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**Thiết Kế cho Gia Tài Nông Nghiệp: Cho Khu Tôi ở Nu Ô Linh
Đông - Designing for a Living AgriCultural Heritage: For my
Vietnamese Neighborhood in New Orleans East**

Nguyệt Nguyễn

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**THIẾT KẾ CHO GIA TÀI NÔNG NGHIỆP:
CHO KHU TÔI Ở NU Ô LINH ĐÔNG
DESIGNING FOR A LIVING AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE:
FOR MY VIETNAMESE NEIGHBORHOOD IN NEW ORLEANS EAST**

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 Robert Reich School of
Landscape Architecture

by

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There is an Igbo proverb from Nigeria that states: “It takes a village to raise a child.” While the origin is of African-descended heritage, the concept is parallel to my Vietnamese ancestry and the universal human family as a whole. The saying speaks to the holistic effort of a community in supporting a loved one as they grow, develop, and navigate the world. We do better work in the company of others, and this thesis project has been a journey only possible because of the guidance of many.

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Thank you to my neighborhood of Versailles in New Orleans East, for being my first home and community. I remember sprawling green backyards all around us, walking to school on the weekend to learn Vietnamese, and visiting relatives during Tết (Lunar New Year). I remember the sweet rice treats Bà would get at Chợ Xóm on Saturday mornings. I remember coming back after undergraduate school so I could re-learn what it is to be of Vietnamese heritage in America. Thanks to my family at VEGGI Farmers’ Cooperative for being part of the journey. Shout out to Daniel, Nam Thư, Chika, and Thư. You all introduced me to Nguyệt. Thanks to our cohort of elders and young people. With you, I learned what it takes to build a

community. I am grateful to have grown up in a landscape that blends Vietnamese, American, and New Orleans culture.

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ABSTRACT

Versailles in New Orleans East is home to one of the densest populations of Vietnamese outside of Việt Nam. Following the Việt Nam War in 1975, thousands of refugees fled the country and several hundred were resettled in this neighborhood. Over time, community members rooted in a sense of home through tangible and intangible means in the landscape. Elders grow vegetables, herbs and fruit from Việt Nam in yards and vacant lots. Neighbors and amenities are within walkable distance. The Catholic church is a focal community hub. Language and tradition are practiced at the family and the community scale.

Over time, environmental disasters and acculturation have eaten away at the Vietnamese community's cultural identity. Residents have moved away, Vietnamese-owned businesses are in decline, and the younger generation shows decreasing interest in Vietnamese culture.

The design goal of this thesis is to tie the study of cultural landscape with community engagement to inform the design of an intergenerational community garden. The long-term goal is to build cultural conservation and begin bridging the gap between the older and younger generation in the Vietnamese-American community in Versailles. There are three methodologies: 1) Documenting household edible gardens and interviewing gardeners, 2) co-learning with community members through design workshops, and lastly, 3) using data from fieldwork and research to propose a community garden that encourages intergenerational interest and understanding.

Keywords: autoethnography, community garden, cultural landscape, diaspora, immigrant, landscape architecture, New Orleans, participatory design, refugee, urban agriculture, Vietnamese

PREFACE

Vietnamese home gardens were a landscape I grew up with as a child in Versailles, New Orleans. Our home had a big grapefruit tree in the backyard. Whenever it was the season for flowers, you could smell the fragrant aroma a hundred feet away in front of the house. I remember the purple and green leafed lá mớ (skunkvine) that crawled all over the chain link fence. The shady trellis overhead along the side of the house felt like a cool canopy when my brother and I searched for anoles. Bà Ngoại (my maternal grandma) lived with us and had raised all three of my siblings since we were babies. She cooked family meals every day on a stove outside. I remember she would save and dry plant stalks when they got old for their rattling seeds. The back door was often left open during nice weather, and the closed iron screen door kept bugs out, allowing air to circulate from the outside. We always had a view of the garden from this frame. The older relatives we visited also had these growing green worlds in their backyards.

It was not until I moved out of this context and observed loss of culture as I got older that I understood the significance of gardens in Vietnamese-American culture. My family moved to Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and it was not as easy to be in touch with our heritage anymore. Getting Vietnamese groceries and going to church changed from a few minutes' walk to a thirty-minute drive. Bà Ngoại speaks mostly Vietnamese, and didn't have neighbors to socialize with anymore. The garden provided a safe haven and sense of agency for her. My younger brother and sister have more of a barrier in understanding and speaking Vietnamese with her than I did. It was different celebrating Tết, Vietnamese New Year, in Baton Rouge as the Vietnamese community was spread out and not geographically focused like in

Versailles. We couldn't just walk across the street to give special New Year's greetings. There was no longer a neighborhood full of the deafening sound and smell of firecrackers filling the air anymore. I saw how other second-generation Vietnamese navigated the tension in following the older generations' collective mindset versus the individualism of America. This included myself.

In undergraduate school, I settled on geography and anthropology as my discipline. After hopping from major to major, this combination of fields felt like the best alignment for what I was attuned to. Learning about different places, different cultures, and the ways to understand them in depth resonated with the empathetic part of me.

I returned to the gardens in Versailles as a final project in a human and environment course. Christopher Airriess is a geographer at Ball State University who has published a significant amount of articles on Versailles. In the 1990s, he was particularly focused on the vegetable and herb gardens, and how the community has created Vietnamese landscapes. He did a field study to understand the spatial and social components of the gardens, and I wanted to update it as it had been about twenty years. Where both of our research had room to grow, I realized, was that there was acknowledgment of an issue - the gardens' disappearance with acculturation of the younger generation – without any solutions offered.

Nearing the end of my undergraduate studies, I crossed paths with a student who was in a field I had never heard of before. It was called landscape architecture. It seemed to be a balance of what was important to me: people, nature, and art. This thought would become a seed that I would return to later.

Towards the last year of school, I was amidst intergenerational disagreements that led to me having a bad association with Vietnamese culture. The older generation seemed so restricting and not open to change in my opinion. In the desire to re-learn what it meant to be Vietnamese in America, I returned to Versailles upon graduation in 2014. There was this farm near our old home that caught my eye every time we came back to the neighborhood to visit relatives. I volunteered for them after school, and ended up joining the team.

It was a non-profit farmers' cooperative called VEGGI (formerly known as Village de l'Est Green Growers Initiative). I worked with them for two years, and learned that it was more than just a farm. We experimented with more less humanistic methods of agriculture (e.g. no-till, no weeding, etc.) in the mornings, managed sales and deliveries of tofu and produce, coordinated community events, and collaborated with Rethink on the Food Justice Collective (FJC).

Working with young people in the multicultural FJC was perhaps our greatest and most challenging investment in our future: reconnecting the younger generation with the land and each other. The curriculum centered around learning cultural food histories, gaining responsibility in food cultivation, and building trust and communication as a group. Activities were a foundational tool for the cohort, an approachable way to absorb new material together. We also learned that food was a large motivating factor that brought people together. Young people were attracted to morning harvests on Friday because we would collectively cook and enjoy breakfast together. One youth who was initially skeptical of tofu would bring up that one dish that an elder prepared every now and then: "When will we have it again?"



Figure 1. Cover for a proposed Decolonize Now: Food Justice Collective (FJC) cookbook. a culminating project for FJC members to tie experience in growing food to family/cultural recipes.
 Pictured are FJC members working and cooking at VEGGI farm.
 Drawn by FJC member Gabby Nguyễn. 2016. Image source: VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative.

A group of my close friends and I planned a month-long trip to Việt Nam in 2016. Most of Vietnamese heritage, and most of us have never been to the motherland before. I found that many things were different, but also familiar. There were plenty of flowers that looked like the ones I grew up with. There were many foods that I knew and many that I did not know about.

As we traversed from Sài Gòn (Hồ Chí Minh City) northbound to Hà Nội, the landscape became an ever-changing scene. We transitioned back and forth between city life, the countryside, mountains, beaches, and islands. Street life, whether rural or urban, meant people gathering together outside to enjoy each other's company.

The trip also brought up questions of cultural identity for me. Việt Nam was my roots, but there was several generations of disconnect. I was not regarded as Vietnamese by the natives here. I was not seen as American in America. I felt much more American because that was the soil I was raised on, but I am appreciative of my ancestry. There was one Bác (elder) whom I met towards the end of the trip who summed things up nicely for me. She kindly reminded me to ask my Bà Ngoại and mom where they came from when I got home, ok? I smiled, fighting tears. I had a lot of work to do.

Community work was emotionally taxing, and there was often a culture of it overtaking one's personal life. I began burning out, and also had doubts about the non-profit structure as a sustainable mode of operation. I thought back to landscape architecture, and decided to give school another chance.

When I looked into applying to graduate school for landscape architecture in 2016, I knew I wanted to do something for the community where I grew up. I was just unsure of what it would be exactly. I had written in my personal statement: "I want to explore the idea of: How do we design beautiful new spaces that are informed by and reflective of the culture of a community . . ."

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1. Intentions, Goals, and Objectives

In the courses I took in landscape architecture, I began to see the correlation between my background of studying people and place as a practical application in design. It became evident to me that researching history and sociocultural context of a site informed the process of design, which better serves the residents of that area.

With local projects, I was drawn to interacting with the community and their landscape. Talking with people who lived and/or worked in a site allowed me to see into their world and bring their story to the design process. Taking in the sights, sounds, and smells of a site allowed for a connection to the vernacular in experience and memory.

Because we design for people, it is important to remember that not everyone is familiar with a culture that is different from their own. In a mask movement theatre class I am taking, we wear black clothing, white masks, and do not say a word. We assume a neutral character that has no history and no past. We have to be aware to not move in ways that are characteristic of ourselves. This stripping away of our uniqueness focuses on communicating what is universally human. A moment of loss or discovery is acted out as it were our very first time. I came to see this as recontextualizing any and every story, which parallels with design narratives. When working closely with a community, finding a baseline to understand the culture and context helps both the designer and the audience. Even if the designer has a level of familiarity with the community and/or the culture, it is especially even more helpful to find ways to reflect on and explain what the designer may be used to.

I wanted to give back to the community that raised me. I wanted to better understand the culture of where our elders come from. I wanted to learn how to better balance Vietnamese ancestry in an American lifestyle and environment.

For this thesis project, the goal was to address cultural erosion in Versailles by having landscape architecture include the study of cultural landscape in the process, and participatory design into the process. With the decline of gardening and agricultural knowledge through the generations, a community garden seemed an appropriate landscape for Vietnamese agricultural heritage to live on in a way that resonates with the younger generation. I wanted the design to reflect the people that it serves, and to gain experience as a designer working with community.

Chapter 1 sets the context for how the Vietnamese community became situated in Versailles. There is an overview of Việt Nam¹ and its landscape as tied to agriculture. The country's legacy of resistance leads to the Việt Nam War, resulting in the Vietnamese diaspora. Arriving at the neighborhood level, I share important aspects of the culture. These have contributed to Versailles' sense of community, and also affect acculturation. Chapter 2 covers theoretical frameworks in which to view the project. Chapter 3 digs into the fieldwork of studying cultural landscape and participatory design. Lastly, Chapter 4 is a reflection on the methodology, and plans for further analysis, design, and long-term goals with the community.

¹ As Vietnamese is monosyllabic¹, Vietnam is actually Việt Nam and will be referred to as such in this paper. Laurence C. Thompson ("The Problem of the Word in Vietnamese" *WORD*. Vol 19, no. 1, 1963) 39-52. doi: 10.1080/00437956.1963.11659787.

1.2. Việt Nam: A Country Overview

How did Vietnamese people end up in New Orleans East, America? A visit to libraries in New Orleans and Baton Rouge reveals that a majority of books on Việt Nam are about American involvement with the Việt Nam War that ended in 1975. However, there is more to Việt Nam's history than this relationship. One approach is to look across the world to Việt Nam, back in time thousands of years ago to comprehensively understand this story of migration.

Việt Nam sits on the coast of Southeast Asia, south of China and east of Laos and Cambodia. Shaped like a letter S, the whole of the east coast has a relationship with the East Sea (see Figure 2). The metaphor of a Vietnamese person balancing rice baskets at either end of a pole across their shoulders has been used to visualize the shape of the country.²

According to Vietnamese legend, a dragon named Lạc came to Việt Nam – a warm and bountiful land with mountains, valleys and rivers. He met a fairy princess named Âu Cơ and they fell in love. They became man and wife, and had one hundred children together. The kids were brave and friendly like their father, and full of grace and beauty like their mother.

Over time, the dragon decided the family was too large to live together, and would have to spread out. Both parents did not want to do this, but agreed it would be for the better, as the children were getting old enough to begin their own families.³ The dragon took half of their children to the sea. The princess took the other half to the midlands of the Red River.

² Paul Rutledge (*The Vietnamese in America*. Lerner Publication Company, 1987), 6.

³ David C. Cooke, *Vietnam: The Country, The People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), 1-2.

One of the children became the first king of Vietnamese people.⁴



Figure 2. Topographic map of Việt Nam.⁵

⁴ Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (University of California Press, 1993), 7.

⁵ Sterling, et. Al, inside page.

Việt Nam is one of the oldest countries in the world. There are civilizations that date to more than 2,170 years ago.⁶

Việt Nam encompasses 127,881 square miles, and is comparable in square footage to the state of New Mexico.⁷ The length runs nearly 1,240 miles long, and the width ranges 31 to 310 miles. The population was approximately 97 million in 2018.⁸

The landscape ranges from mountains in the north and central region⁹ to river plains in the south. Mountains comprise three quarters of the country,¹⁰ and run along the majority of the country's length.¹¹ One fourth of Việt Nam lies above 2,050 feet. Half of the country is hills and lower slopes. The remaining fourth is below 65 feet, primarily composed of the delta regions and coastal plains in the central region.¹²

Việt Nam's best-known topographic features are the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong Delta in the south. Both major delta regions are a few yards above sea level and are heavily populated and devoted to intensive agriculture.¹³

⁶ Cooke, 4.

⁷ Cooke, 4.

⁸ "The World Bank in Vietnam", The World Bank, last modified October 18, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview>.

⁹ Eleanor Jane Sterling, et. al, *Vietnam: A Natural History*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁰ Sterling, et. al, 3.

¹¹ Rutledge, 8.

¹² Sterling, et. al, 3-5.

¹³ Sterling, et. al, 5.

The shape, topography, and location of Việt Nam situate the country in a range of climate.¹⁴ Being in monsoon Southeast Asia, Việt Nam receives heavy rainfall. The two seasons are described as rainy and dry. The dry season averages two to six months, from March to May. The raining season occurs during summer, from May to October.¹⁵

1.3. Vietnamese AgriCulture

“The scholar ranks first, then comes the peasant.

But when the rice runs out and you run wildly about.

The peasant comes first and the scholar second.”¹⁶

Việt Nam was traditionally considered to consist of four main groups of people: scholars, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants. Each played an important and necessary role in contributing to society.¹⁷

Việt Nam is known as the Rice Bowl of Asia.¹⁸ The fertile Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong Delta in the south, in combination with the rainfall and hot climate, create the

¹⁴ Sterling, et. al, 7.

¹⁵ Sterling, et. al, 9.

¹⁶ Sterling, et. al, 9.

¹⁷ Cooke. 49.

¹⁸ Cooke, 9.

optimal environment for growing rice.¹⁹ This area, which makes up a quarter of the country, supported almost 80 percent of its population as well as had enough to export before the Việt Nam War.²⁰

Vietnamese people have historically lived in these regions,²¹ cultivated rice in these lowlands, and cultivated a deep connection to the land of their agricultural and communal forebears.²² Women were early agriculturalists, and were said to have discovered rice cultivation.²³ The pre-colonial village was a collective unit of residences designed around farming. Life and land were communal.²⁴ The structure and self-sufficiency of the village built in a strength to resist French and American capitalist institutions.

¹⁹ Rutledge, 6.

²⁰ SarDesai, 1.

²¹ Rutledge, 8.

²² Nancy Wiegersma (*Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 26.

²³ Wiegersma, 28.

²⁴ Wiegersma, 19.



Figure 3. Rice terraces post-harvest. Mountains of Sa Pa, northern Việt Nam, summer 2016.
Photo source: Author, 2016.

1.4. Việt Nam: A History of Resistance

Một ngàn năm đô hộ giặc Tàu

A thousand years of Chinese invaders

Một trăm năm nô lệ giặc Tây

One hundred years of Western slavery

Hai mươi năm nội chiến từng ngày

Twenty years of civil war every day

Gia tài của mẹ, để lại cho con,

Mother's inheritance, she left for us,

Gia tài của mẹ, là nước Việt buồn

Mother's inheritance, a sad country

(“Gia Tài Của Mẹ”)²⁵

(“Mother’s Inheritance”)

²⁵ Bùi Văn Phú, “Khánh Ly Hát cho Quê Hương?” *BBC* (2014)
https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/forum/2014/04/140425_khanhly_hanoi

A history of warfare is so significant in Việt Nam's timeline that it appears in popular culture. "Gia Tài Của Mẹ" ("Mother's Inheritance") is a song by a famous composer and singer duo, Trịnh Công Sơn and Khánh Ly, respectively, that encompasses the long duration of occupation Việt Nam and her people have had to resist. Repeated invasions have given rise to resilience and freedom from outside control.²⁶, illustrating the resourcefulness of the people against force larger than them. Vietnamese nationalism began out of opposition to the century-long rule by China.²⁷ This strong sense of identity allowed for survival during Chinese colonization.²⁸

All foreigners have left their mark on the landscape and the people of Việt Nam. Chinese and Vietnamese customs have many similarities due to their proximity and longest period of warfare with one another. Language, food, and Confucianism are just some examples. The French, the second longest occupier, influenced the spread of Catholicism. This played an important role in sequential exoduses of Vietnamese people during the Việt Nam War. With the communist regime in place, more than 900,000 people in the North fled to the South for fear of religious persecution. 50,000 to 100,00 were killed trying to leave.²⁹

²⁶ Felix Greene (*Vietnam! Vietnam!* Palo Alto: Fulton Publishing Company, 1966), 7.

²⁷ SarDesai, 43.

²⁸ Wiegersma, 26.

²⁹ Cooke, 22.

ENTITY	TIME PERIOD	YEARS OF OCCUPATION	(TRANS)NATIONAL CONTEXT
Chinese	111 BC-939 AD	1000	Colonization, monopoly on salt and iron
Chinese	1407-1428	21	-
Portuguese	1535-1635	100	European trade, introduced Roman Catholicism
Dutch	1636-1674	38	European trade
English	Unclear	-	European trade
French	1857-1940	83	European trade, (rice and rubber) colonization, Catholic conversion
Japanese	1941-1945	4	World War II
French	1946-1954	7.5	World War II
Internal	-1975	-	Anti-communism, Việt Nam War
Americans	1964-1975	9	Red scare, Việt Nam War
TOTAL YEARS OF OUTSIDE OCCUPATION		1262.5	

Table 1. Occupation of Việt Nam by foreigners. Table summarizes major time periods but is not all-encompassing. Sources: Cooke, Greene, Rutledge, SarDesai, and Wiegersma

The United States' heavy involvement in Việt Nam's affairs played a role in the creation of Versailles. The U.S. invested heavily in the warfare (see figure 4), as well as opened arms to Vietnamese refugees after the war in 1975.



Figure 4. A comparison of U.S. investment in World War II, the Korean War and the Việt Nam War. War Remnants Museum in Sài Gòn (Hồ Chí Minh City), Việt Nam, 2016. Photo source: Author, 2016.

1.5. From Việt Nam to America

The civil war in Việt Nam scattered Vietnamese people like seeds across the world. 130,000 Vietnamese fled the country following American withdrawal.³⁰ It was not a direct journey for refugees to arrive at their final destinations, but rather, a life of uncertainty ahead.

Waves of refugees left Việt Nam at different times and under different circumstances. 40,000 people were estimated to have been evacuated out of Việt Nam in 1975. With flight not an option for people who left after 1975, many in this “second wave” used boats to escape. This is where the term “boat people” came from.³¹ Many refugees did not make it. Dangers at sea included patrols, pirates, and storms. The number of lost and presumed dead boat people at sea are estimated between 40,000 and 200,000.³²

Countries nearby Việt Nam served as first asylum for boat people. Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines were a few of those countries. Final countries of asylum included Australia, Canada, China, and France. The United States took in more boat people than all of the countries combined,³³ approximating at 150,000.³⁴

Once in America, refugees were settled camps across the country: Camp Pendleton, California; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, and Fort Indiantown Gap,

³⁰ Airriess and Clawson (*“Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana”*), 1.

³¹ Rutledge, 23.

³² Rutledge, 24.

³³ Rutledge, 31.

³⁴ Rutledge, 18.

Pennsylvania.³⁵ The only way to leave the camps was to have a sponsorship by an individual, family or organization.³⁶

New Orleans became an attractive destination because of active sponsorship. The climate was similar to that of South Vietnam, and there were economic opportunities for many Vietnamese who had prior experience in the fishing industry.³⁷

1.6. Welcome to Versailles

In 1975, the Associated Catholic Charities rented blocks of apartments in New Orleans East to resettle 1,000 refugees. The neighborhood became colloquially known as Vęc Xai, or Versailles, after the Versailles Arms apartments where they were first settled. In the early 1970s, the areas had white residents who moved out and black residents who moved in.³⁸

³⁵ Airriess and Clawson (*“Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana”*), 1.

³⁶ Rutledge, 19.

³⁷ Airriess and Clawson (*“Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana”*), 3.

³⁸ Airriess and Clawson (*“Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana”*), 3.



Figure 5. Versailles Arms Apartments, 2015. Photo source: Author, 2015.

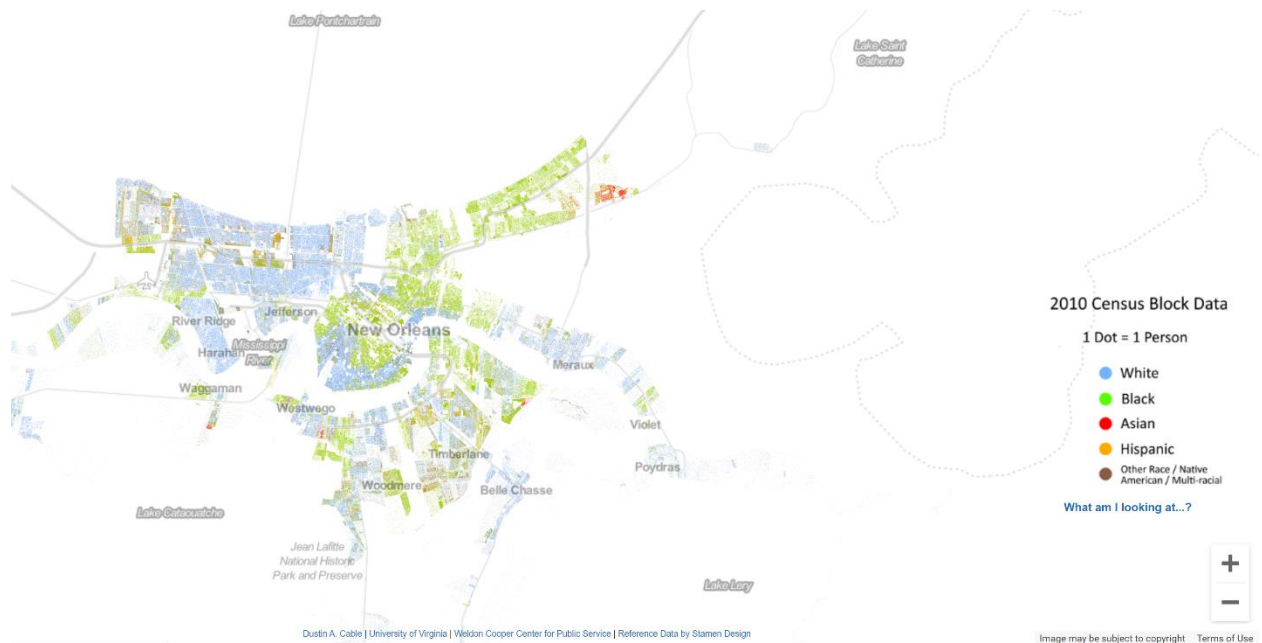


Figure 6. Racial Dot Map for New Orleans, not to scale, 2010 census. Versailles is the red triangle in the top right corner. Image source: University of Virginia.



Figure 7. Versailles racial dot map, zoomed in to Versailles.
The majority of the neighborhood is Vietnamese and Black.
Image source: University of Virginia.

The landscape of Versailles tells stories of rural agricultural practices from Việt Nam. A walk or drive through the neighborhood reveals side trellises sprawling with vine vegetables, occasional front yards full of green leafy vegetables and herbs, and organically created plots alongside the waterway. Neighborhood residents used any bit of available land - both household and unused - to root in a sense of home with Vietnamese vegetables, herbs and fruits.³⁹ Gardening style is polycultural as in rural Việt Nam, with multiple crops sharing a single plot.⁴⁰

³⁹ Airriess and Clawson (*"Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana"*), 8.

⁴⁰ Airriess and Clawson (*"Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana"*), 9.



Figure 8. All land is fair game for cultivation. A patch of dirt at a sidewalk intersection is home to Thai basil, lemongrass, and shiso. Photo source: Author, 2017.

Surplus vegetables are sold at the Saturday morning market on Alcee Fortier Boulevard, the main commercial corridor of Versailles. While the gardens are reminiscent of Vietnamese countryside, the commercial strip is similar to that of Southeast Asian cities. Approximately 40 businesses flank both sides of Alcee Fortier (see figure 9), and the ground floor is commercial. The second floor is residential. Businesses provide the neighborhood with a range of basic services. There are: restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, pharmacies, jewelry stores, salons, bars, clinics, a law firm, and mail service to send items to Việt Nam.⁴¹

⁴¹ Airriess and Clawson (*"Versailles: a Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana"*), 10.



Figure 9. The commercial corridor on Alcee Fortier Boulevard and surrounding context – residences and the Maxent Canal. Image source: Google Maps, 2020.



Figure 10. Chợ Xóm, Squatters' Market, in operation every Saturday morning. It closes up around 8 AM. My Ông Bà Nội (paternal grandparents) used to vend their produce here every Saturday morning. Photo source: Author, 2017.



Figure 11. South view of the commercial strip on Alcee Fortier Boulevard. Photo source: Author, 2017.

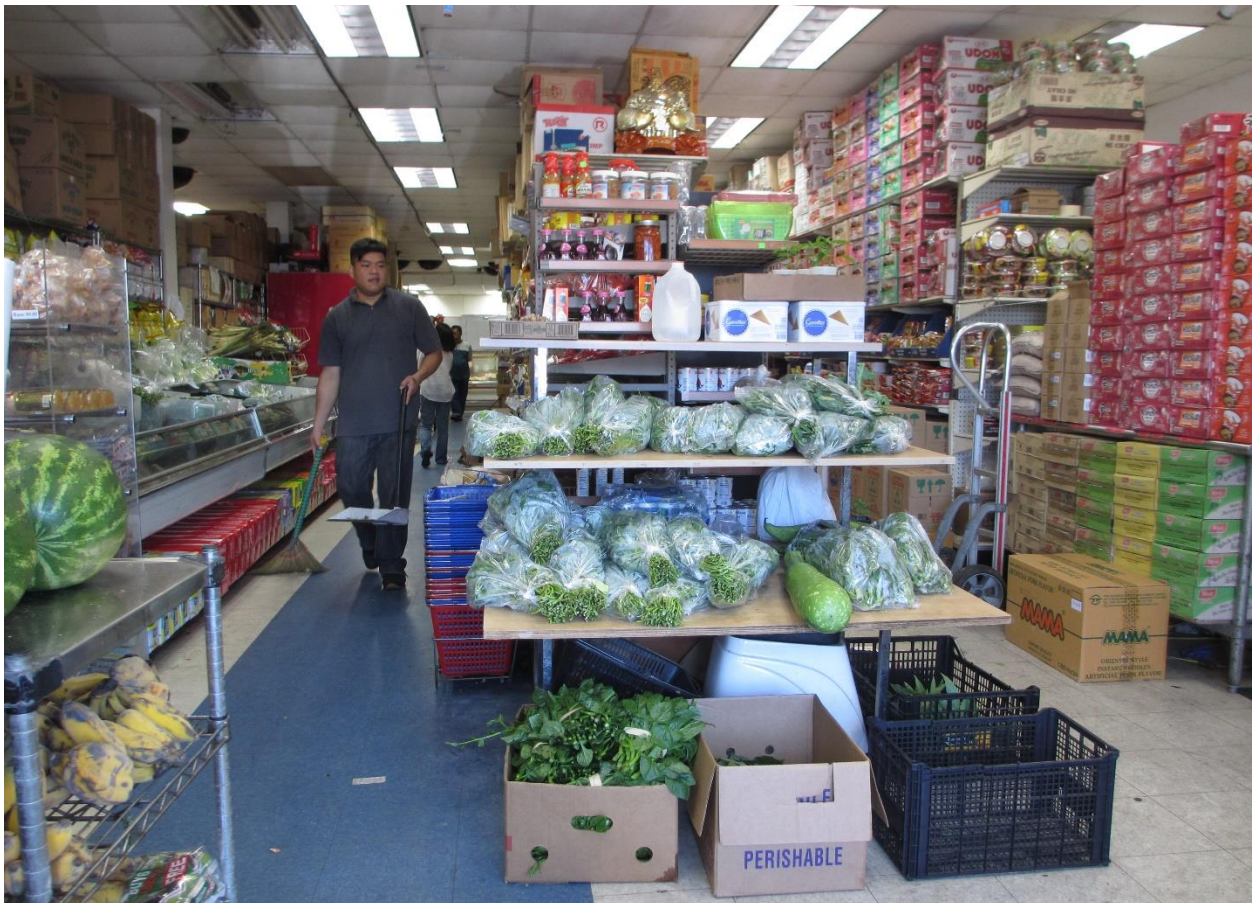


Figure 12. Inside Minh Cảnh on Alcee Fortier Boulevard, family-named, owned, and run grocery store. Cảnh is the name of the elderly couple and Minh is their son. Ông (Grandpa) Cảnh's picture is taped up near the cash register. Bà (Grandma) Cảnh can often be seen near the front door, sitting on a low stool sorting through leafy vegetables. The first view stepping inside is a section for neighborhood-grown produce. Photo source: Author, 2017.

1.7. Vietnamese View of the World

Moving to America, first-generation refugees and immigrants had to adjust to a new culture. There are some aspects of Vietnamese culture that differ from that of American culture. Without prior knowledge, either side could offend that other. This includes intergenerational relations within and their second-generation children. Social interactions, food, and family are a few key topics that will be briefly illustrate the Vietnamese view of the world.

Social Interactions

It is customary for Vietnamese to speak in more roundabout ways. Similar to Chinese culture, my Chinese friend once explained it as, “You have to be smart enough to get it” (see figure 13). I once had a dinner in the neighborhood with a family newly immigrated and they commented that I spoke very directly. In Việt Nam, this is considered disrespectful whereas it is a norm in America.⁴²

There is a hierarchy of age in Vietnamese society. The older a person is, the more respect they are paid. In America, everyone referred to as “you” no matter their age. In Vietnamese, there is a multitude of words for “you” depending on the relation of the person speaking to another. Age, gender, and familial relation or societal role determine the expression for “you”. For people older than you, they have to be addressed by title (e.g. Bác –

⁴² Cooke, 103.

female or male elder). Teachers are addressed by their first name in my department at Louisiana State University. However, this is considered rude in Vietnamese culture.



Figure 13. Anh đến lật lá bẻ cành / Để cây trơ gốc / còn em phơi đầu
I (male) come to pick the leaves and break a branch / The tree is aging and dying /
And you (female) shade your head

The elder author of the sign explained that this tree was medicinal, and people would harvest from it often. His sign is essentially indirect speaking in the form of poetry: “Leave this tree be!”
Alleyway in Nha Trang, southern Việt Nam. Photo source: Author, 2016.

Children are taught to obey elders, and seek the advice of older family members.⁴³ To this day, my parents still remind me, “Chào Bác chưa?” – “Did you greet your elder yet?”

Arguing with elders and questioning decisions are not allowed. Loved ones are still remembered in the form of household altars after they pass away (see figure 14).⁴⁴



Figure 14. Catholic bàn thờ (altar) in Versailles. Flowers, fruit, and candles are common offerings. The ancestor in remembrance is the homeowner's husband. Photo source: Author, 2017.

⁴³ Rutledge, 42.

⁴⁴ Cooke, 47.

Food

“Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you who you are.”

- Brillat-Savarine⁴⁵

The aphorism suggests that when we eat, we consume our culture, principles, and values. Food is an artifact,⁴⁶ an evolution of culture and practicality. The Vietnamese diet is derived from a historic relationship with the land and with the sea. A warm ecology of plentiful rain fostered an environment for abundant agriculture. Coupled with the peoples’ intensive work ethic and dense settlement in fertile lands, Vietnamese cuisine encompasses a range of fresh foods.

Rice was the optimal crop to grow in this environment,⁴⁷ and a staple food of the Vietnamese diet. It is eaten in some form or fashion – steamed, as noodles, as thin sheets,⁴⁸ etc. – at a majority of daily meals. While it is low in nutrients, other foods that accompany it supply the rest. Fish and seafood have protein. Herbs and leafy greens have fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Ground nuts and coconuts have fat. Fish sauce - fermented fish in brine - is a common

⁴⁵ Nir Avieli (Making Sense of Vietnamese Cuisine. *Food, Culture, and Asia*. <https://www.asianstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/making-sense-of-vietnamese-cuisine.pdf>), 42).

⁴⁶ Avieli, 42.

⁴⁷ Avieli, 43.

⁴⁸ Cooke, 124.

seasoning and condiment. Fresh spices often used throughout dishes– shallot, garlic, ginger, chili, pepper, and lime – also are a source of vitamins and minerals.

Meal time is communal. All the dishes are at the center of the table and everyone picks from them with chopsticks as they eat. It is customary for younger people to help serve their elders.⁴⁹

Family

Family has been the root of Vietnamese society since ancient times,⁵⁰ and it permeates language, traditions, and other aspects of the culture. For Vietnamese, the family name comes first, then the middle name, then last is the given name.⁵¹ There are specific words to distinguish grandparents, aunts, and uncles on either the mother or father's side.

In Eastern culture, the collective is understood as the primary social unit whereas in the West, there is emphasis on the individual and independence.

⁴⁹ Avieli, 43.

⁵⁰Khac Kham Nguyễn (*Introduction to Vietnamese Culture*), 14.

⁵¹ Cooke, 30.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Scope and Limitations

The scope of this paper focus on the historic and sociocultural context of Việt Nam and Versai. As thousands of years and transnational relations will be covered, select frameworks will be introduced and work in synthesis to guide the direction: autoethnography, refugee and immigrant theory, ordinary landscapes, community gardens, participatory design, and proposed designs for Versailles.

2.2. Autoethnography

“ . . people are imprinted with the landscape of their early childhood. . . lasting memories, persistent ways of framing the world, enduring ideas about places are laid down in those years of rapidly expanding cognition.”⁵²

- Anne Whiston Spirn, urban designer, teacher, and landscape architect

Coming from a background in anthropology, having been raised in Versai from childhood to early adolescence, being of Vietnamese heritage, and possessing motivation for continual connection with Vietnamese culture all form my basis in autoethnography. Ethnography is “the study of people in their own environment through the use of methods such as participant observation and face-to-face interviewing”.⁵³ Autoethnography additionally

⁵² Graeme Wynn. “D.W. Meinig and *The Shaping of America*.” *Journal of Historical Geography*. Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 610-633, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2005.09.003>

⁵³ “What is Ethnographic Research?” National Park Service. <https://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/ERCb.htm>. Accessed 2020 Mar 8.

acknowledges a researcher's level of insider status within the group being studied. Personal and interpersonal experience are compared and contrasted with research as data that reflects cultural experience.⁵⁴ There is a focus on accessible text through making culture familiar for insiders and outsiders,⁵⁵ evocative storytelling, and reaching a wider audience.⁵⁶ Ethnography is used in this project is the medium for collecting data through studying the gardens and working with community members through participatory design.

2.3. Refugee and Immigrant Theory

Refugees and immigrants have different circumstances of leaving their home country. Immigrants make the choice to leave and have plans for resettling. Refugees do not want to leave but are driven to do so out of safety from military or political reasons.⁵⁷ Unlike other contemporary Asian immigrants, Vietnamese were mostly forced out of their homeland due to the threat of political persecution.⁵⁸ "Critical Refugee Studies" calls for a contextual centering of

⁵⁴ Ellis, et. al. "Autoethnography: An Overview" pp. 277.

⁵⁵ Ellis, 276.

⁵⁶ Ellis, 283-284.

⁵⁷ Rutledge, 21.

⁵⁸ Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston III ("Social Capital and the Adaptation of the Second Generation: The Case of Vietnamese Youth in New Orleans"), 825.

Vietnamese refugees around war, race and violence.⁵⁹ Fear, uncertainty, and anxiety have implications in the landscape of their new place of settlement.

In the second generation, children of refugees or immigrants are born into the dominant culture they have immigrated to. They can feel trapped between opposing aspects of their parents' upbringing and that of their new home country.⁶⁰ In this paper, second-generation will be referred to as the "younger generation" and first-generation will be the "older generation". This how each group is distinguished in the Vietnamese language, *đời trẻ* and *đời lớn*, respectively.

For refugees, the adjustment to a new home can be compounded by feelings of loss and loneliness, and a lack of community. Refugees have a strong attachment to their homeland and recreate it in the new home to help alleviate the pain, rooting a sense of familiarity.⁶¹

2.4. Ordinary Landscapes

"The often ambiguous term 'landscape' refers to the ordinary and or commonplace visual elements of a community that residents create to satisfy their needs, wants and desire. In a sense, the cultural landscape is a visual manifestation of the culture that created it and can be

⁵⁹ Kiều-Linh Caroline Valverde (*Transnationalizing Viet Nam: Community, Culture, and Politics in the Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 4.

⁶⁰ Cliff Akiyama ("Bridging the Gap between Two Cultures: An Analysis on Identity Attitudes and Attachment of Asian Americans"), 251-263.

⁶¹ Airriess ("*Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans*"), 228.

interpreted or reads as a cultural autobiography. The many elements composing the cultural landscape are seen as subtle 'signatures' of the unknowing authors of that landscape. . . A community can transfer its character to the landscape."⁶²

- Christopher Airriess

Similar to how studying the origins of a people's food reveals its relationship with the native ecology, the study of landscapes describes more directly how man's culture interacts with the surrounding environment.⁶³ It tells us about the values, beliefs, and identity of the individual and the collective creator.⁶⁴ Man consciously makes decisions in everyday work and play that reveal patterns in the landscape.⁶⁵

Landscapes undergo change. In changing landscapes for the better, the society that created them also have to go through a similar process.⁶⁶

⁶² Airriess (*Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans*"), 229.

⁶³ Henry Glassie (*Vernacular Architecture*, Philadelphia and Bloomington: Material Culture of Philadelphia and Indiana University Press, 2000), 25.

⁶⁴ Anne Whiston Spirn, *Pragmatic Sustainability* (The Nature of Mill Creek: Landscape Literacy and Design for Ecological Democracy", 2016. <https://wplp.net/publications/Spirn-NatureMillCreek-2015.pdf>)

⁶⁵ David W. Meinig (*The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. Oxford University Press. 1979), 35.

⁶⁶ "Reading the Landscape", *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. Oxford University Press. 1979) 228-229.

2.5. Community Gardens

A community garden is a public one which the community owns, has free access to, and has a degree of democratic control.⁶⁷ Historically, the community garden movement began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with urban decline perking interest in green spaces. Vacant lots were given new life with vegetable and flower plantings. Many of those gardeners were recent immigrants. The movement started out with a focus on food production. More recently, it has incorporated community development and open space. Community development encompasses the agency of community members improving problems together.⁶⁸

Community gardens serve a range of purposes, addressing health, therapy, economy, social opportunity (volunteer, leadership, discussion)⁶⁹, and nature education⁷⁰ Community gardens also encompass a community of people who each assume different roles.⁷¹ There are gardeners, garden members, and garden friends.

⁶⁷ John Ferris, et.al (“People, Land and Sustainability: Community Gardens and the Social Dimension of Sustainable Development”), 560.

⁶⁸ Laura Saldivar-Tanaka and Marianne E. Krasny, “Culturing Community Development, Neighborhood Open space, and Civic Agriculture: The Case of Latino Community Gardens in New York City,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 21, no. 4 (2004): 399–412, accessed February 3, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-003-1248-9>.

⁶⁹ Ellen Teig, et. Al, “Collective Efficacy in Denver, Colorado: Strengthening Neighborhoods and Health Through Community Gardens,” *Health and Place* 15, no. 4 (2009): 1115-1122, accessed February 3, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2009.06.003>.

⁷⁰ Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 399–412.

⁷¹ Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 399–412.

The Garden Patch program in Berkeley, California is a case study of a community garden working with young people. Over one hundred teenagers were employed. The lessons in responsibility and food production carried over in their motivation to obtain jobs, graduate high school and go to college. Teenagers were given instruction by volunteers, and bloomed under their guidance.⁷²

2.6. Participatory Design

What is participatory design? It involves a creative scientific process of sorts - individual and communal reflection on issues, and testing solutions together.⁷³ It is a horizontal approach, involving the users and/or stakeholders of a design to take part in creating an environment that is reflective of their needs. Similar to the emergence of community gardens, there were two phases. The “idealistic phase” in the late 1960s fought development. The “entrepreneurial phase” came about in the early 1970s. Today’s participatory design is more commonly a combination of the two.⁷⁴

The level of collaboration ranges from educational to programmatic, as well as short-term and long-term.

⁷² Randolph Hester, *Design for Ecological Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 380

⁷³ David de la Pena, et al, *Design as Democracy: Techniques for Collective Creativity* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2017), 4.

⁷⁴ “Participatory Design,” *Urban Portrait*, 15 August 2013, <https://iamurbanist.wordpress.com/2013/08/15/participatory-design/>.

Anne Spirn's West Philadelphia Landscape Project is a case study in working with young people over the course of twenty years. "To read and shape landscape is to learn and teach: to know the world, to express ideas and to influence others."⁷⁵ Spirn shared the tools of map-reading, analysis, articulating, and advocating for dreams for change with middle schoolers. Together, they learned about the environmentally-unjust siting of their subsiding neighborhood because it was above a former creek, and that they had the agency to shape change with knowledge and reasoning.⁷⁶

With shorter-term participatory design, early participatory designer Lawrence Halprin had this to say: "Workshops for me are a way to reveal deep seated needs and desires about people's lives [But their aim is to] accomplish a way to execute what people desire to have done. In that sense they are action oriented. In a workshop we are not having group design. We're dealing with concepts, philosophy, attitudes, points of view. That's where a lot of this goes wrong, because any facilitator may get as far as this and then, if he's a lousy designer, it doesn't turn out well."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "Participatory Design".

⁷⁶ Spirn, 18.

⁷⁷ "Participatory Design".

2.7. Versailles Precedents

There are two landscape architecture ideas relating to agriculture and heritage that were proposed for Versailles. The first proposal is a terminal project from 1989, titled: “A New Orleans Vietnamese Cultural Center”. The author, Thanh Tô, was from the neighborhood.⁷⁸

There are two main critiques for Tô’s project booklet. One, he did not have support for as to why community members feel loss of culture in the future generation. He also did not explicitly explain his choice of site for the cultural center. As of 2013, the site he chose is now home to VEGGI Farmers’ Cooperative, a community urban farm that sells produce to the city metropolis. Two, his proposed design emphasizes the architecture more than the landscape in the title, verbage, and graphics (see figure 15)⁷⁹.

The later-known project is titled “Viet Village Urban Farm”. Post-Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the community had to decide how to rebuild their homes, gardens, and economic opportunities. As gardening was a common shared skillset, a collective farm was envisioned.

Pillars of the community – MQVN Community Development Corporation and Reverend Viên Nguyễn – and National Alliance for Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Montana Environmental Study

⁷⁸ Thanh Tô, *Cultural Identity: A Vietnamese Cultural Center in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture, 1989).

⁷⁹ Tô, 52.

Program acted as consultants. The Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture and Tulane City Center drew up the design.⁸⁰ The project won an ASLA award in 2008.



Figure 15. Thanh Tô's "New Orleans Vietnamese Cultural Center. Image source: Thanh Tô.

⁸⁰ Viet Village Urban Farm, 6.



Figure 16. Bird's eye view of Viet Village. In the bottom left corner is the parking lot around MQVN Church.
Image source: Spackman Mossop Michaels



Figure 17. Keyed masterplan of Viet Village. Central features are community and commercial plots, and market buildings. Image source: Grist.



Figure 18. A vision for a farm lacking of vernacular Vietnamese gardening: orderly and geometric plots, fencing that keeps plants in and people out, and an absence of multi-tier cultivation. Image source: ASLA.

The project was slated to complete in 2008. However, it stayed as “paper-tecture” for a variety of reasons. The need for wetland mitigation was a significant one.

"What a terrific urban farm—we'll be seeing many more projects like this in the future. The landscape architect has evoked the strong tradition of gardening within the Vietnamese community and will strengthen the cultural identity of this neighborhood."

— 2008 Professional Awards Jury comments on Viet Village⁸¹

The design is a valiant effort at highlighting the agricultural heritage of the neighborhood. However, there are several issues. Identity, scale, form, and social structure do not seem to be an appropriate fit for Versailles. “Viet Village” is not what residents would call the space. Rather, it reflects a misguided or uninformed outsider’s perception on Asian sociocultural system. A village does not describe a marketplace but rather, an autonomous community.⁸² The scale of the proposal encompasses twenty-eight acres, approximately 21% of the neighborhood. In terms of the form, planting spaces are linear, calibrated, and geometric. The rendered drawings evoke a trim and groomed landscape, which is not characteristic of the neighborhood aesthetic (see figure 18). Lastly, the design is mostly for the older generation.

The program of economic plots, markets, and urban agriculture do not necessarily speak to the younger generation. The focus of the project is on the economic function, but what

⁸¹ “ASLA 2008 Professional Awards – Analysis and Planning Award of Excellence.” ASLA, 2 Feb. 2020, <https://www.asla.org/awards/2008/08winners/411.html>.

⁸² Wiergersma, .

happens as elders pass away? There is one play area for younger children and sports fields for older children that are not socially integrated into the urban farm (See figure 16).

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Three-Fold Strategy: Listening, Creating, and “Did I Hear you Right?”

“Poetry and folk sayings, however, can provide only an uncertain guide to attitudes to home and images of it. Surveys, autobiographical accounts, and field observation should be able to supplement these.”⁸³

- David E. Sopher

In desiring the input to be from and by the people the design would serve, the objective of this project was to blend research with fieldwork for information that is qualitative and quantitative. Studying the cultural landscape of Vietnamese gardens in Versailles and working with a focus group of community members through design workshops were chosen as methodology to achieve research goals.

3.2. Summer - Documenting Household Edible Gardens in Versailles

What is a Vietnamese garden in America, and specifically, in Versailles? In summer 2019, I set out to document edible household gardens in the neighborhood, and interview their gardeners. Twenty gardens was the initial target but ten was decided as a realistic yet encompassing enough to show a range of types. Nine gardens became the end goal due to the

⁸³ David E. Sopher, (“The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning”. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. Oxford University Press. 1979), 143

tenth gardener cancelling last-minute. Three of the contacts were secured through existing relationships, five through new connections, and one connection was made by spotting someone in the yard and asking permission to document and interview. Gardens were photographed, crop layout plans were drawn, and gardeners were interviewed for background information.

Gardens ranged spatially in square footage, orientation to the house, and level of maintenance. They shared a common language of materiality – various scavenged wood, metal, and plastic objects served as pots, trellis structures, bed dividers, and water storage.

Five of the garden locations in orientation to the house were a combination of front-back-and/or side. The majority - eight out of nine – had a component of the garden in the back of the house (see figure 19).

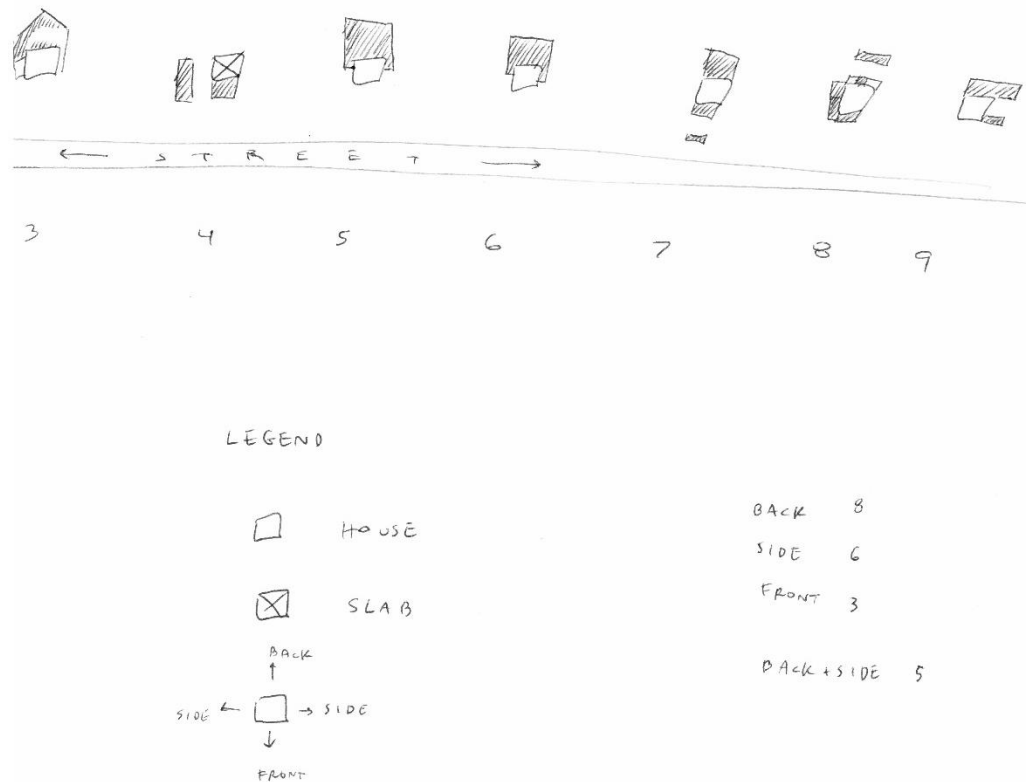


Figure 19. The orientation of household gardens to the house. 8 out of 9 had a back component.
Image source: Author, 2020.

In the course of documenting the nine gardens, I identified a summary of crops found.

The summer crop palette included:

PLANT GROUP	VIETNAMESE NAME	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	USE
Herbs	Lá lốt	Betel leaf	<i>Piper sarmentosum</i>	One of the traditional gifts in Vietnamese engagement ceremonies, the symbology stems from folklore of unity and loyalty in marriage.
	Rau cần	Chinese celery	<i>Apium graveolens</i>	
	Ngò ôm	Culantro	<i>Eryngium foetidum</i>	Eaten with phở
	Thì là	Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	Often paired with fish to "fight" the fishy smell.
	Diếp cá	Fish mint	<i>Houttuynia cordata</i>	Considered a cooling herb
	Kinh giới	Lemonbalm	<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	
	Xả	Lemongrass	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>	Used in xông, herbal facial steam, a health remedy
	Húng quế	Mint	<i>Mentha</i>	Garnish for noodle soups and used in spring rolls. Used in xông
Fruit	Cóc	Ambarella	<i>Spondias dulcis</i>	
	Chuối	Banana	<i>Musa</i>	Leaves to wrap various rice cakes Blossom for salad
	Thanh long	Dragonfruit	<i>Hylocereus undatus</i>	
	Xung	Fig	<i>Ficus carica</i>	
	Ổi	Guava	<i>Psidium guajava</i>	
	Táo tàu	Jujube	<i>Ziziphus jujuba</i>	Dried form used in a type of chè, or "wet dessert"
	Nhãn	Longan	<i>Dimocarpus longan</i>	Considered a hot (internally) fruit

(Table continued)

PLANT GROUP	VIETNAMESE NAME	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	USE
Fruit	Mãng cầu	Mangosteen	<i>Garcinia mangostana</i>	
	Đu đủ	Papaya	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Aids with digestion. One of the fruits used in a combination for Tết (Lunar New Year) that forms the phrase "Cầu dừa đủ xài" ("Prayer for enough to eat")
	Đào	Peach	<i>Prunus persica</i>	The flowers are a traditional flower for Tết, Lunar New Year
	Lê	Pear	<i>Pyrus</i>	
	Hồng	Persimmon	<i>Diospyros kaki</i>	
	Khế	Starfruit	<i>Averrhoa carambola</i>	
Leafy Greens	Rau dền	Amaranth	<i>Amaranthus tricolour L.</i>	Considered a cooling green. Cooked in soup. Slimy leaves good for joint health
	Rau đay	Jute	<i>Corchorus</i>	Considered a cooling green. Cooked in soup. Slimy leaves good for joint health
	Rau mồng tơi	Malabar spinach	<i>Basella alba</i>	Slimy leaves and stems cooked in soup
	Chùm ngây	Moringa	<i>Moringa oleifera</i>	Eaten in soup
	Rau cải	Chinese mustard	<i>Brassica juncea</i>	Often used for pickling
	Rau muống	Water spinach	<i>Ipomoea aquatica</i>	Eaten boiled or stir-fried
Root Vegetables	Sắn	Cassava	<i>Manihot esculenta</i>	Tuber used to make pie
	Khoai lang	Sweet potato	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>	Leaves have been used for xông, herbal facial steam
	Khoai môn	Taro	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Tuber used for chè

(Table continued)

PLANT GROUP	VIETNAMESE NAME	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	USE
Other Crops	Mướp đắng	Bitter melon	<i>Momordica charantia</i>	Symbolic food for Tết. In south Việt Nam, it is called "khổ qua", suffering passes. Often gutted and stuffed with meat and cooked in soup.
	Dưa leo	Cucumber	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	Eaten with raw with dry noodle, and spring rolls.
	Bầu	Cucuzza	<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i>	Stir-fried with protein and/or vegetables
	Đậu bắp	Okra	<i>Abelmoschus esculentus</i>	Used in canh chua, a sweet and sour fish soup
	Mía	Sugarcane	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>	Peeled and sectioned to chew raw, or pressed as a juice, popularly found at hội chợ, Lunar New Year festivals, in New Orleans
	Cà pháo	Thai eggplant	<i>Solanum melongena L</i>	Often pickled. Considered a hot food, and poisonous if consumed too much
	Đậu rồng	Winged bean	<i>Psophocarpus tetragonolobus</i>	
Spices	Cà ri	Curry leaf	<i>Murraya koenigii</i>	
	Riềng	Galangal	<i>Alpinia galanga</i>	
	Gừng	Ginger	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	A warm food. Stir-fried, used in tea, phở, and cháo (congee)
	Ớt	Bird's eye chili	<i>Capsicum annuum</i> 'Bird's Eye'	Braised with fish or meat Added to fish sauce
	Nghệ	Turmeric	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	For healing scars Soaked in alcohol as medicine for pregnant women Dried form as tea

Table2. Summer 2019 crop inventory of Vietnamese gardens in Versailles.
The crops have everyday, medicinal, and symbolic purposes in Vietnamese cuisine.
Source: Crop use knowledge from observation and elders' sayings.

I conducted seven interviews post-documentation. Six were in-person and one was over the phone. Three were in the vicinity of the garden. Garden #4 belonged to someone else but was on land that belonged to gardener #3. I grouped interview questions into three categories: 1) previous experience with gardening in Việt Nam, 2) current experience gardening in America, and 3) outlook on the future of the culture. All were communicated in Vietnamese with the exception of one that was bilingual.

The crops were mostly for household consumption, as well for sharing and selling. Gardeners communicated the health benefits of growing their own produce: physical exercise, a hobby, preventive medicine, seeing seasonal change, growing alongside the plants, and knowing there is no use of pesticides.

A shared outlook on intergenerational relations was a contrast in Vietnamese education and American education. One gardener expressed that hard work built character and that kids in America had too much time to play. Two said that their kids do not listen. One gardener said, “I learn very well because the recording of my grandma. We do not hesitate to accept [what] they (elders) tell you. . In America, they said it’s good [to] learn from mistake[s]. In Asian, you never ever make mistake[s]. Your parent[s and] grandparent[s] make sure you [are] perfectly [sic]. We do no [make] mistake[s]. We must be perfect.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Chi Trần. Personal interview. 8 August 2019.

3.2. Fall – Community Garden Site and Workshop Outreach

I designed a flyer (see figure 20) to find participants interested in design workshops (see figure 19). Outreach to recruit interested community members for design workshops took several forms. Neighborhood businesses with frequent foot traffic were asked for permission to post physical flyers. Flyers were posted at six businesses: two pharmacies, two grocery stores, the catechism school, and a restaurant. Digital flyers were sent to contacts from the neighborhood and the youth-centered non-profit VAYLA (formerly Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans) to share with their circles. Upon learning of the project, one of the business owners with whom years of relationship has been built through VEGGI, offered one of their extra buildings as a meeting space.

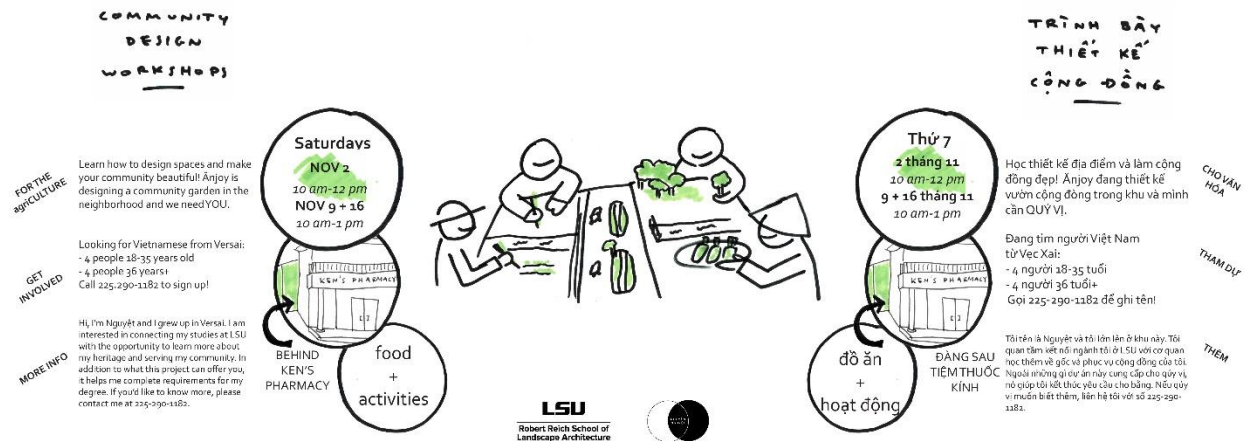


Figure 20. Designed bilingual outreach flyer for design workshops. The middle graphic originated from a prompt: "What do you want the workshops and the project to be?" The nón lá (conical leaf hat) has come to symbolize the older generation with agricultural knowledge, and the baseball cap the younger generation. The table represents a gathering place to discuss, design, and eat. Image source: Author, 2019.

During the outreach period for the workshops, the neighborhood non-profit VIET (Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training) saw the flyer and reached out. The program director offered their eight-acre space as a location for a community garden design.

Established in 2001, VIET is the first non-profit in the state of Louisiana that focuses on serving non-English speaking communities.⁸⁵ VIET has a range of partnerships, including: neighborhood NOELA (New Orleans East, Louisiana) Community Health Center, Tulane University, New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC), Total Community Action (TCA), Louisiana State University AgCenter, and WaterWise NOLA. VIET's programs focus on health, centering around family, young children, and seniors. From their social media postings, the majority of community members they serve are Vietnamese and Black.

VIET's programs situate a potential for fruitful intergenerational and multicultural exchanges. There are separate programs for the older generation and the younger generation. Their "Let's Move Again" program with Tulane and NOELA hosts a weekly exercise group (see figure 21) and health workshops as well as fieldtrips for seniors. For youth, there are summer physical activities to fight childhood obesity. Fruit trees were also established on site as part of "Let's Move Again". Their "Family First" program encompasses domestic violence education, after-school homework assistance for pre-k through seventh grade, a summer program for youth ages five to twelve, and tax preparation services. For children in pre-k 3 and pre-k 4, VIET has a Head Start Center with TCA. They have a small business technical assistance program, as well as volunteer groups who come to do trash pickup.

⁸⁵ Kellogg Fellows Leadership Alliance. "Meet Cyndi Nguyen — New Orleans' first Vietnamese-American City Council Member". Connected Leadership by FKLA. Accessed 1 Mar 2020.



Figure 21. Weekly exercise for seniors at VIET office. Photo source: VIET

VIET is located in the center of the western half of Versailles. The land belongs to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, and VIET has a thirty-year lease with them. VIET's current office is the largest building on site, formerly St. Brigid Catholic Church. It closed in 2008 and merged with Mary Queen of Vietnam.⁸⁶ The smaller brick and mortar building was a rectory.

The site currently has two brick buildings, two mobile buildings for their Headstart Center, a constructed wetland, two miscellaneous buildings, fruit trees, a playground, a koi pond, and a walk trail. The largest building is the office (see figure 22). The perimeter was fenced after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as the program director disclosed that the site was used as a dumping ground after the hurricane.

⁸⁶ Melinda Daffin. "24 Closed Catholic Churches of New Orleans: Vintage Photos from the Times-Picayune." The Times-Picayune. https://www.nola.com/archive/article_a56caa1b-a245-5b3c-94b1-62b97a29c710.html. Accessed 8 Mar 2020.



Figure 22. VIET's property, in color. Neighbored by New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) playground to the right and nestled by residences. The office is visible from the main road, Dwyer Blvd (not pictured), parallel to Granville Street and just southwest of the doubled-loaded houses.

Image source: Google Earth Pro, 2019.

3.3. Winter - Participatory Design Workshops

There were three goals with the workshops: 1) share design thinking skills 2) bridge the intergenerational gap and 3) learn from participants' perspective for the garden. There were four workshops held on Saturdays throughout November and December 2019. Meeting duration averaged two hours. One wall in the room was used as a visual reference for pinning up daily agendas, participant responses, garden imagery, images of VIET's programs and the site (see figure 23). A large table was the working space for drawing, writing, making models,

and discussion. There were two participants – one older generation woman and one younger generation man. The sharing of design thinking was structured around a simplification of the design process that the author led: sketching, analyzing the site, iterative design, and model-making.

The initial target number for the group was to have a focus group with a maximum number of eight, seen as manageable for one person. The group would ideally be balanced in terms of gender and generation (older and younger) for a range in perspective. The final group ended up being two community members who were interested after learning of the project over phone conversation. Due to time constraints, I decided to work with this group of two.



Figure 23. Workshop work space. Photo credit: Tố Ngọc Worthington.

The first workshop was introductory. Because the project was discussed with both participants over the phone, there was no need to reiterate workshop goals. The agenda included: a visualization activity, workshop overview, participants' sharing their interest in the workshops, and a reflection on gardens, and an introduction to sketching.

The first activity focused on memory, observation, and exercising the imagination. Participants were tasked to recall their experience from the front gate to the office space. They then walked through the outdoor space of the property again, and were prompted to give suggestions for improvement. The older generation participant was liberal with her

imagination, and said more plantings would improve the concrete environment. The younger generation participant was more introverted, and commented that the trash did not give a good first impression.

Participants were then asked why they were interested in a community garden, and why they wanted to participate in the workshops. The younger generation participant said it makes the culture unique, it builds community collaboration for the older and younger generation, and that his mother would be interested in participating. The older generation participant said that plants clean air and provide food to eat and trade. She said it is good to have a community that grows, has knowledge about plants, and that seeds can be shared.

While the first two activities eased participants into design thinking with verbal expression, the third activity explored written and graphic communication. Participants were asked to write, then draw “What is a good memory do you have with a garden?” The older generation participant drew from sensory experiences with their home garden. She spoke of smelling seasonal flowers, picking them for her altar, picking fruit, and feeding fish in the pond. The younger generation participant did not have experience with gardens but spoke to appreciation of the social aspect and the opportunities they provided. He shared liking how character Rabbit from the television show *Winnie the Pooh* would tend to his garden. He talked about enjoying the plants at Dallas Arboretum, and helping his mom move plants around the house (see figure 24).

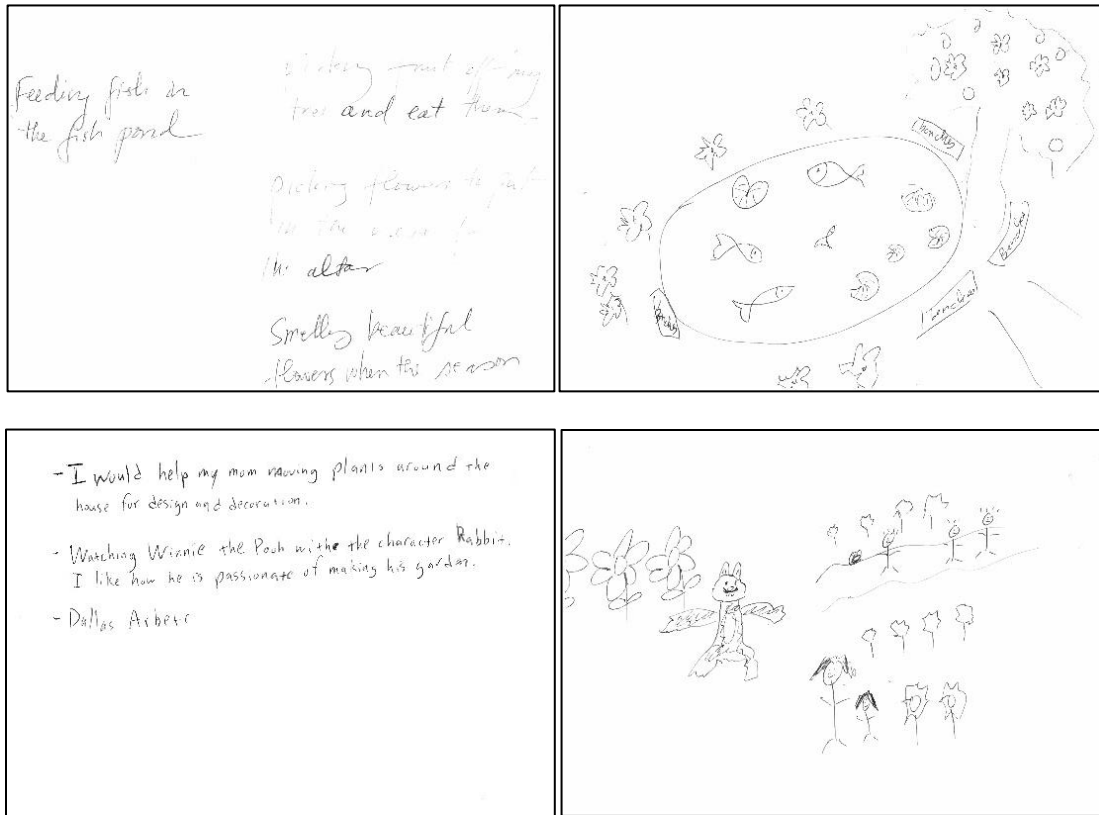


Figure 24. Exercising graphic visualization of thoughts.
 Participant responses for: "What good memories do you have with a garden?"
 Top two: Older generation participant's responses
 Bottom two: Younger generation participant's responses

Lastly, participants practiced a few minutes' sketching in the office. Sketching was explained as a way to remember and record the world. It was emphasized that capturing the essence took precedence over precision. Each person was given a sketchbook and encouraged to sketch daily.

The second workshop was an introduction to the preliminary phase of site design – site visit, map-reading, and visualizing existing conditions.

The first portion was getting to know the project site. VIET is not open on weekends, but the program director entrusted the key so the group could access the property. Participants were handed a site base map and as the group toured the site, recorded notes, took

photographs, and sketched following author's demonstration of how to draw. The younger generation participant noted the trilingual signage on the walking trail, and pondered if VIET was secular upon seeing a location that formerly had a statue of the Virgin Mary. The older generation often shaded her head with the map, commented on the design of the koi pond being unsafe for children, and exclaimed that the site was nice and a very big project.

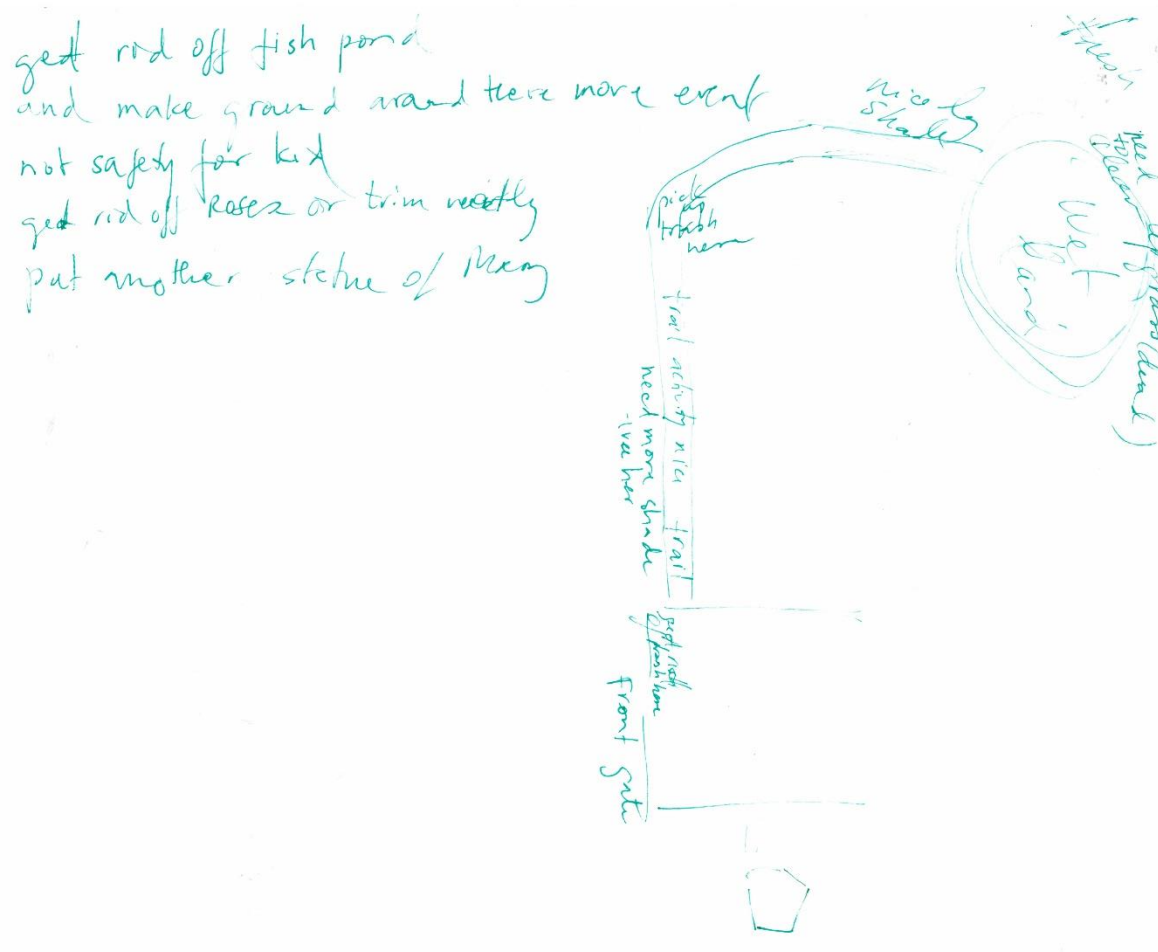


Figure 25. Example of participant field notes. Her observations were: safety, cleanliness, shade, and religion.



Figure 26. Group site visit at VIET. Participants experience the overgrown portion of the walk trail.
Photo credit: Tổ Ngọc Worthington.

Returning to the meeting space, participants were introduced to 3D representation and teamwork. Participants were tasked to represent the site using provided modeling material: wood, clay, wire (see figure 27). A sample model of the office space was demonstrated to get them started.

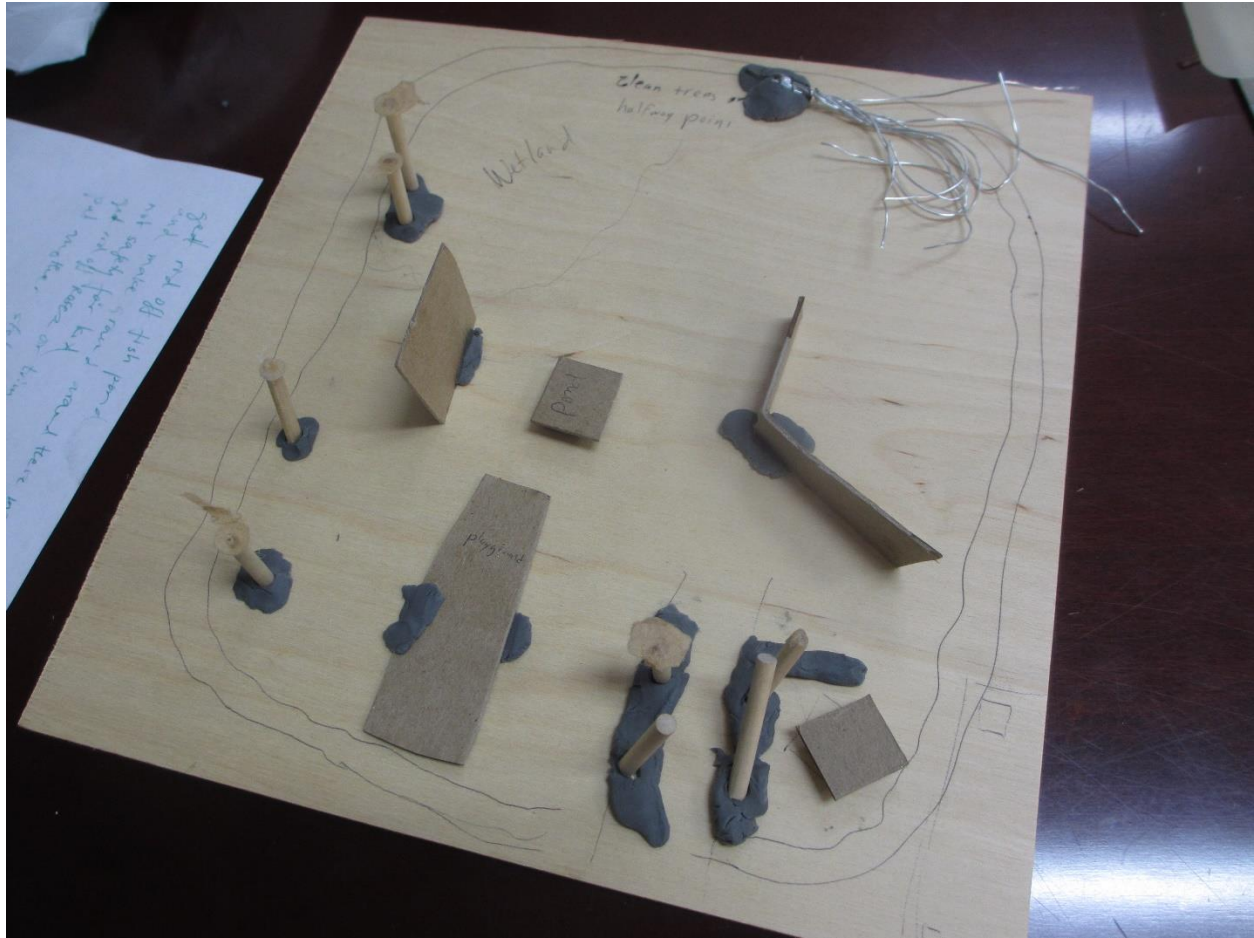


Figure 27. Participants' visualization of existing conditions at VIET. Clay was used as quick adhesive. Note the observation of areas of shade (trees) and the representation of overgrown vegetation.

Photo credit: Tố Ngọc Worthington.

The third workshop's agenda encompassed a bonding game, iterative program diagramming, and modelling new ideas.

For building trust, communication, and fun, participants started the workshop with a blindfold activity. When one person was blindfolded, the other guided them along the business corridor outside the meeting space using only verbal directions. They took turns, and there were a lot of laughs and fumbles (see figure 28). Both found that giving instructions had to be specific so the other could follow.



Figure 28. Blindfold-leading activity. Don't run into someone else! Photo credit: Tố Ngọc Worthington.

Returning to the meeting space, participants were asked to consider ideas for the whole VIET property so that a community garden would be nicely situated in a thoughtful masterplan. Participants worked with program bubbles and a large basemap of VIET. Some programs were pre-suggested, such as garden, picnic, and dog park. There were blank bubbles for participants to suggest other programming options. After completing one concept, participants explored iteration by doing a second to see what new possibilities could be generated. Some new ideas were: trash can, concession, greenhouse, pavilion, and outdoor gym, and hedge as fencing (see

figure 29). With the second iteration, a bold move was suggested by the older generation participant. The fish pond was enlarged and relocated to the wetland area (see figure 30).

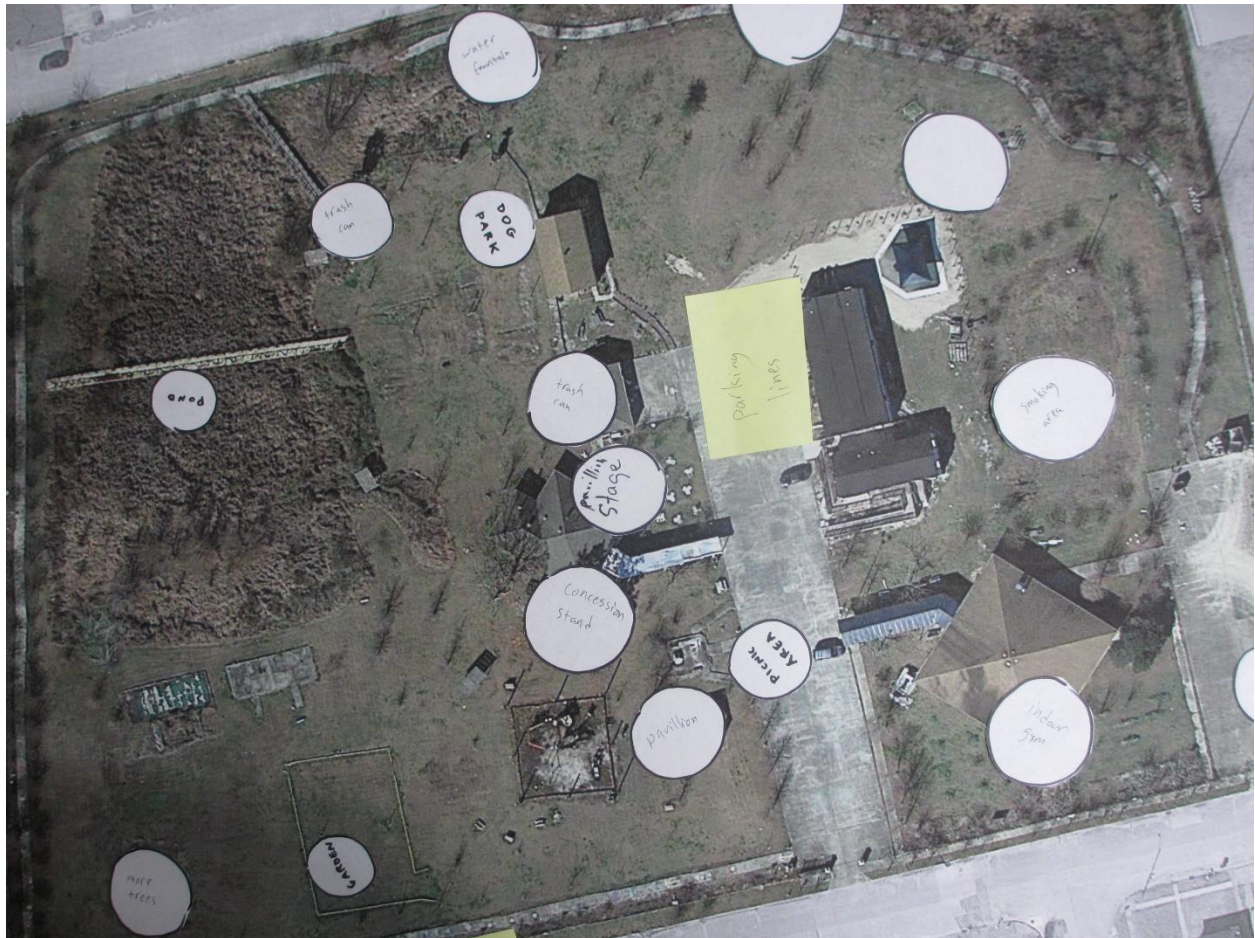


Figure 29. Participants' program diagram #1. Photo credit: Tổ Ngọc Worthington.



Figure 30. Participants' program diagram #2. Photo credit: Tổ Ngọc Worthington.

The last activity for the third workshop was to model a conceptual composite of participant favorites from the two iterations. The older generation participant began to get more comfortable with this second round of modeling. She worked with unfamiliar materials, and got creative with curling paper for hedges and cutting slits in paper rolls to be trees (see figure 31). The younger generation participant seemed more hesitant or unsure in their modelling process. A dog and some human-scaled figures were made to help them out.



Figure 31. Participants' model for a composite of ideas for VIET.

Feature areas: an expanded pond with pagoda (top left), hedges as fencing (incomplete representation in bottom left, but meant as a perimeter), a stage, a dog park, picnic area, and a green house (bottom right).

Photo credit: Author, 2019.

The fourth and final workshop moved out of design thinking and making and focused on processing thoughts with Vietnamese culture. The agenda included: a reflective activity, intergenerational dialogue, returned to participants' interest as relating to a community garden, and workshop evaluation.

First, participants were asked to recall memories in response to major cultural elements, *cực khổ* (working hard), *tiếng mẹ đẻ* (Vietnamese language), *quần áo* (clothing), *hiếu thảo* (duty

to your parents), ngày lễ (holidays), and đồ ăn (food), as well as contribute any they felt were missing. As they shared, their thoughts were quickly pictorialized. Most of the responses fell into the more tangible categories of food and holidays (see figure 32 and 33).

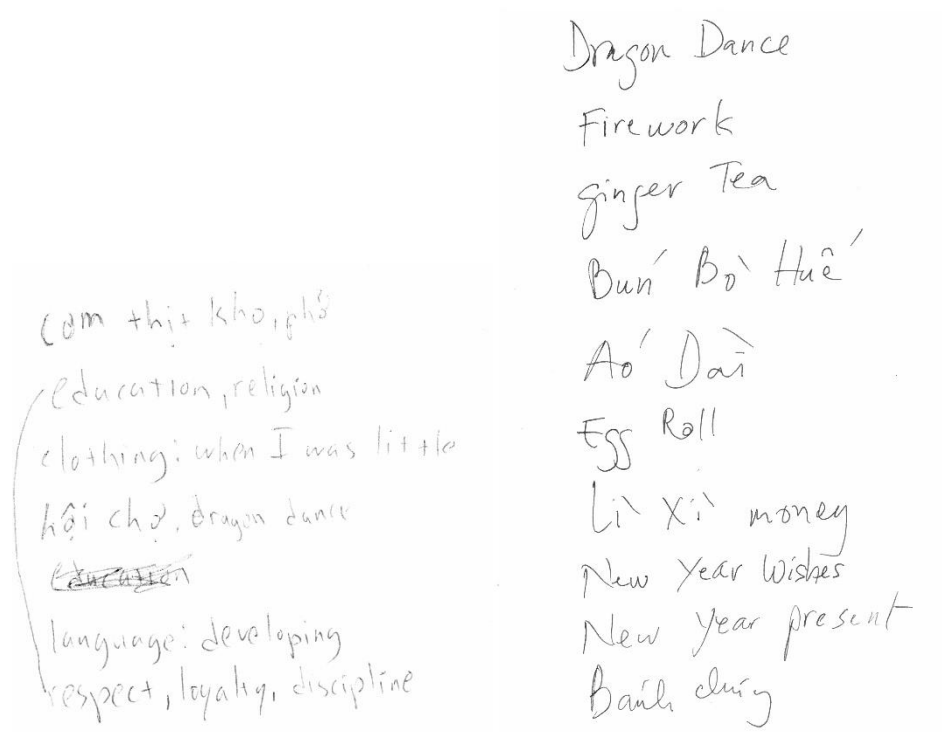


Figure 32. Participant responses to "What are experiences that come to mind when you think about Vietnamese culture?"

and practical interests overlapped in the sense of a garden growing plants and growing the community.

Lastly, written evaluations allowed for reflective, quiet communication. Participants were prompted to respond about expectations, takeaways, and suggestions for improvement. Comments on workshop improvement included having more community members in the future. Both participants expressed value in learning from the other generation's perspective.

The workshops allowed for third-party observation of generational social patterns. While the focus group of two was not the most representational of the population, it allowed for a simplified dynamic and more in-depth expression. There was a clear pattern of the younger generation participant's interests pointing to priority social fulfillment and consideration of mental health. The older generation participant also revealed a distinct focus from their comments. Practicality was what took precedence – the ability to share food and seeds, the safety of the koi pond at VIET, etc. Where their interests overlapped was that a community garden brings people together.

Two participants limited the range of community perspective but was a manageable number of people to start out working with. The older generation participant seemed to become more comfortable with expressing improvement ideas and model-making. This could be due to a more outgoing personality, longer life experience, experience with gardening, and a familiarity with me as I used to frequent her home to spend time with my friend, her daughter. The younger generation participant was more introverted, didn't have experience with gardening, and potentially left more room for the older generation participant to speak out of cultural respect.

In the future, outreach can have more time budgeted to increase interested participation. Physical flyers did not seem to be an effective method in Versai, whereas digital flyers helped, and connections and word of mouth were most effective. This parallels with finding gardeners and gardens to learn from. There was trust when both parties shared a mutual friend, as compared to approaching unfamiliar gardeners from the street. Reaching out to the younger generation for workshops needed more priority as there is no concern of the older generation being interested in gardening. A decisive decision can be made as to where the workshop falls on the spectrum of participatory design, and a more representative quantity of participants will be more reflective of the community.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Lessons Learned

There were many lessons learned throughout the process of this project. With the garden study, more quantitative questions such as “Why did you choose to put plants where you did?” could lend insight into gardeners’ design process. Interview responses were initially written by hand, then moved to typing real-time. The computer allowed for more precise recording, and faster post-processing.

With the participatory design side, outreach to the younger generation needed to take precedence in order for a passing on of agricultural knowledge to occur. The designer needs to decide where the scope of their project falls on the spectrum of participatory design: This project tried to encompass education and programmatic. However, a educational component seems to require a longer timeframe for true measurable effectiveness.

Relationships and the ability to speak, understand, and write Vietnamese language are important when working in Versai. Having prior knowledge of the community pillars (the church and non-profit organizations) facilitated outreach. Being small, a woman, and more soft-spoken possibly gave others a perception of being more approachable and potentially influenced others' willingness to support.

4.2. Future Endeavors

There are is a short-term and a long-term phase in moving forward with design for a community garden in Versailles. The short-term objectives encompass the remaining timeframe in the semester – mid-March to end of April, one and a half months. There are two parts: 1) Analytical study of the gardens and 2) designing an intergenerational community garden that ties together: contextual research, lessons learned from the garden study, and lessons learned from the workshops. Long-term goals span beyond the semester and encompass community engagement. For the long-term phase, there are also two parts: 1) outreaching to the younger generation and 2) garnering community interest and feedback for the vision of an intergenerational garden at VIET.

Short-term Phase (Design)

To contextualize the household gardens at the neighborhood scale, numerical data for the amount at the neighborhood scale will be collected. This may also reveal if gardens have concentrated areas throughout the community. A sample survey done with satellite and street view on Google Maps' 2020 imagery of the houses south of Dwyer Boulevard, west of Alcee

Fortier Boulevard, east of VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative and the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church lot, and east of the Maxent Canal showed that 53 out of 174, or thirty percent of houses had a garden. This area was chosen for the sample as it was a simple grid, and efficient to visually track. Determination of a garden was noted with the presence of a trellis (crisscross structure), banana trees, plots. This potentially excluded gardens with overhead structures that obscure them from aerial view.

At the garden scale, a table of comparative data for the nine gardens documented will generate typologies. The typologies will then be abstracted for their spatial quality as well as content. Level of maintenance, ground vs. container, square footage, crop type, and vertical elements will be potential parameters. With the interviews, memories and experiences will be extracted as inspiration for the community garden. One such example is garden #9. The interview was an immersive experience for the author. Water and seasonal jujube were shared during the conversation, which was outside under the patio cover, adjacent to the garden. The wife spoke of their little dog who used to love getting sprinkled under the hose when plants were being watered. She said her mother would always pick the malabar spinach. Instantly, a connection was made as to their abundance of this vegetable and its own unique structure for climbing as compared to other gardens. They said that on weekends, their home would be full of people with many cars parked outside as it was family time, and an invitation was extended to come spend time together.

Long-term Phase (Building relationships)

To reach the younger generation, a potential route is asking to share the project with eighteen years and older students at the neighborhood Tôma Thiện catechism school. The youth non-profit VAYLA is undergoing change in leadership and did not have the capacity to support throughout the duration of the project's methodology component. They potentially would not be an option. The program director of VIET also suggested promoting the project with a table at neighborhood holiday events. The next one would be for Tết Trung Thu, Mid Autumn Festival.

A preliminary conceptual masterplan was drafted (see figure 34) and shared at a community meeting for feedback. As the design was not yet fully reflective of the garden vernacular and meeting turnout was low – five older generation community members – it was determined that a larger interest group, especially with a significant number of younger generation community members, would be necessary for a sustainable community garden. The program director of VIET was enthusiastic in suggesting bringing the project to them since they didn't come to us. She also expressed there could be a potential funder who would like to see the design.

Vườn Cộng Đồng ở VIỆT

A Home Community Garden at VIET



Figure 34. This design for a community garden was inspired by aspects of home: contextual (multiple uprootings from Việt Nam to America), physical (canopy and enclosure), and emotional (family gathering, specifically, mealtime). The wetland landscape is evocative of southern Louisiana and southern Việt Nam (removing heavy-use infrastructure from the subsiding west and north portion of the site). The community garden is the central feature encircled by the

headstart school, the walk trail, and VIET's office. Lastly, a pavilion and cafe serve as a multifunctional gathering space. The takeaway from the community workshops was that the older generation prioritizes primal and practical needs. The younger generation is primarily concerned with social contribution and fulfillment. As there is a lack of outdoor spaces in the neighborhood for the younger generation to socialize, the café aims to invite the younger generation to connect and be involved with food and heritage. Image credit: Author, 2020.

Prior to the masterplan meeting, the project was shared at a VIET potluck lunch mostly attended by older generation community members. A community member expressed economic opportunity with having a garden at VIET. Afterwards, a man who cared about the community offered his support in helping build a community garden. A woman from WaterWise NOLA similarly expressed interest in the project, and there could be potential for collaboration.

While there is hope and support, further knowledge of the household gardens is to be gleaned to incorporate in the design of the proposed community garden. The younger generation will be actively engaged as they are the future. Projects with community involvement take longer than I realized in setting out to schedule my research. With community participation, more needs and wants are considered in decision-making, but are worth building the trust and investment in their future.

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VITA

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