Let my people grow: The diffusion of the Jewish farming movement through the Jewish community of the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan Area

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Introduction

The Jewish farming movement (JFM) is a phenomenon that practices sustainable agriculture with messages rooted Jewish values as well as ecological and social-wellbeing (Jewish Farm School 2011; Kayam Farm 2011). The movement began between 2005 and 2007, and operates through non-profit and educational small scale farms, community gardens and urban agricultural sites. Jewish farming initiatives may be part of a larger revival in social justice activism amongst Jewish communities in recent years.

Purpose/Importance

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to account for the diffusion of the Jewish farming movement through the Jewish community of the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan Area. Today’s Jewish Baltimore includes 42,500 households with 93,400 people, making it the 14th largest Jewish community in the United States (Ukeles and Miller 2010, 13-14). Within the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan Area, 75% of Jews live in five areas, as seen on the map below: Pikesville, Park Heights, Owings Mills, Reisterstown and Mount Washington (Ukeles and Miller 2010, 20).

Four questions guide this research, reflecting the major categories of innovation diffusion research including the invention of the innovation, the diffusion of the innovation and the impact of the innovation (Brown 1981; Morrill, Gaile and Thrall 1988).

Research Question 1: What is Baltimore’s Jewish farming movement, how did it begin and what factors contributed to its original invention?

Research Question 2: How is Baltimore’s Jewish farming movement diffusing through the Jewish community of the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan Area?

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of Baltimore’s Jewish farming movement on its adopters’ Jewish identities and sustainable lifestyles?

Research Question 4: How does Baltimore’s Jewish farming movement compare to other, similar movements in the United States?

The results of this diffusion study will be used to
(1) advance knowledge on the creation and diffusion of the rapidly growing small-scale, sustainable agricultural movements in the United States
(2) add to the literature on Jewish identity from “new” Jewish initiatives
(3) add to the literature on ecologically sustainable lifestyle changes through community-based organizations
(4) provide the Baltimore Jewish farming community with a geographic perspective of diffusion and adopter impacts to aid future planning.

Methodology

A grounded theory research method is appropriate for the study of Baltimore’s Jewish farming movement, because it is a relatively new phenomenon and has not yet been theoretically analyzed from a geographic perspective (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Creswell 2007). The researcher abstracts relevant, emerging themes and contexts from the empirical data to create an original theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Data Collection Methods

In addition to literature reviews and metadata, a mixed methods data collection approach will be used through open interviews, surveys and solicited semi-structured (SSS) diaries.

Data Collection Process

Data collection and analysis are cyclical under the grounded theory method. The researcher collects data and tests it against propositions until emerging incidents are grouped into categories to make a theoretical explanation of the research question (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Seale 2004). Data collection and analysis continue until the research reaches “theoretical saturation,” or “the point in category development at which no new properties, dimensions or relations emerge during analysis” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 143).

Data Analysis Procedure

Grounded theory analysis occurs through a series of coding steps. General concepts which are clustered into descriptive categories and evaluated for interrelationships and finally into one emergent “substantive-level” theory (Creswell 2007, 67; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Seale 2004). The researcher’s data analysis process is guided by Creswell’s “Data Analysis Spiral” (2007).

Preliminary Findings

Four major categories were extracted from the open coding analysis of two Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved preliminary pilot interviews. The four major categories include:
(1) “Creating a new movement to respond to a new time period”
(2) “Expanding a new movement through networks”
(3) “Impacting adopters”
(4) “Planning for the future of a new movement.”

Bibliography


