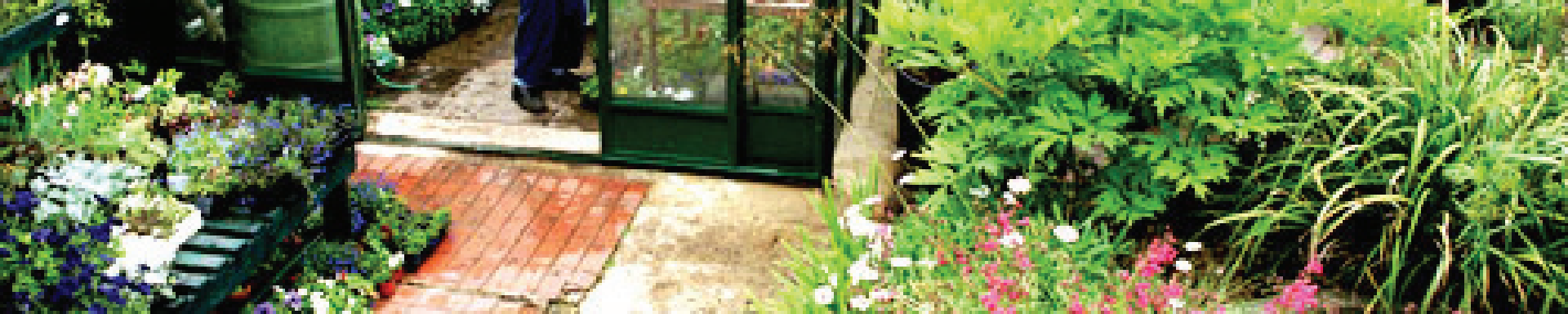




CAMDEN GARDEN CENTER:
AN URBAN NURSERY AS A BUSINESS MODEL
FOR COMMUNITY REBUILDING

4.213 URBAN NATURE AND CITY DESIGN
PROFESSOR ANNE WHISTON SPIRN

JASMINE KWAK



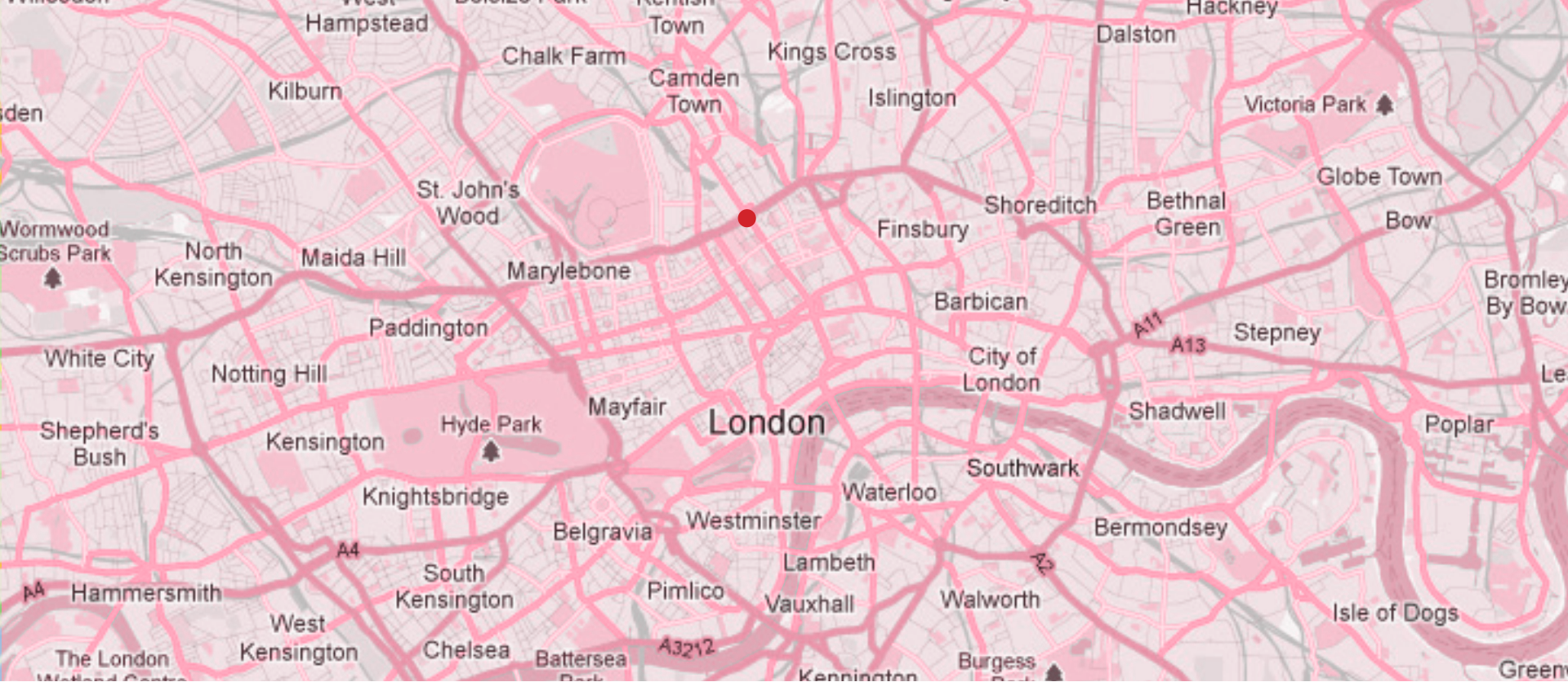
ABSTRACT

THE STRATEGIES BETWEEN TOP DOWN AND BOTTOM UP APPROACHES IN URBAN RENEWAL CASES ARE DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT. BEING AN OUTSIDER IT IS APPARENT THAT THE GOALS OF THE TWO PARTIES ALIGN: SETTING A SUSTAINABLE GROUND IN TERMS OF BOTH PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ASPECT TO PROTECT THE FUTURE OF OUR HABITATS. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF ITS WIDE ENOUGH DIFFERENCE IN ITS STRATEGY, WE EXPERIENCE CASES IN WHICH WE SEE THE FRUSTRATION IN BOTTOM UP IMPLEMENTERS SUCH AS SKIP FOR THE CITY'S LACK OF HELPING HAND AND TOP DOWN IMPLEMENTERS IN CITY MUNICIPALITIES WHO ARE VERY SLOW, IF AT ALL, IN ACCEPTING THE REALITY OF VACANT LOTS AND BURIED FLOOD PLAINS. **WHAT CAN BE THE FACTOR THAT BRINGS TWO PARTIES TOGETHER?**

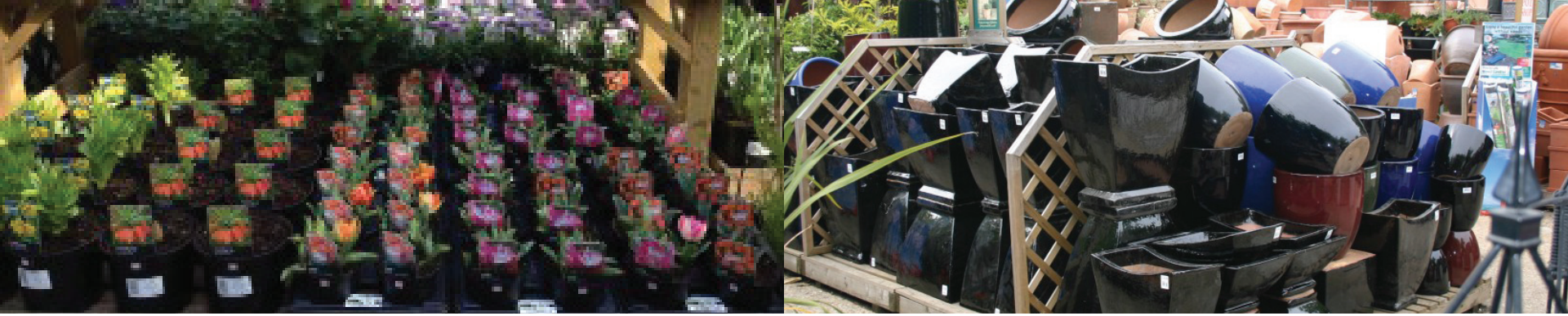
THIS RESEARCH WILL LOOK TO **CAMDEN GARDEN CENTRE** IN NORTH LONDON AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL CASE STUDY THAT ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE THIS GAP. THIS RESEARCH WILL EXAMINE HOW EDUCATION FOCUSED ORGANIZATION CAN BE USED AS A WAY TO PROVIDE **ECONOMICAL BENEFITS FOR THE SOCIETY** AND LAY OUT ITS TRANSFERABLE STRATEGIES, BOTH EDUCATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL METHODS, THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN OTHER PLACES, SPECIFICALLY IN CITY OF PHILADELPHIA.

CAMDEN GARDEN CENTRE IS A PLACE FOUND IN 1983 BY A GROUP CALLED SOUTHERN TASK EDUCATIONAL TRUST. RECENTLY RENAMED AS CAMDEN GARDEN CENTRE CHARITABLE TRUST, THIS GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS CREATED A BUSINESS THAT IS OWNED BY A CHARITY RATHER THAN INDIVIDUALS. ITS GOAL WAS TO PROVIDE VOCATIONAL TRAINING, THROUGH THE MEANS OF GARDENING AND LANDSCAPING, TO THOSE WHO WERE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN JOB MARKETS. THEY HAVE A VERY SPECIFIC "TRAINING SCHEME" THAT ATTEMPTS TO PROVIDE THESE TRAINEES WITH SPECIFIC GUIDANCE THAT WILL ENABLE THEM TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN REAL LIFE JOBS.

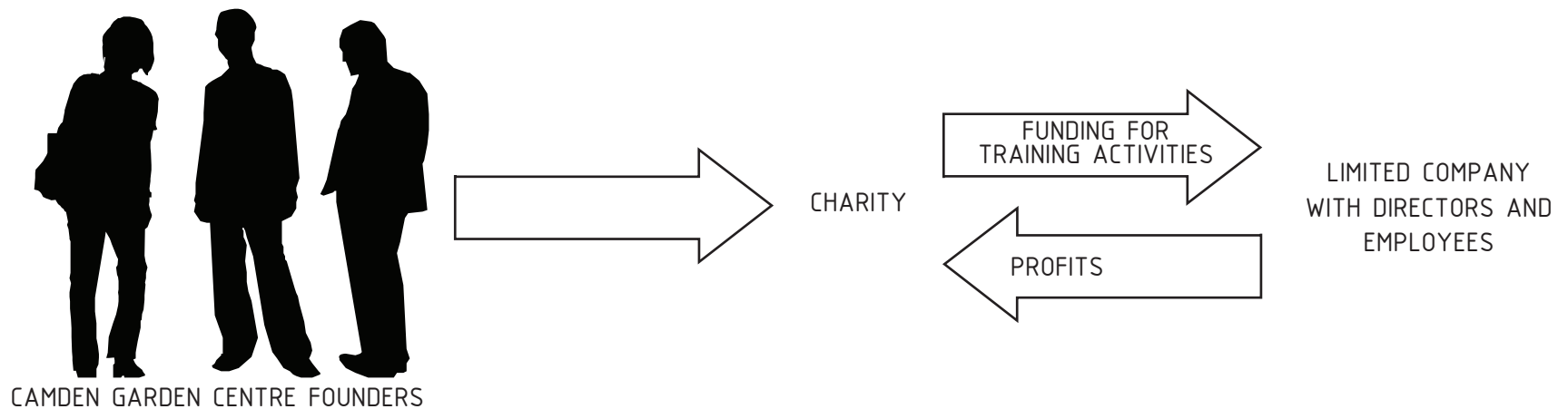
THIS RESEARCH WILL ALSO BREAK DOWN THE TRAINING SCHEME THAT CAMDEN GARDEN CENTRE HAS, HOW IT CAN BE REPLICATED AND IMPLEMENTED, WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF THIS TRAINING SCHEME AND WILL ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE ANY IMPROVEMENT THAT CAN BE ADDED TO THIS MODEL.



Located in North London in a city called Camden, Camden Garden Centre is a for-profit nursery that is serving its neighbors with their horticultural needs. However, Camden Garden Centre is not like any other nursery one finds. The mission of their business is the following: "To educate and train young people and adults over the statutory school leaving age in work and life skills likely to enable them subsequently to find satisfactory employment both by arranging periods of work experience and otherwise and by such means also to relieve poverty and improve social welfare and conditions of life among such people."



ORGANIZATION OF THE BUSINESS



Established in 1983, Camden Garden Centre was organized by a group of local business people who at the time were concerned about the level of unemployment in the neighborhood. This group of founders happen to be interested in garden and therefore took on a nursery as the basis of the business model. What they setup was a charity in the name of "Southern Task Educational Trust." They were to be a shareholder of a limited company with directors and employees that generates profits then will be donated back to the charity. Then the charity can fund for the training activities for this business model. This feedback loop business model gave the benefit of none of the directors being liable financially.



CHALLENGES

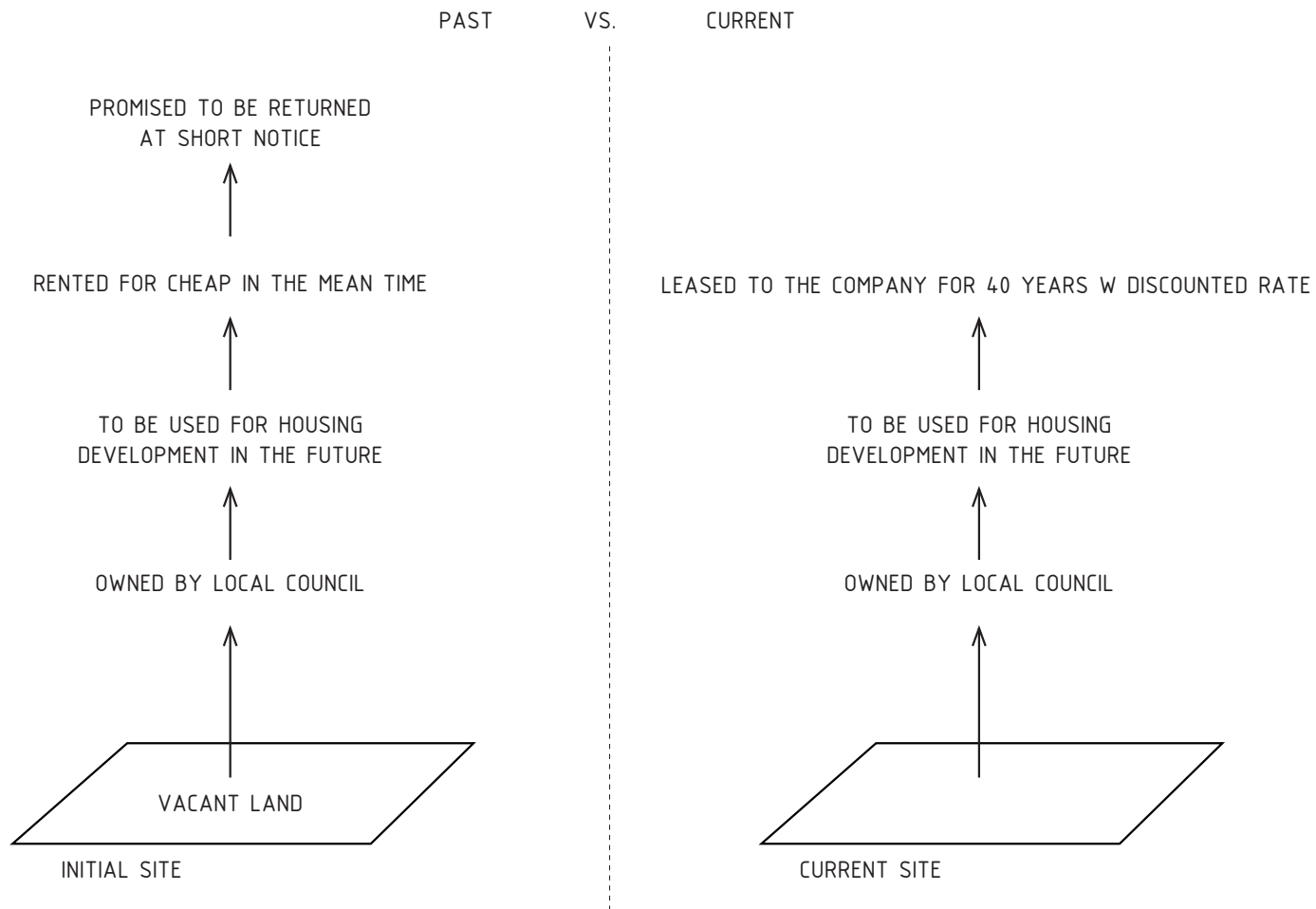
From this point on, this research will address the challenges that Camden Garden Centre went through from its start in 1983 and how they went about solving these challenges. When the organization started, the challenges that it faced were the following:

1. FINDING A *SITE* THAT WOULD ENABLE A SOLID BUSINESS TO GROW
2. *STAFFING* ADEQUATELY WITH PROFESSIONAL STAFF
BUT AT THE SAME TIME BE ABLE TO TAKE ON INEXPERIENCE AND VULNERABLE TRAINEES
3. FINDING *FUNDING* - CONVINCING SUPPLIERS AND BANKS THAT THE BUSINESS IS SUSTAINABLE = ESTABLISHING A GOOD BUSINESS PLAN

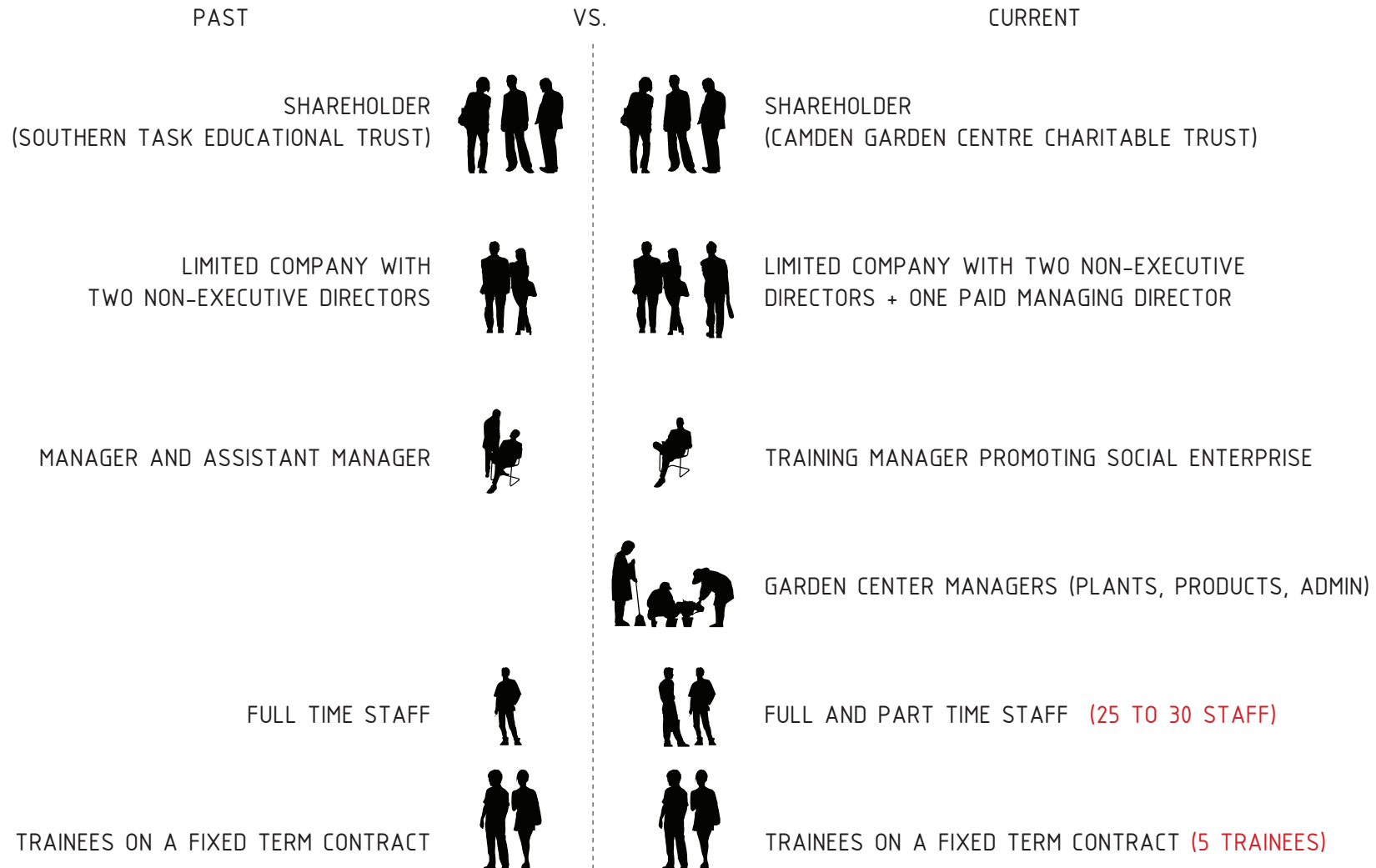
CHALLENGE 1: FINDING A SITE

Solution: Camden Garcen Centre acquired a vacant land that were owned by the local council. This vacant land was to be used for housing development in the future so the lease was to be temporary and low cost. Local council leased the plot for a low price under the condition that it will be returned at a short notice.

Recently, when the local council wanted the initial land back for development, Camden Garden Centre had to find another land to move to. The local council had another vacant land that could be leased for next 40 years. Because the business has been provedn to be profitable, the local council was willing to lease out the site to Camden Garden Centre for a low price.



CHALLENGE 2: STAFFING FOR TRAINING



CHALLENGE 3: FINDING THE FUNDING

INITIAL FUNDING:

FOUNDERS GOT A CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION, CALLED WELLCOME TRUST OR NOW CALLED GLAXO SMITH KLINE) TO GUARANTEE A LOAN (OBTAINED CHEAP MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT THROUGH GOODWILL USING THIS LOAN)

INITIAL
(1983)

BUSINESS GOAL: SELF SUSTAINABILITY

- THEY ARE NOT RELIANT ON FINDING CHARITIES THAT CAN PROVIDE FUNDING
- MAINTAIN A REAL BUSINESS THAT THE TRAINERS CAN LEARN FROM

1989

£850,000 TURNOVER

SOME TRAINEES TOOK OVER THE BUSINESS AFTER THE ORIGINAL MANAGERS LEFT
BUSINESS NEARLY FAILS

THE NEW SITE IS OBTAINED = REQUIRES HIGHER TURNOVER

NEEDS MORE BUSINESS EXPERIENCE = HIRED GARDEN CENTER MANAGER

NOW

£1.5 MILLION TURNOVER

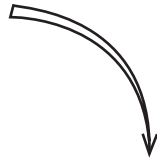
CGC'S TRAINING SCHEME

Camden Garden Center has a very unique and interesting method of training their employees in hope of improving their communities. This part of the research will delve into how the program is set up, how they are run, and also how they are funded.



TRAINEES

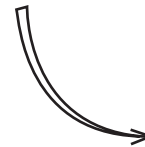
SO FAR OVER
300 OF THEM



WHO ARE THEY?

THEY ARE PEOPLE WITH:

- MILD LEARNING DISABILITIES
- RECOVERING FROM SUBSTANCE OR ALCOHOL ABUSE
- RECOVERING FROM MENTAL BREAKDOWN
- HOMELESS CAUGHT IN NO JOB OR HOME
- CRIMINAL REOFFENDING



WHAT DO THEY DO?

- FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT
- 2 YEAR TRAINING
- EARN NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE
- EARN NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) AND QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework; replaces NVQ) IN AREAS INCLUDING:
 - RETAIL AND CUSTOMER CARE
 - HORTICULTURAL
 - FORKLIFT TRUCK OPERATOR LICENSE
 - CAR DRIVING LICENSE
 - BRICKLAYING
 - IT
 - PESTICIDE SPRAYING
 - INLITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS
 - FIRST AID
- WORK IN GARDEN SERVICES DIVISION



FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT
2 YEAR TRAINING
EARN NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

cost of Training Scheme
£18,500 = \$29,500

TRAINING

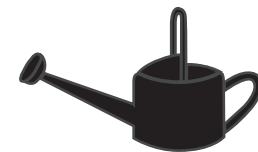
REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

0 YEARS

2 YEARS

INTERVIEW

- WORK IN GARDEN SERVICES DIVISION
- EARN NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) AND QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework; replaces NVQ) IN AREAS INCLUDING:
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 - FIRST AID



- WORK TRIAL PLACEMENT WITH POTENTIAL FUTURE EMPLOYER OF THEIR CHOICE

CGC CONTINUES TO THEIR WAGE



CURRENT STATUS:

£1.5 MILLION TURNOVER
25-30 STAFF
5 TRAINEES

DESPITE ITS SUCCESS OVER THE YEARS, IN THE LAST 4 YEARS, BUSINESS HAS BEEN TOUGH. THE NEW SITE REQUIRES GREAT BUSINESS PROFIT AND THEY HAVE TAKEN ON MORE TRAINEES.

HAVE RECEIVED EXTERNAL FUNDING A FEW YEARS AGO FROM ESMEE FAIRBAIRN FOUNDATION BUT NOW THE FUNDING IS RUNNING OUT!

TRAINEE SPONSORSHIP

"Camden Garden Centre's role in providing vocational training and employment to people who find themselves excluded from the labour market is even more important in straightened times. Camden Garden Centre Charitable Trust and Camden Garden Centre very much want to be able to continue to develop the trainee scheme and the outreach work. To do this, Camden Garden Centre Charitable Trust is seeking business or individual partners who are prepared to consider sponsoring a named trainee at Camden Garden Centre or contributing to other aspects of the Trainee Scheme as might suit them. A full-time trainee position costs £18,500 p.a. (\$29,500)"

CONCLUSION

In a book titled, Design And Landscape For People: New Approaches To Renewal, Cumberland and Musgrave lays out what they think is the key elements to creating urban landscape renewal for communities. This provides us with a basis in which we can start to evaluate the organization's successfulness.

Participation

- *New participatory and network models*
- *Relying on rigorous methodologies; low-cost tools, sophisticated communication and dissemination strategies, and radical thinking*
- *Critical value of an independent catalyst or facilitation organization which could initiate a public debate about the changes in civic society and which could bring the tools to enable different communities and stakeholders to participate within this debate*
- *Notion about who makes decisions for whom, and also who has the right to participate*

Openness

- *Recognition of regeneration as a continuous process of change*
- *"The idea of the unfinished" vs. "Finishedness"*
- *Finishedness has no space left for appropriation by the community. The community cannot grow through adaptive inhabitation of the town; and if change in the wider context threatened the predetermined vision of the future embedded within the design, there are no ways that the space (physical and social) can adapt in response.*
- *Space open for opportunity*
- *Openness should allow for both irrationality in the process and community appropriation of the spaces as development takes place.*

What Camden Garden Centre have done remarkably is the openness for regeneration and change throughout the years. They were able to spring back even after a financial difficulties, and they have been flexible enough to relocate their site in an unplanned manner. What is applaudable is how they have so far kept up financially sustainable and not to rely on outside funding. Most of their expenses have been covered simply by the profits from the nursery. What could be learned from CGC is this for-profit business model that is under the branch of a charity with the intention of social role in community. In order for someone to make changes in society, there needs to be a level of financial sustainability so that it is not reliant on the hands of others to support their mission. Camden Garden Centre is an exemplary study case for that. Their success over such a long period of time serves to prove that this is a model that could be replicated in other communities. The missions and the small techniques in which this happens can vary-- however, the idea of financial sustainability in order to maintain a mission in society is something that should be recognized by not only small bottom up organizations but also by the top down municipalities so that these kinds of methods are supported and recommended in other communities.

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