

Food, Politics, and Aesthetics: Communities of Sense in Sacramento Urban Gardens

By

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ABSTRACT

Diverse groups of people view urban agriculture as the solution to many socio-ecological problems. However, urban agriculture is often used as an umbrella term for a diverse set of activities from urban commercial farming to community gardening. As official city planning efforts increasingly formalize community gardens as official components of urban public space, there is a need for an analysis of the power dynamics at play in the transformation of informal gardening spaces. This paper presents a case study on community gardens in Sacramento to explore how different community groups and decision-makers articulate and put into practice definitions and meanings of community gardening. The findings demonstrate that understandings of ‘community’ and ‘garden’ are not fixed, but are negotiated through relations of power, allocation of resources, and structures of decision-making. In resisting and negotiating the formalization of an unofficial community garden, gardeners engage in a politics that draws upon the aesthetic practices of food production, disrupting and challenging the official visions of acceptable urban agriculture practices.

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BACKGROUND

Last year spring came quickly in the rich agricultural valley of Sacramento, so it was no surprise that on a cool and sunny February morning, people were already hard at work in the International Garden of Many Colors. As I entered the garden for the first time, I was greeted by an elderly woman wearing brightly a colored babushka; beckoning me towards a young tree growing on the inside of her garden fence, she crushed bay leaves in her palm for me to smell, pressing more of leaves into my hands for me to take home. Looking around in the underutilized public open space beneath giant electrical towers, winter crops such as cabbage, potatoes, fava beans, and wheat were growing well, and bright orange calendula flowers spilled out into the paths. As I spent the season coming back every week, by early May the buzz of the power lines above was matched by the busy bees below; the gladiolas, roses, and irises started to bloom, alongside growing tomato forests, dense raspberry bushes, and meandering squashes.

Started in the early 1990s by mostly Russian, Ukrainian, and Mexican immigrants, this informal community garden lies just north of the American River running through the heart of Sacramento. Many gardeners grow fruits and vegetables from home countries not easily found in typical American grocery stores, like black currants, sorrel, and fresh garbanzo beans. Gardeners not only grow much of their own food, but also medicinal herbs like artemisia, yarrow, chicory, greater celandine, plantain, and comfrey. The meandering and maze-like garden supports thirty-five to forty families and covers three and quarter acres.

Located adjacent to an affordable housing apartment complex, the garden and its gardeners reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity the city is known for, and the garden supplies fresh produce for all kinds of treasured food traditions, from borscht to salsa. However, this garden is a place of struggle as much as success, an incredible asset to some and a worrisome

liability to others, and an unsettled question mark in the context of an urban agriculture revolution happening in Sacramento.

This year spring is marked by the sound of earthmovers and dump trucks. For a third of the gardeners, pulling out fences and uprooting perennials has replaced the winter harvests and spring plantings. The garden is being partially demolished and the city is moving forward with the construction of an official community garden right next to the existing informal one. For many of the remaining gardeners, who tentatively go about clearing brush and repairing homemade fences, they still wonder if they will be allowed to stay. Like other community gardens around the U.S. and elsewhere, the International Garden of Many Colors (IGMC) is a site where differing visions of urban food production and public open space are up for debate. The land is legally owned by the city, and the garden partially sits within a major utility easement. Though gardeners know they do not technically own the land they cultivate, they nevertheless feel a sense of ownership through the effort they have put in and continue to devote to the beauty and productivity of the land.

In 2012, citing Homeland Security regulations, the local and regional utility companies put forward plans to build an access road and clear areas underneath the towers. When the original plan was shown to cut right down the middle of the garden, effectively destroying the IGMC, gardeners organized a protest at City Hall to resist the destruction of a critical place of food production for their families. With support from the affordable housing organization's community organizing program, gardeners advocated for an alternative route to keep the garden intact. In 2015, after several years of resident community organizing and meetings with the city and the local council member in the district, the struggle shifted into a new phase, with a proposal by the Sacramento Parks and Recreation Department to build an official community

garden right next to the existing garden. Gardeners organized again to advocate for displaced gardeners to have priority in the new garden, to which the city eventually agreed. However, there has been no formal guarantee that the remaining gardeners will be allowed to stay, and inconsistent statements from city officials only feed the gardeners' feelings of distrust.

As the interest in urban agriculture has grown over the past several years, more stakeholders have become interested in the history, struggle, and future of the International Garden of Many Colors and what it represents, including myself. In the course of my conversations with organizers, residents, resident gardeners, and city officials, I began to question what was meant by “community garden,” and the opportunities available to gardeners—or any resident in Sacramento interested in urban agriculture planning—to engage with city officials at the level of design and vision of public amenities devoted to, in some shape or form, growing food. Some gardeners were excited about the official proposal, given the resources that come with a formal garden, like guaranteed water, free seeds, and shared tools. Others were wary, wondering whether or not the new garden would meet their needs in terms of space, design, and autonomy; some worried the new garden might become an excuse to get rid of the old garden entirely. At the same time, gardeners have been through their own internal struggles to effectively organize themselves and become a united community.

Construction on the new city community garden began March 1, 2016. During the build-out, gardeners in the IGMG were requested by the city to remove all garden materials from underneath the towers. As of late May 2016, construction is complete and gardeners await a move-in date. But it is unclear whether or not the remaining two-thirds of the gardeners will be allowed to stay in what remains of the IGMG. The local city council member has been supportive of the garden, but the Parks and Recreation Department has said they would like to

remove all gardeners from the space within the next three years. As of late-May, the new Niños Community Garden was not open to the public, though spring/summer plantings are already underway in the IGMC.

INTRODUCTION

Given the diverse forms of contemporary urban agriculture, why is it important to study community gardens? From my perspective as a human geographer, community gardens often serve as entry points into the urban food system for garden users and non-users alike. Similar to other components of the built landscape, they bridge past, present, and future time-spaces at micro and meso scales; gardening is often a future-oriented project, mainly informed by past experiences, and demanding of present attention. Community gardens also represent the material nexus of cultural and ecological knowledge. From providing fresh produce to pollinator habitats, community gardens are multi-functional and multi-beneficial, meeting diverse needs and desires at the same time in complex ways that are unmet by other types of open space. Finally, community gardens complicate the logics and dynamics of capitalism, and demand critical reflection on assemblages of power and resources at multiple scales.

In the midst of diverse claims about the value of local food and increased urban agriculture-related activities within the city, one of Sacramento's oldest independent, low-income, and immigrant-run urban gardens is under threat of demolition and "replacement" by an official city community garden. As is detailed throughout this research, a material and conceptual transformation is actively taking place at the IGMC; one model of gardening in the city is being replaced by another. Given this dynamic, I address two overarching questions: How are differing understandings of community gardening enacted upon the physical, cultural, and

political landscape, and to what ends? How does community garden development, particularly official formalization, account for hyperlocal configurations of urban agriculture?

Urban agriculture is increasingly considered in the effort to find solutions for the myriad of challenges facing urban communities in the U.S. and elsewhere; a short review of the literature reveals a long list of benefits of urban agriculture, including increased food security, development of social cohesion, improved nutrition and health outcomes, increased land values, creation of safe places, blight reduction, increase in social capital, cross-cultural integration, job creation, and opportunities for youth (Carney et al., 2012; Firth, Maye, & Pearson, 2011; Hale et al., 2011; Holland, 2004; Surls et al., 2014; Voicu & Been, 2008).

However, urban agriculture is often used as an umbrella term for a diverse set of activities, ranging from urban commercial farming to community gardening. As traditional planning arenas expand to include new forms of urban agriculture, there is a need for clearer thinking about definitions and typologies of urban agriculture in relation to goals at policy-making and planning levels (Napawan, 2014). As urban agriculture policy becomes part of larger efforts to achieve sustainability and equity in cities, there is a need to understand how diverse definitions and meanings are articulated in and through relations of power, allocation of resources, and structures of decision-making.

The recent conflict surrounding the future of the IGMCC provides a timely moment to explore and compare the narratives and practices of community gardening in unofficial and official community gardens in Sacramento to better understand the power dynamics at play in realizing a vision of urban agriculture in the city. My inquiry has been guided by several methodological questions. First, how do different actors understand and practice urban agriculture/community gardening, both materially and discursively, and for what purposes? In

particular, how does a group of primarily immigrant gardeners understand and practice ‘unofficial’ community gardening? Finally, how does the city understand and enable a state-sponsored and supported practice of community gardening?

Through this study, I hope to demonstrate that unquestioned normative assumptions regarding community gardens can at times gloss over divergent ideas and practices, and as such, seemingly benevolent solutions contain more complex and often disempowering maneuvers of governance and control. In exploring these questions at a moment of conflict and transformation, this research sheds light on how official urban agriculture planning, including the design of community gardening projects, is fraught with tensions about what constitutes the appropriate form of urban agriculture in public spaces, and how meanings of “community” and “garden” influence physical form and socio-cultural management of space.

Investigating and revealing the politics of urban gardening also sheds light on the connection between practices of place-making and democracy. The tensions point to challenges in realizing democratic practices in the city, especially as questions of food, health, and socio-ecological resilience increasingly (though perhaps unevenly) figure into official planning strategies. As urban agriculture becomes increasingly popular in Sacramento and across the U.S., it is critical that the many different histories and ways of designing and doing urban agriculture are brought into public discussion and decision-making processes for effective and equitable policy and planning.

METHODS

This research is anchored in critical social science approaches that consider the production of knowledge a social activity, and acknowledge the interplay between social

construction and material reality (Sayer, 1992). I draw from Haraway's vision of situated knowledges and the assertion that "we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (1988). Thus, my findings represent a particular reflection on what has happened, is happening, and the importance of what might happen at the International Garden of Many Colors.

The findings and arguments in this paper are the product of a combination of ethnographic observations, participatory design workshops, interviews, and case study analysis. My choice to use several interpretive and participatory approaches reflects the complexity of studying material and discursive practices that occur in spaces and times of negotiation and conflict; ways of being in the world and ways of knowing or speaking about the world are not always in perfect alignment, especially when questions of normative behavior and access to resources are at stake.

The initial exploratory fieldwork for this project was done during the spring of 2015 while I was an intern with the affordable housing organization that operates the apartment complex next to the unofficial garden, where the majority of the gardeners live. I spent two days a week for ten weeks on-site, getting to know the history of the garden, meeting the current gardeners, attending garden committee meetings, and dealing with garden issues. Since I started in April, I was able to witness many gardeners preparing and working in their spring and summer gardens. I was also granted access to the garden's small "archive" of documents, including old meeting notes, garden notices, garden rules, and posters from old protests housed at the affordable housing offices.

During the Fall of 2015, I attended and participated in seven on-site gardener meetings, three of which were participatory design workshops conducted by UC Davis landscape architecture students as part of a senior design studio class. Their participatory activities designed to get feedback from gardeners on the existing and proposed garden also became part of my data. I conducted semi-structured interviews with three individuals who have plots in the unofficial community garden and are active in the garden committee coordinated by the affordable housing organization. Finally, my data on the IGMC also includes the numerous informal conversations I had with gardeners during meetings, workshops, clean up days, and other site visits to the garden, which were recorded regularly in field notes on site and afterwards.

Outside of the International Garden of Many Colors, in fall 2015 I conducted two semi-structured interviews with city officials at differing levels of community garden oversight in the City Parks and Recreation Department. I examined official city documents outlining and describing the community garden program, as well as newspaper and utility company newsletter articles detailing the existing unofficial garden, the proposed relocation, and proposed official garden.

Additionally, I attended two community workdays at an official city community garden (Fremont Community Garden) in the central core of Sacramento to conduct participation observation, which included brief informal conversations with approximately fifteen gardeners, some of whom attended both workdays. I conducted semi-structured interviews with two individuals who have plots in city community gardens, one of whom has a plot in the garden I observed; the other has a plot in a different garden also in the central core of the city (Southside Community Garden). Both individuals I interviewed had served in leadership roles at their

garden in some capacity; one of the gardeners is also involved in the local coalition promoting urban agriculture, whose activism and organizing greatly contributed to the adoption of the recent urban agriculture ordinance.

I used an interpretive approach to analyze the data, drawing on grounded theory as well as phenomenological methods to understand how people define and conduct their gardening practices (Creswell, 2007). Myself being the primary analytical tool, my academic, theoretical training, and lived experiences informed the way I interpreted my data. Having grown up with a productive food garden as a child, and having continued to grow much of my own fresh produce in a private neighborhood community garden in Davis, my hands-on experience helped me build rapport with expert resident gardeners, interpret what I perceived to be happening, and understand how people placed value on the different aspects of their garden. The value of my own gardening experience was doubly evident to me in my interactions with different members of the affordable housing organization who did not have knowledge of food plants or production.

The type of data gathered in this research also reflects certain personal reflections and limitations on my ability to communicate with gardeners with whom I did not share a language, and the lengthy process of trust-building across cultures that I did not feel comfortable rushing into. Partly informed by Charles Briggs' work on interviews as 'communicative events,' I sought to contextualize my conversations and interactions as moments of shared meaning-making and to be aware of moments of resistance, silence, and 'talking back' (1986). Being that many of the gardeners at the IGMC are immigrants who primarily speak Russian or Ukrainian, garden meetings and workshops were conducted in English with Russian translation performed by affordable housing staff. At times I translated for Spanish-speaking gardeners during garden meetings, as did other affordable housing staff.

As a non-Russian/Ukrainian young woman and researcher with little familiarity with Russian and Ukrainian culture and social norms, I felt it was more appropriate and less intrusive of people's privacy to conduct observations and conversations in group settings. Given the multiple roles I played and was perceived to play—intern, graduate student researcher, volunteer, garden supporter—I was granted access to spaces and information that sometimes exposed internal contradictions and power struggles, not all of which appear in this project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is informed by multiple disciplines, including geography, political ecology, urban planning and design, community development, sociology, and anthropology. The first part of this section outlines the broader literature on urban agriculture, providing definitions and documenting community gardens research that focuses on material, concrete, and tangible aspects of gardening. The second part details ongoing debates within urban agriculture and community gardens research, primarily focused on garden discourse, politics, and subjectivities.

Urban agriculture: histories and materialities

An international and historical look at urban agriculture establishes that agriculture has not always been exclusively a rural practice, and that the current form of modernity could benefit from a more integrated socio-ecological systems approach (Barthel & Isendahl, 2013). One of the most well-known international case studies for the potential of urban agriculture is Cuba, where many different farm and garden types exist at multiple scales and play a significant role in providing food security for the island (Altieri et al., 1999). A more recent evaluation of the potential for urban agriculture in the developing world looked at 15 countries across the globe, finding that anywhere between 10-70% of urban households are involved in agriculture,

suggesting a diversity of urban food production systems. However, it is unclear how great a role urban agriculture plays for income generation and/or food security, highlighting the need for more empirical research amongst poor urban populations (Zezza & Tasciotti, 2010). For U.S.-focused urban agriculture researchers, even amidst the global literature on urban agriculture there are important lessons to be learned regarding the long-standing importance of home gardens within the context of small-scale agricultural production (Niñez, 1987).

Attempts to define urban agriculture expose debates about the differences and similarities between agriculture, farming, and gardening. Vitiello and Nairn, for example, challenge the distinction between community gardening as an informal “not-for-sale” activity and farming as a formal “income-generating” one:

a fuller understanding of the activities of both community gardeners and urban farmers suggests that these distinctions are both inaccurate and not especially useful for understanding either gardeners’ or farmers’ impacts on urban food economies and community food security. (2009, p. 58)

Allowing for greater flexibility and acknowledging the ongoing meaning-making that occurs in place-making projects, I use the term urban agriculture to refer to all types of growing food in cities. Laura Lawson has defined ‘community garden’ as “a neighborhood garden in which individuals have their own plots, yet share in the garden’s overall management,” echoed by the American Community Garden Association which offers the definition of “any piece of land gardened by a group of people” (as cited in Gittleman, Jordan, & Brelsford, 2012). The more general term ‘urban garden’ often includes “school gardens, relief gardens, children’s gardens, entrepreneurial job-training gardens, horticultural therapy gardens, company gardens, demonstration gardens, and more” (Gittleman et al., 2012). In order to allow space, as it were, for various understandings and practices of gardening and community, I use both community

gardening and urban gardening to refer to land voluntarily cultivated by groups of people in cities or at the edge of cities.

The history of American community gardening, which includes subsistence gardens, war and relief gardens, and “gardening for community” spaces, reinforces the notion that urban gardens have played multiple roles in cities (Lawson, 2005). The cyclical nature of community gardening efforts is also linked to economic downturns and changing social norms, which signals the ongoing cultural work that occurs to determine the value and material expression of agriculture in urban society. The recent wave of community gardening, starting in the 1970s, has focused on community building and community development, usually downplaying food production benefits while uplifting social benefits (Adam, 2011). However, as social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological conditions have shifted over the last 40 years, the current moment of expansion and growth in community gardening has continued to be explored in relation to contemporary concerns and realities, particularly issues around ecological sustainability, environmental justice, and food security (Holland, 2004; Milbourne, 2012; Smith, Greene, & Silbernagel, 2013).

Beyond the social dimensions addressed above, another subset of community gardens research focuses much more explicitly on the material aspects of gardening, such as productivity, impact to household budgets, changes in vegetable intake (Carney et al., 2012), quantitative and qualitative measures of health and wellness impacts (Blair, Giesecke, & Sherman, 1991; Hale et al., 2011; Twiss et al., 2003), and community cohesion and social capital (Firth et al., 2011). As increasing attention is being given to lack of healthy food access and the resulting health and nutrition issues in urban areas, researchers have begun to explore the impact of urban agriculture in regards to the agricultural productivity of urban gardens. Community gardens in Philadelphia,

for example, were documented to have produced the equivalent of just under \$2 million dollars worth of produce in the late 1980s (Blair, Giesecke, & Sherman, 1991); a comprehensive follow-up study done in 2008 calculated that Philadelphia's community and squatter gardens produced \$4.9 million dollars worth of summer vegetables (Vitiello & Nairn, 2009).

However, the potential tangible and intangible benefits of gardens, particularly community gardens, often must compete with other social and economic processes that valorize space. Particularly from planning perspectives but also at times amongst gardeners themselves, many gardens are seen as temporary uses of vacant land and gardeners often struggle to maintain use and access when real estate pressures and local planning agencies collaborate on redevelopment projects (Drake & Lawson, 2014).

Urban agriculture debates

Another key sphere of research focuses on discourse, power, cultural meaning, and economic and political aspects of urban agriculture and community gardening. This research ranges from explaining locally informed dynamics to critical engagements with broader structures and flows of resources and power.

Ghose & Pettygrove (2014) use social network theory to show how those involved in urban agriculture in the form of community gardening engage in 'scaled networks constituted by strong and weak ties' in order to gain access to resources and information within a neoliberal context. They argue that less powerful actors often must conform to dominant interests. Reynolds (2014) emphasizes the need to look critically at the reproduction of unjust systems, revealing how urban agriculture efforts can perpetuate race and class based disparities in terms of access to financial support, publicly owned land, and public services. Knigge frames community

gardens within geographies of care and asserts that state restructuring devolves responsibility for social welfare and physical care of vacant properties to local organizations (2009).

Even as the trajectory of community gardening has moved into a more explicit community-building approach, questions still remain about what ‘community’ means and to whom. Using the example of urban agriculture projects in Detroit, Morgan points out there exist “multifunctional values associated with these new foodscapes” and draws a distinction between ‘community vision’ and ‘corporate vision’ (2015). As Kurtz demonstrates, “at the intersection of notions of community and garden are the issues of enclosure, inclusion and exclusion” (2001, p. 656). Moreover, Ernwein argues, the “spatial anchoring and reach of gardens are closely tied to a specific concept of public and community that is negotiated between actors through a politics of scale” (2014, p. 80). There exists a strong link between the spatial framing and social framing of gardening projects, and these framings help (re)produce particular notions of community.

The meaning and expression of community in urban agriculture projects continues to be relevant, especially as cities develop official planning and policy strategies to incorporate community input and promote community-level partnerships. As Firth et al. argue that “it is not always clear whether community gardens are run for the community, by the community, or that they just happen to be located in certain communities” (2011, p. 557). Within the sphere of planning and design, Hou demonstrates the value of informal social processes in community gardening development, highlighting the capacity of self-organizing leadership to be flexible, innovative, and generate long-standing support for and community ownership of gardens. However, he highlights the tendency of city planning, as a normative practice, to focus on “formal mechanisms at the expense of informal social processes and reciprocity” (2014).

As urban gardening projects and practices continue to find their legitimation both within and outside of traditional political arenas, there is an emerging debate on radical, critical, and political gardening. According to Certomà and Tornaghi, political urban gardening entails “common activity changing the matter and space of daily life in real places” (2015). In community gardens research, there is a strong debate about the possibility of urban agriculture projects to simply reproduce neoliberal subjectivities and politics, or to provide avenues of resistance and/or radical political alternatives. However, as many of these scholars argue, the political processes, identities, and communities articulated in and through urban agriculture projects are far from linear or straightforward, and often hold competing or contradictory notions and practices in tandem.

Pudup (2008) argues that ‘organized garden projects’ are extensions of neoliberal logic, promoting self-sufficiency and personal responsibility in the face of the retreat of social services and safety nets administered by government entities. Bradley & Galt (2014) see urban agriculture as a potential for radical critique of the globalized capitalist food system, at times a self-reflexive form of resistance along the path to food justice. Drawing upon Polanyi’s idea of the “double movement,” McClintock (2014) argues that “urban agriculture...may exemplify both a form of actually existing neoliberalism and a simultaneous radical counter-movement arising in dialectical tension...indeed, contradictory processes of capitalism both create opportunities for urban agriculture and impose obstacles to its expansion.” Others also frame the urban agriculture movement as containing both radical and neoliberal seeds (Galt, Gray, & Hurley, 2014).

In grappling with the dynamics of the neoliberal governance patterns and capitalism, there is a need to hold theoretical space for multiple logics and practices, which sometime simultaneously compete, co-opt, dominate, resist, and submit. As urban agriculture once again

becomes part of the city formally and informally, I apply a combination of material and discursive lenses to questions of the politics of urban gardening. The ongoing production of what is materially and discursively a “garden” makes it difficult the empirically ‘fix’ analyses of what constitutes neoliberal governmentality and/or radical anti-capitalist resistance. By applying multiple theoretical frameworks that address embodied practice as well as conceptualization of practice, I attempt to build an understanding of urban gardening that acknowledges the social production of space (Soja, 1980).

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Community is not an object, but a dynamic process. The concept of community is linked to the concept of nature, especially in regards to community gardening. People’s relationships to ecological processes and to each other are both critical elements of what constitutes ‘community’ and ‘garden.’ Broader social and political processes also inform what takes place in and around community gardens, including access to land and resources. The planning and implementation of community gardens on public lands in particular often require rules and structures of authority. In this section I elaborate a theoretical framework that combines first world urban political ecology, politics of aesthetics, and notions of power and control. I draw out the concepts of community, nature, property, governance, and aesthetics to frame and guide my analysis.

Urban political ecology & community

Community gardens are sites and products of everyday socio-environmental practices in the city; they exist within a web of power relations that reflect broader cultural and economic processes and place-making practices. Scholars from diverse disciplines have long pointed to the complex relationship between people, place, and power, particularly within community

development literature. As evidenced by the critique of urban gardening as a technique of neoliberal politics, it is important to note that “the very notion of community may be self-limiting as a revolutionary force because it is defined by (and acquires emotional valence from) its subordination to the state” (Creed, 2006, p. 8). In confronting commonsense notions and unexamined assumptions, Creed argues “against the fetishization of community...the normative presumption of community as positive... [and] the objectification of communities.” Instead, he calls for inquiry into the making and unmaking of communities, analysis of ‘progressive’ as well as essentialist projects, and acknowledgement of the diverse regimes of knowledge that shape and form a part of communities (2006, pp. 10–11).

However, much of the community development literature does not explicitly focus on or theorize the ecological aspects of community and/or environmental practices within and amongst groups. There are many important questions to explore in community gardens research and scholars engage with theory from a wide range of disciplines, including geography, city planning, landscape architecture, environmental psychology, urban ecology (Francis, 1987; Goldberg, 2013; Hale et al., 2011; Lawson, 2005; Okvat & Zautra, 2011). However, political ecologists often position themselves and their work within academic and nonacademic debate in such a way that calls attention to the “winners and losers” of local and global economic, social, and ecological processes, highlighting injustices and identifying alternatives (Robbins, 2012b). Political ecology is an evolving academic community and discipline that often acknowledges and includes nonacademic actors, organizations, and communities that are working towards social equality and environmental sustainability (Jarosz, 2004). This “community of practice” pushes the boundaries of traditional academic disciplines and begins to answer the important question of “what do we want social science *for*?” (Sayer, 1992, p. 229, emphasis in original).

The origins of political ecology stem from the integration of political economy with investigations of environmental and ecological change (Blaikie, 1988). The rise of first world political ecology is the result of the recognition that questions of society, the environment, and power are by no means constrained to the third world or (post)colonial geographies. In studying environmental injustice, systemic racism, and ecological destruction at the very center of global economic power, political ecology research reveals ongoing patterns of internal colonialism, exploitation, oppression, and control that inform economic policy and politics at the national and global level (see Friedmann, 1978; Jacoby, 2001; McCarthy, 2002; McClintock, 2011 for examples). While some first world political ecology scholars continue to focus on primary production, conservation, and environmental impacts, I align myself with scholars who, like those in cultural geography and landscape studies, are interested in the “analyses of everyday lived environments and society–environment entanglements and discourses in landscapes” (Galt, 2013).

In addressing the need for understanding community as a complex socio-environmental relationship, political ecology scholars have often focused on colonial/postcolonial relationships to demonstrate how narratives of people and place are tied together to support particular ideologies of resource control (see examples from Bassett & Zuéli, 2000; Jarosz, 1993; Painter, 1995). In evaluating efforts to achieve community-based conservation, Agrawal and Gibson demonstrate that community is a dynamic, contested category without easy assumptions about what certain types of actors will do on and/or to the land (1999).

In seeking to draw attention to the physical-environmental foundations of urbanization and attempting to “re-natur[e] urban theory,” urban first world political ecology demonstrates that “inequitable urban food systems reflect asymmetrical power relations in the city, so much so

that hunger and other forms of food insecurity are the result of the interplay of power and politics in urban space” (see Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006; in Morgan, 2015, p. 1382). Bringing political ecology to bear on urban gardening, Classens draws attention to the co-constitutive character of nature and society, challenging the persistent categorization of these concepts as separate (2014).

In this research I seek to understand the ways in which different actors position themselves in relation to urban ecological processes, examining multiple scales of politics and understandings of urban open space. The importance of problematizing essentialist visions of community and nature is critical to urban agriculture research and food systems planning, especially as different knowledges, visions, and histories are often subsumed under the overall umbrella of urban agriculture or community gardening. This is not to say that the answer is to narrowly define such categories or activities, but to forefront the processes of meaning making and contestation that occur discursively and materially. In using the lens of urban political ecology, I seek to understand who benefits and who loses in the context of the replacement of one type of community garden by another. By exploring the dynamics of community and garden as process (Massey, 1995), I provide a frame for the ongoing articulations of what community means and *should* be both in informal and official community gardens in Sacramento.

Political gardening: Politics of aesthetics & property

Investigating questions of power and access to resources are critical to building a nuanced and complex understanding of social and ecological change, especially around issues of property and the production of categories of control. As Wekerle and Classens argue, “initiatives to grow food in cities reflect an ongoing renegotiation and shift in uses of private and public

property as urban foodscapes” (2015). This renegotiation involves challenges and disagreements over property, governance, and aesthetics.

Traditional notions of power characterize it as a discrete entity that can be housed somewhere or within some thing or person. However, a more nuanced understanding of power, and thus forms of governance, emphasizes its relational aspects, and the ongoing conditions of negotiation. A combination of these perspectives, one that acknowledges the relational quality of power, which ascribes the potential for power to all, as well as the uneven distribution of material things that limit/enable individuals to act according to their intentions, continues to provide a helpful theoretical framework in which to explore questions of governance.

Rancière’s work on the politics of aesthetics provides an effective starting point to build linkages between relations and materialities. Rancière argues that “politics has an inherently aesthetic dimension and aesthetics an inherently political one,” and in doing so grapples with the production, distribution, and policing of basic everyday practices, as well as what constitutes a political act. In his view, politics is an “intervention in the visible and the sayable” and a questioning of the distribution and definition of what is proper (2010). While Rancière generally explores questions of political art and speech, in my work I draw on the broad definition of aesthetics as the realm of sensory experience overall—the visual, the physical, the audible, the olfactory, and of course, the edible. In addition to the concept of aesthetics, in this research I also draw on Rancière’s notion of the ‘distribution of the sensible,’ which describes police power (the power of the state) as that which partitions and defines the world and people. This distribution separates and excludes at the same time as defines what constitutes participation. Just as political ecology helps build an understanding of the interplay between human and non-human actors, the politics of aesthetics bridges everyday sensory practices with political participation.

Moreover, the connection between proper, propriety, property, and proprietor indicates a further link between governance and materiality; proprietor implies there is a proper owner of land, one that conforms to proper understanding of appropriate norms of property use. The division of land into public and private categories and ownership/management regimes was key to the development and expansion of early capitalism (Wood, 2000). However, Wekerle and Classens describe the multiple ways land is claimed as property, including “land as commodity to be traded and sold; the personal attachments to land through history, culture and symbolic meaning; land as community property; and the conception of land tied to a land ethic and caring practice” (2015). As political ecologist Paul Robbins has also argued, “property rights over nature politically and ecologically mediate between differing users and ideologies of use” (2012a). These differing users and ideologies of use are certainly present in community gardens, as made evident by diverse land tenure arrangements (e.g. private vs. public land, long-term vs. short term), garden aesthetics (e.g. messy vs. ordered, ornamental vs. food plants) and management structures (e.g. collectively run vs. individual plot management).

Additionally, rights of control and rights of use do not always match up perfectly, and multiple overlapping property management regimes (religious, cultural/ethnic, traditional, colonial, legal, etc.) often exist simultaneously (Ng’weno, 2001). Rocheleau et al. suggest that the concept of “nested rights” is more helpful in thinking about the different ways in which actors in different social positions (e.g. gender, class) negotiate rights of use in the context of limited or absent rights of control (1996).

In ‘first world’ urban food systems, private/public property regimes are not necessarily self-evident or fixed, especially as communities make new (and revive old) claims about the “highest and best use” of public and private property. For example, McCarthy argues that both

informal and formal communal property rights play a role in rangeland management in the American West, highlighting the importance of very local-scale politics in determining material access to land, as well as the power of extralocal aesthetic criteria to inform natural resource management.

The right to use public property and the allowance of certain activities on public property is also connected to notions of what consists of a public good, the value of public property, and the proper aesthetics of public space. Different types of urban gardening, including Scottish allotment gardens in particular, do not fit well within the binary categories of public/private, urban/rural, and leisure/production (DeSilvey, 2003). Ferris, Norman, & Sempik argue that “what distinguishes a community garden from a private garden is the fact that it is in some sense a public garden in terms of ownership, access, and degree of democratic control” (2001, p. 560). However, democratically run community gardens certainly exist on private land, and there exist very different perceptions of fenced community gardens by non-users, ranging from “safe and accessible” to “private clubs” (Francis, 1987).

Gardening practices and the aesthetics related to them directly and indirectly figure into the negotiation of presence, and claims to property figure into the negotiation of what constitutes appropriate gardening practice. In using a theoretical framework that links politics and aesthetics, I demonstrate the connection between everyday practices and a broader discussion of democratic participation. I use this theoretical framework to critically explore questions about the ability to grow food in a particular way, the opportunity to participate in public space planning, and the distribution of publicly funded amenities, such as public parks and recreation areas.

URBAN GARDENS IN SACRAMENTO

In the following section, I present a narrative detailing how differing definitions of urban gardening are enacted in the physical, cultural, and political landscape. I demonstrate how community garden development, particularly official formalization, represents a struggle over meaning, politics, and aesthetics, and account for hyperlocal configurations of urban agriculture. I start by addressing the following questions: How do different actors understand and practice urban agriculture/community gardening, both materially and discursively, and for what purposes? In particular, how does a group of primarily immigrant gardeners understand and practice ‘unofficial’ community gardening? How does the city understand and enable a state-sponsored and supported practice of community gardening?

The International Garden of Many Colors

For Anya,¹ gardening has never been a trendy thing to do. Originally from Russia—she corrects me, the late USSR is more precise—Anya has lived in Sacramento for 20 years and currently lives in the affordable housing complex next to the IGMC. She has five children, most of whom are grown. Despite this, she is a busy woman. She currently homeschools her youngest daughter and regularly provides childcare for her two-year old granddaughter. Anya started her garden at the encouragement of her parents, who thought she should have a garden for her children. Anya and her elderly mother both have garden plots adjacent to one of the electrical towers; her mother lives nearby in affordable senior housing. In her garden Anya has several fruit trees, including mulberry, plum, and pomegranate (see figure 1). She planted the pomegranate just last year and it has only borne one or two fruits so far. If she is forced to move out from under the towers, she worries it might not survive a transplanting in the heat of summer—no one is sure when the removal might actually happen (fieldnotes. April 2015).

¹ All names that appear have been changed.



Figure 1. Anya's Garden. Mulberry tree produces fruit that is shared with family members who live nearby (left). Transplanted cucumber starts are shaded with scrap wood, small branches, and leaves (right). Photo credit: author (2015).

As the name suggests, the gardeners at the International Garden of Many Colors come from diverse place and speak multiple languages, including Hmong, Ukrainian, Russian, English, and Spanish. For what are mostly women, immigrant, gardeners, the garden is a space where families are able to plant culturally rooted perennial and annual food crops like black currants, cherries, raspberries, beets, lemongrass, sorrel, nopales, and tomatoes. Like Anya, most of them live in the affordable housing complex directly adjacent to garden, which is part of an open space parkway and utility easement corridor that extends for about a mile and a quarter north.

The history of the garden, as told by the residents, dates back to the mid 1990s, before round of levee improvements took place along the edge of Garden Highway, and before the affordable housing non-profit took over half of the neighboring apartment complex. Long-time residents and gardeners talk about how the garden evolved slowly, over time, mainly through a

process of auto-construction. Beginning with a small group of people at the far southern end nearest the towers and closest to the affordable housing complex, the area started to gradually expand out under the towers and into the parkway as more people wanted to garden. Nina, an older woman from Ukraine with ten children, shared that at first, she did not garden directly under the towers. She started with a small space and over time she and her family cleared more of the land, and like other gardeners, they built fences and pathways as they saw fit, often reusing or recycling materials (see figure 2).

This patchwork of individual and family efforts has resulted in a labyrinthine layout, familiar to those who regularly work in the garden, but confusing to outsiders. Today, carpet



Figure 2. IGMC Paths. Northern entrance to IGMC, one of the few that are not gated (left). Grape vines and tomatoes grow along trellises made from scrap wood and tree branches. Peach and palm trees are much taller than the 15-foot maximum height requirement issued by utility company regulations (right). Photo credit: author (2015, 2016).

pieces lie in some of the paths to suppress weeds, and fence styles vary from small white picket posts to repurposed metal bedsprings. Many, though not all, of the plots are fenced off from one another and are gated and locked. Plots in the IGMC also differ greatly in size; a few are as small as 20 by 20 feet, while others are as large as 120 by 40 feet. Many of the gardeners maintain their

own compost piles in their plots; a few collect plant material in buckets of water for later use. Gardeners who grow raspberries, blackberries, grapes, and cucumbers often have permanent trellising structures in their plots, which range from simple sticks to elaborate arbors. Stuffed animals serve as scarecrows in one plot, while in another a gardener battles gophers by putting old soda cans on sticks to rattle in the wind (see figure 3).

One spring afternoon as I am standing in the shade with Polina next to the large plot she shares with her husband, I notice the grape trellis is made out of an old electrical cord. I ask her about it and Polina laughs, explaining that she uses everything, that nothing goes to waste in the garden. Just like in Ukraine, where she grew up and “everything had another use,” she saw someone throwing out a vacuum in the dumpster so she went and cut the cord for her trellis. When I ask her where she learned to garden, she explains that her mother worked in the sugar beet fields in Ukraine and had a garden at home as well. Every morning her mother would milk their family cow and have to give a gallon to the government. Polina says she learns new things about gardening every year, like when the gophers ate all her potatoes a few years ago. Now she plants more than can really fit in the space just so she can harvest some for herself. For fertilizer she takes sorrel leaves, squash leaves, anything green, and puts it all in water for a few days to make a wet compost (fieldnotes, May 13 2016).

Though gardeners know they do not actually own the land they work, they nevertheless feel a sense of ownership and pride through the effort they put in and continue to devote to the beauty and productivity of the land. Previous city attempts at removal were met by energetic resistance from the gardeners, who at one point went to city hall with hand-drawn “Save the

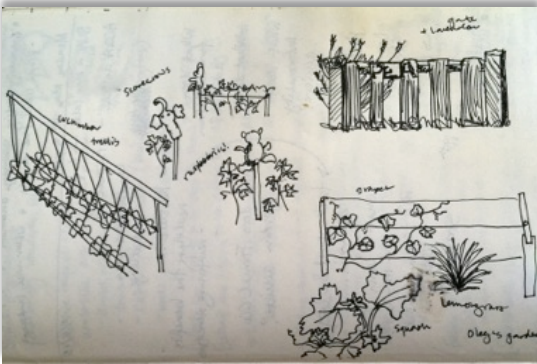


Figure 3. IGMC Garden design. Stuffed animals guard fruits (sketch). Decorative “peace” sign (top left). Bedsprings are repurposed as fences (bottom left). Permanent trellising structures support raspberries, cucumbers, and blackberries (bottom right). Photo: author (2016)

Garden” signs to protest its proposed eradication. In maintaining and defending the site, gardeners draw upon multiple understandings and values to justify its existence, including the importance of food production, and autonomy or freedom. However, even as gardeners unify some of their thoughts and actions in order to defend the space, these multiple meanings and values create tensions and at times, moments of conflict in the garden. In particular, the meaning of community is debated in conversations about fences and privacy, and informal leadership and internal power dynamics generate questions of inclusion and exclusion, and fair distribution of resources.

Growing food for families

When we eat lunch one day at her apartment, Anya brings out preserved tomatoes she has put up from the year before; she cans them whole, with some herbs and salt. I ask her what makes a good garden, and she replies with the following:

When they have enough produce to feed their family, that's a good garden. Like it's good to have it look good too if it's possible, but if it's not possible, at least you have food. That's the main point of having a garden--to have food. And next, to look at it, and enjoy it, you know? Don't you agree? (personal communication, October 26, 2015)

For Anya and many other gardeners at the IGMCC, the primary purpose of their garden is food production (see figures 4 and 5). The type of food, quality, and access are all important aspects of this production focus. As one gardener from Ukraine explained to me, “Ukrainian dill is much better than American dill.” In a presentation to the local city council member after a series of design workshops, the gardeners clearly articulated the value of food production in their garden:

“We do not garden as a hobby: We garden to feed our families and extended families nutritious fruits and vegetables... We save money by growing our own food... It increases our access to pesticide-free, non-GMO foods that we would not be able to afford in the grocery store... We are Farm-to-Fork².” (field notes, January 15, 2016)

² In further research, I would like to explore the strategic adoption of the “Farm-to-Fork” language, which is increasingly popular in Sacramento’s more radical urban agriculture advocacy scene as well as in official city



Figure 4. IGMC annual and perennial crops. Small plots are planted intensively with onions, beets, squash; tomatoes are shaded behind cloth (top). Oldest gardens are like ‘food forests,’ with tall stands of black currants and small figs trees, in addition to plants like comfrey and calendula (bottom left). In spring, winter wheat is supplanted by cucumbers kept safe under plastic jug cloches; roses provide ornamental beauty (bottom right). Photo credit: author (2015).

boosterism and promotional marketing. Combining theoretical perspectives from Pudup on the creation of “citizen-subjects” (2008) and Agrawal’s “environmental subjects” (see Robbins, 2012b), the positioning of long-standing immigrant gardeners as the essence of the “Farm-to-Fork” movement makes claims to both the city’s socio-political and ecological spheres.



Figure 5. IGMC food production. Vegetable garden under transmission tower grows onions, potatoes, calendula. Raspberries and onions flourish under mulch. Cucumbers are trained up off the ground, a practice innovated in the California climate. Photo credit: author (2015).

The way the garden looks, and ‘looking good,’ is often secondary to an abundant harvest that is economical and healthy; furthermore, the very meaning of a ‘good garden’ is wrapped up in aesthetics of visible abundance and devotion of space to growing food.

Drawing the connection between their own knowledge and heritages and their current gardening practices, gardeners explained, “We produce varieties that are local to our home countries and important to our diverse cultures...we are able to garden the same way we were taught in our childhood in this garden” (field notes, January 15, 2016). Gardeners with roots in the former Soviet Union also demonstrate the link between their experience in their homelands and here in the United States. During a design workshop session, Nina described her experience as such: “I’m working fourteen years in the garden. I love my garden, it’s the way we live.”

Maria, a single mother with several children, chimed in that she had two hectares in Ukraine, almost five acres (field notes, October 26, 2016). Last year, Nina put up over three hundred jars of fruits and vegetables, pickling and preserving them for later use. She stores the jars behind the two couches in her small living room, which doubles as a display room for the many photos of her ten children and twenty-four grandchildren.

One of the extended Latino families who garden at the IGMC have lived in the neighboring affordable housing complex for over twenty years. The group of brothers all work in agriculture in the region and are usually busy in the rice fields. At a workday in early spring, I have a rare opportunity to chat with the youngest of them about his plot as we drag out a pile of fruit tree clippings, hauled between us on a bed sheet, to the green waste dumpster.

Manuel says he likes to garden, to get some exercise. I ask him about how important the food harvest is. He replies yes, that is good too, all the tomatoes and tomatillos they get out of their plot. I ask him, "Y si no lo tuvieras...? [And if you didn't have it?]" He replies, "Compraria. Pero eso es dinero. [I would buy. But that's money.]" He goes on, estimating that they harvest about two hundred pounds of tomatoes from the garden in the summer, and with tomatoes at a dollar per pound, that's pretty good. I'm surprised—"Doscientas libras? [Two hundred pounds?]" I ask, confirming the number. He says yeah, about that much, considering how much you can harvest each time—he holds up an imaginary bag of tomatoes in his hands for me to consider. (Field notes, February 13, 2016)

Despite having a physically demanding job in the agricultural sector, Manuel still likes to garden for exercise and has a sense of the quantitative impact of personal gardening, both in terms of the amount and value of food grown. For low-income families living in below-market rate housing, growing diverse types of foods in the IGMC is part of household economic decisions that directly impact overall health and wellness. His rough estimate of the tomato harvest value is compared to conventional prices rather than organic prices, which is how most of the produce is grown in the IGMC; the tomatoes are arguably worth much more, even in dollar terms.

This key food provisioning discourse and aesthetic practice at the IGMC emphasizes the functionality of the garden to provide food for people who use it directly, as well as indirectly through sharing. In presentations to public officials, gardeners expand outwards from that central practice and language to further articulate the garden as a space for their children to learn where food comes from, a peaceful place for stress relief, a site for sharing values, ideas, and food, and as a place of ecological benefit. These interdependent and interwoven meanings are rooted in a particular ecological relationship to the space, primarily growing food for oneself and family. However, the meaning of the garden is also expressed through another set of values that inform material and aesthetic expression in the garden: a sense of autonomy and the ability to decide how to manage one's plot.

The importance of freedom and autonomy

One morning in April 2015, I help Anya prepare the ground for her spring tomato and cucumber plantings. As I am shoveling dirt, I accidentally slice a small ring-necked snake in half, surprised at the biodiversity of the space even as I see the trash left behind by folks passing by the plot on their way to the convenience store nearby. She tells me the stray cats she sometimes shares scraps with help to scare off gophers who like to wreak havoc on her vegetables. As we dig holes for tomato starts, she asks me how many plants I would put in the row—she already knows her answer and is testing me. When I say ten, depending on how close you want them, she smiles and says she doesn't like them too dense and would only put in six. She says gently but firmly, "It's nice to be able to garden how you want." While Anya does not have solidly built fence or lock on her gate, as some other gardeners do, she asserts her autonomy over the space in other ways. At one of the design workshops, she and another gardener articulated the values of freedom and autonomy both abstractly and concretely:

The community organizer asks, “What are other concrete things that we like about the garden?” Anya answers, speaking about the gardeners as a whole—“They can do what’s right for them...they like that people don’t point fingers.” Sandra pointedly adds, “Freedom in America is land.” Anya continues, “If you want raised beds, you can do that, if you don’t want, you don’t have to.” (fieldnotes, October 26 2015)

The concept of having the freedom to manage land according to one’s needs and values is also reflected in the ‘origin’ story of the garden as told by one of its oldest members. An elderly Mexican man, Don Jaime has worked in the IGMC for many years and told me his version of its genesis one sunny morning as I admired his garbanzo beans³.

Back before the affordable housing organization took over the management of the complex, Don Jaime lived at the apartments and wanted to garden. He went to management to ask if he could plant some things in the open space near the towers, a request which management granted. Back then the levee was not as high, and so when the city came to raise the levee, a crew of city workers cleared out all the trees and bushes right next to his small garden. During the cleanup, one of the workers accidentally destroyed his garden, pulling out a bunch of jicama in particular, the seeds for which Don Jaime had brought from Mexico. The neighbors, seeing the work crew pulling apart Don Jaime’s garden, ran quickly to tell him what was happening. When Don Jaime came out to see his wrecked garden, the city worker was very apologetic and said his boss could probably pay him for the destroyed veggies. Later that day, the crew boss himself came to Don Jaime to apologize for what had happened, and offered to pay him one hundred dollars. Don Jaime politely refused the money, having only lost ten jicamas. Instead, they walked together out to the parkway, where the boss stood with arms spread wide and told Don Jaime he could garden all the way from where they stood in front of the levee up to the access road—a big swath of open land. Don Jaime explained to the boss that he could not possibly farm all that area, so the boss told him he could be in charge of giving it away to other people to grow things. And so that is what Don Jaime did.

The negotiation of access to land, the securing of the freedom to farm, and the right to distribute rights at the IGMC have all historically occurred primarily through informal and dynamic structures of power outside (or alongside) of official bureaucratic systems. This has allowed for people with otherwise little power to make decisions about public property or access to private resources to become empowered within their immediate spatial and social context.

³ During my fieldwork I heard this story told two or three times; what is written here reflects is primarily drawn from my May 2015 field notes.

This origin story also points to how informal access to public land underlies the formal city governance structure, how ‘rights’ to land at the IGMC have been negotiated through relationships, and how those ‘rights’ focus on use (farming/gardening) rather than control (legal ownership).

While not as food production-focused as early 20th century urban gardens (e.g., victory gardens), productivity analyses of contemporary community gardens have demonstrated the ongoing role of food production and the accompanying economic savings. Algert et al. have shown that community gardens in San Jose saved gardeners \$435 per plot per season, and demonstrate that in this context, community gardens produce yields comparable to “high-production biointensive farming,” higher than conventional production yields. However, garden design and choice of crops play a significant role both in determining savings and in yields, as well as gardener’s knowledge, skills, and access to water (2014). In regards to social structures, Hou demonstrates the value of informal social processes in community gardening development, highlighting the capacity of self-organizing leadership to be flexible, innovative, and generate long-standing support for and community ownership of gardens (2014).

For low-income gardeners at the IGMC who may not have the resources to reliably access fresh foods, self-provisioning can range from a critical source of everyday food to providing equally important quality supplementary ingredients. Moreover, the abundance at the IGMC is related to the ability of the gardeners to apply their knowledge and skills in garden design and choice of crops, not simply a result of access to land. The localized, informal access to and relative freedom and autonomy over land stands in contrast to the structural socio-economic barriers experienced by low-income families who do not necessarily have the resources to achieve private home ownership. Nina explains that she decided to live at these

particular apartments because the management advertised the opportunity to have a garden. After years of living at the complex, she knows many residents and gets along well with her garden neighbors even though they speak different languages. Though less expensive than other market rate housing might be, she still feels the rent is high for the amount of income her husband makes. “The only reason I stay here is because of my garden,” she tells me (personal communication, May 18, 2016). For residents like Nina for whom private home ownership is out of reach, the tending the garden becomes an alternative commitment to land that creates a strong attachment to place and represents an important long-term investment in place with multiple benefits and returns over time.

The “community enough” garden

In the current organizational structure, gardeners have the freedom to design and manage their plot as they see fit, and in moments of crisis, people have come together to fight eviction. However, like in other community gardens, the “community” aspect takes just as much work as turning the soil, weeding, and watering. Despite being supported in part by the affordable housing organization’s community organizing program, consistent formal leadership and management of the IGMC can be difficult to sustain. While the IGMC is ethnically diverse, it can also be socially difficult to navigate, given the competing informal and culturally specific norms of engagement.

At garden committee meetings run by the affordable housing organization and garden leaders, maintaining ground rules for respect in meetings, sticking to procedures that resolve conflict, and sorting out who gets a plot to work on is not simple or easy. Historically, gardeners have secured plots in a number of ways, mostly through incremental land clearance and dispersal amongst friends and family networks, primarily along cultural or ethnic lines, with occasional

spurts of more organized and structured efforts. For example, in 2012, a large amount of land was cleared and allocated to residents by a lottery system with the support and leadership of the apartment complex's community organizer. This was partly in response to the concern some residents had about equity in access to plots by people of different ethnicities. Language barriers at meetings and a lack of onsite translators for languages beside Spanish and Russian make it difficult for all gardeners to participate in the management of the garden equally. Gardeners attending meetings in 2015 raised issues such as the lack of water and reduced water pressure due to overloaded infrastructure, difficulty in accessing garden plots, fairness of distribution of resources, and respecting each other's plots.

The challenge of managing the garden is made more complicated by the fact that although the affordable housing complex supplies the water, they have no property right over the land and little enforcement power on the site. The rules and regulations outlined by gardeners in the late 1990s are sometimes heeded, sometimes not. As Anya explained, "Just because you have rules doesn't mean people follow them." Ultimately, the inherent lack of power to enforce said rules has meant that more informal and less visible negotiations over space and contestations of power have played out in the garden.

Place-making practices in the garden are drawn from to sometimes competing visions of the garden amongst gardeners themselves, and reveal different assumptions and values about what makes a community garden. Since there is no fixed definition of what a community garden is, gardeners and non-gardeners alike bring their vision and understanding to the space. While most of the gardeners at the IGMCC are gardening to grow food for their families, a few use the space primarily as a place to relax, and one plot serves as an outdoor education space and demonstration garden for an on-site youth afterschool program. Amongst some gardeners and

their neighbors in the affordable housing complex, there is some tension between the idea of the garden as an individual space versus a collective space. These challenges reflect the ongoing work required in producing an understanding and practice of ‘community’ in community gardening.

In particular, the issue of inclusion and exclusion in the garden came up clearly in both the design workshops conducted by landscape architecture students and in interviews with gardeners:

Following up on the issue of fences, I ask the group, “Are the fences to protect the garden from people outside, or from each other?” Several of the women present smile and laugh. Anya says “Mostly outside people”—Veronika interjects “From each other too”—and Sandra says “Both.” (field notes, October 26 2015)

Sandra: “We shouldn’t have fences. If we’re a community, we should be able to respect and come in here and have the cute little bricks or whatever. And it needs to be open to everyone. If we respect it, each other, then that would happen. But to have fences only means we are not a community. Means we’re divided. And we don’t respect each other.” (personal communication, November 11, 2015)

On the one hand, the debate over the meaning and value of fences is about a material need for the protection of people’s harvests, but also about the shared practices and understandings of what the garden is, who it serves, and what kind of gardener is the ideal participant. Anya summarized the complexity of the IGMC and the struggle to define community garden in the following way:

“I think it's community enough... because people with different countries, different nationalities, different personalities and I think they work well enough with all backgrounds, all different experiences, they work well enough. And some people want to make, like cut them the same length. It's not possible. I don't care how many times you can say 'we can do it'--doesn't help. Doesn't change anything...Same as we have different skills, we are not all same. We are equal in some things, and in rights probably, and privileges, but in skills and intelligence, and whatever, we are not equal...even if you put [us each in] an equal plot.” (personal communication, October 26 2015)

These differing views on the relationship between the community and the physical garden also reveal different understandings of fairness. For some gardeners, fairness means equality (open access, same size plots), but for others, fairness means equity (protection of vulnerable groups, attending to differences among people).

Addressing the initial methodological question, how does a group of primarily immigrant gardeners understand and practice ‘unofficial’ community gardening, I have demonstrated the centrality of food production materially and conceptually at the International Garden of Many Colors, and that the garden is a place of culturally informed design and organic aesthetic. Moreover, I have highlighted the importance autonomy and freedom in the garden, especially as it relates to access to public urban food production space and limited access to home ownership and private property. Finally, my research points to several tensions within the existing informal garden in terms of leadership and management, respect and equity, and definitions and perceptions of community. In the following section I put forward an understanding of how the city understands and enables a state-sponsored and supported practice of community gardening, furthering my discussion on aesthetics and design, property, governance, and community.

City of Sacramento Community Gardens

Like other cities in the U.S., urban agriculture is no stranger to the city of Sacramento; as suburban monikers like Orangevale and Citrus Heights suggest, before the growth of urban sprawl the region was dominated by orchards and farmland. Asian immigrants, particularly Hmong refugees resettled to the region after the Vietnam War, have developed multiple peri-urban and urban farm sites, both for personal consumption and commercial retail (Corlett, Dean, & Grivetti, 2003; Goldberg, 2013). The current wave of urban agriculture activism has led to a series of local land use ordinance changes, at times re-establishing previously overturned rights

to grow and sell, but also expanding recent state-level legislature in the region, including tax incentives for the cultivation of private vacant lots (Lang, 2015; Ortiz, 2015).

The history of land use activism for urban agriculture is deeply intertwined with the history of community gardens in Sacramento. While longitudinal data for informal community gardens in Sacramento is difficult to find, in the 1980s Mark Francis documented 23 community garden sites, including two large gardens in the Midtown neighborhood (1987). The Midtown gardens, Ron Mandella Community Garden and Southside Community Garden, were started in the late 1970s during the nationwide resurgence of social and ecological activism in urban cores focused on community empowerment and community building.

Constructed on state-owned land slated for eventual development, the gardens flourished for several decades, until the economic boom of the late 1990s precipitated the redevelopment of the site, which initiated a massive struggle to save the gardens. The outcome of that struggle was the total demolition of the gardens in the early 2000s. However, as part of the redevelopment agreement, in 2005 the city instituted an official community gardening program within the Parks and Recreation Department. The program was promptly inaugurated with a partial replacement of the Mandella garden on the original Midtown lot, and the establishment of a new Southside garden on vacant city property right next to the highway in the Southside Park neighborhood (Capitol Area Development Authority, 2016; Feliciano, 2009; “Fremont Community Garden: History,” 2013, “Ron Mandella Community Garden records,” 2005). The birth of the official community gardening program is thus rooted in struggles over informal and unofficial strategies of urban agriculture, and open space reclamation and use.

An exploratory survey of unofficial community gardens in Sacramento conducted for this research estimates around 20 active unofficial community gardens in 2016, though more likely

exist. In comparison to the 1984 study, when 23 unofficial gardens were active in comparison to 69 city-owned parks and playgrounds, the number of city-owned and managed community gardens is now at 15, out of 222 parks and parkways totaling nearly 3,200 acres of land (City of Sacramento, 2016). The following sections outline the discourse around official community gardens in Sacramento as articulated in government planning documents and by Parks and Recreation staff. I draw attention to the diminished role of food production, the importance of proper public aesthetics, and challenges to defining ‘community’ in the garden and the ideal garden user.

Providing healthy lifestyle amenities

The City Parks and Recreation Department is a key player in the making and maintenance of everyday lived environments in the city, particularly in the definition and provision of “nature” for urban residents, the outlining of proper urban aesthetics, and the promotion of an ideal, healthy, urban resident. Community gardens fit into a larger public space-provisioning project, and are formalized in and through official planning documents. According to the November 2007 Staff Report to City Council:

Community gardens enhance the City of Sacramento's urban environment by creating green spaces and providing areas where Sacramento's citizens can interact with nature... The Community Garden Program provides many benefits to Sacramento neighborhoods such as community stewardship, neighborhood beautification, promotion of a healthy diet and nutritional education... The Community Garden Program is consistent with the City's strategic plan to enhance sustainability and liveability and expand economic development throughout the City of Sacramento. (City of Sacramento, 2007)

Community gardens are also included in the broader civic engagement mission of volunteerism and youth employment. The development of green-space infrastructure requires significant public investment and resources, and as such, city programs and the experience of nature is also designed to bring in the public as stewards who are also interested in the protection

and control of those resources (in accordance with official criteria). Community gardens, from an official perspective and strategy, fit into a larger vision of community building, ideal aesthetics, and the making of a healthy citizen; the explicit importance of growing food is not articulated in these official documents.

This vision was also reflected in the interviews I conducted at the Sacramento Parks and Recreation Department, wherein staff commented on the multiple purposes community gardens can serve.⁴

Interviewer:

“What are the benefits, or purposes, of community gardens?”

Parks & Rec Staff:

“Really what it is, is taking an area in the city that's blighted and working with the community who's usually eager to do something, to transform it into something different.” (personal communication, October 27, 2016)

Interviewer:

What are the objectives of the city's community gardening program?

Parks & Rec Staff:

Increase access to healthy fruits and veggies, growing healthy communities. Recreation, provide opportunities for team-building and individuals... to get an outdoor experience, same as with softball or swimming...also to meet people share ideas... but it's “what they make of it.” Like all Parks & Rec programs, we provide an opportunity if people don't have that at home or where they live. Exercise. That's a small part but that too. (personal communication, October 15, 2016)

While increasing access to healthy fruits and vegetables is one stated purpose that the city's community gardens can serve, the garden is also seen as a public space amenity developed to strategically combat blight and poor neighborhood aesthetics, provide areas of recreation and leisure, and encourage healthy lifestyles. As one Parks and Rec official explained,

“We want folks to have healthier lifestyles. Food is a very important part of it, but also playing and being active is another. I mean it goes hand in hand. We have parks where

⁴ Interview excerpts are from both recorded and non-recorded interviews. Quotes appear when source was audio recorded or when quotation marks were included in fieldnotes; sections without quotations are from interview notes.

you can go out and run and play, and then we have these great community gardens and if we can add them into our parks, we're hitting every benefit in our parks... Community garden, park, whatever—you need those areas for people to come and meet their neighbors, and just ease the stress of every day [life].” (personal communication, October 27 2016)

Moving from more abstract notions of health and wellness to concrete, aesthetic experience, in my conversations with members of the Fremont Community Garden and Southside Community Garden, gardeners and garden leaders seemed to view the produce they received as a secondary benefit to the primarily social, spiritual, and exercise-related benefits of gardening. When asked about the importance of food production, they did not seem to think that the main reason most gardeners participated in the community garden was in order to provide a significant amount of fresh fruits and vegetables for their households:

“Well some people grow just flowers. It's more or less a hobby [or] displaces some of their household budget. It's not so much, not for too many people it's a subsistence thing. If I weren't growing there or doing my other gardens and busy, I would just the buy it at the store or buy it from somebody else. But it's not like if I can't grow it there I'm gonna starve. I think more or less it's that people like the garden. They like a little plot, it's cool.” (personal communication, November 18 2015)

While gardeners clearly grow food in their plots, the motivation for both the development of the garden as a public resource and the participation of residents in the space is less about food production and more about the broader social benefits of community gardening.

Proper public garden aesthetics

Form and function follow closely in many gardens, as is the case in the International Garden of Many Colors; even a quick visual scan of the IGMG reveals the importance of food production, and gives clues about its slightly messy organizational structure. The city's community gardens are no different in that regard, and while official discourse may speak to

multi-functionality, the form of city gardens points to more narrow underlying aesthetic values and forms of management and control.

City gardens are designed by professional city landscape architects, with grid-like and linear layouts that reflect the standardization and replicability of garden design procedures (see figures 6 and 7). Plot sizes generally range between ten by ten feet to ten by twenty. The smallest of the city's community gardens features six plots, while most of the others offer between 20 and 40 plots, including several ADA accessible plots. At the showcase city garden in Midtown, gardeners grow a variety of plants in their plots, including edibles such as tomatoes, eggplant, kale, lettuce, and squash. Garden space is also dedicated to growing perennial and annual herbs, flowers, and displaying permanent or seasonal decorations (see figure 7). Public areas within the garden include amenities such as a bocce ball court, an orchard area, and shared herb garden beds. City gardens are generally fenced and locked with keypad gate locks, and are visually legible to outsiders or non-gardeners; clearly delineated decomposed granite paths and neatly kept beds reflect the proper design aesthetic undergirded by city code regulations and garden rules.



Figure 6. Fremont Community Garden. View of Fremont Community Garden layout and amenities, including bocce ball courts, tool storage shed, and compost bins (top). Slightly raised ten by ten and ten by twenty foot plots are neatly planted with a mix of lettuce, tomatoes, kale, lavender, and poppies. Tents in background are set up for community composting awareness event open to the public. Photos: www.slowfoodsacramento.com (top), author (bottom), 2015.



Figure 7. Master Plan for Bill Bean Jr. Community Garden, City of Sacramento Department of Parks and Recreation (2010). Plots measure ten feet by fifteen feet, feature standard community amenities like shared compost and storage area, ADA accessible plots, and decomposed granite paths.

Despite the standard garden layout and design, other aesthetic components to official community gardens can come later after the build-out, both visual and edible:

Interviewer: How do you customize gardens?

Parks & Rec staff: Art work, mosaic projects... we can reprogram a garden later... after gardeners get in, we can ask them what they'd like to plant. [For example] here at Fremont Community Garden stuff was added later, like the orchard. There are restrictions on what we can plant, but we try to get stuff the gardeners like. Some people want exotics, like avocados, but they can die after one season. Sometimes we can grant requests, sometimes we can't. (personal communication, October 15 2015)

However, design and planning generally only involve gardeners after the garden has been built out according to the standard guidelines, and additional codes and regulations further delimit what can and cannot be planted in the garden, particularly long-term perennials like fruit trees. Moreover, those additions require extra funding, which can be hard to come by in the first place; according to Parks and Recreation staff, gardens can cost between two hundred to five hundred thousand dollars to build (personal communication, October 27 2015). Resources allocated to the

program make their way through many rules, codes, and regulations, finally materializing as reflection of an intricate bureaucratic and value-laden social structure, and a well ordered, easily managed aesthetic experience.

As stand-alone sites or as part of existing parks, city community gardens must conform to proper public park aesthetic guidelines and expectations. The aesthetic order extends to the internal management of plots and is maintained through garden governance structures, and plots not being used for food production year round must be well kept and orderly. At a workday at Fremont Community Garden, I observed garden advisory board members conduct a regular fall garden inspection, assigning visual ratings to each plot; a board member explained that the plot should be “mulched, weeded, no dead plants, [and] ideally [have] a cover crop or winter garden” (see figure 8).



Figure 8. Fremont Community Garden Plots. Garden plot decorated for Halloween (left). Garden plot awarded top rating during fall garden inspection (right). Neither plot is being intensively cultivated for food; garden leaders say that plots are generally more heavily planted during the summer season. Photo: author, 2015.

This need for aesthetic maintenance in combination with the broader civic engagement program offered by the Parks and Recreation Department can result in tensions amongst different levels of garden management. For example, during a community workday in late fall, I was told by several city gardeners that a group of Americorp volunteers had been brought in by the city earlier that week to clean up the garden. Two garden advisory board members present at the work day expressed frustration at this, since many people have ‘community hours’ to catch up on closer to the end of the year. Gardeners who do not fulfill their community hours risk losing their eligibility for a plot. In this case, garden leaders did not seem to be adequately consulted about the city-run cleanup, and even though the paths were clean, gardeners attending the workday did not have as much work to do to fulfill community hours. These dynamics of aesthetic management and control connect to larger questions about for whom the garden exists, and what that user group or community is imagined to be like.

Visions of communities and garden users

The community garden program in Sacramento provides public space for growing plants, edible and non-edible alike, to a city with a diverse population. Not every garden is exactly the same, but all are guided by a particular set of institutional norms that are at times in tension with diverse needs at the garden level. In terms of governance structures and oversight mechanisms in the city community gardening program, both city gardeners and Parks and Recreation Department staff spoke to a ‘split’ within the official community garden participants:

Parks & Rec staff:

“We had two groups of folks—one group of gardeners, they want the city to help, hold their hand throughout the whole process. And then we have more rogue gardeners that are like, “Get away from us, city! You’ve done what you needed to do, let us do our own thing now.” And so we created two models that appease both sides. The independents and the folks that just, kind of want us to keep monitoring.” (personal communication, October 27 2015)

In my conversations with city gardeners who seemed to fit into the “rogue” category, they did not describe themselves as such but spoke of their struggle to secure more autonomy and day-to-day oversight of the garden. One garden leader explained that after the gardeners fought for and gained control over the wait list, which was previously managed by the Parks and Recreation Department staff, they discovered that many people supposedly with plots had moved away and their plots had never been transferred to people on the notoriously long waiting list. In advocating for the devolution of power to the level of the garden, city gardeners sought to address not only inefficiency but also challenges to accessing an important public resource.

Despite the Parks and Recreation Department’s emphasis on the importance of community gardens being run by gardeners themselves, one of the garden leaders I spoke with discussed the internal contradictions of the city program and the perception of a limited capacity to build garden leadership:

“Well it's a community garden, that's the name they put on it... it's owned by the city—it's like a typical tenant-landlord relationship. There's built-in tension. It's like you don't own the place, the owners want one thing—there's just built-in tension. But you know, landlord-tenant relationships vary, some are really harmonious, some are really combative... Half of what I'm doing at the garden is growing a community there. Okay, let's figure out how to run things, and work together and how to grow this thing, and with each other, and it doesn't seem to be something that's part of [the program's] tool bag.”
(personal communication, November 18, 2015)

The garden observations and conversations with community garden program staff and garden leaders point to a tension within the city’s community garden program between the larger beautification efforts inherent to any parks management institution, and the effort to build community through spaces and programs offered for recreation. Concerns about visual aspects and public perception as well as community empowerment are present in the narrative and practice of city community gardening, albeit unevenly.

As community gardens in Sacramento have become part of formal, bureaucratic planning arenas, they have entered longstanding cultural, economic, and institutional structures that seek to streamline, regulate, and manage public space for the public good. However, there are differing understandings of both community and garden from an official perspective as well as amongst different user groups. Francis demonstrates a this point in his comparison of unofficial community gardens and parks in Sacramento in the 1980s, in which he argues that “parks are passive, publicly-controlled places which people often use alone and “like.” On the other hand, gardens are active places that people make themselves, use for work and socializing, and can “love”” (1987)⁵.

Moreover, planners and designers account for end user groups in their work in ways that reflect both the inherent challenges of designing multi-use public space as well as entrenched social, cultural, and economic biases and blind spots. In her research on park design in Los Angeles, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris points to the tendency towards universality in park planning:

“Following the norm of the average user, park suppliers tend to satisfy some universally shared needs, but cannot respond to some group-specific needs and cannot satisfy cultural patterns of park use. Contemporary neighborhood parks do not offer effective group settings that take into account the different use patterns of men, women, children, young adults, the elderly, different ethnic groups, or the homeless.” (1995, p. 100)

Responding to “the needs of the average user with the average park,” the models are not simply generic but are archetypal in that they connect to longer histories of park development and urban recreation theory espoused by city planners and designers like Frederick Law Olmsted and others. She continues:

⁵ It should be noted that Francis’ comparative study specifically looked at the Ron Mandella and Southside community gardens and the adjacent area of Fremont Park. Today Fremont Community Garden is considered the model community garden by Parks and Recreation staff (personal communication, October 27 2015) and is anecdotally much loved in the rapidly gentrifying Midtown neighborhood.

The typical park design mixes elements from past design models in order to create an easily reproducible, standardized milieu, one which seeks to be multiuse, but is also acontextual and may be insensitive or indifferent to cultural and social specificities. The supply of the typical neighborhood park rests on the assumption that the mixing of physical elements (greenery, playfields, sitting areas, play equipment) in accordance with professional design standards can address the different needs of the users. (1995, p. 100)

Community garden planning is an important sub-element of the history of park and city planning that has historically been challenged by similar issues to park design. In his work on formal and informal garden planning Hou argues the following:

Three assumptions have shaped planning's general approach to community gardens, according to Lawson: first, a fundamental mismatch between desire for orderly planning and the incremental gestures of gardens; second, the personal nature of gardening; and third, the gardens' associations with social actions rather than physical entities." (2014, p. 82)

The city of Sacramento's community garden program has sought to make gardens permanent through orderly planning, designing and providing areas that put personal garden space in the context of shared social space designed to enhance public good. However, this vision of public space, public good, and proper design comes with a history of top-down planning, standardization of forms, and strategies to address the average user.

In exploring how the city understands and enables a state-sponsored and supported practice of community gardening, I have argued that city community gardens are considered healthy lifestyle amenities in official discourse, and fit into much larger projects of neighborhood beautification, provisioning of nature, and management of healthy urban residents. Moreover, I have demonstrated that the aesthetic order of city community gardens is rooted in a set of principles quite different from those at the IGMCC, ones that value and respond to regulation, codes, and notions of proper public aesthetics and behavior. Additionally, I have discussed some of the tensions in the current city garden development and oversight structure that point to different understandings of how gardens should be governed, and a range of imagined users or

communities. I have drawn attention to the idea that historically, public space provisioning institutions have sought to address the needs of the average user over diverse and specific communities, groups, and peoples.

Despite what is at times a rigid city planning culture, normative aesthetic and organizational criteria for spaces like community gardens continue to be influenced by grassroots processes and imaginations—such as the community-building approach espoused by 1970s garden activists in Sacramento. However, changes seem to occur mainly through efforts that have pushed back against reductive and top-down approaches to planning. It is precisely during these moments of pushback and transformation, particularly when unofficial community gardens are forced to or attempt to become formalized within official structures, that differences are revealed, garden purposes, publics, and aesthetics are debated, and trade-offs become visible. In the next section I continue to explore normative understandings of community gardens and ‘alternative’ visions in discussing the ongoing transformation of the IGMC and the building of the new community garden in the Niños Parkway.

Transformations and transplants: building a new garden in the parkway

According to long-term gardeners at the IGMC, gardeners were mostly left to their own devices during most of the garden’s existence in the 1990s, and even through the 2000s. Garden documents kept by the affordable housing agency show different efforts at introducing programming in the garden, such as a women’s herb circle, and physical improvements such as the building of a tall fence along the garden border adjacent to the housing complex. The garden expanded over time to include more plots, including one run by an on-site youth services and development organization. Even as new families would join the IGMC, not all plots remained actively used as families moved away from the area, sometimes fell sick, or were no longer

interested in gardening. Though active gardeners exist throughout the entire garden space, many of the most regularly maintained and intensively cultivated plots are located in the southern half of the garden, where the electrical towers also stand.

In 2012, the local and regional utility companies put forward plans to build an access road and clear areas underneath the towers. The original plan to build the road right down the middle of the garden—destroying most of the most actively tended plots—was dismissed after gardeners brought pressure on their city council member in the form of protest at City Hall. With support from the affordable housing organization's community organizing program, gardeners advocated for an alternative route to keep the garden intact. However, negotiations with the city and the Parks and Recreation Department revealed that local officials both seemed to support the garden *and* wanted it to get cleared out. In 2015, after several years of resident community organizing and meetings with the city and the local council member in the district, the struggle shifted into a new phase, with a proposal by the Sacramento Parks and Recreation Department to build an official community garden right next to the existing garden. Gardeners organized again to advocate for displaced gardeners to have priority in the new garden, to which the city eventually agreed. However, no formal guarantee was given that the remaining gardeners would be allowed to stay.

After years of being left alone, by spring of 2016 there was a feeling of frustration and confusion amongst many of the gardeners in regards to why they were under threat of complete removal, especially since they felt the labor and care of the garden was valuable to the larger community. As new city garden construction plans moved forward, the city also made it clear that gardeners under the towers would need to clear out the area; the garden committee and affordable housing community organizers held an community garden clean up day to help all

gardeners clean up from winter as well as clear under the towers. As the weeks went by after the initial clean up day, a small homeless camp set up next to the levee at the end of the garden. With emotion in her voice Nina explained her frustration to me; a social worker with the affordable housing organization, who also grew up in Ukraine, translated.

“What do they [the city]—they are giving us such a headache—do they want us to get out of the garden or do they like the garden, we cannot understand what they want... and the garden, what used to be under the towers, and it's like it's destroyed, nobody's doing anything, and we see nobody's who's in charge of it really. The tents that are there, even though we go [there because] the trees that are there are fruiting [under the towers], we are afraid of [going in there]. [Now there are] snakes. And all the effort, [gardeners] put their money, they put their work, they put their hearts, and trying to keep everything clean. [Before the removal] we didn't have snakes, we didn't have the weeds, we didn't have campers. Sometimes they came to steal some stuff, but it's okay, we have enough for everyone. But we don't want them to camp there.” (personal communication, May 18 2016)

In the absence of more active management by local government, gardeners at the IGMG took responsibility for the garden as much as they could in order to maintain a space that functioned well for their purposes. Having been cleared of gardens, the area under the towers no longer benefits from the gardeners' labor and care, and ripe fruit drops from trees.

In examining the last few years of waxing and waning conflict, tension, and proposals, particularly during 2015 and 2016, several important elements have emerged—how people define the “problem” of the garden, which design alternatives are imagined or explored (or not), and what formalization means and how it is negotiated. I address these each of these issues in turn in the following section.

Defining the “problem”

As made evident by Nina's frustration about the homeless encampment, one solution to a given problem can result in unintended consequences. Looking more carefully at who defines what is or is not appropriate, safe, proper, etc. in the garden—and more generally what

constitutes a problem—sheds light on different groups imagine the space and forms expectations around its form and management.

The relative autonomy enjoyed by the IGMG gardeners was interrupted in 2012, when Parks and Recreation explained they received a notification from the electrical utilities:

Parks & Rec staff: “Per the new Homeland Security rules, they [the utilities] needed a 30-foot buffer around their towers to do maintenance. And that’s kind of what kicked it off. We weren’t looking to do this—this was federal, you know—we had to comply.” (personal communication, October 27 2015)

However, according to Parks and Recreation Department staff, the International Garden of Many Colors had been on the city’s radar for years and is part of a much larger and longstanding encroachment problem along the Niños Parkway. While the expansion of the garden area underneath the towers helped to bring more diversity into the garden and provide for more low-income families, Parks and Recreation staff saw this is a worsening of the encroachment problem:

Parks & Rec staff: In the beginning it was smaller, more orderly, but it’s gotten worse and worse. It “could be a nice green-space” but no one took the initiative to “redesign it on site,” to make it safe and accessible.

Despite concerns about safety, liability, and accessibility, Parks and Recreation staff describe how it is difficult to address problems in the parkway, especially the lack of little political will to deal with errant squatters⁶:

Parks & Rec official: There’s been code enforcement issues out there... there’s been backyard expansion all along the Niños Parkway and the garden is part of that. It’s “been a hot potato no one wanted” to deal with, nobody wanted to say people have to go... But people could get hurt out there and sue. It’s a liability.

⁶ While the IGMG represents the single largest zone of encroachment in the Niños Parkway, many other private property owners have extended their reach into the parkway. Most encroachment appears to be simply backyard extensions, though Parks and Rec staff told me one property owner built a full outdoor basketball court, complete with lights and decorative trees. The numerous encroachments, including the basketball court, are clearly visible in Google Maps satellite imagery (field observations 2015; personal communication, October 27 2015).

Parks and Recreation Department staff explained that City Council members were reluctant to take action on encroachment in the Ninos Parkway, not wanting to take the heat from their constituents. Despite the internal inclination to deal with encroachment issues, one Parks and Rec staff member put it this way:

“There's just so many problems and challenges...you have 226 parks, you have 15 community gardens—you're not going to be able to do everything and sometimes you have to wait for something to really get bad in order to find the money or project—unfortunately that's how it is, you know? The bigger the problem, the more attention it gets.” (personal communication, October 27 2015)

The need to address regulatory demands external to the Parks and Recreation Department also provided an opportunity to deal with underlying liability, safety, and aesthetic concerns about the garden, as was commented on by a Parks and Recreation staff:

Q: Where does the impetus for the new garden come from?

Parks & Rec staff: Homeland Security really started pushing the button, wanted to clean up around the towers, but then also reel in the whole garden, move forward with the new garden...“I'm sure that they're not gonna want to go” to the new garden... for some folks it's “personal attitude”... people don't like change. But we have to reel it in for health and safety. “It's not like we're not giving them an alternative.” (personal communication, October 15 2015).

Parks and Recreation officials acknowledge that people might be resistant to change, and other conversations reveal an understanding of the importance of food production for IGMC families. Despite community gardens being used as a strategy to combat blight in other parts of the city, the IGMC has at times been interpreted as blight by local government:

IGMC gardener: “I was up at the city hall. Something was going on and when the meeting was over, there was something else on the agenda. And I'm just quietly listening and watching, and they're talking about shantytowns, and they're talking about eyesores in the community. And as the pictures are going across the screen, I'm like wait a minute, that's my garden!” (personal communication, November 11 2015)

City discourse draws upon notions of health, safety, liability, disorderliness, and proper aesthetics to justify defining the garden as a problem and thus the generation of a solution.

Conversations with the Parks and Recreation Department reveal a slow, risk-averse bureaucratic and socio-political structure that seems to unofficially support and enable the long-standing lack of governance and policing which would otherwise reign in non-approved uses. While the Parks and Recreation Department is in charge of maintenance and oversight of the Niños Parkway, enforcement has become a political issue within the purview of city council representatives from that district, who in turn are often unwilling to make risky political moves that would displease constituents.

In the back and forth process of negotiating with the city and Parks and Recreation officials about the future of the IGM, many gardeners expressed the distrust of the Homeland Security argument and worried that the clearing out under the towers was just an excuse to get rid of the garden entirely. During a garden committee meeting, an elderly Ukrainian woman emphatically pointed out that no one had gotten hurt in all the years they had been gardening out there, and asked why the City cared about safety now over other times. The community organizers affirmed the group, saying their presence probably deters undesirable activities, the least of which would hardly include terrorism. One woman reminded the group about how the dense vegetation had in fact acted as a fire barrier years before, when the neighboring trees and grassy areas had caught on fire; another commented that the garden helps bring down the ambient temperature around the area, especially in the very hot summers. As a local amenity in a low-income neighborhood, the garden serves multiple purposes, and the criteria by which the garden is evaluated by its most active users differs greatly from the Parks and Recreation Department and local government.

Exploring alternatives

The issue of what constitutes an ‘alternative’ (and to what) is an important one, especially if one of the choices is to no longer have a garden at all, or to potentially leave a well-known community because there is no longer adequate space to grow food to offset the cost of rent. The process by which certain ideas have been proposed, designed, and implemented has been iterative, with differing levels of participation on all sides. The plan for the access road as of June 2016 was for the utility companies to purchase a small adjacent parcel from which to directly access the towers and minimize garden impact; the back up plan would put a road along the western edge of the IGMC, displacing additional gardeners (fieldnotes, May 18 2016; Nielson, 2015). Though Parks and Recreation Department revealed that their intention was to remove all gardeners from the existing area in three years (field notes, personal communication March 2016), gardeners continue to maintain the site and most would like to figure out a process by which it can become protected. While it is unclear what the eventual outcomes will be at the International Garden of Many Colors and the newly constructed Niños Community Garden, observations and conversations with gardeners suggest several concerns.

Leaning over the fence one February afternoon during garden construction, I ask a Ukrainian woman, who studied farming in a Soviet vocational school, how she feels about the new garden: “In my opinion, I don’t agree with them taking off the top layer⁷—it’s very good soil!” She pulls out a clump of grass root nodules from a bucket of weeds on the ground. “You just need to take out the roots—the bad plants—and turn the soil over. The plants can grow in the ground” (personal communication, February 13 2016). Many gardeners at the IGMC have a wealth of ecological knowledge about growing food, increasing soil fertility, saving seeds, etc.,

⁷ The construction of the Niños Community Garden involved removing the top six to eight inches of soil and grass material and trucking in new soil to fill the garden beds.

either from their cultural background, place of origin, or in working for years in the garden and sharing information with other gardeners. Especially for low-income gardeners, working with available resources and applying ecological knowledge strategically has been a way to invest in the land over time.

Even though gardeners and community organizers requested to see the city's plans for the new garden far in advance of the build out, Parks and Recreation Department staff did not share the design until six months later, right before garden construction began. These plans were released right after the conclusion of a series of participatory design workshops, to which Parks and Recreation community garden staff were invited, but did not attend. In those garden design workshops conducted in the fall of 2015, many gardeners expressed how much they valued the privacy of their gardens, and worried that the new garden, right next to a public park, would be too public. Many long-time gardeners expressed little interest in moving to the new garden, wanting to stay with their established fruit trees and large, individually fenced plots. Another gardener said she didn't want to move so far from her apartment—she enjoys being able to look out her back patio and see her plot. A few gardeners however, said they were interested in moving in order to have reliable water pressure—a struggle in the IGMC given the outdated and overloaded system.

Offering a suggestion for the design of the new garden during a workshop, one gardener said, “every spot should have a fence,” while another commented, “20 by 20 feet is too small”; (field notes, October 26 2015). In an interview, Nina explains to me that she thinks the city's community garden “is a good garden for beginners” but the plots are too small for people who had space before or in the event of produce getting stolen. “For example,” she says, “you plant a

zucchini, it takes up about one meter, round. If you plant a rose, it takes the same. If you put one, two, three things, it takes up a lot” (personal communication, May 18 2016).

Gardeners’ concerns about city garden design and issues of privacy reflect differing assumptions about what is or is not a community garden. Parks and Recreation Department perspectives also reveal a gap between an official understanding of community gardening and the type of food-production community garden that the IGMC represents:

Parks & Rec staff: “And I think one of the challenges that we're dealing with, at the Niño’s Garden, is I never visualized it as a community garden. What I was visualizing was more of a community, like uh—more [like] agriculture—because these people are not gardening just for the fun of it, they're gardening to put food on their plates, for their families, and you can see that they have long plots, so we were thinking we need to give these folks a little bit more, instead of you know, our typical smaller plots, but with the money we end up—we have to squeeze as many plots as we can.” (personal communication, October 27 2015)

While the IGMC is acknowledged as a place for intensive food production, that aesthetic and material practice is characterized as outside the norm for city-sponsored community gardening. Despite the recognition of a potential need for greater flexibility in the planning and design of the garden to replace the IGMC, Parks and Recreation officials did not seem to engage with gardeners in that effort beyond minor plot size adjustment.

Moreover, research into city plans and documents revealed plans for the modification of the International Garden of Many Colors and the idea of a new community garden dating back to 2010; community organizers and garden committee members were not aware of the existence of such designs until fall 2015. Figure 9 shows the southernmost section from the Niños Park Bikeway Master Plan, which includes a proposed clearance area under the towers, utility access road, extended bike path into existing garden, and new community garden adjacent to the IGMC. While more schematic and conceptual in nature than an official site layout, the design reflects a certain disconnect between community residents living adjacent to public space and the design of

public space; it also does not fully distinguish between what exists at the site and what is proposed, essentially rendering invisible what might be lost in the transformation of the space.



Figure 9. Niños Park Bikeway Master Plan, Section 4. From report to City Council on the Ninos Parkway Project, Phase Three (August 17, 2010). Plan shows proposed clearance area under the towers, utility access road, extended bike path into existing garden, and new community garden adjacent to the International Garden of Many Colors.

In contrast, as part of the participatory design workshops UC Davis landscape architecture students created maps of the existing IGMG showing plot boundaries, water spigots, entrances, and paths, as well as potential clearance areas (see figure 10, top left and right). Workshop participants commented on how beautiful the maps were and how they showed the complexity of the space; as one community organizer said, “a politician would never imagine something like this.” As students worked with gardeners to identify potential improvements in the existing garden and develop proposals for the new city community garden, they translated the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of the gardeners into plans and designs that made the IGMG experience more visual, visible, and legible to those familiar and unfamiliar with the garden. At one of the student presentations, a gardener commented, “We see in them [the designs] the ideas

we shared with you” (fieldnotes, December 11, 2015). Through a participatory design process, gardeners were able to see their own cultivated space through a different view, and have their ideas incorporated into a professional visual form of communication.

These designs were later shared during a presentation to the local district councilmember in an effort to maintain the garden and to communicate additional design ideas to the city. By that time, however, the design of the new city garden had already been completed by city landscape architects, and the local councilmember explained there was no way to change it. As a result, a visual analysis of the city garden design compared to the IGMC shows distinctly different styles and forms these gardens take (see figure 10). They represent material expressions of particular values, histories, and cultures, as well as reflect the assemblage and deployment of cultural and economic resources towards specific ends.

The IGMC garden fills the space underneath the parkway from edge to edge, no matter the shape. The organic and nonlinear layout of plots in the IGMC, along with different plot sizes and the planting of trees, demonstrates both the commitment to place and the flexibility of the space; families of different sizes work can work in plots that fit their needs and abilities, expand into new areas, make new boundaries, but also must respect well-worn paths and other people’s fences. The gates open into the fenced area of the affordable housing complex, hinting at the private nature of the IGMC.

The city design, on the other hand, imposes a rectilinear order on both the space of the parkway and the new community garden (see figure 10, bottom). Plots are all equal in size, at 20 by 20 feet, with the usual amenities of a garden tool shed in the center and several ADA accessible raised beds. Though not clearly labeled in the figure, the gated entrance is placed along the east side facing the small public park and near the existing public walkway. The new

garden can be expanded in the future according to its internal grid, representing its replicability despite hyperlocal variations of needs. Additionally, the city community garden is integrated into the surrounding public park landscape rather than oriented towards the more private spaces of neighboring homes and apartments.

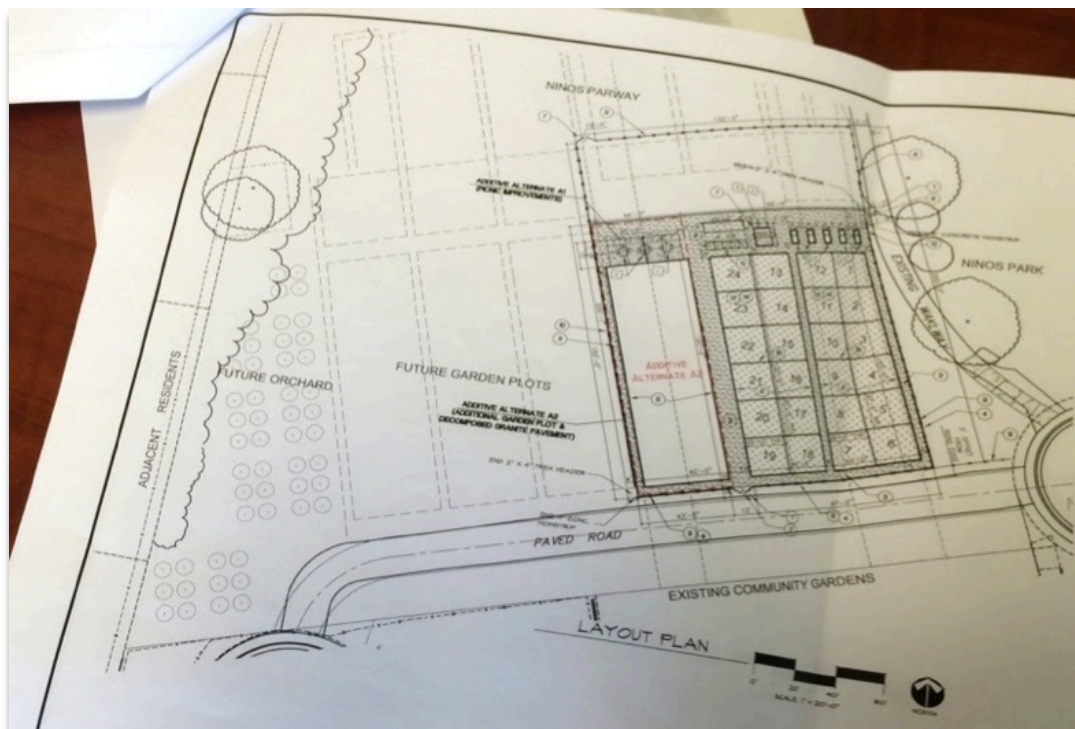
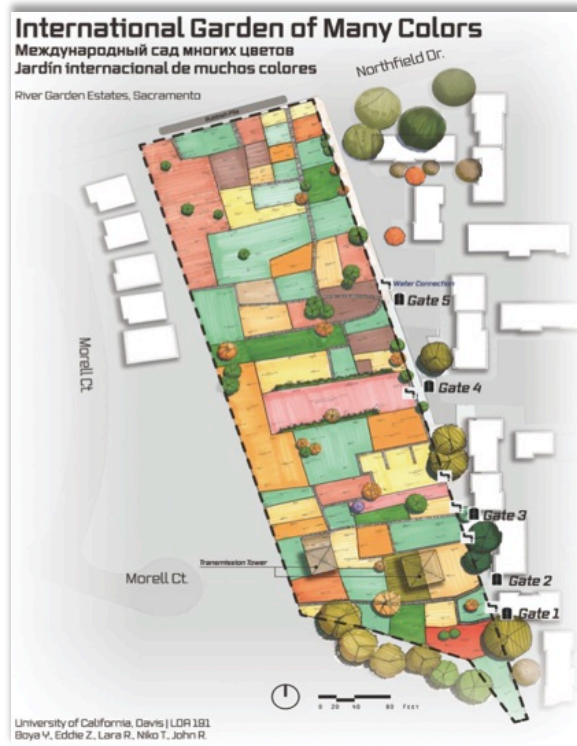


Figure 10. Garden site plans. Site maps drawn by UC Davis Landscape Architecture students demonstrate an organic and nonlinear layout in the International Garden of Many Colors in contrast to the standard design layout of the new Niños Community Garden. Site maps: Fall 2015 LDA 171 students (left); Shuyang Wang & Min Kyung Seo, 2016 (right). Photo: David de la Peña, 2016 (City of Sacramento, Parks and Recreation Department).

Negotiating formalization

Gardeners were not only concerned with the material limitations and opportunities proposed in the new garden, but also garden oversight. When I asked about her opinion on the new city garden, Anya replied, “somebody else's garden, somebody else's rules.” The issue and power of rules sharply came into play during the spring of 2016, after the construction of the new Niños Community Garden had begun. In an effort to move forward with the formalization of the existing garden, the Parks and Recreation Department requested that the gardeners come up with a set of guidelines modeled off of the City’s Community Garden guidelines and others the gardeners might suggest. As the community organizer for the affordable housing organization explained, “some items are negotiable, some are not.” However, since Parks and Recreation staff refused to come to the garden committee meeting, some gardeners were concerned about this strategy:

The translator, Maria, relays a question from a Ukrainian woman. “What if someone doesn’t want to sign?” The community organizer answers, “Whoever doesn’t sign will get kicked out, at least that’s what I assume.” “It seems like the city want to kick us out anyway,” comments one of the gardeners. The organizer responds, saying, “We can’t stop because 100% [of the gardeners] won’t sign. These guidelines are going to be your guidelines. Those that work on them won’t have a problem signing.” Again, the translator relays another gardener’s concern—“Why do we have to sign if [the City] is not coming to us?” Nina follows up on this point while Maria translates—“Before, we didn’t need any paperwork⁸, we didn’t need anyone to support us!” The organizer explains their options, as he sees them: “We have the opportunity to become protected. [The City] has looked the other way and then threatened you. With this, it becomes a garden they recognize.... This is the opportunity to resolve it.” With this document, he thinks this means the City will not get rid of the garden. Nina asks, “Do we have the City’s signature? Because right now it’s just ours.” (field notes, May 11 2016)

After the meeting, I talk with Nina about the issues she raised. She tells me they have had no problems in the garden until the past few years, and it seems like the City has no power to kick

⁸ The International of Many Colors garden committee did in fact write up a set of guidelines for gardeners to sign in 1999, a few years after the affordable housing organization took over management of the apartment complex.

out the gardeners outright, and instead they are making the gardeners do it themselves. Given the challenge the Parks and Recreation Department faces in physically removing the gardeners at will, the governance tactic instead draws upon legal structures and negotiations of correct conduct in the garden. The signed indemnity agreement the Parks and Recreation Department requires of the gardeners to continue to garden on the land they have cared for, some for many years, constitutes a transfer of authority as much as it protects the state from liability issues. Later when I ask her what she thinks of the city representatives, Nina responds with light sardonic humor:

“The funniest thing is that we didn’t even see Parks and Rec. And they are hidden somewhere over there where they are, we just hear their voices like they are giving us directions, so we don't know if they're scary or not, [because] they are not coming to us. But the feeling is not really good because we don't know what to expect from them because they are not coming to tell us what they want from us.” (personal communication, May 18 2016)

Though gardeners have explained to me they know and respect that local officials are busy, the lack of engagement and communication leaves feelings of uncertainty. However, it also becomes a strategy, as Nina commented, to make the gardeners do the work of making their garden conform to city standards without direct collaboration or negotiation. For some, the build out of the new Niños Community Garden and the transformation of the IGMG has meant the lifting up of ‘recognition’ and ‘protection’ from the city as benevolent; gardeners however, have mixed views on the new garden both in design and purpose, and express concern about the mechanisms by which they are made legible to the state, and thus able to be managed and controlled.

DISCUSSION

Property mobilized in the name of urban food production supports a variety of functions, from providing means of subsistence, means of production, to means of social reproduction.

These overlapping and hybrid functions come into play in Sacramento's community gardens, especially in the IGMC where food production plays a central role for low-income, primarily immigrant gardeners. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of the gardeners live in the publicly subsidized affordable housing apartment complex adjacent to the garden. Affordable home ownership, and thus the benefits and access to private property, has not materialized for these working class immigrant families. Despite being renters, many IGMC gardeners are not short-term residents, and have made meaningful economic and ecological investments in large, productive garden plots through the addition of physical amenities such as fences and shade structures, and the management of soil and nutrient cycling. Inequitable access to private property because of class position makes the importance of nested rights and in this case, informal rights of access to public land far more important to gardeners and their families.

The design of official city community gardens as ordered, equal and interchangeable plots, accommodations for disabled persons, decomposed granite, and locked fences reflects the internal motivations within bureaucratic institutions: formalization and control. This issue of control and order is held in tension with the public facing values of providing public services and amenities. However, parks and public amenities, including community gardens historically, have always formed part of larger civic projects to mold, transform, and control the public, their behavior, their health and wellness, and their bodies (Lawson, 2005).

As the more recent "grassroots" understanding of community gardening (i.e. from the 1970s, the shift towards 'community building' and away from food production) has become part of city institutions, the underlying issue of the formation of the healthy and "good" citizen has not changed. Moreover, the design and provisioning of community gardens depends more upon the concept of sustained use, but not necessarily sustained user; community gardens are built

with the hope that the abstract citizenry will continue to maintain them as such, not that particular individuals make long-term investments in soil health, microbial biodiversity, and perennial food plants.

In claiming the centrality of food production for their families, the gardeners at the IGMC make a moral claim to public property they have developed for their own purposes outside the immediate control and direction of local governance structures. Unwilling and perhaps unable to invalidate the claim conceptually (to deny the importance of food) or physically (to deploy bulldozers), the Parks and Recreation Department makes alternative claims to the space to “reel it in.” The official discourse draws on safety, regulatory/code compliance, and liability issues to claim the space, undergirded with issues of proper aesthetics and an abstract public vision of a healthy community. The official discourse also frames the garden space as a problem that local government can then solve.

As community gardens become more legitimized in local political and bureaucratic arenas, they often become more formalized as they are subjected to tactics and strategies of governance which seek to bring them under more institutionalized control:

Parks and Rec staff: “...they were on property illegally...I mean—yeah I say "Oh they're illegally gardening"—we're not going to kick anybody out. I mean that's not what we're here for. But what we're here for is to really help them you know, have a garden where they're not gonna get kicked out. Where they follow rules and we can help conserve water and give them you know, I think a little bit better way to manage, you know, what they want to grow. And so it's like a win-win for everybody. That's what I think.”
(personal communication, October 27 2015)

In the case of the IGMC and the Niños Community Garden, this process is characterized as positive by local government as it can bring certain benefits such as secure land tenure, access to more reliable resources, and often provides structure and/or oversight for longer-term management. However, as community gardening spaces are negotiated in the context of uneven

power relations, there are also trade-offs and complex processes of authority/subject making. In the case of the IGMC, the Parks and Recreation Department is faced with a situation where city residents have been successful in providing themselves needed and desired amenities outside of official channels.

Given the lack of immediate police power over the technically squatted garden area, a Homeland Security argument opens up a pathway for the Parks and Recreation Department to reassert their power over public property that has been repurposed for food production. In precipitating the removal of the gardeners, and in presenting the solution of an official community garden and a path to formalization, the bureaucratic apparatus re-establishes its own relevance in the garden space and reinscribes garden subjects over and about which it can again assert control. As Pudup argues, the neoliberal political rationale lies “not so much in the ‘absence’ of the state [but] in the presence of state power and authority manifest in calls for personal responsibility, empowerment and individual choice” (2008). This control is linked to what Pudup also refers to as “the production of subjectivities,” in this case the healthy role model gardener:

Parks & Rec staff:

“You've seen the cultures and the type of folks that are in [the IGMC], I mean they know the benefit. They've survived by growing their foods and probably in their other countries, so, I feel like they know the value of it. But it's our responsibility to make sure they realize they're part of a greater community and they're doing not only good for themselves, but also for other generations, and they're being role models for their kids, showing that you can grow healthy foods and eat great. You don't need to go run to McDonalds to get your dinner you can actually grow everything that you need. So I think it's our responsibility to continue pushing community involvement and holding people accountable, for insuring that these gardens sustain and they thrive.” (personal communication, October 27 2015)

This production of the responsible, healthy subject occurs through techniques of governance that simultaneously re-configure the spaces of real, tangible gardens, and draws upon individual gardeners themselves to become the enforcers of regulatory guidelines.

It is certainly true that IGMC garden leaders have attempted to defend the garden through strategies that both seek to conform and give challenge to official rules, regulations, and discourses. The longevity of the gardens under the towers points to what James Scott calls the “indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability.” The ongoing transformation also reflects Scott’s argument that “no administrative system is capable of representing any existing social community except through a heroic and greatly schematized process of abstraction and simplification...It is not simply a question of capacity...it is also a question of purpose” (1998). As gardeners negotiate the terms of their gardening practices with the city, they resist categorization as those who pursue gardening simply for recreational purposes, and highlight their role as food producers for their families. Through this claim, they seek to expand the acceptable form of urban agriculture and community gardening as supported by the city in practice, and highlight that the official forms available to people to produce food in urban contexts might need to be different across class and ethnic heritage.

Providing gardeners with the opportunity to formalize the IGMC through the creation of guidelines is not as much a moment to participate in democratic politics, nor a simple production of compliant neoliberal subjects. I suggest that what is happening in this so-called transformation is a version of the interplay between Rancière’s notion of dissensus and consensus, the latter of which he argues, “does not simply mean the agreement of the political parties or of social partners on the common interests of the community. It means a reconfiguration of the visibility

of the common” (2009). In the underutilized public space in the parkway, the gardeners engage in a kind of politics that is rooted in the connection to aesthetics and embodied practice. Rancière argues that politics “consists in re-figuring space, that is in what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it.” The re-configuration of an open space parkway into a place of urban food production makes visible an alternative experience of public space in the city and re-distributes resources according a different understanding of what is ‘sensible’ to do, be, and aesthetically produce in that space.

As Anya says “[the gardeners] are used to working, not playing political games” (field notes October 14, 2016). In living out a gardening practice that diverges from and goes beyond the official forms and purposes of the state-supported practice, they disrupt what Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible in important ways, and demonstrate a “community of sense” around food production as an aesthetic act. Rancière defines a community of sense as “a frame of visibility and intelligibility that puts things or practices together under the same meaning, which shapes thereby a certain sense of community... [it] is a certain cutting out of space and time that binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility.” In contrast to a general idea of parks volunteerism, stewardship, and abstract citizen, I argue that at the IGMC, the centrality of food production is what helps bring people together in community, to define themselves as a particular kind of community garden, one that does not presume community but one that is continually forming itself in the garden. The aesthetic practice of gardening at the IGMC, with its visible density, abundance, and diversity, produces shared patterns and systems of meaning that are intelligible to gardeners, but not as intelligible to the state. The politics that form around the defense of this garden are rooted in the aesthetic practice of urban gardening, and aim to make space for alternative aesthetic realities in the city.

CONCLUSION

Gardening practices in the city are as political as they are aesthetic, as idealistic as they are practical. While Nik Heynen et al. posit that community gardens generally possess the “power to produce urban environments in line with the aspirations, needs and desires of those inhabiting these spaces, the capacity to produce the physical and social environment in which one dwells” (as cited in Milbourne, 2012), this research argues that power is not necessarily wrapped up within the garden itself, but in the broader social and political context, and in a politics of aesthetics that reframes what is possible in public garden space.

Creating a socially and ecological resilient, healthy, and equitable city requires much more than planting vegetables, though I would argue food lies at the center of humanity’s social, cultural, ecological, and economic relationships. What will the future of democratic, community-based, immigrant gardening in Sacramento look like? In planning for community gardens, stakeholders should seek a balance between formal and informal structures to meet the needs of a broad spectrum of users, especially in culturally diverse places. As von Hassell argues, “The effort to create and protect community gardens themselves “straddles grassroots community activism, urban agriculture, environmental activism, and a more individualized search for meaning, spirituality, and community” (as cited in Okvat & Zautra, 2011, p. 379). The success and struggle at the International Garden of Many Colors invites advocates, planners, and gardeners alike to consider how social and cultural diversity goes hand in hand with biodiversity. In the end, polyculture is also about people, and their different ways of being in the garden.

Urban agriculture projects certainly hold the promise of benefits to those who engage in them directly. They also represent an investment cities can make in urban infrastructure. However without careful attention to the forms these projects take and the ways in which

communities are able to participate in their making, dominant normative assumptions can make it difficult for diverse gardening types to flourish. Certomà & Notteboom argue that “despite owing a lot to the alternative urban culture, urban gardening initiatives often became an integral part of the institutional planning strategy, not because they are *flattered* by it, but because they *transform* it through continuous, non-linear and networked relationships (including cooperation, antagonism, [and] opposition)” (2015 emphasis in original). However, those transformations are not abstract changes, but real policy and resource allocation decisions impacting real people. In the case of community gardens in Sacramento, I argue there is a lack of local capacity to address the needs of experienced residents who have an understanding of urban agriculture that is primarily oriented towards household food production, and not recreation or leisure. For lower-income communities, especially immigrant communities with roots in practices of cultivation, an urban agriculture infrastructure that provides space for that type of production is a critical public amenity. This research confirms the idea that the move towards co-production of space requires a major shift for city agencies and planners who normally maintain full control over city making processes (Hou, 2014).

However, given diverse needs amongst diverse communities, what does local government need to understand and do in order to meet these needs? More open, collaborative visioning and design processes are one avenue to addressing these issues. Just as planners design different types of parks for different ages of children, there is an opportunity to diversify publicly funded urban agriculture forms in Sacramento. The very existence of the informal garden speaks to this opportunity also as a potential unmet need. As city Departments go through budget and leadership crises, there are obvious constraints on building internal capacity—this is why ongoing partnership with the public is crucial for the survival of public amenities and

institutions. Shifting an understanding of the public from simply consumers of public amenities into co-designers and collaborators can allow for hyperlocal (i.e. neighborhood level), culturally appropriate aesthetic realities to emerge from a range of “experts” that includes gardeners themselves.

Community gardens are important urban forms because they conceptually and materially encompass multiple social and ecological relationships—they are places to grow food and community. They also make deeply rooted aesthetic values and norms visible in the built environment. When carried out by local government agencies, they also become particular strategies for managing urban open space, parks, and public services geared towards leisure and recreation. However, there is no one right way or one correct urban form of community gardening—there are many ways to grow food in the city, many ways to grow community, and many different communities for local government to serve.



Figure 11. Garden Futures. International Garden of Many Colors (left) and the newly built Niños Community Garden (right). Photo: author, 2016.

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