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Cultivating change: Aspirations, realities and limits of community gardens in Windsor, Ontario

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Graduate Program in Anthropology
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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CULTIVATING CHANGE: ASPIRATIONS, REALITIES AND LIMITS OF
COMMUNITY GARDENS IN WINDSOR, ONTARIO

Monograph

by

Brian E. Venne

Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This thesis, based on ethnographic research carried out in the summer and fall of 2012, focuses on three community gardens created post-2009 in the city of Windsor, Ontario, a time when the city faced serious economic and food security challenges. Specifically, this thesis investigates how the goals of community building, knowledge transmission, and food security are variously enacted at Windsor community gardens. Beyond illustrating the varied nature of community garden projects, the analysis presented draws attention to some of the factors that influence the success of individual gardens. The neoliberal context may frame garden projects but it does not fully contain them. These projects are not just about self-help and citizen responsibilitization but also about the empowerment of marginalized communities. They are not about market-oriented solutions to the problems of a de-industrializing city but rather represent an alternative, albeit modest, to the neoliberal status quo.

Keywords:

Community Gardens, Food Security, Community Building, Alternative Food Initiatives, Urban Agriculture, Windsor, Ontario

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank everyone involved with community gardens in Windsor that I interacted with. My time in Windsor was unforgettable and I learned so much from all of you. Without your acceptance, friendship, and assistance this thesis would not exist, so again, thank you. You all have inspired me to continue to work towards a better food system for all. I would specifically like to thank Michele Legre for all of her support in connecting me to different people and for including me in the garden collective. From my perspective, as well as others, your work and dedication has made a real difference and I can only hope that it will continue to do so in the future.

I must also express my immense gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Adriana Premat who guided and helped me along through the thick and thin. I appreciate all the time (and stress) you spent helping me edit and clarify the life experience embodied in these pages. A big thank you also goes out to my family for their encouragement, to my amazing partner, Claire, for her support which helped me through the difficult times, and to my feline companion, Leia.

I wish to thank my colleagues in the anthropology department as well, especially Jon, Matt, Kelly, Chelsea, Josh, Renee, Ian, Jose, and Caleigh for sharing their ideas and providing feedback, and for all the great discussions and good times we had de-stressing over drinks. I've learned a lot from all of you and your work and activism continues to motivate me. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Kim Clark and Dr. Tony Weis for their advice and feedback early on, when this thesis was only a bunch of ideas. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship

and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western for their financial support.

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Introduction

Background

In this thesis, I chose to focus on Windsor partially because of my own personal connections and experiences (Windsor is where my parents were born and raised and where most of my extended family still resides), but most importantly because I became interested in the food-related initiatives that were emerging there amidst the economic decline. Living in Windsor for about six years while attending school, I became involved in university clubs and student organizations, some of which got me thinking about the environment, food, and gardening. In particular, a course project at the University of Windsor allowed a group of us to observe neighbourhoods to determine whether or not they could be categorized as food deserts – defined as an urban area lacking access to fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods within a 15 minute walk (Larsen & Gilliland, 2008). After that course, the professor and a few students, myself included, formed a group called the Food Advisory Working Group that aimed to start discussions around the type of food system and food policies we wanted to see in Windsor-Essex.

The City of Windsor is located at the south-western point of Ontario along the Detroit River and surrounded by Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie. The Ambassador Bridge connects Windsor to Detroit which, according to the Government of Canada, is the “largest commercial land border crossing in North America handling over \$130 billion per year, or 28%, of Canada–U.S. trade” (Transport Canada, 2010). The fertile land in Windsor-Essex County has provided agricultural opportunities long before Europeans

arrived. Today, agriculture remains an important aspect of the region's economy with the "highest concentration of vegetable greenhouses in Canada" and "almost double the number of workers in agriculture-related occupations compared to the rest of the province" (Antoniw, 2012a). Windsor is commonly known as a manufacturing based economy, particularly for its central role in the automotive industry.¹ During the most recent recession, the city was hit hard with manufacturing in the automotive sector, a pillar of the regional economy, declining by 9.4% from 2008 to 2011 (Antoniw, 2012b). This was accompanied by a significant decline in population, as people left the city in search of work.² Those who stayed behind faced some of the highest rates of unemployment in Canada, which hit 13% in 2009 (Statistics Canada, 2013).

During my field research, from April 2012 to October 2012, the average rate of Windsor's unemployment was 9.5%, in comparison to the provincial average of 7.9% (Workforce Windsor-Essex, 2012). Linked to this economic downturn, local and regional food banks saw a spike in demand during this time and struggled to provide for the influx of individuals in need of emergency food assistance. For example, the Windsor-Essex Food Bank Association reported that the total amount of people served at local food banks increased by 242% from 2006 to 2009 with little relief during the following years (United Way / Centraide Windsor-Essex County, 2009).

¹ Windsor was home to the "Big Three", which is a common reference to the large automotive companies Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors, all of which had production facilities within the city. At the time of research Chrysler was the only remaining auto company that operated a production plant in Windsor.

² The latest census data reveals that Windsor's population declined by 2.6% between 2006 and 2011, leaving a total of 210,891 residents in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013).

In part as a response to the increasing need for emergency food assistance, community gardens have sprung up across Windsor-Essex and City Council even agreed to a proposal put forward by activists and community organizers to fund the creation and expansion of these sites. Although the term “community gardens” can refer to “...plots of urban land on which community members can grow flowers or foodstuffs for personal or collective benefit (Glover, 2003, pp. 264-265)³ community gardens in Windsor were primarily framed as food security initiatives. I was curious to know if these garden projects were as much about improving food security as suggested by media reports, city officials, and garden proponents.

I was also interested in learning about the possibilities that alternative food initiatives and networks offer in terms of addressing the injustices and inequalities found in the current food system. Having examined the literature on urban food movements, I initially wanted to explore to what extent community gardens in Windsor are incorporating a food justice approach (which will be described shortly) and lead to political activism. However, throughout the research I realized that garden projects in Windsor are not explicitly addressing food justice. This situation led me to shift my analysis to other dimensions of community gardens that are prominent in the literature and were important to the garden coordinators and volunteers I worked with. These included the social, educational, and environmental aspects of the gardens.

³ The usefulness of the term “community gardens” has been problematized on various grounds by authors like Kurtz (2001) and Pudup (2008), however, for the sake of clarity and simplicity I will use this term to describe the diverse garden projects in this study, though I recognize the problems with grouping all such projects under one term.

Field Sites

The field research was conducted between May 2012 and October of 2012 and focused on three community gardens located in the City of Windsor. In choosing these particular sites I considered factors such as my own accessibility in terms of established relationships with gardeners and geography. All three gardens were funded by City Council's Seed and Feed grant, a one-time funding source to new and existing community gardens.⁴ All gardens also fell under the wing of a public institution or non-profit organization as this affiliation was required by the grant's funding guidelines. Despite these shared characteristics, the three gardens differed considerably from one another in terms of membership, specific aims, and the characteristics of the surrounding neighbourhood. These differences were a key factor in my selection of these sites since I wanted to encompass a diversity of garden projects. First, I chose the Ford City Community Garden partially because of its coordinator, who I had previously met, and who was very involved in alternative food initiatives and vocal in his support for local food production and consumption. This garden, started in 2010, is located in an economically deprived area characterized by low income residents and a reputation for substance abuse and sex workers. Additionally, the area has as a history of urban renewal efforts and the garden was connected to a number of renewal projects and organizations at the time of this research. The second garden I selected, the Bruce Park Community Garden, was chosen primarily because of its unique location in a downtown city park with an ethnically diverse and economically marginalized population. This garden was

⁴ City Council described the grant as a "Food Security Initiative in the form of a Community Garden Expansion Strategy", and the total amount allocated was \$100,000 from an existing provincial grant referred to as the "Provincial Unconditional Grant" (Windsor City Council, 2012).

started in the spring of 2012 with City Council's grant funding, though the organization behind this garden was involved in starting a few smaller community gardens in the area the year before. Furthermore, the coordinator of this garden appeared to be well connected to city officials as well as to a local anti-poverty organization. The third garden in my sample, the Campus Community Garden Project (CCGP), was started in 2010 by a professor at the University of Windsor. I selected it due to my existing contact with the coordinator and its distinctive ecological approach. Unlike the other two sites, this garden was not located in a low income area.

Research Methods

During fieldwork I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants at each of the three community gardens mentioned above. In total 15 participants were interviewed (eight male and seven female), including four from the Ford City garden, five from the Bruce Park garden, and six from the Campus garden. These participants consisted of five garden coordinators and managers, five core members, three average plot holders⁵, and two hired garden attendants.⁶ I also interviewed three garden coordinators from other community gardens in Windsor-Essex, as well as two city administrators and one United Way coordinator. These interviews provided an opportunity to gain a glimpse into the broader work of community gardens within Windsor-Essex.

⁵ This category overlaps with the others since some coordinators, garden staff, and core members held plots, but I thought it important to separate participants into categories that reflect their main roles in the gardens.

⁶ These positions were considered part-time work and filled by students.

I initially intended to interview more gardeners at each of the three garden sites that constitute the focus of this study but experienced some challenges. At Bruce Park and Ford City, I did not have my own plot or a designated role. At times, I would visit the gardens eager to work and talk with gardeners but ended up alone with nothing to do. I asked the coordinators to introduce me to other gardeners and, although they seemed willing, this did not happen. On my own, I was only able to meet a few gardeners since individual schedules were unknown, even to the coordinators.

At both of these gardens I felt very uncomfortable assuming that I had the right to talk to people, especially vulnerable people, about their experiences, as if they needed “the ethnographer” to give them a voice. Although the gardens were open to anyone, they were intended for the people living in these neighbourhoods and I was acutely aware that I was an outsider. Conscious of my own privilege as a (white and middle class) university educated researcher, I struggled with my role in these gardens. I wanted to incorporate more than core gardeners in my research, yet I also wanted to respect people’s space and did not always feel comfortable approaching people I did not know at the gardens. In the end, this, alongside with the mentioned scheduling obstacles, resulted in my only being able to include a handful of gardeners’ voices in this thesis.

Though in the analysis presented here I rely heavily on interviews with garden coordinators and core participants at each garden, my analysis is supplemented by observations made at each garden. In total, I spent approximately 48 days at the Bruce Park garden, roughly the same time at the Ford City garden, and twice as long at the Campus garden. On any given day I would visit one, two, or three of the gardens and assist with planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, or other tasks, especially pertaining to

the communal sections. I did not have a regular schedule because activity in the gardens varied due to weather and planned events. Some days I only visited one garden, while other days I travelled back and forth across town on my bicycle and visited all three.

At the Bruce Park garden I attended most scheduled work days, which were intended to encourage participation from plot holders and other volunteers. I would assist the garden attendant with the general maintenance of the communal sections or plots that needed care. I also participated in the initial ground work at this garden and helped to lay the wood chip paths, rake out the plots, plant seedlings, and construct small beds from old (food grade) plastic drums. Throughout the season I assisted with other maintenance activities such as setting up the rain barrels on the nearby shed structure. At the Ford City garden, I helped maintain the communal sections and assisted the coordinator with various tasks. I worked with volunteers to plant the communal plots, assemble a small greenhouse and till raised bed plots for other gardeners. During these times at both gardens I observed different people interacting and also talked with the garden coordinator, part time attendant, core volunteers, and a few area residents that would stop by.

In contrast to these two gardens, I spent a larger portion of my time at the Campus garden due to its close proximity to my apartment and my existing relationship with the founder. At this garden, I was able to maintain my own plot and was responsible for a particular communal section. As a former University of Windsor student, I was familiar with the area and easily integrated myself into the garden community. These factors allowed me to become part of the garden project and to feel more at ease when approaching other gardeners. Similar to the Bruce Park and Ford City gardens, at this

garden I assisted with the land preparation and planting, and other tasks such as constructing raised beds and assembling a small greenhouse. Through my participation in these activities, as well as other events, I had the opportunity to interact with various gardeners and managers.

During my time working in the gardens I also had other opportunities to interact with participants. Specifically, I attended 13 events and meetings that took place at the three gardens. I also attended eight workshops and meetings related to community gardens and a number of neighbourhood events. At these events, I witnessed gardeners and managers discuss the goals of the garden with each other, visitors, new volunteers, and the media. By attending garden management meetings, including the Windsor Essex Community Garden Collective, I gained insights into managers' plans regarding garden events, educational goals, and volunteer management. Also, by attending potlucks and social events, working my own plot at one garden, and working closely with two part-time garden attendants, I had the opportunity to ascertain the level of social cohesion among gardeners and managers. Having a weekly presence at the gardens I was able to observe positive interpersonal interactions, tensions, and frustrations as they unfolded.

While unable to equally assess the impacts of the gardens on all participants, I felt that the rapport I was able to build with coordinators and core gardeners in particular allowed me to explore how the community garden projects are framed, carried out, and assessed by the people who make them possible.

Key Terms

There are a number of key terms which often appear in the literature on urban agriculture and which I found to be common in the discourses of garden participants. These are community, education, and food security and food justice. In this section I will go over some of the literature pertaining to each term and briefly place it in the context of my own data from the three field sites in Windsor.

Community

Community is a concept whose meaning depends on those who use it. Discussing the romanticized construction of “the local” in US community food security initiatives, Allen (1999) states that,

Community has no practical meaning independent of the real people who construct it and act in it. What community means is mediated by income, wealth, property ownership, occupation, gender, ethnicity, age, and many other personal characteristics (p. 120).

Similarly, von Hassel (2005) states that “visions of community are as diverse as community gardeners themselves” (p. 109). Parallel to what these authors argue, the varied demographics and backgrounds of Windsor garden participants lead to quite different ideas of community and the goals associated with community building.

Acknowledging that the concept of “community” varies in meaning from person to person and from context to context, however, does not mean that it should be ignored. Particularly in the case of community gardens, Kurtz (2001) affirms that “community continues to resonate as an idealized concept” and the concept of community remains an

"imagined but nonetheless powerful discursive reality with material consequences too important to be ignored" (p. 661). This reigns true among community gardeners in Windsor who often mentioned the importance of community aspects of gardening.

Glover et al. (2005) comment that community gardens are places "where people can gather, network, and identify together as residents of a neighborhood" and these social interactions can foster the kind of reciprocity and trust associated with "conventional forms of social capital" (p. 454). Seto (2009) also affirms that "as residents work cooperatively on garden tasks, sharing knowledge, they create social networks of interaction and sharing, mobilizing network resources, and building social capital" (p. 7). Social capital, defined as "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate actions of cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p. 67), was found to be an important element of community gardens in Windsor.

The social science literature on community gardening and urban agriculture points out that gardens can serve as a starting point or catalyst for people to get (more) involved in improving the living conditions of their neighbourhoods. For example, Glover et al. (2005) argues that community gardens bring together neighbourhood resources to address issues like sustenance needs, while von Hassel (2005) affirms that community gardens are "sites for urban renewal far beyond notions of beautifying a neighborhood" (p. 92). According to Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny's (2004) research with community gardeners in New York City, through their participation, gardeners become engaged in "analyzing their own problems and taking action to improve economic, social, cultural, or environmental conditions" while "feeling part of, and identifying with, the community as

a whole” (p. 400).⁷ Researchers working with community gardens in Canada make similar points (Baker, 2004; Wekerle, 2004; Levkoe, 2006). As will be seen in subsequent chapters, although social ties and networks were extremely important to participants at all the garden projects I worked with in Windsor, community activities at the garden did not necessarily lead to political activism.

Education: Knowledge of Food and Sustainability

Some community garden projects aim to teach participants gardening skills including land preparation, sowing, general care and maintenance, harvesting and preserving, bee keeping, the use of herbs for medicinal purposes, and nutrition and cooking practices (Holland, 2004; Twiss, Duma, & Paulsen, 2003; Seto, 2009; Kelly, 2012; Wills, Chinemana, & Rudolph, 2009). Some garden projects also explicitly aim to encourage environmental stewardship and ecological practices by teaching participants about conservation, ecological diversity, composting, companion planting, rain harvesting, and so on (Holland, 2004; Kelly, 2012).

Other educational objectives of community gardens focus on teaching participants about good food and nutrition, making them aware of the importance of organic, fresh produce for a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle. These efforts are aimed at both youth (Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007; Wallace, 2011; Pudup, 2008) as well as adults (Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007; Hancock, 2001; Evers &

⁷ For more on community gardening and neighbourhood improvement see: Bartolomei (2003) and Kurtz (2001).

Hodgson, 2011). This focus on food is in some cases linked to an increased awareness of some of the problems with the dominant food system.

Barriga (2004) argues that community gardens can foster alternative ways of understanding the food system by triggering reflection on the connections between local and global aspects of the food system. Through participation in the garden and at educational workshops, tours, and speaker presentations, people can begin to understand the links between “the economic system and its impact on the environment” (p. 24), and this has the “potential to transform participants’ view of social and economic systems” (p. 15). Some gardens, like the HOPE community garden in Toronto, partner with non-government organizations (NGOs) to organize interactive workshops on social justice issues that focus on anti-discrimination, mental health, racism, and problems faced by newcomers and refugees (Kelly, 2012). As will be discussed below, educational workshops that give attention to social problems such as income inequality, structural racism, and inadequate affordable housing are often part of a food justice approach to community gardening but were not as common in the Windsor gardens this study focused on.

Food Security and Food Justice

The commonly referenced definition of food security, coined at the World Food Summit in 1996, states that food security exists “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (World Health

Organization, 2013).⁸ Within Windsor the main food security focus of social assistance organizations and community garden projects is on the geographic and economic access to food. Geographic access pertains to the distance one must travel to a store selling fresh, affordable produce. Economic access, on the other hand, mainly pertains to one's income level as well as the cost of healthy, fresh foods.

As Allen (1999) points out urban agriculture, including but not limited to community gardening, is not a complete solution to urban food security problems because the fruits and vegetables grown on small urban plots “cannot begin to meet people's complete food needs”, yet it can make a significant contribution to ensure food access for those in need (p. 123). This was highlighted by Windsor garden participants who noted how the gardens provided a space for economically disadvantaged persons to grow their own food and who added that fresh and nutritious produce was donated to shelters and food banks.

Having a seasonal plot at a community garden permits some control over one's access to and production of food, yet solely focusing on food access and growing one's own food does not necessarily challenge or address inequalities in the food system. As Allen (1999) rightly points out, access to food through community gardens or urban agriculture “will do little to improve income distribution” (p. 123). A narrow food security approach overlooks *why* people lack access to fresh affordable food. A food justice approach, instead, seeks to address disparities that lead to food insecurity, asserting “the right[s] of historically disenfranchised communities to have healthy

⁸ Other UN agencies such as the FAO and WFP also use this definition, see: FAO's Agriculture and Development Economics Division (2006) and World Food Program (2013).

culturally appropriate food, which is also justly and sustainably grown” (Sbicca, 2012, p. 456). The important difference to be made here is between one’s *right* to food and one’s *access* to food. One’s right to food, as Sbicca points out, is the opposite of “charity [which] does not offer a vision or means for overcoming inequalities via structural change because it often takes the form of social services that respond to immediate needs, such as food banks” and thereby “respond[s] to consequences of the agrifood system without seeking to change the underlying causes” (p. 461).

Still, garden projects have shown that they can successfully incorporate a food justice approach that addresses some of the inequalities and injustices within the food system. For instance, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network incorporates food justice in its mandate with a focus on racial and economic barriers to participation, redistribution, and ownership within the food system (Holt-Giminez & Wang, 2011, p. 88). In Windsor, as will be shown, some community garden projects partner with organizations, such as Pathway to Potential,⁹ which are working to change legislation that affects income distribution and affordable housing – a characteristic of a food justice approach.

Organization of Thesis

The core chapters of this thesis explore how the goals of community building, knowledge transmission about food and ecological agriculture, and food security are approached at each the garden sites included in my research. Chapter one focuses on the Ford City

⁹ <http://pathwaytopotential.ca/about-us/>

Community Garden, Chapter two on the Bruce Park Community Garden, and Chapter three on the Campus Community Garden Project.

The final chapter of the thesis summarizes the preceding discussion probing the effectiveness of each garden project in meeting its goals in these areas. It further comments on what may account for different degrees of success at each garden and overviews the possibilities and limitations faced by community gardens in a neoliberal context.

Chapter 1: Ford City Community Garden

Introduction

I catch the CROSSTOWN 2 bus from campus in the morning and travel east down Wyandotte Street towards Drouillard. Looking out the window I see the cityscape change as we move across town. Along the route empty store fronts with for sale signs are posted in the windows of closed businesses. The bus passes through "Little Lebanon" with the restaurants and store signs written in Arabic, which indicate I'm now on the east side of town. Living in Windsor for years I had heard about the Drouillard area being a rough part of town where sex workers walk the streets at night, crime and drug problems are common, and where one should not walk alone – a reputation that proved to be more of a stereotype than reality. Nevertheless, the area has its problems, some of which the Ford City Redevelopment Committee prioritized in 2007: drugs, commercial corridor, and abandoned and derelict buildings (Hayes, 2009).

I get off at my stop and walk up Drouillard Road towards the garden with the feeling that I'm now "CROSSTOWN", as the name on the bus reads. I walk up the slow hill from the underpass and see the International Tavern, a shady looking bar on the corner of a short side street leading to the gates of Ford. The closed auto plant hides in the backdrop behind a row of small houses as a shadow of the neighbourhood's past prosperity (Figure 1). From its opening in 1904 until it closed its doors and moved to Oakville in the 1950's, this auto plant and other manufacturing operations changed the small farming community into a boom-town known as Ford City (Hayes, 2009, p. 8). As

a result of recent urban renewal efforts, an automotive working class identity is etched into the walls of Ford City through the many murals as well as the civic address numbers and street signs showcasing the company's iconic Model Ts (Figure 2). Further up the street empty shops and store fronts are sporadically located among small homes, as the commercial corridor in Ford City has a "considerable vacancy rate".¹⁰ Finally, about a half a block from the tavern and the Ford plant there is a large gap between two vacant buildings with bright flowers and small fruit trees.



Figure 1: The closed Ford plant located near Drouillard Road, a few blocks from the garden. Photo taken by author.

¹⁰ Personal communication with a member of Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal, a local NGO working in the Ford City area.



Figure 2: One of several decorative signs recognizing Ford's history in the neighbourhood. Photo taken by author.

The garden spans three lots between two rundown buildings, and between an alley and the sidewalk on Drouillard Road (Figure 3). I learned from members of the garden that before it became a community garden the land was vacant and littered with waste from illegal dumping of household waste. According to local residents, the city's only response was to post a sign informing people that dumping is illegal. "These plots used to 'grow' bags of garbage, old couches, refrigerators, needles, and broken bottles", according to Steve, the volunteer garden coordinator, "which reinforced the stereotyped image of Ford City". When Steve approached the city about using the land they wanted the garden to pay taxes on the property, but he told them, "No, we're doing you guys a favour" by cleaning up the land and putting it to use. It took about two years to obtain the tax-free lease that allowed the community garden to use the city's property.

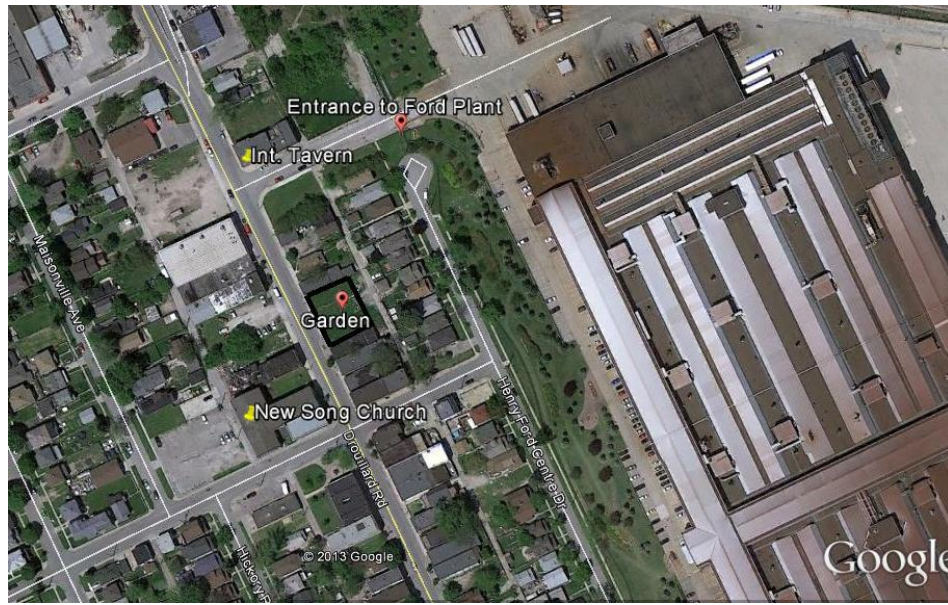


Figure 3: Satellite view of the Ford City Community Garden and surrounding neighbourhood in 2010. Photo from Google Earth.

Back at the garden entrance Jim, who is approximately 50 years old, walks out from his place across the alley without a shirt and looking a little rough. I had heard that alcoholism is not uncommon in this neighbourhood and so my first thought was that he is the neighbourhood drunk based on his appearance and demeanor, but my rash judgement is quickly disproved as I learn he just woke up after working midnight shift. Jim is very friendly and likes to talk, and he and I chat as he waters the raised beds with a hose that leads back to his place across the alley. The garden coordinator and Jim's landlord have an informal agreement where the garden pays the water bill since no other water source is available nearby. Jim is quite proud of his role here, and his commitment to the garden is stronger than any other person I met there. He takes pride in his role and responsibility as a caretaker and watchman at this garden, which is important to him and to the up keep of the garden.

Over the past two years the Ford City Community Garden has established itself as a hub of activity in the neighbourhood. This is in part due to the welcoming yet informal attitude of Steve, the garden coordinator; who takes a hands-off approach providing gardeners with the autonomy to manage their own plots, while still providing necessary assistance and support. One day I overheard someone ask Steve to take down the bright yellow caution tape that Jim had put around the raised beds because “it looks ugly”, to which Steve replied: “It’s not my garden”. Another time a gardener asked him where to plant a tree sapling to which Steve jokingly replied, “This is your garden, empower yourself”. Contrary to what it may seem, in these situations Steve was not being dismissive but rather encouraging gardeners to take ownership of the site. As he explained to me, through his work in the garden Steve learnt, “to just let people be themselves, and being okay with letting things go.” At the Ford City garden, members’ recommendations and ideas were always taken into consideration and were even implemented without Steve’s supervision – what he referred to as “decentralized decision making”.

Based on my observations the Ford City garden was slightly less coordinated than the other gardens I worked in and visited. Steve informs people when he will be around to work and encourages people to come out at those times – but those times are based around his own busy schedule. On a few occasions, Steve contacted me about his plans to work in the garden and I would arrive to find him working alone. He explained that in order to get a good amount of work done around the garden he would sometimes show up unannounced to work without the constraints of other gardeners approaching him. The volunteer garden coordinator position is not Steve’s only responsibility, which also

includes a family, a full time job, working as a volunteer pastor at New Song Church, being a founding member of a Community Supported Agriculture initiative and chicken cooperative, and participating in a range of Windsor-Essex Community Garden Collective activities. Such commitments, understandably, do not permit Steve to devote much time to coordinate meetings and recruit new members.

The recruiting and engaging of potential gardeners is done in a manner that fits Steve's limited time availability and general laid back approach to managing the garden. The few methods used to advertise and recruit members are: word of mouth; a Facebook page; New Song Church announcements; and a spot in the newsletter put out by Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal (FCNR).¹¹ Relatively little time and effort are put into the recruiting endeavour, yet during the 2012 season all the garden plots were planted. The recruitment approach is not a product of laziness or apathy but rather characteristic of the aims and goals of the garden: if people want to come to learn how to garden and grow vegetables, then it is assumed they will come.

The garden is quite visible along the main street across from New Song Church – a well-known and popular place – and many community events have been held in the garden. These events and the visibility of the garden emphasize the garden's openness and allow neighbourhood residents and interested others to join voluntarily. Parallel to findings from research among gardeners in New York City (Schmelzkopf, 1995), the bulk of maintenance and organizational work at the Ford City garden falls on a few core

¹¹ FCNR is an NGO located down the street from the garden and involved in a number of different neighbourhood events as well as community improvement projects. For up to date information on FCNR see their page at <https://www.facebook.com/FordCityNeighbourhoodRenewal/info>

volunteers, especially Steve. Most of these core volunteers believe that one of the main roles of the garden is to foster a sense of community among neighbourhood residents.

Community Building

Within the neighbourhood surrounding the garden there are a number of social services and charities, including Drouillard Place providing emergency, employment, and education services to residents (including children and youth) and The Blue House drop-in centre for women providing shelter, support, protection, and assistance to women. As mentioned, New Song Church is also located across the street from the garden and provides a free daily breakfast and a weekly Friday dinner serving anywhere from 100-250 people in a night. Their food bank offers some fresh seasonal vegetables (mostly tomatoes and peppers) donated by Essex County farmers and Forgotten Harvest.¹²

According to the garden coordinator, who is also a volunteer pastor at New Song, at least half of the garden plot holders attend the weekly meals served at the church. Down the road and across the street from a relatively new public park, is a community centre that houses community development organizations, such as FCNR, and hosts a range of social programs and events. The centre and these organizations are all located within the span of about four blocks along Drouillard Road and their presence in this neighbourhood reflects the prevalence of vulnerable, marginalized and low income area residents.

The garden coordinator and others around the garden sometimes mentioned problems in the Ford City-Drouillard area such as alcoholism, drug use and addiction,

¹² Forgotten Harvest is a 'food rescue' organization that aims to "relieve poverty and hunger in Ontario by rescuing surplus, prepared and perishable food and donating it to emergency food providers." <http://www.forgottenharvest.ca/page.aspx?p=4>

prostitution, and crime. For this reason, this neighbourhood has a long history of community driven improvement projects that have targeted such problems and aimed to improve the overall image of the area.¹³ When asked about the challenges in the area

Steve, said:

Just like an affluent middle class suburb may have people walking their dogs, the same thing happens in this area only there a lot of people...in various states of drug use, maybe they're drunk or high, maybe they're just angry at the system. Because we invited more community participation, it invites more interaction with people who may or may not have good social skills or be able to resolve conflicts, [or] manage their addictions or health. Somebody gets drunk and attacks the cherry tree. That happened this year. Somebody has a fight with the scarecrow. That happens sometimes. But that's all part of the community garden, that's all part of the 'community' in community garden...there's people that raise hell and you have to work through that.

In general, Steve contrasts the urban Ford City neighbourhood from that of more affluent suburban neighbourhoods by alluding to class and substance abuse. Steve and Jim occasionally spoke of people in the neighbourhood who are generally trouble makers, and sometimes under the influence of drugs and alcohol. One day Jim, in a low but serious voice, mentioned that the house down the street from the garden is a "crack house". The Ford City area evidently has its challenges with poverty, unemployment and related social ills like substance abuse. Or, in other words, "'Positive' is not likely the word that leaps to mind when most Windsorites think of Drouillard" (Willick, 2010). But, regardless of the mentioned challenges the community garden remains an inclusive project that brings local residents together as part of its mandate to serve the Ford City community. The intention is not to seek out poor, marginalized, and food insecure residents in order to teach them in a paternalistic manner. In Steve's words,

¹³ For a detailed historical overview of image renewal initiatives see Hayes (2009).

[A motivation for the garden] was that it was a community improvement project...I also started the garden because it would bring in members of the community and I wanted to use the garden as a method of community building...There's this loose, anarcho-syndicate type, cooperative approach for everyone to come together to not only learn how to garden together but learn how to live together. This is a type of garden where it's 10% gardening 90% social work, and sometimes higher....One of the things that I'm always sharing with the participants very verbally is community gardening is all about learning how to live together, how to work together. Sometimes you end up facilitating discussions, resolving conflicts, or just helping people with hurt feelings or past baggage, because people may say 'this person is no good don't let them be involved'. There's those types of situations that happen in the garden too because it's an open invitation to the whole community.

Admitting and accepting conflict as part of the garden contrasts with celebratory accounts of community gardens that often assume a unified 'community' underpins the work. For example, in Baker's (2004) work on newcomer and immigrant community gardens in Toronto, she fails to mention any conflicts or disagreements among gardeners and leaves one with the impression that a cohesive community of gardeners work together in harmony. However, as Pudup (2008) cautions, 'community' "can mean a group of residents sharing neighborhood proximity but no other affiliation; they are not always friends, much less a 'community'" (p. 1231). At the Ford City garden for example, a few homemade signs in individuals' plots warn "DON'T TOUCH" and "DON'T USE" (Figure 4).



Figure 4: A homemade sign to inform other gardeners and visitors. Photo taken by author.

Underscoring the strong feelings of territoriality that sometimes develop over individual garden plots, Jillian, a plot holder, once told me, “If you’re coming here and feel like working on the beds don’t touch *these people’s* beds because they might freak out on you”.¹⁴ These verbal warnings and signs hint at theft, disregard for one’s neighbours’ labour, and a conception of one’s plot as a private space. This, in turn, reveals that we are not dealing with an idealized harmonious “community” that freely shares the same space and its products.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the garden provides a safe healthy place where people in the neighbourhood can garden and interact with others. Specifically, the garden seems to be a place where people dealing with addiction and mental health challenges feel welcome to participate. In describing people’s reasons for getting involved, Steve told me:

¹⁴I have inserted italics here to indicate the removal of people’s names.

I know someone that comes to the garden just to stay sober, because that's part of their recovery. Other people are coming because they don't have anything else to do in their day and they're disabled. One guy comes because it's something to do that's safe because he has horrible seizures all day. A lot of people around this area have addiction problems and those that come to the garden have something healthy to do on a regular basis.

This account coincides with research findings on Toronto community gardens which underscore the health benefits of gardening. From this perspective a community garden not only helps to reduce stress but provides a “positive place for social interaction” (Wakefield et al., 2007, p. 97). Similarly, in Armstrong's (2000) interviews with 20 coordinators from both urban and rural community garden projects in the US, physical activity and mental health benefits were often cited as key reasons for participating in community gardens. The health benefits of gardening were not commonly mentioned during interviews with participants at the Ford City Community Garden but nevertheless seem to be important aspects of the garden work.¹⁵

In their work on community gardens in New York, Salvidar-Tanaka and Krasny (2004) argue that gardens provide sites for socializing and holding special events where neighbours and friends of all ages can meet and interact. During their research in predominantly Latino gardens, they found that “gardeners and garden members view gardens more as social and cultural gathering places than as agricultural production sites” (p. 404; p. 407).¹⁶ Though quite different in both context and demographics, I observed similar experiences at the Ford City Community Garden, as well as at the other two

¹⁵ For more literature regarding the health benefits of gardening projects see Hale et al. (2011) and Seto (2009).

¹⁶ For more on community gardens as social spaces see Egger (2007).

gardens in this study. Joanne, from an NGO that works with the garden, also commented on the community building aspect of the garden and said:

Community members that may not have a common purpose or interest can meet in this space under the name of gardening, and it's an open friendly place for people to come together. One conversation about tomatoes turns into 'hey did you hear about the protest happening at ABCD? Did you know about the guy Joe that lives down the street that will lend you his ladder if you ever need it?' It turns into all of these connections being made, that without this type of a space might not necessarily happen, I think.

With community building as one of the mandates and initial motivations behind its creation, the garden at Ford City serves as a safe and welcoming location for residents to interact.

The garden also provides a space for people in the neighbourhood to gather for various community events happening throughout the year. For instance, a tire painting event occurred where volunteers and families came out to the garden and painted old car tires that were repurposed into flower and herb planters (Figure 5). Another event that involved the garden was the Chrysler Day of Caring, organized by United Way, Drouillard Place, and FCNR, in which over 100 Chrysler employees and community members volunteered in the Drouillard Road event painting building walls, cleaning up alleys, landscaping planters along the sidewalks, and so on. At the garden, Chrysler volunteers built theft-proof wooden boxes that housed a number of trees and shrubs they donated (Figure 5). Joanne also mentioned the garden's participation in a neighbourhood arts and heritage festival, during which a number of children and adults helped paint colourful puzzle piece shapes on the building wall that overlooks the garden. A local

artist, Jeff Bassett, was invited to paint the center piece on the wall with his iconic yet simple street art message: “Smile”¹⁷ (Figure 6) (CBC, 2012a).



Figure 5: The finished products from two events at the garden. Photo taken by Steve Green.

¹⁷ This artist is known for his ‘Smile Campaign’, in which he pastes and paints the word smile on abandoned and neglected building across Windsor.



Figure 6: Painting during the arts and heritage event. Photo taken by Steve Green.

Through my own interactions with residents in Ford City both at the garden and during these community events, my perceptions of the area's image changed. Walking down Drouillard Road towards the garden stopped causing anxiety or nervousness, and I stopped viewing Ford City as a rough and dangerous neighbourhood full of drugs and crime. Instead, Ford City began to feel to me like a welcoming place and the garden, its coordinator, its members, and some neighbourhood characters, became friends and acquaintances. I came to realize that the garden is part of a vibrant active community of people working to bring about change and make the neighbourhood a prosperous, safe, and attractive place to live. Conflicts and limitations persist, but the Ford City Community Garden is an important part of this neighbourhood and, as illustrated by the examples given in this chapter, has literally improved the area, both physically, by cleaning up a previously neglected vacant site and socially, by providing a safe space for community members to come together.

Knowledge of Food and Sustainability

Another mandate of the garden is to teach people the basics of growing and maintaining vegetables, including how to grow organically without chemicals. Steve, the coordinator, is quite an experienced gardener and many gardeners turn to him for advice and support.

Joanne comments:

It's a learning garden...Steve will come out and teach people how to garden, when to pick, how to harvest because so many of us don't know those things because we go to a supermarket and it's already there for you.

During my time at the garden I often heard volunteers ask Steve about many different aspects of gardening because he is so knowledgeable. In keeping with his overall leadership style, however, Steve is very patient and open when it comes to sharing his gardening knowledge. He explains:

Sometimes as a coordinator you forget that the whole reason you're there is to help people learn how to grow things. And you can't forget that, you can't be angry when they screw it up, when they wreck something because they didn't know. They didn't mean to, they thought the season was over. You have to let it happen...Failing is part of community gardening, letting people do their own things and learn, and guiding them when you can.



Figure 7: Steve standing in front of the new sign with freshly harvested Toscano kale and kohlrabi.

Photo taken by author.

The teaching and learning support is not limited to residents living in Ford City but extends to visiting groups as well. For instance, during the summer of 2012 a YMCA group of Quebec exchange students visited and helped out at the garden (Figure 8). Vera, the coordinator of the YMCA group, describes what happened:

Steve took us around to everyone's different plot and told us about what they were growing, how to grow them, and how to harvest them....They [the visiting youth] were very interested in, what did he [Steve] call it, the vegetable variety tour? Something like that...and he let them try the vegetables and he would ask everyone what it is, so he was trying to feed their knowledge.



Figure 8: Steve giving the YMCA exchange students and Vera a 'vegetable variety tour'. Photo taken by Adam Wright.

In these and other ways, the Ford City garden and its coordinator reached out to youth from local schools and beyond, as well as to anyone interested in growing food, providing them with educational support and resources (land, water, seeds, etc.) to gain gardening knowledge and skills.¹⁸

Food Security

The area where the Ford City garden is located has been classified as low income¹⁹ and a food desert; a term that is increasingly used in the literature on food justice and which is used by some interview participants and Windsor food activists. Convenience stores tend

¹⁸ Though other types of skills and knowledge may have been learned in the garden, practical gardening was the most common.

¹⁹ Based on Statistics Canada's data from the 2006 Census and data from the City of Windsor's Planning Department, the Ford City area's average annual household income is \$19,140 or 36% below the city's average.

to be the primary source of food in urban food deserts selling lower quality produce that is wilted, damaged or spoiled (Raja, Ma, & Yadav, 2008, p. 470). Studies have also shown that people living in a food desert often pay higher prices for a narrow range of groceries at small food retailers and convenience stores compared to supermarkets – an average of 1.6 times more (Larsen & Gilliland, 2008, p. 3). In the Ford City area limited access to fresh produce is not only due to a lack of grocery stores (the nearest one is located approximately 2 km from the garden), but also to a lack of access because of low income.

In this context, the Ford City Community Garden contributes to food security in two ways: by growing food and donating it to food banks in the area, and by providing the space and support for residents to grow their own food. Joanne speaks to the latter:

Within this community people do have a difficulty quite often providing healthy food for their families and themselves, so this [garden] space was designed to give people an opportunity to grow their own food and have control over the production.

Steve elaborates on this point:

There was a high need for low income people to learn how to stretch their budget and how to reinterpret where their food basket comes from.²⁰ Because that's a big issue: food security. A lot of folks in this area are food insecure and they're not sure if they'll have enough money for the rest of the month let alone week, which is why the whole [New Song] church is there to begin with. You can show them ways to save money every growing season by having some container gardens or being involved in the community garden.

As Steve explains, gardeners in Ford City can save on food by growing vegetables that would otherwise have to be purchased at inaccessible prices. This claim is partly

²⁰ Steve also alludes to an educational aspect in that teaching people to grow their own food will lead to a better understanding of how and where food is produced as well as reducing one's dependencies on grocery stores. This approach is part of what Wekerle (2004) and Starr (2000) refers to as "delinking" from the corporate dominated food system.

corroborated by more systematic studies of garden-associated savings in other parts of Canada. One New Brunswick study (Hlubik, Hamm, Winokur, & Baron, 1994) estimated that food budget savings for gardeners amounted to \$75-380²¹ over one season, while a Toronto study found a strong link between community gardens, increased quality of nutrition, and savings on household food costs (Wakefield et al., 2007). Furthermore, Saldivar-Tanaka and Kransy (2004) note studies in the Northeastern US which found that growing food in community gardens lowered participants' food bills and improved access to nutritious foods, especially imported ethnic foods that are normally expensive (p. 410).²²

As Joanne said, the Ford City garden project is creating opportunities for area residents to grow their own vegetables by providing the land and resources to do so. Similar to other community gardens I visited in Windsor, there are no fees or costs for people wanting a garden plot. Other necessary resources such as tools, compost, topsoil, and even seeds and seedlings, are also available free of charge. The garden is open to anyone with enough time and interest to tend a plot, help out occasionally, or stop by and pick produce.

The eighteen plots that make up the Ford City Community Garden are all raised beds because preliminary soil tests found harmful chemicals in some areas. The majority of plots have been allocated to individuals, including families and couples, while only two plots are designated as communal. Unlike other gardens, Ford City gardeners were not required to donate a portion of their produce to charity or to devote time to working

²¹ I have adjusted this number to reflect the inflation rate from 1994 to 2013.

²² The studies they referenced are Blair, et al, (1991), Fox, et al, (1985), and Patel (1991).

the communal sections that were mostly maintained by the coordinator and other volunteers. I would often meet Steve at the garden and he and I would weed and harvest the communal plots as well as some individuals' plots that were in need of care. Most of the produce we harvested was donated to the nearby food banks at Drouillard Place and New Song Church, and by the end of the 2012 season the Ford City garden donated a total of 865 lbs of produce to local food banks.

In addition to food banks, residents in the area received gifts of produce harvested from the garden. Steve explained:

Well none of the produce is sold, it's all given away...we don't promote selling your produce.²³ A lot of it goes to houses and families that need food. Some of the produce is grown to be given away, and we regularly invite strangers, people that have had nothing to do with the garden, to come and help harvest because we have too much stuff. Sometimes we make announcements at the Friday night dinner, or at the Sunday morning services [at New Song Church], so none of it goes to waste.



Figure 9: Heirloom tomatoes harvested from the garden and set up on a table for anyone to come by and take home. Photo taken by Steve Green.

²³ According to the City Council's 'Seed and Feed' grant criteria, produce from recipient gardens is not to be sold, though no one is diligently monitoring what individuals do with harvested produce.

Steve affirmed, “I don’t know anyone that doesn’t harvest from that garden and then give it away on the way home, to their friends, neighbours, and family members [living in the area]”. Steve further explained that some gardeners’ primary goal is to “grow food for other people [in the neighbourhood], so they do it for humanitarian reasons”. As a result, the Ford City garden helps address food insecurity in the area – either directly by giving people an opportunity to grow their own food or indirectly through donations to neighbourhood food banks and shelters.

Maintaining a garden plot in Ford City partially contributes to improved food security, but as previously mentioned, this does not necessarily encompass a food justice approach. As Riches (2003) points out, food security initiatives tend to overlook “who controls the food supply and its distribution” (p. 92) and why some people are not getting adequate living wages to meet their basic needs.

There is no doubt that since its inception two years ago the Ford City garden has increased local residents’ access to free, healthy, and organically grown food. In fact, the educational aspect of the Ford City garden aims to reduce residents’ reliance on grocery stores by teaching people to grow their own vegetables. But at the same time, the garden project in Ford City has not (as of yet) extended its mandate to organizing its members to advocate for rights to food²⁴ or target the underlying inequalities that lead to food insecurity – elements that are foremost in the minds of those interested in food justice.

The Ford City garden is not an explicitly politicized project that aims to target structural inequalities by actively lobbying the government to guarantee living wages,

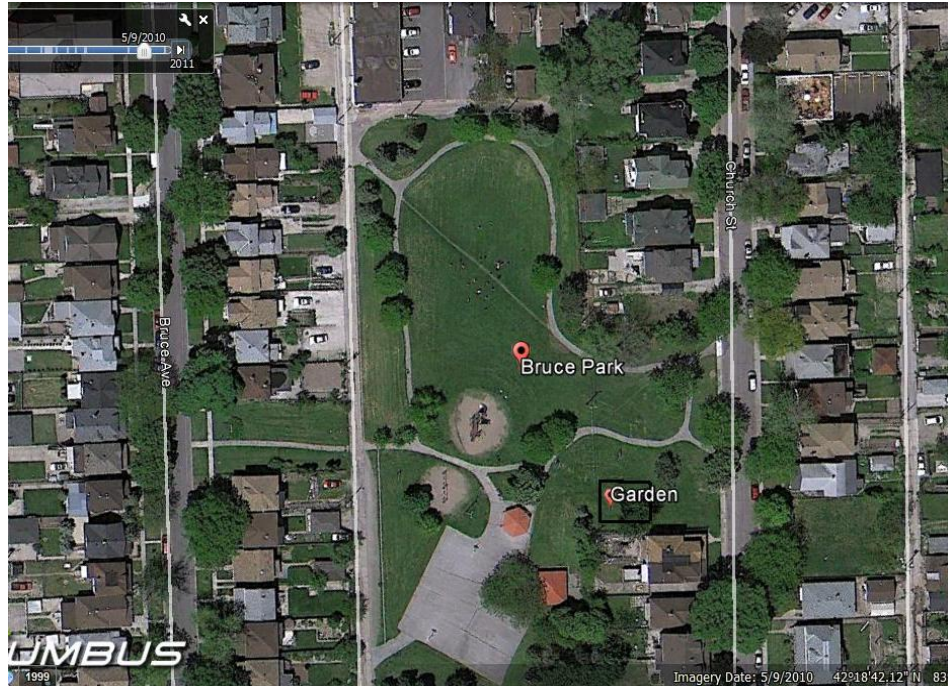
²⁴ For more on a broader approach to human rights, including economic and social rights, see Teeple (2004).

affordable housing, or the right to food. However, while not explicitly endorsing political activism, it is clear from Joanne's words cited earlier ("One conversation about tomatoes turns into 'hey did you hear about the protest happening at ABCD?...'") that the very act of creating and participating in the garden has the potential to encourage political involvement among neighbourhood residents. Moreover, it would be wrong to dismiss this garden project as an example of the kind of charity work previously discussed in the introductory chapter. From the evidence I was able to collect, it seems clear that the garden was not seen by community members as an expression of the community's passivity but the opposite. This was most eloquently expressed also by Joanne as she told me: "[The creation of the garden was about] ...taking back a space that was vacant and crappy, which was a bit of a kick in the pants to them [the city]." In her words, which echoed the sentiment of others, the neglected vacant lot became a symbol of the municipality's lack of interest in the area, while the garden represented the community's empowerment and activism.

Chapter 2: Bruce Park Community Garden

Introduction

Bruce Park is located downtown in a residential area between Bruce Avenue and Church Street. The community garden that carries the park's name is located near a pedestrian path that cuts through the park connecting both streets (Figure 10). Houses in the area are located on small plots in close proximity to one another with fairly large front porches and sidewalks on both sides. According to an urban planning report, there are "several one way streets that control the flow of vehicular traffic while establishing a stronger pedestrian oriented environment" (City of Windsor, 2011, p. 26). This creates a physical environment where residents are more likely to see each other and interact as opposed to a suburban design based around large fenced backyards, minimal front porch space, and vehicle dependent transportation. The garden's founder mentioned that this layout of the neighbourhood provided the appropriate conditions for residents to engage with each other.



**Figure 10: Overhead view of Bruce Park in 2010. The garden’s location is indicated by the black box.
Photo from Google Earth.**

Physical attributes aside, the community garden at Bruce Park is located within an area characterized by a declining population as people move from the urban core to the suburbs (Brownell, 2012a). Though gentrification is not a problem, divestment and urban flight have contributed to the decline of this area. A number of care facilities such as Regency Park Nursing Home, Bruce Villa (special needs home), Victoria Manor (assisted living facility), and the Downtown Mission (homeless shelter and soup kitchen) are all located within approximately three blocks of the garden (Figure 11).

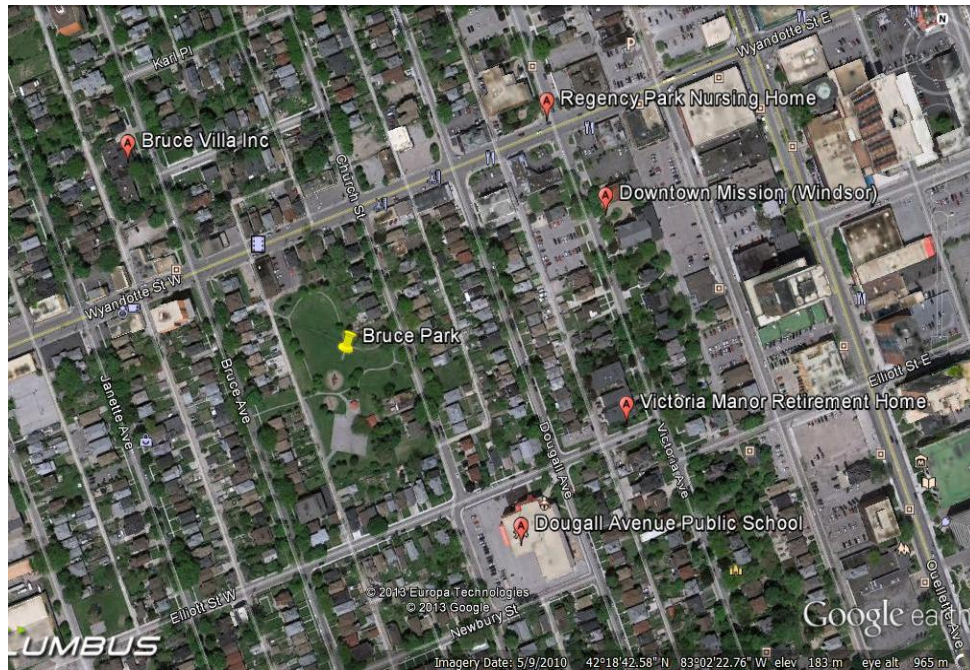


Figure 11: Overview of neighbourhood and nearby care facilities. Photo from Google Earth.

In addition to the specific populations catered to by these facilities, a significant number of immigrants reside in the neighbourhood. For instance, from 2008-2009 the Canadian Government assisted 1,300 refugees from the Karen region of Burma, and over 100 settled in Windsor, with many living in the area near the garden (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). According to the most recent census data, almost half (42%) of the residents in the City Centre area around the garden speak a non-official language, the most predominant being Arabic (11%) and Chinese (7%) (City of Windsor Planning Department, 2013). Sallie, a regular volunteer at the garden, spoke about this social diversity as she mentioned attempts to reach out to such varied populations:

One of the biggest challenges is language barriers, because there are a lot of people who can't speak English past hello and tomato... In the Bruce neighbourhood there's a lot of ethnic backgrounds so there's a lot of different languages spoken on that street...I got translations for Mandarin from the YMCA, for a [garden] sign: what it is, the contact info, and so on.

Like the Ford City garden started by members of the New Song Church, this garden was started by a group of volunteers belonging to a faith-based group called the Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative (DWCC). Bob, the head of the collaborative and the garden's founder, referred to this organization as a "community development organization that focuses on one neighbourhood at a time". According to their website the main goal of the DWCC is to make the downtown area "a great place to grow up in and grow old in" – a paraphrase from the Bible's Old Testament (Zechariah 8:4).²⁵ In this respect, the Bruce Park garden seems to share some of the same community revitalization goals that characterized the Ford City garden. Despite the religious affiliation of garden founders, I rarely heard references to their faith-based background and its members did not appear to engage in the kind of proselytizing or preaching that can sometimes dissuade people. The DWCC, on the contrary, came across as an open and inclusive organization that ran several other projects in the area including a small raised bed garden in the courtyard of a social housing complex.

Bob, along with a handful of DWCC volunteers (who I refer to as the core volunteers) initiated the planning and preparation of the garden with the help of area residents in the early months of 2012. A number of residents and groups participated in the initial planning and preparation of the garden including meetings to discuss how the garden could be organized, such as the pros and cons of individual or communal plots. Later in the spring, a group of local secondary school students participating in the United Way Youth Challenge (Perta, 2012) visited the Bruce Park Garden to assist with its

²⁵ For more about the DWCC see: <http://www.dwcc.ca/>

preparation. Brandon, a core volunteer, recounts how George, who lives a few doors down from the garden, spontaneously got involved:

We rented a rotor tiller and a sod cutter. We went out there and the neighbour, George, saw us trying to fiddle with this machine, we didn't know what we were doing, so he hopped over and said he used one many times. He comes out with a kitchen knife to cut the ground for sod too.

A couple weeks later, during another work day, some residents in the area, including young kids, came out to help turn over soil and plant seedlings. The coordinator had a personal connection to Eduardo from a YMCA newcomer program that works with Karen refugees, and contacted the group to assist with the garden preparations. They also got involved in helping prepare the garden.

Once the land was ready and the plots dug, the coordinator and garden attendant recruited potential gardeners by contacting various nearby organizations and extending personal invitations. The garden was divided up into approximately 16 plots (Figure 13) about half of which were communal in the sense that no individual or organization was responsible for their upkeep. The communal plots were primarily maintained by the garden attendant, coordinator, and a few core volunteers. The remaining individual plots were maintained by elementary students from Dougall Public School, a YMCA newcomer youth group, two young school students and their caregivers, an after-school/summer program run by Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women (W5), and a local resident named Mary.

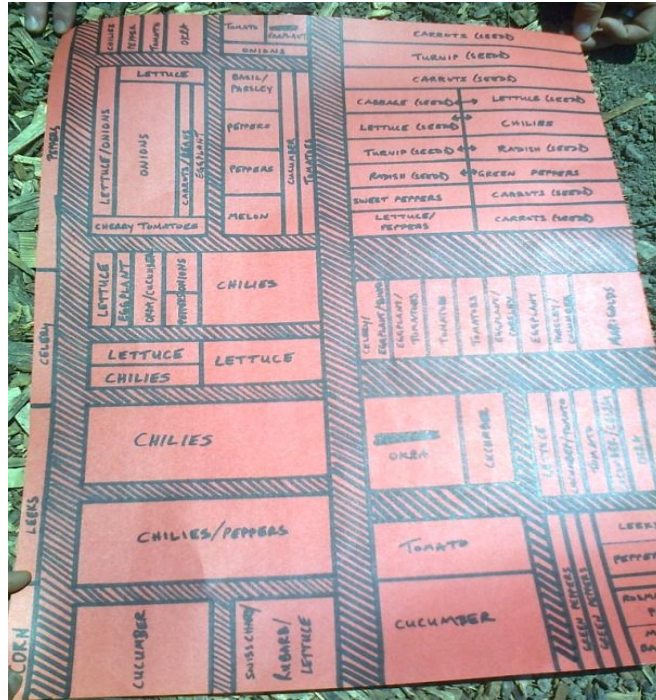


Figure 12: A map drawn by the hired garden attendant indicating which vegetables were planted in each plot. Photo taken by author.

Most of the seeds and seedlings were either purchased by the coordinator or donated to the garden, but some area residents brought their own seeds to plant. Mary, a middle-aged working mother who lives down the street from the park, purchased and planted her own seeds and maintained her plot independently. Mary explained how she does not mind and even encourages people to pick vegetables from her plot when they ripen. For her, gardening is a recreational activity that she enjoys after work (both paid and at the home) while her kids play in the park. George, who lives a few doors down from the garden, also planted seeds he purchased himself and showed a similar willingness to share the produce of his eight cultivated ridged rows. After sowing the seeds, George let Sallie, the part-time garden attendant, and other volunteers maintain his patch with the intention of donating the produce. The radish and lettuce he planted, in fact, became a

communal plot which was harvested and given away to area residents, to a nearby food bank, and to people attending a barbecue organized by garden members.

During the beginning of its first season the Bruce Park Community Garden enjoyed the active participation of area residents who helped plan, prepare, and maintain the garden. However, throughout the summer participation declined and became one of the key challenges at the garden. In order to increase the amount of committed plot holders, core volunteers sought out the names and contact information of residents interested in maintaining a plot the following season. Since the Bruce Park community garden was the first garden of its type to be created in a publicly owned and maintained park in Windsor, it was important for the founder and other interested participants that it be a success. If it were, they believed this would help encourage the creation of similar gardens in other public parks around the city. Bob, the garden's founder, explained that "it's a test project...and if it doesn't work, it's going to be a long time before somebody gets another kick at the can at doing it". In this respect, it was significant that Bruce Park gardeners maintain their presence in the park even with dwindling volunteers and resources.

The issue here was not just the creation of new community gardens in the city but the preservation of public parkland. While the Bruce Park garden was starting up in the spring of 2012 the City of Windsor was holding budget meetings and announced its plans to deal with "surplus parkland disposition" (City Council, 2012, p.8). The reasoning behind this, according to a representative from the Parks Department, was that "there are many small parks requiring high maintenance but have low functionality" (Windsor Essex County Environment Committee, 2012). Media and public attention then focused

on the possibility that public parks would be sold off and the land developed (CBC, 2012b; Hames, 2012). This announcement put the Bruce Park garden in a unique position. Bob, commented on the parks situation while starting the garden:

The city was going through policy on parks and recreation and re-evaluating how many parks they have and which ones were useful. I was unaware of this conversation at the time that it was going on [but found out soon after]. So Parks [Department] was looking for, or was open to ideas that added value into their park system, saying ‘is this a role for community gardens? Could community gardens make parks more useful?’

A short time later, the community garden at Bruce Park was preparing the land and in need of a large quantity of mulch. Volunteers, such as Brandon, decided to contact the city for help:

So we called the city and within an hour they [workers from the Parks and Recreation Department] brought a dump truck and dumped half a truck load, no paper work, no bill and shook our hands and said “thanks for doing this, we’re really excited by what this could be”. And there might be some self interest, the more the parks are used the more their jobs are preserved, that might be jaded in thinking but it might be something which makes sense. And he [the parks worker who dropped off the mulch] says, “We do a lot of work in here and it’s just nice to see someone appreciate it by participating in it this way”.

Considering the city may sell off parkland can lead one to speculate, as Brandon did, that workers in the Parks Department are supportive of the garden partially because it helps ensure the continued use of parkland, hence protecting their livelihood. In this context, it is not surprising that during a Windsor-Essex County Environmental Committee meeting a representative from the Parks Department stated that it “is interested in working with the Community Garden Collective to identify parks best suited for community gardens” (Windsor Essex County Environment Committee, 2012).

As mentioned, whether or not community gardens can solve the supposed problem of “surplus parks” partially depends on how the garden in Bruce Park is

perceived by the city's decision makers. Consequently, the connections between City Hall, the Parks Department, and the Bruce Park Community Garden are important to understand because the garden's significance extends beyond its own mandate and into municipal planning and politics.

Among the gardens I visited in Windsor, the Bruce Park garden was the most connected to city administrators. During the initial planning stages before the garden was authorized in the park, the garden's founder utilized pre-existing contacts at City Hall.

Bob explains:

The personal relationship I had with an administrator at the city and their confidence in what we were doing as a community collaborative gave access to the decision makers and the shapers up front. And we never abused that. So we were able to propose the idea, and what the cost was to them...there's no budget money for them [gardens] other than the grant. And so they took a risk, they took a chance on it. So we had the people committed to it before it happened.

Obtaining permission to start a garden in a city park involved more than gardening skills or community organizing; this process included utilizing contacts within different departments at City Hall to gain access to decision makers. For example, an executive administrator at City Hall informed me of how they connected Bob with the head of the Parks Department who then assisted with the initial garden proposal that was submitted to the city. Bob also mentioned that "a former councillor, who is very excited by it [the garden] and lives nearby, said 'I'll support you', and gave us some input on our proposal, like how a councillor would respond to it." The Bruce Park garden was approved within a short time of submitting its proposal, less time than it took other gardens to secure land. The garden coordinator's networking efforts as well as the support of administrators and the Parks Department were surely factors accounting for this fast turnaround time,

making it possible for the garden to be created and allowing its founders to show how a garden could contribute to helping revitalize an urban community.

Community Building

In this section I discuss how participants understand “community building” and their motivations to create the garden as a community building project. Additionally, I explain the actions taken to accomplish this goal at the garden.

In 2011, speaking about the DWCC’s previous garden projects, Bob explained that the garden was created “not only to grow vegetables but more so to create community, bring neighbours together, neighbours caring for neighbours” (Pathway to Potential, 2011). This goal was just as prevalent during the 2012 season. During a short video filmed by the City of Windsor Bob then spoke about the reasons behind the new garden as follows:

One [function] that is more our focus is community development: how do we make a neighbourhood a great place to grow up in and a great place to grow old in?...The avenue for bringing people together is by doing it through gardening...it’s an excuse to gather folks together and to get to know our neighbours and make it a healthy safe place to live (City of Windsor, 2012).

The discourse of ‘community development’ or ‘community building’ (used interchangeably) arose frequently during my work with the Bruce Park garden and its core members. Underneath the term “community building” is the perception that a community is in need of building and that residents are alienated from one another. Indeed, the founder and core volunteers perceived the Bruce Park community as broken and in need improvement. Being critical of standard urban development practices, Bob explained that:

Our physical environment, the way we design our cities, pushes people away from one another and there are systemic problems too. So our real estate agents steer certain people to live in certain areas...Deprivation economics, so people have fled, people with resources whether they are social networks or connections to jobs have fled certain parts of the city and so it creates a desert of networking as well.

He continued on to describe his understanding of brokenness in the surrounding neighbourhood by elaborating on how people are shaped by their life experiences and how social interaction with others is shaped by pre-existing prejudices:

Someone dealing with a drug addiction is naturally going to isolate themselves from those around, or we isolate them to keep them away, so their brokenness can never be addressed, or they're captive to addictions. Someone who's been abused will tend to look at authority with hostility and suspicion and will stay away and isolate for self preservation... post-traumatic stress, like someone coming over as a refugee will have a natural hostility to the police or to any government official because of the environment they were in, that's brokenness.

Given the concentration of poverty and declining population levels in the Bruce Park area, perceptions of the garden's founding members are not unfounded. The coordinator and residents of the area also spoke about problems with illegal activities occurring around the park such as drug deals. Founding members hoped that the community garden in Bruce Park would help change this as happened in places like New York City, where community gardens – through the transformation of vacant urban land into green, social spaces – helped push away drug dealers in troubled urban areas (Schmelzkopf, 1995, p. 371; Dow, 2006). Theft was another problem facing the Bruce Park neighbourhood and the garden initially experienced this first hand when its rain barrel and watering cans disappeared mid-season. These are neighbourhood problems that the coordinator and core volunteers hoped to be able to address through the development of the garden into an inclusive space for socializing and strengthening relationships, and through the regular presence of people in the park to help prevent criminal activity.

Few events or venues exist for residents in the area to gather and socialize, therefore one of the main actions taken at the Bruce Park garden was hosting neighbourhood events such as barbeques that provided free hotdogs and hamburgers along with fresh vegetables harvested from the garden. The purpose of these events was to promote the garden and also to bring people from the neighbourhood together as part of the garden's community building goal. When compared to the literature on well established gardens, such as 20 year old gardens in New York City (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004), the community building events and actions I witnessed at Bruce Park garden seem small. But the Bruce Park garden only started in the spring of 2012 and has ample room to grow – as a community building project and as a garden. The founder spoke about the barbeque events and building trust with the community:

Folks did not trust us at the beginning when we started the garden, but as the barbeques went on they began to come out, they've seen in the days and weeks the consistency in some way, they know how to respond, they think 'ok this is a safe group that I can begin to build a relationship with'.

At the first barbeque about 30 people attended, half of which consisted of friends and family of the DWCC and the other half consisted of area residents – most of who were involved in the garden. Everyone socialized while enjoying the food and many commented on the garden. People were surprised and happy with how well the garden was doing – a common reaction I heard throughout the summer from area residents and the core group of volunteers. The second barbeque was better advertised than the first through flyers dropped in mailboxes and word of mouth. About 40 people came out and very few were associated with the DWCC (only four). Some people knew each other and had the chance to catch up and chat, while others had noticeably never met and made conversation while waiting in line for the free meal. After everyone received their food

some dispersed and relaxed in the park, while others stayed around and conversed. One man was visibly intoxicated and slightly belligerent, which caused some tension when he loudly voiced his concern about receiving a burger – since they were running short due to high demand. A few women who spoke little English cut in line and also caused some uneasiness and bickering with those waiting in line to be served. The barbeques created a neutral space for residents to socialize and interact, but inviting a diverse group of people together from the neighbourhood brought to the surface new and existing tensions as well.

The activity around the garden during the barbeques was exceptional and gathered the most people I ever observed at the park. The coordinator was absent at the second barbeque and there was no guided or structured tour, so the event was run by four to five young adults, myself included, who managed to ‘keep the peace’ as tensions occasionally arose while people waited in line to be served. It was somewhat hectic and unorganized but the volunteers felt as though it was a success in creating a safe, social atmosphere and bringing people out to the garden – with the help of free food. The occasion also allowed residents to sign up if interested in helping with the garden, and five people gave their contact information.

Knowledge of Food and Sustainability

Another goal of the community garden project was related to food knowledge, which the coordinator and founding members understood as reconnecting and appreciating how our food is produced and gets to our tables. Implicit in the narratives of founding members

interviewed on this subject was a commentary on a general de-skilling of people as pertains to food-related knowledge. Bob commented:

We're in an incredible environment where we live and we can have gardens relatively easy. It would be valuable to reconnect folks up to [food], to understand [food] by having their own backyard gardens or community gardens, [so they can] appreciate how food gets here, what it costs, what fresh tastes like.

What Bob is speaking about here is the often mentioned disconnection between urban consumers, the food they consume, and the people who produce it. This disconnect, which is usually attributed to the industrial food system, is characterized by the distant and anonymous relations between producers and consumers that characterize conventional grocery store shopping (Hinrichs, 2000, p. 295). For instance, a study done in the nearby Waterloo Region found that “food items sold in southern Ontario have travelled, on average, about 4,500 kilometres from the place they were grown or raised” (Xuereb, 2005, quoted from Campsie, 2008, p.9). Patel (2007) affirms that the conditions under which most of our food is produced “may seem impossibly distant, so removed from our experience as food shoppers that they might as well happen on Mars” (p. 8). The foods sourced “from Mars” that end up in Windsor supermarkets were perceived by the coordinator and core volunteers as lacking the freshness, good taste, and nutrition that characterizes the organically grown vegetables at Bruce Park. This produce is contrasted with the unhealthy food choices readily available at supermarket which as Weis (2007) points out include an abundance of “processed foods full of fats, sweeteners, artificial flavours, and colouring” (p. 15).

When Bob mentions ‘how food gets here’ he is referring to the knowledge and skills involved in growing one’s own fruit and vegetables – a knowledge that has declined with the advent of the industrial food system and urbanization. Bob and other

founding members of the garden explicitly spoke about their motivations to start the garden as a way to counter some of the ill effects of the industrial food system. Brandon, a core volunteer, said that the garden should be a place for parents and their children to “know where their food comes from, and to know that it doesn’t just come in a plastic bag on the [grocery store] shelf”. At Bruce Park, Brandon contrasted processed and packaged foods to fresh and nutritious vegetables grown in the garden underscoring his and other core garden members’ concern over the de-skilling of the population with respect to food.

At the Bruce garden “reconnecting” people to how and where food is produced is a daily practice. On a few occasions, I observed adults with children walking through the garden explaining and showing the young ones different plants and vegetables. I also witnessed how Sallie, a young university student hired as a part time garden attendant, happily shared information with people who often stopped by to chat and inquire about the garden and plants they were unfamiliar with, like Swiss chard or kale. At these times, Sallie not only gave these individuals information on what these plants were and how to prepare them but often gave them a portion of the produce so they could take it home and try it.

The core volunteers also engaged youth in the area in order to educate them about food. The coordinator and a few other volunteers from the DWCC, for example, assisted with the school breakfast program²⁶ at the nearby Dougall Public School and served meals to children living in the area. Through the volunteers’ work at the public school and regular presence at the garden, kids became familiar with core volunteers, and while

²⁶ For more on the nutrition program see: <http://www.osnp.ca/>

playing in the park they would regularly ask if they could help out in the garden. A teacher at Dougall Public School also agreed to bring her class of students to the garden and maintained a small border plot there. These were not scheduled activities, but the founder and core volunteers would at these occasions impart some knowledge of gardening skills to the participating youth.

The coordinator and garden attendant also engaged local organizations that bring youth to the garden, such as Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women (W5) and the YMCA. As W5 began to incorporate a health and nutrition element into their programs, they came to manage a plot in the Bruce Park garden with a group of girls mostly from East Africa (Burundi, D.R.C., Eritrea, and Somalia) and South East Asia (Thailand). Twice a week they walked to the garden to maintain their plot and harvest vegetables in order to prepare salads back at W5's office downtown. The program coordinator at W5 admitted that not all the girls were interested in helping out at the garden, but with those who were she shared her basic gardening knowledge.

During the garden's first year in Bruce Park the founder and core volunteers had their share of challenges establishing the garden with limited resources, and thus the educational aspect of the community garden was fairly unstructured: with no formal lessons or organized workshops. Nevertheless, the garden was often discussed as a site for learning and indeed was a space where residents could gain important gardening skills and food-related knowledge – a significant achievement in a neighbourhood where people have limited access to fresh, affordable produce.

Food Security

Compared to Ford City, access to nearby grocery stores is less of an issue around the Bruce Park area since a Food Basics is located nearby.²⁷ However, the garden is in an economically marginalized area where residents have difficulty affording fresh, nutritious produce. This, as Sallie explained, was an important factor when deciding to create the garden. She explained:

I've definitely met a lot of homeless people, [and] families that don't have too much money and I think that's one of the reasons why it's a good spot for it [the garden] because it meets the need [for food] right in the neighbourhood.

Given the incidence of food insecurity in the area it is not surprising to find that, similar to the other two gardens I volunteered at, the produce harvested at Bruce Park Community Garden is either donated to nearby food banks or given directly to area residents.

On a number of occasions the garden attendant or coordinator, sometimes with the help of volunteers, would harvest the available vegetables and deliver them to a food bank run by Men United for God. This faith-based food bank opens its doors every Tuesday and often serves a long line of people. Furthermore, "Men United is one of the only food banks available to the working poor. It does not require people to show their income is below a certain level" (The Windsor Star, 2008; 2010). They also serve the same clients weekly, which is unique compared to other food banks that limit the amount of times an individual can be served each month. The garden coordinator admitted that the overall amount of produce donated to the food bank was minor in comparison to other

²⁷ According to grocery chain Metro Inc.'s website, Food Basics is "a discount format providing low priced quality products to value-seeking customers in 114 locations across Ontario" <http://metro.ca/corpo/profil-corpo/alimentaire/basics.en.html>

gardens and donors around the city since growing copious amounts of vegetables was not the garden's forte. Nonetheless, the community garden in Bruce Park supplied the nearby food bank with less common vegetables which complemented the more common tomato, pepper, and cucumber donations coming from the county (which sometimes consisted of damaged or lower quality produce).

Similar to Ford City's garden, some volunteers at Bruce Park viewed growing one's own food as part of an effort to ensure people living in the area have sufficient access to fresh, nutritious produce. The founder recognized that although charity in various forms is often needed to assist society's most vulnerable and marginalized, it does not address the problem of why people are in need in the first place. Bob explains:

One of our principles is, the classic way of providing services to those 'in need' is destructive rather than constructive. Doing stuff for people ultimately damages them rather than empowers them, [BV: like handouts you mean?] handouts, doing meals where they're just the strict recipient and not participating in it, it just reinforces that "I am unable to solve my problems"...And it moves folks also to mindset of entitlement, "the meal was lousy today, like they got to give me a better meal".

As Bob explained, handouts can actually cause problems and reinforce dependency on assistance such as food banks. To be clear, Bob and the garden volunteers are quite supportive of food banks and the Downtown Mission's free noon-time meals²⁸ but wish to move beyond a donor-recipient model of service delivery. This core principle underpins the approach at the garden that encourages people to learn about growing their own food. Sallie, the garden coordinator, explained:

²⁸ In fact, the previous year the DWCC worked with the Mission to start a community garden at their downtown site, but they ran into challenges and it did not continue the following year. For more on the meal service provided by the Mission see: <http://downtownmission.com/meals/>

Seeing how their food is grown I think is important especially in a neighbourhood like that where there is low income families. And they'll benefit from learning how to grow their own vegetables because in the end it saves you money right?

Growing fruit and vegetables in backyards and community gardens involves very little cost, and in fact, the Bruce Park garden was able to provide the land and resources free to gardeners because of donations and City Council grant funding. However, despite the lack of costs only a few residents from the surrounding neighbourhood maintained individual plots. During the first season difficulty in recruiting area residents to maintain individual garden plots meant that the produce harvested from communal plots was the garden's main method to provide relief to food insecure residents in the area. Although the garden was not intended merely as a 'charity', in some ways due to low participation from the surrounding community, the garden has ended up serving more of a charity function.

Communal plots made up half of the garden space and were maintained by the garden attendant, coordinator, and various volunteers including a number of area residents. The harvested produce from these sections was normally donated to a nearby food bank, like Men United for God, but it was also given directly to people living in the area. On one occasion Bob, a volunteer and I harvested the communal sections and delivered the resulting produce to a few homes across the alley from the park. On the way to these homes, Bob noticed a group of men drinking and playing soccer and walked directly toward them offering the vegetables which they thankfully accepted – a few guys even began to snack on them. He then went on to the homes where government assisted refugees from the Karen region of Burma now lived. He knocked on the doors and

navigated through language barriers while handing over a bag of vegetables to a couple families.

Another interesting method of distributing harvested produce was what Bob referred to as “neighbours ‘helping themselves’”.²⁹ Vegetables were sometimes picked without the volunteers or coordinator knowing who ‘helped themselves’. Other times, people would come by and pick while volunteers and I were present but language barriers made it difficult to communicate which plots were open to everyone. This caused friction among some individuals who maintained individual plots (Figure 13), yet overall it was a minor issue without significant conflicts or confrontations. The coordinator and core volunteers confirmed that this was part of the reason why the garden was there in the first place: to provide a free source of food to people living in the area.

²⁹ This is what was written by the Bruce Park garden in the City’s Seed and Feed Grant Funding Outcome Report under the heading ‘WHERE DISTRIBUTED’.



Figure 13: A note left by an upset gardener reads "THANKS a lot for wrecking all MY HARD WORK and money. This WAS planted. DO NOT PLANT IN MY ROWS". Photo taken by author.

Contributing to food security was a common theme across all the gardens I visited and interacted with in Windsor-Essex. This is partially due to City Council's grant that required applicants to prove that their, "garden will advance food security in Windsor-Essex County".³⁰ At the end of the 2012 season grant recipients completed an outcome report that documented the total weight of produce harvested and donated to non-profit organizations. For the Bruce Park garden, donating to food banks allowed the coordinator and volunteers enough time to weigh and record produce before handing it over. However, informal methods of distribution at Bruce such as giving produce to people walking by, or neighbours helping themselves, made it very difficult to measure and

³⁰ This was written in the Seed and Feed Grant Funding Criteria included in the application package

document. Consequently, the garden's coordinator and attendant had to estimate the total amount of produce donated.³¹

Overall, the core volunteers and coordinator at the Bruce Park Community Garden faced challenges in garnering widespread community participation, yet the garden flourished and proved that a small group of dedicated volunteers could grow food in a public park and provide some local residents and food banks with a weekly donation of fresh vegetables.



Figure 14: The Bruce Park garden in the early spring of 2012. Photo taken by Leslie Strugnell.

³¹ Recording the amount of donated produce was not enforced through any systematic record keeping or disciplinary measures.



Figure 15: The Bruce Park garden in the middle of the summer of 2012. Photo taken by Leslie Strugnell.

Chapter 3: Campus Community Garden Project

Introduction

The Campus Community Garden Project (CCGP) is located in West Windsor between the Ambassador Bridge and Detroit River. The west-side is commonly known as Old Sandwich Towne and viewed by many Windsorites as a rough part of town with relatively high poverty and crime rates. The area's history as one of the first European settlements west of present day Quebec dating back to 1701 is celebrated with heritage buildings, tours, and its own festival. Along the main strip of Sandwich road is a cluster of locally owned businesses, including a handful of small pubs, a bicycle shop, and a bakery. A public school and heritage buildings like Mackenzie Hall Cultural Centre and the Duff-Baby House are also located in the area. The University of Windsor and the Campus garden sit on the edge of Sandwich Town (Figure 16).

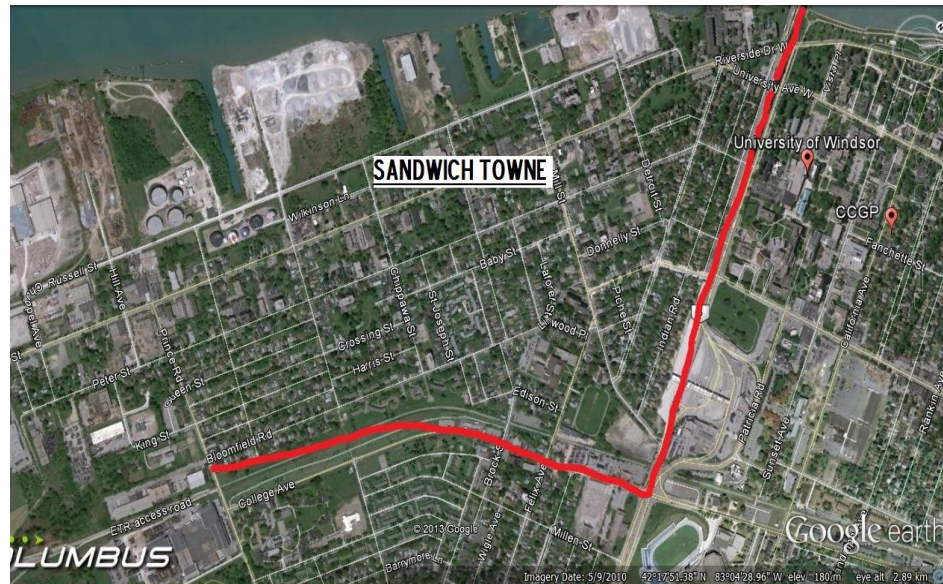


Figure 16: Map of West Windsor –the red line (which leads to the Ambassador Bridge) demarcates the boundary to which Sandwich Towne is located to left. Photo from Google Earth.

The area around the university consists of a mix of family dwellings, high rise apartments and student rental units. Area residents and homeowners have often filed complaints about noise levels and the amount of garbage left behind at the end of each school year (City News, 2013; CBC, 2013). Exacerbating the often rocky relationship between the residents and students is the fact that few events or spaces exist for both groups to interact in a positive atmosphere. According to Edith, the CCGP founder and a professor at the University of Windsor, the garden was in part created to address this gap.

Edith’s passion for environmental sustainability and food was the reason why she became involved in previous garden projects in the area. These included a garden initiated by university students as part of a course project. This garden, which was located on the same plot the CCGP now uses, was not maintained by the following student cohort and so it was discontinued. The founder then tried to get involved with FedUp Windsor

Community Gardening Network³² but to her dismay this organization disbanded in 2009, as its founding members moved away.

In 2010, at a meeting of an environmental committee formed by students, faculty, maintenance, and other university staff, the garden's founder, brought forth her idea of creating the Campus garden. She recounted:

So we were discussing different ways to make the campus more sustainable and I suggested a garden. An area that not only is green per se, like all the lawn areas here, but that is also productive. I wanted to see a garden here where food can be produced for people in need and the students on campus in need, but also for the people in the neighbourhood.

The environmental committee members supported her idea and even assisted with the application process. For instance, the director of the university's Grounds Department, whom she already knew, and a few people from the Finance Department supported her in writing a proposal to the university. The founder also commented on the additional support received from the university:

The university gave us in-kind things from ground services. They roto-tilled the land at the beginning and they would haul compost for us. We got two *huge* loads from the city donated but the university went there with their large truck to transport it back to the garden. They make sure we get wood chips whenever we need it, the university is very supportive.

The garden first entered into an informal agreement with the university to use the land free of charge and over the last three years this relationship has changed and become more formalized. In 2012, the Campus community garden applied for the City's Seed and Feed grant but a community partner (non-profit or not-for-profit organization) was required for the application. At that time, the founder contacted the university

³² <http://fedupwindsor.blogspot.ca/>

administration and they agreed to sign on as partners, but this changed their relationship.

Edith explains:

[When the garden was started] there was never a contract with the university, it wasn't clear what our status or affiliation with the university really was. For the longest time I understood our project as a grassroots project...but it wasn't clear to the university because if we don't have a lease for the land, how do we deal with that [partnering for the grant]? And the university lawyer was surprised that we are not really a university entity. So since then we are considered a university entity, but again without official recognition and without a contract. So we are somewhat in the gray zone, but the university is kind enough to still let us use the land and provide us with [access to tapped city] water if we don't have enough.

The Campus garden had less contact with the city compared to the other two gardens since the university owns the land. Still, the three gardens share the same uncertain land tenure as many other community gardens in Canada, the United States, and beyond. The land-use privileges of community gardens can easily be revoked in favour of public or private developers (Schmelzkopf, 1995; Allen, 1999). The “gray zone” that the CCGP's founder mentioned relates to short term leases or informal agreements that leave gardens with little to no legal claim to the lands they maintain and occupy. For instance, new volunteers at the CCGP are required to sign a waiver that states,

The Campus Community Garden (CCG) is located on land owned by the University of Windsor (UofW) and the University reserves the right to take possession of all or any part of the CCG...removing any garden plots, plants and personal property located on the University's land.

Despite this insecure land tenure status, members of the CCGP remained optimistic that their positive relationship with the university would allow the garden to flourish for years to come, which was reflected by their small greenhouse, fruit trees, and other semi-permanent initiatives.

The garden is located on land where three houses once stood (Figure 17), across the road from campus and directly beside a house occupied by a university organization

called the Ontario Public Research Interest Group (OPIRG) (Figure 18). This organization is comprised of students engaged in environmental and social justice activism. The OPIRG is an ally of the Campus Community Garden Project allowing its house to be used for meetings and storage, and even the use of outside faucets and rain reservoirs for watering the garden.

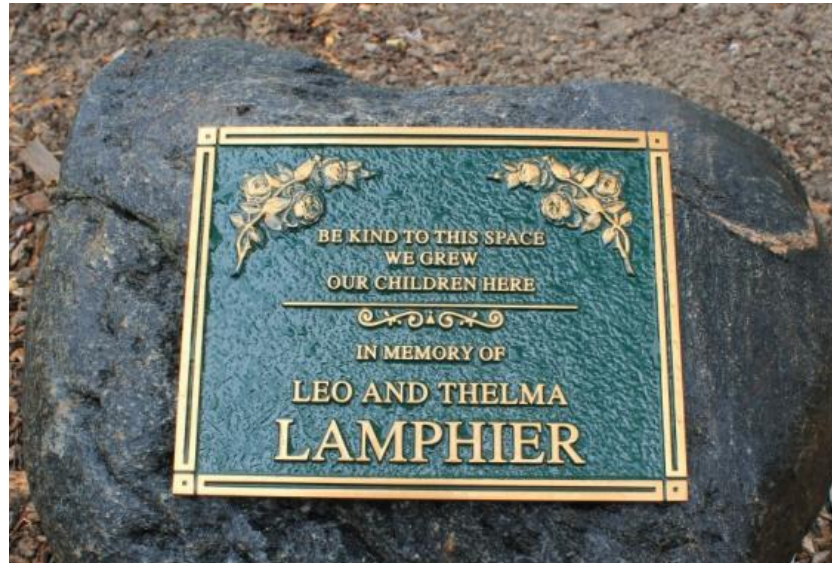


Figure 17: A memorial plaque was donated by the former residents of the property where the garden was created. It reads: "BE KIND TO THIS SPACE, WE GREW OUR CHILDREN HERE". Photo taken by Adam Wright.

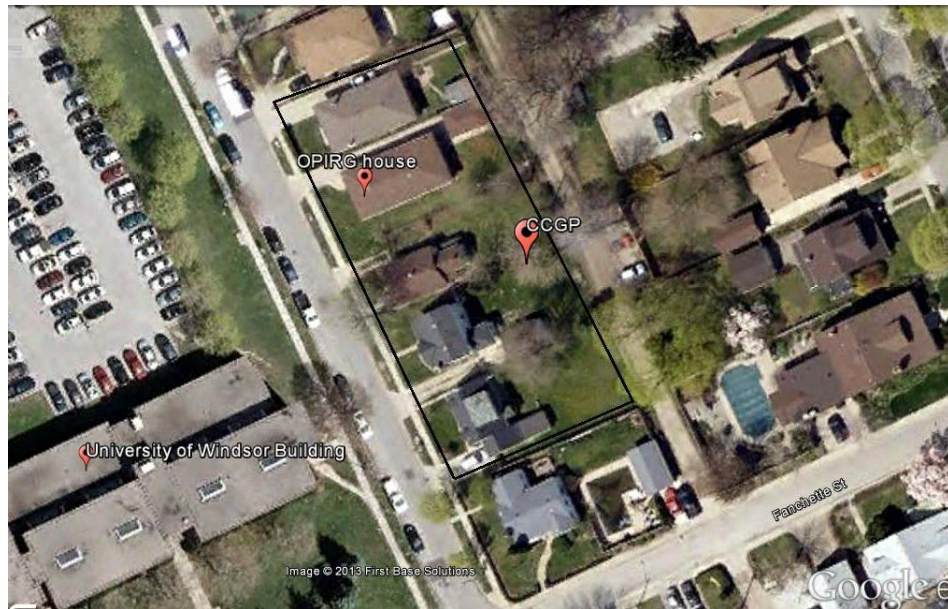


Figure 18: Overview photo from 2006 before the CCGP existed. By 2012 all of the houses except the OPIRG house were demolished. The borders of garden are demarcated in black. Photo from Google Earth.

According to the garden's founder the lots beside the OPIRG house, where the garden now stands were "a wasteland; it was very ugly, very poor soil, it was just not a nice eye sight". Another volunteer added that "It was a field of rubble, there wasn't any life there even in the soil. I remember digging the first bed, and I needed to use a pick axe to open up the soil!" In this respect the Campus garden is similar to the Ford City garden since both were started on vacant neglected land that volunteers cleaned and beautified. From a land owner's perspective these vacant lots were cleared, landscaped, and maintained at no cost. A volunteer at the Campus garden commented, "I think from the university's point of view they were happy if someone was going to take that area over, do something with it, so it was a win-win situation." Also parallel to the vacant land at Ford City, soil tests were conducted at the Campus garden and found above average levels of harmful

chemicals, such as arsenic. Brent, a volunteer gardener who was a university student when the CCGP started, recalls this period:

I heard there was a garden and the soil was toxic and contaminated. We weren't allowed to walk through it because it was barricaded and closed off with a sign from the university saying there was arsenic poisoning in the soil. But it wasn't [barricaded] everywhere, people were still doing some gardening there.

Project organizers dealt with the contaminated sections of the garden by either designating these as “naturalized areas” without edible plants or building raised beds that would allow for food cultivation (Figure 19). Efforts were also made to improve soil quality by introducing native plants known to absorb toxins, such as sunflowers. The garden also had a border of native flowers and fruit bushes, an herb spiral, and three distinct sections.



Figure 19: The Keyhole Garden in the forefront with the Independence Garden's trellises in the background. To the right of the Independence section by the tree is the naturalized area. Photo taken by Adam Wright.

The first section was called the Keyhole Garden and designed with a permaculture³³ approach that emphasizes biodiversity, companion planting, and resource conservation (e.g. less water and no tilling) (Figure 19). The Keyhole area was divided into six sub-sections and designated as communal; meaning that 100% of the produce harvested from here was donated to nearby food banks and shelters. A wide variety of fruits, vegetables and herbs were grown in this section, the largest variety of plants compared to other community gardens in Windsor-Essex. The second section was called the Independence Garden and was also designed with an environmental approach resembling individual allotments but with bordering flowers and native plants (Figure 20). About five raised beds were located in this section and maintained by individuals growing specific crops in each plot, such as beets, peas, and eggplants. This section differed from the Keyhole Garden because 10% of the vegetables grown were taken home by the people maintaining the plots whereas the remaining 90% was donated to food banks and shelters. The Independence Garden was primarily maintained by long-term volunteers such as two of the garden's managers, whereas the Keyhole section was maintained by the founder and mostly newer volunteers.

³³ A keyhole garden is a permaculture design with more rounded edges than a conventional garden in order to increase biodiversity and productivity while allowing gardeners to access the beds without stepping foot in them. The design often mimics the shape of a keyhole. <http://garden.menoyot.com/?p=83>



Figure 20: The sign hanging in the independence section that reads, "Welcome to our food forest. This garden demonstrates an *ecological* approach to gardening. The design borrows from principles found in *nature*..." Photo taken by Adam Wright.

The third section was called the Allotments and was divided into approximately 20 plots measuring 12' x 5' each (Figure 21). With the expansion of a new lot during the summer 2012 (funded by the Seed and Feed grant) the total number of plots doubled to 40. Before plots were designated to individuals, including myself, they were required to sign an agreement and waiver which stated:

I will support people in need by sharing the food that has been grown in the CCGP lot, which includes donating about 10% of the harvest obtained from my allotment. I permit volunteers to harvest ripe produce that will be donated to a food bank or community organization if I am not available on 'harvest days' to do it myself.

This provision was unique to the Campus garden where individual plot holders were required to donate a portion of their harvest to food banks and shelters – part of the garden's mandate to contribute to local food security (developed later). Plot holders were also expected to contribute a small amount of labour (10 hrs per season) to assist with

communal harvesting and the garden's overall upkeep. These provisions reflected the formalized structure at the Campus garden where individual plot holders were expected to adhere to certain guidelines and rules that the managers of each section implemented. While plot holders at the Ford City and Bruce Park gardens were also encouraged to help out with communal work and to participate in food donations, this happened in a more informal way than at the Campus garden with its signed agreements and managers.

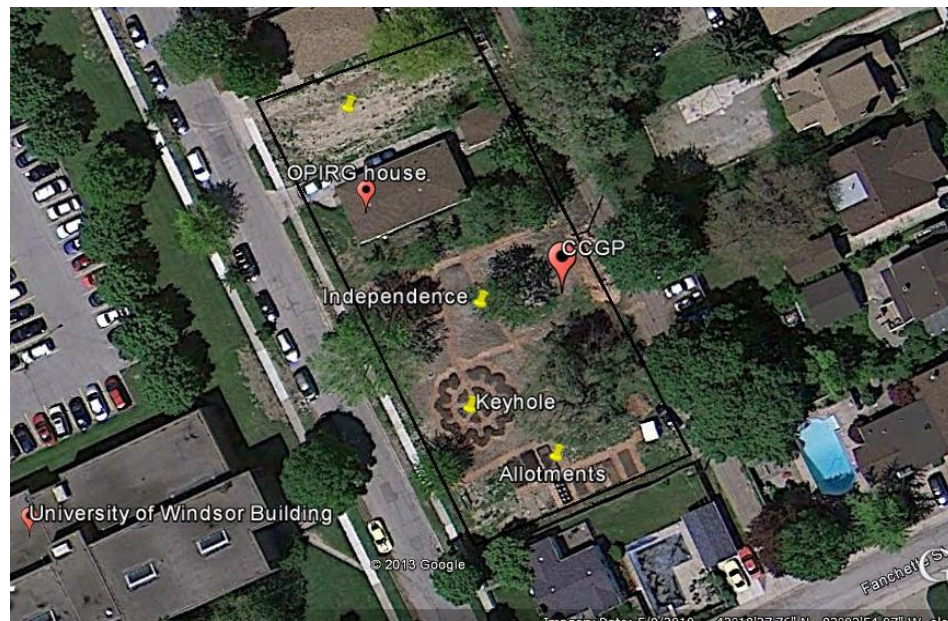


Figure 21: Overhead view of the CCGP and all its sections from 2010. Above the OPIRG house is the location of the 2012 expansion lot. Photo from Google Earth.

The management structure of CCGP was different from that of other gardens included in this study. The garden was run by a management team that coordinated volunteers, held management and planning meetings, and oversaw the general operations of the garden. The team consisted of managers from each section, a few long-term volunteers, and a part-time employed garden attendant. During my research, the management team was concerned with facilitating democratic decision making and reducing the experience of hierarchy at the garden.

Gardeners sometimes expressed their frustration with the lack of autonomy when working in the communal sections. They felt the managers were too controlling and gardeners were apprehensive and worried about “getting in trouble” when taking initiative to add or remove plants. For instance, one day I overheard two gardeners venting their frustration: "I got ‘consultation’”, to which the other gardener replied "of course you did, I got sort of lectured". Another volunteer expressed his discontent working in the communal section and hoped to get an Allotment plot the following year in order to have more freedom while gardening.

At the same time, some gardeners, including managers, were frustrated with Allotment holders who did not put in enough hours helping out at events and in the communal sections. As noted, each Allotment holder was expected help out with events and activities, but unlike the 10% of produce donations expected from each Allotment plot, this labour commitment was not written into the volunteer waiver form. Rather, it was an informal agreement that was not enforced but encouraged, and some plot holders chose not to help outside of their individual plots.

The way in which the Campus garden was structured and managed did cause some conflicts and it constituted a challenge that the management team worked to address. For example, the management team had extensive discussions on how to strike a balance between getting everyone’s input while avoiding long meetings. Brent explained:

You have a lot of people that have different opinions on how to do things and it’s hard to bring them all together, especially if you’re trying to do it in a collective kind of democratic way. You’ll notice as you go around to a lot of different gardens, some that work pretty well generally have someone that’s just in charge of it, and spending most of their time doing [this]. When you try to do it collectively you have some unique challenges.

One manager proposed the possibility of holding less management meetings by setting up different committees in order to create a horizontal rather than vertical structure. He said most people do not want to sit through long meetings in order to decide things because people come to enjoy working at the garden rather than to attend meetings.³⁴ The brainstorming and conversations at the meetings led to recommendations which the management team would present to the general membership (i.e. active volunteers not on the management team) at a future general meeting where voting would take place.

Despite some concerns over volunteer commitment and democratic decision-making the garden functioned well under the current structure. The garden project succeeded in growing and donating a large amount of produce, and provided people from the university and the surrounding area with an opportunity to grow fruits and vegetables while building relationships with one another.

Community Building

Parallel to the Bruce Park and Ford City community gardens, one of the main motivations to create a community garden on campus was to create a space for area residents to socialize and foster positive relationships. Specific to the Campus garden was the goal to increase the interaction between people involved with the university and people living in the area, or, in other words, to ‘bridge the gap’ between the campus and neighbourhood.

Edith, the founder, explained:

I thought it would be important to build a bridge, to have people from the neighbourhood seeing what people do here on campus and getting to know the

³⁴ Interestingly, I was told by someone from a different garden project that long meetings and an overemphasis on structure and procedures was one of the reasons why FedUp disbanded.

people who work here. And if you share a common interest, if you share the love for gardens and plants, then I think it is a major thing that connects people.

A newer student volunteer, when asked about the purpose of the garden, also underlined the notion of bridging “the gap” by explaining how the garden was a place for:

...the academics, the students, and professors to get involved with something that would benefit the community living around the university, or Windsor in general...We also get quite a few community members coming here [to the garden] who have their own plots and we get to meet them, so the students and community members get to mingle.

My own first impression was that the majority of gardeners were associated with the university, but I later learned (and observed) that university professors, students, and staff made up about half of the volunteers while the other half consisted of neighbourhood residents. Consequently, the stated goal to ‘bridge the gap’ between the neighbourhood and university appeared to be successful. The CCGP also held events and workshops open to the public which brought together people from the community. For example, near the end of the summer the Windsor Essex Community Garden Collective, including the founder of the CCGP, set up a garden tour and rented a bus to showcase the various gardens in Windsor-Essex. The CCGP was the last stop on the tour and additional activities were held there, and a blue grass band played in the background while people socialized and wandered around the garden. I noticed that many people in attendance were residents of the area but not regular volunteers from the university community, which again demonstrated the efforts of the CCGP to engage with area residents.

An essential part of ‘building a bridge’ and attracting residents from the neighbourhood was creating a space where people can socialize and build relationships. All of the gardeners interviewed at the CCGP described the importance of the garden as a social space that allows people to meet and build relationships. For instance, one

volunteer – a 27 year old international student who arrived in Canada less than a year before joining the CCGP – spoke about how the garden provided a space for socializing and getting: “to meet new people and make friends”. Other volunteers also talked about relationships, such as Theresa, a volunteer in her 60’s, who said that:

It’s allowed me to get to know people. Someone said before: ‘if I didn’t have this garden I would never have known all of you people’. And it’s true; I [too] would have never known all these people unless I was involved in the garden.

The CCGP made an effort to bring people together through regular work days where volunteers would meet at the garden for general maintenance work in the communal sections, and other gardeners would also come by at these times to tend their individual plots and socialize. New and old volunteers from various backgrounds and ages would observe each others’ plots, share ideas and advice, and converse during these work days. Brent, a program coordinator at the university and a regular at the garden, recounted that the garden provides a means:

...to become more engaged with students and the community around here, and I’ve met all kinds of people like yourself that I would never have met had I not been involved in the garden...relationships form because of a garden and extend from there. I wouldn’t have had an opportunity to meet neighbours and community members, and we’ve got a number of them involved that I’ve become friends with. All the time I see opportunities to meet with students from different departments and it’s just a nice informal way to engage with people.

Every month the CCGP also held potluck meetings where any interested gardener could attend with the option of bringing a food dish, which often included ingredients grown in the garden. Though minutes were sometimes taken, the meetings were largely informal and relaxed as everyone sat in the shade and enjoyed homemade dishes. When asked about what she liked best about the garden, Theresa shared her thoughts on the potlucks:

I like the potlucks because it gets you out of [your] comfort zone because you're meeting people. It's very easy to stay in your house and be away from people, and it gets you out into the public where you need to speak and talk.

Another example that demonstrates the social aspect of the garden was the prevalence of volunteers that help solve problems with unhealthy looking plants and inform each other of which plots to take care of when a gardener is away or unable to work the plot. This type of assistance and sharing was a regular occurrence throughout the season, and according to some gardeners, it fostered a communal sense of responsibility. Benoy, a newer volunteer expressed his sense of community that came with helping other gardeners,

Sometimes, I see that if someone is away from town for a while, others are pitching in to help his or her plot. Which is important since it creates a communal feeling because you know that if you are not there, the community will take care of it to a certain extent. So you can relax and don't always have to be scared that "my plants are dying" or "I don't know what's happening to them." You can have peace of mind. Like when you were away one weekend, I watered your cucumbers, the examples are countless.

I myself witnessed how, when a regular volunteer injured her back, others maintained her individual plot as well as the communal section she was responsible for. Another time, a volunteer, who I became friends with, confided in me a very personal and urgent matter that needed attention and thus asked me to look after his two plots. These are a few examples of how the CCGP's community building mandate was put into practice through sharing a common interest in gardening and helping one another.

Similar to volunteers at the Bruce Park garden, some CCGP volunteers spoke about the garden serving as a means to bring people together in a neighbourhood where people, particularly new-comers, would otherwise have few opportunities to interact cordially. Brent explained:

How do we break down isolation for people living in the community, like newcomers? That's tough...How do you find a chance to meet fellow Canadians? Places like the garden help build those connections...We've approached settlement agencies to provide opportunities for people who are newly immigrated here, and we've had a few people that have taken advantage of that and taken plots.

The people he is referring to are two women – originally from Senegal – who had been involved in the Campus garden on and off since 2010. Everyone was fascinated by the uncommon crops they grew so one of the women was offered a shared space in the Independence Garden. This was significant because, as explained earlier, these plots were primarily maintained by members of the management team.

There were other instances of newcomers experiencing the garden as a special place that helped them adapt to a new environment. Benoy, an international student, also explained his experience joining the Campus garden telling me that:

I was a new student here, absolutely new, I didn't know anybody and I was kind of getting lonely being far from home. I found the CCGP in my early days here, not that I have been here for long [laughs]. It was of those places where I could go and do something, that I actually feel like I belonged to, which is important.

Though other gardeners did not explicitly speak to me about feeling a sense of belonging at the garden, in my own experiences and observations it seemed that what Benoy expressed here was a common result of participating in the garden community. For example, after isolating myself in my apartment or the nearby coffee shop for hours on end reading, writing and analysing data, I would visit the garden to connect with others. There, I would often learn about a different plant variety and growing method from an experienced grower or simply have some laughs and share stories with other gardeners. For me, as well as for others, it seemed like the garden was a great cure for loneliness,

and provided a medium to connect individuals from widely different backgrounds and ages.

About the cross-generational interaction the garden made possible, Brent stated:

We tend to have a lot of isolation between, for example, younger and older generations. There's not a lot of opportunity for younger people to talk with older people, and ... [when it happens] it tends to be more formalized, like a teacher role or whatever. I feel like I can let down on that role when I step over to the garden and just relate on a more personal level, as opposed to my professional role here [at the university].

A handful of volunteers at the CCGP were university professors but in the garden students and young people referred to them by first name and interacted with them as friends. During my time working in the garden I witnessed the varied interactions and friendships among young and old gardeners and I became friends with a number of people who were the same age as my parents. Through a shared interest in the garden, I was able to connect with them as equals without the barriers of hierarchy based on age or social status that sometimes prevent younger and older generations from building relationships.

While the garden was successful at providing a space for people to socialize and interact across generational and background differences, the CCGP, like other community gardens in Windsor, had difficulty engaging and attracting new gardeners. When I mentioned the garden to friends living in the area or other parts of Windsor, I learned that the garden is not necessarily perceived as open and inviting to all. Many were unaware that the garden was open to the public, and one former student commented, "I've passed by it before but didn't know if we were allowed to walk through it [the garden]". The garden attendant also mentioned that during conversations with people passing by he learned that some knew very little about the garden and assumed it was an exclusive

group or university project. This was one of the challenges the management team hoped to remedy and looked to the experiences of the garden attendant for ideas. For instance, the CCGP sign in front of the garden potentially deterred people from inquiring because it looked like many other official university signs around campus and thereby appeared as an exclusive University of Windsor project (Figure 23). Accordingly, the garden attendant suggested a large ‘welcome’ sign with contact information to invite pedestrians to enter the garden and inquire about joining.



Figure 22: The road-side sign at the CCGP with the University of Windsor’s official logo. Photo taken by Adam Wright.

Engaging and attracting new volunteer gardeners and increasing attendance at work days, meetings, or events were the main challenges mentioned by most volunteers involved with the CCGP. The challenge of attracting new members was even acknowledged by the founder, who admitted that more work could be done in this regard. One garden manager planned to increase the garden’s outreach work at the university, specifically the

International Student Centre, by contacting the director during the summer. Another volunteer planned to develop flyers and drop them in mailboxes around the neighbourhood. As the garden founder noted, there were signs that despite limitations in outreach efforts, interest in the garden was growing. She noted, for example that out of all the pages on the University of Windsor's website, the CCGP had the most hits last year. One way to attract new gardeners was through the organized workshops offered for current and aspiring members.

Knowledge of Food and Sustainability

The educational dimension of the garden, especially teaching people how to grow their own food, was a key objective behind the CCGP. Edith, the founder explained that “The garden can be the first step [where people] learn how to grow their own food, because I think it is very important that people are educated about this”. For those volunteers working at the garden learning to grow their own food was a central motive in getting involved. Theresa said:

My number one reason [for getting involved] is when I retire I want to know about gardening because that's going to keep me busy, and I want to grow my own [food].

Another volunteer expressed a similar rationale for joining the garden: “I see volunteering in community gardens or organic farms, things like that, as kind of learning opportunities for me, because, once I settle down, all these experiences and lessons are going to help me”, – referring to learning about ecological gardening practices.

Other gardeners had more systemic rationales when describing their interest in the learning aspects of the garden. In particular, university students spoke about a ‘disconnect’ between consumers and producers and a need for people to learn where their

food comes from and how it is produced. Julie, a university student and a new plot holder, explained:

It started clicking to me that there's this huge sort of disconnect in our society that it's ok to buy processed foods and things in a grocery store, whereas we need to learn how to get back to the basics...my dad grew up on a farm but I wasn't raised to know how to grow food, or the importance of any of that.

Benoy, the mentioned international student, also commented on this disconnect and explained his concern about the lack of food knowledge:

The process of producing or growing your own food is being kind of taken away from peoples' view. People become, I'm kind of tempted to use the word complacent but that doesn't really quite describe it. People who have never seen how tomatoes or other foods are grown but they are going to the supermarket everyday getting their veggies, meat and fish, and they think they just grow somewhere...But the problem is when they become so detached they don't know that their actions are, in whatever way, affecting the whole big picture.

These concerns reveal an understanding of the garden's role in helping address the 'disconnect' between consumers and producers encouraged by the dominant organization of our food system. The majority of participants at all three community gardens expressed concerns about food sold at large grocery stores that obscures the process of production and distribution, and the need for education about the food system.

While some gardeners spoke about their broader concerns with the food system and the importance of learning about this, others, like the founder and a manager, emphasized learning about environmental stewardship. Hence, the organized workshops held at the CCGP largely focused on individual ecological gardening practices, such as

vermacomposting, rather than political-economic issues.³⁵ Educational activities at the CCGP mainly emphasized environmental practices, or as Brent put it:

We've gardened more in an environmental way in terms of working with nature, trying to increase biodiversity, and we really have been successful in the two years we've been doing this...Personally, I've become really interested in the concept of permaculture principles; another word for it could be ecological gardening...We've already done quite a bit in implementing that stuff in the garden. I would see that as differentiating us from a lot of the other gardens in the Windsor community.

Throughout the 2012 season Brent worked closely with the garden attendant to document the biodiversity found in the Campus garden, from various insects and birds to plants and rainfall. They recorded educational videos and had plans for developing a virtual tour and other online learning tools so that anyone could learn about ecological gardening without ever stepping foot in the CCGP.

Another important component of the CCGP's educational approach was engaging youth in gardening. The founder expressed her desire to increase this approach saying, "I wish I could offer more workshops and get more people involved, especially young people." The goal of attracting youth to the garden and providing them with the chance to learn gardening skills was not only expressed by the founder but also by volunteers. Julie voiced her opinion on the importance of engaging the youth:

Teaching kids good eating habits and how to grow food, that's exactly what should be happening, that's exactly what our society should be working towards. We really need to know where our food comes from, and kids need to learn these skills.

³⁵ One exception was a film night organized by a student gardener which focused on peak oil and environmental concerns pertaining, but not limited, to food. The event also partnered with OPIRG and those in attendance consisted of university students.

In line with these aspirations, during the spring of 2012, an elementary school bus full of students visited the garden for a scheduled work day and planted sunflower and squash seeds in pots made of newspaper, assisted with planting fruit bushes, and helped with other general maintenance activities. A few other youth events were held at the garden throughout the summer including the United Way's Volunteer Youth Challenge. Yet, according to the founder these events were limited due to funding issues so she wrote a proposal to the university in order to create a youth education program where students would regularly attend the Campus garden to learn how to grow their own food, but unfortunately the university declined the proposal.

Lastly, CCGP partnered with the city's social housing unit in a project that aimed to teach residents of high-rise apartments how to grow food in containers. Brent explained:

The garden-in-the-pail program [is] where we take 5 gallon pails we get for free from Harvey's [fast food restaurant] and turn them into a planter with cherry tomatoes, herbs and a flowers and hand those out in downtown housing.... We probably have about 40 pails we've done, and it's something we'll continue so people can bring their pails back and [they will] get replanted in the spring.

The intended beneficiaries of this program were people living in a low-income subsidized housing unit downtown and illustrated how one aspect of the university garden project tried to address food insecurity in the city.

Food Security

Addressing food insecurity was another key mandate of the Campus Community Garden Project, however, unlike the other two gardens, providing a space for people struggling with food security issues in the broader community was not a main characteristic of this

garden.³⁶ Many of the volunteers at the CCGP are professors and staff at the university or middle class homeowners in the neighbourhood. As I was told by someone involved in a different community garden, this garden is “more reflective of the ideals of people that live on campus and make a good income.” The CCGP’s main contribution to food security, rather, was in its donations of harvested produce from its large communal sections to local food banks and shelters, something which (as suggested in the CCGP’s website) shows the garden’s commitment to helping “people in need”.³⁷ One manager emphasized this commitment, explaining that:

The garden looks to use the property to do something with purpose, and the purpose is to grow food to give it away. And I really like that idea, I take the odd thing home, but I basically just like to see it grow and then give it to somebody, because I have enough at my house.

In addition to the communal sections, the Campus garden was unique in that its Allotment holders, as mentioned earlier, were required to donate a portion of their individual harvest as well. At the end of every harvest day volunteers diligently weighed and recorded the amount of produce before dropping it off, and by the end of the 2012 season, the garden had contributed a total of 586 lbs of produce to six different food banks and shelters.

This total amount of harvested produce contained a wide range of different herbs and vegetables; as the CCGP grew the most varieties of plants (40 in total) among the ten community gardens that received funding from the city. This wide variety included many

³⁶ The founder mentioned the garden providing a space for students “in need”, and with increasingly high tuition rates in the province of Ontario (the highest in Canada) student poverty is a stark reality among university students, especially international students whose tuition rates are often three times that of Canadian citizens and residents. For more on this see Shantz & Vance (2000); Yam (2009)

³⁷ <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/ccgp/>

unusual vegetables and herbs such as borage, tarragon, and chard. I often wondered if the recipients of the donated produce knew how to prepare and utilize these less common vegetables and herbs. During conversations with gardeners I learned that a few spoke with the kitchen supervisors (i.e. head chefs) at the women's shelter and Downtown Mission, who regularly received donated produce. Both chefs expressed their gratitude for the wide variety of herbs and vegetables because they are experienced in food preparation and put everything to good use. The women's shelter, located a few blocks down the road, was especially grateful since their building experienced a backed-up sewer causing flooding and damaged their food supplies (Brownell, 2012b). With local food banks and shelters in Windsor struggling to offer fresh produce to an ever increasing clientele, efforts such those of the Campus community garden make a difference.

Conclusion

Having spent the preceding chapters focusing on the specifics of three garden projects, I will conclude by analyzing the effectiveness of these garden projects as pertains to the expressed goals of food security, community building, and knowledge transmission. This exposition will include some reflections on how specific neighbourhood contexts and project characteristics influence these objectives and the activities carried out at each garden site. I will then give an overview of the possibilities and limitations which neoliberal capitalism presents for those interested in promoting community gardens, closing with some personal thoughts on the future of these sites in Windsor.

Paralleling the literature on urban agriculture, which associates related projects with improved food security (Altieri et. al., 1999; Baker, 2004; McCormack, Laska, Larson, & Story, 2010; Langer, 2012; Rosset, 1996; Starr, 2000), in Windsor, garden coordinators, the media, local government representatives, health administrators, and food bank workers have consistently underscored the contribution made by community gardens to alleviating food insecurity among the most vulnerable sectors of the population. All three gardens considered in this study contributed to local food security in two different ways. First, the gardens grew vegetables and donated them to charities such as food banks and shelters. Second, the gardens aimed to contribute to local food security by providing those in need with free space and resources – including seeds and tools – to grow their own food.

Not all gardens were equally successful in recruiting individuals interested in producing food to supplement their household diet. As mentioned, Steve, the coordinator and founder of the Ford City garden was previously involved as a volunteer pastor at the

New Song Church – an institution with a history of assisting the most vulnerable residents by serving daily meals, housing a small food bank, and also serving as a community hub. This prior experience in the community meant that Steve not only understood residents’ food security needs, but he and New Song had established close relationships with residents that helped him recruit them into the garden. By contrast, Bob, the coordinator at the Bruce Park garden, was less successful in meeting his expressed goal of engaging food insecure residents while moving beyond a conventional charity model of giving handouts to the “needy”. Even though the garden project was able to build relationships with some local residents and to recruit participants from social service organizations, after one year of its creation, organizers were still building trust with people in the neighbourhood. The Campus garden also faced similar challenges integrating food insecure residents despite its three year presence in the area, suggesting that factors other than age of the garden may be at play. The history of community engagement in each neighbourhood seems to be important here. The Campus and Bruce Park gardens (both facing problems with recruitment) were located in neighbourhoods with few community events and few organizations that might bring residents together for common activities. I believe that it is not a coincidence that, by contrast, the Ford City garden, which was far more successful in recruiting people interested in producing their own food, is located in a neighbourhood with a long history of resident engagement in initiatives that range from urban renewal projects to residents associations. In this regard, my research suggests that challenges in recruiting food insecure residents into the different gardens may be in part influenced by the embeddedness of the project

coordinator in the community as well as by the history of resident engagement in community activities in general.

Despite the challenges in recruiting marginalized populations into the gardens, there is no doubt that community gardens in Windsor make an important contribution to food security, particularly in the form of food donations. Windsor has a well established food security network including, but not limited to organizations like United Way, Windsor-Essex Food Bank Association, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, the Unemployed Help Centre, and Forgotten Harvest.³⁸ The contributions that community gardens make to these organizations are measurable and concrete. The City Council's funding initiative, which emphasizes the food production dimension of the gardens, required grant recipients to record the amount of produce donated to food banks and shelters. The report for the Seed and Feed grant submitted to City Council in 2012 stated that the total amount of produce donated by community gardens in Windsor-Essex was upwards of 107,500 lbs (though this figure includes a community garden that produced nearly 76,000 lbs of tomatoes and bell peppers on two acres of land using mechanized equipment, much like a conventional farm found in the county).

The public focus on food security contrasts with what community garden participants highlighted as their main motives for getting (and staying) involved: the social and community aspects of the gardens. Throughout the 2012 season many events took place in the three gardens, such as social gatherings, arts and heritage festivals, work days, and garden tours. These events in part reflected the garden projects' aims to utilize the garden as a "community building" space – a goal which was granted minimal

³⁸ For more on the past work of food security in Windsor see Plesoianu, Seagave, & Strachan (2009).

attention in City Council grant outcome reports, where little space was allocated for grant recipients to note community contributions.

While all three gardens aimed to create a social space for community members, each garden project varied in the number of events held, as well as the degree of success in achieving what the coordinators saw as “community building” goals. At the Ford City garden, Steve wished to create an open and inclusive space where residents could build relationships that would overcome the barriers created by mental illness and substance abuse. To achieve this, the Ford City garden hosted a number of events throughout the season, some of which coincided with other community activities, such as the arts and heritage festival and the Chrysler neighbourhood cleanup. As mentioned above, this garden project successfully tapped into pre-existing community connections, engagement and activities fomented by other organizations active in the area, such as Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal and Drouillard Place.

The Campus garden and Bruce Park gardens differed in their overall objectives in community building, as well as in the challenges they faced. The Campus Community Garden Project aimed to bridge the gap between the surrounding neighbourhood and the campus community. On the one hand, they were relatively successful in achieving this goal, as approximately half of the garden participants were from the broader neighbourhood and three of them held management positions. On the other hand, the garden project faced difficulties fully engaging the surrounding community, even as it hosted a number of events open to the public, including monthly potlucks, a May Day labour event, and another social event coinciding with the Windsor-Essex community garden tour. According to one garden manager, it was difficult to attract people from the

off-campus community because the neighbourhood consisted of many residents who were “working professionals and university students with more financial resources”. At Bruce Park, Bob and the core volunteers wished to create a safe space which would address the isolation and “brokenness” of marginalized residents, a space where “neighbours cared for neighbours.” The coordinator and volunteers organized a couple community barbeques with good attendance but they faced challenges in garnering residents’ support and participation in the garden itself. Despite the fact that the explicit community building objectives at each garden were not fully met, it was evident that garden participants valued the social aspects of the gardens and the feeling of community fostered within them. As mentioned, all garden participants frequently stressed how the gardens had led to friendships and increased opportunities for socializing and networking within the neighbourhood.

Much of the socializing that went on in the gardens involved the informal exchange of knowledge about gardening techniques, pests, and crops (i.e. how to grow them and how to use them in recipes). Although all garden coordinators shared an antipathy for the industrial agrifood system and believed in organic agriculture and in the health benefits of home-grown produce, not all of them attempted to systematically impart knowledge on these topics. The Bruce Park and Ford City garden members did not organize any educational workshops as this goal was not prioritized by them. Instead, the two garden projects took a more hands-off approach and allowed participants to learn through experience and from each other about basic gardening practices, such as planting times, harvesting times, and soil conditions. Although the founder of the Campus garden expressed regret over the limited amount of workshops she was able to run during the

2012 season, she did manage to organize a few formal workshops and the garden project began to explore the use of digital media (videos and photos) to create virtual tours and online learning modules. Since environmental sustainability was promoted as a core value of the Campus project, educational efforts at this garden were geared towards ecological agriculture (intercropping, composting, vermiculture, natural pest management, etc.). This knowledge, in turn, seemed to have a particular appeal for many of the Campus garden participants who, as previously mentioned, tended to be educated, middle class university students, professors, university workers, and neighbourhood residents.³⁹

As outlined, the way in which the objectives of food security, community-building and knowledge transmission were addressed at each garden depended on a number of factors, including the coordinator's embeddedness in the community, prior resident engagement in neighbourhood projects, recruitment challenges, age of the project, and neighbourhood class composition. Also important, of course, is the broader neoliberal political context in which all three gardens were inserted.

Neoliberal policies can be said to have led to the proliferation of community gardens and to have limited their evolution. Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as a "theory of political economic practices" that emphasizes individual freedoms through a framework of "private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 3). Since the 1970's there has been a shift to neoliberalism that involves "deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (p. 3). Regarding food,

³⁹ It's important to note that this did not encompass everyone. It would be incorrect to state that every gardener at the Campus Garden Project shared the same interest in environmentalism.

Allen (1999) argues that (since the 1980's) industrialized countries such as Canada have shed their social welfare responsibilities resulting in increased food insecurity and hunger, as well as a proliferation of food banks. Peck and Tickell (2002) describe this neoliberal shift as a 'rolling back' of the state's social welfare programs and the accompanied "regulatory dumping" (p. 386) where the responsibility to ensure citizens' welfare, especially the welfare of those at the margins, is offloaded onto NGOs and the private sector. In this context, NGOs involved in community garden projects have taken on the responsibility of addressing food insecurity among the most vulnerable sectors of the population by tapping into meagre private funds, scarce government grants, and by relying on volunteerism. In Windsor, for instance, community gardens have been dependent for their functioning on short term grants, fund raising, and volunteers. Only two full-time community gardening positions existed throughout the city at the time of the research and both of these positions were dependent on grant funding.⁴⁰ After the City Council's one-time community garden grant ran out, there was no financial support expected from the City.

Without access to reliable funding, NGOs in a neoliberal context operate in an environment based on competition for scarce resources. As some authors point out (Allen & Guthman, 2006, p. 409), not all localities end up having equal access to funding, NGO support, or volunteers to carry out planned projects. In this context, it becomes important for those involved in the food security movement, in Windsor and elsewhere, to also address inequalities among organizations. Allen and Guthman (2006) argue that, within

⁴⁰ Both the United Way's Food Matters coordinator and the new 2013 WECGC coordinator were funded by 3 year Ontario Trillium Grants.

the constraints of the neoliberal context, alternative food initiatives must walk a fine line when navigating relationships with people in powerful positions. When pushing for changes in the local food system such initiatives can be constrained by the fear of alienating people who have the power to influence change (p. 412). In Windsor, community gardens must negotiate with elected officials and administrators to facilitate the continued growth and maintenance of the gardens. Gardens are dependent on the City as pertains to land use (both the Bruce Park and Ford City garden have short term land leases with the city), policies and bylaws that affect urban food production, and funding opportunities. They are also dependent on other sources for additional funding. This dependence may in part explain why there was no explicit agenda at any of the garden projects included in the study to raise gardeners' awareness of social injustices or to prep them to become active political actors pressing for structural change.⁴¹

Another aspect of the neoliberal context that has shaped community garden projects involves the hegemonic emphasis on individual responsibility and self-help at a time when the state no longer guarantees rights and entitlements to food (Lockie, 2009). Garden projects that target marginalized populations can be said to be making the poor responsible for meeting their own food needs. According to Pudup (2008, p.1230), some garden projects today are also too focused on "individual change and self-actualization", emphasizing individual lifestyle changes over collective action to bring about systemic change.

⁴¹ For garden projects in other cities that include these elements see: Levkoe (2006), Hassanein (2003), Welsh & MacRae (1998), and Barriga (2004).

The neoliberal constraints I have discussed above are important considerations when looking at the work of community gardens and other alternative food initiatives. Yet, I agree with Harris' (2009) argument that framing initiatives in a way that suggests "the reproduction of neoliberal forms is inevitable" can actually "conceal any political potential that such activism might offer" (p. 58). I believe community gardens can be more than reformist projects that merely reproduce neoliberalism. These projects represent the modest, daily efforts made by individual citizens and local organizations working to address urgent and important problems affecting de-industrializing cities, from decaying physical landscapes to food insecurity amongst the most vulnerable of city residents. That many of these efforts happen outside of the market is also significant in a context where good quality, nutritious food, is a commodity that only those with money can access. From formal donations to food banks to sharing produce with other gardeners and even strangers, these community gardens are effectively decommodifying food.

This vantage point allows me to return to the optimism about community gardens that led me to this research – an optimism that appears to be shared by others. Similar to its neighbour across the river in Detroit, Windsor's economic decline has opened up new spaces and discussions about urban food production, environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, urban planning, and social justice. Food activists can (and have taken) advantage of this opportunity. Interest in community gardens in Windsor is relatively new but it is expanding each year.⁴² Community gardens in Windsor have the potential to develop and expand their approaches to include a food justice perspective as they partner

⁴² Between the end of my field work and the publishing of this research several more community gardens have started in the city.

with local NGOs, such as Pathway to Potential (P2P), which are tackling systemic problems of poverty and inequity. Though P2P does not directly advocate for increased access to food, it promotes and advertises the diverse benefits of Windsor’s community gardens,⁴³ as well as partially funding them. For example, in 2011 Pathway to Potential became the charity of choice for a summer festival and allocated the \$12,000 in donations directly to community gardens across Windsor-Essex, including the Ford City garden (Vasey, 2011). Additionally, P2P was part of the group that helped develop the City Council’s “Community Garden Expansion Strategy” that included the \$100,000 Seed and Feed grant for Windsor-Essex community gardens.⁴⁴

P2P is also partnered with United Way, whose Food Matters program is heavily involved in community gardens. For instance, P2P along with United Way and the Windsor-Essex Food Bank Association successfully wrote an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant for a food strategy coordinator who organizes a multitude of events, workshops and other food related activities. This food coordinator also initiated the Windsor-Essex Community Garden Collective (WECGC) where the managers of each community garden meet monthly in order to plan events and share resources. In addition, P2P collaborates with many other community non-governmental organizations focusing on health, housing, education, youth, immigrants, and First Nations – including Drouillard Place in Ford City. These are but a few examples to illustrate the manner in which community gardens become inserted into the work of other organizations involved in food and social justice initiatives that are more explicitly political in nature.

⁴³ P2P created a few videos showcasing the gardens it donated money to (Pathway to Potential, 2011).

⁴⁴ The Director of P2P was also listed as a consultant for the strategy (Cercone & Eizenga, 2011).

The community garden projects I studied in Windsor are not radically transforming the food system or the city, but my research suggests that the modest steps they are taking are significant for many residents of this de-industrializing city. The gardens offer citizens a way to gain access to fresh, nutritious, produce, as well as an opportunity to strengthen neighbourhood ties, share knowledge with each other and engage with the natural environment.

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Ethics Approval



Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Adriana Premat
Review Number: 18908S
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 30
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: Growing food alternatives in a changing motor city: community gardens in Windsor Ontario
Department & Institution: Social ScienceAnthropology,University of Western Ontario
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: March 27, 2012 **Expiry Date:** August 31, 2012

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		
Letter of Information & Consent		
Other	Text - Oral Script	
Other	Email Script	


This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

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