Collective gardening as a coping strategy for residents in deprived neighbourhoods: a literature review

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Abstract

Collective gardening is a form of collective action where people from different households voluntarily collaborate in managing outdoor spaces. Collective gardening has often been initiated as a strategy to cope with problems of marginalisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion, as a means of revitalising deprived neighbourhoods. Such initiatives have been taken by residents and citizen organisations as well as by housing companies and authorities. The paper presents the results of a literature review, the aim of which is to analyse documented experiences from collective gardening in regard to its potential role as a catalyst for neighbourhood improvements. Four cases are presented to illustrate how collective gardening has been an important element in revitalisation processes in different area contexts. The literature review in total, however, covers about 60 publications from North America, Europe and Australia. A model is developed to map out and analyse the suggested outcomes of the studied processes, comprising three complementary perspectives: a resident perspective looking at life opportunities and needs satisfaction for individual citizens; a neighbourhood perspective adding concerns about management efficiency, status and robustness of the area; and a society perspective where issues about larger-scale resource distribution, value reproduction and land use conflicts are brought in. The overall conclusion is that collective gardening shows great potential to improve life opportunities for marginalised resident groups, create positive development spirals in deprived neighbourhoods, and contribute to sustainable urban development. However, some issues need further investigation, as previous findings have largely been based on uncritical research approaches. Notably, the question of internal divides and social exclusion within the local areas deserves more attention. Awareness of hindering and facilitating factors in the local conditions is needed when forming policies to support local involvement processes.

keywords: community participation, resident management, urban regeneration, community gardens, deprived neighbourhoods

Introduction

Already in the late 1990s, the problem of deprived urban neighbourhoods was pointed out as "one of the most intractable" issues in high-income countries (OECD, 1998), and since then the situation has only become more aggravated. Broadcasts of youth burning cars have imprinted an image of high-rise and immigrant-dense European suburbs, or American downtowns, as dangerous lawless nests of crime and despair – the modern badlands of civilisation (paraphrasing Dikeç, 2007). While social exclusion is no new phenomenon and urban slums have been a topic since urban planning was invented, the current debate about deprived urban areas in welfare states has emerged during recent decades (see, e.g., Atkinson, 2008). Development of policy responses to urban deprivation problems is confronted with the dilemma of applying area-based initiatives in a tradition of people-

based general welfare systems, with the challenges of involving the local communities and different actors in broad regeneration partnerships that are democratically legitimate, inclusive and effective. The current paper, however, does not primarily analyse urban policies. It looks at a certain type of area-based local involvement initiatives, focussing on practices rather than policies..

Problems of neighbourhood deprivation are largely the results of macro-structures – on regional, national, and even global levels – and long-term solutions must involve reformations of these structures to decrease inequalities in society. However, the problems are manifested locally, and solutions must therefore also involve micro-perspectives. Searching in the local situation for ways to tackle deprivation problems is not necessarily contradictory to, but rather a prerequisite for, long-term reformation of the macro-structures. As Anne Power (1997, p.400) notes: "Cities only succeed through many small, successful neighbourhoods". In a similar spirit, Marilyn Taylor (1998) states that the bottom line in reversing the vicious circle of exclusion and stigmatisation of deprived neighbourhoods is social capital, and that it is through small-scale, local involvement initiatives regeneration can take place. "Playgroups, environmental schemes, youth activities, and cultural activities may not hit the headlines, but they give people the opportunity to engage in a small group and an enjoyable activity with others whom they trust" (Taylor, 1998, p.826).

While the focus here is on coping with problems in "low-status" areas (for convenience denoted as deprived neighbourhoods), it is appropriate to note that part of the problem complex must be sought in "high-status" areas (not deprived in a conventional sense, but certainly contributing to other forms of urban deprivation). Indeed, the conditions for contributing to sustainable urban development may be better in many respects in poor and relatively dense multi-family housing areas than in the land-consuming small-house areas that attract wealthier citizens. The well-known devastating effects of private car dependency and high-consumption lifestyles in sprawling villa suburbs are highly neglected in urban planning policy and practice. Some effort is devoted to combating the ills of areas shunned by economic and cultural capital, but the capital flight per se and the problems it causes elsewhere are hardly addressed at all. What is also alarming is that the measures taken tend to be authoritarian and punitive rather than aiming at social inclusion, integration and mobilisation of local communities in constructive revitalisation processes (see, e.g., Body-Gendrot, 2000; Dikeç, 2007). This too calls for looking into grassroots-driven, place-based initiatives, not only as responses to ills, but also as manifestations of possible alternatives and models for urban development in general.

The present paper deals with *collective gardening*, as one example of such initiatives. A literature review has been carried out, aiming at analysing the potential outcomes of collective gardening and reflecting on its limitations, constraints and opportunities, not only for the depressed neighbourhood and its inhabitants, but also for sustainable development in a wider societal perspective. Collective gardening is a term used here to address a variety of initiatives in different countries, which share three components: they aim to improve the physical environment by providing functional public or semi-public *green spaces* in urban areas; *gardening* or open space maintenance is a core activity for those involved; and the initiatives are *collective* in the sense that local citizens work together in the process. Each of these components is linked to specific movements and academic disciplines. There is also a large body of literature in each related knowledge field. The present literature review has concentrated on studies in which all three components interlace, i.e. studies on collective gardening rather than on urban green space functions, horticulture or collective action. The literature reviewed comprises about 60 journal articles, research reports, books and theses dealing with collective gardening, identified mainly by searching in article and library databases. Almost half of the studies have been conducted in the US, about one third in Sweden and the rest in Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia and Spain. They represent a wide range of disciplines, such as geography, sociology, economy, health sciences and landscape architecture. Specific attention in the present article has been given to case studies describing collective gardening as revitalisation initiatives in deprived neighbourhoods[1], which encompasses 14 of the texts. Some of the remaining case studies have been carried out in areas that are not to be considered as deprived, while the main part

of the literature does not involve area-based case studies at all, but analyses collective gardening by other means and from other angles (e.g., telephone surveys and questionnaires analysing certain issues).

The findings are presented in three sections. First, to give the reader a concrete illustration of how collective gardening has functioned as a strategy for coping with neighbourhood deprivation, four example cases are described. Second, documented effects of collective gardening are discussed, using a framework based on three levels of analysis. Third, the concluding section offers reflections on the limitations of previous studies and directions for future research.

Four examples of collective gardening in deprived neighbourhoods

The cases of collective gardening described in the literature often take place in deprived urban neighbourhoods. These areas differ, largely depending on the national contexts, but they share the disadvantages of having a low status compared to other neighbourhoods in the city, a population with generally low incomes, and often different types of social problems, such as drug addiction, criminality and lack of safety. Typically, the ethnic composition also differs from the national average, with high rates of non-EU immigrants in European cases and high rates of African Americans or other ethnic minorities in US cases. Four cases will be presented here to illustrate different types of collective gardening processes in deprived neighbourhoods; see Table 1. These cases represent a comprehensive range of different contextual and organisational settings.

Table 1. Overview of the four example cases of collective gardening in deprived neighbourhoods.

Case	Country	Type of area	Initiative	Type of process
Self-management in Holma	Sweden	large-scale semi-central public housing	housing company	the housing company encourages residents to sign contracts to take over parts of the maintenance work
Community gardens in Waterloo	Australia	large-scale inner-city public housing	university, residents, housing authority	gardens with allotments for the residents have been constructed on the housing estate
Eriksbo Cooperative	Sweden	large-scale sub-urban public housing	residents	an association of residents signed a contract to take over parts of the maintenance work from the housing company
Queen Anne Memorial Garden	US	mixed inner-city	residents	an association of residents have established a garden on a vacant lot in their neighbourhood as a central part of a revitalisation process

The *self-management in Holma* was introduced by the municipal housing company in the early 1990s as a strategy to tackle social problems and a bad area image. Holma is an area with about one thousand rental apartments owned by the municipal housing company, situated some kilometres from the inner-city of Malmö, Sweden's third largest city. It is a typical representative of Swedish housing areas built in the beginning of the 1970s, with three-storey and eight-storey slab blocks forming semi-closed square yards with grass lawns, small play grounds, etc. The self-management is organised by letting tenants form yard teams and take over maintenance duties from the company. Team members sign contracts with the company and get a rent reduction as compensation. According to an evaluation by planning researchers Björn Alfredsson and Göran Cars (1996), the Holma project was very successful in improving social cohesion and it gained considerable attention among Swedish municipal housing companies in the 1990s. However, the national tax board became concerned about the system, which brought about a governmental commission and eventually a new law drastically limiting the size of compensation. Nevertheless, the self-management in Holma carries on and it has been a source inspiration for many similar projects in Sweden, initiated by tenants as well as housing companies (for more information of such processes in Sweden, see Castell, 2005, 2006, *forthcoming-b*).

The community gardens project on the *Waterloo public housing estate* in Sydney is a result of a broad coalition in which university students, the housing authority, the city council and local tenants all played active roles. Funding was available through a governmental programme aiming at improving the quality of life on deprived public housing estates, and an organisational framework of technical assistance and knowledge support was built up in the city. Three community gardens were developed on the Waterloo estate in 1997 and 1998, which was the subject of a larger evaluation carried out by the School of Social Work at the University of New South Wales (Bartolomei et al., 2003). The area, situated a couple of kilometres south of the city centre, was cleared of slum housing in the 1950s and thereafter developed in the 1960s and 1970s with modernist multi-family houses up to 30 stories high, amounting to 2,500 public rental housing apartments. The three gardens studied are each situated in front of a 17-storey building. They are designed by a landscape architect firm and constructed by the housing authority, each garden consisting of a locked area with small allotments and a more public part with benches and flowerbeds. Tenants rent allotments to grow their own flowers and vegetables. They also collaborate in maintaining shared spaces. A similar project is the Riverside community garden in a high-rise rental housing area in the outskirts of Toronto, initiated by the private housing management company together with a gardening NGO (Baker, 2004).

The *Eriksbo cooperative* in Göteborg is a highly interesting and quite unique example of tenant involvement on a neighbourhood level. In physical respects, the Eriksbo housing area is very similar to Holma: one thousand apartments built around 1970 with three- and eight-story slab blocks forming square yards. Its geographical location is more peripheral, almost ten kilometres from the city centre and cut off by un-built areas. Like many other Swedish suburbs from the time, it suffered from stigmatisation, lack of services and empty apartments by the end of the 1970s. Architect Birgit Modh (1988) has described how some of the inhabitants were engaged in an ideological debate within the social democratic youth league, searching for a more active citizen role; instead of detached individuals passively relying on distant abstract powers, citizens should cooperate to reclaim control over fundamental issues of everyday life, such as the conditions of the neighbourhood. In the early 1980s, they started a sports club and a garden group. The local self-management movement grew successively and Eriksbo cooperative was founded to coordinate the different projects. In the early 1990s, the cooperative signed an agreement with the municipal housing company to take over responsibility for open space maintenance in the area. It also started an elementary school and took over the local supermarket. More than half of the population were members and about ten percent were actively involved, according to Anders Törnqvist (2001). However, the activity has declined drastically since the late 1990s, which sociologist Jan-Erik Lind (2005) attributes to the inability to involve new resident groups – notably youth and immigrants – in the cooperative. He also establishes that many chose to leave their assignments when economic compensation for those doing maintenance work was reduced by the end of the 1990s. The housing company has now taken over the open space maintenance again.

The story of *the Queen Anne Memorial Garden*, as told by leisure researcher Troy Glover (2003; 2004), is in many regards representative of many of the community gardens in deteriorated North American inner-cities. Instead of the large-scale modernist rental housing areas from the 1960s and 1970s described above, the most typical urban neighbourhood deprivation in the US takes place in older, mixed, mainly home-owner apartment blocks in the traditional city centres. A common element in these neighbourhoods is vacant lots where old buildings have been removed and no new development is taking place. In many cases, these vacant lots are described as maladies that accumulate trash and provide space for 'anti-social' behaviours – drugs, prostitution and different sorts of crime (see, e.g., Schukoske, 2000). Glover's Queen Anne Memorial Garden story is about how a grassroots movement in one of the many deprived neighbourhoods decided to take control of the development themselves, as in the example of Eriksbo. A group of residents formed an association and initiated different projects to revitalise their neighbourhood. The most important part of the process was the establishment of a community garden on a vacant lot, which had previously been a

hang-out for prostitutes and criminals. The community garden became "the only tangible symbol of their efforts to exert local control over their urban space" (Glover, 2003).

These four examples, summarised in Table 1, all deal with intentional neighbourhood revitalisation through collective gardening. They represent a contextual variety, from a mixed-tenure inner-city 'old-town' in the US to a 1970s satellite suburb of monotonous public rental slab blocks in Sweden. While the Anglo-Saxon 'community gardens' are fenced and partly based on household plots for food production, the Swedish self-managed estate grounds are more large-scale and open in character without definite demarcations and with more grass lawns, broader pathways, etc. The Swedish cases are arranged through maintenance contracts, where involved residents actually get direct economic compensation for their work. The level of local control also differs. In the US example and in Eriksbo, the residents initiated and 'own' the process, while it was largely initiated and steered by the landlords in Holma and Waterloo.

Documented effects of collective gardening in deprived neighbourhoods

Collective gardening processes always involve a complex of interrelated factors, and assessing their potential effects is a difficult task. Applying different disciplinary perspectives, the reviewed studies together illustrate a wide range of functions filled by collective gardening. Some publications also aim to give comprehensive descriptions of potential outcomes, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Three models for analysing or describing collective gardening outcomes.

Stocker and Barnett (1998)	Bartolomei et al. (2003)	Lawson (2005)
- physical and ecological sustainability through organic food production - social and cultural sustainability through the creation of a community place - economic sustainability through development and spread of knowledge and skills	- Reclaiming public spaces - Community building - Environmental education - Community enterprise - Social and cultural expression - Restorative qualities - Social and environmental sustainability	- Bringing nature into the city - Education (connecting people to nature; job-training) - Democracy and self-organising capability

When discussing coping strategies in connection with neighbourhood deprivation, three perspectives can be applied: a resident perspective, a neighbourhood perspective, and a society perspective. For the resident perspective, Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef's (1992) general categorisation of human needs will be used to sort out the complex of potential effects on residents' life opportunities. Life opportunity outcomes also influence to a large extent the outcomes from a neighbourhood or society perspective. What is good for individual residents is typically also good for the neighbourhood and for society as a whole. However, altering perspectives may reveal conflicts of interest, and it makes sense to initiate a discussion of what happens when we move from a resident perspective, centred around satisfying individuals' needs, to a neighbourhood perspective, focussing on management efficiency, status and robustness of the local area, and to a society perspective, where the local area outcomes also must be related to other areas and to wider and more long-term implications. Figure 1 illustrates this analytical framework.
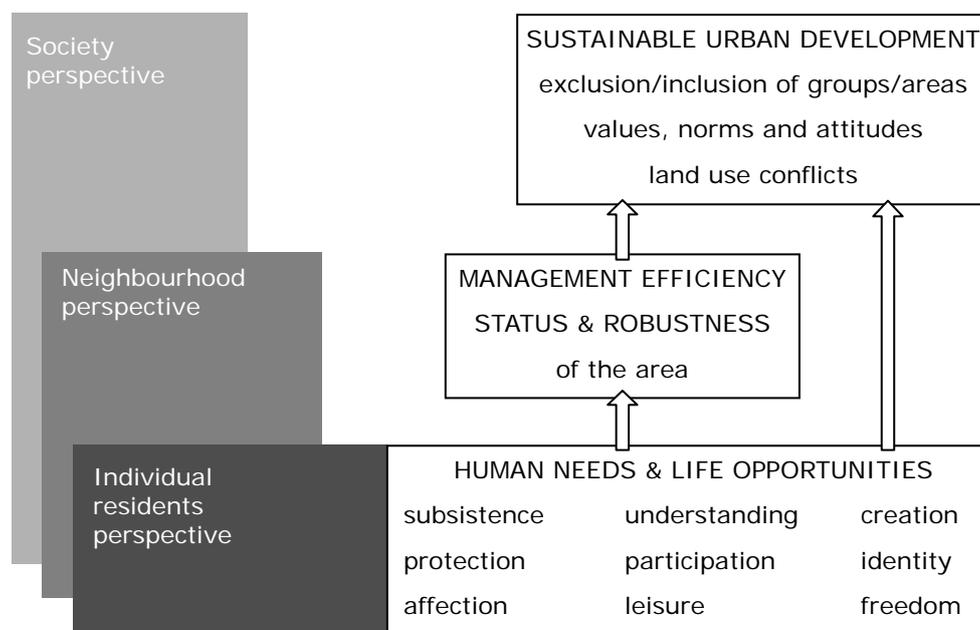
Figure 1. Framework for discussing effects of collective gardening in deprived neighbourhoods.

A residents perspective: effects on life opportunities and needs satisfaction

According to Max-Neef, there is no clear hierarchy of human needs, as has usually been suggested. Rather, there is a web of interlacing needs categories, which are all essential, independent of culture and current living standards. These categories are identified as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom (Max-Neef, 1992; see also Cruz, Stahel & Max-Neef, 2009). There are different ways of satisfying these needs, and Max-Neef's Human-Scale Development approach emphasises the importance of empowerment of marginalised groups, to give them the means to influence their own life opportunities. Local community participation initiatives, such as collective gardening, therefore fit well into the Human-Scale Development framework.

The *subsistence* need can be satisfied through healthy living environments, access to nutritious food, and sufficient income, all of which are often discussed as potential outcomes of collective gardening. Especially in dense urban environments without access to green spaces, like in many North-American inner-cities, the establishment of gardens per se is often described as fundamental to the improvement of living conditions (see, e.g., Schukoske, 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004). Nature and gardens are seen as healthy components in dirty, noisy and hard artificial environments, and references are made to environmental psychology theories of restoration as well as to research on air filtration and the micro-climate regulation effects of plants. The fresh food argument has not been emphasised in Swedish studies, but is frequently addressed in Anglo-Saxon cases. A couple of studies even have nutrition as the main focus, claiming that opportunities to grow vegetables will improve public health (Twiss et al., 2003; Alaimo et al., 2008). Another implication of food growing is that poor households may receive a valuable income supplement, which is also pointed out in many of the Anglo-Saxon studies (see, e.g., Parks & People Foundation, 2000; Baker, 2004; Holland, 2004). Some of the studied gardens aim primarily at giving youth or socially excluded persons job opportunities or at strengthening their ability to find a job (see, e.g., Spence, 2001).

The *protection* need is addressed in collective gardening initiatives by improving the safety or sense of safety in the neighbourhood. Two types of mechanisms are described in the literature. One is that safety is improved through informal social control, i.e. that neighbours get to know each other through the collective gardening process and develop local norms. Thereby, strangers will be identified as strangers and watched, and behaviours conflicting with the norms will be sanctioned (see, e.g., Cele, 2002; Glover, 2004). The other mechanism is that behaviour will be affected by the envi-

ronment in the sense that an orderly, clean and well-kept street or yard will reduce the risk for crime (see, e.g., Schukoske, 2000). Safety is a prominent issue in Anglo-Saxon as well as Swedish and other European studies, and both the social control factor and the physical order factor are well established.

The *affection* need is met through the creation of emotional bonds among neighbours as well as between residents and their neighbourhood. This is a fundamental element of all described cases. Although often initiated primarily to improve the physical environment, the most important outcomes of collective gardening processes, as described in the literature, tend to be development of social relations and networking between neighbours – community-building and creation of social cohesion (see, e.g., Berglund et al., 1995; Glover, 2004). The physical place, independent of formal ownership, is appropriated by the residents, which strengthens the affectionate sense of home (see, e.g., Modh, 1998). However, there are also conflicts mentioned in some of the cases, where collective gardening processes seem to have made visible or reinforced divides between different groups of neighbours (see, e.g., Glover, 2004). If new tensions are created, this will potentially counteract satisfaction of the affection need.

The *understanding* need is not always explicitly addressed in the literature, but it is clear that collective gardening processes always involve organisational learning and knowledge development. Some studies discuss the transfer of gardening skills between participants as an important outcome, while others focus more on the development of organisational abilities and citizen insight into how society functions.

The *participation* need is a natural concern for any project where citizens are involved in community development. By definition, collective gardening involves sharing ideas, solving problems and working together with others, debating, distributing responsibilities and other kinds of interactions where the individual is a part of a collective process. In many cases, it also involves fund-raising, constitution of associations, contracting procedures and other formal relations linking the local neighbourhood groups to external actors representing society at large. Although this aspect has not been analysed a great deal in the literature, it is clear that most residents in concerned areas are not directly involved in the collective gardening processes. Some studies suggest that there may be a risk for exclusion of certain groups.

The *leisure* or, as also termed, the *idleness* need is discussed in all in-depth descriptions of collective gardening processes, often in terms of the need for casual social exchange, for children to play, for relaxation and for sensory impressions. The needs are largely met through the provision of more functional open green spaces, i.e., places to meet, play, rest and enjoy (see, e.g., Bartolomei et al., 2003; Bengtsson et al., 2003; Rosol, 2005). As collective gardening gives residents influence over the design of their shared open spaces, it is not surprising that the spaces get better adapted to their needs and aspirations. Another dimension of the leisure need is that gardening itself is often described as a rich leisure activity, involving both intellectual, physical and social stimuli. However, if some groups are excluded from the decision-making and from the garden activities, we cannot exclude the possibility that the leisure need is not satisfied equally for all.

The *creation* need seems to be a strong incentive for getting involved for many of the collective gardeners interviewed in the reviewed case studies (see, e.g., Jarlöv, 1982; Bartolomei et al., 2003). One of the benefits of gardening, as compared with other types of community involvement initiatives, is the highly tangible and relatively direct result. Many describe the joy of interacting with the physical environment and creating something beautiful. A specific theme in several of the case studies is the important role collective gardening plays for marginalised ethnic minorities in letting them express their native cultures (see, e.g., Giraud, 1990; Baker, 2004).

The *identity* need is about belonging, pride and self-esteem, which are also common themes in descriptions of collective gardening processes, especially in connection with revitalisation of deprived neighbourhoods (see, e.g., Severson, 1990; Modh, 1999). There are strong symbolic values in turning worn lawns or rubbish dumps into blooming gardens, which cultivate self-determination among

the involved residents and present the place with a totally new face, both to inhabitants and to visitors. Collective gardening changes the physical environment, but it also reshapes social functioning. It thereby appears to be a viable way to transform a disadvantageous identity.

The *freedom* need can be connected to the ideas of empowerment that frame some of the studies of collective gardening processes, emphasising the meanings of being able to influence one's living conditions (e.g., Bengtsson et al., 2003; Glover, Shinew & Parry, 2005). By getting together in collective action, marginalised residents gain control and opportunities to take a more active part and to have a say in local development issues. At the same time, which is important, the collective gardening processes studied are voluntary work, where everyone can influence under which conditions the get involved or chose not to get involved at all. This freedom, however, is higher in some cases than in others. Great freedom in organisational forms is described in some cases as a major strength – as it makes it more flexible, adaptive, and accessible for new groups – but also as a problem, as it makes it more dynamic and impedes institutionalisation (discussed in Bengtsson et al., 2003; Bengtsson & Berger, 2005).

A neighbourhood perspective: management efficiency, status and robustness of the area

Moving up the level of analysis to the neighbourhood level, it is still a major concern to satisfy the needs of the residents. Moreover, however, some additional concerns must be brought into the discussion – issues that are partly connected to individual needs satisfaction, but not directly covered in Max-Neef's framework. *Management efficiency* is one of these issues. Particularly in large-scale rental areas managed by one company or authority, it is obvious that collective gardening may play an important role for management efficiency. Several studies point out that involvement of residents implies bringing in new labour resources into the management system (e.g., Aalbers, 2002; Delshammar, 2005). This may result in direct savings for the management organisation as well as a more valuable output in terms of, e.g., higher up-keep levels and more intricate and labour-intensive designs. Several studies also claim that high savings are made through reduced vandalism, which is explained by informal social control and that residents are more prone to care about what their neighbours are managing (see, e.g., Schukoske, 2000; Baker, 2004). In some cases, economic gains appear to have been an important incentive for management organisations to promote and support collective gardening. On the other hand, there are also indications in some studies that it takes a great amount of time and devotion to facilitate the involvement processes and solve emerging conflicts, and that new types of professional manager roles are needed – reasons why many housing managers avoid collective gardening initiatives (see Lindgren & Castell, 2008).

While life opportunities can be seen as the central concern at the individual level, *area status* can be seen as the central concern at the neighbourhood level. High status means that investments and people with valuable resources (purchasing power, skills, contacts, commitment, etc.) are attracted, which will promote positive development and most likely further improve living conditions for inhabitants. Low status, on the other hand, will most likely lead to the opposite: market investments will cease and more affluent people will move away, draining the area of capital resources. The status of the area is to a certain degree defined by outcomes on the individual level. If residents are satisfied, it will contribute to a positive image of the area. On the other hand, the area's image is also largely determined by external causes. The media's role is often described as crucial in shaping the identities of urban neighbourhoods, and few incidents of crime and disorder may give rise to long-term stigmatisation if they are broadcasted repeatedly and in an unbalanced fashion (see, e.g., Alfredsson & Cars, 1996). A common claim is that collective gardening processes can play a significant role in raising the status of an area (see, e.g., Been & Voicu, 2006; Tranel & Handlin, 2006). While higher status is generally a goal, there are also some complications. Some of the reviewed studies point at the risk for negative effects of gentrification. One problem is that increasing property values, as a result of rising attractivity of the area, may result in higher rents for tenants. In fact, achieving higher status for the area may occur at the cost of the poorest households, which may be pushed out, causing worsened living conditions for them. Some studies even suggest that the status

lift caused by a collective gardening initiative in the end may threaten the very existence of the garden, as the land owner may suddenly become interested in investing in new developments on the garden lot (Armstrong, 2000; Englander, 2001).

The implications of collective gardening for management efficiency and for the status of the neighbourhood must be considered in a long-term perspective, which is not just a matter of the potential gentrification dilemma. Different challenges will emerge, affecting the neighbourhood in different ways. How well the neighbourhood is prepared to meet these challenges can be discussed in terms of its robustness. Some of the studies claim that collective gardening processes can make the local community more robust, mainly by accumulation of social capital and thereby an increased capability to mobilise resources (notably, Bengtsson et al., 2003). This is due to the development of new social networks, norms of cooperation and trust among neighbours, but also self-determination, organisational skills and contacts with other institutions. Another described source of robustness is that social stabilisation sometimes takes place in areas previously characterised by high flows of in- and out-migration.

A society perspective: sustainable urban development

From a society[2] perspective, the citizens' life opportunities and the successful development of individual neighbourhoods are important factors for sustainable development. What is important, though, is that *all* citizens and *all* areas must be considered. If the success for one group of citizens or one area is achieved at the expense of other groups or areas being excluded and marginalised, it is not a successful development from a society perspective. For example, if revitalisation of a deprived area involves mechanisms that push out (instead of helping and integrating) households viewed as problematic, which is often the case, the problems will most likely only be moved to other areas and segregation will persist (Andersson, 2006). Similarly, if marginalised citizen groups, such as ethnic minorities or unemployed youth, are excluded from the revitalisation process, there is a risk that they will feel even more marginalised and that long-term inclusion will be undermined (see, e.g., Body-Gendrot, 2002; Smets, 2005). Thus, a society perspective on sustainable urban development requires being attentive to externalities that affect excluded groups or spatial segregation patterns negatively when assessing the outcomes of specific revitalisation processes. It should also be noted, however, that there may be positive externalities, e.g., that a successful process in one area may inspire other areas to initiate their own revitalisation processes, or that the collective gardening outcomes will benefit not only the active group of residents, but other groups in the neighbourhood as well as a wider city district. Such positive spiralling effects are often described (see, e.g., Bartolomei et al., 2003; Bengtsson et al., 2003).

Another issue, which becomes more important and changes character when we move from a neighbourhood perspective to a society perspective, concerns what kinds of *values, norms and attitudes* are reproduced in the collective gardening processes. In general, the literature is enthusiastic about the effects – it is claimed that collective gardening may foster awareness of ecosystems as well as sociability and democracy. Tolerance and inclusion are apparently seen as important objectives by active residents, also in cases where ethnic divides are mentioned (see, e.g., Glover, 2004).

When applying a society perspective, the question of collective gardening must also be related to current debates on urban density. Many debaters emphasise the need to densify cities to make them more resource efficient as well as more liveable. In New York, the competition over land is a major issue for the community garden movement, and gardens are often juxtaposed against new housing developments, whereby two 'common good' interests are in conflict. Some authors, however, argue that there is enough land available and that authorities are more interested in short-term economic profits than in providing housing for low-income households (see, e.g., Staeheli, Mitchell & Gibson, 2002). Nevertheless, land is a limited resource, there are many potential aspirations concerning developments, and in the future, land use conflicts may challenge an emerging new gardening movement also in European high-rise suburban settlements, however well-provided with open spaces they may seem today.

Conclusion and further reflections

Judging from descriptions of such widely differing contexts as the Queen Anne Memorial Garden and the self-management system in Holma, collective gardening obviously has great potential to improve the situation for habitants in deprived neighbourhoods, as well as to turn a vicious circle into a positive spiral of community revitalisation. Urban dwellers without their own land may gain access to some of the opportunities villa garden owners possess, such as flower beds to view, sitting places in the spring sun, apple trees that children can climb and a vegetable garden to grow. Moreover, in addition to the potential improvements of the physical environment and opportunities to garden, the social processes resulting from neighbours cooperating in a joint endeavour may give rise to a number of interesting outcomes, such as increased sense of safety, development of human and social capital, and the ability to mobilise in order to cope with emerging challenges. From a resident perspective, collective gardening may significantly improve life opportunities in deprived neighbourhoods. From a neighbourhood perspective, it may improve management efficiency, raise the status of the area and contribute to robustness. From a society perspective, all these potential benefits must be analysed in relation to overall structures of social exclusion, spatial segregation, value reproduction and urban morphology. However, based on the reviewed literature, there is little reason to expect collective gardening processes to counteract sustainable development in any regard. While acknowledging the potentials, some remaining issues need to be reflected upon.

First, it is apparent that the literature on collective gardening is mainly produced in a positive and enthusiastic manner, and the possibility of *biases* cannot be eliminated. Few studies reveal critical approaches, taking into consideration the perspectives of those inhabitants who are not directly involved in the processes. In the reviewed studies, core-group members in neighbourhood associations, other actively involved residents, project leaders and management staff are interviewed, but never the neighbours who are not part of the processes. Nevertheless, non-involved residents constitute the largest group, as the majority of residents in the studied examples typically choose "the comfortable state of passivity" (Uggla, 1993, p.27). It has been suggested that the natural rate of involvement is as low as one percent (Skidmore, Bound & Lownsbrough, 2006). To further explore the effects of any community involvement initiative, it is of course of utmost importance to give all concerned groups a voice.

The second issue follows on the first, as it concerns the possibility of more *negative effects*. Due to the way in which most studies have been conducted, the existence of negative externalities cannot be eliminated. Glovers' (2004) study reveals that there is indeed an issue of distribution of gains, in the form of social capital, among the members of the neighbourhood associations, where the non-core members felt excluded from opportunities. Based on some in-depth descriptions of collective gardening processes, it could also be assumed that non-involved residents are excluded from the shared neighbourhood spaces when they are appropriated by other residents (an assumption which is confirmed by empirical studies and explored further in Castell, *forthcoming-a*). Most important is the question of whether the most excluded and impoverished groups are becoming empowered and integrated through the involvement processes or whether they are being left outside. The stories normally describe the gains from a community perspective, neglecting the possibility of inequalities, tensions, and conflicts *within* the community.

Third, there is reason to revisit the question of (macro) *structural* and (local) *situational causes* of urban deprivation. Are collective gardening initiatives of the kind described here really means for making long-term structural changes or is it merely a matter of coping with surface symptoms? Robert J. Sampson (2009) has emphasised that a deprived neighbourhood's stigma, which he discusses in terms of the residents' socially perceived disorder, tends to be very persistent over time. In other words, it is difficult to turn around the social psychological mechanisms determining the status of a certain area and to change a disadvantageous development. And, as Roger Andersson (2006) argues, the escalating economic segregation between urban areas cannot be reversed by only targeting the poorest neighbourhoods with area-based initiatives. More drastic structural changes will be needed, aimed at creating a mixture of land uses, tenure forms and dwelling standards both

in poorer and wealthier neighbourhoods, as well as general welfare policies to reduce inequalities between different population groups. It would even be possible to argue that tenant management and other initiatives involving the local community in solving their own problems are in harmony with the neoliberal political agenda that contributes to the problems, and thus contributes to the re-production of inequalities (see, e.g., Pudup, 2008). On the other hand, however, where collective gardening processes emerge as grassroots initiatives, they can be interpreted as a means of resistance and as part of the pressure for changing structures (see, e.g., Hayden, 1995; Staeheli, Mitchell & Gibson, 2002).

Fourth, an interesting perspective when analysing these kinds of processes is what could be called the issue of *conflicting aesthetics*. Some authors have reflected on the discrepancy between the aesthetics of authorities or established groups and the aesthetics of grassroots or outsiders, in terms of order vs. disorder. Lise Saugeres (2000) shows that tenants who do not tend their front yards in accordance with the housing officials' dominant management discourse are viewed as an underclass that threatens the societal order and as being in need of control. Similarly, Elena Domene and David Saurí discuss how local officials view retired working class men's vegetable gardens as a disgrace, violating either the order of the built environment or the order of nature. Gardens per se are sometimes discussed as hybrid environments, between an explicitly designed urbanity (e.g., parks) and an ostensibly uncontrolled nature. There is a balance between tidiness and liveliness involved in open space management, which can be seen as parallel to the balance between control and freedom in the building of society. Sophie Body-Gendrot (2009, p.72) claims that "some inefficiency, disorder and unpredictability are productive for the rejuvenation of cities", which is a call for authorities and housing companies to have the courage to turn over responsibility and control to the citizens and give them the means to get involved in creating their own city.

Finally, what remains important to analyse is how different *conditions* may influence the initiation, progress and successfulness of collective gardening processes – conditions related to physical, social and organisational structures. Knowing the conditions and their implications may be valuable when developing strategies to initiate or support collective gardening or other community involvement processes. To some extent, conditions may also be reshaped to better support the processes. Regarding the *physical* structures, some authors claim the existence of clearly demarcated semi-public open spaces (i.e., what are referred to as residential yards in Swedish) is a good basis for involvement processes, while experience shows that also less demarcated and more public spaces can be managed successfully by groups of citizens. The *social* composition of inhabitants is a sensitive issue, as ideals depicting involvement processes as cross-cultural melting pots are contradicted by statements indicating that collective action is obstructed by group heterogeneity. Apparently, conscious commitment and cautiousness are needed in areas conditioned by socially heterogeneous populations. Of great importance are the *organisational* conditions, in terms of tenures, housing companies' management forms, existing institutions and associations, etc. In Sweden, as well as in other countries with a strong public housing sector, the housing companies are key actors in many collective gardening processes, in particular regarding deprived urban areas. Many successful examples of collective gardening processes are organised as neighbourhood revitalisation partnerships of public institutions and civic associations, with the housing company and the local tenants' union as central actors. In the US cases described, on the other hand, there are fewer public institutions and many initiatives are instead supported by well-organised networks of civic associations. This difference can be connected to different historic traditions as well as different ideological viewpoints (see discussions in Body-Gendrot, 2000). Whether long-term ideals tend toward socialism, communitarianism or laissez-faire capitalism, the institutional frameworks as well as traditions of civic cooperation must be acknowledged as essential factors influencing how involvement processes can function.

Notes

[1] Deprived neighbourhood is used here without being strictly defined. In the literature cases, the neighbourhood may be described in general terms as poor, deteriorated or somehow exposed to socio-economic problems and stigmata. However, detailed descriptions and quantitative indicators of deprivation are not always available.

[2] Society is here used in a purposely vague manner. Typically, the issues brought up are appropriate to an analysis of consequences on a local municipality or nation-state level. However, the same logic can (and should) be used also on a global level, which eventually raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy of current border control policies and about priorities and distribution of resources between countries.

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