

What do we mean by 'Social Dynamics'?

Through the week you'll have an opportunity to consider what 'social' and 'social dynamics' means to you; how being involved in Urban Agriculture and Local Foods, for whatever reason, has social dynamics benefits and also can contribute to a vibrant family, community and city.

If you're already involved, the conversation may be a catalyst to expand your thinking on how you could increase your benefits by expanding the social dynamics dimension of your Urban Agriculture / Local Foods initiative.

To start the conversation on this theme, consider:

When you hear the term '*social dynamics*', or when you hear people talk of '*social*' - what are you thinking about? There are many facets to this concept.

This post uses the concept of 'facet' as an analogy. Like facets on a cut diamond or gem stone, these are different ways to look at a 'whole' - recognizing that none stands alone, and every facet is influenced by the others in the whole concept.



- here are some possible facets of the concept of social dynamics that you might consider:

- Is it about one particular aggregations of society - individual persons, families, neighbourhoods, communities, cities and whole societies? For example, a Teacher might focus on a classroom, or a school community - or on the school as one part of a community, while Mayors might focus on the communities and neighbourhoods within their city boundaries - and how their city relates to other centres as well as the whole province. You'll see references in the videos to individuals' benefits (their own or others), to benefits for a group - associated with an agency for example, as well as to overall community benefits,
- Do you think mostly about agencies who deliver services,(and if so, does it relate mostly to sorrow systems - family violence, bullying, poverty reduction, homelessness, disease prevention or treatment, etc) - and to supporting vulnerable people? Some of the videos describe how they provide food for agencies who support vulnerable people. Or you might think mostly about the many sectors whose policies and services are about 'people' (including education, health, justice, culture, social services etc) Dustin Bajer's story focuses on the K-12 education for example, while Annette Anderwald's videos focus on nutrition and personal / family wellbeing.

Or do you think mostly about advancing, growing social assets through learning and developing skills and mindsets associated with resilience and long term sustainable vitality by developing skills and knowledge to adapt to the challenges that life brings. If the latter, this might bring an interest in strategies such as learning in different life stages, health promotion, community development, quality of life development etc)? Mark Holmgren, in the Bissell story, describes their interest in this latter approach.

Do you think there's benefit from using both approaches, or is one more compelling than the other?

- Do you focus exclusively on one of the age cohorts or stages in a life course (children, youth, adults, seniors)? On one kind of community - boom communities, rural or urban centres?
- Is it about the 'whole', that encompasses physical, mental, relational and meaning/identity, or mainly about one dimension? In our move to specialization, it won't be surprising if your focus is mostly about one or another of the dimensions and you don't have many ways to consider strategies for the 'whole'.
- Is it one of cost - of providing services to meet vulnerable peoples' needs, of wealth transfer, of charitable acts? Or is it about growing value - and recognizing that social assets are part of a vibrant society?

Or you may incorporate two or three of those facets in the stories you tell about Urban Agriculture or local foods. The videos describe some of the benefits people identify, and suggest what they might be thinking of when asked about the 'social' benefits of Urban Agriculture.

You may consider yet other facets of Social Dynamics:

- Is your habitual assumption about survival - getting by? Or is it about thriving, of being healthy and vibrant, of achieving highest potential - of individuals, families and peer support groups, or of neighbourhoods communities and cities? And if it is about thriving, how do we construct agencies and services so they operate in alignment with this intent? And how might choosing one or the other influence how we value social assets?
- Do you assume that health and social dimensions (or assets) are stagnant (or a fixed standard to be achieved) at best, or a gradual deterioration (vicious spiral) at worst? Or could we recognize that in a 'virtuous spiral' of development that social assets can grow and develop - perhaps even to flourish and achieve highest potential over time if tended properly through developmental stages across the life course? Consider how the stories and case studies describe these.

If we think about growing social assets, could we consider activities to grow and improve those assets as investments? And if we focus more on the investment potential - do we then look for ways that people, neighbourhoods and communities grow and develop desirable characteristics - inclusive, safe, vibrant - and maintain those characteristics in the face of changing demographics and new housing forms?

And does that help us consider the relative merits of different strategies not just from the outcomes they create, but also their comparative return on the investment?

And if it is attractive to go in this direction, do we understand enough about the factors and processes involved in growth and development to sustainable vitality - and how do we 'count' and value the various facets of social assets as well as this progress?

Our assumptions are that:

- 'Social Dynamics' is a multi-faceted concept, and different people will focus on different facets.
- Expanding the ways that we consider *Social*, and *Social Dynamics* in Urban Agriculture and Local Foods can be translated into other activities, and can help to find new ways to achieve our dreams for ourselves, our families and our communities.
- Looking at how people can be involved in Urban Agriculture / Local Foods helps us see 'strengths', even in the most vulnerable - and helps us see how individuals and groups develop and deepen those strengths even more, growing their resilience, long term sustainable vitality and quality of life in the process.
- If we design Urban Agriculture and Local Foods initiatives purposefully for multiple outcomes, we can maximize our impact - with social outcomes (or assets), as well as knowledge, environmental and economic outcomes/assets.
- Looking at Urban Agriculture and Local Foods for multiple outcomes helps us understand better how to operationalize the aim of the Land Use Framework to consider social, environmental and economic factors.
- By creating multiple outcomes, that we will have more well-rounded, sustainable initiatives, as well as welcome more people to be involved. We also need to 'count' social assets in new ways, together with other individual and societal assets to get a well-rounded picture - a new kind of 'progress'.