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## Sustainable agriculture and the Red Stick Farmers' Market: an exploration of the use of concept in design

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SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND THE RED STICK FARMERS' MARKET:  
AN EXPLORATION OF THE USE OF CONCEPT IN DESIGN

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Landscape Architecture

in

The School of Landscape Architecture

by  
Lawrence Christopher Company  
B.A., Mississippi State University, 1989  
M.P.P.A., Mississippi State University, 1991  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents and my brother for their unwavering and unquestioning support.

To the faculty and staff of the Louisiana State University School of Landscape Architecture for not limiting this student's exploration of what is possible.

To all of the farmers, community gardeners, volunteers, board members, grantors and staff that made the vision of BREADA come true.

And to Baton Rouge for supporting its local farmers.

Thank you for taking a chance on a dream and a dreamer.

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## ABSTRACT

This is a treatise on an attempt to translate a concept -- the driving principle of a design in the parlance of the design studios at the Louisiana State University School of Landscape Architecture -- into practice, form and function. If form follows function, as states the oft quoted proverb of design credited to Louis Sullivan, then perhaps as much attention should be given to the design of the function as the form. What this treatise will demonstrate is that function designed around a concept can result in physical manifestations, or forms, of that concept. In this case a concept was applied to a community development project. The project in turn created physical manifestations of the concept. The focus of this work is on a project begun in 1996 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The concept underlying the Baton Rouge project was to use active stewardship of the land and its people as a means of promoting economic and community development. This concept was put into practice through the creation of the Baton Rouge Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance, or BREADA, the function of which is to foster stewardship of land and community. Among the most evident forms borne of the concept and BREADA are the Red Stick Farmers' Market, the community garden project, and the recently-created Main Street Market in downtown Baton Rouge. Examination of the Baton Rouge project lead to a second premise. The concept that drives the design of the function and form can also guide the creation of the conditions necessary to produce the desired function and form. This includes such seemingly mundane aspects of a project's creation as how it is organized, funded, administered, evaluated, and staffed.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This is a treatise on an attempt to translate a concept -- the driving principle of a design in the parlance of the design studios at the Louisiana State University School of Landscape Architecture -- into practice, form and function. If form follows function, as states the oft quoted proverb of design credited to Louis Sullivan, then perhaps as much attention should be given to the design of the function as the form. What this treatise will demonstrate is that function designed around a concept can result in physical manifestations, or forms, of that concept. In a very real sense a concept, an idea, can be translated into concrete reality. In this case a concept was applied to a community development project. The project in turn created physical manifestations of the concept.

Consider a simple example of the use of concept in the design of form and function. A landscape architect is asked to design a floodwater containment basin that can also serve as a recreation amenity for a community. The function of this basin is to serve as an instrument for flood control when conditions warrant, and as useable recreation space when flood conditions do not exist. The landscape architect might then design a park with permanent features such as paved walking and biking paths, small play fields, concrete benches, and perhaps even a concrete skate board park, all of which would be resilient after the water has receded and that would not impede drainage. In this example the design of the form of the park and containment basin is guided by the function it is to serve.

Those who proposed the dual function of this space made the conscious decision to use a public work to create useable public space. They could have designed a park or a containment basin, but they instead chose to use a single space for both purposes. In this way they

conscientiously designed the function the space was to serve. The function in turn informed the design of the park and basin. The final design of the park and basin manifested the concept underlying the function that was to use a piece of land for the dual purpose of floodwater containment and recreation.

The focus of this work is on a project begun in 1996 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Its intent is not to evaluate the outcomes of the effort, or to serve as a step-by-step guide. The purpose is to convey "lessons learned" from the perspective of the lead organizer of the project in order to provide food for thought for others who may wish to pursue a concept-based community development project. As the author is also the lead organizer in question, this work is necessarily subjective. However, it is my intent to highlight lessons that I believe are broadly applicable.

The concept underlying the Baton Rouge project was to use active stewardship of the land and its people as a means of promoting economic and community development. This concept was put into practice through the creation of the Baton Rouge Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance, or BREADA, the function of which is to foster stewardship of land and community. Among the most evident forms borne of the concept and BREADA are the Red Stick Farmers' Market, the community garden project, and the recently-created Main Street Market in downtown Baton Rouge.

The concept focused thought and energy and thereby gave direction to the effort for both the organizer and the work of organizing. Certainly different aspects of the overall project appealed to the different people and institutions that took part in the effort and made it possible for BREADA to exist and do its work. But underlying all of the constituent parts was the unifying driving principle of stewardship of land and community. This underlying principle tied

together what some must have certainly viewed as very disparate parts: community gardens, farmers' markets, a public market, technical assistance for farmers and entrepreneurs, and advocacy on the behalf of the project's constituents before institutions with resources and power.

The concept was also the inspiration for the organizer. It generated energy and passion. It fueled the work. For a time, at least a year, making the concept come to life was more important than compensation beyond subsistence and anything resembling a forty-hour, five-day work week. It generated a burst of energy that lasted long enough to fuel the creation of a more durable and sustainable organization built by many dedicated people and institutions.

Too often, success or failure of a project is measured by things produced. What can be overlooked is the particular spark of an idea that got the entire effort underway in the first place. At first glance the idea itself may seem to pale in comparison to its impacts and the meaning of those impacts. Indeed, it is the tangible outcomes that typically motivate people to become involved in an effort, and it is the number of jobs produced, or the amount of money saved or generated, or any number of other measures that are used to evaluate a community development project. But the underlying lesson of BREADA, and other grassroots community development projects, is this: were it not for the driving concept the practice, form and function would not have come to be.

What follows is an explanation of the context and evolution of the concept, and highlights of the concept's application and its central role in the core aspects of organization building and project implementation. It is at the same time the story of the design of a function, and how the forms that followed the function embodied in many ways the concept underlying the function.

## CHAPTER 2

### "STEWARDSHIP OF LAND AND COMMUNITY" -- THE CONCEPT IN CONTEXT

The notion of concept in this paper has to do with the principle that drives the qualities of the design. In this case we are examining the use of concept in the design of the function as a means of making the products of that function, or the forms in which the function manifests itself, embody those qualities.

Robert M. Pirsig captured the idea in his book Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. In his book Pirsig explores the nature of quality, which he explains, "is not a *thing*. It is an *event* (1981, p.215)." "Quality couldn't be independently related with either the subject or the object but could be found *only in the relationship of the two with each other*. It is the point at which subject and object meet (1981, p. 215)." He goes on to state that, "The very existence of subject and object themselves is deduced from the Quality event. The Quality event is the cause of the subjects and objects, which are then mistakenly presumed to be the cause of the Quality! (1981, p. 215)."

The idea being explored in this thesis is the design of the function to set the stage for the "Quality event."

If you want to build a factory, or fix a motorcycle, or set a nation right without getting stuck, then classical, structured dualistic subject-object knowledge, although necessary, isn't enough. You have to have some feeling for the quality of the work. You have to have a sense of what's good. That is what carries you forward (1981, p. 255).

The concept or idea is the source of the function, and the "Quality event" is the experience of the form that follows the function.

Quality isn't something you lay on top of subjects and objects like tinsel on a Christmas tree. Real Quality must be the source of the subjects and objects, the cone from which the tree must start (1981, p. 263).

In the case of BREADA, the "Quality event" is the experience of the farmers' market, or the community garden, or perhaps the seminar on sustainable farming practices. To understand how the function was designed, and how the "Quality events" were created, we have to explore the concept that drove the function.

In describing the concept underlying this project, the creation of BREADA, the goal is to familiarize the reader about the cosmology underlying the concept enough to understand how the concept manifests itself in function and form.

The concept underlying BREADA was to use active stewardship of the land and its people as a means of promoting economic and community development. The theory and practice that inspired the concept can be found in sustainable agriculture specifically, and sustainable development generally.

The word "sustainable" has become a prefix to many pursuits: sustainable agriculture; sustainable development; sustainable design, and even the seemingly dubious notion of sustainable growth. The concept of sustainability is powerful as it implies vitality and durability over the long-term. This notion has particular appeal for those who feel that too much emphasis is placed on the short term, the here and now, without much thought for meeting future needs.

The problem that sustainability has faced, however, is that which many popular notions face: the translation of an idea into action. Acknowledging an idea as being good or useful is one thing; seeing the idea put to action is quite another.

While the idea of sustainability enjoys continued debate in the halls of academia, public policy and even corporate America, evidence of its everyday application is lacking. What Professor of Sociology and Political Economy Charles Derber's said about communitarianism could apply equally well to the idea of sustainability: "Communitarianism must move from the

halls of academe to the bowling alleys, taverns, and street corners if it is to do more than absorb gallons of printing ink (Derber, 1994, p. 117).”

Sustainable farming, or agriculture -- the two are used interchangeably in most literature, as is alternative agriculture -- is one profession in which the theory is increasingly being put into practice. This should be an encouraging sign for proponents of sustainability, regardless of profession, because of the place of agriculture within our society. Agriculture remains the basis of our culture as it is what sustains our physical existence. In the words of Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., “If economics is reconceived in service of community, it will begin with a concern for agriculture and specifically for the production of food....The most fundamental requirement for survival is food. Hence, how and where food is grown is foundational to an economics for community (Daly & Cobb, 1994, p. 268).”

Agriculture has a pervasive influence on our society from its support of our existence, to its use of land (930 million acres or two-fifths of the land in the U.S.), its contribution to the economy at all scales, and its contribution to environmental problems (Bird, Bultena & Garner, 1995). If agricultural practice can be made more sustainable, it can inform and redirect many aspects of society. At the heart of sustainable agriculture is the decision by farmers to commit to sustainable farming.

### **Definitions of Sustainable Agriculture**

What is sustainable agriculture? The definitions vary but they tend to reference the carrying capacity of the land and those who work it. They tend to connote a relationship between the human community and the working landscape, and a notion of stewardship: taking care of that which does not belong to the caretaker. An often-repeated definition of sustainable agriculture is that put forth by Wendell Berry: an agriculture that depletes neither soil nor people

(Berry, 1986). This definition is popular because it simply yet powerfully expresses the interrelationship between the productivity of a living ecosystem—the soil—and the well being of the human community. In many cases, the land or community is expanded to include what was earlier referred to as the whole community or ecosystem or what Berry calls, "the Great Economy - the economy that sustains the total web of life and everything that depends on the land (Daly & Cobb, 1994, p. 18)."

Other definitions qualify sustainable agriculture in greater detail. In the preface to Meeting the Expectations of the Land, Bruce Colman explained the books' concept:

What this agriculture features is relatively large numbers of people getting their livelihood on the land, growing crops that act like wild ecosystems--that is, that build the health of the soil even as they deliver the seeds (grain), leaves, fruits, meats, and roots that compose a healthy diet....This agriculture will start with the places where crops are grown. It will look at the soils, climate, human and natural communities--the whole environment--of a place and then go to work with them to produce food. The soil's needs will be what matters; economics and markets and all the rest will properly meet the expectations of the land or else pass away (Jackson, Berry & Colman, 1984, p. x).

Other definitions, an example of which can be found in Planting the Future, define sustainable agriculture primarily in terms of reducing off-farm inputs.

[Sustainable agriculture is] diversified, flexible, cost-effective, environmentally sound family farming that replaces chemical-intensive practices with on-farm resources, renewable energy, conservation, and skillful management of natural processes (Bird, Bultena & Gardner, 1995, p. 10).

Planting the Future states that sustainable agriculture is a goal rather than a set of specific practices. This highlights the fact that an agriculture that is sustainable must meet the specific needs of the land being farmed and the people doing the farming. In other words, sustainable agriculture is place-specific, as is the best landscape architecture.

While it is not always explicit in the definition, sustainable farming must be cost-effective and provide an acceptable standard of living for the farmer. Output and production are

still important to the sustainable farmer. What the reader should note, however, is the underlying goal of farming in a manner that is responsive to the environment and the human community. As Colman's definition makes clear, the economy as it is commonly understood becomes subservient to the "expectations of the land" which includes family and community. This responsiveness supports another goal, that is the minimization of off-farm inputs. The economic focus of the sustainable farm, while certainly influenced by outside factors such as markets and policy, has a more internal focus and seeks to minimize dependence on those factors that lie outside the farm, family and community. This relates to a goal of sustainable farming that is perhaps more implicit: the goal of farmers to wrest some control from external forces.

For example, farming that is responsive to the environment and community would, in the most practical sense, negate the need for environmental regulation. Farming that reduces dependence on external inputs reduces the need for borrowing against future crops and the land. Farming that is responsive to local conditions encourages diversity, and locally derived strains of crops that are successful can reduce dependence on mass-marketed hybrids or genetically modified crops that for reasons of biology or contractual obligation cannot be used as seed stock for future seasons. Farming that produces goods to be more directly marketed to consumers will increase the farm share of the food system dollar, and decrease dependence on federal price or income support programs.

But there are risks. Sustainable farming would work best in a community of farmers who have adopted sustainable farming methods (hereafter described as "sustainable farmers"), and in most communities this has yet to be the case. In fact, it is reported that organized information and support are difficult to come by (Bird et al., 1995). Sustainable farming requires intensive management and intimate knowledge of the farm ecosystem and may require over 25 percent

more hours than those put in by conventional farmers (Bird et al., 1995). This creates added stress. The data is mixed, but while inputs may be less, profit may be no greater and may in fact be less than that derived from conventional farming (Bird et al., 1995). Furthermore, most USDA crop programs are biased against sustainable farming for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the de facto penalization of crop rotations by sustainable farmers because, to the extent that federal crop program payments constitute a significant portion of a given farmer's income, these rotations decrease the acreage eligible for a variety of payments. This is an example of how federal farm policy puts sustainable farmers at an economic disadvantage relative to conventional farmers (Bird et al., 1995).

### **Sustainable Agriculture and Conventional Agriculture Compared**

Given the risks of adopting sustainable farming methods, what is it about the nature of conventional agriculture that encourages some to take these risks? Planting the Future lists some of the most common characteristics of conventional or industrial farming:

The structure and practices of industrial farming align with stalwart American beliefs and values: continued economic growth is necessary and desirable; expanded productivity is essential to ensure abundant, cheap food; larger farm units and improved labor efficiency are key to continued agricultural modernization and farm profitability; technological innovation is an appropriate measure of agricultural progress; [and] profit and production maximization should be primary goals of farm operators (Bird et al., 1995, p. 5).

The goal of conventional agriculture is increased productivity and output tied to continued economic growth. However, the emphasis on productivity and output has created environmental and social problems. The authors of Planting the Future refer to these problems as conventional agriculture's "dark side."

[I]ndustrial farming's dark side is troubling: with the industrialization of agriculture have come increased environmental problems including excessive topsoil erosion, water pollution, depletion of aquifers..., and loss of wetland prairie, woodland, and wildlife habitat;...industrialization has led to massive

displacement of farm families;...the precipitous decline in farm population comes largely from farm consolidation into ever-larger units;...other worries include recurring financial crises in agriculture, diminished autonomy and financial independence of farmers, high concentration of food and fiber production, widening financial disparity among farmers, declining opportunities for young people to enter agriculture, and the burgeoning power of corporate agribusiness (Bird et al., 1995, p. 5).

The authors note that what some may view as conventional agriculture's "dark side" is viewed by others as symptoms of progress. Traditional economic theory would support this view, perhaps explaining the problems mentioned above as negative externalities: spillover effects whose costs are not accounted for by those causing the effect.

This is not to say that proponents of sustainable farming are disinterested in production and output. The difference is determined by factors that prescribe the scale of production and output. Sustainable agriculture requires that production and output be scaled to the carrying capacity and health of the soil, ecosystem and community, all of which are interrelated. Conventional agriculture scales production and output to the numerical growth of the economy that is based on the actualization of the economic self-interests of individuals (consumption).

The conventional economic theory that explains the industrialization of agriculture as rational behavior also holds that the actualization of individual economic self-interest is the basis of community welfare. Problems associated with industrial agriculture represent negative externalities: short run costs that society must bear to achieve an economy of scale that makes more efficient use of resources that will ultimately provide some greater good to society. Any production foregone due to adoption of sustainable farming practices are simply the opportunity costs of the farmer.

I would argue that the divergence of the two systems is based on a fundamental difference in value orientation. Production and output goals in sustainable agriculture are

determined by the health, sustainable carrying capacity, and general well-being of the ecosystem and community involved *in production*. Production and output goals in conventional agriculture are determined by rates of *consumption*, and the source of inputs and the health and sustainable use of the factors of production are important only in as much as they enable output to meet current consumption and provide maximum short-run profits to investors. The ease with which capital now moves makes long-run considerations less important.

The definitions of sustainable agriculture cited make clear that sustaining the *producing* community is of vital importance. Sustainable agriculture seeks to ensure a supply of food and fiber now and for future generations by sustaining all of the factors of production, particularly the ecological viability and carrying capacity of the agricultural landscape, and the long-term economic viability of the producers. Conventional agriculture seeks to maximize short-run profits by minimizing costs and maximizing short-run consumption with little emphasis on the long-term sustainability of factors of production other than capital. These differences between sustainable farming and conventional farming are fundamental.

Early advocates of alternative agricultural practices were concerned primarily with the negative effects on rural communities and others downwind or downstream by environmental degradation and the dislocation of the farm population (Leopold, 1970; Carson, 1962; Berry, 1977). Arguments are now being made that the goal of quantitative growth that underlies the industrialization of agriculture should be replaced by qualitative development that internalizes the costs of negative externalities, and which serves a higher common good.

Economist Herman Daly is arguably the leading critic of traditional economics. He holds that traditional economics has viewed the economy as being self-contained and self-perpetuating and has seen the potential for growth as unlimited, assuming an infinite supply of resources

(Daly, 1989). That is, traditional economics assumed a closed, circular flow of resources through the economy, with growth occurring as resources are added to the flow and as consumption increases. As resources were assumed to be infinite, the growth of the economy was assumed to be unlimited. Theologian John Cobb notes that traditional economic theory also views individual human beings in this manner: “that *Homo economicus* is self-enclosed...unaffected by relations to others (Cobb, 1994).” Daly and Cobb confront these assumptions with the laws of thermodynamics as demonstrated by an hour-glass.

An hour-glass is a closed system, with no sand leaving and no additional sand entering. This represents the first law of thermodynamics; that no energy is created or destroyed within the system. Now the hour-glass is turned upside down, and the bottom half of the glass fills at the expense of the top half of the glass. No additional sand is added to the system. This is representative of the second law of thermodynamics, or the law of entropy. The sand dropping from the top chamber into the bottom is capable of doing work, while the sand in the bottom chamber has spent its capacity to do work and represents waste energy. The difference between the metaphorical hour-glass and a real hour-glass is that the metaphorical hour-glass representing entropy cannot be turned upside down, just as waste energy cannot be easily recycled (Daly & Cobb, 1994).

The example of the hour glass demonstrates the fact that the amount of energy available to do work is fixed or finite, and that as energy is expended to do work, it is converted to a less-efficient or less-usable form. As the economy is dependent on energy, it too is subject to physical laws. Just as energy is finite, so must growth be finite as it depends on a finite supply of energy and other resources. Taken a step further, it could be suggested that the rate of growth is inverse to the rate of entropy. That is, as entropy and the supply of waste energy increases, then

economic growth could be expected to decrease as available energy is in shorter supply and the economy becomes mired in the residuals of waste energy such as global warming.

Daly holds that the traditional study of the economy is similar to a biologist's attempt to "understand animals only in terms of their circulatory system with no recognition of the fact that they also have digestive tracts. The metabolic flow is not circular. The digestive tract firmly ties the animal to its environment at both ends (Daly, 1989)."

Daly puts forth a strong argument for a model of an economy that operates within the larger system or, as phrased earlier, the whole community. Or, to continue the digestive tract analogy, this new economic model would focus on the efficiency of digestion rather than expanding the organism's ability to consume, and excrete, ever greater amounts. This model would require the economy to be more immediately responsive to the community, and that individualism be replaced by "person-in-community (Daly & Cobb, 1994, p. 164)."

An understanding of Daly's model of the economy is critical to the understanding of the rational basis for sustainable agriculture. Growth, production and output must be finite. Sustainable agriculture is one approach by which we can attempt to put the reins on the rate at which energy approaches an entropic state. These reins cannot prevent the coming of the entropic state, but they can slow down the pace at which it is approached. Prolonged survival, not infinite survival, is the realistic goal of sustainability, and our focus should be on qualitative economic development – improving the overall quality of life in the greater community -- not quantitative economic growth. In the words of Daly and Cobb, "Before this generation are set two ways, the way of life and the way of death. May humanity choose life (1994, p. 21)!"

In the paragraphs above I compared and contrasted two different philosophies of farming and agriculture. Summarized briefly, conventional agriculture is based on the traditional model

of economics, and sustainable agriculture is best considered through Daly's proposed model of economics. Put another way, conventional agriculture is based on the pursuit of individual interests and the assumption of infinite quantitative growth in a world of boundless resources, whereas sustainable agriculture is based on the assumption of the supremacy of "person-in-community" pursuing qualitative development in a world of finite resources.

There are qualitative differences between these economic models, and it would seem that the practice of sustainable farming would require a qualitatively different orientation than that held by the farmer devoted to conventional practices.

I would argue that the choice by a farmer to commit to sustainable farming practices implies a different ethic towards land and community than that held by conventional farmers, and that commitment to the practice of sustainable farming is the actualization of that ethic.

Those farmers that are presently committing themselves to the practice of sustainable farming are deviating from the norm. No person or institution is forcing these individuals to adopt these practices. Their choice is their own and, in most cases, that of their family. In as much as the choice is their own, so is the assumption of risk. Something is motivating these men and women to adopt a new, often untried, and largely unsupported way of living. The use of the term "way of living" is intentional, as that is the nature of farming as it is a livelihood and not a job. Therefore, the decision to commit to sustainable farming directly and perceptibly influences every aspect of the farmer's life, and the life of his or her family.

Sustainable farmers would be considered innovators under professor of communication and journalism Everett M. Rogers' model of diffusion of innovation; venturesome individuals whose, "interest in new ideas leads them out of a local circle of peer networks" and into the network of other innovators with similar interests (1995, p. 263). Rogers also states, "The salient

value of the innovator is venturesomeness, due to a desire for the rash, the daring, and the risky (1995, p. 264).” I would suggest that the sustainable farmer as innovator is driven more by an ethic than a desire for risk-taking behavior.

The goals of sustainable farming suggest that sustainable farmers would seek not only to provide for the household, but also to do so in a manner that contributes to the community as well. Habits of the Heart offers three competing views of work put forth by Ed Schwartz of the Institute for the Study of Civic Values. The first view is one of corporate capitalism, which states that jobs are determined by what the market will bear and the end of work is consumption and private satisfaction. The second view is one of welfare liberalism, which encourages the government to enable everyone to compete with essentially equal chances of success and to offer support to those who do not succeed. The third view is one of “work ‘as a calling, contributing to the common good and responding to the needs of others as these needs become understood” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 218). Bellah describes a confrontation between a proponent of the first view and a proponent of the third:

And there, for the moment, the matter stood. Two images of American life confronted each other: the efficient organizational society of private achievement and consumption versus the civic vision of work as a calling and a contribution to the community, binding individuals together in a common life (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 218).

Bellah’s and Schwartz’s idea of “work as a calling” is reminiscent of the sustainable farming goal of responsiveness to the community. Similarly, the corporate capitalist view supports the goals of conventional farming that place emphasis on increased production, output and consumption. If they are correct in their assumptions, one would expect sustainable farmers to be more likely to view their livelihood as a “calling,” as opposed to considering farming to be primarily the means by which to realize “private achievement and consumption (1985, p. 218).”

Prior studies have suggested differences between the values of sustainable (or alternative) farmers and conventional farmers. Beus and Dunlap developed a model to test whether or not the two groups “hold fundamentally divergent paradigms of agriculture, and thus, literally see the world quite differently” (1991, p. 432). The Alternative-Conventional Agriculture Paradigm Scale (ACAP Scale) was developed to measure the basic values and beliefs that were assumed to define the two different perspectives on agriculture. The item which provoked the most significant disagreement between sustainable and conventional farmers was “whether farming is first and foremost a business or a way of life” (Beus & Dunlap, 1991, p. 450). Beus and Dunlap state:

Although conventional agriculturists object to the decline of rural communities and see farm traditions and culture as essential to good farming, they are far more likely than alternative agriculturists to view farming as primarily a business rather than a way of life (1991, p. 450).

This finding would support the hypothesis that sustainable farmers are more likely to view farming as a "calling," whereas conventional farmers are more likely to take a view of farming that is more consistent with the corporate capitalist perspective as described by Bellah and Schwartz.

Beus and Dunlap’s results also indicate that sustainable agriculture is taking a more encompassing view of issues. They observe that, “issues such as pesticide use or soil erosion...may become increasingly tied to other issues in future agricultural debates. Debates over the structure of agriculture or the viability of rural communities, for instance, may increasingly merge with debates over pesticide use and other ecological issues in agriculture (1991, p. 458).” In the past, proponents of sustainable agriculture viewed aspects of ecology and community somewhat independently. The study by Beus and Dunlap indicates that sustainable farmers are taking a more holistic view of agriculture and its impacts.

Findings of a study reported in Planting the Future tend to support the findings of Beus and Dunlap. Sustainable farmers were asked consider economic, family health, environment, family/peer group, and philosophy concerns and choose from among them their two most important reasons for adopting sustainable practices. Farmers in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana and North Dakota were included in the survey. Iowa and North Dakota sustainable farmers ranked family health and environmental issues as the two most important reasons to adopt sustainable practices. Economic concerns ranked third in both states. Minnesota farmers were most highly motivated by environmental concerns, with economic concerns coming in second. Montana farmers listed economic concerns as their primary concern with the environment as second (Bird et al., 1995).

### **Sustainable Agriculture as Farmer Philosophy**

The study found that philosophical motives were minor factors in motivating farmers to adopt sustainable practices, though a sizable minority (25 percent) of North Dakota farmers rated philosophy as their second major concern. This was based on response to the statements “a new farming system is needed” or “agriculture is moving in the wrong direction” (Bird et al., 1995, p. 158). A different study of both sustainable and conventional farmers in Iowa produced results similar to those of Beus and Dunlap in 1991.

Using the ACAP scale (response to 14 pairs of statements) proposed by Beus and Dunlap, the farmers were asked their opinion on several agricultural issues. The lower numbers on the scale measured commitment to conventional agriculture, and the higher numbers commitment to sustainable agriculture. Conventional farmers averaged a score of 44 and sustainable farmers averaged a score of 60. The authors of the study report that these findings confirm that sustainable and conventional farmers are distinguished not only by farming

practices, but also by polar views on the desirable direction of U.S. agriculture and rural life (Bird et al., 1995).

A particular finding of the Planting the Future study of the farmers in the four states suggests that sustainable farmers have a richer, deeper commitment to the practice they have adopted than the scales and other statistics can convey. Sustainable farmers experience many difficulties but still choose to commit to the practice anyway and experience personal satisfaction in doing so. The difficulties of sustainable farmers include comparatively poorer economic performance, lack of organized support, greater stress related to increased management demands, and a general lack of information about sustainable practices (Bird et al., 1995). Both conventional and sustainable farmers in the four states were asked how satisfied they were with farming practices. Those indicating the highest level of satisfaction ranged from a low of 11 percent in Montana to a high of 44 percent in Iowa (Bird et al., 1995). However, when only the responses of sustainable farmers were considered, a significant finding was made.

[N]early all [sustainable] farmers in the four states were either satisfied or very satisfied with their new practices (84-100 percent). Dissatisfaction was infrequent, ranging from 0 percent in Minnesota to 16 percent in North Dakota. This suggests that neither the concerns of sustainable farmers...nor their comparatively poorer economic performance, are sufficient to deter them from farming sustainably (Bird et al., 1995, p. 170).

This finding supports the idea that sustainable farmers are motivated by something deeper than individual economic welfare. The sustainable farmer appears to derive satisfaction not so much from the amount produced as from the quality of the method of production.

Could the practice of sustainable farming mean the actualization of values for the sustainable farmer? Understanding the role of values in the practice of sustainable agriculture is important for two reasons. First, understanding the values of a person gives us a much richer understanding of who the person is, especially if these values guide behavior and are actualized.

Therefore, we progress from the idea of *what* a sustainable farmer might be, could be, or should be, on to *who* the sustainable farmer *is*. Second, values help a person define their relationship with the rest of the world, therefore understanding the values of the sustainable farmer gives us insight into the relationship which some actual practitioners of sustainability have with the world. This insight takes the idea of sustainability out of the realm of abstraction and theory, carries it to the actual experience of those who live it, and allows it to stand for verification.

Riley Dunlap and Kenneth Martin wrote of the need for agricultural sociologists to include factors of the physical environment in their research. They argued that, “If sociologists are to produce valid and useful research on agricultural processes, it is imperative that they shed the conceptual blinders imposed by our disciplinary tradition of ignoring nonsocial variables (1983, p. 211).” This is because agriculture necessarily involves a relationship between and among humans and the land. Knowing that a relationship between human and land exists is insufficient. What will most decidedly determine the fate of that relationship are the values that underlie it.

### **How to “Grow” Sustainable Agriculture?**

So what can be done to make the practice of sustainable agriculture more the standard and less the exception? In his book *Cosmopolis*, Stephen Toulmin states:

Available futures are not just those that we can passively forecast, but those that we can actively create: for these de Jouvenel coined a new name--'futuribles'. They are futures which do not simply happen of themselves, but can be made to happen, if we meanwhile adopt wise attitudes and policies (1990, p. 2)."

As a whole, farming is an exceptional profession. Less than two percent of America's population now farms, yet two-fifths of the land of the lower 48 states is dedicated in whole or in part to some form of agricultural use. Such a vast percentage of our population has never before been so far removed from the agriculture, and the land, which sustains us. Indeed, never before

have so many been so reliant upon so few for their existence. And never have so few been so unaccountable to the many dependent upon them.

The nature and nurture of our nation's agricultural landscape is rapidly being given over to industrial processes. The standardized foodstuffs found on our supermarket shelves are the product of standardized processing, which in turn requires standardized raw commodities produced by standardized agricultural production processes. These standardized agricultural processes are imposed upon diverse landscapes, ecosystems, and our struggling farm communities. The needs of the land, its ecosystems, and our farm communities must meet the demands of these industrial agricultural practices or else they are expected to pass away. We are told that this is the price that must be paid for plentiful cheap food, and that the policies that support, regulate, and promote our food system must meet the needs of these practices. But then it is the few multinational corporations that dominate virtually every facet of our nation's foodsystem—including our own policymakers—that are dependent upon industrial agricultural practices that tell us this must be the way.

Consider the facts. Mary Hendrickson with Food Circles in the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri, Columbia, reports that, "Retailers can now dictate terms to food manufacturers, forcing changes back through the system to the farm level. As the balance of power shifts to the retailers, smaller entities in all parts of the food system are being left out. Rural areas and inner urban areas are most likely to be left out of the retail revolution (Hendrickson, 2003)." Farmers are increasingly locked out of the marketplace, and consumers actually have less choice when it comes to how, where and by whom food is produced.

Hendrickson has found that eighty-one percent of the market share in beef is held by five corporations; fifty-nine percent in pork, and fifty percent in broilers. In grains and milling, sixty-

one percent of the market share in terminal grain-handling facilities is held by four corporations. In 2000, forty-two percent of the market share in U.S. food retailing was held by five retailers: Kroger, Wal-Mart, Albertson's, Safeway and Ahold. Their market share had nearly doubled since 1997. Hendrickson expects their market share to rise to 54 percent in 2003 (Hendrickson, 2003).

Our food and agriculture system is subservient to the industrial processes which make it possible for the ownership and control of land, production, processing, shipping, marketing, and sale to be concentrated in the hands of very few. What is the result? Farm communities are depopulated as families move off the land because they cannot meet the terms of competition dictated by the few multinational corporations who derive their power through concentration and market consolidation, and whose power is increased as fewer farm families remain on the land and as fewer competitors exist in the marketplace. Ground and surface water resources are threatened by overdrawing for irrigation, nutrient enrichment from synthetic fertilizers, and waste that is released by, or which escapes from, confined animal feeding operations. Wildlife habitat is lost or degraded as more and more acreage is put into production, or as practices pollute or otherwise degrade habitat. Species of plants and animals that are perceived as being at all incompatible with crops or livestock may be targeted for elimination. These are some of the symptoms of our industrialized agriculture.

Then there is the alternative: the family-scale farm that is capable of better stewardship of land and community. Agriculture, the production of food and fiber, is not an option, but the structure of our nation's system of agriculture is, and that system is determined by the conscious choices of consumers, policymakers, and farmers.

In his essay "Farming and the Global Economy" in his book Another Turn of the Crank, Wendell Berry states:

What we must do is simple: we must shorten the distance that our food is transported so that we are eating more and more from local supplies, more and more to the benefit of local farmers, and more and more to the satisfaction of local consumers. This can be done by cooperation among small organizations: conservation groups, churches, neighborhood associations, consumer co-ops, local merchants, local independent banks, and organizations of small farmers. It also can be done by cooperation by individual producers and consumers. We should not be discouraged to find that local food economies can grow only gradually; it is better that they should grow gradually. But as they grow they will bring about a significant return of power, wealth, and health to the people (1995, pp. 6-7).

He goes on to say the following about the source of the correct answers to the problem at hand:

They cannot be legislated or imposed by international or national or state agencies. They can only be supplied locally, by skilled and highly motivated local farmers meeting as directly as possible the needs of informed local consumers (1995, p. 7).

The need to keep farm families on the land and to improve their competitive position in the marketplace has nothing to do with nostalgia or other emotional sentiment. Because of their scale, they are better able to tailor specific practices to specific characteristics found in the agricultural ecosystem of the farm. The farmer works with the natural processes of the agricultural ecosystem to sustain its productive capacity now and for future generations.

Furthermore, farm families are tied to, and accountable within, their communities—local government, schools, businesses, churches, and all of the traditions thereof. This is what farm stewardship entails—accepting responsibility for the care and nurture of the natural and human communities that underlie a system of agriculture that is capable of meeting the food and fiber needs of today, and which may be sustained through future generations.

Are family-scale farms inherently better stewards and more ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable? No. But the needs of farm family, farm community, environment, and consumers can be harmoniously met now and for future generations when a farmer makes the conscious decision to have intimate knowledge of the land he or she farms, takes into

consideration how the practices on that farm impact the larger natural and human communities, and begins to hold him or herself accountable for his or her own actions because ties to those communities are recognized. However, it is unreasonable to expect a farmer to behave in this manner if the marketplace and food system policy create overwhelming disincentives or barriers to proper stewardship.

Sustainable agriculture is best practiced at the scale of the family farm because these farms operate at a scale that enable them to be responsive to the needs of family, land, community, consumer and the environment and these farmers are motivated to do so not by shareholders but because they are part of a larger community and they care about that community. Writing about the value and art of family farming in his book Home Economics, Wendell Berry wrote:

The small family farm is one of the last places--and they are getting rarer every day--where men and women (and girls and boys, too) can answer that call to be an artist, to learn to give love to the work of their hands. It is one of the last places where the maker--and some farmers do still talk about "making crops"-- is responsible, from start to finish, for the thing made. This certainly is a spiritual value, but it is not for that reason an impractical or an uneconomic one. In fact, from the exercise of this responsibility, this giving of love to the work of the hands, the farmer, the farm, the consumer, and the nation all stand to gain in the most practical ways: They gain the means of life, the goodness of food, the longevity and dependability of the sources of food, both natural and cultural. The proper answer to the spiritual calling becomes, in turn, the proper fulfillment of physical need.

The family farm, then, is good, and to show that it is good is easy. Those who have done most to destroy it have, I think, found no evil in it. But if a good thing is failing among us, pretty much without being argued against and pretty much without professed enemies, then we must ask *why* it should fail (Berry, 1987, pp. 166-67).

Agricultural ecosystems are diverse by nature, and farm stewardship practices must be responsive to, take advantage of, and preserve that diversity. Industrial agricultural technologies which require standardization at a large scale in order for these technologies to pay for

themselves not only cannot respond to the diversity found within agricultural ecosystems, but also lead to the concentration of farmland into the hands of fewer and fewer people. Stewardship of the land requires practices that work with the specific conditions found on specific parts of the farm.

This means that land uses on the farm should relate to what specific conditions can best support. For example, highly erodible land may be better suited to grazing or hay production than to row crop production. Sandy soils should be managed differently than clay soils, nurturing the unique qualities of each to produce outstanding crops that thrive in different soil environments. Rivers and streams should be protected by restricting or preventing activity along their banks, and buffer zones should be created to filter runoff, capture soil, and provide wildlife habitat. Some land is better left in trees or other habitat, making sustainable forestry or grassland management an option. Species of wildlife that have the potential to cause significant damage are not eradicated, but rather the conditions for significant damage are mitigated by management practices based upon an understanding of habitat needs and seasonal behaviors. Diverse conditions within the agricultural ecosystem require diverse practices that do not fit the industrial model, and diverse farm practices produce diverse goods that require diverse markets.

Consumer wants and needs are diverse, and sustainable agriculture and proper farm stewardship are dependent upon a marketplace that can tie these diverse consumer interests to a sustainable food and agriculture system that is built upon a foundation of many, rather than fewer, sustainable farms. Food system policy must be supportive of such a marketplace, and supportive of proper farm stewardship practices. Behavior on the farm is, therefore, directly related not only to the behavior of consumers, but also the behavior of those who make farm policy. Over 50 years ago our federal government made the very conscious decision to support

the concentrated, consolidated, industrial model of agriculture over the family-scale farm and sustainable agriculture model. It did so through its regulatory and farm policy, and by promotion of this model through our nation's land grant research institutions and their agricultural extension services.

The fact remains that we live in a democracy and have a capitalist economic system. Our behavior as consumers, and participants in our government, can have a profound impact on what system of agriculture dominates over two-fifths of our nation's landscape. Certainly the multinational agribusinesses have incredible influence over our nation's food system policy and market, but the institutions that enabled them to capture this power can also be used to return the power to the people if the people have the will to make it so. The farmer as steward is not a choice left to the farmer alone. That farmers may remain on the land and act as stewards is also dependent upon the decision of the public at large to value farm stewardship in the choices we make as consumers, and in the choices we make as we participate in the governance of our nation. In this way, good stewardship can serve as a foundation of community and economic development.

The practice of sustainable agriculture as an alternative to the conventional food and agriculture system is happening in communities around the country. One of those communities where such an effort has begun is Baton Rouge. What follow are highlights of the story of the attempt to translate an abstract idea into concrete reality by designing the function of a community development project. In the case of the organization of BREADA, an abstract idea was translated into a design concept. That design concept was then applied to the organization and function of BREADA. Because the concept drove the organization and function of the project, those products produced by BREADA to at least some extent embodied the concept.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE BATON ROUGE EXPERIENCE -- TRANSLATING CONCEPT INTO PRACTICE, FORM AND FUNCTION

The point that was constantly being driven home to me in the design studios of the School of Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University was that good design does not just happen. Good design is the product of a strong idea and not happenstance. But in these studios the discussion centered around concept as it relates to form -- the driving principle of form underlying a design. What was the concept underlying the design of a built space in the landscape? What drove the form that created the experience of that space?

The question that always nagged at me as we would discuss the relationship between concept and design is what comes before the discussion of the form? Where does the design concept come from? I came to the LSU Masters of Landscape Architecture Program with an interest in sustainable development and design, particularly as applied to rural communities. I was very resistant to the idea when we first began the discussion of concept as it applies to form because I did not immediately see where sustainability would fit in.

Sustainability, as I understood it, was a desired end. It could inform but could not drive the form. It could tell me, for instance, that in designing a development in a rural community that certain densities would be desirable from the standpoint of both maintaining rural character and making good sense in terms of proper use of resources such as land and water. It might inform the orientation of structures to make the best use of passive solar energy, or what soils or habitats should not be disturbed so as not to disrupt existing natural systems that could be harnessed. In many different ways sustainability could inform how the design should function.

What sustainability could not do in a very direct manner was drive the physical design that inspired the use of spatial relationships, colors, materials, and other components in such a

way that together they create the desired experience of that space. The concept that drives the design of the physical space ultimately determines how well the space "works:" how well all of the components that comprise the design come together so that the experience of the space is that which is desired. This is what I was being taught in the design studios. I came to the studios with an overriding concern about function. What I did not understand at first, but gradually began to realize, was that the physical design of a place is as important as the design of the function of that place because it is the successful execution of the form that makes the function work.

All things being equal, the physical design determines whether or not a function works as intended. Two designs may provide the means to achieve desired technical ends equally well, but the one that ultimately works best is the one that appeals to those to whom it was intended to appeal. Two cars may perform to the same precise technical standards but it is the overall design that determines its success to the driver. The same may be said for a housing development. Two different designs may meet identical technical criteria (i.e. square footage, impact on the landscape, impact on public services), but the overall design will determine the development's success in terms of owner satisfaction.

The fact is that neither form nor function should stand alone. Each is dependent upon the other for the greatest possible success. To design the highest "Quality event," that point at which Pirsig explains the subject and object become aware of one another, both form and function must be given equal respect. The function helps us get to the form, and the form helps us get to the function. The success of form and function working in harmony with one another can lead to truly profound "Quality events."

## **The Beginning of BREADA**

The development of the concept underlying the creation of the Baton Rouge Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREADA) was an evolutionary process that first began during an urban design studio in the fall of 1995. In the urban design studio students were to work with one another and with a community organization to design solutions that could be part of the revitalization of a low-income, predominately African-American neighborhood that had fallen victim to capital flight with the building of an interstate through the neighborhood. This neighborhood, which had been characterized by a residential area surrounding a core business district, was once a cultural and economic center for the neighborhood between the north gates of LSU and downtown Baton Rouge. Speaking with the neighborhood's older residents, it was very evident that this center was a source of pride for African-Americans in Baton Rouge. In the midst of segregation this area produced political leaders, professionals including doctors, professors and attorneys, performers and sports legends.

The construction of the interstate resulted in the flight of capital as African-Americans and whites with the means to do so moved beyond the downtown area, causing the economic engine of the neighborhood to seriously falter. With the decline of the neighborhood's business district, and the movement of commercial activity to the suburbs from downtown Baton Rouge, the neighborhood declined.

By 1995 the neighborhood was experiencing many of the same problems relatively isolated inner-city neighborhoods throughout the nation were and are facing. Of concern to the older, well-established residents in the neighborhood was drug-related crime and violence among young people in the neighborhood. As a result, through a city government initiative called "Operation Takedown" houses were being torn down on properties that were on the delinquent

tax rolls as a means of eliminating the places where drug activity was occurring or could occur. This solution addressed neither the core causes of the violence nor answered the question of what should happen on these empty spaces in this residential area. A neighborhood that had already undergone severe economic fragmentation was now experiencing both physical and social fragmentation.

While this physical fragmentation lacked the abrupt presence of the first major disturbance, the construction of the interstate, it was insidiously destructive. The streets of the neighborhood were lined primarily by single-story, single-family dwellings or duplexes. Now the houses began to disappear in a neighborhood whose population was becoming increasingly transient as more and more properties were rented rather than owned. Neighbors came and went, and now houses were going, too. Vacant lots numbered a few hundred in this few square mile area. While vacant houses blight a neighborhood and can play host to undesirable activity, the creation of a vacant lot where a house once stood tells you that no one is coming back to that space on that street anytime soon. Vacancy and abandonment is one thing, but dismantlement is another.

Our urban design studio was given the opportunity to work with this neighborhood through a collaborative effort between the LSU administration at a very high level, and a community development organization within the neighborhood. While our class had had the opportunity to work on real issues with real community organizations before, this one was very local and our "clients" were looking for real solutions from us. The work to be produced through this studio was being taken very seriously by the neighborhood organization, and there were historical tensions between the University and this neighborhood. The local nature of the

project, the high expectations and the real tensions were a solid introduction to the realities of urban design.

Our job was at least as much about community development as it was about the design of place. We had to explore the questions that would underlie possible recommendations of form. Economic development and employment were key goals, but what kinds of jobs and what kinds of businesses did the neighborhood want? Improvements to existing housing and the building of new housing were goals, but what were the expectations of the neighborhood residents when the hard questions about affordability and the possibility of "gentrification" were introduced? It was agreed that the neighborhood should be better connected to downtown Baton Rouge and the University, but how could this connection be made so that it did not act more as a pedestrian or vehicular bypass around the neighborhood?

My classmates developed diverse approaches and a rich tapestry of solutions were presented to the neighborhood. This tapestry included streetscape designs, standards for infill development, and strategies to tie this neighborhood back into LSU and other surrounding areas, among others. Each approach had its own merits, and together the approaches suggested a wide range of opportunities.

The approach I took was decidedly more conceptual, arrived at more by circumstance than by design. Of all of the problems faced by this neighborhood two kept trying to relate themselves to one another in my mind. The first was the vacant lots. One thing this neighborhood had was a lot of vacant space, much of which was not maintained. Another complaint from neighborhood residents was that the local supermarket was expensive and the vegetables were not top quality. The store ultimately closed leaving the neighborhood with only chain convenience stores or small independent grocery stores that, too, tended to be expensive.

The glowing exception was a local farmer named Matthew Byrd who sold his own fresh-cut collard and mustard greens and turnips from the tailgate of his truck at a busy intersection in the neighborhood.

Meeting Matthew Byrd was a turning point for me. I had been exploring sustainable agriculture and sustainable development through literature and conferences but here was an example of sustainable agriculture applied. Matthew lived in the neighborhood but farmed about 40 minutes away in the rural area west of Baton Rouge across the Mississippi River. Matthew was selling his goods to his neighbors, and the money that changed hands stayed in the community. This was an example of economy in service to community working for the mutual benefit of everyone involved. It was also an example of making the best of what was available. For a few hours a day Matthew transformed a vacant lot on a busy intersection into a produce stand using only his pickup truck and his greens. In return neighborhood residents had access to the freshest possible greens and turnips, all of which had been picked only a couple of hours before. Matthew got a fair price for his labor, and his customers paid a fair price for their produce. This was an example of economy in service to community in perhaps its most pure state.

Matthew inspired me to explore an idea that I otherwise would have rejected as being too conceptual or theoretical. Would it be possible to develop a solution around the concept of land stewardship? Stewardship of the land, "the responsible care of property belonging to another," in the words of Wendell Berry, was an intriguing idea (1990, p. 99). While Berry was referring to the idea that all land ideally belongs to the whole community and that we pass it down from generation to generation, it intrigued me as a characterization of what this community at once had and did not have.

This neighborhood was filled with vacant property, most of which was not maintained, yet ownership of most of this land was tied up in the gray area of forfeiture to the city in lieu of back taxes. What if neighbors worked together to put some of this vacant land into the production of food? In so doing they could grow the freshest possible produce for their own consumption, while at the same time serving as stewards of land that had been abandoned by its owners.

There was precedent. Co-housing projects, housing cooperatives and "intentional communities" often put food production at the center of their development (Smith, 1995). In addition to growing food for themselves, would it not also be possible for them to sell their surplus to one another, or even to pursue urban market gardening? Literature on this topic was growing fast with books such as MetroFarm by Michael Olson, Backyard Market Gardening by Andy Lee, and Public Markets and Community Revitalization by Theodore Morrow Spitzer and Hillary Baum. Some cited examples from inner-city Philadelphia and Los Angeles. While I did not know it at the time, an entire movement was growing up around the idea of communities producing their own food, as embodied by the Community Food Security Coalition ([www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)).

Around this same time I was fortunate to hear about a project that had just gotten underway in New Orleans. The New Orleans Greenmarket, renamed later the Crescent City Farmers' Market, was a farmers market opened on the corner of Magazine and Girod featuring produce grown and sold only by the farmers themselves, and a booth sponsored by the New Orleans Parkway Partners community garden project. The Parkway Partners booth featured fresh vegetables and flowers grown and sold by community gardeners in inner-city New Orleans.

The discovery of this local precedent was transformational. It emboldened me to pursue my rather unconventional notion further.

My notion became a proposal to the class. It suggested that vacant lots could be transformed into community gardens not only as a means by which neighborhood residents could produce food for themselves, but also for sale. The gardens could also be used as a means of neighborhood organization, and be the starting point for other efforts such as neighborhood watches. The proposal also suggested that a farmers' market be created to provide a place where community gardeners could sell their goods to the public, but that area farmers also be invited to ensure a sufficient supply and diversity of goods for sale.

I was surprised and pleased that this unconventional agrarian approach to inner-city neighborhood revitalization was not rejected out of hand by my classmates, though I still had my own fear that it was too conceptual. There were concerns that the idea would be viewed by the neighborhood's African-American residents as "traditional;" that they would reject the idea of working the fields for a living. I had not considered this possibility, but the prospect that I might suggest an idea that could possibly be hurtful almost lead me to drop it. But with class support, I presented the proposal to the neighborhood.

Having braced myself for something other than enthusiasm, I was amazed that the proposal was not only greeted with support, but that there were questions as to when work might start on the first garden. Whether the idea appealed to the neighborhood because they liked the whole idea, because they were most compelled by the idea of a community garden that could be created in the near-term, or because the presentation that included many slides from New Orleans demonstrated precedent, I do not know. But this neighborhood's interest provided me with the opportunity to pursue the idea of stewardship-based community development.

During the Spring of 1996 I was able to begin the process of researching what it would take to organize a community garden, and under what conditions a farmers' market might work. This was made possible by the leadership of the professor of our urban design studio, the neighborhood outreach project of LSU that facilitated our class' involvement with the neighborhood, and the neighborhood organization with which our class worked. What I did not realize at the time was that the seed of a new organization had been planted that would grow up around the idea that Matthew Byrd made me, and soon dozens of others, realize could be put into practice: that development could be fostered by stewardship of land and community.

### **The Lessons from BREADA**

The Baton Rouge Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREADA) was created during the Summer of 1996 after a Spring of much research. That research included volunteering virtually every Saturday with the Crescent City Farmers Market, which is a product of the ECONomics Institute at the Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice at Loyola University in New Orleans ([www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org](http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org)). With LSU's support I was also able to attend an International Public Market Conference in Philadelphia sponsored by the Project for Public Spaces ([www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)).

What became evermore apparent as I conducted my research was an affirmation of Pirsig's concept of the importance of Quality. A farmers' market or a community garden can serve many different functions, and it is the quality of that function that to a large degree determines the qualities of that market or that garden. For example, a community garden that is organized primarily as a neighborhood beautification effort will have a different organizational structure and possess a character that is different than the community garden organized primarily as a means of organizing a neighborhood. The former may be organized primarily around the

promotion of a desired aesthetic, while the latter may forego aesthetics as a primary product of the garden in an effort to simply bring people together as they pursue gardening as best as they are willing or able.

I mentioned previously that it is my contention that the function helps us get to the form and the form helps us get to the function, and that the success of form and function working in harmony with one another can lead to truly profound "Quality events." I will argue here that the concept underlying the function, the concept that underlies the overall purpose of the design or the reason why the design should exist, must also drive the processes that produce the form and function as well. This includes such seemingly mundane aspects of a project's creation as how it is organized, funded, administered, evaluated, and staffed.

Going back to the example of the community garden, the manner in which one organizes a garden primarily for beautification or horticultural splendor is different than that manner in which one would organize a community garden that is intended primarily as a means of neighborhood organizing. While not mutually exclusive, the former will tend to be exclusive by design whereas the latter will be inclusive by design. The former will be organized around certain aesthetic guidelines and standards and the gardeners will have to either have or learn the skills to meet these goals. The latter, while perhaps requiring a certain level of maintenance, will be organized around the goal of making it as easy as possible for anyone willing to maintain a plot to do so regardless of ability. The driving concept behind each garden is different, and the process by which each garden is organized and governed must be different if it is to succeed.

To repeat Pirsig's point, "You have to have some feeling for the quality of the work. You have to have a sense of what's good. That is what carries you forward (Pirsig, 1981, p. 255)." The concept, at its core, is a statement of value. It tells us what is desired. It tells us what the

subjective goal of the end product should be. It is the concept that tells that the goal is art for art's sake, or the goal is cold economic efficiency, or cultural diversity, or socioeconomic exclusion, or an infinity of other goals and values, good or bad. By asserting the goal, the concept guides us to create the conditions necessary to produce the desired function and form.

How work gets done is often communicated through that which the work has produced. Pirsig states that, "The ancient Greeks never separated art from manufacture in their minds, and so never developed separate words for them (1981, p. 260)." Explaining why some people find certain technologies to be "inherently ugly," Pirsig states:

The real ugliness lies in the relationship between the people who produce the technology and the things they produce, which results in a similar relationship between the people who use the technology and the things they use (1981, p. 261).

He then goes on to say:

The creator of it feels no particular sense of identity with it. The owner of it feels no particular sense of identity with it. The user of it feels no particular sense of identity with it (1981, p. 261).

Explaining why people are drawn towards things with high quality, in this case a beautifully crafted wall in Korea, he states,

It was beautiful, but not because of any masterful intellectual planning or any scientific supervision of the job, or any added expenditures to "stylize" it. It was beautiful because the people who worked on it had a way of looking at things that made them do it right unselfconsciously. They didn't separate themselves from the work in such a way as to do it wrong. There is the center of the whole solution (1981, p. 261).

How something comes to be can have a profound influence on that which is created. Just as this is true for technological innovations and walls in Korea, it is also true for community gardens, farmers' markets, works of art, built landscapes or even things such as law and policy. In order to achieve the desired qualities in function and form, the concept should drive the

relationship between the creator and that which is being created. It is this relationship that can make all the difference.

The concept underlying BREADA, to use active stewardship of land community as a means of promoting economic and community development, was intended to drive a project that would reconnect people with one another through the land. In his essay "God and Country" included in his book What Are People For?, Wendell Berry says of stewardship that it is, "the responsible care of property belonging to another. And by this the Bible does not mean an absentee landlord, but one living on the property, profoundly and intimately involved in its being and its health (1990, p. 99)." In the case of BREADA stewardship was intended to mean care for our neighbors and for the land that supports us. This concept would be expressed through two primary functions.

First, it would establish a two-way relationship between those who bought food and those who produced it, compelling each to identify with the other and the working landscape that was the ultimate source of this relationship. By reconnecting consumers with farmers, the consumer would become aware of how, where and by whom their food was being produced. Farmers, on the other hand, would have a major incentive to be mindful of how they produced the food they sold because their well being was tied to the well being of their customers and the land that was the source of their livelihood. As Wendell Berry put it, "If communities of farmers and consumers wish to promote a sustainable, safe, reasonably inexpensive supply of good food, then they must see that the best, the safest, and most dependable source of food for a city is not the global economy, with its extreme vulnerabilities and extravagant transportation costs, but its own surrounding countryside (1995, p. 6)."

Second, it would connect people to the neighborhood in which they lived and with one another by bringing them together to work a common piece of land in which they had a common interest but did not per se own. Neighbors would come together to transform an idle piece of vacant land into a garden by accepting individual responsibility for the maintenance of their own individual plot or plots, and by accepting mutual responsibility for the land they worked and shared together.

The connection between farmers and consumers would be created through the development of a farmers' market. The connection of neighbors to one another and to their neighborhood would be created through the organization of community gardens. Both efforts would be developed by a new community-based, not for profit organization called the Baton Rouge Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREADA). BREADA would be formed in the Summer of 1996. Both the farmers' market and the first community garden would be organized during the fall of the same year.

What follows are examples of how the concept drove the overall organization and conduct of BREADA and its projects. These examples are intended to clarify what is meant by the use of concept to drive the relationship between the creator and that which is being created to communicate the intended qualities through function and form.

### Organization Building

The creation of an organization to support the concept required community leadership, funding, and day to day management of the effort by people who also believed in the concept's promise. This is an important qualification. While some people and resources were attracted to BREADA because of the underlying idea, it by no means implies that some sort of oath of allegiance was sworn to uphold an abstract idea. People and resources were attracted to what the

concept promised to deliver. In this case the concept promised not just a farmers' market, but a farmers' market founded on relationships between farmers and consumers. The concept promised not only community gardens, but community gardens founded on relationships among neighbors and the place where they lived.

The concept provided the vision of what was to be supported by board, staff, technical advisors and capital. It provided a vision of not only the forms, in this case the farmers' market and the community gardens, but a vision of the function of these forms. The concept defined the character of that to be created.

Potential board members were given a presentation of what it was that BREADA would try to accomplish. This presentation included a discussion of the type of farmers' market and the type of community gardens that would be created and what it was that these projects would accomplish, as well as a visual component that included slides from market and garden projects in New Orleans, Philadelphia and other places. The goal of this presentation was to ground the potential board member in the concept underlying BREADA and the vision of what was to be produced, and provide this person with visual examples, or proof, of the real-world application of the concept.

When applying for funding a similar presentation was made, though most often in the form of written grant proposals. Even though a face to face presentation was made to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation which provided the initial venture capital and has provided continued support for BREADA and its efforts, the formal request to the foundation was made in the form of a written proposal. Grant writing is an art. In very few words you must grab the attention of the funder or grantor by telling them what you are going to accomplish and why it matters. This "what" and "why" must be reflected in every aspect of the proposal. From the letter of inquiry to

the budget to the evaluation strategy, the proposal must be clear in its purpose. Concept can be immensely helpful in focusing the proposal, right down to the budget. If organizing farmers or neighbors is key to making the concept reality, then the budget should reflect this by the level of resources dedicated to this activity. If relationships between farmers and consumers, or among neighbors, are a major goal of the concept then a major feature of the evaluation should be the measurement of whether or not new relationships were created and some measure of the strength of those relationships.

The concept underlying the project will have an impact on the sources of available funding. Many foundations and even individual donors have a mission in mind when they determine how their funds are to be used. The concept underlying BREADA, and the high level of constituent involvement that the concept promoted, enabled the organization to qualify for significant funding from the social justice-oriented Catholic Campaign for Human Development. But just as BREADA's goals allowed it to pursue funding from foundations with social or environmental missions, it discouraged application to others, such as those with strong ties to corporate agribusiness. That the nature of a project will have a major impact on the sources of funding for the effort should come as no surprise.

When choosing staff the concept should also inform the necessary skill set. Certainly core management skills are key for a project director, but the candidates for the position should demonstrate a predisposition towards support of the concept underlying not only the end product, but the means by which the organization is to produce that product. It is one thing for a candidate to demonstrate the ability to organize or manage a farmers' market (it should be noted here that the skills necessary to organize a farmers' market are not necessarily the same as those necessary to manage the market), but it is imperative that the candidate be able to demonstrate

that they understand the quality of the market that is to be created and what it will take to create that quality.

### Site Location

The concept also clarified goals. The goal of the concept was to promote community and economic development through stewardship. The mission of BREADA was to translate this concept into concrete practice. For this reason the leadership of BREADA chose to locate the farmers' market where community and economic development were on the one hand very much needed, and on the other hand where the project had a reasonable chance of being successful. Had the exclusive goal been to organize a farmers' market in a place where it would be guaranteed to work, the logical placement of the market would have been in an area that was already flourishing. To have gone down this path would not have been in keeping with the purpose of the project as guided by the concept.

The project was born in a neighborhood that lacked good access to affordable, fresh food. For this reason the leadership of BREADA wanted to locate the market in close proximity to this neighborhood. A variety of locations were evaluated by many different criteria including ease of access, consistent availability, proximity of shelter in the event of inclement weather, physical comfort (e.g. security, noise, exposure to the elements, aesthetic neutrality if not appeal, etc.), and the emotional or psychological comfort meaning that people from this neighborhood would feel at home at the site. Locations of interest included vacant area under the approach to the Mississippi River Bridge, church parking lots, and shopping center parking lots.

It was ultimately decided that the market should be located in a municipal parking lot in downtown Baton Rouge at 300 North Boulevard. Objective analysis would not indicate that this was the best location for the market because of the lack of proximity to major thoroughfares and

crossroads, the lack of commercial activity on weekends, conflicting opinions within the public about the safety and comfort of going downtown, and even the lack of significant on-site parking. Subjective analysis would indicate otherwise.

To be sure there were significant incentives for locating the market downtown, such as support from the Downtown Development District. The open-air parking lot that would be home to the farmers' market was also in close proximity to a parking garage that could serve as an alternate location on rainy days. It was also revealed after the market was opened at the North Boulevard location that this was generally the location of the original "sanitary market," or public market, in downtown Baton Rouge.

The primary incentive, however, was to use the market to reconnect urban and rural people alike with downtown Baton Rouge as the city center, and to have the market in close proximity to a number of low-income neighborhoods in a "non-threatening" location. Because downtown Baton Rouge was generally empty on weekends save for special events, there was the sense that it belonged to everyone: rich and poor; black and white; young and old; rural, urban and suburban. The notion of stewardship played a major role in the decision to locate the market at the North Boulevard location. Here was a vacant lot in the middle of a downtown area that was largely devoid of many people on weekends. If this vacant public property could be turned into a new social and economic institution in the greater Baton Rouge area, it would speak volumes about the potential of real urban revitalization, the promise of the family farm, the willingness of consumers to go out of their way for quality goods, and the ease with which people from very different backgrounds can be drawn together in a marketplace that was more than just a place to shop.

I have often described the selection of the North Boulevard location as a Field of Dreams event. The famous line from that movie and the book Shoeless Joe by W.P. Kinsella was, "If you build it, he will come (1982, p. 3)." That location was chosen on the basis of faith as much as careful analysis. It was a certainly a risk, but in this case faith in an idea resulted in a market that embodied the intended purpose in both form and function. The market began on the first weekend of November, 1996 with 16 farmers and hundreds of customers. Now, more than 6 years later, the farmers' market has more than 30 vendors and easily more than a thousand visitors on any given Saturday and it has inspired the opening of a public market that is a joint project of BREADA, the City of Baton Rouge, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the State of Louisiana and the Louisiana Agricultural Center.

#### Rules and Regulations

The intended purposes of the rules and regulations governing the farmers' market and the community garden project were driven by the project concept. In both cases they were written to promote the intended function of the projects, and this in turn manifested forms that were based on the intended function.

For both the market and the community gardens the rules and regulations stressed the imperative that participants were expected to work with one another to resolve problems. The governing structures of both were designed to put the fate of the community gardens and the farmers' market into the hands of those who participated in and benefited from them. The BREADA board provided oversight, but the projects created by BREADA were to be generally self-governing. It would have been easier to give the board dictatorial powers to enforce the idea underlying the market and gardens, but that would not have been consistent with the concept.

The rules and regulations governing the projects were intended to promote stewardship of the projects themselves. The participants were expected to care for that in which they had a stake, but in which they had no ownership. Individual interests were to temper one another for the sake of the well being of the whole. The process did not always or often work smoothly, but that is the nature of self-governance. Under this structure the participants would largely determine among themselves if the market or garden was to fail or succeed. The concept informed regulations based on self-determination through participation and fairness. By design the concept did not guarantee success.

### Technical Assistance

BREADA provided a haven for those who were encouraged to promote good stewardship practices within their own institutions as well as those who were not given strong institutional support or encouragement. While not limited to those with academic pursuits, many professionals and students from local universities including Louisiana State University, Southern University, and the University of South Louisiana (now known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette) volunteered their services to BREADA's constituents. Often times these volunteers were pursuing interests that were outside the norm such as small-scale agricultural production, organic practices, sustainability studies and even alternative means of organizational development and management. As was mentioned in the section of this paper describing the concept in context, those who pursue interests that are counter to or otherwise differ from the norm can be isolated or even ostracized. While not able to insulate these innovators from potential perils, BREADA was able to provide a forum in which they could demonstrate that their work was valued and valid.

When a concept is executed in function and form it is bound to repel and attract people based on their own particular beliefs or interests. BREADA provided those attracted to it the opportunity to both give and receive. By giving their time and skills to farmers, gardeners and consumers the volunteers themselves were given a safe place to pursue their interests. It created conditions whereby they could practice and promote stewardship.

### Motivation and Care

In Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha, the lead character finds and pursues a path that he was called to follow. The pursuit itself created a profound joy in Siddhartha. "When every freshly acquired knowledge only engendered a new thirst, then again, in the midst of his thirst, in the midst of his efforts, he had thought: Onwards, onwards, this is your path (Hesse, 1981, p. 83)."

An idea or concept can generate powerful passion and energy which can fuel our work. In the case of BREADA the concept generated both enthusiasm and provided direction for its pursuit. The concept informed us as to where we were going, why we were going there, how we should best get there and ultimately what we hoped to see when we arrived. But we never would have been able to move forward had it not been for the motivation generated by care about the promises of the concept. What the concept inspired and what created the motivation was care, and care should not be underestimated.

Care is what motivates community leaders to serve on boards, or foundations to award grants, or consumers to go out of their way for good food, or farmers to go out of their way to produce the best quality food possible, or neighbors to brave heat and mosquitos to come together and transform a vacant lot into a garden.

A good idea can inspire care and action and give direction to both. For designers it could be that the highest calling of the art is to help individuals and communities articulate what it is

they really care about. As designers we can help express the values of our society through that which is created, and through the act of creation itself.

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## VITA

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