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Handbook on Prisons and Jails

Editors: Danielle S. Rudes | Gaylene S. Armstrong | Kimberly R. Kras | TaLisa J. Carter

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BEYOND GREEN CORRECTIONS
An Invitation to Socio-Ecological Initiatives in the United States Prisons, Jails, and Communities

Matthew DelSesto, Daniela Jauk-Ajamie, Elizabeth Lara, and Shea Zwerver

Introduction

In the spring of 2021, Yale School of the Environment and Boston College co-convened the "Conference on Social and Ecological Infrastructure for Recidivism Reduction." The first of its kind at such a scale, the online event gathered hundreds of people from around the world. Presenters and participants had expertise on the carceral experience as it relates to in-prison and reentry initiatives for environmental education, therapeutic horticulture, food justice, ecological conservation, agriculture, forestry, landscape architecture, and more. There were a variety of virtual sessions, including narrative presentations on the long-term evolution of particular programs, discussions of qualitative studies and impact assessments, panels on public health, analyses of industry and vocational training, and workshops that facilitated group reflection and strategizing.[1]

The conference took place at a time when the coronavirus pandemic was wreaking havoc inside carceral facilities worldwide, compounding the impact of poor conditions that were already diminishing the mental and physical health of imprisoned populations (Lara, 2022; Covid Prison Project, 2022). Prisons and jails have long faced scrutiny from incarcerated people, advocates, activists, and scholars whose work focuses on prison operations and experiences of confinement. Nationwide, general trends toward high prison budgets, long sentences, overcrowding, and extreme punishments have ultimately led the United States to have one of the highest recidivism rates worldwide – with evidence suggesting that the severity of punishment in prison by itself does not have a reliable deterrence effect (Nagin, 2013). In order to address these issues, public discourse and policy have increasingly emphasized mechanisms for decarceration (Berman & Adler, 2018). While some of these mechanisms are inherent to the prison system, such as gubernatorial sentence commutations and pardons, others come from squarely outside the criminal legal system. Central to these external mechanisms is the creativity and resourcefulness of activists, advocates, and organizations that prioritize the well-being and liberation of the millions of people in prisons and jails nationwide, and the many millions more who are formerly incarcerated.

Indeed, sessions at this groundbreaking conference were a direct reflection of such creativity and resourcefulness, and of the tireless work that these individuals and organizations have undertaken. In this chapter, we aim to synthesize and articulate some of the knowledge

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produced through the emerging network associated with the conference. We analyze major themes that emerged in conference presentations, discussions, and workshops. In representing these themes, we recognize that we are building a somewhat uneasy synthesis of knowledge from different perspectives on carceral settings. For instance, in this chapter, we build on the knowledge of the speakers who come from a broad set of backgrounds including activists, educators, researchers, and correctional administrators. Many presenters had lived experience of incarceration or decades of experience working behind prison walls, but others were new to this work.

Based on a collaborative review of 20 conference sessions (throughout the chapter, sessions will be referenced by their corresponding number in the Appendix), we identified major themes for socio-ecological interventions in carceral settings.[2] We choose this approach because although scholars have previously analyzed the "greening of prisons," and practitioners have evaluated specific programs, our goal here is to offer a summary of key issues that arise across different socio-ecological programs and sites. In order to serve as an invitation to researchers and practitioners to engage more intentionally with the often-unrealized potentials of this sector, the chapter is organized in the following way. First, we discuss the "call for presenters," which influenced both who presented and the content of the sessions that we subsequently analyzed. Then, we review three themes that we identified from the recorded sessions: centering relationships, negotiating access, and navigating money and measurements. Finally, we address some further implications for research and practice in the field.

Background

The presentations that we analyze in this chapter revolve around the organizing principle from the call for presenters, "social and ecological infrastructure for recidivism reduction." Interpreted broadly, the theme invited presentations related to interventions both within and beyond carceral spaces. It also focused on activities that have not typically received much formal or dedicated institutional support. We use the term socio-ecological to describe interventions that involve a mix of social dimensions and ecological, environmental, or nature-based elements. While there has been considerable interest and debate regarding the so-called "green" prison in research and practice (Feldbaum et al., 2011; Jewkes & Moran, 2015; White & Graham, 2015; Mazurek et al., 2020), we see the sorts of interventions described in this chapter as offering the potential to go beyond a green corrections paradigm. That is, they represent a small, somewhat marginal, and emerging group that is, in part, envisioning interventions that might accomplish more than correctional rehabilitation or greening.

The phrase *socio-ecological* in the conference title reflects the fact that social well-being and ecological health are fundamentally entangled, as is the degradation of both. Any purported environmental initiative, therefore, also has social implications that must be nurtured for it to be successful over the long term, and vice versa. In the context of the conference, this phrase refers to the goals and objectives of the represented organizations and individuals. These objectives are generally not singularly environmental or social, but both. For instance, some practitioners include environmental impact, such as acres restored, trees planted, and so on, as part of their proposed measures of success (Zwerver et al., 2022). At the same time, initiatives with an emphasis on ecological restoration also emphasize the intentional formation of new social relationships to mobilize resources, gather people together, share knowledge, and intervene in a particular site.

The practices represented here also signal the importance of extending the benefits of environmental initiatives to the most disadvantaged and oppressed groups. This is especially

crucial for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, who have historically been marginalized within standard narratives of environmentalism, sustainability, and environmental justice movements (Brisman 2004; Pellow, 2017). The environmental justice definition of environment as "where we live, work, play, learn and pray" was advanced in the 1980s through the organizing of Black communities and other communities of color that were negatively and disproportionately impacted by the siting and operations of toxic industries nationwide. In this view, many sessions' conceptions of environment and ecology may be understood within a broader framework that integrates the needs and aspirations of people whose lives have been impacted by incarceration.

The use of the term *infrastructure* in the conference title emphasizes the goals of many presenters to situate individual programs or initiatives within a larger network of people or organizations that have shared values and objectives. It also points to the work that some organizations are doing to imagine and build something that does not yet exist – a robust infrastructure that addresses the range of social, economic, and psychological needs of those involved in the criminal legal system. While corrections programs and research have tended to focus on individual-level metrics and interventions, such as the impacts of "substance use disorder treatment" and "cognitive behavioral therapy," the framing of infrastructure alternatively emphasizes the social-ecological dimensions of interventions. An infrastructural approach conceptualizes effective interventions as more than targeting individual thinking or pathology. Instead it focuses on the creation of new relationships, networks, support systems and collaborations that make reentry successful.

It is also significant that the community-based organizations implementing socio-ecological programs discussed here do not simply send their volunteers, employees, or affiliates into prisons in a one-directional flow. Rather, they create partnerships with a range of organizations in the public and private sectors who provide guidance on program and curriculum development, volunteer as guest speakers in prisons or jails, hire and act as mentors to formerly incarcerated individuals, and ultimately become part of an emerging infrastructure. Additionally, former program participants increasingly go on to contribute to program development and implementation after being released from prison. The distinctions between prison-run programs that rely on corrections employees and inside-outside collaborative efforts have a considerable impact on the morale and dynamics of the programs.

Furthermore, the socio-ecological interventions described here are distinct from correctional industry operations which use the incarcerated population for labor either to offset state costs and/or benefit private corporations. These are pervasive, as, according to Anthony Ryan Hatch, "*All fifty states* run 'correctional industries' that use prison labor to produce commodities exclusively for sale to other state agencies within the same state" (Hatch, 2019, p. 73, emphasis in original). What is missing from such programs that seek primarily to address institutional needs (i.e., the political-economic demands of the prison-industrial complex) is the focus on human needs and creative capacities. This is related to the fact that the standard logic of corrections is to assess the success or failure of a program by measuring recidivism rates.

As researchers and policymakers have increasingly pointed out, recidivism is challenging to track without access to consistent data across different jurisdictions, is commonly misinterpreted and misapplied, and is arguably one-dimensional and stagnant (Butts & Schiraldi, 2018; Leverentz et al., 2020; National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022). In many ways, this framing of "social and ecological infrastructure for recidivism reduction" also seemed to attract researchers and practitioners who are interested in reconceptualizing how prison and reentry programs are enacted, assessed, and understood. This reconceptualization in

part includes a shift among scholars and practitioners toward frameworks, such as desistance and decarceration (Middlemass & Smiley, 2019; National Institute of Justice, 2021). For instance, compared to other kinds of interventions, the unique characteristics of programs involving ecological dimensions are relevant for desistance when they focus on the process and experience of people who are returning home from prison or jail (DelSesto, 2022).

At the same time, when it comes to socio-ecological interventions in the carceral system, there is much more at play than measurements of recidivism and desistance are capable of representing, as evidenced in the conference presentations. In the social-ecological interventions described below, researchers and practitioners point towards guiding values and ways of understanding the importance and impact of their work, which include but also push the boundaries of conventional measurements (i.e., recidivism). Building on the findings and perspectives represented in the conference, the following sections provide an exploratory review of some emerging themes in the field of socio-ecological interventions in the U.S. prisons and jails.

Centering Relationships

Prisons and jails in the United States rely on the punitive isolation of individuals. This is because they have, in part, been structured around the principle that "prisoners should 'suffer,' not only through the loss of freedom, but also by virtue of prison conditions, which should be of a worse standard than those available to the poorest free workers" (Moran & Jewkes, 2014, p. 352). The design of correctional facilities often reflects this underlying principle, which limits the prison's capacity to sustain anything beyond its basic, often dismal, operations. Despite a longstanding interest in rehabilitation among some actors and within U.S. prisons and jails, incarceration in this context is fundamentally about the removal and separation of individuals from society. Incidentally, people who are incarcerated are also often separated from regional ecologies and denied access to the natural world. The most punitive spaces are deliberately solitary and isolating – from bare and concrete prison yards with large walls that block the outside world to forms of solitary confinement units that take isolation to extreme levels (Wener, 2012; Nadkarni et al., 2017). Even when not founded solely on punishment, the practices of correctional rehabilitation also rely on the removal of people from communities to focus on individual behaviors (Wright et al., 2012), as opposed to restoring, healing, or transforming relationships.

The socio-ecological program characteristics described below tend to challenge the isolation of prisons and jails by creating positive and life-giving relationships. They connect people to each other and wider living systems through a variety of intentionally designed curricula and spaces. This means that they often describe establishing various kinds of relationships within and beyond the walls of prison buildings. Presenters at the conference describe the formation of new relationships that result from their programs, as well as opportunities for mutual encouragement, generative challenge, learning, rest, inspiration, empowerment, or even liberation.

Many presenters are decidedly in solidarity with individuals who are incarcerated and see their work as part of a larger social transformation (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 20). Others express using a more measured approach to bring socio-ecological programming to students who are incarcerated and focus on reforming certain aspects of the systems they work within, for example, improving food access or STEM education (6, 15, 19). Either way, relationships are centered in the programs, and also in the ways practitioners and researchers talk about their work. Below, we summarize the many ways that the notion of "relationships" is used by researchers and practitioners when presenting on their work.

The Relationship of Incarcerated People to Themselves

Many of the programs featured in the conference use gardening and lessons from ecology as a way to give people opportunities for rest, learning, and structured exploration. Program participants design and plant gardens and use them as a setting for meditative or restorative activities (1, 11). In many cases, incarcerated gardeners are the catalysts for creating a new space, and external organizations accompany these leaders to provide support for resources, materials, logistics, and programming (5, 19). Groups also describe using garden metaphors as a means for personal development or self-reflection (1, 2, 7). One presenter, for instance, conceptualizes program participants as "tired travelers," and seeks to create spaces for refuge and inspiration through nature (2). Based on testimonials provided during multiple presentations, these programs offer some participants the opportunity to transform their relationship with their past experiences. One program integrates a framework of "inner gardening" in its curriculum to foster emotional intelligence and open up possibilities for healing (1). Gardens oriented toward food production offer spaces for incarcerated participants to regain dignity and agency in relation to their bodies, lives, and food intake (1, 2, 7, 20). Overall, it seems that socio-ecological programs can offer a holistic framework that provides opportunities for simultaneously "connecting to ourselves, the community and the natural environment" (1), as one program graduate put it.

Interpersonal Relationships Among Participants

Throughout the presentations, we find descriptions of programs that have the potential to transform the relationships that incarcerated participants have with one another. Students build relationships in an open, more neutral space where the typical hierarchies that structure prison life are diminished. One former participant shared his experiences of the ways "Gardening brings people together" and creates "comradery across races" in an environment where boundaries between racialized groups are usually harshly lived and enforced (9). This follows what Beth Waitkus, the founder of Insight Garden Program, observed in her scholarship about how the program was one of the few racially integrated parts of the prison yard (Waitkus, 2004). Likewise, the founder of Pennsylvania's Correctional Conservation Collaborative (16) noticed how participants from across racialized groups would come together during tree climbing lessons to encourage each other to overcome their fears.

Relationships Between Incarcerated People and Program Facilitators

The facilitators, teachers, and mentors that access the prison system through socio-ecological programs often describe the gratitude and appreciation they experience from incarcerated students and program participants. As one presenter noted, volunteer instructors for an arboriculture training felt energized and refreshed, being able to share their knowledge with a receptive, curious, and engaged audience. Based on their initial experience with the work, they were inspired to return every year to share their knowledge while also learning about the carceral system and the experiences of incarcerated people (16). Correctional facilities often lack meaningful programming and are characterized by monotony and hierarchical relationships. The majority of the programs represented in the conference take a collaborative approach that seeks to empower students to participate in ways that are aligned with their needs, interests, and aspirations. As some presenters discuss, participants of the socio-ecological programs led by external partners instead of corrections staff feel more willing to

share and ask questions. This is in contrast to feeling like just another number in their daily interactions with correctional staff and spaces (1, 3, 4). This relationship and trust-building seem vital to successful reintegration.

The quality of the relationships between program facilitators and participants is also reflected in the person-first language that facilitators typically use while presenting their work. Presenters often refer to participants as students or participants (7). A particular feature of several socio-ecological programs is that participants are not seen as a passive workforce or simply recipients of knowledge, but as collaborators and co-designers of the program, with an emphasis on peer-to-peer learning and mentorship (Trivett et al., 2017). Some programs specifically train peer educators and go on to hire formerly incarcerated participants as programming staff and reentry support (1, 3).

Relationships Between Incarcerated Participants and Corrections Staff

Several presenters shared observations of positive changes in the dynamics between correctional staff members and incarcerated participants. When staff members are actively engaged in the program's initiation, development, and operation, they can also receive positive benefits (Wagenfeld et al., 2018; Moran et al., 2021). This seems to make it more likely that corrections staff will come to see incarcerated participants as positive and creative actors (14). Building on one presentation, one research study (Jauk-Ajamie & Blackwood, 2022) found that a garden intervention improved team culture and social skills among participants, while also improving relationships between correctional staff and participants. Overall, this demonstrates the potential of socio-ecological programs to encourage humanizing relationships between staff and those who are incarcerated. It also seems that the general sense of community that some programs foster may also have ripple effects across the institution (7).

Parent-child Connections in Prisons

Incarceration can have negative impacts on the parent-child relationship and on the children themselves. There were two presenters whose work was explicitly oriented toward providing spaces other than typical visiting rooms where incarcerated parents could spend time with their children and visiting family members (17, 18). One presenter described a program aimed at helping incarcerated fathers become "STEM role models for their children" (6). The program collaborated with a local museum and provided space and resources for incarcerated fathers and their children to play, experiment, and learn together. Another presenter detailed the development of a collaboration with landscape architecture students and incarcerated women in order to design and build a garden that the women could enjoy with their children (18; see also Winterbottom, 2020). Unfortunately, the presenter also shared that on the day of the planned garden installation, the incarcerated women were not able to help due to last-minute administrative changes. Still, there are documented cases where an intervention like a "planting party" may offer a joyful activity for incarcerated parents to share with their children (Toews et al., 2018; 2020).

Relationships to Educational Actors and Colleges

Many programs are carried out through partnerships with academic institutions (such as colleges or research facilities). In some programs, students and educators offer hands-on lessons on landscape design and garden installation (9, 18, 11). In other contexts, programs

affiliated with universities offer a wide range of environmental coursework and research opportunities through which participants gain certification, credentials, or college credits that open up future academic opportunities they may not have otherwise envisioned (Trivett et al., 2017). Educators have also provided mentoring and letters of recommendation. In several of the programs, participants meet professors and teachers for the first time, which, according to one person's account, has led participants to feel more empowered and comfortable accessing academic institutions post-release. In some cases, specific scholarships have been established for formerly incarcerated people to pursue further education at the partnering college post-release (7).

Relationships Assisting Reentry and Social Support Post-release

As evidence has long demonstrated, intentionally designed prison and reentry programs can assist people in their successful integration back into society (Petersilia, 2001). Some presenters reflected on the significance of earning certificates or credentials via program participation and the impact these have on their case for parole (1, 3, 4, 7). Additionally, some program staff are able to write character reference letters for parole boards and act as references when formerly incarcerated participants apply for jobs post-release. One presenter described the involvement of parole board members in their program's operations (16). Generally, programs take these kinds of measures based on the idea that it increases participants' chances for release, and that it may shift the culture of parole boards.

Many programs also offer reentry support in the form of maintaining communication as former participants adjust to life outside (1, 7, 16). Some bigger programs have begun to formalize their reentry support and begin working with program participants in anticipation of their release (1, 3). Moreover, presenters describe bringing in community members, social agencies, and local resources into prisons or jails where they work. These outside resources can evolve into viable social support that can be utilized post-release. Even if socio-ecological initiatives often do not always offer structured reentry support, former program participants may build on relationships they have formed while incarcerated.

Relationships to the Environment

Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated participants, corrections staff, and outside volunteers also describe a change in the way they view their relationship with one another and the environment (4). Sometimes this even correlates with a change in self-identity as a gardener or ecologist, which evolves with increased exposure to natural settings and ecological concepts. For instance, one presenter described incarcerated participants in an ecological restoration program who developed a deeper appreciation of the connections between their own identity, personal wellness, and ecological health (2). In some presentations, it was clear that developing new relationships with the environment necessarily involved making connections outside of prison or jail buildings, particularly in terms of the flow of ecological knowledge and materials across prison walls (4, 15, 20). Overall, access to nature and the environment emerged as a topic among presenters within the much broader category of "negotiating access" to which we now turn.

Negotiating Access

State, federal, and local prisons and jails are tax-funded facilities that nonetheless remain almost totally inaccessible to the tax-paying populace – outside of incarceration, visitation, program

provision, and strictly regulated volunteering and research. According to the Sentencing Project, of all the people incarcerated in state and federal prisons, about 92% are publicly managed by a state agency. Even private prison companies typically work on government contracts, use public lands, or are subject to regulation from state agencies (Buday & Nellis, 2022). Overall, despite their position squarely in the public sector, prisons are rarely framed as part of public land, and what happens within prisons or jails by design happens outside of public knowledge.

Incarcerated populations and carceral spaces are an often-ignored part of what people think of as "the public." And yet, through socio-ecological programs, members of these populations are on publicly owned lands and might even be seen extinguishing fires, maintaining street trees, or otherwise restoring natural and built features outside of the prison. The question of who has the right to access what places or resources, and when, is an outcome of both logistical demands of maintaining a secure environment and also political definitions of individual rights. Accordingly, the issue of access is highly contested in regard to prisons and jails and must be negotiated in particular ways by those who are implementing socio-ecological programs. Below we identify four major issues related to access: access to programs, nature, land, and employment.

Access to Programs

Most conference presenters reported that their programs came with a series of major hurdles, even prior to the extreme disruptions brought by the coronavirus pandemic. Even in states where a robust network of programming exists, presenters describe many barriers to accessibility, such as resourcing and capacity (1). Part of this has to do with a persistent overreliance on conventional prison programs that are managed primarily by corrections staff. When it comes to alternative programs at facilities nationwide, there are likely thousands of incarcerated people on waitlists, hoping to access potentially life-altering rehabilitative programs. Figuring out a way to manage waitlists (i.e., first come, first serve versus needs-based) and defining participant needs is a crucial component of program operation. Interestingly, an unanticipated result of the coronavirus pandemic has been the shift some programs have taken toward offering remote, correspondence-based participation. One program manager described developing and mailing twenty-page packets that include informative lessons, group activities, journaling exercises, and worksheets (1). Program participants are then welcome to mail back parts of the packet for feedback from the program managers. Occasionally, the managers will also coordinate supply drop-offs at various prisons to facilitate remote participation (1, 4).

Importantly, the chance to work or volunteer for these programs offers the general public a means of accessing prisons in a way that typically is not possible. Neil Barsky of the Marshall Project has suggested that one vital and under-acknowledged mode of spurring change in corrections is to open up the hidden world of prisons to the public (Barsky, 2019). What he advocates is to drastically scale up programs that harness the time and skills of "the public" who are willing and able to work alongside incarcerated people as volunteers, offering instruction and counseling. While not "a substitute for more difficult prison reforms" – including in the areas of bail, sentencing, police work, and parole – greater percentages of the general population spending time in prison and forming relationships with incarcerated people has the potential to impact public opinion and prison policy.

Access to Nature

Several presenters emphasized the importance of leveraging their power and resources to offer incarcerated people the chance to access the natural environment and its therapeutic effects

(Lindemuth, 2007; Wener, 2012; Jauk-Ajamie & Blackwood, 2022). One program explicitly states that its work is grounded in the belief that access to nature is a human right (1). Aside from the satisfaction that may come from working in gardens, simply lingering in them for prolonged periods can offer considerable benefits, especially within the context of highly stressful carceral settings. According to one presenter's description of his research and practice, "just the view of the garden from the visitors room can reduce stress" (18).

According to another presenter, it is also necessary to consider possibilities for people to access resources and meaningful, productive relationships with nature prior to becoming incarcerated. The presenter states that reclaiming public space and a relationship to the environment within often hostile urban settings is one way to prevent the emergence of factors that lead to incarceration in the first place (5).

Access to Food

People in prisons and jails often lack access to both nutritious food and healthy environments. Driven mainly by three large industrial food suppliers, the typical prison or jail diet is high in carbohydrates and sodium. Over the long term this is detrimental to physical and mental health (Soble et al., 2020). Though not all programs focus explicitly on food production for the benefit of the incarcerated population, those that do have the potential to meaningfully increase access to fresh, nutrient-dense food (7, 8, 12, 17). Food preparation and nutrition classes are often integrated (7, 20). One presenter echoed the remarks of many in describing how, during some program sessions, participants spend time simply eating from the garden and resting. He noticed that giving space for these activities can have profound positive impacts on participants' physical and mental well-being (17). In contrast, there are cases where garden program participants do not have formal permission to eat the food that they grow – something that some program managers have been working to change.

Access to Land

Interestingly, many presenters use concepts of "land" and "nature" basically interchangeably, while also emphasizing the connections between the way land is treated and the way people are treated. Many speculate about whether it may be possible to reconnect to oneself by building a relationship with the land. In the context of carceral landscapes, it is important to consider the question of land and whether, how, and to whom it is made accessible or inaccessible. One common theme is presenters conveying their experiences reckoning with the vast amount of land that correctional agencies own and manage (16, 17). In addition to sometimes dozens of adult prison facilities, this land might also include youth facilities, conservation land, fire camps, agricultural land, and correctional officer training facilities. The numbers of facilities and amounts of land mass are hard to track and are often based on state corrections websites (that may or may not reflect contracts with private prisons). In the case of some departments of corrections, this land mass includes many thousands of acres spread across their respective states.

For people involved in community-based organizations that provide in-prison programming, reckoning with the scale of land and resources managed by corrections agencies involves working to understand what different land uses are feasible on different types of land, especially regarding building and planting restrictions. One group of presenters, while discussing the amount of land owned by one state department of corrections, speculated on the possibility of dividing it up so that incarcerated people can have individual plots (17).

Furthermore, they suggested these plots could also be accessible by visiting family members, who could participate in managing it and growing plants.

One way that prison programs access land is via partnerships with resource management agencies or conservation organizations. Perhaps the most common motivation for these partnerships is to access forms of expertise and infrastructure that can facilitate skill-building for incarcerated people and job acquisition for formerly incarcerated people. These partnerships also lend prison programs degrees of legitimacy in that they help them tap into and potentially meet the needs of the state and local industry. For example, one presenter described a Pennsylvania prison surrounded by about 2,400 acres of forested land, 60 of which are host to a tree nursery (16). This offered a prime location for a vocational training program focused on forestry, arboriculture, and tree nursery management. Another Pennsylvania prison has miles of the stream on their property, which itself is surrounded by farmland. This became a site for lessons on how agricultural practices impact water quality and aquatic macroinvertebrates (16).

Other programs, as a point of contrast, are more explicitly oriented toward combining the social benefits of programs with biodiversity conservation (4). One garden program, for example, has speculated on what it might mean to factor prison land into efforts to create spaces for urban or peri-urban wildlife refuges (New Garden Society, 2018). This perhaps speaks to people's tendencies to connect the management of public land with the operations of state and federal agencies.

Access to Employment and Vocational Training

Historically, legally enforced "civil death" has characterized experiences of incarceration, wherein imprisoned individuals were stripped of standard rights and privileges. They were also refused the right to take ownership of anything they produced, such as a piece of writing, which was instead considered prison property (Cummins, 1994, p. 24). This has had significant implications for the labor of incarcerated people. Today it is increasingly well-known that prison jobs pay mere cents per hour of work and generally fail to improve employment prospects post-release. Prison jobs, in general, are oriented more toward social discipline and control rather than the development of human capacities (Hatton, 2021).

The people who run the socio-ecological programs described here are well aware of this context, and some aim specifically to increase access to employment in regional green industry jobs where incarcerated people are being released (3, 16). They conduct this work with the understanding that comprehensive green workforce development programs can provide important opportunities, as this sector generally has higher wages and lower barriers to entry than other industries (Muro et al., 2019).

One strong example of this is the Correctional Conservation Collaborative in Pennsylvania, which worked with the Tree Care Industry Association to deploy the Ground Operations Specialist training and certification process (16). Through this process, participants earned nationally recognized industry credentials that would help improve their employability within the tree care industry post-release. Another presenter shared that their program focuses specifically on "green jobs training" (3; see also, Ehrenpris et al., 2021). Several presenters noted that this work requires focusing not simply on imparting knowledge to potential workers but on creating a space for incarcerated people to learn from each other and develop "soft" job skills (teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, etc.) that can make the difference in securing and maintaining employment (2, 3).

This work also requires preparing incarcerated people for "good" jobs, which one set of presenters described as jobs with livable wages and opportunities for career advancement (3).

This means providing education about environmental sectors with strong wage growth and assisting people returning home with job placement. Many presenters explained that creating pathways to green jobs requires ongoing networking and organizing with potential employers or activist and advocacy organizations (3, 10, 16). One group of presenters described efforts to mobilize the public and private sectors to bring gainful employment opportunities to communities that have high rates of unemployment, policing and incarceration (10). In other cases promoting access to employment has also meant learning from and supporting advocacy organizations that work toward systemic change in different areas of the public and private sectors (4).

Navigating Money and Measurements

A major theme in the conference is the need to define and measure success. For those who are implementing or participating in a program, the impacts may seem obvious. Long waiting lists for programs evidence how potential participants may be drawn to the positive working relationships or general atmosphere of a space that feels different from the rest of a prison or jail. But what should the goals of a socio-ecological program be, and how should they be documented and measured?

Need for Funding and Resources

The reality of the programs discussed here is that many are operating in correctional institutions as "volunteers" who must sustain their work with donations of time, supplies, and money from organizations outside of prisons (1, 7). In some cases, small non-profit organizations get philanthropic support or grants to fund their work, which also relies heavily on volunteers (1, 2, 7). In other cases, larger institutions such as colleges or universities fund a position that is responsible for prison-related programming (4, 5). Still, others are funded in part by a paid staff position in a corrections department (15, 19). Overall, finding financial support to sustainably run such programs is a challenge.

Soliciting support in itself creates administrative burdens alongside the personal and professional challenges of navigating multiple work roles and identities. This is due in part to the fact that securing such support requires that practitioners act as the primary representatives of programs and spaces that otherwise are not represented to the wider public. At the same time, they also operate at the behest of corrections agencies which could easily retract their support. While corrections agencies may offer support in the form of funding and access to staff and work spaces, it is also often the case that corrections staff and potential funders do not understand the logistics and impacts of these programs (1).

Need for Innovative and Diverse Measurements

Socio-ecological programs face competing expectations for measuring their work and representing it to the public (7, 15). This is of critical importance, as effectively evaluating, measuring, and reporting on program operations is essential for maintaining funding. Furthermore, various funding bodies generally require outcomes reported in terms of different metrics, such as educational credentials, job placement rates, or recidivism rates. While meeting these requirements, presenters also expressed the need for assessments that use holistic impact measures beyond the narrow framing of metrics such as recidivism rates. In particular, some express interest in research on physical and mental health outcomes for participants and staff, as well as behavioral changes and social embeddedness (9, 17, 18).

This is in line with the latest report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022), which concludes that binary recidivism measures are insufficient and post-release success involves multiple life domains, such as health, employment, housing access, and civic engagement. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022), as well as the U.S. National Institute of Justice (2021), also consider the potential relevance of desistance as an alternative metric to recidivism rates, which was discussed by at least one presenter (5). A desistance approach is process-oriented and can provide nuanced insight into reentry experiences and progress made over time. In addition to securing access to funding, these refined reporting metrics could contribute to the overall proliferation of nature-based programs.

Developing Collaborations Despite Power Imbalance

A selection of presenters stressed that programs that emerge via collaborations between community-based organizations and corrections must not be beyond critique. Their operations require financial, logistical, and ethical compromises, they stated, and the organizations implementing programs should be transparent about what these are. This includes transparency in the documentation of outcomes. At the same time, some argue that critique and measurement of these programs should not supersede knowledge of and critique of state corrections budgets more generally (12, 13). Others suggest that critique and evaluation should be done collaboratively, across organizations, so that it might better inform policy and practice (2, 4). There was also discussion of the fact that corrections budgets do not often allocate much for the socio-ecological programs described here (13). Relatedly, outside organizations or those who manage programs are typically positioned as less important than security-focused operations in correctional environments (15).

By the final day of the conference, questions remained among presenters about how researchers might effectively ally themselves with those who are doing work on the ground. There were also questions about what types of research and evaluation practitioners should pursue (17). On the one hand, corrections agencies may have very different goals than outside organizations. And yet, the very practice of attempting to collaborate can create concrete changes in larger correctional practices and policies (11). There was a general sentiment among attendees and presenters that processes of establishing and refining programs did not need to detract from critiques of carceral systems. For some, this meant that the very process of designing an intervention could involve aligning values, pedagogy, and practices with systems-level changes (20). At the core of many of these sessions was the notion that socio-ecological interventions ought to do more than just create an individual program, and instead focus on developing new networks of care behind and beyond prison walls.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Based on the practices and research of an emerging national network, this chapter looked at the ongoing operations, implications, and possibilities of socio-ecological programs within carceral settings. It highlighted organizations whose work seeks out possibilities to shape infrastructures of care that might counter some of the negative impacts of existing systems of punishment, discipline, and control. Particular emphasis was given to different efforts from around the country to implement interventions aimed at more than individual rehabilitation, while still attempting to meet individual needs. Furthermore, presenters insisted that in order for socio-ecological interventions to fulfill their potential, there is a need for social and

organizational innovations that create new collaborations. This was based on reflections that ultimately, prisons and jails are simply not the best places to facilitate healing. Interventions within these sites therefore are not enough to create larger system-changes that might better address the harms related to crime. In addition to partnerships between corrections and non-profit organizations, for many, this meant new forms of collaborations that extend beyond carceral institutions.[3]

The kinds of networks represented here point to the possibility of creating systems of mutual aid, care, and support that are grounded in relationships between people and their environments. Rather than speaking in terms of conventional models of correctional rehabilitation, presenters describe their work more frequently as cultivating new relationships, creating opportunities for access to impactful programming, and measuring or communicating their work to different stakeholders. Indeed, many mention the goal of "rehabilitation" only in passing, if at all. Given that such programs are aspiring to more than individual rehabilitation or change, what is their unique contribution to theory and practice?

All of the programs we described have established new partnerships with various parts of the criminal legal system and bring new collaborators to prisons and jails. The role of participation and multi-organization engagement was a central theme throughout the presentations. Accordingly, it is worth seeing socio-ecological interventions not simply as creating a specific program or space. Beyond specific programs, they are creating new social-ecological networks and infrastructure, often centering the leadership and experiences of formerly incarcerated people. These new networks include academic institutions, local governments and state agencies, green industry actors, unions, businesses, social service organizations, and others. Partnering with external organizations also leverages local expertise, allowing for a diversity of perspectives on social and environmental issues.

The speakers at the conference generally note that socio-ecological programs raise different concerns compared to other kinds of correctional programs. Maybe the most notable is the shared goals of many members of the network. Beyond objectives aimed merely at "greening" or "sustainability," many of the organizations here aspire to an understanding of the environment that is about thinking and acting towards connections among people, organizations, communities, and wider living ecologies – reconnecting to the web of life that we depend upon for survival (Norton et al., 2013). More than a single program or one-off intervention (such as cognitive behavioral therapy, structured counseling, a single course, or job training) presenters describe how supporting effective outcomes for individuals involves participating in the creation of new social ecologies. This means mobilizing webs of relations between humans (whether these are incarcerated people, corrections staff, or collaborators from community-based organizations) and wider ecologies (landscapes, watersheds, plants, animals, and food systems). Overall, this *ecological* orientation is a key insight that points to the possibility that these interventions might, in some ways, transcend the typical limitations of the carceral system.

The work presented in this chapter also highlights the broader relevance of a social-ecological view for understanding the role of an intervention in the context of prisons, jails, or communities impacted by incarceration. For instance, the ecological view can encourage a different theory of change, or how change happens. That is, seemingly micro actions and relationships can have non-linear, unexpected, and cascading effects into larger systems. This is because, as one presenter discussed, the individual is not separate from society, but individuals are part of a "nested social ecosystem" and, therefore, can contribute to shaping their surrounding context, even as they are being shaped by their context (20). As two of the correctional staff explained, creating interventions that also allow staff to see their relationship to the environment

differently has the potential to change the "culture of the institutions" (4, 11). According to these staff members, this cultural change might manifest as a shift in self-perception of both corrections staff and incarcerated people. These shifts might result in further changes, such as improved relationships between corrections officers and incarcerated people and the creation of new protocols and policies (Waitkus, 2004; Jiler, 2006; Jauk-Ajamie & Blackwood, 2022).

One important quality of the programs represented here is the fact that rather than emphasize scalability or replicability, practitioners instead emphasized the importance of building programs in a way that is mindful of site-specific knowledge, practices, relationships, and organizations. And in the process, practitioners can learn from each other in terms of where components of programs can be adapted from one site type to another or how different professional practices can offer insights across disciplines (Campbell & Wiesen, 2009).

This is an especially important lesson at a moment when large foundations and organizations, along with policymakers and the general public, have turned their attention to criminal justice reform (Pickett, 2016). Despite the fact that some large national organizations or projects – whether in policy or research – may have "capacity to scale," an ecological view reminds us that it is also important to understand and build on what partnerships and resources already exist within local contexts. This also means collaborating with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated leaders in a specific site in the process of imagining, implementing, or evaluating an intervention. Such an approach resonates with emerging models for co-design or co-production of systems and services rather than a one-way relationship between service providers and incarcerated service recipients (Weaver, 2013; McCulloch, 2020).

Overall, learning from the creative orientation of many researchers and practitioners described here, it seems important that research pays attention to more than the deficits or problems of incarcerated populations. Criminological research and correctional operations have historically focused on the Risk-Needs-Receptivity model. This approach identifies the risks someone might face for recidivism, crime-specific/ criminogenic needs, and potential receptivity to interventions. Yet the inclusion of ecological components points to the promise of strengths-based approaches, which look holistically at people's experiences in the larger social context (Ward & Brown, 2004). As many presenters noted, the nature of plants, animals, and living ecologies invites a framing of interventions that is oriented toward growth and human potential.

Despite the promise of these sorts of interventions, presentations also suggest that it is important to engage with the contradictions of social-ecological interventions in the context of prisons or jails. On the one hand, while presenters and participants acknowledged many critiques, they generally saw value in the relationships they could build or the harms they could reduce by actually going into prisons or jails on a daily basis. At the same time, working with prisons or jails also requires reflexivity to continually address privilege and power differentials that emerge in the work (see, for example, notes from the conference's concluding "Next Steps" workshop: DelSesto, 2021).

In this context, the goal of a socio-ecological infrastructure in the context of carceral spaces would not only be to sustain a specific program, curriculum, or space, but to design interventions as part of ongoing creation of new social-ecological networks. Such emergent networks may work within prison or jail spaces but can also attempt to transcend them when possible. This could mean, for example, looking beyond prison buildings themselves as a site of social-ecological interventions or permeating prison walls by training and working with new partners, such as environmental justice organizations. It could also mean more intentionally designing programs with people who are incarcerated as part of a network of systems and services, rather than as a single intervention. This may require more time upfront, in

terms of recruiting and training employers, genuinely co-designing services with incarcerated participants, or being open to evolving or reorganizing institutions to meet people's needs. In the long term, these sorts of investments will lead to the development of a stronger web of social-ecological support for positive individual and social change.

Notes

1 The 20 recorded sessions from the 2021 event are listed in the Appendix. They were curated from an open call for submissions on the theme "social and ecological infrastructure for recidivism reduction" that was initially sent around in the fall of 2019. This conference was followed by a second hybrid event on the theme of Ecologies of Justice in 2022, which this chapter does not discuss in detail. More information on both events is available at: ecologiesofjustice.org.

2 This chapter is not a comprehensive review of socio-ecological interventions. Rather, it is a small sample from a loose and emerging network of organizations who were interested in the conference theme. In writing about these presentations, we make no claim to have a definitive interpretation of these practices. We also recognize that there are certainly other initiatives, practices, or interventions that would fit the themes of the conference. Our analysis is shaped by the fact that at various points, the authors of this chapter have been volunteers or employees of corrections or state agencies, volunteers or paid staff of non-profit organizations or higher education institutions, or affiliated as organizers, allies, or collaborators with activist groups. We also represent disciplinary perspectives from a range of disciplines, from anthropology and sociology to environmental studies and criminal justice. In watching each presentation, we paid particular attention to the following issues: What key issues are being identified in the presentation – for research and practice? How do presenters tell the story of their work? Who is presenting, and what's their relationship to living or working in prisons? What are they presenting about? How are they communicating their message? Why are they doing what they are doing?

3 In a "Workshop on Next Steps" at the end of the conference, practitioners and researchers noted a number of key takeaways for future research and practice, which are reflected here (DelSesto, 2021).

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Appendix

List of recorded conference presentation titles and presenters, from the 2021 Conference on Social and Ecological Infrastructure for Recidivism Reduction (link to full conference program and recordings available at www.ecologiesofjustice.org)

[1] Not Just a Gardening Program: A Dynamic Approach to Healing, Transformation and Reentry

Karen Hsueh, *Co-Director of the Insight Garden Program*
Arnold Trevino, *Reentry Coordinator and Co-Facilitator at Insight Garden Program*
Sol Mercado, *Nursery Technician at Planting Justice*

[2] Restoration Not Incarceration: Lessons Learned from an Ecological Rehabilitation Program for the Formerly Incarcerated

Christine Norton, *Professor of Social Work at Texas State University*
Jarid Manos, *Writer and Founder of Great Plains Restoration Council*

[3] Workshop on Implementing Empowering Environmental Education in Prison and Jail Settings

Raquel Pinderhughes, *Professor of Urban Studies and Planning at San Francisco State University and Executive Director of Roots of Success*
Grady Mitchell, *Roots of Success Instructor and Reentry Coordinator*

[4] Sustainability in Prisons Project: Developing Transformative Partnerships for People and Ecosystems

Kelli Bush, *Co-Director of the Sustainability in Prisons Project*
Steve Sinclair, *Co-Director of the Sustainability in Prisons Project and Secretary of the Washington State Department of Corrections*
Carolina Landa, *Statewide Reentry Council Coordinator in Washington State*

[5] Gardening Inside and Out: Reflections on Connecting with Our Social and Ecological Environments

Stacy Burnett, *Public Health Advisor at New York City Health + Hospitals*
Manny Gonzalez, *Teacher and Founder of New York Health Markets/Farmers To-Go Bags*
Demetrius James, *Bard Prison Initiative Public Health Fellow*
William Jett, *Fleet Manager at GrowNYC*
Jocelyn Apicello, *Faculty Advisor for Bard Prison Initiative's Urban Farming & Sustainability Program and Community Engagement Internship*

[6] Bars without Barriers Prison Outreach: STEM Education, Prisoners, and Their Families

Heather Kleiner, *Co-Founder of "Bars without Barriers" Prison Outreach*
David Boone, *Director of the Caddo Correctional Center's Work Re-Entry Facility*
Ebony Mitchell, *Outreach Assistant for the "Bars without Barriers" Prison Outreach Program*
Dianne M. Clark, *Executive Director of Sci-Port Discovery Center*

[7] Gardening in Carceral Settings Across the U.S.

Rima Green, *Director of the Lettuce Grow program at Growing Gardens*
Sharon Everhardt, *Assistant Professor of Sociology at Troy University*
Daniela Jauk, *Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Akron*
Stephen Carmody, *Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Troy University*
Andria Blackwood, *Research Specialist for Oriana House, Inc.*
Brenda Gill, *Professor of Criminal Justice and Social Sciences, Alabama State University*
Mirabai Collins, *Program Coordinator for the Lettuce Grow program at Growing Gardens*

[8] Social and Ecological Impacts of the Prison Food Experience: Insights from the Food in Prison Project

Leslie Soble, *Food in Prison Project Research Fellow for Impact Justice*
Terah Lawyer, *Program Manager for Impact Justice's Homecoming Project*
Roy Waterman, *Co-Founder of Drive Change*
Mark McBrine, *Food Service Manager at the Maine Department of Corrections Mountain View Correctional Facility*

[9] Workshop on Creating Responsive Therapeutic Places to Improve Wellbeing

Amy Wagenfeld, *Lecturer in the Boston University Occupational Therapy Program and Principal of design +cOnsulTation*
Daniel Winterbottom, *Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington*
Naomi Sachs, *Associate Professor in the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture at the University of Maryland*

[10] Urban Wood Project: Baltimore

Morgan Grove, *Social Scientist at USDA Forest Service's Baltimore Urban Field Station and Lecturer at Yale School of the Environment*
Jeff Carroll, *Co-founder and Principal at Urban Wood Economy*
Steve Freeman, *Vendor Resource Manager at Room & Board*

[11] An Unlikely Partnership: Balancing Security with Therapeutic Landscape Benefits in a Correctional Setting

Julie Stevens, *Associate Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Iowa State University*
Patti Wachtendorf Lund, *Former Warden of the Iowa State Penitentiary*

[12] Food as Resistance: Food Justice, Urban Agriculture, and Prison Abolition

Kanav Kathuria, *Open Society Institute Baltimore Community Fellow and Founder of the Farm to Prison Project*
Antoin Quarles El, *Founder of HOPE Baltimore*

[13] Greening the Cage: Green Racial Capitalism and Moments of Resistance in the (Un) Sustainable Prison Garden

Evan Hazlett, Research & Advocacy Manager at Berkeley Food Network

[14] Aquaponics in Corrections

Michael (Mac) McLeon, *Vocational Instructor for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Michael Unit*

[15] Security to Sustainability

Rebekah Mende, *Vocational Trades Instructor at Maine State Prison*
Patrick Connor, *Sustainability and Agriculture Program & Habitat for Humanity Project Manager at the Maine Department of Corrections*

[16] Correctional Conservation Collaborative: An Effort Aimed at Reducing Recidivism While Increasing Pennsylvania's Capacity to Meet its Environmental Goals

Shea Zwerver, *Founder of the Correctional Conservation Collaboration, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Recreation*
Greggory Vinson Clegg, *Tree Climber*

[17] On Being Human: Strengthening Protective Factors Through the Design and Use of Therapeutic Landscapes in Prisons

Julie Stevens, *Associate Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Iowa State University*
Amy Wagenfeld, *Lecturer in the Boston University Occupational Therapy Program and Principal of design +cOnsulTation*
Barb Toews, *Associate Professor in Criminal Justice at University of Washington Tacoma*

[18] Re-Connection Through the Garden, Healing Inside the Walls

Daniel Winterbottom, Landscape Architect and Professor of Landscape Architecture at University of Washington

[19] Selecting Plants for Prison and Jail Gardens

Tony Hall, Garden Educator at Franklin County House of Correction in Massachusetts

[20] Workshop on Designing Local Food Programs in Jails & Prisons

Abrah Dresdale, *Faculty for Sustainable Food and Farming Program at University of Massachusetts-Amherst and Omega Institute*