<sup>2</sup>

## Section 2: Community Overview

We chose South Chicago and NKO (for map see Figure 13.2) as the first two research sites because they seemed fertile ground to explore the potential of making climate action relevant to a diverse range of residents. Both communities are located on the city's South Side and have significant differences in demographics, geography, and history. South Chicago is racially and ethnically diverse – with a population that is 62 per cent African American, 33.4 per cent Latino, and 5.6 per cent white – and largely working-class, with a 2000 Census median income of \$34,279. NKO is racially homogeneous, with a population that is nearly 97 per cent African American,



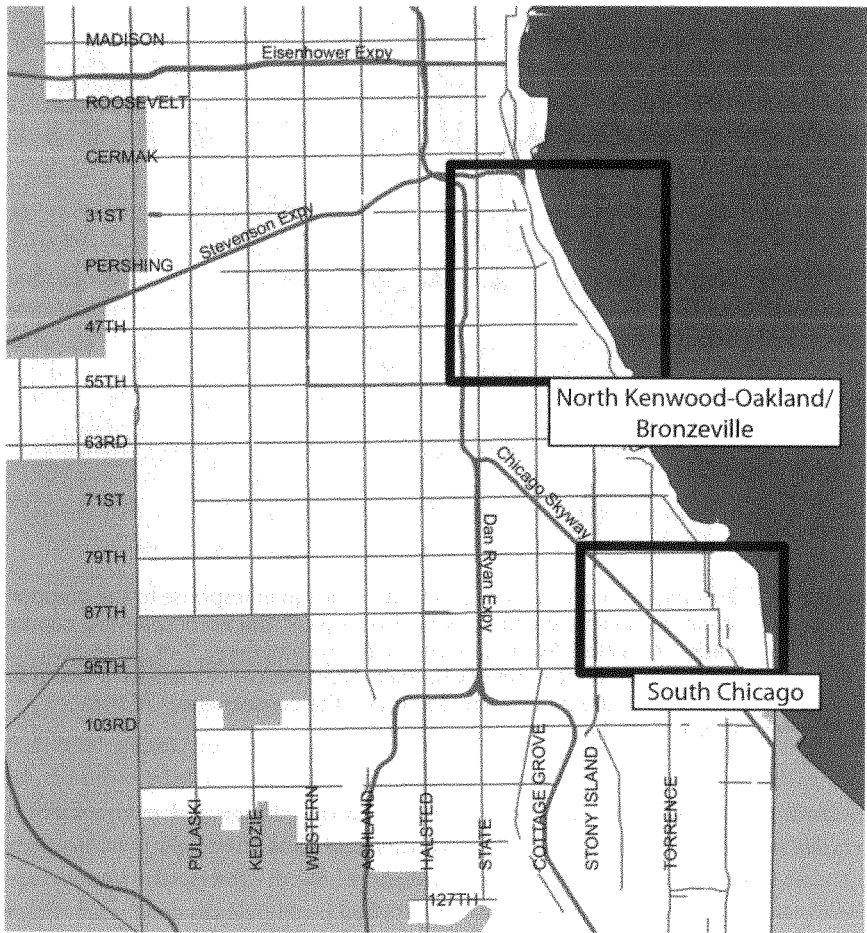


FIGURE 13.2 Map of research areas in Chicago © The Field Museum, ECCo.

but it has recently become highly class stratified with many subsidized public housing residents living next to increasingly affluent homeowners.

Like the rest of the Southeast Side in which it is located, South Chicago was born with the expansion of the American steel industry in the 19th century. Much of the community derives its identity from an interwoven history of heavy industrialization and ecological richness, as well as the subsequent histories of immigration and deindustrialization. As a result, the heritage of South Chicago is grounded in working-class origins, particularly the strong tradition of labor union activism among the largely immigrant workers who were the backbone of the mills. Many of the social and environmental practices we documented in South Chicago can be traced back to the traditions different groups brought with them and fostered through their experiences in the steel mills, from Appalachia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America (Sellers 1998 and Walley 2009).



In recent years, the Southeast Side has been defined by nearly constant and dramatic change. As a result of the steel mill closures in the 1980s, community demographics shifted and City services contracted as well. Our research suggests that during this process, residents came to believe that mainstream organizations, including the City, were not going to take care of them as their livelihoods failed. This, in turn, led to a strong culture of self-sufficiency and the birth of a plethora of community organizations that provide social services and advocate for community needs. It also resulted in a strong tradition of community-based activism that mobilizes residents to address big challenges—some of which have been related to the environmental degradation left behind in the region by heavy industry.

Discussions of heritage in South Chicago and the Southeast Side often emphasize the community's history of standing up to powerful forces and fighting for justice and a good quality of life. Stories about the steel mills emphasize not only the work itself, and how hard it was, but also steelworkers' experiences organizing for their rights through union activism—again, across lines of race and ethnicity. This particular theme is embodied in the popular play, *Unfriendly Fire*, by local author Kevin Murphy (2003), which details the events leading to, and the fallout from, the confrontation between police and union members at Republic Steel on Memorial Day of 1937. The important role of confrontation also emerges in discussions of the birth of the region's environmental movement in the 1980s, which stemmed from conflicts concerning proposals for increasing landfills in the area and building Chicago's third regional airport. Ongoing volunteer efforts to address pollution through restoring and rehabilitating city lots, public parks, and nature preserves are one example of how this environmental activism in South Chicago continues to this day.

In comparison, NKO has been shaped by competing needs for housing near downtown. In the late nineteenth century, Chicago's growing white middle-class built up NKO as a residential area. Shortly thereafter, the exploding African-American population—fueled by the Great Migration—was forced to crowd into the neighboring communities that would become Bronzeville. After restrictive covenants fell in the 1940s, African-American families started moving into NKO from older parts of the adjacent 'Black Belt' to find better housing, and the neighborhood was quickly absorbed into the greater Bronzeville cultural area. Over its history, NKO has been influenced time and again by government experiments in urban planning. It has been victim to discriminatory federal home appraisal practices in the 1930s and 1940s, host to thousands of public housing units in the 1950s and 1960s, neglected by city planners in the 1970s, and more recently a site of property redevelopment and gentrification as a result of changes in public housing that removed thousands of now dilapidated units and their residents (Patillo 2007: 4).

Due to constant in and out migrations, as well as the flow of those who commute for work and services, NKO area residents described strong connections with many other parts of the city, particularly African-American areas on the South and West Sides. This, in addition to the Bronzeville area's historic significance as a national center for African-American culture, results in residents identifying with a broader conception of African-American heritage than a purely location-based one. As an

outgrowth of this many NKO residents support broad notions of racial uplift, but the specific shape of that identity and uplift varies by class and social aspirations. Many NKO residents are also personally committed to projects that improve the appearance and perception of their community, in response to the legacy of concentrated poverty brought on by public housing developments. Campaigns for well-managed affordable housing, resident-led efforts to keep area parks safe by involving youth in structured activities, and neighborhood councils that monitor the quality of new developments, renovations, and general property maintenance are all examples of the types of concerns that have mobilized community action in NKO.

Environmental issues have only recently begun to be talked about and addressed in NKO, partly in response to promises of green jobs and cost savings via energy efficiency spread through the wider media and Chicago's organizational networks. In addition, though, a small minority of community leaders are passionate about climate change-related issues, such as peak oil, and are actively trying to spread awareness and mobilize action, in part by framing these issues as strategies for tackling other community challenges. For example, the Bronzeville Alliance holds monthly movie nights featuring sustainability-themed movies and is creating community gardens to address a number of issues including access to affordable healthy food, job training, and beautification.

Like South Chicago, NKO also has a strong culture of self-sufficiency, but it is embedded in their close relationship with city government and with nearby research institutions like the University of Chicago and the Illinois Institute of Technology. Our research suggests community leaders warily adapt pragmatic engagement strategies: staying aware of various policy initiatives and research projects to try to harness them to their local goals. This is complicated by internal differences among community organizations, which often prevents them from forming a unified front. One of the most significant points of difference exists between those groups who work to increase property values and others who focus on developing residential capacities to improve life for the entire community without displacing its lower-income members.

Both the South Chicago and NKO communities have a mix of agencies with outside connections, local community organizations, small businesses, and activist residents who operate as primary advocates for various community concerns. But while the South Chicago community's history of rapid industrialization and deindustrialization has given rise to a vibrant set of grassroots organizations and local social networks, NKO with its changing population patterns and long history of direct government intervention is primarily led by organizational brokers: groups that act as bridges between the community and powerful institutions. Our research in the two communities suggests it is key to have both types of community assets working in concert—grassroots organizations and cultural brokers—to implement and drive successful initiatives to mobilize residents around climate issues.

Understanding the histories and social contexts of these two communities, as presented in this section, provides a basis for thinking in a more nuanced and embedded way about their environmental engagement and how to increase this engagement by linking it to other community concerns—as discussed in the next two sections.

## Perspectives On the Environment and Climate Change

In both South Chicago and NKO, awareness of climate change figures into community life, but to differing degrees and in different ways. For example, in South Chicago and on the Southeast Side there is significant interest in the concepts of climate change, global warming, and 'going green' that relates to the area's long interconnected history with the natural environment. This recognition is directly tied to historical memory of the impact of mills on local air and water quality, as well as current struggles with open space, landfills impacting the region, and coal piles releasing pollutants into the area. In contrast, for residents of NKO, climate change tends to be a more abstract and distant concern that is not recognized as an immediate threat to the environment in the Chicago region.

Despite differences about the immediacy of climate change impacts, residents of South Chicago and NKO both recognize that climate change is an important concern. One area where this was particularly evident was in discussions of the weather. In South Chicago, we documented numerous examples of residents expressing concern over recent changes in weather patterns. For example, a local owner of a body shop described small talk he engaged in with clients about winters being milder and having less snow than in the past, while participants in a neighborhood focus group observed how bird migrations have changed and geese now remain in the area all year. In NKO, local awareness of changing weather patterns emerged through interviews in which participants were asked to answer the question: 'What three words come to mind when you hear 'climate change'?' Responses such as 'extremely hot,' 'extremely cold,' or some variation (see word cloud in Figure 13.3) reflected recognition that weather and climate is now or will be more variable or unpredictable; in addition, participants tied these statements to observations about recent changes in local seasons, noting warmer winters and cooler summers. Other observations in NKO highlighted changes in local growing seasons and the mix of local flora and fauna, thus demonstrating awareness that climate change is not just a global, but also a local phenomenon.

Not only do residents in both communities recognize that changes in climate are taking place, but they attribute these changes to anthropogenic causes (although speculation varies widely on the technical nature of these causes). For example, respondents in both South Chicago and NKO reported a conviction that the space shuttle going up into space pokes holes in the atmosphere that lead to changes in weather, with an NKO resident stating, 'We have emissions going out and the sun coming in.' In another example from South Chicago, an immigrant from Mexico City regretted that human pollution of the ocean is resulting in the dramatic hurricane and tsunami events she sees reported on the news.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that both communities recognize the impact of human behavior on their environment, differences emerged in views concerning individual responsibility for altering behavior to mitigate climate change. Specifically, residents in South Chicago tended to have a sense of personal responsibility vis-à-vis the environment, while those in NKO felt that personal impacts on the environment are insignificant compared to the large-scale damage caused by corporations and the



FIGURE 13.3 As part of our interviews in NKO, participants were asked, ‘What are three words that come to mind when you hear “climate change?”’ Their responses are depicted in this word cloud. More frequently occurring words appear larger.

© The Field Museum, ECCo/Image by Sarah Sommers.

U.S. government. For example, a young Mexican woman born in South Chicago related her distress about the polar ice cap melting and the plight of the polar bears and said, ‘We need to comport ourselves well with regards to the environment.’ In contrast, a resident of NKO expressed skepticism regarding the effectiveness of individual behavior when government spending and businesses are destroying the atmosphere by launching satellites and space shuttles, rhetorically asking what point there is to doing little things to address the problem when the government is sending up the space shuttle? This attitude of skepticism was also echoed by many NKO residents who believe that the scope of climate change and the solutions to address it are beyond their control.

Awareness of climate change and its human causes are further evidenced by the ways in which people in both communities report learning about these issues, specifically by relating them to personal experiences.<sup>3</sup> Our research shows that residents of South Chicago often have had experiences that demonstrate to them the concrete effect that humans have on the environment. For example, Mexican immigrants to South Chicago drew on first-hand experiences of water scarcity and changing temperatures in Mexico to shape their environmentally proactive behaviors in Chicago, while white families from the U.S. and Eastern Europe who survived the closing of the steel mills actively linked industrial air contamination to the high incidence of pulmonary illness, cancer, and degenerative mental illnesses experienced in their communities. In NKO, residents drew on personal experiences related to the environment more broadly—about pollution, weather, the atmosphere, and consumerism

(what they can purchase to help the environment)—to construct models of how climate change works and what can be done to address it.

Beyond personal experience, the media and different social institutions play an important role in both communities as information conduits about climate change. Both communities report learning about the impacts of humans on climate change from a variety of formal and informal institutional sources, including media, schools, and community organizations. For example, in both communities, mass media is an important source, especially television. More formally, in South Chicago and NKO, a number of schools and educational programs offered by community organizations seek to explicitly raise environmental awareness and teach people about climate change. There are more of these programs, though, in South Chicago. For example, a number of South Chicago community organizations—including many that have not traditionally advocated for environmental issues, but instead have focused on housing, health care, and jobs—have expanded their programming over the last few years to include support for local gardening, campaigns for improved recycling programs, and field trips to local natural areas. Examples of such programs include a local health clinic sponsoring a community garden as a source of local, fresh produce, the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce coordinating efforts to install solar-powered trash compactors along a major street to reduce litter, and a local community center sponsoring a summer camp program that takes children on field trips to local ecological areas to learn about invasive species.

### *Environmentally-friendly Practices*

Our research found that local practices often re-enforce CCAP goals because significant portions of both communities have already sought out creative means for conserving their scarce financial resources. For example, residents of NKO and South Chicago report taking steps in their homes to help offset some of their energy expenditures, including turning off lights and television sets when leaving rooms, turning off water when brushing their teeth or doing the dishes, and replacing incandescent bulbs with City-provided CFLs (often received from local organizations that distribute them at community events). Similarly, residents of both NKO and South Chicago reported frequent attendance of DOE-sponsored events where they learn about energy efficiency and receive weatherization kits and CFLs to help them improve energy efficiency at home.

Both communities are also actively engaged in different forms of recycling. In South Chicago, recycling has a long history and is tied to local efforts to minimize pollution and reduce the expansion of landfills into valuable wetlands. Community organizations run programs that aim to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts of landfills on the community while at the same time addressing a lack of City-sponsored recycling programs that are more readily available in other parts of Chicago. For example, a community health program worked with City offices and education organizations to increase access to recycling centers and to further increase awareness of the need to recycle in the neighborhood. In NKO, community

interviews and surveys revealed a near universal awareness of the importance of recycling; however, participation is hampered by widespread skepticism of the City's ability to effectively manage recycling programs. That said, schools in the NKO area actively engage children in recycling efforts, and some parents report that the enthusiasm their children bring home from school encourages them to recycle, despite doubts of its efficacy.

Other environmentally-friendly practices that residents and community organizations engage in are cultural in origin: they are learned behaviors inculcated through heritage traditions and through the creation and maintenance of social relationships. Continuing with the topic of recycling, in both communities, specific forms of local practice have emerged around a variation on recycling: repurposing. In South Chicago, these are rooted in long standing traditions of thrift, dealing with scarcity, and entrepreneurship in the Latino community. Though community members complain about a lack of easily accessible recycling centers for large items like appliances and electronics, local organizations work hard to provide recycling outlets for smaller household items such as clothing, used furniture, metal and plastic goods, and paper. For example, a local community center collects and distributes gently used furniture and clothing to community members who need them, and then uses the cloth from worn out clothing for summer camp craft projects such as making Aztec calendars. In NKO, in keeping with the community's long standing participation in Chicago's mural movement, a community-based design center and a local artist have both created high profile recycled art projects. The design center aims to use art to raise environmental awareness and is interested in transforming its building into a green demonstration site.

In South Chicago, some environmentally-friendly practices reflect the diversity of its immigrant heritage (see tapestry made of recycled objects in Figure 13.4), while in NKO, similar practices tend to reflect strong ties to agrarian roots in the rural South. These practices also reflect the communities' working class origins and residents creatively adapting to limited financial resources. For example, one practice that is part of everyday life in South Chicago, and increasingly in other areas including the suburbs, is found in the *junqueros*—Latino scrap metal collectors—who pick up defunct appliances and other large metal items that are cast off in alleys and transport them to reclamation centers for income. Residents specifically report leaving defunct appliances on the curb for *junqueros* to collect rather than calling a removal service because they know the appliance will be recycled. This practice is complemented by appliance repair shops owned and operated by local community members that refurbish small electronics for resale—items that would otherwise find their ways into landfills. Meanwhile, Latina women reported that they prefer to use rags to clean up messes in their homes rather than paper towels because that is what their mothers and grandmothers did. Similarly, seniors in South Chicago told stories of growing up crafting quilts and other handicraft items from household odds and ends to sell in the neighborhood and for use at home—a tradition that some continue.

Gardens are also popular in both communities. In South Chicago, there are a growing number of community and backyard gardens, and even one effort to create



**FIGURE 13.4** A partnership between a community organization and an environmental organization in South Chicago resulted in a program on creative recycling. Families involved created this tapestry, which combines recycled objects from contemporary life with skeletons, a common symbol used during 'Day of the Dead' celebrations, which are based on Mexican cultural beliefs that see death and life as an integrated whole.

© The Field Museum, ECCo/Photo by Sarah Van Deusen Phillips.

a backyard gardeners' network. Residents and organizations grow fresh vegetables that they cannot find locally, including vegetables that have cultural significance, such as chili peppers, tomatoes, and corn for Latinos and okra, greens, sweet potatoes, and watermelon for African Americans. For one senior who participated in a focus group in South Chicago, gardening is an important part of her own community heritage—and others' cultural heritage. She recalled: '... there was a spot ... that was put aside for the people to grow their vegetables. And the Mexican people used to call it the *jardines*. They used to grow corn, potatoes, to feed, supplement their needs, especially during the Depression that started in 1929.'

Gardeners in NKO typically garden in their backyards; there are very few community gardens and a few new school gardens. Residents attributed their horticultural interest to family or the community where they were raised (e.g. Iowa, and Tennessee), while members of both communities recall gardening as an important part of their past. A number of community members in NKO expressed a nostalgic connection to their childhood chores tending plants in the rural South, while others recounted memories of their grandparents gardening, though they do not engage in the activity themselves.



These examples of how South Chicago and NKO engage in locally meaningful practices that are also environmentally friendly represent key opportunities for generating participation in CCAP work. We recommended to the DOE that CCAP programs should recognize, reward, and build on the diverse conservation practices that already exist in communities—and which are often ignored in climate change discourse focused on the importance of behavior change. As our research in South Chicago and NKO demonstrates, a variety of sustainable practices exist in low income communities where residents have developed innovative strategies for maintaining a high quality of life based on minimal resource use, re-use, and extensive sharing. Furthermore, in both NKO and South Chicago, community heritage is central to how residents view themselves and confront challenges, thus much effort is put into preserving this important cultural history. Climate action programs can work to encourage heritage preservation efforts to also identify eco-friendly community traditions and valorize them as an important part of local heritage and a means of meeting broader-scale mitigation and adaptation goals.

### ***Barriers to Participation in Climate Action-related Programs and Implications for Action***

As the examples above demonstrate, our research uncovered a number of ways in which heritage traditions and lifestyles of low income populations facilitate environmentally-friendly practices. However, we also identified patterns in both communities in which past experiences and cultural norms serve as barriers to conservation behavior. For example, in the same focus group referenced above in South Chicago, many seniors reflected on how hard life was for them as children and expressed relief at no longer having those hardships. One resident captured this sentiment by saying she was grateful for paper napkins and other disposable items that make life easier now. Relatedly, one community leader in South Chicago told us that the African-American youth she works with are not very interested in recycling or re-using old products. She said that they equate these concepts with ‘used,’ and the youth tend to feel that they ‘aren’t good enough to get new stuff.’

Our research found cultural barriers to climate-friendly practices even more prevalent in NKO, due to its socioeconomic diversity and concern that some residents have about raising the community’s image. While African-American cultural traditions of frugality, outdoor socializing, and growing food can be seen as community-rooted climate action, some cultural expectations and community rules discourage these practices. For example, when researchers showed one community leader and long-time NKO homeowner a set of photographs that included a clothesline, she told us (paraphrased):

[A woman down the street] made the mistake of hanging clothes on a line. ... I think everybody within two blocks was down at her house telling her to take those sorts of clothes off the line! ‘Where do you think you are?’ And I’m sure she’s got a dryer in the house, but she thought she was going to get some

clothes dried on a line and get the fresh open air. ... disastrous (laughs). This is just not that kind of community.

The key here is that hanging out clothes carries a stigma because it suggests people cannot afford basic modern amenities and thus conflicts with a local identity of middle class respectability. These expectations are reinforced in the lease terms at mixed-income developments that prohibit the use of clotheslines on balconies and thus encouraged residents in part through the provision of dryers, to practice a more energy intensive, urban middle-class lifestyle—in this, cultural barriers are reinforced by institutional barriers. Raising chickens—a practice that is becoming increasingly popular around the Chicago area—is another practice that interviewees suggested would not be tolerated in NKO.

These ambivalent sorts of sentiments toward environmentally-friendly practices reveal some of the cultural complexity involved in pushing people to change their behaviors—especially when, as is the case with some of the practices called for in the CCAP, the behaviors being promoted counter American markers of success, signaled by a more consumptive lifestyle. But this does not mean that such sentiments have to be barriers to climate action success. Rather, the DOE can build on existing cultural practices that promote conservation to develop creative strategies for diverse engagement. Key to this is recognizing and rewarding practices that mainstream society frequently denigrates by emphasizing how such practices can come to indicate a high quality of life that is not based on excessive material possessions. A truly successful climate action engagement plan will help people recognize and take pride in the expertise they already have in conservation and sustainable living, thus changing their behavior in proactive ways that become locally meaningful. Indeed, our research illustrates that communities are interested in such changes. For example, in NKO a staff person from the local design center responded to our research findings by suggesting that the center start a community-wide clothesline art project to validate and promote the reintroduction of clotheslines, which for him brings to mind memories of his grandmother socializing with the neighbors while hanging out the clothes.

Our research in both communities also revealed that distrust of the City, large institutions, and major efforts initiated by them is another major barrier to climate action—especially when the action desired is participation in the City's climate action plan. In both South Chicago and NKO, there is significant suspicion among both community leaders and residents about 'green' initiatives that are introduced to the community from outside. South Chicago is a community that feels it was cast aside when the steel mills closed because it was no longer valuable to the city. There, residents suspect that current interest in 'helping' their community by improving environmental conditions is more about gentrification and displacement—the potential value of new lakefront residential properties to the City and developers—than about a genuine desire to help current residents or even improve the environment. This attitude of suspicion has some of its roots in a particular case concerning Waste Management (the local garbage collection company), in which the company dis-guised a proposal for a five-year extension for dumping at a landfill slated for closure

as a plan for redeveloping the landfill as a park. When the community discovered Waste Management's duplicity, they took their complaint to the City, where they encountered what they perceived to be strong support for Waste Management's position over their own. Ultimately, the community prevailed and the landfill was closed as scheduled, but the experience left behind resentful feelings. Further evidence of distrust manifests as concern that redevelopment will push residents out of homes that some families have lived in for generations. This fear was represented most clearly in signs posted around the South Chicago neighborhood that said: 'Jobs 4 Green not Green 4 Condos,' sighted by a researcher during a bus tour sponsoring green development initiatives in the area. As with the Waste Management proposal, residents see green redevelopment as a City-sponsored process that overlooks their concerns and problems rather than addressing them, a stance that is captured particularly well in one woman's ironic response to being asked to participate in an energy savings challenge on the City of Chicago's CCAP Web site: 'Does having your gas and electric shut off count as energy conservation?'

In NKO, distrust of City and outside institutional programs stems from the community's long history of racial segregation and what some community leaders see as the City's efforts to capitalize on community assets—including its close proximity to downtown and Lake Michigan—to benefit outside businesses and government. One recent example can be seen in the abortive 2016 Olympic bid, during which a shuttered local hospital on the lakefront was acquired by the City of Chicago for the Olympic village rather than for community needs. Subsequent to the loss of the Olympic bid, the City has abandoned its promise to build proposed housing regardless of the bid's outcome. Even as many residents sense that the area is 'on the cusp of something big,' this history of outside influence has encouraged many to be suspicious of new initiatives, as demonstrated by one community leader's statement, 'The City of Chicago has always known how to keep its blight close ... The City sees where money is coming from. When money was coming for public housing they built them. When there was no money in that they dismantled the buildings to salvage the copper and sell that ... They are looking at this neighborhood to find gold.'

This cynicism also extends to the CCAP. Community leaders fear that the City and its outside collaborators are once again going to reap the benefits of externally driven change without gains accruing to area residents, or that resources will, as one resident and climate action advocate put it, travel 'down well worn paths' and completely bypass the area for better connected communities and constituencies. However, this distrust does not translate into a lack of interest in working with the City. On the contrary, the fear that resources will not make it to the community is prompting community organizations to seek meaningful partnerships to ensure they are not left out. For example, the director of an area development partnership, who is well aware of the City's history of implementing top-down housing policies, said that she still believes 'win-win' partnerships are possible to address climate change, because it is an issue around which they can design programs that meet both government and community stakeholders' expectations.

As the discussion above illustrates, people in NKO and South Chicago encounter very real barriers—particularly in terms of trust and historical memory—that may prevent them from readily engaging with CCAP programs. In response to this distrust, we recommended that the DOE expand its work around energy efficiency focused on existing buildings and raise its visibility. Though residents in both communities express skepticism of the motives underlying green development, they are open to environmentally friendly building projects as long as they do not result in gentrification and displacement. The DOE is already actively partnering with a number of community organizations in South Chicago through distribution of resources such as weatherization kits and CFLs—efforts that have proven popular with local residents. By extending these efforts in NKO and demonstrating their value to improving and maintaining historically important building stock, the DOE can contribute to community efforts to preserve its heritage and support residential stability.

### Co-Benefits—Linking Climate Action To Community Concerns

In our research we look for local concerns that could be addressed through climate action work around the five CCAP strategies: energy efficiency in buildings, clean and renewable energy, improved transportation options, waste reduction, and adaptation. We start by exploring what efforts are already underway that are directly or indirectly related to the strategies. For example, as mentioned earlier, in South Chicago we found community organizations helping residents reduce their energy bills by installing CFLs and weatherizing their homes, and we also identified a successful collaboration between the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce and community organizations to launch a low emissions community trolley. Likewise, in NKO we found a network of community organizations advocating for a new train route and a number of efforts, both organizational and individual, to raise awareness of peak oil and energy efficiency issues. These types of efforts—climate action that is emerging from the local community—provide useful starting points for engaging the communities directly in the CCAP strategies.

We also look for co-benefit opportunities: for action and interest around issues that are indirectly related to the CCAP strategies. Economic development, cost savings, health, and transportation are co-benefits of climate action that are often cited in national discussions about climate change and are mentioned specifically in the CCAP. These issues are considered co-benefits because addressing any one of them has the potential to help improve day-to-day life for residents *and* reduce carbon emissions. We found action around all of these issues in South Chicago and NKO. For example, in both communities, there are emerging efforts to develop awareness of green jobs and to provide residents with healthier food options, through community gardens and farmers' markets.

But even concerns that look similar can vary significantly from community to community depending on ecological landscapes, community demographics, and the social, economic, and political history of the area. People in post-industrial South

Chicago, for example, are used to thinking about air quality as both a health issue and an environmental issue. This offers an opportunity for building on concerns about health and pollution to make connections to CCAP strategies that may affect air quality. On the other hand, people in NKO, a largely residential community, did not often express deep concern about pollution or air quality. They did express concern about ground-level pollution from cars and bus exhaust, however, and connections might be made between this kind of pollution, climate action, and another big concern in the area, respiratory health. In our work we aim to identify local variations of common co-benefits in order to help the City and its partners develop climate awareness and action programs that match local issues, values, and practices.

In addition to the most commonly considered co-benefit areas, our research suggests that many other community concerns can in fact provide building blocks for creative entryways into increasing climate change awareness, knowledge, and action. The following table (Table 13.1) shows the community concerns in South Chicago and NKO that have the potential to link to climate action, and where and how these concerns overlap and vary.

In South Chicago *and* NKO, these productive co-benefits relate to housing (South Chicago: affordable, NKO: residential stability, restoration and preservation), youth development, use of space (South Chicago: open space, NKO: public space), heritage (South Chicago: community and multiple cultural traditions, NKO: African-American), and crime and safety. In South Chicago, our research also highlighted healthy food as a strong potential co-benefit as well as an overall interest in ‘living local’—related to the strong sense of self-sufficiency that pervades that area (as explained earlier). In NKO, our research identified a broad focus on economic development as a potential co-benefit, encompassing not just the traditional focus on green jobs but a broad array of activities from marketing the community as a destination neighborhood and establishing commercial corridors to offering financial literacy training for former public housing residents to help with resident stability.

**TABLE 13.1** Community concerns in South Chicago and NKO.

<i>South Chicago Issue</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>NKO/Bronzeville Issue</i>
<i>Affordable</i>	Housing Youth Development Crime and Safety	<i>Residential Stability, Restoration &amp; Preservation</i>
<i>Open Space</i>	Use of Space	<i>Public Space</i>
<i>Community/Cultural (multiple traditions)</i>	Heritage	<i>African-American</i>
<i>Healthy Food</i>		<i>Economic Development (broadly defined)</i>
<i>‘Living Local’</i>		

Following is a discussion of how residents in South Chicago and NKO have very different perspectives on two of these concerns: housing and use of space. The comparison illustrates the importance of developing a nuanced understanding of community concerns to make CCAP community engagement recommendations that residents will welcome and that will result in significant action. For example, a nuanced understanding of these issues and how they differ by community can help explain why many residents in South Chicago are interested in 'living local' and might support affordable, energy-efficient maintenance or renovation programs that benefit long-time home-owners; and why many residents in NKO are more interested in supporting programs that either preserve or maintain historically and aesthetically significant housing stock or that build or maintain newer, mixed-income housing developments that are attractive to a changing, economically diverse influx of home owners.

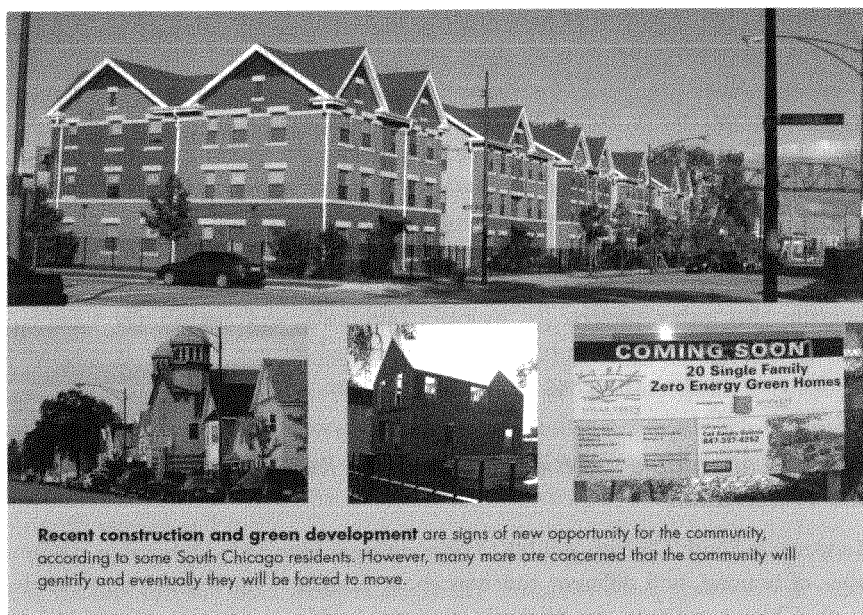
### ***Housing: Affordable v. Residential Stability, Restoration and Preservation***

Residents in South Chicago and NKO have different histories with housing, different types of housing, and different concerns about housing. Our research suggests that South Chicago residents are primarily concerned with maintaining affordable local housing options, and would participate in programs that help them improve their current homes. Many residents in NKO would also participate in programs that maintain or improve existing homes. But due to NKO's history as a historic African-American community as well as its participation in major housing initiatives over the decades and the wide socioeconomic spread of its current residents, there are a number of other housing concerns in this community that can also serve as links to climate action.

Many residents in South Chicago see their homes as their primary personal asset; they want to keep their homes in good shape; and they want to stay in the community. Over the past few years, a majority of the most visible 'going green' efforts in South Chicago have revolved around development of new affordable housing and green design. This largely stems from the work of the Claretian Associates, a non-profit developer that focuses on building affordable housing that is easy to maintain.

While some South Chicago residents welcome new, energy-efficient housing, many expressed worry that green building initiatives will result in greater scrutiny of the neighborhood by outsiders, gentrification, and displacement of current residents (see examples of new developments in Figure 13.5). Because of this fear, some organizers in South Chicago have critiqued the definition of 'affordable,' arguing that most residents cannot afford to rent or buy 'green' housing, and have also observed that the jobs that this development brings are generally non-union and go primarily to non-residents.

On the other hand, residents do welcome initiatives that help them retrofit existing structures. This concern was expressed in terms of an expanded time horizon of green initiatives related to energy efficiency, durability of construction, and conserving water as meeting generational needs for durable, easy to maintain, and affordable



**FIGURE 13.5** Recent construction and green development are signs of new opportunity for the community, according to some South Chicago residents. However, many more are concerned that the community will gentrify and eventually they will be forced to move.

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housing for future generations. Based on these findings and concerns about gentrification, we recommended that the DOE connect its energy efficient buildings strategy to residents' desire to improve their own homes and their interest in cost effective and long-term affordable housing for current and future generations. We also suggested that they de-emphasize their standard message around housing, which is that weatherization will increase home value—a proposition that can seem negative to people whose primary concern is to stay in their homes for the long-term, not sell them.

In NKO housing is a key mobilizing issue that has many facets. Beautiful greystone homes are seen as one of the community's primary assets; most of the major community organizations in the area make housing a priority; and all major community-planning projects over the past decade list housing as a concern. There have been dynamic shifts in housing stock and resident type throughout NKO's history, and the last 30 years have been no different. During this period—as thousands of subsidized housing units were demolished, and many residents were displaced—the African-American community changed from what many saw as a gang controlled model of urban blight located around a number of public housing buildings to being one of the hottest real estate markets in the city. Some of the demolished public housing was replaced with new, mixed-income housing developments; and a wave of new



construction along with a great location close to downtown drew affluent homebuyers to the area. While NKO might be an attractive option for all new homebuyers, the area's history as an African American neighborhood just next to the historic Bronzeville community made it particularly attractive to middle- and upper-class African Americans who were welcomed 'back' by most of the remaining home-owning residents.

While the economic downturn has slowed the pace of housing construction and sales in NKO and throughout the city, many community leaders and residents believe it can and will become a stable, mixed-income community with nearby commercial amenities. Different community leaders, however, have different visions of stability and different motivations for achieving it. Some want to expand existing affordable housing and support for low-income residents because they believe good housing is essential for people struggling to get an education, raise a family, or maintain employment. Others want to expand mixed-income housing to include a combination of market-rate, public, and subsidized housing and renting options because they fear an over emphasis on lower income affordable housing might concentrate poverty in the area and drive down property values. Many community residents engage in significant activity around maintaining and improving their homes. Several respondents singled out the physical aesthetics of their homes as the primary reason they moved to the area in the 1980s and 1990s. They explained that they purchased homes in NKO because they saw beauty and history beneath disrepair and dilapidation and were excited to rehabilitate their homes. Residential and political leaders as well as a powerful local community council place a high value on preserving historically significant landmark buildings and maintaining the visual aesthetics of the housing stock more generally.

Based on these findings we recommended that the DOE support initiatives that use energy efficiency as a strategy for addressing the shared concern of residential stability, by helping residents afford to stay in their homes. We also suggested that they increase awareness and knowledge of green options for home restoration, remodeling, and repair specifically by focusing on green technology and practices that are consistent with maintaining the historic character of the built environment.

### *Use of Space—Open Space v. Public Space*

Local place-making practices and the use of space are important community interests in both South Chicago and NKO, but concerns differ in each community. Residents in South Chicago are primarily concerned about open spaces, including natural areas (many of which were degraded from decades of exposure to industrial pollution), parks, and community gardens. South Chicago residents often talk about past or current experiences outdoors. Some talk about how these experiences (like fishing, walking, or restoration of natural areas) have been key to building personal attachments to and understandings about nature; others talk about how interacting in the outdoors has been important in building relationships between diverse groups of residents. In contrast, residents in NKO are primarily interested in controlling

outdoor public space, like undeveloped lots or vacant areas, parks, boulevards, and even private yards and other outside areas that are visible to the public.

Environmental restoration and open space have been significant concerns in South Chicago and on the Southeast Side more generally for many years, largely due to the industrial history and unique ecology of the region—the lake shore, the Calumet River, and the wild lands near the industrial corridor and mill areas—and a strong community tradition of cross-cultural interaction in outdoor spaces. As a result, there are many active restoration efforts operating within the South Chicago community. Alongside these are community initiatives related to securing or maintaining open space in neighborhoods. For example, at a local subsidized housing development, residents and the local tenants association are working with a teacher at an elementary school and other community residents to reclaim a series of vacant lots as an outdoor learning classroom, while local restoration efforts organized by C3 leaders (an environmental stewardship training program offered by the city), local high school teachers, and the City seek to rehabilitate city lots, public parks, and forest preserves for public use. South Chicago as a community is also focused on building a sustainable agricultural system, and a number of organizations are operating community gardens as a strategy for growing healthy food and building community, in part by drawing on different cultural traditions (heritage gardens). Open space initiatives, particularly gardens, have also been seen as a strategy for addressing crime, by reclaiming vacant land and providing youth with jobs and something to do. Community organizers are adamant that crime in their community has decreased in the summertime because so many youth have been working in the community gardens through a youth employment program sponsored by the state.

Because open space is a strong community asset in South Chicago, and gardens in particular are gaining so much momentum, our report to the DOE (The Field Museum 2009) recommended that they help the organizations running community gardens turn them into hubs for community engagement around climate action. We suggested that the organizations could be trained to use gardening as an entry point into education and action related to climate change and accompanying co-benefit issues that will improve quality of life. As an environmental practice linked to multiple community concerns and embedded in the cultural heritages of a number of populations, community gardening could be used to validate and encourage sustainable behaviors that reduce emissions and encourage low-resource, collective lifestyles connected to the outdoors.

In contrast, leaders and residents in NKO are concerned about *how* public spaces—including publicly visible private spaces—are used. These spaces include parks, sidewalks, boulevards, vacant lots, store fronts, and even front porches. Public space in NKO is valued for providing opportunities for people to socialize, do business, and exercise. Photographs taken during our research capture men playing chess, cyclists, people carrying their groceries, people catching public transportation, and runners. But use of public space is also highly contested due to concerns about community respectability and fears about safety. Many residents disapprove or are suspicious of unstructured activities in public spaces even as they support collective and purposeful efforts to beautify them.

Responses to certain public behaviors exemplify these concerns about the correct use of public space and how they connect to other concerns, not the least of which is building community among different people from different socioeconomic strata. Loitering is one kind of public behavior that connects to concerns of crime and safety (see Figure 13.6). Several respondents, including seniors and recent arrivals to the neighborhood, complained about men who stand in front of area grocery and convenience stores, and some reported that such behavior discouraged their patronage of those stores. Other residents expressed concern about public activities that they perceive as bad etiquette. For example, one middle-class homeowner complained that she is frequently awakened at five in the morning by honking as someone picks up a neighbor who lives in subsidized housing. She suggested that there should be a required orientation for these types of residents on proper community etiquette. Another respondent complained that one of the main boulevards has too many benches.

However, not all uses of public space in NKO are so contested. Many residents value creative uses of public space that bring together diverse residents to foster positive impressions of the community, around art. In fact, NKO has a history of public art projects that seek to bring the community together around collective representations. It is the site of at least two historically significant Black Arts Movement era murals from the 1970s—'A Time to Unite' (1976) and 'Black Women Emerging' (1977). A local artist in NKO has also gained significant recognition across



**FIGURE 13.6** Signs prohibiting loitering hang in storefronts along the Cottage Grove commercial strip in NKO. A banner for 'The Grove' hangs from the lamp post by the street as part of a marketing strategy to attract new customers and business to the neighborhood.

© The Field Museum, ECCo/Photograph by Sarah Sommers.

the city for turning a vacant overgrown lot across from his house into a sculpture garden and open air art museum (Spicer and Rivera 2004). As members of a historically marginalized community, many long-time residents are deeply concerned with the community image and welcome public and private efforts to 'beautify.' The artist got approval from the local alderman and planning council, involved local gang members to help protect the artwork, and was encouraged in his efforts by neighbors who gave him flowers to plant around the statues—ultimately creating a space owned by the whole community.

Because strengthening communities' connections to the outdoors is key to climate action, and public space in NKO has been the site of both contestation and vision, we recommended that the DOE support organizations' efforts to build bridges (and reduce suspicion) between residents by means of creative and collaborative uses of public space. In particular, we suggested that they encourage climate action work that brings together different sets of community members to create, maintain, beautify, and take ownership of public green spaces.

## **Moving From Research To Action – Impacting The City's Climate Action Programs**

This final section provides an overview of the initial impact that our research has had on the development of the City of Chicago's climate action programs. It discusses our efforts to build on anthropological insights to help connect climate-focused programs to community goals, link service delivery to engagement, and assist community organizations in gaining access to and some sense of ownership of a large-scale, government-sponsored initiative.

As explained at the outset of this chapter, our community studies have had a very applied goal since the beginning: to recommend strategies to the City of Chicago and its partners in the Chicago Climate Action Plan for engaging diverse neighborhoods in the plan's implementation. In all of the reports that we write, our recommendations focus partly on process: building strong relationships with community stakeholders. They also focus on program design: developing climate action programs that start with local understandings, resonate with issues that communities care about, and build on existing values and practices.

Originally we expected that our role would more or less end once we submitted our research reports to the Department of Environment. However, soon after submitting the report on our pilot study in South Chicago and the city-wide focus groups we had conducted with community leaders, ECCo was asked to work with the DOE and its partners to help them build on the research findings to design community engagement programs focused on residential retrofits, under the CCAP strategy, 'Energy Efficient Buildings.' Our role in program design and implementation has continued to expand and has proven to be crucial in ensuring that the research findings have significant impact.

Our biggest impact has been on the development and facilitation of the City's first major CCAP community engagement program, the Energy Action Network (EAN),



**FIGURE 13.7** Members of the Energy Action Network at the second quarterly meeting of Program Year 1.

© City of Chicago.

a pilot program that launched in November 2009 (see Figure 13.7). The EAN comprises 21 community-based organizations that are receiving extra funding and training to work with residents to expand heating assistance and reduce energy use through utility subsidies, weatherization, and housing retrofits. It is administered by the Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County (CEDA), a nonprofit organization that contracts with community-based organizations throughout the county to administer social service and training programs, and has participation from the utility companies ComEd and Peoples Gas. ECCo receives funding to help run the program with CEDA staff and City consultants, as part of the EAN Planning Committee.

The concept of the EAN developed in part in response to some key recommendations that we made in our initial report on South Chicago about the importance of working through trusted community organizations to engage residents in climate action. Specific EAN guidelines followed a number of the suggestions embedded in this recommendation:

*Help build the capacity of community organizations to take the lead on climate action, individually and in collaboration with other organizations and agencies. To do this, DOE should help community organizations become role models and demonstration sites (not just distribution sites) by providing them with both material resources (e.g., funding, compact fluorescent light bulbs [CFLs]) and symbolic resources (e.g., t-shirts, public acknowledgment). DOE could also nurture collaborative relationships that result in innovative programs aimed at*

creating sustainable communities by simultaneously addressing environmental and social issues. This could be accomplished by offering workshops and expanding networking opportunities that help organizations: 1) understand climate change as well as mitigation efforts and their co-benefits, and 2) diversify their organizational partnerships and constituencies.

*(The Field Museum 2009: 37)*

The influence of the research—and of ECCo's participation in the network's development—can be seen initially in the EAN goals and requirements (developed by the EAN Planning Committee), in three ways. First—and overall—they aim to build the capacity of the member organizations to become climate action *leaders* in their communities, as opposed to just having them implement outside programs. For example, we made the specific goals, such as increasing the number of weatherization applications, open-ended—in the end the DOE/CEDA provided no set required increase across-the-board—to allow for broader interpretations of 'success' that would account for a combination of increased social services, outreach, awareness, and effort. We are also working with utility companies to provide member organizations with energy assessments and facilitate free building retrofits to help them become community-based demonstration sites for climate action. Second, they emphasize the importance of member organizations working to increase the community's awareness of and engagement in energy conservation and climate change/climate action overall (including all five CCAP strategies). Third, they require that organizations collaborate with other organizations in their communities and emphasize the importance of the network itself as a mechanism for peer learning.

The network has now been running for one year, and in that time ECCo has assumed what one DOE staff person describes as a 'visionary' role, which basically involves working with the Planning Committee to ensure that we provide member organizations with materials, trainings, and networking opportunities that will help them move beyond service delivery and energy subsidies—signing more residents up for utility assistance and weatherization—to community engagement and organizational capacity-building. Additionally, we also focus on helping member organizations connect their energy service work with their communities' assets and values related to environment and place. This is important because many of the members came into the EAN with very little understanding of environmental issues, let alone climate change, and understood the network as an energy-focused program but did not relate to the big picture of the program as part of the CCAP. Even with the narrow focus on energy and social services, we try to help them broaden the work that they do by talking to residents ('clients' as they refer to them) not only about available subsidies and services, but also about home-grown, inexpensive or no-cost conservation measures such as unplugging appliances when not in use or using a clothesline instead of a dryer.

As we now enter the beginning of program year two, our challenge continues to be striking a balance between the need to demonstrate immediate quantitative successes—evaluated primarily by the increase in utility assistance and weatherization

applications processed by each member—with ECCo's main interest in building the capacity of member organizations to incorporate energy efficiency and other climate action work into their core agendas for long-term change. In 2011, we will continue addressing this issue, both with the EAN and a new pilot program being launched by the DOE in South Chicago focused on developing models for 'co-delivering' residential services for green and healthy homes and, ultimately, increasing the number of residential retrofits. In the South Chicago project as in the EAN, we will be responsible for helping the lead community organizations bring together a broad range of stakeholders to link home energy issues to other organizational and community concerns, such as those discussed in our report. This project will be our first opportunity to build directly on report recommendations that are community-specific.

### **Conclusion: Broadening The Discussion On Climate Change**

Ecological paradigms in cultural anthropology necessarily take into account both the physical and social environments in which people live. This has been the case in our research on engaging diverse Chicago communities in the Chicago Climate Action Plan. While climate change frequently has a popular dimension informed by mass media, political interests, and global opportunities and markets, our research looks at climate action as a culturally relevant and historically situated local concern. Rather than a one size fits all program for carbon reduction, or a single approach to research methods, our approach has been to accentuate local diversity, the resilience of local communities to adapt to changing environmental circumstances and scarce resources, and new opportunities for collaboration between policy makers and local stakeholders.

Our research also takes the diverse urban environment as a distinct challenge for policy development and suggests ways to build upon an existing history of human-environment interactions that are already present in communities and are meaningful to residents (although people may not always understand them as such). We've documented in our research how two distinct communities in Chicago have very different histories, social demographics, and relationships with the natural environment. South Chicago was dominated by the steel industry and the rapid social and environmental adjustments required by its collapse. The history of NKO, on the other hand, has been dominated by shifting City government interventions to meet competing housing needs: segregating African Americans and then poverty on one hand, and satisfying the demand for middle-class residences near downtown on the other. While these particular experiences have shaped everyday attitudes about the environment and the purposefulness of government action, they also encompass common concerns (e.g., about food security, changing weather patterns, crime, housing, and jobs), and it has been the point of our research to draw out some of these important commonalities and differences.

The City faces a number of important challenges in making climate action relevant to local residents. So far, policy makers have been enthusiastic about new ideas and approaches suggested by our research. Where other approaches have focused on the



most cost effective means of carbon reduction, or global political frameworks and challenges, our research suggests a myriad of other avenues for engaging communities in climate action. These include:

- building on culturally relevant local practices;
- addressing local barriers—many of which are embedded in complicated histories related to social exclusion; and,
- connecting climate action to multiple co-benefits, including but beyond cost savings.

These approaches should help the City attain community buy-in on larger policy related goals as well as identify and develop more creative strategies for facilitating widespread engagement across diverse communities. This can be done in part by figuring out how to implement climate action initiatives that begin in the community and ‘scale out’—as suggested by the community organizer in the opening quote to our chapter.

In sum, our research suggests that climate action can help advance community agendas addressing everyday concerns. It also brings to light some of the ways in which the diverse social and institutional focus of anthropology can assist in illuminating the human-environment interactions in urban environments and provides opportunities for developing broader participatory models for democratic processes and policy development in climate action.

## Notes

- 1 ECCo’s asset-based approach builds on the asset-based community development model pioneered by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) by adding a focus on cultural values and beliefs and on human-environmental interactions.
- 2 Some of our studies also include social network analysis, which adds a quantitative component. We have been collaborating with Northwestern University’s Science of Networks in Communities (SONIC) Research Lab to draw on ethnographic research findings to design and administer computer-based social network surveys. The surveys, which are given to community leaders and residents—many of whom participate first in the ethnographic research—aim to better understand and map communication and knowledge networks related to environmental issues. Findings result in recommendations regarding how the City and its partners can disseminate information through existing networks and work through trusted organizations to mobilize the community around climate action—even when those organizations have not traditionally focused on environmental issues. The first full-scale SONIC research project was conducted in North Kenwood/Oakland and the data are currently being analyzed; thus the results are not discussed in this chapter.
- 3 This finding is in line with other research on public perceptions of climate change. See Kempton (1997).

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