

**David de la Peña, Assistant Professor UC Davis  
Creative Work Portfolio, 2019**

**Project: The International Garden of Many Colors, Sacramento California**

**Date:** 2015-2019, ongoing

**Role:** Community-engaged researcher, instructor, community designer. I have collaborated with gardeners since 2015, using participatory action research as my engaged research approach. I have attended over 40 gardener meetings, mapped and inventoried the garden and its features; coordinated and negotiated with city staff and elected officials; prepared site plans; participated in garden cleanups; worked with 4 student teams to prepare plans, conduct 3 public workshops, install signs, plants and pathways.

**Project outcomes:**

- Student learning for 4 UC Davis courses;
- research for 3 UC Davis graduate students;
- 1 journal article; 2 limited distribution reports;
- 1 approved site plan;
- reversal of eviction notice and recognition of legal permission to garden;
- \$175,000 in implementation funding from City of Sacramento
- Negotiation of management agreement with nonprofit entity

**Description:**

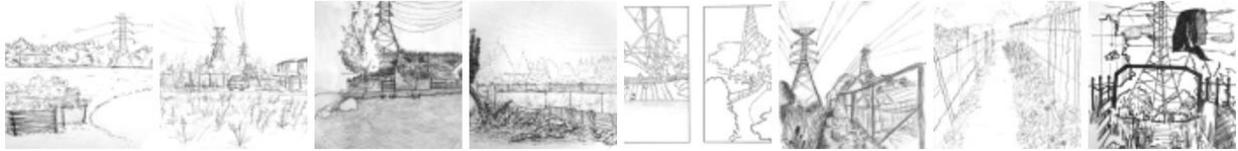
Since the mid 1990s, gardeners in the River Garden Estates neighborhood of north Sacramento have been growing their own food in an underutilized and undevelopable swath of a greenbelt under two sets of power lines. Struggles with the City of Sacramento have galvanized this group of residents who bring their food traditions from the Ukraine, Russia, Laos, the U.S. and Latin America to this informal space. Working with advanced landscape architecture students, Community Development graduate students, and local community organizers, we have been developing an assets-based approach to preserve the garden and plan for its future success. Gardeners are seeking approval to continue to grow their own food and to steward the land that has provided such benefit to their families and the adjacent community.

International Garden of Many Colors

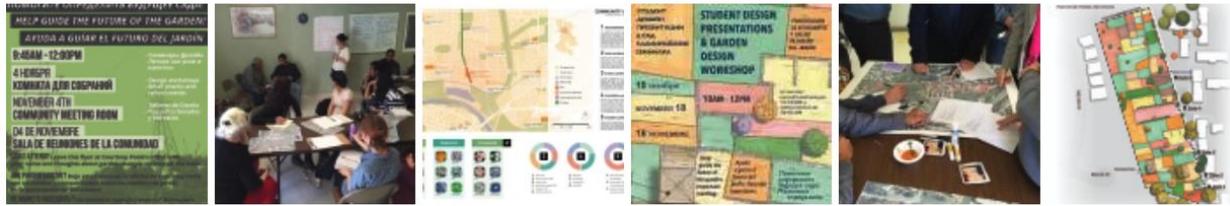
by Alex Cole-Weiss and David de la Peña, UC Davis



*Article about the International Garden in the American Community Garden Association Journal*



*Initial student observations*



*Students helped guide a participatory process that led to a Visioning Document:*



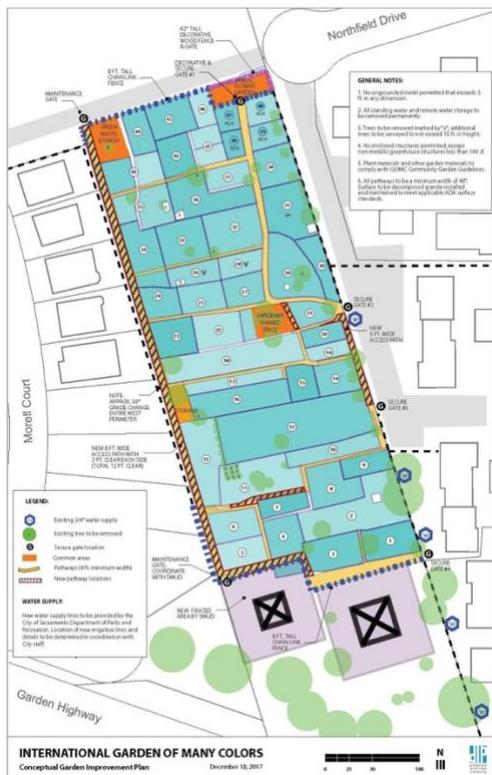
*...and final student proposals:*





The International Garden continues to operate. In 2016 the City of Sacramento evicted approximately 1/3 of the gardeners from the southernmost portion of the site to clear the base of two electrical towers. The City's Parks and Recreation Department also constructed a new city-operated community garden adjacent to this garden, but has had mixed results in convincing resident gardeners to relocate.

In 2018, a final city eviction effort was met with widespread support from community advocates. Over the coming 6 months I helped broker an agreement between the City and the gardeners, which was made possible by a new garden improvement plan. This plan was approved by the City and the local utility district, SMUD. The Sacramento City Council subsequently voted to allocate \$175,000 of Measure U funds to construct the improvements.



*Garden improvement plan currently being implemented*

June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

To Whom It May Concern::

It is my great pleasure to commend David De La Peña for his work as an Assistant Professor at University of California, Davis. Over the past several years Professor De La Peña has developed a working relationship with the City of Sacramento's Youth, Parks and Community Enrichment (YPCE) Department, and in particular the Park Planning and Development Services Division. More specifically he has worked to re-envision and help establish the International Garden of Many Colors in the South Natomas neighborhood of Sacramento. This 3-acre community garden was originally established in the 1990s by an ethnically diverse group of multi-family residents within a power-line easement area that also served as a greenway named Niños Parkway. The City's YPCE Department controls this parkway and several utility providers regulate how the parkway is managed in relation to the utility provision. This includes regulating vegetation heights and restricting the use of metal fences and structures. Given that this garden was informally established and by definition was a maze of garden plots, it is not surprising that it suffered from poor circulation paths, makeshift water infrastructure, and public safety issues. Gardeners utilized a loose organizational model and despite it's challengers grew an abundance of food. Several years ago, the City was under pressure to better maintain the parkway vegetation in order to provide clear vehicular access to several power-line towers, and was in the process of relocating this informal community garden that was obstructing access to regular maintenance. This sparked disagreement between the City and both community garden users and local advocacy groups that saw this informal garden as a respite from the urban landscape and a place for low-income residents to grow healthy and organic produce.

Professor De La Peña became involved as a mediator to help facilitate a discussion between the City officials, local advocacy groups and community garden users. Professor De La Peña applied his training as an academic, a researcher and a landscape architect, by placing this community garden in context with larger issues of food security, greening the urban landscape, climate change resiliency, local land stewardship and how these residents could continue to utilize this space for to improve their quality of life. Over the course of four years, Professor De La Peña initiated a series of community meeting to better analyze the needs of all stakeholder groups and understand the points of disaccord. He involved his UC Davis Landscape Architecture students to conduct assessments of these gardens to better understand the challenges and opportunities they presented. Through this multi-year effort, Professor De La Peña was able to synthesis a clear list of improvements and design solutions that would address the community garden's challenges and the City's regulatory obligations. The City's initial approach was to construct a formal community garden just north of this site where there were less restrictions imposed, however gardeners

would not relocate. At times, City officials felt strongly that the residents had to relocate to accomplish regulatory goals. It was through De La Peña's collaborative effort that the City approached the utility easements holders to see if they would entertain alternative methods of addressing utility requirements, and also allow the informal garden to co-exist. The City's main concerns were to be in compliance with the utility easement requirements including a clear path of travel to access power line footings, maintenance of vegetation height restrictions, prohibition of metal fences and structures, and addressing safety issues related to water collection methods and vector control. Through Professor De La Peña's leadership, City officials, community garden users and advocacy groups came to a better understanding of an alternative approach. As part of this effort, a garden master plan and garden name were approved. In addition, a clear action plan was agreed upon that included incorporating a vehicular maintenance road for access to power-line towers, improving pedestrian and ADA circulation paths, removing all metal fencing and structures, and upgrading the water infrastructure to reduce waste and increase vector control.

I can surely attest that without the invaluable work and participation of Professor De La Peña this long standing community garden would not exist today and this community, which is in such need of quality of life amenities and better food access, would be worst off. The work of Professor De La Peña underscores the role of academic institutions in relation to local communities and governments to bridge divides, promote understanding and present solutions to challenging problems. Through Professor De La Peña's work in participatory research and civic engagement he was able to inject new approaches to collaborative work and articulate how this community garden supports larger efforts for a more sustainable and equitable city

Sincerely,



Raymond Costantino, MCRP  
Park Planning and Development Services Manager