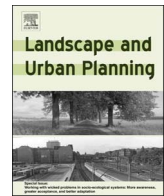




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Research Paper

Urban community gardens: An evaluation of governance approaches and related enablers and barriers at different development stages

Runrid Fox-Kämper^a, Andreas Wesener^{b,*}, Daniel Münderlein^c, Martin Sondermann^d,
Wendy McWilliam^e, Nick Kirk^e

^a Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS), Aachen, Germany

^b School of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Environment, Society and Design, Lincoln University, PO Box 85084, Lincoln 7647, Canterbury, New Zealand

^c University of Kassel, Germany

^d Academy for Spatial Research and Planning (ARL), Hanover, Germany

^e Lincoln University, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

The governance structures of societies and organisations are significant determinants of their success; however, little is known about those associated with community gardens. Community gardens as models of urban green space governance can follow different approaches. They often are designed and managed by groups of like-minded or neighbourhood residents and may meet local needs, typified by low investment and bottom-up governance structures. Gardens governed by top-down governance structures may meet the needs of larger and more diverse populations. Through a content analysis of international scholarly literature from North America, Australia, UK, South Africa and Germany, in addition to key informant interviews from case studies in Germany and New Zealand, the paper critically examines garden governance structures and practices at different stages of garden development. Results expand the existing knowledge of international governance types by suggesting a continuum of top-down, bottom-up and mixed governance approaches. They identify enablers and barriers to garden development in relation to governance at different stages and provide insights into governance approaches during garden planning and design, implementation and management phases.

1. Introduction

Recent research on urban community gardens has emphasized a range of social, economic, cultural, and environmental benefits (e.g., Colding & Barthel, 2013; Guitart et al., 2012). Their growing popularity parallels the shift towards cooperative forms of spatial design and land-use, and reflects the shift from government to governance including changing roles, responsibilities and impact of government agencies and local citizens (Rosol, 2010). In the field of urban planning, this shift has been described as the ‘communicative turn’ encompassing new approaches and practices of cooperative planning and spatial governance (Healey, 1996, 2012).

It is especially important to analyse these approaches and practices through an analytical governance-lens in order to understand various forms of community gardens, as well as barriers and enablers that influence garden development. Community gardens present a broad variety of governance practices and structures. This needs to be addressed more explicitly in order to understand how the ‘communicative

turn’ depicts itself at a concrete level experienced by local stakeholders. Against this backdrop, the paper helps to fill a research gap by answering three research questions: What are the governance structures identified by the international scholarly literature and case studies? Do they change over time in relation to different garden development stages? And, what are enablers and barriers in relation to governance practices at different stages? The paper combines a systematic literature review of international scholarly articles with case study research in New Zealand and Germany in order to synthesize findings from literature with empirical data.

In this paper, community gardens comprise both allotment-style and collectively operated gardens following the broad definition of Guitart et al. (2012), p. 364. They are “hybrid parts of the city belonging to both: the built environment and the green infrastructure, the public and the private, the planned and the unplanned” (Fox-Kämper, 2016 p. 366). However, they are also contested spaces, subject to land-use and interest conflicts and serve as battlefields of the ‘right to the city’ (Staheli, Mitchell, & Gibson, 2002). For example, community gardens

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: runrid.fox-kaemper@ils-forschung.de (R. Fox-Kämper), andreas.wesener@lincoln.ac.nz (A. Wesener), muenderlein@asl.uni-kassel.de (D. Münderlein), Sondermann@arl-net.de (M. Sondermann), Wendy.McWilliam@lincoln.ac.nz (W. McWilliam), nick.kirk@lincolnuni.ac.nz (N. Kirk).

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have been regarded as political statements against neoliberalism (Schmelzkopf, 1995, 2002) as much as spaces that originated from neoliberal urban governance and policy (Jessop, 2002; Rosol, 2010, 2012).

Governance concepts in their various interpretations encompass the descriptive shift from state-centred (top down) to multi-actors (horizontal) forms of regulation, normative orientations in terms of ‘good governance’, as well as analytical models to understand the modes of regulation and interaction. Such an analytical understanding of governance draws attention to the actors, their relationships, institutional frameworks, and decision-making processes (Nuissl & Heinrichs, 2011). Accordingly we use governance here as an analytical framework to identify different governance structures (actor-relationships in vertical and horizontal regulative regimes) and governance practices within these structures (barriers and enablers occurring in the interactions between different groups of actors) with regard to the socio-political and spatial regulation of urban gardening.

Concerning the structural dimension of actor-relationships, a continuum of top-down and bottom-up governance structures can be observed. Top-down models (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975) of policy implementation are concerned “with the degree to which the actions of implementing officials and target groups coincide with the goals embodied in an authoritative decision” (Matland, 1995, p. 146). Bottom-up models, by contrast, “argue that a more realistic understanding of implementation can be gained by looking at a policy from the view of the target population and the service deliverers” (p.148).

Nettle (2014) observes that community gardens can be classified as either top-down or bottom-up governance structures depending on who initiated them. McGlone, Dobson, Dowler, & Nelson (1999) noted the difference between gardens that were managed by external professionals (top-down), and those that were managed (bottom-up) by community members including professionals. Governance structures of urban garden projects are embedded within institutional frameworks at urban, regional and national levels including the specific cultures of spatial planning within different societal contexts (Ioannou, Moran, Sondermann, Certomà, & Hardman, 2016; Othengrafen & Reimer, 2013; Sondermann, 2016). Various forms of governance practices can be observed, both in intra-level and inter-level interactions within and between gardening groups and public authorities. Okvat & Zautra (2014) noted that as opposed to other urban green spaces, such as parks, community gardens are often based on bottom-up community-based efforts. Eizenberg (2013) argued that ‘bottom-up’ initiated gardens are a relatively new trend which began in the 1970s. However, the differences between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ gardens are not always distinctive and boundaries between the two can be blurred (Nettle, 2014). For example, governments may have supported community group-initiated gardens through the provision of land, funding and enabling legislation, and government-initiated gardens may have required significant local input and community involvement.

2. Research method

2.1. Literature review and analysis

The Guitart et al. (2012) systematic literature review of the international scholarly literature on community gardens served as the basis of our literature review of community garden governance. Despite the popularity of community gardens in Germany and New Zealand, no papers based on these landscapes were apparent as part of the review. Therefore, a second literature review was conducted to include German and New Zealand studies. The second review applied the same paper inclusion criteria as Guitart et al. (2012). Papers selected were English-language publications, original research and published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Based on the combined reviews, 82 articles were selected for content analysis (Table 1) including 78 papers from

Guitart et al. (2012) and four that reported on German community gardens. No papers from New Zealand met the applied review criteria by the time of the review (2015).

A content analysis of the 82 articles was conducted to identify papers with information on governance structures. Cases in each paper were analysed and classified by applying the governance typology of McGlone et al. (1999). Papers with governance information were further analysed to identify changes to governance structures, and enablers and barriers to community garden development related to governance structures and observed practices at different development stages. The typology of McGlone et al. (1999) proposes five different governance structures for community gardens: First, Top-down: This category defines gardens which are “entirely managed by professionals [...] and, where they [exist], management committees [have] no local community representation” (p. 17).

Second, Top-down with community help: This includes gardens planned, established, or managed by paid professionals with community involvement. These gardens are “run by paid workers or volunteers [...] who have “considerable flexibility and day-to-day responsibility, but their influence in shaping the overall project [is] limited” (p. 18).

Third, Bottom-up with professional help: Gardens established and managed by local communities with the help of paid professionals. These gardens might receive more professional help when the garden is being planned and established; however as they develop, they adopt, “a more supportive role, as volunteers [take] on more of the responsibility for running and managing the project” (p. 18).

Fourth, Bottom-up with informal help: Gardens in this category share the characteristic “that the professional involvement [is] informal (unpaid) and unstructured” (p. 19).

Fifth, Bottom-up: Gardens are run and managed, almost exclusively, by local communities. While they sometimes receive support from other organisations “responsibility for management and day-to-day running [...] [remains] with the local communities” (p. 19).

2.2. Case study research

The geographical focus of the case studies was chosen to fill a gap in the scholarly literature on New Zealand and German community gardens. There have been few, if any, relevant research publications about this topic from New Zealand (Guitart et al., 2012, p. 368). Furthermore, despite the historical tradition and current popularity gardens of community gardens in Germany, only a few studies have been published in English-language journals (Table 1). To fill this gap, we conducted case studies of gardens in Christchurch, New Zealand and in four German cities (Aachen, Düsseldorf, Hannover, and Kassel). The selected cities are large metropolitan centres of regional importance characterized by populations greater than 100,000 and less than one million people, with long-term population growth. Individual garden projects were selected with regard to different spatial distributions within the cityscape (inner city and suburban), lifespans (temporary and permanent), development stages (infancy and well established) and governance structures (Figs. 1 and 2).

2.2.1. Historical background and institutional settings

In New Zealand, the first community gardens were established in the 1970s and have thrived due to growing urban populations, increasing commercial development, the need to strengthen community networks, and a growing interest in urban food production among residents (Trotman & Spinola, 1994).

There are no official statistics about the total number and geographical distribution of urban community gardens in New Zealand; however, some city councils and gardening associations provide information on their websites. For example, according to the Canterbury Community Gardens Association there are 29 community gardens in the greater Christchurch area (CCGA, 2016).

Typically, community gardeners need a lease, agreement, or license

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