Food and power in the Carolina Campus Community Garden Distribution site: Envisioning political possibilities through de-centering space and community

**Introduction**
Our research examines the dynamics of food distribution in the Carolina Campus Community Garden (CCCG). It de-centers the analysis beyond the spatial limits of the garden itself and revises the notion of a unified community, allowing us to envision Housekeepers’ active role in effectively shaping the CCCG, through the active production of place.

**Methods**
We used qualitative methods and an ethnographic approach. Participant observation and informal conversations were conducted at five food distributions, including one a cooking demonstration; one garden volunteer work day; and one CCCG Advisory Committee meeting. We also conducted Semi-structured interviews with the CCCG coordinator, one housekeeper zone manager and one housekeeper.

**Conclusion:**
In this space, the politics of giving and receiving “good” food are constantly re-worked: the meaning and values attached to the food itself are negotiated; understandings of “who is in charge” are destabilized.

Through these dynamics in the distribution site, the “community” in the CCCG is re-defined and expanded. This allows the possibility of democratizing the construction of the Community Garden, incorporating the bodily practices, languages, aesthetics, values, and tastes of the Housekeepers.

**Discussion**
For some CCCG members, encouraging housekeeper participation in the garden itself is an issue of not wanting to give them a “free handout”; but it is principally a question of trying to build community between volunteers, students, and housekeepers through the practice of farming together.

This current fragmentation in the “community” does not seem to be transcended in the distributions, where the embodied spatial divisions and tensions are an expression of a broader disconnect between Garden volunteers and housekeepers.

However, at the distribution site, another community is “in becoming”, influenced by the properties of food itself to foment conversation. Especially for immigrants, certain foods evoke the memory of their countries and cultures of origin; for everyone, it allows the sharing and creation of culinary knowledge.

“There were also two Karen men, really friendly guys. I talked to one of them who spoke okay English. He had also two full bags and was happy for so much eggplant. He said he didn’t like US food; he eats only Asian food, what they cook at home. He mentioned that there are eggplants where he is from, and many of the same vegetables, also squash”.

Fieldnotes, second visit to the Distribution site
The spatial and social proximity of the place where food is grown, and the creative process involved in its preparation, shape the interactions and conversations that take place.

Solidarity ties are enacted between the housekeepers to ensure collective access the food. As a recurrent practice, housekeepers ask for more bags in order to fill them and bring food to co-workers who cannot make it.