

Thesis Statement

The City of Detroit is facing many challenges in its long standing neighborhoods. These challenges include, but are not limited to, lack of resources and education, financial instability, and increased crime. This lack of resources is illustrated by the thirty-thousand individuals in Detroit that do not have access to healthy foods. This means that 48% of households in the city are undernourished.¹⁹

With education comes marketability, and improved socio-economic status. For many in Detroit, this remains an issue, with the high school graduation rate remaining at around 64.5%.⁴ Unemployment brings with it financial instability. The unemployment rate in Detroit is currently at 20%, which is much higher than the national average.³⁶ With lack of education and financial instability comes crime. Detroit is no exception, with the second highest crime rate in the country, behind only Memphis Tennessee.¹⁵ Despite all of this, Detroit's long-standing neighborhoods have pride and connection to place that has been forged over time. Even though conditions have become less optimal, these communities remain because of the strength and overall fortitude of their members. This thesis looks to draw on and strengthen those connections through communal living, to fill the aforementioned gaps in some of Detroit's long-standing communities.

With this in mind, the topics framing this thesis are social, economic, and ecological. The social aspect of communal living defines the connections that are necessary for true community. This has been studied through the lived experiences of communal living residents, and the layout of their communities. Lastly, the elements of ecology that lend credence to this investigation are urban farming, sharing resources, and the impact on communities through an improved environment. As found in the literature review, we live in a capitalist society where ownership is seen as a part of one's status. However, as this thesis seeks to *shift the focus from I to we*, this separation is one of the elements that divides the community and holds them back. Because we live in a capitalist society, any community-based project must be economically viable before it can move forward. This is why introducing a socialist project into a capitalist framework is a challenge. The underpinnings of this

thesis are about people and improving the quality of life for all. As with many communities across the Detroit landscape, much of the population in Gratiot Woods is below the household poverty line. In real terms, 53% of the households in Gratiot Woods are below that line.²² This means that improving the socio-economic status of the community is a step in the right direction. Doing this means filling the gaps in the aforementioned community to achieve a more cohesive vision for all. This cohesive vision is essential to improving the quality of life for Detroit's communities, and developing a framework that facilitates real change. One aspect of the investigation that has been taken into account to do this is the current conditions in Gratiot Woods, which helps to better understand the assets and opportunities of the area. To build stronger connections, the social structure of communal living has also been studied to strengthen the connections that already exist and extend them across generational lines.

The investigation also takes into account the economic implications of communal living to improve the economic viability of communities, and the socio-economic status of its residents. This is simply a measure of the communities ability to provide for the employment needs of its citizens, and as such, finance its own improvements and maintain or improve its socio-economic status.³² The last piece of this equation that has been studied to make communities stronger or more sustainable is the ecological effects on quality of life through urban farming. Through urban farming, they can improve their food self-sufficiency, and in doing so, improve their health and well-being.

The central argument of this thesis is that the current model for neighborhoods in Detroit is not sustainable now or going forward. Not only is this true for Detroit, but all cities across the country for many different reasons. For this reason, this thesis is targeting communal living toward any metropolitan area with similar conditions. The conclusion is that it is necessary to develop a new framework that draws on humanitarian connections that are built over time within a community. The new framework focuses on long-term sustainability and resilience through communal living, more specifically the social, economic, and ecological aspects that make them successful.

The position of this thesis is that resiliency starts at the neighborhood scale. At this scale, it is important to build connections that lead to caring, which is therefore the foundation of any resilient community. These connections are built through communal living, and were investigated through the lived experiences of communal living residents. It is also important to make communities economically viable, which has been looked at through the lens of communally owned businesses. The idea is that needs or gaps that have been identified within the community are filled in this way. This brings money into the community, as well as allowing money to be cycled back into the community. There are many precedents of community-run and owned businesses that fit well with the idea of communal living. Community run businesses further strengthen connections, and make these communities more economically viable.

The literature has also shown that a lack of resources and ecological justice has statistically given people of color (that currently make up much of Detroit's neighborhoods) unhealthy, and therefore shorter life spans. The current statistic on this is that because many live without access to healthy foods, 60% of the population in Detroit is overweight which leads to chronic diseases, and in turn shortens their life span.⁸ To combat this situation it is important to look into agrarian societies both current and past, to find a solution to food self-sufficiency that will improve the overall health of the community. The literature

shows that another way neighborhoods can combat this situation is through well-maintained parks and other green spaces, which improve mental and physical health.

After coming to these conclusions, it is important to acknowledge the opposing viewpoint. This viewpoint is that this investigation is nothing more than window dressing, and that it does nothing to focus on the real issues at hand. Things such as the twenty-minute city, ecological improvements or sustainability, as well as building social connections, do nothing to address the real issues that are plaguing many of our neighborhoods. Many will also state that this is a social welfare project, and as such, has no place in a capitalist society. In reality, our current urban frameworks are not sustainable for many reasons, some of which are mistrust, over-consumption, and misuse of resources that can and should be shared. Developing a new framework based on communal living is the way to rectify this situation. This is important because it is the future of Detroit's long standing neighborhoods. Many of the neighborhoods in Detroit have similar existing conditions. Due to this, the new framework is adaptable to other neighborhoods in the City of Detroit, and other communities with similar conditions. The contributions to the field are many, just to name one, it allows communities and urban planners a more sustainable framework with which to improve the economic viability, sustainability, and quality of life in urban communities.

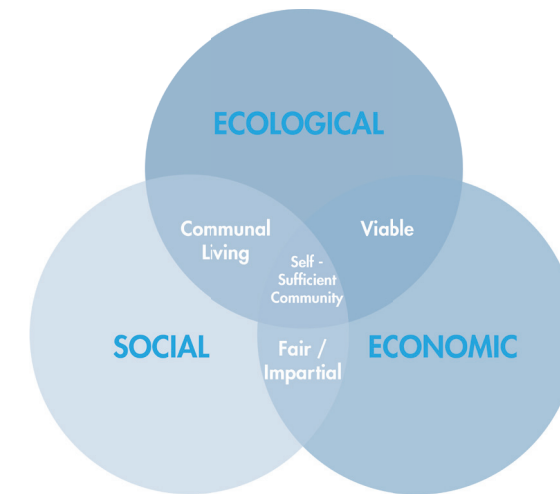


Figure 1: Framework