



Original article

Tracing regime influence on urban community gardening: How resource dependence causes barriers to garden longer term sustainability



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ABSTRACT

This article explores how resource dependence leads to barriers to urban community gardening. Nine barriers to urban gardening were identified: finance, space, organizational structure, water, external damage, soil, communication, interpersonal issues, and participation issues. Using process tracing and grounded theory, we found that these barriers could be divided into three groups: primary, secondary, and participation barriers. Primary barriers are caused and directly influenced by the regime, whereas secondary barriers are the result of decisions and actions taken while addressing the primary barriers. All of these barriers cause frustration and affects the ability of the gardens to retain and acquire new members. This affects the longer term sustainability of the gardens and their potential to contribute to an urban governance transition.

1. Introduction: urban community gardens and transitions

Urban community gardens (UCG) are increasingly populating our urban spaces (Stiftungsgemeinschaft anstiftung & ertomis, 2016). They have positive impacts such as community development (Peters, 2008), building social capital (Alaimo et al., 2008), providing space for physical activity (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004), contributing to healthy body weights (Zick et al., 2013), providing urban residents contact with nature (Maller et al., 2006), as well as economic benefits (Draper and Freedman, 2010). Moreover, UCGs provide habitats for a variety of plants and animals and fulfill important climatic functions in urban areas as they mitigate the urban heat island effect (Dihlmann, 2003; Crossan et al., 2015; Bauduceau et al., 2015). The three case studies in this analysis come from Berlin which has been called “the German capital of community gardens” (Meyer-Renschhausen, 2010) and the number of UCGs in the city has blossomed since the early 2000's (Stadtacker, 2016). The government of Berlin has recognized the importance of urban gardening in both the guidelines for sustainable development (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt, 2016a,b) and their development plan for climate (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, 2011).

Academics have discussed the rise of UCGs in terms of transitions in urban governance and the urban landscape (Bell and Cerulli, 2012). This is because UCGs are community-based grassroots initiatives and such initiatives have the potential to spark transitions (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Seyfang, 2010; Middlemiss and Parrish, 2010; Smith et al.,

2013; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Hargreaves et al., 2013; Becker, 2018). UCGs are usually social gardens in that they are participatory and focused on the community (Müller, 2011). They are spaces where new ideas and alternative practices can be explored and improved upon (Kemp et al., 1998; Geels and Schot, 2007; Markard and Truffer, 2008). Such a transition would ask the UCGs to change the regime, the dominant rules and norms that are enforced by regime actors. Regime actors are actors that, whether purposefully or not, reinforce and protect that regime.

However, despite the positive impacts of UCGs, their growth in numbers, the recognition of the importance of UCGs, and academic literature discussing their potential to facilitate transitions, a transition has not yet been achieved. Thus, in this article we ask the overall research question: what are the barriers to urban community gardening and how do these barriers prevent an urban gardening transition? To answer this overall research question, several subquestions will be answered:

1. What are the barriers to urban community gardening?
2. What are the causes and effects of these barriers?
3. How do the barriers threaten an urban community garden's longer term sustainability?
4. What can be done to alleviate or reduce these barriers and what role do they play in preventing a transition in how we use urban spaces?

Thus to answer these questions, we will first review the multi-level

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perspective and resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). Secondly, we will describe the selection of case studies as well as the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Strauss, 1987; Strauss et al., 1996) and process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) methods used. In Section 4, the results will be presented including the primary barriers, secondary barriers, and participation barriers. Lastly, we will explore the implications of the findings for transitions as well as how to alleviate some of the barriers in Section 5.

2. Transitions and resource dependence

We employ the framework the multi-level perspective (Geels, 2002, 2004; Geels and Schot, 2007) to understand the position of UCGs in an urban gardening transition and the relationship between UCGs and the regime. The multi-level perspective is a framework for understanding socio-technical transitions (Geels, 2002; Geels and Schot, 2007). It consists of three levels of increasing structuration (Geels, 2004; Verbong and Geels, 2007) and institutionalization (Fuenfschilling and Truffer, 2014): the niche, the regime, and the landscape. An urban community garden is a niche, a site of innovation and alternative practices somewhat protected from the regime (Kemp et al., 1998; Geels and Schot, 2007; Markard and Truffer, 2008). In being a niche the UCG does the work of insitutionalizing and supporting their vision of a change (Becker, 2018) and Becker et al. (2017). A regime is "... a coherent configuration of technological, institutional, economic, social, cognitive and physical elements and actors with individual goals beliefs or values" (Holtz et al., 2008) and consists of the municipalities, developers, funders, and other actors who enforce and reproduce the status quo. The landscape is the cultural, environmental, and historic backdrop in which both the regime and niche operate (Grin et al., 2010; Rotmans et al., 2001). In order for a transition to occur it is the niche that must replace or become a part of the regime (Geels and Schot, 2007) through, for example, changing rules or practices. Such a transition could have both positive and negative aspects.

Niches such as UCGs sometimes rely on regimes for various resources, which allows the regimes to shape the niches (Becker et al., 2017). According to resource dependence theory, a theory on organization interdependency, UCGs dependent on the regimes will use the least restrictive method of minimizing their dependence, attempt to reduce uncertainty, and attempt to increase their independence (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003; Davis and Cobb, 2010). Resource dependence theory will be used in this article to explain how regimes are able to influence the UCGs and create barriers within the gardens.

3. Methods

To answer our research questions we used grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Strauss, 1987; Strauss et al., 1996) and process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) on semi-structured interviews from three case study UCGs. Pseudonyms were chosen for the UCGs to maintain the anonymity of interviewees and gardens: Neighborhood Garden, Public Park Garden, and Social Enterprise Garden (Table 1). The case study gardens were selected from Districts that did not border with Brandenburg (the rural state that surrounds Berlin) to ensure that

the gardens were urban. All of the gardens had to be established in or before 2013. Gardens were specifically selected that had different organizational structures and were willing to participate in the interviews. The gardens range in size from around 1200 m² to 1850 m² and range in age from 3 to 12 years since their founding.

The eleven semi-structured interviews (Table 2) conducted with interviewees from the gardens consisted of questions on the barriers faced by the gardens, how they tried to overcome the barriers, and who helped them in overcoming the barriers. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in German. Additionally, field notes were taken during and immediately after seven participant observations and further questions were answered by interviewees in three email conversations (Table 2). All interviews and observations were conducted between July 2015 and April 2016. All interviewees gave informed consent before the interviews were conducted.

Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Strauss, 1987; Strauss et al., 1996) was done on the interview transcriptions and field notes using QDA Miner Lite 4 (Provalis Research, 2016). Memos were written throughout the analysis. Barriers to gardening and attempted solutions were identified by the interviewees. Moreover, process tracing was also done on the data to better understand the causes of the barriers. Process tracing is a method of following the data between cause and effect (Collier, 2011) including the mechanisms that move the process along between the variables (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). In this article, process tracing is used most prominently in Fig. 1 and allows us to analyze how one barrier causes another and the mechanism through which this occurs.

4. Examining and tracing the barriers to garden longer term sustainability

Through using the methods described above, we located nine barriers to urban gardening (listed in Table 3) and traced the causes and effects of the barriers (Fig. 1). Based on analyzing the data, the barriers were divided in three groups: primary barriers, secondary barriers, and participation barriers. These groups and individual barriers are further described in the subsections of this article.

Table 3 lists the barriers described by the interviewees along with the gardens affected, as well as efforts to solve or mitigate the barriers by different actors. These actors include members of the gardens, other grassroots or community-based initiatives, and regime actors. The initiatives can include local organizations within the garden's network such as other community gardens or neighborhood non-profits whereas the regime actors include government officials and larger organizations such as national organizations. What is clear from Table 3 is that for some of the barriers the gardens received more external assistance than for others. For the finance, space, and organizational structure barriers (the primary barriers) there was significant external support from both other community groups and regime actors. The secondary barriers were more mixed with the soil and water barriers receiving direct inputs specifically from regime actors, while the other secondary barriers (externally-caused damage, communication, and interpersonal issues) were mostly handled internally by the gardens. The gardens also had support in dealing with the participation barriers; however, this

Table 1
Designated name and description of each case study.

Pseudonyms	Description of the garden
Neighborhood Garden	Between 10 and 20 members. The object of this garden is to offer a place for neighbors to grow vegetables, fruit, herbs, and flowers. The garden has a loose organizational structure and its history has been marked by a struggle to find a suitable space for the garden.
Public Park Garden	Around 200 members. The goal of this garden is the cultivation of raised beds by neighbors and offering education on organic gardening. The garden offers workshops and cooperates with preschools, schools, and other institutions. Its organizational structure is stricter than the Neighborhood garden and its history has been one of growth in participant numbers.
Social Enterprise Garden	Around 100 members. The aim of this garden is to positively impact the surrounding neighborhood. The garden has the strictest organizational structure and attempts to raise money through some of its activities.

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