Community and ownership: a relational study of community gardens

Ellen van Holstein
University of Wollongong

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses1

Recommended Citation
COMMUNITY AND OWNERSHIP:

a relational study of community gardens

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Ellen van Holstein

Certification

I, Ellen van Holstein, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Ellen van Holstein

10 June, 2017
Declaration

Some parts of the following publications, completed during my candidature, have been reproduced in this thesis:


Abstract

Community gardens are widely promoted for their community building and educational capacities and they are equally criticised for their capability to perpetuate neoliberal logics of self-reliance and responsible citizenship. This thesis takes a relational approach to community gardens, focusing on community gardens in a relatively affluent and gentrifying urban area. It does so through examining community gardeners’ practices in three community gardens in the inner west of Sydney, Australia, and the ways in which through these practices gardens are connected to the wider urban environments in which these spaces are situated. Rather than prioritise institutional relationships or practices which generate social capital, as community garden scholarship tends to do, this thesis focuses on community gardeners’ practices, examining how community gardens relate not only to Council policies and interventions, but also to domestic garden spaces, infrastructure, non-human organisms and so forth. Community garden practices and relations were studied through participant observation at working bees and community garden meetings, and through twenty-four in-depth interviews with community gardeners and neighbours. Fifteen interviews included a walk from the participant’s home garden to the community garden. This broader approach opens up ways of knowing the practices through which gardeners come to understand themselves as individuals in a group. A key finding is that garden communities come into being through their members’ practice which in turn respond and shift according to the non-human agency of technology and plants, and the values and objectives of individual gardeners. In these responsive practices, gardeners constantly balance personal experiences and values such as feelings of ownership and accomplishment, and community objectives such as reciprocity and inclusiveness. This finding is supported by three empirical threads. First, the thesis focuses on gardeners’ propertied relationships to land in the form of plots and
fences. This thread troubles understandings of community gardens as commons and explores the various overlapping kinds of work private and communal property do in these community spaces. Second, the thesis analyses gardeners’ practices in relation to the food that is produced and harvested in the garden. This thread demonstrates how gardening practices and attachments to plants take shape in relation to personal objectives and that a sense of community is partly generated through gardeners’ relationships to plants. And finally, the thesis pays attention to gardeners’ individual and collective water management choices and practices. The focus on water practices and infrastructures emphasises the importance of external dependencies, such as domestic spaces, and values and expectation around fairness and economic rationale, in shaping community garden practices. Each of these empirical focus points sheds light on how gardeners are engaged in a complex set of relationships which allow them to invest in the community project for the sake of their personal goals while also creating a community space. In developing this relational approach to community gardens with a special focus on ownership, the thesis offers the insight that community gardens understood as spaces that build community, and community gardens as spaces that encourage self-reliance, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it shows that depending on context, the concepts of ownership and community can be practised in socially inclusive and exclusive ways. The thesis encourages an opening up of questions around how community might function in a central, dense and relatively affluent urban area such as Sydney’s Inner West. It also offers insights into community formation that are useful for policy makers who wish to encourage community belonging either through community gardening or through other social activities such as markets, festivals, political participation or volunteering, that encourage people to generate a sense of community in relation to their material and social contexts.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I want to thank Lesley Head. I feel very privileged to be your student. You have been very generous in the time you allowed me to find my way. You helped me see the big picture and stay on track without ever setting me a deadline. I am thankful for your support and for the opportunities you have given me throughout these years. But most of all, thank you for trusting me, even when for a little while I lost trust in myself.

Next I want to thank Leah Gibbs. Your kindness and open door made the PhD challenges more manageable. Thank you for all the dinners, the coffees, the advice, and the conversations about everything that did, did not, and never would end up in the thesis. Thank you for the thoroughness of your reading. I became a better writer because of it.

How lucky am I to not just have had one, but two amazingly generous and supportive supervisors! Thank you both.

A warm thank you to everyone who participated in my study. This thesis would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your time, for welcoming me in your homes and gardens, and thank you for talking honestly, generously and eloquently about topics that might have seemed silly. Your words directed my thinking and made the writing fun. I am very grateful for the time and thoughts you shared with me.

I was lucky to start my candidature at AUSCCER with seven fellow students who were as eager yet unfamiliar with the task ahead as I was. Lucky was I too that this crew expanded throughout the years. Enthusiasm, apathy and triumph are all better shared, and so I would like to thank the G12 crew and all AUSCCER postgrads for the Fri-thais, the awkward moments standing together during department and conference morning teas, the reassurance that it is okay for first drafts to be shit, the help locating obscure university forms, and the
weekend escapades to bars and bush tracks. I am especially appreciative, for fun times, distractions, proofreading and for their general awesomeness, to Charlie, Sophie-May, Chantel, Elyse, Nick, Shaun, Alex, Vicky, Kiera and Susie. It would have been plain boring without you all.

Other people at the University have been helpful and supportive in myriad ways. Thank you to all AUSCCER staff for the great collegial atmosphere. I thank Chris Gibson for his advice and encouragement. Thank you also Chris, for the road-trip extravaganzas, the karaoke and the cowboy talk. Thank you Chris Brennan-Horley for your work on the maps. Thank you beers to follow soon. Thank you Renée Agostino, Liz Rowe and Elyse Stanes for your help with the technical and administrative work involved in research. Thank you Nigel Woods at student support services for helping me learn to manage the challenges of academic expat life. Thanks to the community of international postgraduate students on campus for all the laughs. I am also grateful for colleagues at conferences whose feedback and sharing of ideas helped me shaped my thoughts. I am particularly indebted to geographers at the University of Groningen and at RMIT for their generous feedback on seminar presentations of this work.

Off campus I would like to thank my friends Zoe and Mel for cheering me up, feeding me, dancing and celebrating with me. Thank you for coming running. Thank you for not being geographers. Thank you for making me happy and keeping me sane.

A big thank you to my housemates throughout these years, for being okay with my hermit behaviour when I was writing and for not kicking me out during grumpy moods. Thank you also for not minding me taking two hour baths.

And then lastly, I want to thank my family and friends in the Netherlands. Thank you Papa and Mama, Mieke and Carla, Menno and Niels, Line, Anneke and Marjolijn. Thank you for being supportive even though it might not always be clear what I do or why I can’t do it back
home. Thank you for making me feel loved even when I am far away and for making me feel at home whenever I am back. I am very glad to have a sister who enjoys the same challenges I do and who always has a pep talk or sound advice prepared. It was great sharing the Australian adventure with you, Mieke. I can’t imagine how I would have managed without your encouragement along the way.
# Table of Contents

Certification i  
Declaration ii  
Abstract iii  
Acknowledgements v  
List of figures xii  
List of tables xiv  

## Chapter 1: Introductions  
1. Why a thesis on community gardening? Introducing the research problem 1  
   1.1 Why a thesis on community gardening? Introducing the research problem 1  
   1.2 The aims and questions 4  
   1.3 Thesis design 6  

## Chapter 2: A relational conceptualisation of community gardening  
1. Introduction 9  
2. Thinking space relationally 10  
3. The roots of community garden research 15  
   3.1 European allotment and community garden research 15  
   3.2 American community garden activism and the right to the city 17  
4. Tensions 20  
   4.1 Paradoxes of community 20  
   4.2 Community gardening in relation to neoliberalism 22  
5. Subjectivities 24  
6. Practice 28  
   6.1 Home gardens and practice 29  
   6.2 Practising community gardening 30  
7. From here 33
Chapter 6: Transplanting, plotting, fencing: relational property practices in community gardens

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Relationality and practice in property thought
   6.2.1 The complexity of property relationships
   6.2.2 Property as practice
   6.2.3 Community gardens as commons

6.3 Researching property practices

6.4 Relational property practices
   6.4.1 Transplanting: moving between home and communal space
   6.4.2 Plotting: understanding property in the context of community
   6.4.3 Fencing: protecting and connecting the garden

6.5 Discussion and conclusions

Chapter 7: Relating to plants, food and community

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Producing food in urban community gardens

7.3 Researching relationships to plants and food

7.4. Results and discussion
   7.4.1 Valuing community gardens
   7.4.2 Growing food in community gardens
   7.4.3 Relating to plants and food

7.5 Discussion and conclusions
# Chapter 8: Managing a shared resource: a relational approach to water use practices

8.1 Introduction 184
8.2 Water use practice in a variable climate 186
8.3 Researching water use practices 190
8.4 Water infrastructure and practices in the community gardens: 194
  8.4.1 Stanley Road Community Garden 194
  8.4.2 Park Street Community Garden 195
  8.4.3 Highfield Community Garden 198
8.5 Discussion 200
  8.5.1 Aspiring to community garden goals 200
  8.5.2 Expecting and valuing water 204
  8.5.3 Community garden water use understood in a broader context 207
8.6 Summary and conclusion 211

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Relationality 214
9.2 Contributions, implications and directions for future research 219

## References

Appendix 1: Recruitment letter 243
Appendix 2: Participant information sheet 245
Appendix 3: Consent form 246
Appendix 4: Background questions 247
Appendix 5: Interview guide 1 248
Appendix 6: Interview guide 2 250
List of figures

Figure 4.1: Location of the study area 47
Figure 4.2: Stanley Road Community Garden Map 53
Figure 4.3: Stanley Road Community Garden 54
Figure 4.4: Park Street Community Garden Map 56
Figure 4.5: Vegetable Patch and Shed at Park Street Community Garden 57
Figure 4.6: Caretaker roster at Park Street Community Garden 58
Figure 4.7: Highfield Community Garden Map 60
Figure 4.8: Highfield Community Garden 61
Figure 4.9: Conceptual map of the walks per garden 83

Figure 5.1: Stanley Road Community garden situated between terraces and apartments 96
Figure 5.2: Pumpkins at Stanley Road Community Garden 96
Figure 5.3: A car tyre functioning as a garden plot at Stanley Road Community garden 96
Figure 5.4: Hessian sacks put down to suppress grass at Stanley Road 98
Figure 5.5: Scarecrow and a wind spinner at Stanley Road Community Garden 99
Figure 5.6: A gnome in Stanley Road Community Garden 99
Figure 5.7: Community gardening promotion material at the local public library 100
Figure 5.8: Water infrastructure at Stanley Road Community Garden 101
Figure 5.9: Park Street Community Garden entrance 104
Figure 5.10: Park Street Community Garden gates and padlock 104
Figure 5.11: Pile of mulch on Park Street Community Garden’s driveway 104
List of tables

Table 4.1: Community garden characteristics 52
Table 4.2: Overview of participants 64
Chapter 1: Introductions

1.1 Why a thesis on community gardening? Introducing the research problem

Community gardens are envisioned as places of change, where people can educate themselves on environmental change, waste reduction and food production, and move towards more energy and resource efficient ways of life. Community gardens are expected to contribute to sustainability, waste reduction, fresh food provision, urban greening, education, social inclusion, social capital, health and empowerment. One can find these expectations in academic literature (Guitart et al., 2012), in urban policy (City of Sydney, 2014a; 2014b) and on Council websites (City of Sydney, 2016; Inner West Council, 2016). This conceptualisation of community gardens relies on an understanding of these spaces as compartmentalised and somewhat isolated pockets where people can engage in practices and alter their values in ways they might not be able to in other places.

These expectations and the spatial conceptualisation which undergirds these, sit in tension with current thinking in critical cultural geography where space is conceptualised not as a blank slate which people act upon, but rather as constituted by the social relationships and practices which envelop space into a continuous process of becoming. This relational conceptualisation of space departs from the insight that space does not precede social life (Amin, 2004). The actions of people create meanings and thus actively generate space. This means that space exists in a relationship with the social; a relationship in which the social and the spatial constantly reshape each other. Space is then not stable matter on which stories play out, as it is always implicated in the story (Massey, 2006).
This relational understanding of space illustrates that places are always shaped in their relationships to other places. Just as Doreen Massey used the example of Kilburn High Road, London to illustrate how one place is affected by faraway places and people (Massey, 1991), so we can see that a community garden must also be shaped by the values and aspirations people bring into it, by the practices that people develop in relation to infrastructure and plants and by the social relationships individual garden members are engaged in beyond the garden space and its community. This relational conceptualisation of space then problematizes a reading of community gardens as inherently different from their surroundings or as sustainable or inclusive in themselves.

Community garden research has been slow to take up a relational approach to place. The overly positive description of community gardens found throughout the community garden literature is an expression of this. The thesis presented here contributes to efforts to develop a more critical approach to community gardens. It does so through a focus on the practices that shape these places; practices which transcend the community garden space and engage people, institutions, infrastructure and routines that are situated outside these spaces. This approach allows for a relational understanding of community gardens as embedded in larger and changing landscapes of social relationships and practices, and enables the development of a critical stance towards the ways in which people’s values and desires are implicated in how these spaces take shape. This allows the thesis to shed nuanced light on the multiple ways in which community gardening is practised and to reflect on the potential of community gardening practices to generate some of the beneficial outcomes they are so closely associated with. The thesis sets out to do this without attempting to fixate these benefits in any particular place or practice, rather it focuses on the iterative, flexible and changing relationships which mould gardening practices.
I will engage more closely with the strengths and shortcomings of the community garden literature in chapter 2. I want to point out here that some scholars have indeed engaged with the relationships of community gardens to places, people and institutions outside the garden space. For example, we see scholars unpack the often challenging relationships of community gardens with local Councils, real estate developers and land trusts (Eizenberg, 2012a; Rosol 2012; Mintz and McManus, 2014). These enquiries start to show that community gardens are challenged by urban policy that follows the logic of cost efficiency and profit, which occurs at the expense of the power of community gardeners to enact a sense of ownership over the sites they cultivate.

Others draw attention to the importance of the spatial context of the neighbourhoods in which these projects are situated (Kurtz, 2001; Glover, 2003) and to the values, aims and practices that shape these community spaces (Turner, 2011). The study by Turner sheds a rare light on community garden practices. While a practice approach is common in domestic garden studies, and has proven efficient in revealing the ideologies and norms which underpin practices and their outcomes for sustainability and inclusion (Hitchings, 2006; Head and Muir, 2006; 2007a), community garden research tends to focus on outcomes. These relational and practice focused studies show that gardeners bring different views of sustainability and community to these spaces which leads to conflicting goals and uncertain project outcomes.

This research project was born out of my fascination with do-it-yourself urbanism and satisfies my curiosity regarding what it means when people shape their own living environments and public spaces. I am interested in questions such as whether actively shaping space – building a house or starting a garden – affects people’s relation to that place and their practices in that place. Community gardens are often conceived as a temporary use of space and their lay-out and management models are commonly shaped by the respective
garden community. Because community projects and initiatives by individuals are often conceived outside established governmental or other institutional frameworks, I am also interested in how projects relate to that established institutional framework and how people negotiate the temporal and uncertain status of the spaces they create. Based on these interests, this thesis was formed around the phenomenon of community gardens. The conditions of community gardens offer many possibilities for scholarly engagement with issues of ownership or environmental stewardship in relation to responsibilities of care, the sharing of resources and the control of boundaries, both physical and normative ones. This thesis develops a critical approach to community gardens, focused on the practices which shape these spaces and in doing so aims to further relational geographical research.

1.2 The aims and questions

This thesis aims to shed critical light on community gardens as spaces that are shaped relationally through practice and to highlight the connections and interdependencies of community gardens. This aim allows a move away from research that is focused on project outcomes and instead facilitates an understanding of how gardeners’ relations to other places, people and non-human organism and matter give rise to certain gardening and community practices. The aim is also to uncover how these relational dynamics work in a gentrifying and relatively affluent urban area, to expand research literature that has focused on community gardens in low-income neighbourhoods.

The thesis pursues these aims along three empirical threads that emerged from fieldwork: the community garden as a set of property practices; the community garden as a site for relating to plants and cultivating food; and the community garden as a place where people relate to
each other and the environment through water use practices. These threads help understand how community gardens are not beneficial in themselves, but potentially become inclusive or environmentally adaptive through the practices of gardeners; practices which take shape in relation to various externalities such as policy, other gardeners, communication technology, plants with different requirements, and so forth. Concurrently, the empirical focus on community garden practices furthers relational thinking in the literatures connected to these themes. This includes not only spatial relationality, but also relational theories that emphasise for example, the agency humans in relation to non-humans such as plants and the formation of subjectivities in relation to material objects and infrastructures.

Through examination of different sets of practices in three community gardens in Sydney, Australia and in putting forward the mobile research method of the walking interview to trace the practices of community gardeners from home to community spaces and back, I ask a series of questions about the ways in which community gardens as sets of social relationships take shape in relation to places, people non-humans, ideas and other external influences:

1. How is community gardening practised in relation to the context of the wider urban environment it is situated in, such as institutions, regulations and home gardens?

2. What are the various beliefs, ideas, desires and expectations that gardeners bring to community gardens?

3. How do gardening practices take shape in relation to other human and non-human gardeners, plants and technologies?

4. How do gardeners navigate the multiple sets of objectives and relationships that are enacted in community gardens?
1.3 Thesis design

I present this thesis and answer its research questions over eight chapters. After these introductory words, I present the conceptual grounding of the thesis in chapter 2. It is important to note that the overarching conceptual ideas are presented in this chapter, but that the developments in the thematic literatures around property, food and water are discussed in the introductory sections to the respective results chapters later on. In chapter 2, I present developments in relational thinking and its application to community garden research. The chapter shows the importance of researcher sensitivity to practices for understanding gardener subjectivities and the ways in which community gardening responds and adjusts to changing material and social circumstances. However I also show in this chapter that thus far a great deal of community garden research has focused on defending these spaces on the basis of their value as spaces for community organisation. In response to these shortcomings I approach community gardens as relationally constituted spaces.

In chapter 3, I place community gardens in the context and history of Australian suburbia. This chapter provides the contrast that distinguishes the community gardens in this study from the ones that feature more prominently in community garden literature. In anticipation of the empirical threads developed later in the thesis, the chapter discusses Australian suburbia thematically, focusing on the importance of property in the shaping of suburban lifestyles and landscapes, suburban food production practices in Australia, and debates about nature and sustainability in Australia. In this last theme I particularly focus on suburban water use practices and the ways in which gardening connects people to the environment and the weather but also to their neighbours.

In chapter 4, I put forward the research design, the methodological foundation and the methods employed in the thesis. I first discuss the particularities of the Inner West of Sydney
that made this a suitable study area for this research. I briefly introduce the case studies that informed the thesis and discuss how the three gardens were selected. I discuss the recruitment process and the composition of the group of participants. I also use this chapter to reflect on what it means to be ethical when critically researching a volunteer or leisure activity which is commonly understood as good and benign in the popular imagination. I then discuss non-representational theory and associated research methods. I justify choices for participant observation and walking interviews as key methods that reveal how community gardening is spatially and materially embedded in urban contexts. This enables awareness of the relational constitution of the garden as a space that is socially produced through practices that are enacted inside and outside of the garden space, and which are entangled with beliefs and values, organisms and infrastructures, that are not in any way exclusive or inherent to that space.

In chapter 5, I start to unpack the results of the study. I discuss the three case studies in great detail and I reveal how community gardening practices take shape in response to complex synergies between Council policies, group dynamics and personal motivations of gardeners. The chapter reveals the challenges groups face to start a project, and the importance of external support to be successful in subsequent applications for resources. Focusing both on external relationships and on the practices that are performed within the garden spaces demonstrates that the internal organisation of garden groups arise partially in relation to actions by external governance processes and structures and the perception of external threats.

Chapter 6 reveals property practices as one way in which gardeners manage to secure a sense of belonging and permanency in a community group. In this chapter I argue that property practices are multiple and relational. Gardeners see community gardens as a sum of
individual patches of entitlements as well as a space that functions as a shared commons. The chapter problematizes readings of community gardens as either inherently inclusive or as perpetuating neoliberal hegemony and instead demonstrates that these projects are both inclusionary and exclusionary and that they need these two aspects to function as community spaces.

Subsequently, in chapter 7, I apply thinking about ownership more specifically to the practices of growing food. This chapter engages literature on alternative food networks and shows that affluent community gardeners do not garden out of necessity but seek a sense of connection to food and nature. Attachments to certain plants afford this feeling of connection, and can put stress on community relationships when these are freely taken. However, plants that grow abundantly encourage sharing and allow gardeners to challenge aspects of dominant food supply.

The last results are presented in chapter 8, where I focus on water use practices. In this chapter I seek to understand water use practices as shaped in relation to public and private infrastructures, everyday routines and social relationships that extend beyond the community gardens. In the chapter I demonstrate that people enact community mindedness through their water use. People are willing to curb their own water use to enable other people to have flourishing gardens. However, expectations change when gardeners pay for water, and expectations and assumptions about fellow gardeners’ water use alter water and decision making practices in the garden groups.

I conclude the thesis in chapter 9. There I summarise the key findings of the thesis and I reflect on what these contribute to existing scholarship on community gardens. I identify implications for scholars working on urban community spaces and for policy makers who aim to accommodate community gardens in their plans and policies.
Chapter 2: A relational conceptualisation of community gardening

2.1 Introduction

Conceptually, this thesis is positioned on the intersecting theoretical fields of everyday practice and a relational approach to place. In this chapter I introduce these two fields and I emphasise how they matter to community garden research. I particularly focus on the limitations and opportunities for imagining community gardens as space of community inclusion within these fields of thinking. This thesis’ grounding in a conceptualisation of space as socially constituted and bound up in everyday practices, prohibits a reading of any space as inherently transformative in itself. Wanting to prevent discouraging or paralysing community gardening with an overtly pessimistic approach, I develop a critical line of inquiry which continues to identify and encourage the potential for community gardens to foster inclusivity and sustainability practices (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Cameron et al., 2011).

To start, I introduce relational thinking and identify its key contributions and implications. I then review existing literature on community gardens. I discuss the engagements of community gardening scholarship with relationality, as well as the gaps and shortcomings of community garden literature. I discuss the concepts of subjectivity and practice as ways in which we might conceptualise how community gardens are produced relationally and how therefore these spaces are in ongoing iterative connection with other spaces, materialities and ideas. I show how these concepts have informed community gardening research thus far. I formulate the contribution of this thesis in relation to shortcomings in the literature. I suggest a focus on practices that transcend the garden perimeters. With this chapter I aim to open up
community garden research to a relational sense of place and to the relational constitution of community in the face of the agency of non-human organisms and infrastructures. This lays the foundations for a thesis design which explores the relational production of community gardens through practices.

2.2 Thinking space relationally

The spatial turn in social sciences, in which spatiality began to be considered as an active constituent of politics, is broader than geography. It has its foundations in the work of twentieth century philosophers and sociologists, most notably Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, Henri Lefebvre, Bruno Latour and Michel de Certeau. Although these thinkers contributed to the turn in different ways, what they held in common was a commitment to the idea that the power to direct social life is not exclusively situated in the state, laws and regulations, but also in the agency and practices of people and things (Thrift, 1996; Crang and Thrift, 2000). Thrift (1996: 69) described the core of this body of social theory:

*Social structures are characterised by their duality. They are constituted by human practices, and yet at the same time they are the very medium of this constitution. Through the process of socialisation, the extant physical environment, and so on, individuals draw upon social structure. But at each moment they do this they must also reconstitute that structure through the production or the reproduction of the conditions of production and reproduction. They therefore have the possibility, as, in some sense, capable and knowing agents, of reconstituting or transforming that structure.*
In this quote Thrift hints at the spatial dynamics of a theory that combines structure and agency. Through the environment people draw upon social structures and through their practices they enact the potential to change structures which in turn are embedded and constituted in place. Practices are here understood as contextual, in that they are situated in space and time and always come forth out of, and feed back into, social structures.

In geography, the spatial turn gained momentum from the early 1990s, in two strands of relational thinking. Scholars who applied spatial relationality started paying attention to the connectedness of places and spaces, and scholars who committed to material, or more-than-human relationality started thinking through the agency of matter, non-human organisms and technology, how these shape human practices and therefore intervene in the reconstitution or transformation of social structure mentioned by Thrift (1996).

Spatial relationality was developed particularly through the work of Doreen Massey (1991; 2005), John Allen (2006) and Ash Amin (2004). Their work placed relationality at the centre of geographical thinking and moved analytical attention away from structure alone. This turn has had a number of effects. Most importantly, the theory has moved emphasis away from boundaries in an effort to stress the openness, multiplicity and connectedness of space. The theory reacted against an increasingly prominent interpretation of the local as sitting in opposition to the global. This interpretation imagined globalisation to occur at a scale separate from the local town or city, and overlooked how the connectedness of localities was complicit in globalisation.

Massey (1991) did not venture far from home to illustrate how her local high street in Kilburn, its economic functionality, community, aesthetic appearance and character were the result of a historical layering of global connections spanning from the British colonial past to current political and economic conflicts and partnerships. She put this insight forward to
support the argument for a more progressive sense of place in which the identity of place can be understood in multiple and inclusionary ways: ‘If it is now recognised that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places’ (Massey, 1991: 28).

Second and in line with this, the connections of communities to places could then be understood in more fluid and inclusive ways too. Rather than understanding communities as neatly fitting boundaries drawn around narrow understandings of place; spatial identities and belonging could now be approached in terms of networks, communication and diaspora. A global sense of place enables us to see our position in global networks, how we depend on interconnectivity and how connections might be limited.

Third, the insights that came with a relational understanding of space drove a more radical conceptualisation of responsibility and care. Where in a reactionary approach to place responsibility tends to stop at the national border, the urban fringe or the garden fence, a relational sense of place recognises connections to and dependencies on faraway places and communities (Massey, 2004). Policy decisions made in London will not only affect people living and working in that city but also on the other side of the world. This insight is relevant for urban, regional and national policies that affect economies and environmental conditions elsewhere, and it illuminates the positions of individual consumers who through their purchasing choices are connected to globalised trade networks. As one would expect from the nature of the scholarship described above, relational thinking of this kind is most commonly applied to issues of power, governance and political economies at the scales of nation states, urban regions and networks of global trade (Amin et al., 2003; Amin, 2004; Massey, 2007; Jones, 2009).

Material and embodied relationality have proven useful for thinking about the social constitution and reproduction of spaces on a smaller scale, such as urban gardens. In its
attempt to break down boundaries, relational thinking questions the categorisation of the world into entities such as the rural versus the urban, the human versus the non-human and the natural versus the technological. These lines of relational thinking pay ample attention to our affective and embodied being in the world, to the constant flux of our relationships with others, human and non-human, and in those changing relationships our constantly becoming and shifting sense of self (Hinchliffe et al., 2005; Anderson, 2009). For research into gardening and garden spaces, the foci on human-plant relationships and human-technology relationships have been formative for relational thinking.

Geographical work on human-plant relationships has been instrumental in breaking down categorisations of the cultural and the natural in favour of more nuanced approaches to understanding that nature and culture are always already imbricated in garden spaces. Classens (2015) for example relates the arrival of psyllids to his urban garden to climate change and industrial agriculture, to illustrate that urban gardens are not pockets of nature, but spaces that are intricately connected to social and natural processes that transcend the garden space. This conceptualisation limits the possibility to portray gardens as inherently ‘good’, and shows that this goodness has to be socially produced in some way. Another way into the relation constitution of garden spaces is offered by scholars who focus on how people become gardeners in their relation to plants and garden infrastructures. Working within the theoretical framework of actor-network theory, Russell Hitchings for example reveals how gardeners and plants mutually enrol each other into the garden be virtue of biophysical growing capacities, aesthetic sensibilities and the enjoyments of gardening (Hitchings, 2003). Along similar lines, attention has been paid to gardeners’ emotional experiences when encountering or talking about plants and animals in their gardens (Hitchings, 2006; Ginn, 2014). This work explores the importance of gardeners’ sensibilities, their confidence in their
role as gardeners and the ways in which these subjectivities translate into ethical commitments and environmental practices.

Geographical work on human-technology relationships has equally contributed to dismantling anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism in social sciences. Challenging the understanding of technology as outside or beyond the human, geographers such as Thrift (1996) Anderson and Wylie (2009) and Kinsley (2013) draw attention to co-constitutive human-technological relationships. They point to the materiality of technology and the agency of footwear, communication technology, and bicycles to make humans engage with each other and with their environments in certain ways (Wylie, 2005; Ingold, 2008; Brown, 2015). For example, a focus on the materiality of technology is inspiring an understanding of digital communication technology not as opening up ‘cyberspace’, but as assemblages of screens, wires and electrical currents that profoundly change the ways in which people exteriorize thought and communicate with each other (Kinsley, 2013). This approach to technology has also been instrumental in conceptualising gardening as relationally constituting space. For example, scholarship on water and the ways in which technology makes humans relate to water has been instrumental in understanding how people become modern subjects with certain expectations regarding the availability and cleanliness of water (Kaika, 2005). Water technology and human practices have together constructed the modern home as a space of security and cleanliness. Scholarship on water technology in gardens has revealed that gardeners adapt gardening practices in relation to the flexibility offered by infrastructures in different places (Kaika, 2005; Head and Muir, 2007b). The continuous adaptation of technology and the ways in which technology is at the heart of how we relate to other people, non-humans and to spaces demonstrates how we are not before or after technology, but that we are always engaged in a mutually constitutive relationship to
technologies. I will now review literature on community gardens to show how this field of research has engaged with relational theorisations of space.

2.3 The roots of community garden research

Contemporary community garden research can be traced back to two sets of roots. One set lies in European allotment research where urban gardens are examined through a cultural landscape lens (Klein, 1993; Crouch and Ward, 1997; DeSilvey 2003; Domene and Saurí, 2007; Miller, 2015). Another set is based in the activism that emerged around community gardens that were threatened with eviction in New York in the nineteen-nineties (Schmelzkopf, 1995; 2002; Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Eizenberg, 2012a; 2012b). These two sets have created different research approaches, foci and methods.

2.3.1 European allotment and community garden research

The European branch of community garden and allotment research approaches these projects as spaces in which identity and difference are enacted along gendered (Bhatti and Church, 2000; Parry et al., 2005), class (DeSilvey, 2003; Domene and Sauri, 2007) and racialized or ethnic lines (Klein, 1993; Shinew et al., 2004). Klein (1993) for example studied migrant belonging in Swedish multi-ethnic community gardens and showed that gardening practices from ethnic minorities might be judged or discouraged in shared garden spaces. Her study emphasised the controversies about the policing of borders and social norms, and drew attention to gardens as spaces of conflict instead of spaces of communitarian sanctuaries. And in Barcelona, Domene and Sauri (2007) show that allotment gardens sit in tension with expectations of the ‘modern city’ as the practices and aesthetics of these gardens, associated
as they are with thrift and working class leisure, are deemed out of place in a bourgeois urban landscape. Similarly, DeSilvey (2003) showed that Scottish allotment gardens, once acknowledged as worthwhile spaces, struggle to defend their future existence, not because anything inside the gardens changed, but because external circumstances such as economies of welfare and the acceptability of agricultural practices in cities have changed.

This collection of work is attuned to difference but at the same time it is overly focused on working class spaces, to the extent that it overlooks community garden projects in middle class and gentrifying areas. The community garden research that does focus on community gardens in middle class neighbourhoods shows the exclusionary potential of these spaces, which might be occupied by homogenous groups of white, highly-educated people (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Aptekar, 2015). Quastel (2009) for example shows how community gardens are enrolled by real estate investors to attract gentrifying, green urban lifestyler. These conditions create an urgent need to look at the practices of inclusion, exclusion and transformation that are performed in community garden spaces that are not exclusively aimed at providing opportunity to minority groups.

The focus on working class and minority groups’ gardens also emphasises what these garden spaces offer in terms of food production and health benefits. This focus on subsistence and health does not match the gardens that function as spaces of consumption and leisure. Increasingly community gardens are tangled up in classed lifestyle politics (Quastel, 2009; Sbicca, 2014). Food production is no longer motivated by economic necessity or a working class appreciation of self-reliance, but rather has become part of a middle class understanding of good and clean food. Already in the mid-1980s Fiske and colleagues (1987: 50) identified the increasing popularity of the vegetable plot in Australia as ‘part of a different structure of meanings, connected not to work but to a middle class interest in vegetarianism, whole foods
and “health” as a lifestyle’. Similarly, Gaynor (2006) builds on Bourdieu to argue that the same values that shaped the desire for independent lives in a healthy, unpolluted, green, suburban environment (e.g. respectability, cleanliness) encourage a middle class ‘art of living’ that demonstrates self-control, cleanliness and thrift in shaping middle class bodies. Research on community gardens has not yet engaged at depth with this new trend. This is partly due to this cultural landscape research field and partly due to the second strand of community garden research, which finds its origins in community activism and also focuses on working class and minority spaces.

2.3.2 American community garden activism and the right to the city

Community garden research as it originated in the United States is embedded in a long history of activism. American geographical research on community gardens was arguably kicked-off by Karen Schmelzkopf (1995; 2002) who designed a research project on New York community gardens in response to the clearing of community gardens by the city’s neoliberal Giuliani office in the early nineties. The gardens emerged in a time of economic recession and were a major grassroots improvement of the urban environment. However, within the reinvigorated economy of the nineteen-eighties the gardens had to compete with real estate interests, increasing housing shortage and the city’s budget deficit. In response to this threat, Schmelzkopf positioned the community gardens in Manhattan’s Lower East Side as sanctuaries that offered people a sense of security and a space to meet with other members of the community. Schmelzkopf (1995: 379) wrote that community gardens ‘transcend the separation between the public and the private’ because they are situated in public space but accommodate practices that are conventionally performed in private spaces. She bolstered the phenomenon of community gardens by emphasising positive impacts of gardens on the urban
environment as they produce ‘vital, if sometimes temporary, plots of nature and community within the decayed geography of the surrounding urban space’ (1995: 380).

Since Schmelzkopf drew attention to community gardens as projects worthy of scholarly attention, community garden research has largely remained focused on the issues to which her New York case studies spoke. As a result, community garden research favours a number of lines of enquiry that emerged from this activist agenda. One line is to question the relationships of community gardens to property investment and gentrification (Voicu and Been, 2008; Quastel, 2009; Sbicca, 2014). And in order to protect threatened gardens in a hostile urban landscape and market, another line of enquiry has been to analyse ways in which community gardens support the collective good. Scholars show how community gardens are associated with healthier lifestyles, allowing people access to fresh healthy food and opportunity to exercise (Wakefield et al., 2007; Evers and Hodgson, 2011); and how gardens can provide minority groups with opportunities to create a sense of community, organise themselves politically, feel empowered and gain social capital (Schmelzkopf, 1995; Glover, 2004a; Holland, 2004; Aptekar, 2015).

The potential of community gardens for resident empowerment has made them an important empirical site for the theorisation of the right to the city. This loosely defined ideal put forward by Henri Lefebvre, comprises a radical opening up of politics on the scale of the city to counteract people’s alienation from urban space caused by capitalist processes of commodification (Purcell and Tyman, 2015). In response to this, Lefebvre put forward the idea that political rights on the scale of the city should be prioritised. Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ comprises two rights: the right of inhabitants to participate in decision making regarding the production of urban space; and their right to appropriate space, to access, occupy and use urban space (Lefebvre, 1996; Purcell, 2002). In line with this, community garden researchers
approach these gardens as sites which encourage residents to enact a Lefebvrian right to the city (Staeheli et al., 2002; Follmann and Viehoff, 2015; Purcell and Tyman, 2015).

The right to the city supports people’s capacity to shape urban spaces on their own terms, to create spaces of socialization and to do so independently from the calculated logics of exchange value and corporate interest. Attoh (2011) notes that the majority of ‘right to the city’ scholarship responds against undemocratic examples of urban policy, planning and design. And as one might assume, this scholarship looks at the margins; the proletariat, homeless people, ethnic minority communities, sexual minorities and youth for example, for collectives that should claim this right (Staeheli et al., 2002; Mitchell, 2003).

In line with the previous set of community garden work, this body is shaped by a focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods and poor communities. Community gardens are approached as sites that provide services and opportunities, and that encourage practices that might generate social capital and foster community participation. Accordingly, attention goes to the institutional and legal relationships of gardens with their environment and focuses on gardeners’ practices associated with those relationships. Issues of tenure, social capital and public health receive due attention, with less consideration of the context and effects of actual gardening practices. This research practice is also grounded in an absolutist approach to place. For the sake of their protection, community gardens are portrayed as inherently good or transformative in and of themselves rather than due to their interdependencies or the relationships they foster. In this thesis I recognise the importance of the bureaucratic and political context of a community garden as tenure and ownership partly shape these projects. I combine this insight with critical approaches to community gardening.

Recently community garden research is becoming more nuanced, recognising that different gardens reach different goals, that gardening might have multiple outcomes and that some
might create exclusive rather than inclusive spaces (Aptekar, 2015; Barron, 2016). I now engage with tensions that have been made revealed by community garden and urban agriculture scholarship.

### 2.4 Tensions

The threatened position of community gardens in the North American urban landscape and their simultaneous celebration for offering services and community benefits has led scholars to critique community gardens for their encouragement and accommodation of neoliberal political processes (Knigge, 2009; Perkins, 2009; Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014a). In the contemporary political context of neoliberal urban governance, community gardens are assigned roles that sit in tension. Community gardens are imagined as spaces of resistance against the privatisation of public space and the commodification of community spaces (Schmelzkopf, 2002; Eizenberg, 2012b), but at the same time they are identified as nurturing neoliberal discourses of self-improvement and accountability (Pudup, 2008; Barron, 2016). Another tension is that community gardens are expected to enhance community inclusion and cohesion, while, as any community group, they also rely on a degree of exclusivity (Staeheli, 2008). In the following sections I discuss these tensions.

#### 2.4.1 Paradoxes of community

The first tension I wish to discuss is the one embedded in the concept ‘community’. As sites of community empowerment, community gardens are promoted because they encourage people to foster sense of community, organise themselves politically, gain skills and shape their residential environment. Community garden research has shown that members acquire
social capital through their involvement in a community garden, because it requires a group of gardeners to communicate between themselves, with local government, and other relevant organisations (Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Glover, 2004a; Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014b; Aptekar, 2015). The same work however also shows that these formative aspects of community gardens make them inaccessible to some groups and individuals who lack those skills. This makes the transformative potential of community gardening for the people who might benefit from them most questionable (also see Uitermark, 2015).

This tension in community gardening is an expression of the tensions of community and citizenship at large in that the inclusive potential of both can only be reached through exclusion. People who do not adhere to community values are excluded and this gives shape to a homogeneous group of people. At the same time this practice leads to a conditional sense of citizenship. The formation of citizen subjectivity in community spaces is one reason that has led scholars to problematize the concept of community (Staeheli, 2008).

Another point of criticism revolves around the fact that actually existing communities are not as homogeneous, coherent and trouble-free as the word ‘community’ suggests. Various scholars working in community gardens have pointed this out (e.g. Pudup, 2008; Turner, 2011; Ernwein, 2014). Klein (1993) and Kurtz (2001) drew attention to the exclusionary practices of boundary making and how community spaces are articulated through these acts of exclusion. Glover (2004a) and Turner (2011) highlighted how the capacity of different individuals within one community to benefit from opportunities differs substantially. Others draw attention to coerced communities of gardeners such as school children and convicts (Pudup, 2008), or point towards social tensions within community gardening groups (Klein, 1993; Domene and Saurí, 2007). Pudup (2008) is of the opinion that the term ‘community’ is ‘a highly evocative phrase, [because] it connotes an idealized space of coming together
among people and between people and nature’. For this reason, Pudup (2008: 1230-1231) suggests referring to community gardens as ‘organised garden projects’ instead. Others recognise the tensions, struggles and ruptures that exist within communities and in community gardens, but see these tensions as an inherent and productive aspect of ‘community’ (Klein, 1993; Staeheli, 2008; Aptekar, 2015). The tension between the positive ring to the word ‘community’ and the reality of community is summarised as follows by Staeheli (2008:7):

While community is sometimes swathed in soothing feelings, it is also a site of politics, as should be obvious if it is to be a site in which political subjectivities are formed. As such, community is where contests are waged over membership and the political subjects and subjectivities that ‘belong’ in a political community.

In accordance with this point of view, I recognise that ‘community’ is political; that it comprises cohesion as well as tension. As such, I refer to the gardens as ‘community gardens’, and in analysing community gardening practices I aim to grasp how certain ‘political subjectivities’ are shaped.

2.4.2 Community gardening in relation to neoliberalism

The second tension I discuss entails the relationship between community gardens and neoliberal modes of governance. Critics observe that community gardens can be made to cushion the excess and failure of dominant neoliberal systems of governance and economic regulation. Marginalised groups are capable of sustaining themselves by formulating a political voice, creating community space and accessing healthy food, which allows for the perpetuation of those systems without the need to seriously address the flaws that created
their marginalisation in the first place (McClintock, 2014). This is particularly pertinent when community gardening is done in response to crises such as war and economic recession, and taken up to feed the poor and unemployed.

This tendency is particularly visible in US scholarship, as the erosion of welfare programs and the increasing transfer of responsibility onto community organisation and volunteers there makes researchers cautious of how community gardening absorbs state withdrawal (Knigge, 2009; Perkins, 2009; Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014a). However, the issue is not exclusive to the USA, as Rosol (2012) for example discusses how local government in Berlin attempts to make community garden volunteers responsible for the maintenance of public green space.

Bramall (2011) untangles the historical development of the idea of community gardening as emancipatory acts that create independent and responsible citizens, and shows how that discourse is adopted into austerity discourses towards the dismantling of the welfare state. These contradictory effects have led Guthman (2008) to argue that community projects reproduce the governance rationalities that they aim to resist because they work within what the dominant neoliberal economic project has already rendered possible. Neoliberal rationality encourages the formation of spaces in which competitive and entrepreneurial endeavours can flourish, and these spaces in turn encourage the formation of neoliberal subjectivity (Guthman, 2008). She suggests that food scholars pay attention to the micro-politics of grassroots projects and question what kinds of subjectivities they create.
2.5 Subjectivities

A considerable body of work on community gardens reflects on the potential of these spaces to shape responsible citizens (e.g. Baker, 2004; Pudup, 2008; Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014a). The turn towards citizenship in environmental social sciences offers a view onto the tensions between individuals’ rights and obligations, and considerations that those individuals make regarding the common good and collective well-being (Latta, 2007). Writing about the development of citizen consumers in alternative food, Lockie (2009) distinguishes between choices people make to increase their own pleasure or well-being and choices people make out of a moral sense of obligation or responsibility towards a larger collective. As Glover (2004b) argued, for people to be responsible citizens who keep the collective good in mind they have to be aware of the needs and interests of other people in the community. Community gardens are particularly well situated to further this body of thought as oftentimes gardeners join these community projects seeking a sense of community while at the same time they might have different visions for the garden or aim to achieve different personal goals (Kurtz, 2001; Turner, 2011; Aptekar, 2015).

How community gardens and other alternative food projects might change citizenship and what kind of subjectivity this might lead to, remain points of contention. I observe two camps in this debate. One group is hopeful as to the change alternative food projects can accomplish in terms of socio-environmental justice (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Harris, 2009a; Turner, 2011). Another group is sceptical, and sees alternative projects being easily absorbed into tokenism, defensive localism and the gravitational force of neoliberalisation (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008). These two groups have different views on the extent to which economic practices create change towards more egalitarian and sustainable relationships. Debates focus on the rationalities and mentalities which alternative food
projects employ to encourage certain kinds of consumer and citizen behaviours (Lockie, 2009). Sceptics of alternative food projects see those initiatives extend neoliberal rationalities grounded in market logics, entrepreneurialism and consumer choice rather than offering a more profound and structural change to address the inequalities which undergird the systemic failures of dominant food systems (Guthman, 2008).

The debates about neoliberal subjectivity are framed by a Foucauldian understanding of governance and subjectivity. Foucault witnessed a decentring of state government and the implementation of regulations that encourage subjects to govern themselves. In his lectures he called this style of governance by the infusion of mentalities, ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 2002). Paired with neoliberalisation, the idea that markets, not governments, are best placed to increase people’s wellbeing and that governments should therefore refrain from market intervention, leads to encouragement of people to take on rationalities based around market relations.

As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism works by installing a concept of the human subject as an autonomous, individualised, self-directing, decision-making agent at the heart of policy making. In so far as this vision of the human subject is recognised and assimilated, people are recruited into neoliberal forms of governmentality, even if they also, simultaneously, seek to resist some of its effects (Bondi, 2005: 499).

Consequently, political power is imagined to reside in consumer choice, and citizens are held personally responsible for their wealth, health, wellbeing, and for the state of the environment. Alternative food projects arguably do exactly this, and hence reproduce neoliberal mentalities.

Guthman is at the forefront of debates about neoliberal subjectivity formation in alternative food. In the analytical framework that supports her arguments she identifies four themes in
alternative food projects that intersect with neoliberal rationality: consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement (Guthman, 2008). These themes speak to two tendencies in attempts to formulate alternatives to neoliberalisation. First is the tendency to emphasise on place in alternative food projects, whereby resistance against the global forces of neoliberalisation is imagined to take place in the local. This focus on the local can be encouraged through initiatives such as community events that make local products and processes more highly valued. Valuing the local is strengthened through consumer choice, where people can express their attachment to a locality through purchasing products from a particular place. This leads to an uncritical embrace of all projects that encourage local production and consumption as acts of resistance. As such, localism encourages a regressive understanding of space and globalisation which relational thinkers try to open up.

The second tendency speaks to what Foucauldians call ‘responsibilisation’; mechanisms through which the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves. Through community and commercial projects ‘individuals and collectivities are offered active involvement in action to resolve the kinds of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies’ (Burchell, 1993: 276).

Advocates of alternative food and related projects recognise their potential for empowerment and self-determination:

*community gardens emerge as the paradigmatic example of a new political space in which people with hitherto few options but to passively accept their roles as ‘consumers’ or whatever the food industry chose to supply them with (or to withhold!) are empowered to take responsibility for themselves, their communities, and their environments (Lockie, 2009: 194).*
Community gardens are deemed well positioned to enhance political power because of their non-commercial character. Other than in alternative food projects such as organic labelling and farmers’ markets, this empowerment is organised through gardening practice rather than consumption. These practices might encourage the development of non-capitalist socio-economic relationships. However, at the same time advocates of alternative economies recognise the gravitational force of neoliberalisation and related discourses (in particular see Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Massey, 2013) but warn against rendering that force omnipotent (Harris, 2009a; Little et al., 2010; Galt et al., 2014). Acknowledging the performative power of academic work, these scholars aim to focus on the moments of hope and success and on the alternative practices these moments might give rise to, rather than on the instances of neoliberal mentality that alternative projects might be infused with at the same time.

Using strategic analytical approaches such as ‘reading for difference’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006a) and shaping a politics of the possible (Harris, 2009a) these scholars aim to focus on the ‘emergent practices’ in alternative food projects that might open up new possibilities and new imaginaries. At the same time Harris (2009a) recognises that not enough attention has been paid to the actual practices that transform or resist subjectivity formation. As discussed above, community gardening is a particularly suitable set of practices through which to study subject formation. Despite a growing interest in community gardens, practice has not yet been a key focus of community garden research. In this thesis I focus on the practices that shape community gardens, to bridge the divide between an overtly optimistic reading of community gardens as sites of resistance and a pessimistic dismissal of community gardens as hegemonic spaces. I now discuss practice as a lens through which to study community gardens.
2.6 Practice

Geographers foreground practice as constitutive of social realities and relationships and as conducive to social and political change (Pudup, 2008; Milbourne, 2012; Purcell and Tyman, 2015). Everyday practice is understood as a way to create meaning independent from capitalist markets and neoliberal governance, which can work to alienate people from places and from their power to shape places (Purcell and Tyman, 2015). At the same time research shows that everyday practice is culturally grounded and directed by conventions and habits which prove challenging to transgress (Askew and McGuirk, 2004; Naylor, 2012).

Practice is both the moment of change and convention. In a relational approach to people and place, power receives attention as an emergent property in practised relationships. Power might adhere to Euclidean space, to boundaries and the discourses which support those, but in a relational approach these are seen not as absolute but as ideas that are held up and normalised through practice. As such, practice rather than absolute space or social status are constitutive of power (Gibson-Graham, 2007). This way theorists open up understandings of space, community and economic practice to challenge neoliberalism. Practice is thought both in and outside of current interrelated social systems and that is why it is where we might see possibilities for change.

This thesis builds on insights that have come forth out of practice focused studies such as projects looking at the sustainability of domestic gardening and water use. Based on this work and in response to the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis in relational thinking, the following sections put forward a focus on practice that transcends the garden spaces.
2.6.1 Home gardens and practice

Whereas community garden research pays limited attention to gardening practices, there is an expansive and varied literature on private gardens that does emphasise practice (Hitchings, 2003; Bhatti and Church, 2004; Head and Muir, 2006; Longhurst, 2006; Power, 2005; Bhatti et al., 2014). This literature is attentive to how gardening practices produce attachments and it foregrounds practice as shaping and transforming gardener subjectivity. Longhurst (2006: 590) for example describes domestic gardens as ‘spaces where people can create and enact a range of embodied subjectivities. They are spaces where it is possible to reinforce hegemonic geographies and/or create alternative ones’. And Head and Muir (2006: 505) similarly state that gardens are spaces of ‘close everyday engagement between people, plants, water and birds [and that] both attitudes and practices can change in the process of such engagements’. This type of garden research reveals how garden practices work to transgress and renegotiate boundaries. These boundaries might be physical, such as boundaries between public and private space, or normative, expressed in ideas and judgements about ‘good’ gardening practices.

An important boundary that is made and re-made through gardening is that between public and private space. Various gardening studies have shown that the everyday practices and attitudes towards private-public boundaries are complex and that they frequently challenge dominant notions of individual, community and state responsibilities (Blomley, 2005; 2016; Adams and Hardman, 2013). These studies also show that gardening complicates boundaries as through gardening new layers of meaning and attachment are inscribed onto place. Simultaneously, scholars describe domestic gardens as boundaries between the public space of the street and the private space of the home. Domestic gardens represent privacy and
personal expression, while they mediate community values through public scrutiny (Freestone, 2000).

In line with the visibility of gardens and gardening practices, gardens are also sites of aesthetic judgement and normative boundary making (Hitchings, 2003; Askew and McGuirk, 2004; Aptekar, 2015). The construction of social norms and community values through display of private gardens has been studied for example with a focus on lawn maintenance (Askew and McGuirk, 2004; Robbins, 2007). These studies show that the visibility of private gardens and a community understanding of classed aesthetics spurs people into practices they know are harmful to their community, the environment and even to themselves. Focusing particularly on watering practices, Askew and McGuirk (2004) revealed that these are shaped by a felt necessity to conform to community norms around the upkeep of leisure spaces as a way to express middle class suburban identities, but that watering practices are also shaped by a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the property boundary. Through gardening practices these boundaries and responsibilities are redefined and negotiated by individuals as well as a community of gardeners and neighbours. In this thesis I explore how community gardening practices redefine physical and normative boundaries and shape gardener subjectivity.

### 2.6.2 Practising community gardening

Work in community gardens focused on gardeners’ practices has analysed the formation of community through practice (Klein, 1993; Kurtz, 2001). This work is attentive to boundary making and acts of inclusion and exclusion that are performed through community gardening. Gardening practices are foregrounded as ways of producing a sense of what can and cannot belong in the community space. The visibility of other gardeners’ work makes it possible to
police each other’s practices, which helps create a shared normative imaginary of the good gardener (Turner, 2011). This links with broader practice focused work that asks how ideas of the good, responsible or green citizen are produced, policed, transgressed and maintained (Askew and McGuirk, 2004; Latta, 2007; Lockie, 2009).

As discussed above, a large portion of community garden research focuses on how these gardens are institutionally situated and how they relate to other non-profit organisations, communities and the state (Schmelzkopf, 1995; Staeheli et al., 2002; Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Pudup, 2008; Eizenberg, 2012a; Mintz and McManus, 2014). Pudup (2008) for example describes how the garden projects are organised, how they are funded, who their members are and what the aims of the collective of gardeners are. The relation between community gardens and parties outside the garden, such as government and landowners, shows that these relationships are constituted through practice (Aptekar, 2015). Similarly, Kurtz (2001) showed how community gardens allow urban residents to construct and reinterpret the meaning of urban gardens and urban community through the decisions gardeners put into practice about enclosure. Garden communities enclose the garden guided by ideas about what an urban community garden should be and who can be part of that space based on where people live and how much time they spend gardening (Kurtz, 2001). Practice is there foregrounded as constitutive of the community project and space. These practices create visibility for ethnic and other minority groups and challenge the dominance of the market by enacting community economies. However, the practices that shape the community project and boundaries inevitably also mould its limitations and potentially its exclusivity.

In terms of sustainability Turner (2011) shows that community gardening practices are complicated by different understandings of sustainability, differing goals, and the contexts of personal lifestyles and individual routines of gardeners. She shows that food producing
practices and energy saving practices sit in tension. People are willing to use more water for greater yields when local food is understood as sustainable. She also shows that the gardening practices are not exclusively a means towards sustainability or food, but that weeding and watering are also a way to be socially engaged and purposeful in the community space. Turner’s (2011) community garden work is closely related to insights into consumer practices research which shows the importance of a holistic approach to practices, taking not only the practices themselves into account, but also the routines, the environments and the technologies by which these practices are framed.

Scholars recognise that practices of consumption can create a sense of awareness, responsibility and a sense of necessity for collective action that transcends a particular purchase (Barnett et al., 2005; Lockie, 2009). Consumerism, often directed by value for money self-interest, is also a ‘sociable practice’ in which people think about the impact of a purchase for example on the health and wellbeing of their children or community members (Barnett et al., 2005). Related to this, consumerism is always also tied up in other social practices such as parenting, caring for neighbours, and other such practices that make people who are consuming more than mere consumers. In this thesis I recognise that the practices of production as well as consumption that are enacted through community gardening are also enmeshed in wider everyday rhythms and that they might be informed by competing desires and ideals.

To be sensitive to wider rhythms of work and life, practice is approached as transcending the garden space. I follow Ettlinger (2011: 544) who explains that grassroots efforts to change practices often fail when they are aimed at a particular set of practices and do not sufficiently connect with a wider context. She encourages researchers to engage with practices across contexts to ensure that steps toward change in one context, for example at home, are not
overshadowed by daily activities in another context, such as the workspace, that has not been subjected to the same push for change. This insight also calls for attention to be paid to the material contexts of practices, and inspires sensitivity towards the ways in which community gardening evolves in relation to non-human organisms and technologies.

To understand the potential of social and environmental change towards inclusion and environmental sustainability embedded in community gardening practices, these practices have to be considered as related to practices that take place elsewhere, in the neighbourhood and at home. Similarly, the values, ideals and norms that underpin community gardening practices have to be approached as emerging in and outside the community garden space in relation to policy and community gardeners’ objectives and the material interdependencies of infrastructure and plant behaviour. This opening up of a research lens on practice, works to illuminate fields of community garden knowledge that have been lightly trod thus far.

2.7 From here

In this chapter I foregrounded research that thinks space relationally. I showed that relational thinking opens up understandings of space beyond borders and perimeters, and aims to understand how space is constituted in its relation to people, places and matter elsewhere. I have shown that community garden researchers have engaged with these thoughts to some extent, but that the activist agenda to defend these spaces has also created an understanding of community gardens as inherently good in themselves. This understanding sits uncomfortably with relational thinking.

I have also shown that community garden research pays disproportionate attention to working class and minority groups’ garden spaces. I showed that attention to practice has either
focused on practices within the garden space or on management practices that define the relation of the garden to government and non-profit organisations. I argued that, although the literature is well versed to critically examine how community gardens are managed and situated, little is known about the everyday practices of community gardeners or the ways in which gardeners’ relationships to other spaces inform these spaces and their communities. In other words, little is known about the values, beliefs, norms and motivations that gardeners bring with them from outside the garden to shape the garden space and community group.

In relation to these shortcomings in current community garden literature, I focus this thesis on middle class garden spaces in a gentrifying area of Sydney and I approach practices as embedded in larger everyday routines. I reflect on the micro-politics of community gardens as they are constituted relationally and I ask what kinds of subjectivity are created and emerge in those relationships. To shine a light on gardeners’ relational practices I propose a combination of research methods which is sensitive to community gardeners’ everyday experiences, their relationships to technologies, plants and each other, and their movement between the garden and elsewhere. In line with this, I first situate community gardens in Australia’s suburbs, before moving on to discuss research design and methods in consecutive chapters.
Chapter 3: Context of community gardening in Australia’s suburbs

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I place community gardening in the context of Australian suburbs. This context is important in support of the thesis’ relational approach to community gardening. The suburbs are where most Australians live, and as such suburbia is strongly connected to Australian culture and values and desires such as affluence, independence, privacy and security (Davison, 2005). As the country’s most common residential landscape, urban subdivisions shape understandings of the environment (Gilbert, 1988; Davison, 1994; Davison, 2008). Although many Australian suburbs have larger gardens than those found in the Inner West of Sydney where the fieldwork for this study took place, the suburban context is important because community gardens in Australia are closely connected to the circumstances of life in the suburbs such as the importance ascribed to property ownership and the appreciation of gardening in a private yard. It is because of this characteristic of the Australian suburb in general that the context of the suburbs partly informs the practices I study in this thesis.

Australian suburban values inform practices such as food production which in turn inform practices in community gardens. Informal food production in Australia is strongly associated with the private backyard. Unlike some other suburban nations, such as the UK that has a strong tradition of allotment gardening and America that in its depression-relief and victory gardens has a tradition of community gardening as a crisis mitigation strategy, Australia does not have such a clear historical predecessor to its contemporary community gardening.
movement (for a detailed discussion of the Australian movement see Nettle, 2014). The neighbourhood gardening projects that were started as a response to the national campaign that called people to ‘dig for victory’ and support the nation by growing food during the Second World War, were only a fraction compared to the many people who chose to take on that responsibility in their private garden spaces (Gaynor, 2006). Informal food production, as a quintessential household enterprise that is put to practice in the private yard, affirms the middle class values of self-reliance, independence, privacy and associated conceptions of freedom that suburban Australian society holds dear. Yet, recent decades have seen growing numbers of community gardens in Australia, particularly, or most visibly, in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne (Nettle, 2014). How then to understand this recent popularity of community gardening in Australia’s cities?

In this chapter I move towards an understanding of Australian community gardens in light of the contradictions of the suburbs. In anticipation of the three empirical threads I follow in the results chapters, I organise this chapter around the same three topics: property, cultivating food and connecting to the environment.

### 3.2 Suburban property

The Australian dream promises ownership of private property in a suburban setting. Both as a defence against the perils of the modern city and as a shield against unruly nature, the private realm offered a retreat. The strong desire for private property ownership in Australian suburban society is explained as an inheritance of the importance and immunity vested in private property under British law (Hall, 2010), as expressed in the British saying ‘a man’s home is his castle’. Suburbia enabled the development of a spatial divide between the two
moral codes of the private and public realm, one over which an individual did not have much control and one that functioned as a secluded haven (Davison, 2006). This interpretation leads to the conclusion that the Australian suburb was born as a compromise between British anti-urban sentiments in which the city represents all that is bad and the Australian bush that was understood as too dangerous a place to live (Gilbert, 1988; Davison, 2006). Although firmly grounded in anti-urban ideals, the suburb facilitates urbanisation by offering refuge from it (Davison, 2006). These motives form the explanation for the privatised nature of early Australian democracy, as a pursuit of a private and defensive space articulated to shield off the insecurities and risks that were thought to be inherent to modern city life and the unruly Australian bush.

The appeal of suburbs in Australian society was not the mere outcome then of British colonisation combined with the availability of vast stretches of land. Rather, the dream that shaped contemporary suburban Australia was the product of the coming together of a particular set of values and political agendas. One of the reasons for the creation of a housing market that was based in private property and owner-occupiers can be found in the project of shaping a nation. The Australian dream represented an attempt to create a patriotic middle class citizenry through the model of widespread property ownership (Hall, 2010). The symbolic link between private and national boundaries can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, ownership of, preferably, a detached home, was thought to be directly related to patriotism because love of home was understood as the basis for patriotism and reliable citizenship (Freestone, 2000). In the period between the world wars this political agenda was fuelled by Bolshevik fear, because broad scale private property ownership reassured conservative Australians that the masses ‘inevitably opposed subversive change’ (Rowse, 1978: 7). Additionally, the gardening that is necessary to keep up a detached suburban home was seen as sparking appreciation for the beauty of the country and hence a love for the new
nation and as a way in which citizens could contribute to the aesthetic quality of the landscape (Holmes et. al., 2008). Gardening was also connected to patriotism in that the personality traits or skills required for gardening, such as patience, forethought, tidiness and persistence were seen as prerequisites for good citizenship (Holmes et. al., 2008).

With private homeownership becoming widespread, its value as a status symbol did not erode; rather, homeownership moved close to the core of the imagination of Australian nationhood (Holmes et. al., 2008). The production of modest houses on equally sized plots helped give additional credence to Australia as a fair society with good access to housing. In this way the suburban bungalow, with its generous backyard, came to occupy pride of place in popular versions of the good society (Badcock, 2000). Homeownership in this way contributes to the illusion of an egalitarian country in which everyone has equal opportunities to move higher up in society and improve one’s socioeconomic position. This idea of equal opportunity has become popularly known as the ‘fair go’, identified by many as the most characteristic and important Australian value (Gough, 2006).

As Badcock (2000) argues though, the availability of homeownership to the larger part of society masks many of the inequalities that are inscribed into the property model. Many people remained excluded from ownership or had to go through a substantially larger effort to reach the objective of their dream. For example, as the masculine emphasis in the proverb of the man and his castle suggests, inadequate consideration is given to housing of women and children, and the Australian housing market denies poor families access to services through the uneven distribution of public investment in residential areas (Badcock, 2000). As the suburban landscape has changed and access to services and amenity has become more uneven, scholars have followed this up by pointing towards the inherent inequality of the ownership model and have unveiled that private ownership does not rely solely on individual
effort and thrift, but depends heavily on public endeavour and subsidies for its creation and maintenance (Gleeson, 2005).

Recent critiques of the private ownership model and the increasing materialisation of its principles of inequality in the Australian urban landscape, do little to unsettle the value ascribed to property ownership in the national imagination. The discussion of property in community gardens in chapter 6 will illustrate how these values inform practices which in turn shape garden communities and spaces. The importance of property as a concept that shapes other practices is also important for understanding community gardening and general gardening practices, such as those associated with food production.

3.3 Cultivating food in Australian cities

As mentioned above, small scale food production in Australia is strongly associated with the private backyard. There, it has been a practice which expressed values such as self-reliance, thrift and responsibility. It is important to recognise that, although community gardening is becoming increasingly popular, recent scholarship into backyard production indicates that most households continue to produce at least some food there, sometimes as an inherited family practice (Gaynor, 2006; Head and Muir, 2007a). Research into new structures of meaning surrounding home production of food has found value attributed to the sharing and swapping of home-grown produce (Head and Muir, 2007a). This new attribution of value extends the formerly domestic practice of food production into spaces outside the private yard and home. Further, when people are involved in a community garden this is often not the only space where they grow food. Many community gardeners grow in both private and communal spaces (Evers and Hodgson, 2011).
Importantly, food production is no longer motivated by economic necessity or a working class appreciation of self-reliance, but rather has become part of a middle class understanding of good and clean food. The current popularity of home and community garden food production in Australia is at least partly driven by health considerations and associated understandings of good or wholesome food. The preoccupation with healthy food is reflected in Australian scholarship on community gardening (Harris, 2009b; Kingsley et al., 2009; Evers and Hodgson, 2011; Guitart et al., 2014). The importance of health is also reflected in research regarding people’s food choices, with health and pricing featuring prominently in household decision-making, whereas the environment does not play a significant role in food consumption choices (Gibson et al., 2013). Gibson and colleagues (2013: 38) also point out that decisions around food are not made in a vacuum but are ‘enmeshed in wider rhythms of work and city life’. Food decisions and ways of being involved in community gardens or other community food projects should be understood in light of circumstances such as the availability of space and other household responsibilities.

The importance of values such as self-reliance did not only translate into the urban form of large detached houses on large suburban plots, but also into relationships with food and the practices of its production. In chapter 7 I will discuss the food production practices of community gardeners in detail and in that discussion I will return to this brief history of Australian suburban food production. I first discuss a final aspect of suburban values and practices: those regarding relationships to the environment.
3.4 Connecting to the Australian environment through the garden

Strong held views on the advantages of private property ownership have translated into assertion of people’s ability to enact environmentally positive practices on their private properties. Advocates of homeownership and suburbia imagined the garden as each property owner’s learning environment for urban sustainability:

*Private residential land is both an environmental good which ought to be fairly shared, and a vital educator: a classroom for work-skills, play-skills, nature study and environmental values which an environmentally careful society would be mad to deny to any of its people (Stretton, 1976: 192).*

This quote expresses an outdated truism, as debates about the relationships between urban form and environmental sustainability have gone through various developments. The overtly positive perspective described by Stretton was first replaced with a perspective which took environmentalism as being about protecting a wild nature that existed exclusively outside the city. This perspective found expression in an environmental movement that mobilised to protect untouched natures such as rivers and forests or to save patches of nature in the city from development (Hutton and Connors, 1999). Similarly, debates around urban sustainability have been strongly shaped by a focus on densification (e.g. Troy, 1996; Fay et. al., 2002; Searle, 2007). The main opportunity for sustainable urban development then has largely been sought in making cities denser to minimise car dependency and maximise the nature that can be conserved outside the city’s perimeter (Troy, 1996; Fay et. al., 2002; Searle, 2007; Gleeson, 2008).

However, more recent research focuses on practices and reveals that low density suburbs facilitate sustainability practices related to processes such as water management and food
production that dense urban forms do not (Ghosh and Head, 2009; Gibson et al., 2013). Instead of seeing suburbia as a materialist and apathetic evil, a portrayal of Australian suburbia as having brought forth movements and practices such as community groups campaigning for wilderness preservation and the protection of endangered species (Gilbert, 1988), neighbourhood protests against the development of urban parks (Anderson and Jacobs, 1999), bush regeneration initiatives (Davison, 2005) and more recently the community gardening movement, produces a more nuanced image of the sustainability of suburban society.

One perspective on sustainability in suburban gardening practices that is important for the arguments developed later in the thesis is that focused on water. The Australian backyard is put forward as a place where people can reconnect with the Australian environment (Head and Muir, 2007a). Australian nature was, and to large extends continues to be, understood from a Eurocentric point of view that holds Europe’s temperate climate with a cycle of four distinct seasons as norm (Gibbs, 2010). The practice of gardening makes people aware of heatwaves, floods and droughts, in ways that entice responses. However, considering the appeal of low-maintenance, paved gardens, it is worth asking how much can be learned from the rhythms and cycles of Australian fauna and climate in these gardens. A garden with low resource input and the recycling of garden waste is ecologically more sustainable than consumer gardens and has a larger educative effect on the gardeners (Seddon, 1997; Hogan, 2003). In inner city areas a trend is witnessed in less pervious garden surfaces due to house extensions, and decks and patios taking over garden spaces that were relatively limited in size to begin with (Hall, 2010).

Where people do have access to a sizable yard this does not guarantee engagement in sustainability practice or the emergence of environmental awareness. Household studies show
that gardening is not an isolated environmental activity, but one that ties in aesthetic and social expectations that encourage even environmentally aware people to make unsustainable gardening decisions (Askew and McGuirk, 2004; Head and Muir, 2007b). Decisions regarding water usage on gardens strongly relate to understandings of social status and respectability (Askew and McGuirk, 2004) and to cultural conditions such as normalised washing practices, which dictate how water is used (Moy, 2012). As with food production practices, it is important then to approach water use and other sustainability efforts as sets of practices that are embedded in lifestyle and routine. I will return to these observations in chapter 8 where I discuss water use practices in community gardens in more detail.

3.5 Summary

Community gardens are taken up by policymakers and residents because they offer solutions to urban ills such as limited green space and social isolation, and they help articulate responses to environmental pressures by allowing waste reduction and the production of local organic food. At the same time as community gardens speak to these issues and fit well into the contemporary suburban condition, they are contradictory to the values that suburban Australia is built on, such as self-reliance, independence and privacy. As Andrea Gaynor (2006) hints at for example, the paradoxical popularity of community gardening in a landscape of private homeownership leads to a situation in which community gardens work best when they are structured on a model of individual plots and responsibilities, which raises questions around the likelihood of community gardens functioning as community-building projects. Secondly, many gardening practices have been shown to sit in tension with the motivations that underpin them. Gardeners who are enthusiastic about growing food might not actually produce food but merely plan to do so, and gardeners who are committed to
recycling materials in their garden have been observed actually buying products to be able to reach this goal (see Head and Muir, 2007a). Thirdly, community gardens are important sites for environmental awareness and empowerment because there people can experience the weather, plants, soil and wildlife. However gardens increasingly accommodate consumptive and luxury practices as well and yard space is increasingly smaller and taken up by decks and patios.

These contradictions do not declare community gardens aimless, meaningless or obsolete. Rather, these situations open up opportunities for understanding people’s everyday negotiation of urban sustainability issues in both private and communal contexts. One area in Australia with many community gardens to study these contradictions and opportunities is Sydney’s Inner west. I discuss the Inner West in the next chapter where I introduce the research design and methods.
Chapter 4: Research design and methods

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the research design and its alignment with the research aims, and the methods employed to answer the research questions. The three community gardens that were selected as case studies for this thesis are located in the Inner West of Sydney. This is why I first introduce the Inner West and I explain why this area suited the purposes of the research. I also discuss the criteria I used to select gardens and the choices that directed recruitment of participants. I provide an outline of key characteristics both of the gardens and their communities and participants. More detailed discussion of the gardens and the practices that shape these spaces will take place in the results chapters 5 to 8.

In the second part of the chapter I present research methods and the methodological thought that helped open up an approach to community garden spaces. I engage with thinking on non-representational theory and I put forward the walking interview as a key way to open up the researchers’ gaze towards practices that are articulated in relation to other places, people and matter, and shape the site. This chapter recounts the methods used to gain a greater understanding of community gardens, how they are connected to the urban fabric, and how they make up part of gardeners’ everyday lives. The chapter will shed light on the central considerations that were made in choosing how to approach the garden communities, in how to produce data, and how to analyse and present it.

After a discussion about researching the everyday and central discussions in more-than-representational methods, the chapter turns to the methods that were selected; participant observation during working bees and meetings, and walking interviews with individual
community gardeners. These methods then lead me to discuss how the collected material was analysed, and I end with a reflection on ethical considerations around presentation of the data and representation of the participating communities. In this last section I reflect on my relation to conflicts within the community groups and on the response of participants to my results. These dynamics had implications for how the research was carried forward. It changed the considerations surrounding research practice, and interpretation and representation of the research results in order for the project to remain ethical and close to the experience of participants.

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 The Inner West of Sydney

The community gardens studied in this thesis are located within a one kilometre radius of each other to secure a stable basis for comparison. They are located in the bordering neighbourhoods Newtown and Erskineville, immediately south-west of the Sydney CBD (see figure 4.1). This area is informally known as the Inner West. The choice of the Inner West as the research area is motivated by my aim to create a deeper understanding of community gardens in gentrifying areas. The Inner West of Sydney was also a suitable area to focus fieldwork because community gardens are relatively popular in this area (Mintz and McManus, 2014).

The Inner West of Sydney has a history as a working class area, and has become susceptible to the gentrification process that moves from the city’s centre to its suburbs (Atkinson et al., 2011). The density of this area has increased since gentrification processes started to affect the area in the 1970s, encouraging housing development on fill-in and former industrial sites.
The gardens are located in a relatively dense area with density ranging from 53.47 persons per hectare in Erskineville, of which half the surface area is used to accommodate public infrastructure, to 101.91 persons per hectare in Newtown (City of Sydney, 2011). The residents of these neighbourhoods predominantly live in medium-density housing such as terraced and semi-detached houses, many of which have a backyard. The second largest group of dwelling type in the neighbourhoods is high-density apartments, and the amount of detached low-density housing is small (City of Sydney, 2011).

Investment in real estate drives property prices up and consequently rents are adjusted; a process which induces a shift in the residential composition of the area (Tovey, 2010; Atkinson et al., 2011; Horin, 2011). The working class population, commonly renters, are leaving, and are being replaced by young middle class professionals and families, commonly owner-occupiers. This can be illustrated with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that indicates that, in Erskineville 49% of residents over 15 year old held a Bachelor or
postgraduate degree in 2011 against 38.5% in 2006, and in Newtown this percentage was 45.8% in 2011 against 37.7% in 2006 (Community profile City of Sydney, 2016; Community profile Inner West Council, 2016). With these numbers reaching 24.1% in 2011 against 20% in 2006 in the Greater Sydney area, Newtown and Erskineville are neighbourhoods with relatively high and growing potential incomes.

The area is ethnically less diverse than greater Sydney and this difference has slightly deepened in the period between the census surveys of 2006 and 2011 (Community profile City of Sydney, 2016; Community profile Inner West Council, 2016). The area has a larger representation of people who are of Australian, English, Irish or Scottish ancestry than Greater Sydney. For example, 34.9% of Erskineville residents identified as being of English heritage in 2011, against 24.6% in Greater Sydney. The case study area accommodate less people of Asian or non-English speaking backgrounds. Only 5.5% of Erskineville residents had Chinese ancestry in 2011, against 12.3% in Greater Sydney. Many ethnic groups that are well represented in Greater Sydney, such as Vietnamese, Lebanese and Filipino, do not show up in the statistical data for the City of Sydney and the Inner West because they yielded a response lower than 0.1%. Empirical work also shows that these areas have become more homogeneous in their white middle class profiles as migrant and low income communities move out (Atkinson et al., 2011). The same study cautions against the effects this segregating phenomenon might have on people’s ability to be empathetic towards situations and customs of people they do not interact with as part of their everyday routines.

Studying community gardens in this area provides insight into how community gardens sit in an urban landscape that is strongly shaped by real estate investment, demographic change and densification. It allows me to shed critical light on community garden practices that might be informed by lifestyle preference rather than responses to necessity like the community
garden which prominently feature in the literature. In the next section I discuss the criteria for selecting three particular gardens and I introduce some of their differences and commonalities.

4.2.2 Policy supporting community gardens

Councils in Sydney provide ample information on their websites to support residents wanting to join, start, fund and manage a community garden in the area, stating that these projects help reduce household waste, provide opportunity to produce food, and bring people together. Community gardening is a popular phenomenon in this part of the city. The Council area City of Sydney alone, which includes Erskineville and a part of Newtown, accommodates 23 formally recognised community gardens (City of Sydney, 2014b), two of which are case studies in this thesis. Inner West Council accommodates 10 community gardens (Inner West Council, 2016), one of which features as a case study.

City of Sydney’s vision for a green and inclusive future is outlined in ‘Sydney 2030/Green/Global/Connected’. This document is the outcome of a community consultation process and has led to the definition of key goals that are to lead to a prospering, internationally and locally connected, carbon neutral urban environment in which current and future communities will be able to feel belonging (City of Sydney, 2014a). Sustainable Sydney 2030 is supported by the City’s community garden policy, which actively promotes the development of new community gardens as ‘places for learning and sharing about sustainable living practices, and for actively building community through shared activities’ (City of Sydney, 2014b: 3).
City of Sydney provides community groups with a set of responsibilities and rights. For example, it requires community groups to create safe and inclusive environments, to register as an incorporated association with the Office of Fair Trading, to install a committee of representatives, to run regular meetings and to take out liability insurance. In turn the City grants community gardeners the right to:

- develop their own internal organisational procedures and plan of management providing they liaise with and get support from the landowner; be consulted with regards to any decision that may affect the project and to be advised by the City in a timely manner of any policy changes that impact them; be treated with respect by other gardeners, local residents and partnering organisations; and, negotiate a secure and reasonable agreement with the landowner (City of Sydney, 2014b: 7).

City of Sydney says it recognises the importance of gardeners’ sense of ownership over the space for the success of these projects. The policy is not explicit about how this sense should be created, beyond mention of a management plan and the responsibility the garden group should take for the projects’ day to day functioning and upkeep. The policy also reveals some contradiction in that it requires community gardeners to select a committee of members and at the same time extends to them the right to organise themselves internally on the group’s terms. Inner West Council has adopted City of Sydney’s policy on their website, to promote community gardening in their Council area in this same way.

Despite the fact that the three case study sites that were selected for this thesis are subject to the same policies, the distribution of land and responsibilities are organised in different ways in each of the three case study gardens. They have different relationships with Council and landowners and have made different choices in terms of internal organisation and management models.
4.2.3 Selecting three community gardens

The fieldwork for this research took place in three community gardens. I selected these three community gardens based on two criteria. On the one hand I was interested in different models of tenure, by which I mean the relation between gardeners and landowners and the relative security and stability of that relationship. On the other hand I was interested in various ways in which garden projects are internally managed in terms of membership fees, private plots, and communal areas and associated tasks. Gardens with different types of tenure and internal management were selected. The grounding of the gardens in the same urban area provided a stable platform for case study comparison.

This section teases out the similarities and differences between the gardens and between members of the gardens. I also created an overview of differences between gardens in table 4.1. In the discussion that follows I focus particularly on whether the garden offers members an individual plot or a communally shared space, and the conditions of access. Gardens are discussed in further detail in chapter 5. I replaced garden names with pseudonyms throughout the thesis. The differences between gardens I discuss here are important because they shaped members’ choice to be involved in the respective garden project, and because these characteristics shaped gardeners’ practices and the communities that were thus constructed. In other words, the differences were not only valuable for the research, but also proved of value to the participants, as decisions about which garden to join and how to garden were partially based on these criteria. Gardeners expected certain kinds of social relationships to occur in community gardens and had preference for certain informal property arrangements.
I first selected the case study ‘Stanley Road Community Garden’ because this is a contested community garden in which gardeners struggle with relative insecurity of tenure (see figures 4.2 and 4.3). Stanley Road Community Garden is not endorsed by local Council. The garden is located on a lot that was part of a series of building sites that City of Sydney Council acquired to facilitate the planned widening of this road. After Council’s road plans were cancelled these sites lay abandoned for years. When Council sold adjacent lots to developers,
local residents devised the idea of a community garden to retain ‘open space’ for ‘the community’, as one gardener explained. The garden was started in 2009.

Figure 4.2: Stanley Road Community Garden Map, approximately 15 by 20 meters (as featured in the consultation report)
The organisation of this project is strongly shaped by the compartmentalisation of the garden into private plots (see figure 4.2), and by one gardener, Claire, who as a direct neighbour to the project is heavily invested in the project. Because each gardener has their own gardening project on their plot, people do not need to negotiate with other gardeners. There is no incentive to synchronise time spent in the garden with other people’s daily and weekly
rhythms. Claire’s investment in the project and communication through blind carbon copy emails ensures that everybody knows her, but that people do not know anyone else. The system of private plots and people’s busy everyday schedules results in a lack of social connections. Claire does try to organise monthly working bees, but these are poorly attended to non-existent because of people’s differing everyday routines and perhaps also because people have not yet met other gardeners. The effect of the private plots in this garden, combined with a strong organising figure, is that the gardeners in this group rarely see each other. This is ironic because many gardeners indicated that they joined in search of a sense of community. Several gardeners also mentioned that they had considered joining another community garden nearby, but decided against it because that garden does not have private plots. This other garden became the second case study.

The second community garden, ‘Park Street Community Garden’ was selected because it was mentioned by the participants from Stanley Road Community Garden as being communally organised and enjoying greater security. This garden was planted in 1991, after plans to start a City Farm at Sydney Park in Petersham as a space for the city’s residents to grow organic food, were cancelled. Although the initiative was supported by approximately one thousand residents, South Sydney Council decided against the plans in 1991.¹ Looking for other avenues to establish a permaculture project, the initiators were granted tenure by a public school on the current site. The gardeners won a 3000 dollar grant from South Sydney Council to propagate native plants and work on waste reduction. There were different objectives amongst individuals in the group from the start. Some were motivated by native plant

¹ Twenty-five years later, local government has returned to these ideas, and the farm will be developed over the course over the next couple of years, see http://www.sydneycityfarm.org/about-us/
propagation and bush regeneration, others were interested in the wider principles of permaculture and wanted to grow organic food and set up composting facilities. The differences of opinion quickly escalated, which led many to leave. The remaining group set up a permaculture project, trying to find a balance between organic food production and waste reduction. They roughly divided the garden space into three different zones, one for natives, one for fruit trees and one for vegetables (see figures 4.4 and 4.5). They also drafted up a constitution, registered at the chamber of commerce, opened a bank account and took out liability insurance. The garden does not have a map or a management plan.

Fig. 4.4 Map of Park Street Community Garden, approximately 50 in length and 35 meters at the base of the triangle, sketched by the author.
Park Street Community Garden is formally managed by a team of volunteers. A neighbour across the road is treasurer, one gardener is public officer in charge of managing incoming emails, and another gardener has taken on the role of secretary and also takes on the practical tasks such as organising deliveries of mulch and manure from Council, and coordinating relationships with organisations such as the food coop and people who have installed a beehive in the garden. The garden is open to the public on Sundays from eleven until one o’clock. A team of five ‘caretakers’ rotate the duty of picking up coffee grinds from a local café to put into the compost and then opening up the gate and welcoming visitors who might drop in (see figure 4.6). Gardeners are encouraged to come during these open hours, but
people who have been involved for an extended period of time also have the code to the numeric padlock which allows them to access the garden whenever they please.

![Figure 4.6: Caretaker roster at Park Street Community Garden (May 2014)](image)

The composition of the group of gardeners is different each Sunday. Most ‘caretakers’ only go once every five weeks, when it is their turn to collect the coffee and open the gate. This is why the group has a diary to keep track of garden work that has been done. In practice, people occasionally write down what they have planted, but do not read what others have written. Rather than having a plan for planting and harvesting or an agenda of chores, gardeners do the kinds of things that need frequent doing, such as watering the vegetable patch, turning the compost and raking leaves. When those chores are completed gardeners sit
around or take their cue from the secretary, who attends every week. The lack of direction prevents people from taking on projects and tasks that need time to complete and flourish.

The changing composition and the resulting lack of continuity in the garden are reasons why one gardener strongly believes that a system of private plots would be better. The belief is that private patches will create a sense of investment and responsibility. The idea is that an annual fee for plots would also create greater commitment. This was the reason for two gardeners to mention another community garden in the area that runs on such a model of plots and fees. This particular garden was selected as the third and last case study site.

The third garden ‘Highfield Community Garden’ was selected after repeatedly being mentioned by gardeners from Park Street Community Garden as having an interesting structure of private plots and communal areas (see figure 4.7 and 4.8). Highfield Community Garden was created on an unused part of a public school’s playgrounds. Before plans for the garden were created, this area had been used by neighbours. Home-owners on the garden’s street received keys to the overgrown area upon purchase of their house and children living on the street would use it as their playground. When asbestos was discovered on the grounds, access to the area was immediately denied. A few years later, neighbours developed the idea for a community garden on the site. The newly appointed school principal was a keen gardener and supported these plans. Neighbours founded a sustainability group to secure a legal body for their group. Highfield Community Garden is a sub-group of that organisation. Preparations for the construction of the garden began in 2011 with the writing of the ‘Plan of Management’. Actual construction was started in 2013 with the installation of a geo-synthetic mat to protect produce and people from any remaining asbestos contamination.
Construction was supported by the groups’ successful application for a 25,000 dollar Council grant of which 15,000 dollars went to the school to develop gardening classes. After these
initial triumphs the garden group also proved successful in securing sponsorships from local corporations such as New South Wales RailCorp, which donated old sleepers and Sydney Arbor Trees, which donated large amounts of woodchip. The garden group is also successful in maintaining a productive relationship with Marrickville Council, now Inner West Council, and with the school. The majority of construction was done by the gardeners during fortnightly working bees. Construction activities included building 36, 2.4 by 2.4 metre plots. After construction work had been completed, working bee meetings were turned into a monthly event.

Figure 4.8: Highfield Community Garden (December 2014)
Highfield Community Garden has a membership system in which each member pays 40 dollars annually for basic membership. This gives gardeners access to the garden and all the facilities at the garden such as tools and water. People who only pay the general fee garden in the communal areas along the sides of the garden and are welcome to pick fruit from there. The communal area is small and the trees are not fruiting yet which has made general members experience a lack of purpose in the garden. Consequently the number of general members has declined. Most members now pay the additional 80 dollars rent for a plot. They either do this independently or share the plot and the rent with another member or family.

Highfield Community Garden is formally managed by a committee of volunteers. These committee members take on the roles of president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, a membership and a communications officer. These roles delegate responsibilities to the extent that the president chairs meetings, the communications officer manages the group’s Facebook page, and the treasurer - also being the neighbouring school’s principal - manages the bank account. Besides these tasks the committee functions as a group of insiders who with a few other regular gardeners are often present in the garden and make decisions for the group.

The strategy of following referrals in selecting field sites allowed me to develop a greater understanding of the meaning of distance of the garden to the home, and different management models of gardens, to the participating gardeners in the research project, and what they were seeking when they decided to join a particular garden. Before I selected a garden I pitched my project and gauged gardeners’ interest to participate. I did this to make sure that I was not unwelcome or intruding when undertaking fieldwork activities and to minimise the chance of facing recruitment challenges later on in fieldwork.
4.2.4 Recruiting participants

The focus of the study on a particular area of Sydney’s Inner West means that the gardens’ membership and hence the sample of participants consists of relatively affluent and highly educated people with a preference for a particular green, urban lifestyle that is focused on local community. Or as community gardener Dylan says: ‘we’re all hippies in the Inner West’. As will become clear in this section, members of the three community gardens and participants in this study include long-term neighbourhood residents, new owner-occupiers who might be described as the gentrifiers of this area, as well as more transient residents such as university students. For an overview of research participants see table 4.2.

After selecting a garden I went to working bees to familiarise myself with the lay-out, the functioning and the community of the garden. I then first recruited participants by asking gardeners at working bees and used opportunities that the organisation of particular gardens presented. Recruitment then followed various strategies such as through gatekeepers, letterbox drops and snowballing, but mainly participants were invited through direct contact at working bees where I could introduce my project and gauge interest. Because I am interested in how community gardens sit in the neighbourhood I set out to include neighbours as well as gardeners to develop an understanding of their experiences with garden projects. I did several letterbox drops around Stanley Road and Park Street Community Gardens from which I recruited one respondent. This is why the views that were included in the data set were primarily those of insiders. The decision to abandon letterbox drops was accompanied by awareness that the amount of rich material from observation and interviews with the gardeners was sufficient to meet the research goals. This was also when I realised that the three community gardens allowed me to answer the research questions. At this stage the interview questions were reviewed – a process on which I will reflect later in this chapter – to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Walk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stanley Road</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hellen</td>
<td>composter</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>neighbour</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>renter</td>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>neighbour</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highfield</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>2-15</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>5-15</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>5-15</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>2-15</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>owner</td>
<td>postgraduate</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>policymaker</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
include questions about how gardeners think outsiders see the garden and what those opinions mean to them. At Stanley Road Community Garden a survey was conducted by City of Sydney Council in 2009 that included neighbours’ opinions and concerns regarding the garden. Although these reports did not give voice to neighbours of the gardens directly, it did allow me to learn about the relationship between gardeners and neighbours to some extent.

Overall recruitment challenges differed from garden to garden and depended on individual gardeners’ availability of time and their willingness to communicate. Two of the three gardens had regular working bees that were an ideal occasion to meet the gardeners. I was able to garden alongside the gardeners, which allowed me to largely sidestep gatekeepers. It also gave me the opportunity to learn about how people interacted with each other and with the garden, how many people participated and what sorts of activities they developed during these communal hours. Chats with gardeners informed me about the kinds of topics that were of concern to them, which in turn informed the design of the interview questions. Although many people were willing, or even enthusiastic, to be involved, some gardeners were unwilling to participate either because they were not interested or because I failed to pitch the project to them well. Regardless of how straightforward recruitment seemed, it is important to remain mindful of whose voices ended up being part of the project and of those whose perspectives might have been excluded. I will return to this topic at the end of this section.

The general characteristics of the participants were as follows. Fourteen interviewees were owner-occupiers and seven rented their dwelling. The sample of participants included sixteen people with university degrees, four with a college diploma and one with a high school diploma. Fifteen participants identified as Australian, four as North-West European, one as North-East Asian and one as New Zealand. Three participants did not share demographic information. As a consequence of the diversity in the group of participants they had different
relationships with the area, different opportunities for gardening at home, different routines and motivations for gardening. Many participants across the three gardens said that they joined a community garden because they did not have enough space to garden at home. As reasons for joining a specific garden, participants mentioned the proximity of the garden to their home and features of the garden’s management model.

The sample suits the objectives of this study, but it is worth noting that it does not reflect community gardens in Sydney in general as the city also accommodates gardens that are specifically developed for particular groups, such as ethnic minorities, social housing tenants or mental health patients. In the city one can also find community gardens that are equipped with elevated garden beds and broad paths to be accessible for the less abled. In selecting gardens from Sydney’s Inner West, and gardens with no agenda to target a certain minority group, this study does not encompass the diversity that can be found in community garden groups elsewhere in the city. Instead the research grasps the everyday experiences and practices of a middle class segment of Sydney’s inner city population that has a desire to engage in community building and urban sustainability practices such as the growing of food, composting and recycling.

When gardeners were recruited they were asked to participate in a walking interview from their home to the garden and they were given the option to show their home garden and talk about differences between what the two gardens meant to them. Formulating the invitation this way brought forward a number of barriers. The literature on walking interviews warns of the risk of excluding the less abled or less fit, including the elderly (Evans and Jones, 2011). The sample of participants in my study includes one visitor, not a member, of a garden who preferred to talk at her home for this reason. Because the gardeners had to be quite fit and mobile by definition to be gardening at these sites, this type of barrier was not a deterrent for
other people who were invited to participate in research. The proposition of the walking interview did however deter people in other ways. Some people for example did not usually walk to the garden and preferred to meet at the garden instead. It also seemed that some people were deterred by the idea of the walk having to include their home. Because I was careful not to be intrusive, six interviews took the shape of a ‘show me your plot’-interview at the community garden instead (Ginn, 2014). Although consistency throughout the circumstances in which the data was collected was thought to be important, priority was ascribed to creating circumstances under which participants would feel comfortable and enabled to talk freely (Longhurst, 2010).

Finally, a number of gardeners refused to be part of the research because they did not agree with the way in which I conducted my project. One gardener wanted to participate but refused because his partner did not allow him to. I walked into the garden on my way to an interview because I saw people in the garden that I had not met yet. Although I was in a hurry I thought I would introduce myself quickly, see if I could establish a relationship and ask for their email address or phone number. When I introduced my project, the partner of the gardener questioned my research methods. She questioned the validity of my research based on the limited number of cases and interviews I was conducting. Caught off guard and being in a hurry I did not succeed in providing her with a sound explanation. My response made me lose the opportunity to include this particular person in the study. A couple of people had to be persuaded because they did not believe their thoughts and experiences would be of value to a scholarly project. These participants said after interviews that they hoped they had not wasted my time, or apologised because they were convinced they did. At the same time, many people thanked me after interviews for having listened and for giving them the opportunity to reflect on what they do, what they value, and why they do it.
4.2.5 Positionality

Before I turn to the methodological ideas and methods that shape this study I wish to make a few statements about my relationship to the participants. I entered the research field as an outsider: new not only to community gardening, but also new to the neighbourhood, to Sydney and to Australia. Because I have little affinity with gardening myself, the garden talk that connected me to participants also accentuated differences because it soon was obvious that I had no previous knowledge about permaculture, food production, organic pest control or sustainable water management. This position had advantages and disadvantages. During working bees and interviews gardeners often confessed that they did not know what they were doing and I could reassure them that they were not alone in that. This sometimes made me struggle internally with legitimatising my presence in the gardens and asking people to volunteer their time to participate in my research. This particularly occurred when people misunderstood me to be a gardening expert and I had to explain to them that I did not know much, but that I was keen to learn.

Being an outsider in a group of research subjects is often interpreted as a disadvantaged position for a researcher. At the same time however, feminist critic Gillian Rose builds on the work Pamela Moss to argue that ‘a complete immersion’ which allows one to work from within is an impossible position because no one is ever the same as their research subjects (1997: 313). In acknowledging the impossibility of full immersion, I emphasise the importance Rose ascribes to recognising the differences and the connections between the researcher and the researched. For example, it is important to acknowledge the responsibility that is vested in the researcher regarding the interpretation and presentation of research results and the ways in which participants’ ability to affect the interpretation of their words is limited.
On the other hand, the outsider’s position provides its own set of opportunities as well. An advantage of me being uninformed was that people were willing to explain their practices and reasons for doing things to me; things which might have been taken for granted in a conversation between two experienced gardeners. I came to see that my unfamiliarity with community gardens also had advantages because I started with a relatively open mind not yet inscribed with any impressions or expectations. Because I did not start my project with the idea that gardens are ‘good’, ‘sustainable’, ‘healthy’, ‘educational’, or ‘stress-relieving’ I was able to stay at a distance from those assumptions. This does not mean that I did not form opinions about community gardens at all. As my work progressed and I came across situations that showed me the merit and the pitfalls of community gardens, my ideas about the phenomenon shifted accordingly. These dynamics required me to be aware of the opinions I formed and to limit the interference of those opinions with my field work and the interpretation of the results.

Having moved to Australia from the Netherlands one week before the start of this research project and being new to the country’s cultural landscape also contributed to my position as an outsider. For example, I was not familiar with many plants that people grow, and the weeds that are recognised by many Australians as invasive, exotic and bad, were equally unfamiliar to me. I also had to familiarise myself with Australian ways of gardening and ways of life in general. The idealised image of life in a detached house in an Australian suburb, with lawn out front and a couple of tomato plants growing in the back yard, was unfamiliar to me until I moved to Australia in February 2013. In order to understand what motivates people to garden and to grasp the norms that make people garden in certain ways, I had to be mindful of that gap. Also, I had to get used to a different meaning that is inscribed in the private sphere and develop a feeling for the Australian garden as linked to values such as self-reliance, thrift, tidiness and good citizenship. I feel however that my position as an
outsider also offered advantages as it put me in a position to formulate questions that might otherwise have been left unasked.

I did not remain an outsider throughout the project’s fieldwork. The research process involved many hours of participant observation and ‘hanging out’ with gardeners at working bees, and during these occasions we became more familiar with each other. I saw many gardeners at multiple occasions and at various locations: in the garden, around the neighbourhood, at network meetings and in their homes. During these meet-ups and conversations we sought commonalities. With fellow PhD candidates I discussed the pressures of academic life, with fellow expats I talked about the peculiarities of Australian culture, with one gardener I chatted about sewing as it turned out that we had that hobby in common, and with one participant I turned out to have mutual friends. All these chats and my sustained engagement in the gardens over several months resulted in a familiarisation that slightly removed me from the outsider’s position. This familiarisation resulted in a degree of trust that made it possible to talk about the more controversial experiences and motives for doing things in a certain way. Being in the garden with the gardeners allowed me to directly experience the things that gardeners talk about in their interviews. As part of the methodological underpinnings of the thesis I will now discuss the importance of staying close to experience and everyday routine, but I will return to the thoughts on familiarisation in the section on participant observation.

4.3 Methodology: more-than-representational explorations of the everyday

In aiming to develop an understanding of how community gardens sit in people’s everyday environments and are part of their everyday routines this project builds on a larger research
tradition that focuses on everyday practice and experience. As discussed in the literature review, more-than-representational research is built on the premise that there is not a divide between the ‘really real’ world on the one side, and a ‘really made-up’ world on the other that contains all the real world’s meanings and values (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 6), but rather that meaning emerges through a bodily being in the world and through the movements, practices and sensory experiences such as touch and affect that the body performs.

In thinking through the methods for this research project this meant devising a way to study everyday reality – its ordinary places, mundane activities and engrained routines – while being aware of how the researcher’s presence and actions altered that reality. Minimising the effect of the researcher on the researched is one of the key considerations in literature on potential non-representational research methods (e.g. Cadman, 2009). Non-representational researchers have objections to the traditional sedentary in-depth interview because it separates people from the practices and the environments that are actually formative to the identity and the interpretations of the person who is participating in the study. Instead, scholars experiment with methods such as go-alongs, video and audio diaries to minimise the presence and the impact of the researcher on practices and communities, and to ensure that courses of events and activities are as ‘natural’ as possible when they become part of the data (Kusenbach, 2003; Cadman, 2009).

Rejecting representation as a sole door to understanding the social world, geographers working with more-than-representational theory consider the sedentary interview obsolete as a method to generate or capture research data. Instead of focusing on representations of experiences as expressed in language, more-than-representational methods attempt to be open to how embodiment, materiality and performativity are central to constitutions of self and environment. In accordance, for research methods to capture the rhythms and sensations of
the everyday they have to be sensitive to how embodiment, performativity and more-than-human agency shape ways of being in the world. Although scholarly work is bound to be anthropocentric and will rely on methods of representation – either written, or recorded visually or as audio – for empirical analysis and the generation of research output, there are experiments under way to open up the traditional methods of questionnaire and interview to let in embodied experience and encounters with plants and animals (Hitchings, 2007; Ginn, 2014).

Scholarly arguments have not firmly settled on methods that are suitable for non-representational research (Cadman, 2009). In the meantime researchers employ conventional research methods such as participant observation and the semi-structured interview, as well as walking interviews and visual methods to try and minimise their influence on the narrative of participants and stay as close to participants’ everyday feelings and experiences (De Leon and Cohen, 2005; Anderson, 2004; Rose et al., 2010). However, in these methods the data still consists of people talking about their practices and experiences, which produces research that continues to rely on descriptions of practice and hence on representation to a certain degree (Lorimer, 2005). At the same time, talking is recognised as something that people do as well, so rather than being a mere representation, speech is an embodied practice too (Hitchings, 2007; 2012). This consideration helps scholarship overcome the challenge of researching the non-representational while relying on text.

In the study presented here, walking interviews and participant observation were selected as research methods. In the next sections I will discuss how those methods were employed and I reflect on the limitation of the methods.
4.4 Research methods

Fieldwork consisted of 25 interviews with members and neighbours of the three gardens, 14 of which were walking interviews that included the participants’ home garden. Fieldwork also included participant observation during working bees, annual meetings and meetings of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (ACFCGN). All these activities took place from March 2014 to May 2015.

4.4.1 Observing and participating

Participant observation was important as a recruitment strategy as well as a mode of data collection. Participant observation was used as a technique to gain insight into people’s everyday gardening practices and interactions between garden members, and it functioned as a basis for the design of the interview guides. In total, participant observation was carried out at one working bee at Stanley Road Community Garden, six working bees and a general meeting at the Park Street Community Garden, and three working bees, a general meeting and an open day at Highfield Community Garden. I also attended two meetings of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (ACFCGN) in Sydney, where representatives from several Sydney community gardens came together to share experiences and concerns. Field notes were taken during, but mostly as soon as possible after, these immersions. Notes included descriptions of practices and conversations that had taken place, accounts of things that surprised me, illustrations of how I experienced being in the garden group and area.

Anderson (2004: 255) writes that: ‘participant observation involves researchers “deliberately immersing” themselves in the worlds of cultural groups, to participate as well as observe the
“everyday rhythms and routines” of these communities’. Observation was a crucial mode of fieldwork because as Anderson points out it sheds light on the everyday rhythms and routines surrounding community gardening that this project aims to uncover. Cadman (2009) flags participant observation as a research method that sits well with the conceptual outlines of more-than-representational theory. The method shares with more-than-representational theory an emphasis on embodied presence. The body of the researcher with its movements, comportment and attire are a ‘crucial tool’ and ‘the fact of participation, of being part of a collective contract, creates the data’ (Kearns, 2005: 203). Kearns illustrates this point with the example of playing with children on the floor and how being engaged in the same activity creates the conditions in which data can be generated. Scholars writing about gardens have made similar points about the value of being in the garden and engaging with plants as it sparks people’s memories and opens conversations up to the presence of non-humans (Hitchings, 2003; Power, 2005).

While acknowledging the significance of my bodily presence in fieldwork sites, it becomes equally important to reflect on that presence because an undisguised researcher is bound to change people’s behaviours and interactions (Kearns, 2005). Even when an effort is made to follow what Kusenbach (2003) calls ‘natural’ and ‘authentic’ everyday practices and routines, social situations will nevertheless change when a researcher is added to the mix. The bodily presence of the researcher therefore has to be accounted for. On the one hand my own gardening, weeding and watering alongside other gardeners sometimes created a very comfortable atmosphere where there was much room for silences and for topics to emerge. At other times I noticed that my presence drew much attention. At Stanley Road Community Garden Council had done much research and there I was regarded as yet another researcher. Other gardeners expected me to solve issues such as tenure or relationships with Council. At one community that struggled with internal conflict I needed to be careful not to become a
pawn in a struggle over leadership. Some people for example, took offence at me that I had spoken to others first. I had to treat this with much consideration to make sure participants would trust that I took their points of view seriously.

Although gardening along did not always mean getting along, these experiences also provided some insight into how people interact with each other and overcome differences of opinion and character. The challenge I was facing with the offended gardener was also a point of contention for many gardeners who went on interview walks with me. My participation in the gardening community gave me first hand insight into community tensions. Similarly, my presence during remarkable events created entryways into topics that could be discussed later during the interviews. A good example of this was the encounter with a nest of baby rats at Highfield Community Garden and the subsequent killing of the rats (see textbox 1: encountering baby rats). The event provided an opportunity to discuss the topics of ‘killing’ and ‘pests’ in a very specific way. The shared experience of encountering and witnessing the killing made it easier to move conversation beyond socially accepted comments about refraining from killing and organic gardening practices. Participant observation, embodied presence and gardening practices strengthened the interview methods.

**Textbox 1: Encountering baby rats**

Many different jobs have to be done to build and maintain a community garden. The gardeners build raised beds out of compost and hay on top of the polluted soil. A shed is being constructed for the eight chickens that will soon arrive. Metal scraps are collected to be picked up. The shared garden beds are weeded. The unevenness of the ground requires the digging of a ditch to make sure rainwater runs off to the back.

Because of the sticky, dense soil, the digging of the ditch requires a lot of strength, so the gardens’ strongest men take this job on. At the same time, someone empties out the bottom of the compost bin where the compost is broken down furthest. Buckets are filled with compost and brought over into the wooden cast that demarcates the future garden bed.
All of a sudden one of the diggers - a tall, muscly man - jumps up over the ditch while making a shrieking noise. The other gardeners, looking up in surprise, see a big rat run off along the fence. Mocking laughter ebbs through the group; the big guy is afraid of a little rat. Rachel, one of the core members, jokes: ‘You will be a good one to be put on the chicken roster’.

I am waiting for one of the guys to fill up the next bucket with compost for me to carry to the new bed when I see a tiny pink creature falling out of the bin. The fragile being is worming around on its side in the bits of compost that fell to the ground with it. It is not capable yet of standing on its own feet, not capable yet of opening its eyes to the bright sunlight after having spent all of its still very short life in the dark confine of the bin. The gardeners gather around and respond with sounds of amazement and affection to the vulnerable new found creature. It is not because it looks like one, it is because it fell from the composting heap of garbage, that we all immediately know that this endearing and defenceless being is a baby rat.

Within a split second the atmosphere among the spectating gardeners changes: the rat has to die.

Rachel steps in and apologies beforehand, ‘sorry, but this has to be done’. Everybody understands. There is no need for discussion. Rachel makes sure that there are no children around before she raises her shovel high above her head and lands it on the rat with a dull whump. The creature stops worming. Without being asked to do so Rachel explains herself: ‘these rats will start reproducing within a couple of weeks’. As the gardeners already seemed to have decided unanimously in a moment of quiet, unspoken agreement, they really didn’t have another option than to kill it. The dead rat is shovelled into a bag and the gardeners carry on with their tasks, knowing that more rats will have to be killed today.

A couple of minutes of digging ditch and moving compost later, the complete scenario becomes visible as seven tiny, pink, soft-looking creatures are found swirling around together in the compost. As before, gardeners gather around to have a look at the little rats that are experiencing their first moment in fresh air and spring sun. Rachel is called for, but before she is found someone else has stepped in to carry out the job. The shovel is raised, the whump follows and the rats lie silent. A browse through the remaining compost and the tracing down of a squeaking sound assures that all the rats are dead. They are put in a bag with other things that are to be disposed of, a piece of plastic, and a potato peeler found among the composting kitchen scraps. Like the digging of the ditch the killing is a job done.
Later on the gardeners reflect on what happened. Ashley explains the situation for herself in light of the anticipated arrival of chickens. Those chickens are going to be the gardeners’ responsibility and you really can’t have rats around when you are taking care of chickens. Rose reflects on the rats and having her children running around the garden. She was glad none of them witnessed the killing of the rats. She tells the story of growing up and being taken out rabbit hunting on a farm when she was her son’s age. Where the others were collecting the dead rabbits from traps, she found a wounded bunny that had had its nose caught in a trap. She carried it home pressed to her chest wanting to care for it only to find her mother telling her that the rabbit had to go. Rose reflects that luckily nobody decided to kill it, but that she had to let it go, realising that the results would be the same. In their conversation Rose and Ashley acknowledge and accept the painful moments of realisation that in order for people to reach their goals and fulfil their desires, some other things - like baby rats - inevitably will have to suffer and die.

4.4.2 Interviewing

In the process of recruitment, participants were sent a synopsis of the project and an outline of the topics that interview questions would address (see appendix 1: recruitment letter). At this stage participants were also advised that the interview would take approximately an hour and that the interview would preferably take place whilst walking from the participant’s home to the garden and through the garden. Participants were given ample opportunity to have the interview shortened to suit their schedule or to omit the walk from the research process. Before the start of each interview participants were given a participant information sheet (appendix 2), and asked to sign a consent form in which they were informed of their rights to withdraw from the project at any stage (appendix 3: consent form). The consent form gave opportunity to participants to agree or object to having the interview recorded, to agree or object to having photos taken, and to appear in presentations of the research outcomes with pseudonym. At this time participants were also asked to answer demographic background questions regarding their age, gender, household composition, community affiliation and tenure arrangements (appendix 4: background questions).
The interviews took the form of semi-structured conversations. Questions were evaluated and revised throughout the process of data collection. The first interviews were structured around four main topics (see appendix 5: interview guide 1). First, participants were asked about how they got started at the garden. Second, the participants were asked about how they felt about the current lay-out, appearance and governance of the garden. Third, participants were asked about their gardening practices. Follow-up questions within this topic included questions about planting, weeding, pest control, watering and alternative uses of the garden space. Participants were asked about how they see the relation between the garden and the neighbourhood. This included questions about the value of the garden and relations between the garden and other local organisations and neighbours. At the end of each interview participants were invited to raise issues or share ideas that had not come up. Because these first interviews were broad in thematic scope, interviewees had the opportunity to flag topics and issues that were of interest to them. This information, together with the realisation that some questions did not harvest rich responses, was used to revise the interview guide.

Halfway through fieldwork, after 12 interviews, the interview questions were revised. The new interview guide was structured around themes that had come up during previous interviews (see appendix 6: interview guide 2). New participants were asked more explicitly about the different roles of their private garden and the community garden, and they were asked more explicitly about how they value growing food and about watering practices. Questions about decision making and potential conflicts with other gardeners, neighbours or Council were integrated into questions about these topics. For example, Highfield Community Garden does not have access to tap water, and there, people were asked ‘The garden does not have a tap, how do you feel about that?’ This gave room for participants to talk about different ways in which they valued water and comment about ways decisions
were made. This rephrasing of questions made the questions more specific and with the new guide the interviews sparked richer answers.

Questions were also modified to synchronise better with the walk that was part of fourteen of the interviews. Questions about relations between private and community gardens were asked when I met people at home. On the way to the garden questions were asked about how participants became involved, and when we arrived at the garden we talked about specific plots and practices. Questions about how gardeners perceive the relation between the neighbourhood and the garden were asked either at the garden, or if the walking interviews included a walk back to participants’ homes, those questions were asked then. Both the old and the new interview guide ended interviews with participants being asked about how they would like to see the future of the garden and if there was anything they would like to add to the conversation. This often led to participants emphasising the issues that had come up during the interview that they found to be most important. It also helped to clearly signal the end of the interview.

Participants were not sent the transcripts of their interviews because of discussions surrounding the effect of ‘telling a story back’ (Dunn, 2005). This awkward and patronizing effect can emerge when a researcher captures someone’s story and produces a transcript which includes all the ‘ers’ and ‘ums’, and notes such as [scratched her nose pensively] (Dunn, 2005). It was anticipated that participants were more likely to be interested in presentations of outcomes of research than in transcripts (Dunn, 2005). Checking transcripts also seemed like a large task to ask of participants. This is why instead of sending transcripts, I promised to keep people informed about research outcomes. I sent the first paper that came out of the project to all the interviewees whom I quoted in the paper. I did this to ensure people agreed with and supported the written interpretations and representations of their
voices. Aside from the ethical merit of actively engaging participants allowing them to express opinions and concern throughout the project, verification of interpretation also enhances research rigour (Dunn, 2005). However, some conflicts arose from this practice. I discuss these conflicts in the sections on analysis and ethical reflections.

4.4.3 Walking

The walking interview is undergoing an upsurge in the social sciences (e.g. Anderson, 2004; Wylie, 2005; Waitt et al., 2009; Evans and Jones, 2011). One reason for this is that the walking interview epistemologically fits into non-representational theory because it is sensitive to bodily and grounded experiences. Non-representational theorists problematize the Cartesian divorce of the body from the mind, and hence of emotion from thought, and emphasise the co-constitution, or ‘co-ingredience’ of self and landscape in how people make sense of their environments (Anderson, 2004). Deepening this line of reasoning, Ingold and Vergunst (2008: 7) argue that it is impossible to understand thought as independent from the body because ‘knowing is doing, doing is carrying out tasks, and carrying out tasks is remembering the way they are done’. They understand walking as a social activity in which people react to their surroundings and to others around them.

If human existence is understood as inherently embedded in landscape and connected to the passing of time, it is not possible to understand landscape and subject separately (Anderson, 2004). It follows from non-representational theory that methods in social sciences have to capture, or at least be sensitive to, embodiment, affect and performativity. As Anderson (2004) suggests, the passing of time, the qualities of landscape and the embodied experience of the subject come together in the act of walking, making it a suitable method for exploring practices and embodied experiences of the everyday world. In response to this, the walking
interview is embraced by more-than-representational geographers as an embodied method that takes performance and affect seriously (Anderson, 2004; Wylie, 2005; Rose et al., 2010). Although speaking is an embodied act too, the act of walking is instructive when it illustrates the iterative relationships between subjects and landscapes.

Secondly then, the walking interview is discussed as an interview strategy in which the environment functions as a prompt (Kusenbach, 2003; Anderson, 2004; De Leon and Cohen, 2005; Hitchings and Jones, 2010; Evans and Jones, 2011). Research results and reflections on methods show that the walking interview helps people to recollect memories that are embedded in place (Kusenbach, 2003; Anderson, 2004). Scholars have also found that in off-location sedentary interviews people find it more difficult to talk about mundane activities such as the watering of plants and are thus more likely to stick to talking about what they think is useful information to social science research (Hitchings and Jones, 2010).

Thirdly, walking interviews transfer a fraction of the researchers’ ability to direct how research occurs to participants as it allows them to determine the conditions of the research activities. This is especially so when the participants determine the route. Their control over what they reveal to the researcher is greater than in an off-location interview setting. This is also a reason why some scholars who conduct walking interviews and go-alongs prefer to give their participants the lead (Kusenbach, 2003; Evans and Jones, 2011).

In this research project, participants were asked to walk from home to the community garden as they usually do. The routing of the walk was limited by this request, but aside from the focus of the walk on the community garden participants were free to determine the route, time and the pacing of the walk, as well as the accompanying party which occasionally consisted of children and pet dogs, although most interviews were conducted one-on-one. Participants were given these options to ensure that the research project would be as
convenient as possible to them and that the interview walks would resemble the actual times of day and routes that form people’s everyday community garden experience (Evans and Jones, 2011).

Aside from methodological arguments, the walking interview is also a suitable method for studying community gardening because community gardens are connected to the social and physical fabric of the city (Kurtz, 2001; Cameron et al., 2011). As a mobile method, the walking interview is an excellent way to explore these connections. Kusenbach points out for example that ‘by tracking the natural sequence of places in practical everyday life, go-alongs enhance our understandings of how individuals connect and integrate the various regions of their daily lives and identities’ (2003: 478). And Anderson (2004: 257) for example writes that ‘researchers can become aware of the key routines, habits and practices through which people inscribe their knowledges into places’ and that in order to do so it is important to ‘recreate or step into practices to harness co-ingredience of place-person relationship’.

With the aim of the research project being to deepen understandings of the relationships between community gardens and neighbourhoods and of the practices which produce these connections and a sense of community, the walking interview was selected as a mode of data collection. The walking interview is known to encourage participants to tell place-related stories and to reflect on personal relationships with places visited along the way (Evans and Jones, 2011). Walking was anticipated to provide the opportunity to understand multiple spatial relations that frame community gardening; for example, how participants understand and value boundaries and connections between parks, streets, verges as those are transgressed, and how community gardening relates to participants’ other social relationships and activities in the neighbourhood. The walking interview also allowed me to grasp the spatial spread or containment of a garden’s community. Gardeners did not always join the
nearest community garden but some preferred to walk further to be part of a community garden with a particular organisational logic. Figure 4.9, represents all the walking interviews that were conducted per garden and it illustrates the proximity of the gardens and the geographical spread of the participants that consented to a walking interview per garden.

Figure 4.9: Abstract map of the relative locations of the gardens and the routes of the walking interviews that were conducted per garden (map by Dr. Chris Brennan-Horley)

Kusenbach (2003: 466) advocates for the go-along as a method that provides an ‘intimate vantage point for reconstructing the dynamics of interaction in communal and private realms’. As the project progressed the participants’ private gardens gained importance as they offered a context against which to understand the community garden as inherently different to the exclusivity and the privacy enjoyed there. This illustrates how, by walking, people weave different aspects of their everyday – in terms of locations but also responsibilities and social
relations – into the physical and social urban fabric. The broad range of writing about walking in the social sciences discussed above provides insight into how walking might be instrumental in exploring the structured everyday environment of the city and the position of community gardens therein.

Walking interviews allowed me to combine visits to participants’ home gardens and to the community gardens and this created insight into the different meaning and value of these spaces in participants’ lives. The walks between home and community gardens proved instrumental in uncovering how the gardens are incorporated into everyday lives. It revealed how for some the community garden is a stop on the way to school or work and it prompted recollections of previous trips to the garden.

4.5 Analysis and coding

To facilitate analysis of interviews and observations, the qualitative material was firstly coded topically using MAXQDA11 software for qualitative data analysis. This initial coding was done parallel to interviewing and it revealed the reoccurrence of central themes. These themes included ‘plots’, ‘Council’, ‘food’, ‘water’ and ‘routine’. These topics are closely related to the questions I asked during the interviews and when the key issues around these topics emerged the interview schedule was adapted accordingly. This enabled an iterative dynamic between interviewing and analysis, which allowed me to be attuned to the everyday pleasures, frustrations and general experiences on the gardeners’ minds.

Subsequently, I created greater depth by coding within these topical themes. In doing so I revealed contrasting points of views and motivations. This closer engagement with the topics also revealed relationships between topics. For example, the issue of plots emerged in all the
three gardens and people valued and utilised this concept and spatial device in various ways. For some, having a plot was important for weaving community gardening into a routine, for some it was a cornerstone to their sense of community and others emphasised the importance of understanding the garden as a commons; as a shared space without plots.

The way codes intersect with different points of view in the garden communities made it crucial to reflect on the richness of each topic and the embeddedness of people’s points of view in their wider routines, values, doings and sayings. This was particularly important because the codes closely relate to how the research data ends up being presented and how the community groups end up being represented in the thesis and research papers. At various moments during the research process I created opportunities to reflect on my coding practices and presentation of the data. Conversations with my supervisors were an important aspect of this reflection, as were conversations at conferences with peers doing similar research.

A last important opportunity was the writing and revising process of research papers. Reviewer comments considerably helped to create greater nuance in the analysis and presentation of research outcomes. Attempts to engage in conversations with participants about research outcomes were often successful, but not always. Most participants were happy to read a paper and look at how I embedded their quote in a larger analysis. Participants gave feedback on this and provided more information which helped me write a richer narrative. This feedback loop failed when the academic format and language of a paper obstructed communication with participants who had different points of view than those highlighted in the paper. I reflect on the implications of this attempt to create dialogue, as well as on some broader ethical considerations in the next and last section of the chapter.
4.6 Ethical reflections

From the outset of the research project close attention was paid to the ethical implications of the project and its potential impact on participants and other community members. As part of this process I decided to gain written consent and to inform participants of the expected outputs of the project. I also informed participants of their option to withdraw from the project at any time and for them to object to or agree with having photographs taken and being mentioned by name or pseudonym (see appendix 3). Thought was also put towards data storage and retention, to minimise the chances of my research practice having any negative effects on participants and the larger community garden groups. I considered these aspects of the project in conversation with the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee. They endorsed the research design, including the approach to gaining consent and the interview schedule, under ethics approval number HE13/488.

However, this approval is not where thinking about ethical research stops, for no matter how well methods are thought through and how carefully ethical considerations are weighed, ethical dilemmas are likely to come up in every research project (Hay, 2010). And so despite careful preparation, they came up in this one as well. In this section the inherent ethical unevenness of research practice and related decisions surrounding the anonymity of individuals and the representation of communities are discussed.

Starting a research project on community gardens, I did not expect major dilemmas from the outset. Some did arise however. These were related on the one hand to the selection of a gardening community that experienced internal friction, and on the other to expectations of members in the communities about the research project.
The garden that experienced quarrels consisted of two groups of gardeners, older members and relative newcomers, with different ideas about the purpose of the garden or how a community garden is supposed to look and function. Directly upon first contact with this group one person tried to make me hear their side of the story first. My presence seemed to heighten already existing stress levels and anxieties of gardeners over their position in the group. For example, gardeners would speculate about what others might say in their interview or would ask about the content of conversations with others. In avoiding conversations about quarrels and gossip and in refusing to disclose information I made an effort to show participants the importance of each interviewee’s confidentiality and the value of each person’s point of view. At other occasions I was interested in how people managed and felt about social conflicts that had come to my attention during participant observation at working bees. The uncomfortable reactions of people to some of these questions made me decide to change the subject. I was cautious not to stir up any tensions by giving people the idea that others were talking behind their backs.

These interactions illustrate the potential tensions in the relationship between a researcher and research participants, in which the researcher interprets research participants’ practices and stories (Dunn, 2005). As the sole researcher, analyst and writer in the project I ultimately decided to highlight themes and issues. In this I had to be mindful to represent people with contradicting points of view tactfully. The conflicts at this field site made it necessary to rethink the best way to present the research. Initially it was not anticipated that the use of pseudonyms would be necessary. Of the entire group of participants only one requested to be mentioned by pseudonym. In the writing up of the thesis I decided however not to mention the real names of individual gardeners and I also chose alternative names for the gardens to limit the chance that the thesis affects the position of certain members in the communities.
Aside from being cautious not to represent individual participants in adverse ways, thought also went into how the thesis might make people see communities of gardeners in different ways. As discussed in the literature review, some quite strong assumptions and associations adhere to the concept of the community garden. In focusing on the practices and relationships of which community gardens consist this thesis sheds light on the ways in which community gardens become inclusive or exclusive, communitarian or individualistic through the ways in which gardeners respond to the wider urban landscape, community rules, Council regulations, the weather and so forth, through their gardening practices. This approach and the research outcomes might detract from the positive image of community gardens. I sent my first research paper to participants as part of the verification process I described above. In this process I learned that many but not all participants were accepting of my critical approach. I lament that two participants chose to withdraw from the project at this stage. Their withdrawal detracts from the project content wise in that two perspectives on one of the gardens could not be included in the analysis, but also ethically in that representations of the work now will not include these two points of view. The withdrawn participants did not see the merit of the academic format and language of the paper and disagreed with the importance I attributed to conceptions of property and feelings of ownership as underpinning gardening practices and community.

Considering my intention for participants’ verification of research output to contribute to empowerment and research rigour I have to conclude that this strategy was not successful. Rather than opening up opportunities for conversation the process shut two participants out. Upon reflection I see the challenge of starting a conversation based on an academic paper, as the language and format are not a welcoming platform on which people without tertiary education can debate their opinions. Inadvertently I created a space in which some participants were more capable to engage than others.
This is not to say that the conflict that led to participants’ withdrawal was a semantic one. Ultimately these participants disagreed with my analytical choices and with the perspectives of fellow gardeners and of gardeners at the other case study sites on the topic of community gardening. They withdrew to object to the possibility that my research might detract from the idea of community gardens as benign, public and green. I agree with these participants that I have to be wary how the data and ideas I present here might be put to use by others. Unfortunately, it is not possible to secure the effects of research outcomes. Reflecting on research ethics, Rose (1997) for example concludes that we cannot know or anticipate the effects of academic work. The realisation that research outcomes might be put to unexpected use also makes the responsibility regarding the interpretation and the presentation of research results weigh heavier.

Although it is not possible to determine or predict the effects of a research project, I end this section with a statement about the outcome I intend for this thesis. The intention is to show how community gardens are connected to the larger urban fabric with all its intricacies spanning everyday mundane practice to local government decisions and other conditions of social relationships. Because community gardens do not exist in a void, things that occur in everyday life such as people’s stress of juggling responsibilities, the challenges of leading a life that is both comfortable and just, and the common tendency of people to get into quarrels, all occurred at the community gardens as well. Disputes and contradictory practices in terms of sustainability or inclusion were not included in the thesis with the purpose of arguing against the value of community gardening projects. Instead, I believe that a fuller understanding of those tensions might lead to insight into how such community-led initiatives might be made more sustainable and inclusive.
4.7 Summary

In this chapter I presented the research design, the employed research methods and I discussed the methodological reasons for choosing these methods. I also discussed challenges I faced where pursuit of research rigour and ethical research conduct seemed at odds. These challenges at the same time illustrate the shortcomings of this thesis in that it failed to incorporate points of view that are at the heart of the literature this thesis aims to critique and nuance.

The methods elicit different approaches to community gardens. Observations at meetings shed light on the institutional positioning and practices of community gardening, whereas observation at working bees and the interviews were sensitive to everyday experiences, routines and gardening practices. The walking interview as a key method afforded insights into how community gardening is spatially and temporally embedded in routines. This enabled awareness of the relational constitution of the garden as a space that is socially produced through practices which are enacted inside and outside of the garden space and which are entangled with beliefs and values that are not in any way exclusive or inherent to that space. The combination of this set of research methods was crucial in the aim to open up understandings of community gardens as transformative spaces.

In the next chapters I turn to the empirics of the project. In the first results chapter I will introduce the three case studies in detail and I will discuss the particulars of their origins, their funding, the internal organisation of their communities, and so forth. This is followed by three thematic results chapters. In each of these chapters I tease out different ways in which gardens are relationally shaped and ways in which gardeners’ transformative agenda, community objectives and personal politics are relationally enacted.
Chapter 5: Community gardening as ‘self’-organisation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the community gardens in detail. I focus on the intricacies of gardening practices and how these practices develop in relation to dependencies such as Council policy, funding, or a community that predates the garden. The chapter focuses on the iterative relationship between internal and external processes that organise and govern the garden spaces. The chapter takes a special interest into how these interactions shape internal decisions in the community groups and allow the emergence of uneven relationships within garden groups, creating conflict and allowing certain individuals a stronger voice in decision-making than others.

Community gardens researchers have looked at how community building works in relation to external dependencies such as tenure and funding (Schmelzkopf, 1995; Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Eizenberg, 2012a). These projects indicate that the bureaucratic landscape in which community gardens are situated create uneven opportunities for community groups to establish themselves and flourish (Uitermark, 2015). In this chapter I build on these insights. After the discussions of the three field sites I reflect on three themes: the effects of Council support, the value of secure tenure, and belonging and power relationships within community groups.

The chapter reveals the synergy and friction between external affiliations particularly with local government on the one hand, and how members of the community groups choose to organise themselves internally on the other. The chapter shows that these instances of synergy and friction can put certain individuals in positions of power and can inhibit
community gardens from reaching their inclusive potential. The insight that community garden groups are partly defined by their relationships to external organisations and bureaucracies challenges the conceptualisation of community gardens as transformative spaces in and of themselves. Before I discuss the three community gardens in detail I briefly discuss some of the challenges of starting a community garden in the area in general.

5.2 The challenges of starting a garden

To understand how external rules and regulations shape community gardens it is important to acknowledge firstly that those rules pose considerable limitations and challenges to when and where a community garden can materialise. At ACFCGN meetings this topic raised considerable discussion. Community groups in the process of starting up a garden commented on the challenges of getting Council approval and organising liability insurance. One community representative indicated that she has been waiting and working to start a garden for several years, despite widespread support for the project in the neighbourhood.

The challenges of starting a project on public land have moved community groups to seek alternatives. For this reason the protagonists of Stanley Road Community Garden decided to go ahead and just start their garden, assuming that asking permission is harder than begging for forgiveness. Other groups seek alternative spaces, and plan their garden projects on church or school grounds. These sites offer the advantage that collective insurance is already organised and can be extended to cover the group of gardeners. Tenure is also more secure at these sites, and the community of people that already frequents these places can be a valuable input to the new garden community that is to form, extending their sense of community into the garden project.
These ways around the thorny issues of Council permission and liability insurance do not necessarily make the start of a community garden straightforward. Gardeners at Highfield Community Garden for example explain the work that was involved with getting their project off the ground at their public school. After unsuccessful attempts to get a less than enthusiastic school principal on board to start the garden, the gardeners had to wait for a school principal who was supportive of their idea. When the current principal took office at the school the neighbours’ idea could start to materialise. This required a lot of skill. I ask Sophie about her involvement in this process: ‘Since you were part of that initial setting up and getting it going were you, how were decisions made about how it was going to be structured. Were you involved in that?’ Sophie answers:

Well no not so much there was a guy [...]. And he lives a bit further along and he um, I don’t know if he’s a landscaper but he’s got experience in designing spaces like this. And he’s an arborist so he nutted out this plan. He pretty much sort of worked out the plot design and got a lot of things going in terms of how we were going to deal with the asbestos issue. And luckily we had involved in the early group a woman who was an industrial hygienist, [...] and she knew what we needed to do. So when the grant was successful that was a twenty-five thousand dollar grant and the school kept I think fifteen and we received ten, that paid for a lot of the very expensive geo-cloth that we had to lay down over the site. And then that was followed by gravel and it’s got this woodchip on top. And essentially it became a kind of no-dig garden because of, there is a small amount of asbestos contamination uhm but the whole site regardless was treated as a contaminated site. So, no I was not involved in the design. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)
This quote and the success of the garden to secure money, materials and support from external parties reveals the skill and the social connections that are required to get a successful community garden project such as this one off the ground. This insight echoes findings presented in the literature, for example by Smith and Kurtz (2003) who drew attention to the skills, time and social connections that were mobilised by activists to protect community gardens in New York from being sold to private investors.

At various stages throughout the research project I was made aware of the skills people mobilised to start community gardens and how these efforts related to personal interests. I was shown around a relatively new community garden in South Sydney for example that enjoys great support in the neighbourhood because it prevented the fruition of a plan to build a retirement home on the site. Due to this wide support the initiators of the project succeeded in securing funding to start their project. Council supported the garden in building a 100,000 dollar eco-classroom, and smaller grants of 2700 - 8500 dollars allow the group to run community activities such as gardening and bee keeping workshops on the site.

Personal interests were also mentioned by some gardeners. Two gardeners who live directly next to one of the community gardens mention that the community garden saves their view, and of these, one specified that they prefer the community garden over the potential alternative of infill or affordable housing. Another gardener who lives further away mentioned the limited parking that would be available to existing residents and to the people who might be living in such a future development. One gardener at another case study mentioned that the prospect of social housing could potentially function as a motivation for direct neighbours to be involved.

On the basis of these insights I argue that the struggles and efforts involved in starting a garden do not solely involve the skills that are required to start a community garden project.
We also have to acknowledge that these skills help certain people to advance their personal agendas and help them improve their standards of living. When people move out of a neighbourhood they might capitalise on these skills in the form of increased real estate value due to qualities of their property such as a saved green view.

Relationships with Council and the skills to build those relationships and access money are important then to get a garden started, but they also shape the kind of garden communities that evolve and their possibility to secure support for a project in the future. I now discuss the three case studies to return to some of the inequalities between community gardens in terms of the opportunities and support they are offered.

5.3 The three community gardens

5.3.1 Stanley Road Community Garden

Stanley Road Community Garden is located between the two blind walls of terraced houses and to the back borders on a three storey high apartment block. On a first visit to Stanley Road Community Garden the two metre high fence that runs along the entire width of the site immediately caught my attention. The wired fence communicates deterrence to whoever approaches the garden site. Through the fence, one sees a garden consisting of around twenty beds ranging in size and material from old car tyres nurturing bright red strawberries to a four-square-meter plot outlined with wooden planks that attempt to keep an overtly enthusiastic pumpkin plant in check (see figures 5.1 to 5.3). The shared resources of the group are stacked together in the centre: two compost bins, a small water tank, tools and a small children’s play dining set fully equipped with seats and teacups. The plots in the garden are under attack from
Figure 5.1: Stanley Road Community garden is situated between terraces and an apartment building

Figure 5.2: Pumpkins in a plot made of wooden planks at Stanley Road Community Garden (May 2014)

Figure 5.3: A car tyre functioning as a garden plot at Stanley Road Community garden (December 2014)
grassy weeds that are being suppressed by hessian coffee bags and cardboard sheets (figure 5.4). Some of the plots and the grassy patches accommodate colourful wind spinners, a scarecrow, and a friendly smiling gnome (figures 5.5 and 5.6). On a large container in which gardeners store dry leaves spray painted letters tell passers-by: ‘grow local 2 eat local’, seemingly inviting them to join the community gardeners in their strawberry and pumpkin growing endeavours. Approaching the gate this invitation turns into a challenge as the entrance gates seem chained with two padlocks. An uninformed outsider is likely to take these padlocks to be real, and with no contact details sign posted one would not attempt to go inside.

Stanley Road Community Garden was started in 2009 without council support. The only gardener who helped initiate the garden and who is still there, Claire, says that the group did ask Council for permission, but fearing that waiting for green light would mean waiting forever, the neighbours shimmied through the fence and started their garden regardless. Local residents wheeled a compost bin into the garden and constructed garden beds out of material they had at hand such as used bricks, wooden planks, iron sheets and car tyres. From this moment on the gardeners organised working bees each first Sunday of the month, which were poorly attended at the time of fieldwork to the point that often no one but Claire was there.

Due to the unendorsed development of Stanley Road Community Garden, tenure is uncertain and relationships with Council are troublesome. One way in which insecure tenure and the lack of Council support affects the garden community is that the garden is not formally advertised. Residents of the area are encouraged to join a community garden in the area through posters at local libraries (see figure 5.7), City of Sydney website and at the sustainable living initiative ‘Green Living Centre’, but according to Claire none of these advocate for Stanley Road Community Garden. She mentions this as a reason the garden
struggles to remain a stable group of gardeners because people move in and out of the
neighbourhood, because people are held back by the garden’s insecure tenure and because the
influx of new members is meagre due to a lack of exposure. Another deterrent is the
seemingly locked fence. Because Council requires that the garden is locked, gardeners put a
fake lock on the fence to make it seem that the garden is not accessible. However this
communicates to potential new members that gardening in the space requires an introduction
or a special entitlement of some sort. Claire mentions that the group’s small number has made
it harder for the gardeners to maintain the garden space, and says that this further complicates
the relationship with neighbours.

Figure 5.4: Hessian sacks put down to suppress grass at Stanley Road (May 2014)
After neighbours’ complaints about cockroaches ascribed to the gardeners’ composting activities, Council consulted neighbourhood residents in 2013 to assess opinions and explore possibilities for future relocation of the garden to a more suitable site within the neighbourhood.

The outcome of the consultation process was anything but straightforward. Council reported twelve attendees of the consultation meeting being in support of the community garden and eleven attendees in opposition. The neighbours’ main arguments in favour centred on the concept of ‘community’ and the environmental value of a community composting facility. Arguments against the garden were focused on streetscape aesthetics, limited access of the public to the site, and health risks and other hazards associated with the garden such as people climbing the walls onto adjacent properties via the garden. Council aimed to relocate the garden and sell the site for housing development in order to reduce these risks, homogenise the streetscape, and create revenue. Discussion of potential sites during the meeting revealed however that the existing pocket parks in the suburbs were valued in their
current form and suggestions to sacrifice one to accommodate the garden created resistance.

At the time of writing, Council has made no decision regarding the garden’s future.

Figure 5.7: Community gardening promotion material on display at the neighbourhood's public library (May 2014)
In the meantime, Council ordered the gardeners to clear a one meter wide strip on the site’s perimeter for Council to spray with pesticide. Gardeners are required to suppress grass and plants such as mint and parsley that venture out of the plots into that one metre zone, to which end they put down sheets of cardboard and hessian coffee bags weighed down with bricks. This practice results in pieces of cardboard and hessian sacks lying around the garden, which makes an untidy impression and arguably deters new people from getting involved.

Figure 5.8: Water infrastructure at Stanley Road Community Garden (July 2016)
Another restriction on the gardeners’ activities is that they do not have access to water on site. They are not allowed to build permanent structures such as a shed. Aside from the disadvantages of having to leave tools out in weathering conditions, this means that the gardeners cannot create surface area from which to collect rainwater. The group acquired a 400 litre water tank after winning a fundraiser competition that was organised by the supermarket across the road (see figure 5.8). Gardeners regularly put money together to have the tank topped up with a hose connected to a neighbour’s mains water.

The private plots and the fake lock on the gate allow people to spend time in the garden when they please. Some pop in during the day, others come past the garden on their way home from work. Claire has taken on full responsibility for all aspects of the gardening project. She organises plot allocation, water supply, communication with Council and with the other gardeners. She uses blind carbon copy group emails to communicate working bees or garden news to the other members. This results in a situation where gardeners correspond with Claire, but do not communicate with other gardeners individually or collectively as a group. Claire re-allocates seemingly abandoned plots of gardeners who have no time, or who have lost interest to people who express support for the project. When a new gardener joins, Claire shows them around. She allocates a plot and explains which plots are for private and which for communal use. Everyone has been on a garden tour with Claire and this is why the gardeners all know her. Although working bees are scheduled to take place regularly, these are scarcely attended and gardeners do not know one another.

Claire started the project to block housing development on the lot. Claire has a direct interest because she looks onto the garden from her private home. The agenda to block development and keep the area as ‘green’ space is shared by one other direct neighbour who also looks onto it and who is also involved in the project. Other gardeners were motivated by things
such as landfill reduction, local food production, and community building. Many of these gardeners with alternative motives indicated that they were not concerned about the garden possibly having to move in the future. Because Claire is the one who sends emails to all gardeners to keep them up to date about Council decisions and housekeeping issues, she is described by some as the glue that keeps the project together. However, at the same time her strong involvement with the garden allows others to sit back and as a result the other gardeners do not know each other. It also means that rather than a committee of members negotiating decisions about upkeep and membership, all decisions and responsibilities now lay with Claire. Although private plots might inadvertently impede community building, gardeners at Stanley Road Community Garden prefer being able to garden on their own plot, rather than being involved in a community garden that is completely shared such as Park Street Community garden, a project two blocks further down the road.

5.3.2 Park Street Community Garden

Park Street Community Garden borders a public park on one side and is enveloped by a school’s playground and sports fields on the other sides. As the school’s high fence carries on from shielding off the playground to shielding off an area of dense shrubs and trees, the garden easily goes unnoticed (see figure 5.9). The existence of a community garden is brought to my attention by a sign at the gate that calls on people to join the gardeners on Sundays between 11 am and 1 pm. Peering through the gate that is adorned with a combination padlock and topped off by raggedly curled up and rusty barbed wire, I see a concrete drive way that disappears into a shaded area of trees and shrubs (figure 5.10 and 5.11). The drive way and central patio area of the garden provides a garden table with umbrella and chairs. On the actual drive way sits a pile of mulch, a big igloo tent and a
Figure 5.9: Park Street Community Garden entrance (April 2014)

Figure 5.10: Park Street Community Garden gates and padlock (July 2016)

Figure 5.11: Pile of mulch on Park Street Community Garden’s driveway (May 2014)
whiteboard that advertises the garden as the pickup location for subscribers to a local produce box scheme. Behind the igloo tent, on a large slightly raised bed, grow edible annual plants such as tomatoes, chilies, chokos, parsley and other herbs. When I attend one of the open hours as advertised on the gate, the garden space turns out to stretch deep into the site, with many fruit trees such as banana, mulberry and nectarine trees sitting behind the raised vegetable patch on a slope (see figure 5.12). On the other side of the patch the garden consists of a dark shaded forest of casuarina trees, a pear tree, more bananas and cacti, as well as a beehive, a worm farm and an extensive composting station with bins for compost collection, coffee husks, and three compost turning bays (see figure 5.13). This garden space is not compartmentalised into plots as Stanley Road Community Garden is, but instead is organised into areas that provide room for different kinds of plants and different gardening activities.

Although this garden was started with support of local Council, during the garden’s twenty year history the group has developed practices and modes of organisation that do not necessarily gel with Council’s expectations of community garden projects. Previous attempts by Council to bring the garden in line with their community garden policy has led these gardeners to distrust South Sydney and later City of Sydney Council and make gardeners perceive threats to their tenure. This sense of insecurity is deepened by the fact that the garden is located on land that is owned and managed by the adjacent school with which the group does not maintain a relationship. In short, the external relationships of this garden with Council and the school as the landowner are problematic and create a sense of insecurity and suspicion despite the twenty year presence of the garden community on this site. It is not clear what caused the gardeners’ hostile attitude and distrust, and current efforts of some within the community group to rejuvenate relationships with Council are also met with suspicion.
Figure 5.12: Park Street vegetable patch with the fruit tree area in the background (May 2014)
Internally, the organisation of the project seems straightforward. Five gardeners rotate the responsibility of opening the garden to the public on Sundays to ensure that the openness of the project is maintained. Because council prescribes that each community garden has a committee, Park Street has a secretary, a treasurer and a public officer who manages enquiries from journalists, students and other parties. These three committee members discuss decisions on email and they call a general meeting whenever disputes arise. Although this management structure seems straightforward, in reality reconciling differing opinions
regarding the garden’s objectives and management structure have continued to recur throughout the garden’s twenty-five year existence. At the time of fieldwork, the garden community struggled with some tensions too. The main point of contention was around leadership. With a core member being in the process of moving away, gardeners are anxious about future leadership and decision making processes and quarrel about who would fill each role and which duties and entitlements those roles would entail. Conversations during working bees and interview questions about the social organisation of the project revealed that the secretary and public officer have opposing ideas about the community garden’s objectives, the responsibilities of individual gardeners and the tasks that different committee roles entail. Interviews with general members reveal that this quarrel affects the entire community group.

The group struggles to maintain a sense of cohesion. The system of rotating ‘caretakers’ makes that people only tend to go to the communal gardening hours when they are rostered on to do so. Some gardeners only go to the garden for these two hours once every five weeks, and others do go more often but tend to do this outside of communal hours when chances are slim that other gardeners are there. The group occasionally tries to encourage a sense of community cohesion by changing the code for the lock when people visit the garden on their own accord too often and do not go to the garden’s Sunday hours. This happened during a general meeting and the decision was framed as a way to ensure that only people who are sufficiently invested in the community aspect of the project to attend the communal hours can access the garden after hours. A general member recollected during an informal conversation that the code is also changed out of fear that neighbourhood freeloaders might steal plants and produce. This creates a forced sense of community against a larger group of outsiders. Another point of contention that creates tension in the group is whether the garden should have more vegetable growing space, and if so whether this space should continue to be
managed collectively or divided into plots for individual gardeners. One group of gardeners sees the garden’s core goal to be waste reduction and understands vegetable growing to be a selfish act as the gardeners would take their own products home and overlook the merit of the space in itself. One gardener connected this dispute to Council’s expectations of community garden projects. This gardener felt that adopting a system of plots would make the garden comply with Council ideas of community gardening. This would make it easier, according to him, for the group to apply for grant money, something which the group has not successfully done since its inception. This gardener based his reasoning on the success of Highfield Community Garden, a project in the same neighbourhood that is much younger and that has a well-defined management plan.

5.3.3 Highfield Community Garden

Highfield Community Garden is located next to a public school on a one-way residential street. Like the other two gardens, this site is fenced off from the street. Through the fence I can see a large mulched area and spacious uniform plots made out of old recycled train sleepers (see figure 5.14 and 5.15). A sign on the fence directs me to the project’s website where the gardeners explain that local residents and the school community manage the site and emphasize the goals that underwrite the project:

*Producing fresh, locally grown food, 'The Paddock' provides the perfect place for healthy recreational opportunities for residents of all ages to meet and work, to till the soil together and enjoy the harvest, to share information and experiences, and to build strong community relationships. The garden provides local solutions, by local people,*
to environmental and biodiversity concerns surrounding commercial food production and the food we eat. (Highfield Community Garden website)  

Providing information such as the management plan and map of the garden, membership forms, and an events calendar, this website creates the impression that this is a thoroughly organised project indeed.

Following the website’s calendar I attend the first working bee that is scheduled to take place. Having a closer look at the garden beds, the gardeners here are producing substantially more food than the gardeners in the other two projects. Aside from the plots, the garden consists of communal areas mainly planted with fruit trees such as banana and raspberry trees, but also lemongrass and chamomile. The gardeners have a deck in the back of the garden, an eco-house which Council used as a sustainable living exhibit before donating it to this project, and a chicken shed. The gardeners have the chicken shed ready for use as my fieldwork progressed and the first chooks were picking around by the time the last interviews took place. The roof of the shed provides surface area to catch rainwater and the gardeners have a large water tank for rainwater storage.

The start of this garden was greatly helped by the skills and knowledge of professionals living in the neighbourhood. For instance, a professional landscape architect living in the neighbourhood made the design for the project and someone else was experienced working with Council and knew how to apply for grant money. The group was also organised enough to build the community gardeners themselves according to a pre-established plan. Gardeners moved in the sleepers to construct beds, built up the soil and mulched the paths between the

2 In line with the choice to use pseudonyms for the garden this reference was omitted.
plots. Fruit trees were planted in the communal areas on the perimeter of the garden. The group initially installed a large six thousand litre water tank to store the water collected from the roof of the garden’s shed and chicken coop, and a large bin for communal composting. When the majority of the 36 beds were finished the community group organised a draw to allocate the plots to people. This was considered a fair way to get started because each plot has different conditions such as hours of sun and exposure to wind. The garden opened in 2012.
Figure 5.15: Plots at Highfield Community Garden (December 2014)

Figure 5.16: A 1000 litre water tank purchased to battle the drought (December 2014)
The first year of the garden showed to the gardeners that the project needed some adjustments. For example, the communal composting facility proved difficult to manage. The group therefore purchased smaller bins to be shared between the users of two plots. The water management facilities proved to have too little capacity to meet the water demands of the group. This was especially so in 2012, which was a very dry year. That is why the group bought four, one-thousand litre tanks filled with water (see figure 5.16). This provided the garden with short term access to a large amount of water. When the water ran out the four tanks started being topped up from the school’s mains water connection. Some gardeners believe that water was pumped from the large tank into the four smaller ones to open up space to collect more rainwater from the roof. At this time the garden committee also decided to install a tap to access the school’s mains water in times of drought.

Because Highfield Community Garden is located on land that is managed by the adjacent public school with which the garden group has a constructive ongoing relationship, the context is very different at this third site. Many of the gardeners’ children attend the school and the sense of school community spills over into the garden group. The group has elected a committee and additional roles for example to manage memberships. Committee meetings are held periodically, and an annual meeting is open to all members. This garden was supported by Marrickville Council, now Inner West Council. The project also enjoys support from the neighbouring Council City of Sydney. The gardens are successful in securing funding and sponsorships, for example with the aid of a well-designed website and an annual open garden event to maintain neighbourhood ties and raise funds (figure 5.17). Members are welcome to garden during daylight hours and outside of school hours. The garden also organises working bees. These communal gardening hours are once a month and alternate between Saturday and Sunday to limit the chance that the same people continuously
During working bees the chores for the day are written on a blackboard so that members who attend know what to do (figure 5.18). Chores include things like weeding and mulching, but also digging ditches and retrofitting the shed to accommodate chickens. During working bees, gardeners take care of the communal areas where the fruit trees are predominantly planted. A permaculture teacher oversees these areas and advises volunteers what to do and how to do it. The working bees have a break for morning tea with tea and cake provided by the gardeners. Gardeners are welcome to stay for as long as they like and are welcome to work on their own plots as well.

Figure 5.17: Highfield Community Garden Open Day. Fundraising activities included food stalls selling chutneys and lemonade made from garden produce, face painting and – combining fundraising with pest control – a snail hunt. (December 2014)

Figure 5.18: At Highfield Community Garden committee members communicate working bee chores on a black board. (December 2014)
During the first year of the garden working bees were organised fortnightly but as the set-up of the garden neared completion attendance started to flounder. People felt that there was not that much to do anymore and hoped that people would start attending working bees again when they would be held less frequently. Some gardeners feel that the reduction of working bees threatens the functioning of the garden as a community project and are suggesting social events such as barbeques to make up for the loss of contact hours.

5.4 Community garden relationships

The three community gardens are very distinct in how they are internally organised and in how they relate to external institutions such as landowners and their respective Council. In the remainder of this chapter I reflect on these relationships and on the ways in which internal and external relationships shape the practices that constitute the garden communities. I particularly draw on observations I made at working bees, garden meetings and the meetings of the ACFCGN. The chapter offers the key insight that, although Councils in this part of Sydney are seemingly supportive of community gardens and afford the groups considerable freedom to shape their project based on the group’s vision and needs, great unevenness exists in the opportunities particular garden groups are offered to flourish.

5.4.1 The effects of a bureaucratic embrace

Relationships with Council and the way a garden community starts and maintains that relationship shapes the social and physical organisation of these spaces. The community gardens in this study have established and maintain very different relationships with their respective local Councils. These relationships shape the opinions of gardeners, as well as
their gardening practices and the ways in which gardeners set goals for the project. It also shapes how gardeners understand their sense of ownership over the site.

After the challenges involved in starting a project, relationships with Council and other funding bodies shape the potential of the garden projects to be successful in their projects later on. For example, Stanley Road Community Garden is not eligible for grants because of its unendorsed status. Claire says that she would like to install a tap:

But that would be something that Council would have to agree to and do, and they won’t at this point. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)

And similarly at this garden Beth says:

And the thing about not being provided with water. The permanent structure thing is an issue, because it would be good to have a shed that we could keep all this stuff that would have a roof that would provide water for the tank. So at the moment we have to get our water from the neighbour, who lets us fill it up. So that’s an issue. That’s something I would like to change. (Beth, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Because this garden was started without consent to avoid bureaucratic delays, it is now faced with extra challenges. The problematic relationship with Council limits the opportunities the group has available to them. I will return to the restrictions on water infrastructure in chapter 8 when I focus on gardeners’ water use practices. I want to focus here on the situation that emerges when Council does not support but does tolerate a garden on their land. This somewhat contradictory, yet common stance (see Lawson, 2004) creates a tension that makes gardeners feel that they have to defend the space. In fact, one gardener mentions that the threat she perceived was the reason she joined the garden in the first place:
I went along to a Council sort of meeting last year. And I passed this, Claire, the lady, several times and I know she has got her you know little grassroots community garden going. And she. I just felt. I could see that the Council was trying to impose their ideas on the community. And she sort of had other people involved. And I feel it’s a silly way. You know: ‘Oh you’d like a garden? Well have it here and we’ll design it for you.’ [...] So it was just sort of micro managing the community. Imposing Council rules when something was going fine. (Anna, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Anna finds the interference of Council troublesome because she applauds the community group’s courage and effort to show the initiative to realise the project on their own terms. She fears that Council might want to take credit for the project:

You know the Council has got an awful lot of money. It’s one of the wealthiest Councils in the world because of the gentrification of the city and more rates are coming here. And Clover Moore [lord mayor of the City of Sydney] to her credit wants it all to look very pretty, but so this is probably a bit of an eyesore so. And I suppose she wants to own it, or the Council wants to own it. So that they can feel that they. ‘Look what we’ve done for you’. (Anna, Stanley Road Community Garden)

This sentiment is also expressed at Park Street Community Garden where gardeners express the idea that their gardening practices and the outlook of their garden does not meet Council’s ideas of ‘good’ community gardening and that this makes it hard for them to compete for grant money. Charles’ account of the relationship between Park Street Community Garden and Council is telling in this respect, and worth quoting at length:

Because this space wasn’t recognised for a long time I don’t think. The first ten maybe fifteen years even of this garden has had a hard slog in this respect in that there actually were external threats from which to defend it. And Council turning our water
off at some stage you know things like that used to happen. So we’re not Council’s favourite, we were never going to be Council’s favourite community garden and so when we’re not playing the bureaucratic games and you know you can’t put the garden up to the 2030 Global Green Connected goals of the City of Sydney, they are not inclined to give us any money. They are not inclined to give us any help because it’s not ticking their boxes it’s not meeting their quotas. (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

To this I respond: ‘The garden does meet [the 2030 Global Green Connected goals of the City of Sydney] though’.

It does, but it doesn’t meet them on paper in a shiny, glossy catalogue. Of course it does, it’s a space to grow local food; that does community composting; that provides a hub for local food pick up from local farmers. We had a proposal to become completely water self-reliant and solving the issue of flooding across the road when it pours all in one go and it was going to cost several thousand dollars and the Council had no interest in supporting that. It is not fair but it’s the reality of it that they are never going to help until we fit the homogenised box that they want us to. And I don’t actually even know whether we want to in the end but if we want their money we do. (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

Even though Council policies seem to aim to put gardeners in charge, indirectly gardeners are encouraged to garden in certain ways and according to certain aesthetic principles. Gardeners feel an expectation for their garden to meet a fashionable ‘glossy’ image and imagine Council’s perception of their actual project as an ‘eyesore’. This insight reflects literature that foregrounds aesthetics as a key value for community gardening (Morckel, 2015), as well as
research findings that identify the practice of Councils to judge community garden projects based on their aesthetic qualities (Aptekar, 2015).

I wish to add to these findings that gardens can get caught in a double bind where funds are required to attain qualities that are needed to acquire funds. A good illustration of this situation is the attempt of gardeners at Park Street Community Garden to obtain a model eco-house that was being given away by City of Sydney Council after they had used it as part of a sustainable living exhibition. The Park Street Community Gardeners were very surprised that they were not successful in their attempt and that Council chose to donate the house to a community garden outside of their jurisdiction, Highfield Community Garden (see figure 5.19).

![Figure 5.19: Eco-house in Highfield Community Garden in use as food stall on their annual open day (December 2014)](image)
Ben, who gardens at Park Street Community Garden, assumes that this choice related to the way in which Highfield Community Garden is organised. According to Ben, Highfield Community Garden has a management plan and is run in a business-like fashion. He assumes that this gave Council the impression that the eco-house would be looked after and find a better purpose than at Park Street Community Garden, which is managed in an ad-hoc way. Talking about the eco-house, which is now part of Highfield Community Garden, with a gardener there reveals that having the house opens up yet other opportunities. Sophie, who says that she was not in favour of having the house in the garden, contemplates the possibilities, some of which might lead to new opportunities to receive financial support:

*I think it’s very valuable. It’s worth about ten thousand dollars. So that’s what I would like to do [fix the house and find a function for it] because it’s a real asset having it. And [it] just needs to be restored and tidied up. We are only using it for our open days. It would be nice to use it for other purposes. You know like invite other groups in. We have discussed that at the committee like use it for, offer it to groups for workshops.*

*(Sophie, Highfield Community Garden).*

The story of the eco-house illustrates how Council’s actions create competition between gardens (Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014a). Entrepreneurial qualities such as having a management plan and affiliations with local businesses and organisations are encouraged and rewarded. Rather than the sense of community empowerment and ownership, which Council indicates it wants to foster, we see a shaping of gardener subjectivity around entrepreneurialism (Guthman, 2008; Barron 2016). The creation of entrepreneurialism depends on the presence of certain skillsets that make it easier for residents who are well educated and connected to other professionals to establish a garden with Council support. The story also shows that this support places a garden in a better position to be successful in
acquiring additional assets. The ‘uneven politics’ that promotes certain kinds of self-organisation (Uitermark, 2015) not only dictates which projects are funded, but also determines which projects are to flourish. Parallel to the politics of project funding and support, the politics of land tenure shapes these communities and their gardening practice. I turn the issues of tenure in the following section.

5.4.2 Effects of tenure insecurity

Like funding, an important external condition that shapes a community garden project is the relationship the group manages to establish with the owner of the land. When a garden group’s continuation is threatened this shapes the activities that take place in the garden. I briefly discussed limitations on permanent structures and water infrastructure above, but thoughts about tenure also affect people’s planting practices, internal community politics and whether people want to be involved in a certain garden to begin with.

Claire, the protagonist of Stanley Road Community Garden indicates that it is hard to persuade people to be involved in the garden because it is uncertain how long the project will be allowed to remain in place. People are hesitant to commit to the project because they are unsure whether they will be able to see their plants grow. One gardener for instance says that he limits his involvement for this reason:

*If it became a permanent. If we got something more permanent I think myself and the wife might become a little more interested. As I say she is a keen gardener. She can’t garden up there except what we have on the balcony. You know a few pots. She’d like to come here but she figures it’s too temporary. Gives it a miss. She’s not solo on that. I’d say others are in a similar position. (Henry, Stanley Road Community Garden)*
Ellen: Do you mean people in your building?

Yeah yeah. We get the impression that we may be asked to vacate. And as the Council to my knowledge to date hasn’t given a decision on that. So they sort of tolerate us.

*(Henry, Stanley Road Community Garden)*

As a result of this challenge it is also hard to maintain the garden. The precarious status of the garden and the reluctance of Council to communicate a date means that garden upkeep flounders and that gardens fail to establish and maintain a stable group of gardeners:

*I feel that the lack of support means that the community is disillusioned. Well I don’t know. The community that I can’t really see. But there is so much traffic, so many people see this garden and I don’t know, it would be so great to have more people.*

*(Alice, Stanley Road Community Garden)*

Lack of support creates more pressure on the garden. In the community consultation process organised by Council, neighbours who are not involved described the project as an eyesore, as unappealing and claimed the project attracts vermin.³

Although Park Street Community Garden seems to enjoy considerable security of tenure, gardeners do perceive threats to their tenure. This perception is the product of the garden’s troublesome relationship with Council and their lack of communication with the school. Even though the garden has been an ongoing project without interference since 1992, gardeners adjust their planting in attempts to secure their tenure. Charles explains how issues of tenure undergird gardening practices:

³ In line with the choice to work with pseudonyms reference to the consultation report was omitted.
There is, which goes back to the fear of losing the space, because the perennial trees here are our tenure, that’s what guarantees our tenure. If [the garden] falls in disrepair and nobody grows vegies for two years we will probably be okay provided we have fruit trees to point to and the other activities that go on. It’s a more permanent part of what’s done here and I think that that makes it particularly protected. (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

Some gardeners feel that the presence of trees makes it harder for the garden to be removed and this makes these gardeners not want to sacrifice trees for more vegetable planting space. Ben explains that from his point of view:

It’s a siege mentality where certain people believe that unless we plant trees everywhere the education department will take it back [...] but it has gone overboard. I agree that there is trees here. But you can see there somebody else has put a tree down here with the intention of planting it in this plot here. This is like almost like a territory marker saying, I’m putting a tree here and I want to plant the tree there. And if someone turns their back, the tree will go in. So um, I want to grow veggies here. (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)

This quote illustrates that tension with Council translates into gardening practices which in turn cause friction in the group. At the same time some gardeners are of the opinion that the only thing that would be able to save the garden in the event of eviction would be the support of neighbours. They reason that the involvement of neighbours will increase if there are more plots available for planting, and that hence making room for vegetables rather than trees will increase the security of the project. Charles explains that he does not see the garden under threat at the moment:
Stranger things have happened where community gardens get pushed off a fairly sought after block of land. I don’t think that if they really wanted a couple of quick bucks, trees is going to stop it. I think funny enough what would, is a much stronger solid engagement with the local community. It would take a, residents up in arms would be the only thing that could protect this space in that event I think. I don’t think we would get that right now. I think there would be as many people who would be happy to see it go as to keep it. (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

What we see here is that the planting and the pruning practices in the gardens develop in response to precarious relationships with Council and land owners. These gardeners subscribe to the idea of trees as markers of permanency and resistance (Cloke and Jones, 2004). In contrast, gardeners at Highfield Community Garden who enjoy great security due to their constructive relationship with the school principal, have been able to plan their plantings into the future. Their gardening started with easy vegetables to grow and fruit trees that take several years to start yielding. These different stories show that the relationship with Council and land owners affects gardening practices and the interactions that take place within a garden community. In the following section I delve deeper into the ways in which the relationship with the host organisation that manages the land on which a garden resides, shapes gardening and community building practices.

5.4.3 Gardening practices and community relationships

Landowners also affect community building and a group’s success in creating a sense of community. Whether a garden is already affiliated with an existing community has great impact on the formation of the group of gardeners, their stability and their internal organisation and politics.
Highfield Community Garden is a telling case in point regarding the relational emergence of a sense of community. The garden community to a large extent overlaps with the sense of community the school provides to children and their parents. The majority of the gardeners at Highfield Community Garden know of the garden because their children go to this school:

*We were encouraged by people who we’d become friends with at school, other parents and they’d say ‘you should join the garden’. (Nicole, Highfield Community Garden)*

For these gardeners the garden community and the school community are the same. To my question ‘How do you feel the garden relates to the community or to the neighbourhood?’ Nicole responds:

*Well I know that quite a few local people joined who aren’t even necessarily involved with the school. But there’s also strong links with school families which I really like. (Nicole, Highfield Community Garden)*

The sense of community that the neighbouring school facilitates provides common community ground but also creates slight social barriers where people who do not identify with that provider of community belonging might struggle to feel included. Dylan says that he feels part of the community in some ways. His sense of belonging is limited because a lot of gardeners have children in the school and he does not. I ask him whether the garden fulfils his wish to feel part of something:

*Probably not so much for me personally because we’re connected to the school and a lot of the people that have plots here have children at the school. So there; definitely a sense of another community that exists that I’m not necessarily part of. And that’s not a criticism that’s just a reflection of how it is. [...] I get what I need from it, but there’s*
that bigger sense of community connected through the school. (Dylan, Highfield Community Garden)

Without an ongoing relationship to a school or Council as landowners, the other two community garden groups in this thesis struggle to generate a similar sense of cohesion. At Park Street Community Garden, interference by Council does little to shape a stable community group and rather encourages anxiety and conflict over the bureaucratic organisation and representation of the project. Although Council merely requests gardens to elect a committee of representatives in order to organise communication with Council and to facilitate registration for liability insurance, the instalment of committee members leads to considerable uneasiness in this garden. Even though a committee theoretically only needs to exist to tick boxes, in reality gardeners on a committee end up doing more work than others and they open up possibilities for a core group to emerge in an otherwise egalitarian group.

The research also shows some instances where the organisational structure of the committee is used to promote certain people’s vision of a garden’s future. At Park Street Community Garden a gardener lobbied in the group to have a neighbour who is not otherwise involved in the garden, to take a seat on the committee as treasurer. The gardener did this thinking that a neighbour who looks on to the garden has an interest in keeping it there and in keeping it in presentable state.

At Stanley Road Community Garden, the absence of Council support as well as a community organisation or a school, arguably poses a challenge to developing a sense of community cohesion and belonging. Gardeners do not know each other, which is why a system of private plots is needed to orchestrates people’s unsynchronised garden practices and routines. There is no pressure from Council for the garden to have a committee, to have a communication
structure in place or to have communal gardening hours. This leads to what one neighbour calls ‘a dispersed community’. She says about the working bees:

*It’s not advertised. Like when I started I was told that it happens I think the first Sunday of the month but I haven’t heard anything about it. I should become the secretary or something. If it was going to be a proper organisation, you need people with roles and Claire’s obviously the director or whatever, but you need somebody to do like emails and build that communication. That would probably be a good thing. But I haven’t offered to do it yet.* (Beth, Stanley Road Community Garden)

The plots separate the gardeners onto their own patches of land and a system of individual rather than group emails means that gardeners do not communicate with each other in this project. Council is absent as a third party that requires garden groups to organise their decision-making in a democratic way. Council and the gardeners who participate in this project together place the protagonist in a position of power to allocate plots and to make decisions on behalf of the group. This shows that the interactions between external structures and gardeners’ practices together give shape to the garden community that emerges.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that while stating they support community gardening, Councils also throw up barriers, which are challenging to overcome. These barriers constitute an uneven politics as some residents will be better placed to attain their goal to realise a community garden. The chapter also reveals that these challenges are reproduced and aggravate as a project develops. These insights go to illustrate that garden groups experience limited autonomy in the face of Council policy and interactions with neighbours and
landowners. The chapter has revealed that the sense of ownership gardeners experience depends on relationships with external parties. Conflicts within garden groups also arise in relation to actions by external governance and the perception of external threats. The chapter shows that these interactions and conflicts shape gardening practices and internal garden politics.

Uitermark (2015) identifies the tendency of governments to highlight the success stories of community initiatives such as volunteer-led libraries and community gardens and he urges policy-makers and researchers to also acknowledge and scrutinise the unevenness and the darker sides of these stories. In the context of a retreating state and ongoing budget-cuts to welfare and public services, successful citizen initiatives are put in the spotlight, while questions about projects that did not take off and neighbourhoods that are left without access to services such as a library or community centre are left unasked. This is why Uitermark (2015) calls scholars to recognise the potential of self-organisation and be critical of the uneven politics that promote it. On the one hand self-organisation might empower communities to shape agendas, but at the same time self-organisation is 

predicated on the financial and professional support that helps residents to finance activities and cope with the more vicious problems associated with self-organising in an urban context where community cohesion is not self-evident (Uitermark, 2015: 2310).

His call aligns with work on community gardens in which scholars recognise how community gardens function as stopgaps to roll back neoliberal cuts to the funding of community services (Knigge, 2009; Perkins, 2010; Rosol, 2012; Follmann and Viehoff, 2015).

This chapter built on these insights, and broadened understandings of policy impacts by looking at the ways in which community garden policies and the management of these
gardens by local Councils and landowners shape the practices and communities in the gardens. Mintz and McManus (2014) observe a concentration of community gardens in the central areas of Sydney and suggest that a ‘stronger history and culture of community gardening […] makes [the area] more conducive for garden formation’ (Mintz and McManus, 2014: 554). However, the chapter shows that differences between the skill sets and connections of community groups are likely to translate into unequal opportunities. We may assume that the concentration of community gardens in the central areas of Sydney are better explained focusing on the social networks, skill and wealth concentrated in these communities. This chapter brought the external and internal relationships of community garden groups together and showed how imposed structures of governance shape how communities organise themselves internally in these gardens. It adds to existing literature on community garden cohesion and governance that social relationships in the garden are the product of how external and internal modes of organisation come together. In the next chapters I apply the characteristics and relationships of the three community gardens to three themes. First I zoom in on gardeners’ practices and understandings of property, then I discuss food production and water management.
Chapter 6: Transplanting, plotting, fencing: relational property practices in community gardens

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the aim of this thesis, to analyse practices through which community gardens are tangled up in their surroundings, by focusing on property relationships and practices. The chapter builds on a surge of interest in property in studies on urban agriculture and gardens (Blomley, 2004; 2016; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Lang, 2014; Wekerle and Classens, 2015). These studies have opened up avenues for debates about community gardens and urban food production towards nuanced understandings of the contradictions that are played out in these property spaces. An account of property as practised relationships is helpful for developing a relational approach and steering away from conversations on community gardening that focus on their inherent potential as sites for social and environmental change.

I reveal how property is practised in the three gardens with different property models, focusing on three practices – transplanting, plotting and fencing. I show that community gardeners produce property relationally and that through each of these practices they create overlapping understandings of common and private property. Gardeners have contradictory motivations that are geared both towards community inclusion and the protection of personal interests. The chapter reveals that while feelings of ownership contribute to a sense of community belonging, they also help legitimatise a defensive and exclusive spatial claim.
Policymakers adopt the optimistic outlook on community gardens found in social sciences literatures in which inclusive characteristics and supposed capacity to foster inclusive and resilient communities are highlighted (Beilin and Hunter, 2011; Firth et al., 2011; Glover et al., 2005; Holland, 2004). These messages stand in stark contrast with my fieldwork experiences. Attempting to be involved in community gardens, the exclusionary effects of community gardens become immediately noticeable as I bump into fence after fence. Sometimes a sign directs me to a website or provides me with a phone number. However, in none of the three field sites is access straightforward. Community gardeners I meet in these gardens often raise this issue. One community gardener for example describes the project in her neighbourhood as ‘a gated community’ in which the gardeners do not achieve the aim of creating a sense of community, because it feels like an exclusive club of gardeners. Other gardeners consider exclusive access to the garden fair because the people who invest in the garden should be rewarded for their effort.

Taking its cue from recent developments in property research, this chapter builds on the insight that property and associated rights to include or exclude are not absolute, but constantly subject to changing enactments and interpretations that can make property do different kinds of work with both inclusive and exclusive effects (Blomley, 2004; 2015). As discussed in chapter 2, no community or public can exist without exclusion (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008). Rather than accepting the inclusionary characteristics attributed to community gardens, or judging the exclusionary practices of community gardeners as materialized in garden fences, I ask how community gardens sit in a wider landscape of property relationships and what kinds of property relationships are produced through gardening practices and gardeners’ movements between different property spaces. These explorations lead to the main argument that community gardening practices are partly motivated by community objectives but equally relate to private gardening practices and to
gardeners’ personal lives. Gardeners produce understandings of property relationally, which leads to contradictory motivations and relationships that are at once geared towards community belonging and personal interest. Consequently, the current support for and scepticism towards community gardens can be replaced with a more nuanced consideration of the property practices these spaces facilitate and the effects of those practices.

First I conceptually frame community gardens as spaces for studying the complexity of property practices and relationships. I then reiterate some aspects of the methods and the field sites that particularly contributed to this chapter. I identify three property practices that came forth out of the empirical work – transplanting, plotting and fencing. I use these practices to guide a discussion about property relations in and around community gardens and shed critical light on discourses in which the ‘community’ aspect of community gardening is either put forward as inherently inclusive or as perpetuating hegemonic neoliberalism through privatisation.

6.2 Relationality and practice in property thought

6.2.1 The complexity of property relationships

The concept of property has an extensive theoretical history encompassing various approaches towards understanding what it means to own something. Most recent developments emphasize the contextual and complex nature of property relationships (e.g. Blomley, 2016). Even in its most simplified form - an individual right to exclude others from a particular thing or resource - property requires that people understand property rules and conditions regarding access to goods and other resources (Rose, 1994). Or in Blomley’s words (2016: 227): ‘Property is only good against the world if lay people understand the
nature of the rights to which it is attached’. Even when approached as an individual entitlement, property is an inherently communicative and hence social phenomenon. This is why Rose (1994) argues that any private property regime as a whole is common property shared among its subscribers. This key insight illustrates how property is more complex than an individual’s exclusive right to access or use something.

Complexity also plays out where vernacular understandings and workings of property are substantially different from formal or bureaucratic inscriptions. Property practices might then exist in tension with formally inscribed property rights. For example, Blomley (2004) shows how private property holders adopt adjacent public spaces through their gardening practices. Private gardeners inscribe a layer of private property practices onto public space without an agenda to gain formal ownership, thus creating a complex meshwork of informal property relationships with other neighbours and passers-by. These everyday understandings are important because for property law to be effective it has to resonate with common sense interpretations of what it is and what it should do.

It is interesting to note that research into everyday practices and interpretations of property shows that people are willing and inclined to consider property as flexible and shared in various ways (Voyce, 2003; Blomley, 2005; 2016; Lang, 2014). This includes issues such as taking and sharing overhanging fruit, but also inviting neighbours into one’s domestic garden to grow plants. Although research shows that many property relationships are shaped by and affect community dynamics (see Davies, 2012), the private property regime in which property is understood as the exclusive right of one person to exclude others, remains dominant. The idea of property functions to favour a liberal sense of individualism in which citizenship, subjectivity and identity are to take shape at the scale of the individual in relationship to territory (Voyce, 2007; Keenan, 2010).
These insights are important because law has an interactive relationship with everyday life. It is shaped by everyday understandings and practices of property and simultaneously it ‘continues on through causal chains into the world of stuff’ where it affects real matter and real life (Delaney, 2002: 78). These insights come forth out of legal theorists’ engagement with relational spatial thinking, particularly as put forward by Massey (e.g. Blomley, 2010; Keenan, 2010). An understanding of the ‘mutual embeddedness of space and society’ (Ettlinger, 2011: 541) creates sensitivity for the power of property to determine what or who belongs in certain landscapes and places. This power is facilitated by the capability of property to make itself seem natural, secure and fair to the extent that it masks the exclusion, injustice and reliance on community resources that were necessary to create an illusion of stability (Blomley, 2013; Nedelsky, 1990). This effect is described as the agency of property itself (Blomley, 2013).

The tendency of property to make itself seem natural combined with its power to affect real life creates a need for ethnographic research that uncovers how property is practised in everyday life, how the effects of those practices are felt and how people make sense of its results (Blomley, 2015; 2016). The emphasis on community relationships in community gardens makes these sites very suitable for creating a better understanding of how property requires and shapes community efforts as well as personal investments and benefits.

### 6.2.2 Property as practice

Aside from asking what property represents, researchers ask through which practices – such as naming, fencing, repairing and policing – property is made and what property subsequently makes people do (Blomley 2015; Lang, 2014; Wekerle and Classens, 2015). A focus on practice shows how in everyday life people put property to use in ways that
transgress the two classical categories of private and public property. Private entitlements are partially waived for the sake of common interest (Lang, 2014; Wekerle and Classens, 2015) and conversely, people take responsibility over public space through private property practices in order to take temporary control over common areas (Blomley, 2004; Lang, 2014).

Gardening is one set of practices that allows social scientists to explore the production of ownership (e.g. Cerwonka, 2004; Lang, 2014). Spatial practices such as weeding and planting situate subjects in place and create an imagined sense of community tied to a certain territory (Cerwonka, 2004). At the same time scholarship shows the transgressive potential of these practices, for example where gardeners care for plants beyond the private property fence (Head and Muir, 2006). Lang (2014) provides insight into how the sharing and caring for plants across private yards produces understandings of private properties as shared spaces and that these understandings might differ from legal representations of property. Property scholarship reveals the inclusive and exclusive capacities of property practices and draws attention to the instrumental role of plants in the constitution of property relationships.

Research on urban agriculture shows that gardening practices are potentially radical, which might subvert the hegemony of neoliberal market logic and modes of thought. Gardening practices open up private spaces to be used by third parties and in ways that can exist outside the dominant market (Naylor, 2012; Lang, 2014; Wekerle and Classens, 2015). There are hopeful expectations that practices of commoning might enable more inclusive and ecologically just food chains. At the same time urban gardening and other alternative agricultural practices relate to neoliberalism in problematic and contradicting ways (Guthman, 2004; Pudup, 2008; Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014a; McClintock, 2014). For example, because the very gardening practices that create independence also create an understanding of personal responsibility and accountability. Acknowledging that property is a
complex construct that can be practised and play out in varying and contradicting ways, I argue that community gardeners’ property practices create entanglements of individualized and communal property relationships. This problematizes the idea of community gardens as commons.

6.2.3 Community gardens as commons

Community gardens are eccentric cases of property ownership. They ‘transcend the separation between the public and the private’ (Schmelzkopf, 1995: 379), and complicate the relationships between private ownership and the public good (Lawson, 2007). In the past, community gardens have proven to be constructive community spaces in impoverished urban environments, and have therefore been flagged as a spatial materialisation of the right to the city (Schmelzkopf, 1995; 2002; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008). In light of these benefits, community garden researchers advocate for security of tenure, especially where projects are situated in decaying urban landscapes and are functioning as spaces of empowerment for marginalised social groups (e.g. Schmelzkopf, 1995; 2002; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008).

In line with this, urban agriculture and alternative food scholars celebrate community gardens as inclusive examples of food production sites. The uneasy fit of many community gardens with a binary private versus public approach to property makes researchers put these projects forward as shared resources or as commons (Eizenberg, 2012b). One of the central property issues community garden scholars grapple with is the relation between shared community garden spaces on the one hand and the market and governance landscapes in which they are situated on the other. Community gardens are part of urban landscapes that are strongly shaped by market dynamics which complicates the protection of these spaces when they are used under temporary leases (Schmelzkopf, 2002; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Eizenberg,
Eizenberg (2012b) analyses solutions to this dilemma and finds that through trusts and non-profit organisations it is possible for commons to exist in a neoliberal city that is largely governed on the basis of market dynamics. He contends that the commons, ‘is a mechanism for redistribution through which underprivileged residents compensate themselves for uneven urban development’ (Eizenberg, 2012b: 779).

Scholars recognise that community gardens might work towards individual gain when they work to increase property value (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Quastel, 2009; Eizenberg, 2012a). Quastel (2009: 719) approaches gentrification and community gardens from a political ecology perspective and describes the ‘obscene’ situation in which the urban poor are rendered homeless to provide well-off green urban residents with a leisure space in which they can enact their ‘individualized consumer response to environmental problems’.

Quastel’s work also shows that aside from social inclusion, empowerment and citizenship, community gardens might instead be stripped from their transformative potential and shape exclusive landscapes of property relationships.

To generate a deeper understanding of property relationships associated with community gardens, I wish to build on the insight generated by these studies that have focused on institutional management of community gardens. Attention to gardeners’ practices particularly relating to fences and plots has proven a fruitful approach towards understanding the meanings that are embedded in these community spaces through everyday enactments. Previous work has done so for example by asking how people understand ‘community’ based on the compartmentalisation of responsibilities, entitlements and garden space (Klein, 1993; Kurtz, 2001). Although property is not explicitly mentioned in these studies, the work does show how property devices such as plots and fences shape a sense of community (Kurtz, 2001). Plots also illustrate some of the controversies in community gardens around the
policing of borders and social norms, and draw attention to gardens as spaces of conflict rather than community sanctuaries (Klein, 1993). Kurtz (2001) studies how community gardeners enclose their garden, and how groups of gardeners redefine the meaning of ‘garden’ and ‘community’ whilst erecting physical boundaries and policing social norms surrounding membership and access.

Recent developments in property theory offer an alternative approach in considering property as produced through practice. Those developments enable me to focus on gardening practices and gardeners’ experiences in the wider landscape while keeping property in and outside the garden in sight. An everyday practice approach to understanding property relationships in community gardens reveals how community gardens and gardening practices are connected to other property spaces. The approach reveals the overlapping and relational meanings that are generated through property practices; it shows how these relations work out and to whose benefit. Critiques of community gardens that interpret these projects as either transformative or neoliberal spaces overlook how these gardens are connected to their environments through practice.

6.3 Researching property practices

City of Sydney Council encourages community gardening in various policy documents. Their policy acknowledges the importance of ‘community ownership’ for the long term success of these projects and facilitates this sense of ownership in letting community groups manage the gardens themselves (City of Sydney, 2016). Consequently it does not dictate how garden groups should organise ownership or responsibilities, nor does it consider how ‘community ownership’ might entangle or conflict with personal ownership or interest.
The three gardens’ different management models are important for this chapter because several participants mentioned that they based their choice to join a particular garden on its management model, indicating that gardeners have preference for certain kinds of property relationships in community gardens. The different combinations of shared spaces and plots in the gardens also helped reveal some property practices and related feelings of community belonging that were specific to a garden’s model.

In addition to the conventional semi-structured interviews, the fourteen interviews that included a walk from the gardener’s private garden to the community garden created essential insights into relational understandings and working of property. Although the interview schedules and mobile research methods were not developed with the aim to uncover property relationships and practices, property quickly emerged as a prominent theme. The research methods were arguably sensitive to bring out this theme for two reasons. First, walking provides an ‘intimate vantage point for reconstructing the dynamics of interaction in communal and private realms’ and sheds light on everyday politics of neighbourhood belonging (Kusenbach, 2003: 466; also see Waitt et al., 2009). The walks allowed gardeners to reflect on the different meaning of various property spaces in their lives and routines.

Second, the neighbourhoods in which the community gardens are located are shaped by changing property relationships. Firstly, the contemporary landscape of property relationships in Australian cities is shaped by a deep history of dispossession as these cities are founded on land that was previously used and guarded by Aboriginal people. Additionally, and as discussed in chapter 3, the urban landscape in which the three community gardens are situated is characterised by strongly increasing residential property values and changes to the neighbourhoods’ demographic profiles (Atkinson et al., 2011). Community gardeners in this study are part of this dynamic either as newcomers to the area or as observers of the changes.
to their neighbourhood. One neighbour to the Park Street Community Garden project for example observes:

*The size of the houses has become bigger in Newtown and the prices have gone up. People used to have more time and now people aren’t around anymore. To support a house like that in Newtown nowadays you have to be working all the time. It might be more difficult because of that to keep the garden going. At the same time the educated kind of people that move to Newtown are of the kind that know that gardening is fashionable. They might want to get involved or be near a garden.* (Mary, Park Street Community Garden)

Rising property values encourage owners to invest in their residential properties. Investments such as renovations and extensions were frequently brought up by interviewees as these affected gardening practices. One participant explains he joined the community garden in search of more growing space:

*Figure 6.1: Impervious surfaces, decks and porches make gardens spaces for entertaining family and friends*
And we also have a, quite a large group of friends and I have on my side a big family and so we built the house so that we could basically open up these doors and if we want to have thirty people here anytime we can. So it’s really, and you know, a space to entertain as well as to grow things. (Lucas, Highfield Community Garden)

People’s love of dinner parties and quality time with family and friends make them render their gardens less suitable for gardening (figure 6.1).

Another gardener mentions that the investment of a neighbour in building a second storey on the adjacent property overshadowed his backyard to such an extent that he had to seek garden space in the community garden. This is another example of how investment in real estate complicated people’s gardening in their private growing spaces.

Other participants are conscious observers of how property interests change their residential area. Participants comment on the increasing pressure on available land, the neighbourhood’s changing demographic composition and the role of the community garden in attracting gentrifying homeowners. Even when newcomers might not be interested in gardening themselves, they understand the community garden as having a positive effect on the value of their property. Ben for example comments on the direct neighbours of Park Street Community Garden:

Although they have an important role to play they never come to the garden. I nominated [the neighbour] to be treasurer. To take hold of all the bank accounts and so on because she has a personal interest in seeing the garden survive. (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)

These homeowners are expected to defend community gardens because alternative uses of land such as housing, affordable or otherwise, will block views, eliminate parking space and
devalue adjacent real estate. This urban landscape shaped a research project that sheds light on how private and community understandings of property are connected through everyday routines and practices.

I now discuss three property practices: transplanting plants between private and communal spaces, constructing garden plots and fencing. These practices illustrate how community spaces are inclusionary as well as exclusionary, and how meanings of home and community garden spaces are relationally produced.

6.4 Relational property practices

6.4.1 Transplanting and moving between home and communal space

Community gardens are closely connected to a wider urban environment that is shaped by property relationships. For example, community gardens are strongly connected to the scale of the neighbourhood, as in many of these gardens membership is exclusively available to people who live near the site. Where such rules are not in place, the practicality of everyday routes and routines makes it more favourable for people to join a garden close to where they live. The walking interviews revealed that gardeners’ practices are in part shaped by the proximity of their home to the community garden. I use the practice of transplanting plants between private backyard and community garden as a starting point for understanding the importance of proximity for how people enact connections between home and communal space and make sense of different property spaces. In this section I reflect on the practice of moving plants between gardens and ways in which spatial-proximity shapes this and other practices that entail movement between the community garden and gardeners’ homes.
Residential proximity and the time this allows people to invest into the space result in feelings of ownership. Living directly across the street from Highfield Community Garden, Sophie expresses a heightened sense of responsibility and ownership based on the short distance between her private residential home and the community garden:

*I feel a little bit proprietary about the garden. [...] I feel a sense, a greater sense of ownership of the garden than my own plot. Because I am so, across the road and I’ve been involved with it. And I walk in and I look sort of at the whole not just, oh, what is happening in my plot. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)*

This quote illustrates how community gardens relate to private spaces and how those relations shape gardening practices and feelings of ownership. It also shows that this sense of ownership is not straightforwardly exclusionary or private. Sophie expresses a sense of responsibility over the wider community space, not just her own plot, based on the proximity of her home.

Additionally, gardeners connect home gardens and community gardens through everyday gardening practices and routines. Movement between home and community garden allows them to extend practices from one space into the other. Most participants describe at least some home gardening practices, and these frequently entangle with community gardening practices. The gardeners who do not describe their own garden and the community garden as somehow connected through practices often have – either physically or in terms of sun hours – very limited space to garden at home. Different meanings ascribed to home and community garden space lead to people growing different kinds of plants in each space. At his home garden, Lucas for example mentioned:

*It’s so sheltered and shaded we just can’t grow anything here. And that’s why we wanted to join the plot, so that we can grow some stuff. Yeah so the garden here is
basically just a place where we kind of relax and hang out. (Lucas, Highfield Community Garden)

Lucas chooses to grow food at the community garden and flowers at his home garden because his home garden is too shaded for edible crops to flourish all year round. At Stanley Road Community Garden, Claire puts forward a similar reasoning. When I ask her whether she grows different things in the two spaces, she says:

Well yes because there is more space here [in the community garden] and I tend to try and keep this my space here for edible things [...] because [at home] you might want to have some screening plants or you know different plants but not that you can necessarily eat. So here you can grow just to eat. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)

However, it is more common for people to understand the private and communal spaces as in some way connected through gardening practices. People often start gardening communally when they realise they have limited garden space at home and this encourages them to translate private gardening practices and carry plants into the shared garden. Ben for example says:

So I was always interested in gardening and my neighbours were putting up a two storey extension which is all my sunlight. So all the synergies were there. These guys [the gardeners] needed help. I needed to move my plants which I had been nurturing for 22 years into a place where they could survive. [...] And because my garden has been overshaded by my neighbours next door. I want to basically come here, sit in the sun in the winter and potter in the garden. What I used to do in my own backyard. So it saves my backyard. (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)
Many gardeners move back and forth between community and home garden. People transplant plants between these garden spaces and this way the meaning of the community garden and the gardening practices that take place there are produced in relation to private backyards. At Park Street Community Garden, Alex for example says:

*I’m thinking of moving soon and some of the plants I’ve got that are doing pretty well that I won’t be able to take with me because the place I’m moving is probably smaller I would probably try to give them a new home here. And also sometimes if something is growing well here and you’d kind of want to have one yourself you can try to take it back and see if you can get it to grow. (Alex, Park Street Community Garden)*

These practices of sharing, appropriating and transplanting plants produce relations that transgress the boundaries of private property and community space. Plants are sometimes moved from the private backyard or balcony into the community garden if they need more sunlight or space to grow.

Another reason for people to transplant between the private home garden and the community garden is when a plant requires more attention. People move plants home during precarious stages of the plant’s life and prefer to grow fragile seedlings from home, because this allows continuous monitoring (figure 6.2). While people are motivated to be part of a community project, home growing is easier to incorporate into daily routines. Water and equipment are more readily available and seeing plants on a daily basis is a handy reminder of their needs. Stephanie for example takes struggling plants home:

*So sometimes what I used to do, is that anything that looks like it’s dying I would take home. Every plant, I’d take home and I’d nurse it at home. [...] because where my garden at home is, it’s at my front door. I walk past it, my hose is right there. I go to take the bin out, I see it. I go to take the girls out, which I do at least once a day, I see*
it. I give it water. I did mix up pesticide: garlic and soapy water. And I had it here to spray. And then when I took a few things home I found it easier. (Stephanie, Stanley Road Community Garden)

People say the same thing about growing seedlings. Sarah at Highfield Community Garden says:

You can tend to it pretty much every day if you want to. So it makes it a bit easier to control it. [...] I certainly don’t get to the community garden every day. (Sarah, Highfield Community Garden)
The ways in which gardening practices entangle with everyday routines, makes some people adjust their planting practices altogether. People plant things they think will survive even if they do not water the garden. And Charles has an understanding of his private and community garden as spaces in which he can grow things that require different amounts of time and effort:

*I just use this space to grow things that take a little bit more space or will grow a little bit more on their own. The last maybe two years I haven’t grown anything down here [in the community garden] that I didn’t think would survive at least a week, preferably two weeks without any tender love and care.* (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

This spatial organisation of gardening practices allows people to not go to the garden very often. This way of orchestrating everyday routines enables people to feel part of a community project while not having to change their lifestyle. Ironically, these very practices detract from the sense of community that people get from their involvement. Beth for example does not manage to garden as much as she would like and as a result does not feel a sense of community. She sees this as something for which she herself is responsible:

*I guess I would like there to be a bit more of a community. Yeah I think it’s a dispersed community. But like if I were able to come to the working bees and lots of other people came that would be great. But I feel that’s kind of my fault. Not the garden’s fault. You know it’s my lifestyle that’s getting in the way there.* (Beth, Stanley Road Community Garden)

One could even argue that the spatial organisation of community gardens into plots allows for these gardens to be masqueraded as community projects while those supposed ‘communities’ really do not exist. Stephanie wonders:
I’ve been there for two, maybe longer now, two years and other than Claire I don’t really see anybody in there. But I do see things happening. So whether these guerrillas are ninjas really. (Stephanie, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Sharing plants across private and communal boundaries has recently been identified by Lang (2014: 853) as a practice that allows an ‘interweaving of the logics of private property and commons’. Lang’s study contributes to a larger endeavour to reveal the complexities of property beyond a formal private versus public dichotomy. In an attempt to counterbalance the dominance of the private ownership model, these studies pay attention to examples of formally private spaces that are turned into common space through everyday practice and public use. Lang’s study is another example of how gardening tends to be approached as an open and inclusive practice. The practice of transplanting and the movement of gardeners between home and community gardens show that property is produced in complex relational ways and that these practices are directed by community motivations, but also by personal routines and lifestyle objectives. Fitting ‘community’ into a personal everyday routine relies on private as well as communal space, which encourages people to enact their gardening practices back and forth between private and community spaces. The search for this balance is further illustrated by the practice of ‘plotting’.

6.4.2 Plotting: understanding property in the context of community

In all three gardens, the majority of gardeners value having control over a specific part of the garden. Even in the garden without plots, there is an informal understanding of which patches and plants belong to whom. Plots allow gardeners to fit community gardening into their everyday lives, without risking intervention from other gardeners. The practice of gardening on plots illustrates how property helps people orchestrate a community project with a
personal everyday routine. It helps people make sense of what is theirs to take, keep or share, and how they personally relate to the community project.

For many gardeners the advantage of having separate plots that clearly divide and communicate individual responsibilities is evident. Talking about the history of the garden and whether people wanted private plots from the start, Sophie at Highfield Community Garden answers:

*I think no one even questioned that. […] We were all very happy with that. I have been involved in a community garden prior to this when I was living in Glebe, […] which was just a beautiful space, everything was communal but such a, it’s such a hassle because you plant something, someone takes it or you know someone else plants it, you take a bit, you know what I mean? It’s just irritating. So I think the individual plot is much better. It’s much, much better because people have control over what they want to grow when they grow and if it’s a stuff up its their stuff up, it’s just, and people care for it a lot more I think. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)*

Sophie puts forward an understanding of plants as things that are to be managed and taken by their owner only. She describes practices of sharing plants as irritating, and prefers the sense of security that comes with having control over a plot where other gardeners will not interfere. Private plots are understood as the only sensible way to organise a community project. Even in Park Street Community Garden, where private plots have not (yet) taken hold, Ben, among other gardeners, is convinced that private plots would be better:

*Whereas I and Charles for example say: pay 50 dollars, have your own little plot. And others say you don’t have individual plots, you have to share everything. So like the communist system, the efficiency is actually less I believe. Because no one takes care of the individual plots. (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)*
He explains that the garden does have individual patches of responsibility:

*It’s like a socialist um, collective garden where you cannot grow things just for yourself. But at the same breath we’re told, well we know that if you’re working a patch, no one else will touch it.* (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)

This kind of understanding between gardeners about the autonomy they enjoy in certain areas of the garden emerged in all three gardens. Beth at Stanley Road Community Garden said for example:

*I wouldn’t want to touch something that is someone else’s. Even if it looks like they’ve left it forever. My garden, I was growing flax… linseed and it looked probably like it was a weed. [...] But it wasn’t so I’m glad that someone didn’t fix it. If you know what I mean. So I wouldn’t want to fix someone else’s plot when it’s not needing to be fixed.* (Beth, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Beth illustrates how the plots are an important spatial device for managing personal lives while being involved in a shared project with people who have other routines. The quote also illuminates how the plots rely on mutual understanding and sympathy between gardeners who are trying to manage busy lives. Stephanie says she does not mind when fellow gardeners spend little time in the garden:

*No, I guess if we were all in the same plot then yeah, but because we’ve got little sections, it doesn’t worry me.* (Stephanie, Stanley Road Community Garden)

At all three gardens gardening on plots and the associated separation of responsibilities allow people to avoid gardening with others. This is particularly evident at Stanley Road Community Garden, where the plots create a situation in which the gardeners only know the person who allocates the plots and none of the other members. The ‘dispersed community’, as
one of the gardeners calls it, makes many express feelings of guilt and disappointment. Gardeners join the project seeking community connections but end up not finding the time to make those:

> I don’t know anyone else from the community garden, because I haven’t been able to go to any of the working bees because I have been working, so my garden died and I was like aaarggh. [...] I realized it’s also my fault for not having been to the working bees. (Alice, Stanley Road Community Garden)

People value the possibility to work out their own routine and garden at times that are convenient for them. The system of plots allows people to come and go as they please because there is no need to negotiate with others. This means however that there is no incentive to attend working bees, resulting in the working bees becoming non-existent.

On the one hand the plot is an autonomous space that allows people to follow personal routines, but at the same time the plot is a spatial device that is constitutive of community. People feel that they acquire membership and belonging when moving onto their plot. Claire says that there are no barriers to becoming a member of Stanley Road Community Garden group:

> There is no barriers. You just have to ask, and most people who have asked have come in and been able to take over a little plot, or build their own little plots and build up their own dirt and put their own seeds in. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)

The practice of building a plot is here singled out as a practice that creates membership and belonging to the group.

At Highfield Community Garden, having a plot is also an important part of being a member. However, for 40 dollars a year it is also possible to be a general member without a plot.
Payment for membership without the spatial claim on a plot does not seem to produce the same sense of group belonging. At the 2014 end of year meeting the secretary asks members to think about ways to encourage general members to be more involved, as some mentioned to her that they struggled to see their place and purpose in the community project. Zoe, who just started occupying a plot after two years of general membership explains that she started to feel a greater sense of belonging after she occupied a plot:

*I must say now that I’ve got my own plot I feel more comfortable coming here. I sort of wondered if I should be here or not as much as a general member. Which no one suggested that I shouldn’t be, but I feel more, and I’m coming more often now, so I feel more comfortable, you know, more part of the place.* (Zoe, Highfield Community Garden)

Zoe’s statement illustrates the iterative relationships between practice, property and belonging. Being in the garden and having a spatial claim in the garden generates a sense of belonging which in turn encourages Zoe to be present in the garden more often.

Plots and individual responsibilities appear necessary because they give gardeners a sense of belonging as well as autonomy. Consequently, managing one’s own life and being part of the community becomes a delicate search for balance that is played out on the plot. Gardeners are aware that the autonomy that comes with plot ownership might facilitate withdrawal and that this could be detrimental to community cohesion. At Highfield Community Garden, people have to garden during communal hours for an undefined period to prove that they have a ‘genuine interest’ in the community, or as Sophie puts this, they have to have:

*shown that you are kind of in it actually for also the community bit not just your own gain.* (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)
Community gardeners enact a spatial division of plots that helps them constitute a sense of autonomy as well as group belonging. Although this might seem contradictory, Davies’ (2012) feminist critique on property theory helps us see how the idea of ownership as vested in a bounded self is illusionary at best. Autonomy, she demonstrates, can only be reached in relation to others. In setting up plots of autonomy, gardeners find a way to be alongside as well as with others. This way gardeners balance community yearning with their personal lifestyles. The practice of plotting, while separating the garden space into isolated parcels, also contributes to a sense of common ownership as it enables people to be involved and creates a sense of togetherness. Property practices such as plotting, and resulting understandings of community, also translate into ways people see the entirety of their community garden as a space of entitlement that needs to be clearly demarcated and monitored. I will illustrate this in the next section where I discuss fencing.

6.4.3 Fencing: protecting and connecting the garden

Where gardening on plots helps people manage and understand their own investments and daily routines in relation to, and as part of, the community project, fencing illustrates how people make sense of the group in relation to outsiders. The three gardens already had fences around the site when fieldwork commenced. In singling out fencing as a practice, I refer not only to the actual construction of those fences but more so to how people talk about the fence and legitimatise, enjoy or resent that fence. Fence talk sheds light on levels of comfort and unease with exclusivity, and illustrates how people make sense of ‘community’ in terms of both accessibility and enclosure.

When asked about their opinions or feelings regarding the fence, most gardeners mention that no fence would be better but that unfortunately in the present situation the fence is necessary to keep unwanted others, such as drunks and vandals, out. Some gardeners also see the fence
as a construction that legitimatises the project. At Stanley Road Community Garden, the
garden that was started without Council support, but Council did provide a new fence. Beth
says about the fence that:

* I feel like the Council has given me permission to be here. For the time being. (Beth,
Stanley Road Community Garden)*

When asked about the fence and connections between the garden and the neighbourhood,
gardeners at all three projects tell stories about passers-by stopping, looking at the greenery
and asking about the project through the fence. Gardeners interpret this as endorsements and
as neighbours’ intentions to get involved later on. Henry says:

* I think it’s great for passers-by. They don’t want to necessarily get in here in the first
instance. Unless they’re regulars. And then they think oh I want to be part of it. (Henry,
Stanley Road Community Garden)*

This illustrates that although the fence keeps people out it is also understood as a connection
between the community and outsiders.

At Park Street Community Garden the fence has a similar double role. There, the fence is
used as a mechanism to respond to conflict in the group. When certain members cause
friction, the most active members change the access code to exclude them. The code on the
padlock is also changed when the group’s cohesion is floundering. When gardeners who
attend the communal hours perceive that others choose to garden too much outside of those
hours, the code is changed because people then have to visit the garden during general hours
again when other community garden members are also there. It coerces people back into a
community gardening rhythm.
At all three projects gardeners express moral objections to fences, especially in the context of projects that aim to be for the community. Talking about the fence, Hellen at Stanley Road Community Garden says:

*I feel that when I’m in here or just like when I walk past, people look in, but it’s not a look-in as though… It’s kind of like an us and a them or ‘oh she is allowed in that garden space’ or ‘what is that garden space?’ Or there doesn’t seem to be like, it doesn’t seem to achieve what it’s set out to in that it’s a community garden. It feels like it’s an exclusive club of gardeners rather than something for everyone.* (Hellen, Stanley Road Community Garden)

For outsiders access to Park Street Community Garden is limited to communal gardening hours and gardeners feel that their efforts and the entitlement that those efforts bring, should weigh heavier than the project’s aim of establishing community connections. Charles says:

*I don’t think community gardens should be open to anyone to just stroll through at any time anyway, because it’s not a public garden, it’s a community garden, there is a reward for effort that goes on, that should go on here. And I don’t think that there should be an unlimited entitlement to people who are not involved in that to wander through it. But I don’t know whether that has an effect on how many people don’t wander through.* (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

Here, Charles describes that the effort that gardeners invest in the garden legitimatises their exclusive access to the space, even when that exclusivity might prevent new people from starting to invest similar efforts and thus ‘earn’ their access to the space. At Stanley Road Community Garden Henry says something similar when we talk about whether the space functions as a leisure space:
I wouldn’t want it too comfortable in here for seating as people might come in here and sit down on a seat after the pubs closed. To come in with a bottle of beer and sit and drink it. I wouldn’t like it develop into something like that. So. We don’t need fancy seats. [...] Well relaxing a bit for the gardeners I guess if they want to sit down and have a coke, or bring a coffee in here or something during the day you know. (Henry, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Like Charles, Henry voices a perceived difference between a group of hard-working gardeners, entitled to the garden space on the grounds of the labour they invest and a group of non-deserving others who should be kept out.

Fencing practices such as gardeners talking about the fence, engaging with people through the fence and changing the codes on locks, illustrates the uneasy and contradictory functioning of fences in these community gardens. A fence is here an ‘in-between device’ (Blomley, 2016: 241) which keeps people out, and this seems warranted to some of the gardeners, but at the same time connections between gardeners and passers-by are made through the fence. More than boundaries alone, the fences around these gardens function as edges of connection, simultaneously setting the garden apart and connecting it to the neighbourhood. Fences facilitate the existence of the community projects and generate a sense of legitimacy. The labour that gardeners invest into the garden space creates a common interest to protect that space, even where protective fencing might form a potential barrier to new gardeners who seek to invest their effort.
6.5 Discussion and conclusions

As discussed in chapter 2, much community garden research either advocates for these projects on the grounds of their inclusionary social effect (Beilin and Hunter, 2011; Firth et al., 2011; Glover et al., 2005; Holland, 2004) or highlight how they facilitate roll-back neoliberalism (e.g. Rosol, 2012). Scholarly work puts forward interpretations of community gardens as inclusive spaces or community commons by virtue of their position in an institutional landscape (e.g. Schmelzkopf, 2002; Eizenberg, 2012a). These studies emphasise relations of community gardens to external property regimes. Drawing from property theory that engages with practice (Blomley, 2013) and building on work that has emphasised the relationship between gardening practices and property (Blomley, 2004; Lang, 2014), the empirical exploration of three gardening practices creates insight into how property relations are produced in relational and contradictory ways by the gardeners.

A focus on practised connections between private and community garden spaces illustrates how community gardens are the product of practices that create contradicting and relational property constructs. Rather than isolated pockets of alternative values and practices, community gardens are constituted by people who are simultaneously engaged in various property spaces and relationships. Gardeners move back and forth between those spaces as they garden in community gardens. These relationships and associated practices translate into gardening practices, such as plotting and fencing through which the community space is connected to the larger landscape of property relationships. Interactions with the garden space, transplanting plants between home and community gardens and arranging plants onto plots, help fit the communal garden into autonomous personal lifestyles, and work towards the creation of a community that comprises different practices of property.
Because property practices are multiple and relational, community gardens are not inherently inclusive or exclusive. This chapter shows that property creates legitimacy and group belonging, but also shows the potential exclusionary effects of property practices in community gardens. Garden membership can be limited to people who can afford rent or have time available to invest in demonstrating their community-mindedness. Overlapping practices between private and communal garden spaces also challenge the membership of people who live at a greater distance from the garden. Exclusive access to an individual plot makes it easier for community gardeners to fit gardening in with other personal lifestyle choices but also reproduces a tragedy of the commons discourse that favours a reading of communal ownership as inefficient or wasteful. Belonging is premised on an individual’s connection to a plot of land, and communal understandings and practices of property, although present and necessary in these spaces, are discursively less successful as a consequence of the performative power of property.

Even where gardeners aim to create an inclusive community space, property practices unwittingly create both connections and barriers. For example, these gardeners find it important to have community connections and try to build relationships with other neighbourhood stakeholders and organisations, but at the same time many endorse fences as inevitable boundaries between themselves and the neighbourhood community with which they try to connect. On the one hand, property can work to create an inclusive and cohesive group, but on the other hand these practices also create defensive and exclusionary attitudes towards outsiders.

The gardening practices I presented here problematise readings of community gardens as either inherently inclusive or as perpetuating neoliberal hegemony. The focus on practices in community gardens shows that these projects comprise community-mindedness as well as
practices driven by self-interest. Rather than framing property in community gardens as either exclusively private or as community commons, the work presented here encourages future critical inquiry into the various contradictory relationships that are produced through property practices and how those might be motivated by individual and community interests in simultaneous and complex ways.

In the next two chapters I further discuss the boundaries and relationships people create between themselves and the larger garden community they seek to be part of. I move from the insights about property relationships and practices presented above towards people’s feelings of ownership and attachment. In chapter 7 I discuss community gardeners’ relationships to particular plants and how these relationships generate attachments that in turn shape community relationships. Chapter 8 delves into how ideas and practices of community building shape water use practices. In line with the approach developed in the chapters above, these chapters are sensitive to how relationships between community gardens and external spaces and routines such as personal lives, domestic gardens, and Council interventions, shape community practices. As I have started to demonstrate in this chapter, these relationships do not shape practices that are strictly geared either towards personal or communitarian interests. Rather, we will see the complex ways in which community gardeners navigate the personal and the communal and how they enact personal entitlements and community mindedness over very practical and materials matters such as the swapping of food and watering of the garden.
Chapter 7: Relating to plants, food and community

7.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to the aim of this thesis to understand how community gardens are relationally produced in conjuncture with non-humans such as plants. It pursues this aim by answering the question how in trying to fit food production into their everyday lives, people develop relationships to particular plants and how these relationships in turn shape relations between people in a community group. The chapter will show that to fit community gardening into busy lives, people strategically choose plants with biophysical qualities that suit personal as well as communal circumstances and objectives. The chapter shows how community is relationally constituted through the practices of growing and sharing food. Tensions might arise through the practices of growing food on communal and private plots and the taking and giving of food, but it can also encourage people to reflect on community food production and on their roles as individuals in a community group. In focusing on these food related practices, this chapter builds on the insights presented in the previous chapter, which showed that property practices work to produce both a sense of entitlement and a sense of community belonging and connection.

The chapter also builds on food scholarship. Scholars suggest that middle class gardeners such as those studied in this thesis are more likely to produce food in community gardens out of a desire to ‘reconnect to nature’, to ‘learn where food comes from’ (McClintock, 2010; Turner, 2011) and out of consumer anxieties over pesticide use and preference for local food (Evers and Hodgson, 2011; Turner, 2011). The distinct objectives of middle class community gardeners are also likely to result in different framings of collectivism and individualism
(Jamison, 1985). In poor communities gardens are promoted as examples of self-help and community resilience, whereas affluent gardeners are likely to seek a sense of independence or self-reliance (Turner, 2011; Larder et al., 2014).

Despite the emerging insight that community gardens comprise of intersecting individual and collective goals, community gardens and other urban food production initiatives continue to be celebrated for their collectivist character and transgressive potential (Tornaghi, 2015). Similarly, scholars highlight the potential of community gardens as spaces in which food is decommodified (McClintock, 2010; Barthel et al., 2015) even as it becomes increasingly apparent that many community gardeners are not gardening for subsistence or large yields. Tendencies in the literature to emphasise the transgressive potential of community gardens illustrate a research field that is informed by garden projects in which community food production is an economic and community benefit of some urgency. This is not a fitting starting point to study the food production practices of community gardeners who increasingly garden for recreational purposes. A lack of empirical work on the community gardens of middle class urbanites means that little is known about the ways in which collectivist and individual objectives regarding food production intersect in these gardens, or how gardeners’ desires to reconnect to nature and food are enacted in a landscape that is shaped both by community objectives and individual interests.

The chapter starts with a discussion of literatures on urban agriculture and alternative food networks (AFNs). Second, I provide a brief reiteration of the interview questions and the particulars of the case study sites in terms of food cultivation. Third, I present the results in the form of three themes: valuing community gardens, growing food in community gardens, and relationships to plants and food. In these themes I highlight how people balance
differences between objectives in the group and how relationships such as those with different plants help gardeners reconcile and balance those differences.

7.2 Producing food in urban community gardens

Literature on Urban Agriculture and Alternative Food Networks has paid attention to the motivations of privileged income groups to engage with different sources of food. This literature offers a framework for thinking about the ways in which community gardeners choose to engage with food in these spaces. This is important because home and community gardeners in Australia are motivated by desires for ‘natural’ food and they are committed to sustainable food sources expressed in terms of localism and food miles (Evers and Hodgson, 2011; Turner, 2011; Larder et al., 2014); all of which are critiqued in the alternative food literature as obscuring inequalities and deepening class privilege (Alkon, 2013; Maye and Kiwan, 2010).

Researchers aim to unpack the discourses and practices through which local organic food is being pitched as ‘natural’ and ‘good’ against industrial food which is framed as unnatural and immoral (Guthman, 2004; Alkon, 2013). Scholars recognise that these constructs increasingly steer the consumption choices of elite income groups and that these understandings and consumption practices potentially deepen inequalities (Guthman, 2008; Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Maye and Kiwan, 2010; Goodman, 2015). Similarly, urban gardens are too often celebrated for their ‘naturalness’ without acknowledgement of the socio-natural interactions that constitute them (Lawson, 2005; Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Classens, 2014). To sidestep uncritical constructions of ‘naturalness’, scholars increasingly adopt relational approaches to food and foodscapes and aim for deeper understandings of the social
and natural processes that shape understandings and relations to food and gardens (Alkon, 2013; Goodman, 2015).

Relational approaches to food highlight that food is produced through biological as well as socio-economic processes, and that together these processes shape inequalities and power dynamics in foodscapes (see Goodman, 2015). Both scholars and food activists recognise the co-production of food in that growing food requires ecological systems comprising non-human species, soil and water, but also human labour and value systems that put those systems to work to sustain human bodies (Alkon, 2013). Although this recognition is an important starting point for imagining food systems that are environmentally and socially sound, current discourses around co-production are partial and shaped by privilege (Guthman, 2004; Alkon, 2013). For example, even though it is clear that urban gardens are shaped by social and aesthetic norms in ways that reproduce class relationships and limit people’s access to spaces for food production (Domene and Sauri, 2007; Naylor, 2012; Aptekar, 2015), urban gardens continue to be praised for their naturalness and the re-connection to nature they supposedly facilitate.

The idea of ‘re-connection’ is problematic because it implies that nature and society are separate (Classens, 2014; Cooke et al., 2016). Scholars in community garden research are working past this paradox with a focus on people’s embodied experiences and practices in gardens (Turner, 2011; Cameron et al., 2011). They suggest that community gardens have the potential to facilitate an embodied reconnection to food that encourages a reconsideration of food systems and open the way to more sustainable ways of urban living (Turner, 2011; Tornaghi, 2015). The focus on the bodies and practices of community gardeners has thus far been employed to explore sensory experiences of soil and water (Turner, 2011). It has not focused on relationships to plants. This is surprising because plants are a great focus and
source of pleasure for gardeners (Hitchings, 2003), and they are what ultimately becomes food in community gardens. People-plant relationships also provide an interesting lens to study urban community gardens because as Classens (2014: 236) asserts ‘the biophysical growing capacities of plants’ as well as ‘broader political ecological and political economic processes’ structure human and non-human relationships in particular ways and these might all contribute to the benefits and challenges of urban gardens.

This chapter expands the burgeoning literature on socio-natures in food production spaces by focusing on community gardeners’ relationships to the plants they cultivate. Geographical literature on domestic gardening (Hitchings, 2003; Power, 2005), weed management (Head et al., 2014) and agricultural cultivation (Brice, 2014) focusing on people-plant relationships, has revealed the socio-natural constellations that emerge through collaborative processes of both human and non-human agency. This body of work shows that the perceptions and practices of gardeners are complex, and that they include various non-human collaborators and antagonists such as weather conditions, insects, soil, snails and so forth (also see Ginn, 2014). Scholars particularly draw attention to the ways in which people and plants enrol each other into seasonal and daily temporalities and routines (Head et al., 2012; Brice, 2014). Gardeners choose plants based on their physiological growing characteristics such as their aesthetic qualities or the promise of low maintenance (Hitchings, 2003; 2007).

Relationships between people and plants are under-studied in the context of community gardens and this impedes a full understanding of how food is valued and shared in these gardens. For example, the community garden literature suggests that people gain a sense of accomplishment or independence from growing certain plants and foods (Turner, 2011), and inquiries into people-plant relationships teach us that mutual cultivation fosters attachments between people and plants (Power, 2005; Freeman et al., 2012). Yet, we know little about
how these relationships work out in a recreational community setting that consists of collective and individual objectives. For a fuller and more critical understanding of community gardens as spaces in which people aim to connect to nature and engage with food, a study of relationships to plants is a useful starting point. This is why in the remainder of this chapter I unravel how people incorporate community gardens and plants into their daily lives, how people relate to plants and food, and how these relationships affect community interactions.

7.3 Researching relationships to plants and food

The three community gardening groups that inform this thesis manage and value food production differently. Three different outlooks on community gardening translate into different management models, which results in land and responsibilities being distributed in distinct ways. Consequently, the production of food is managed differently across the three projects.

At Stanley Road Community Garden, the gardeners mention local food production as an important reason to garden, but the quantity and the kinds of food that are produced vary. The most common crops are the kinds of plants that self-seed and that abundantly spread themselves around the garden, such as mint and parsley (figure 7.1).

At Park Street Community Garden, some gardeners are enthusiastic food growers and others focus on managing the quality of the soil, recycling and composting. The garden has a shared vegetable patch and a forest area with fruit trees. The amount of food grown at this garden is however limited in quantity and variety, particularly because some gardeners frown upon the practices of some other gardeners who aim to produce large yields (figure 7.2 and 7.3).
Figure 7.1: Mint and Parsley growing in a plot in Stanley Road Community Garden (April 2014)

Figure 7.2: Park Street Community Garden grows a variety of edible and non-edible plants (May 2014)

Figure 7.3: Chillies on the vegetable patch at Park Street Community Garden (May 2014)

Figure 7.4: Gardener at Highfield ploughing the soil between lettuces and tomatoes (December 2014)
The forty dollar membership fee which gardeners pay at Highfield Community Garden grants them access to fruit trees and crops such as lemongrass that are grown communally. Other food is grown on the individual plots for which gardeners pay additional rent. Outputs at this garden are more substantial, with vegetables and fruit such as zucchinis, pumpkins, tomatoes and chillies growing in many plots (figure 7.4). Data generated through observation at working bees, and especially in interviews, were the most important resource for this chapter. The walking interviews allowed room to reflect on the incorporation of food production into everyday routines. The majority of the interview data presented here was prompted by questions about the motivations, challenges and satisfaction people experience from growing food.

I now focus on the three themes that emerged in gardeners’ reflections on the community garden as spaces for food production: valuing community gardens, growing food in community gardens, and relationships to plants and food. I use these themes to reflect on how gardening practices create attachments between people and plants and how these attachments shape community relationships and practices.

7.4. Results and discussion

7.4.1 Valuing community gardens

Motivations of gardeners in this study reflected those suggested in the literature (McClintock, 2010; Turner, 2011). Out of twenty-five interviewees, ten mentioned community as a motivation to be involved, fifteen mentioned food production and eleven alluded to the value of their community garden as a green or natural space as a motivation to be involved. These
three key motivations were expressed evenly across the three case studies, however, within those broad motivations individual gardeners’ points of view differed.

Gardeners have different reasons for wanting to produce food and understand nature differently. For example, gardeners who value a community garden as natural or green space, described their garden project as a haven or sanctuary:

*We always like nature you know growing a bit of vegies, stuff like that. So this is a really good spot. Only five minutes’ walk and then you can find this piece of paradise.*

(Matt, Park Street)

And at Stanley Road, Henry calls the garden ‘breathing space for a city village’. These perspectives reflect the suggestion in the urban garden literature that gardens offer retreat from urban stressors (Bhatti and Church, 2004) and that people seek to reconnect to nature in urban gardens (McClintock, 2010). It also illustrates the paradox that in seeking reconnection people emphasise a fictitious separation of natural and social spheres (Classens, 2014; Cooke et al., 2016).

When discussing growing food, gardeners acknowledge the social and natural processes that shape the garden. A garden is then valued as a natural space, but also a space of productivity and cultivation. At Highfield, Lucas who joined a year after the garden was planted says:

*From what was here before, which was like an overgrown empty space from what I understand, I think it’s a much more attractive thing to have in the neighbourhood than an overgrown empty space. And you know if people, [...] come and do your gardening and ah grow stuff then it has a... then that is a value in itself.* (Lucas, Highfield)

And talking about food waste, Nicole acknowledges the co-production of food saying:
Someone’s growing that. I think more about the time the farmers or just the people have put into it more than whatever nature has contributed, but that’s a factor as well. (Nicole, Highfield)

Gardeners’ motivations to grow food or reconnect to food sources relate to ideas about food as nature. Interviewees mobilise alternative food discourses around ‘natural food’ as opposed to industrial food to explain their efforts and motivations. At Park Street, where crops are grown communally and gardeners abide by unwritten rules against planting in rows, Thomas explains:

There’s some biomimicry in that garden. And like that’s a good thing. The idea being that you sort of replicate, that occur in, sort of in nature. Like sort of seeds, direct sowing of seeds and not cultivating the soil and sowing neat rows and maximising space which is so prevalent in industrial agriculture. (Thomas, Park Street)

In line with their concerns for the environment, gardeners at this garden approach the project as an ecosystem in which food production is a small part of a cycle. This perspective aligns with the communal model of the garden. In the other two gardens, gardeners focus on attaining natural food based on goals that can largely be accomplished on individual plots, such as the local production and cleanliness of food. At Stanley Road Alice explains why she got involved in the project:

My hope is to be around people that also like, believe in more local food, grow your own food and using unused spaces. I just feel like it is so important because, I don’t know, [it] just is. It is space and we’re so disconnected from our food. So the more we’re planting and caring for the earth I think the better in general. (Alice, Stanley Road)
This quote illustrates how a community gardener in this study connects ideas about local food to personal connections to food and to concerns about the local and global environment. The preference for local food is also based in a desire for the security of knowing that food is organic and that, as Sarah says at Highfield, it ‘hasn’t been in cold storage for a year’.

Local food and connections to food sources are also valued because this food is deemed fresher, cleaner and thus healthier. There is unanimous agreement across the three case studies, whether this is formally written down in the garden rules as at Highfield or enforced in situ as at Park Street, that pesticides are not to be used in the gardens. This aligns with the health and environmental concerns of gardeners with food that has been chemically treated:

*I like the idea of food that hasn’t got chemicals on it; that’s fresh. Cause it’s harder and harder to get. I guess. And it’s expensive too. I guess you know that’s the other thing, I mean obviously this isn’t impacting at the moment on saving money or anything but I guess if you were really involved you could then save a little bit of money as well.*

*(Zoe, Highfield)*

This quote also indicates that when these gardeners are motivated by an economic incentive, this is grounded not in necessity, but in a sense of unfairness towards (organic) food prices. These insights from the research indicate that the finding that Australians no longer garden at home for subsistence but to satisfy a middle class desire for clean and fresh fruit (Gaynor, 2006), also rings true in community gardens.

A small number of gardeners indicate that their motivations to grow food are intended as an act of resistance or protest against conventional food distribution and pricing regimes, particularly supermarkets. Their motivation is to articulate some independence from those regimes by growing small quantities of food themselves. At Highfield, Sarah for example says:
They [supermarkets Coles and Woolworths] keep taking things from their stock only to leave their own brands on sale and I thought that is just not right. (Sarah, Highfield)

As a response she has not bought anything from Australia’s two largest supermarkets for the last 18 months and is determined to buy and grow food locally as much as she can.

Gardeners also express concern for the distance over which food is transported, the way food is packaged and the high prices that supermarkets charge for some products. At Park Street Charles explains why he gardens at the community garden:

I like the time and space down here but it’s an economic and a political decision not a relaxation one or an enjoyment one. First and foremost it’s about growing food and learning to grow more food. Yeah it’s about not paying for food. I hate paying for tomatoes at sometimes seven dollars a kilo and rocket is twenty bucks a kilo when it can grow here. And those skills of being able to grow your own food I think are important. As well as actually doing some of it. I’m not organised or have enough time to do much here. But what I do I think still counts for something. The effort I put into it is worth it, not just in terms of enjoyment or participation in a community project, it’s worth it in terms of the food I take home. (Charles, Park Street)

The desire of community gardeners to feel connected to food sources and to enact resistance to dominant stakeholders in conventional food systems stands in stark contrast with how the gardeners actually use the space. As illustrated by Charles’ quote above, however motivated gardeners are to grow food, they also have other demands on their time. This forces gardeners to be strategic about how they fit the community project into their everyday rhythm. This is the topic to which I turn in the next section.
Many gardeners in the study are involved in community gardening because they want to grow food. For some of them, growing food is a political act and an expression of discontent with current food supply and market logics, for some it constitutes an enjoyable way to spend time and an opportunity to connect to people in the neighbourhood. However, gardeners have limited time and space. Even though gardeners throughout the study hint at a rhetorical possibility of saving money if they had more time, interviewees acknowledge that this would require more time than they are willing or able to invest. Daisy chuckles when she says:

*I always laugh when people talk about growing food as a way of saving money on vegetables, because that is just... it costs more to grow food than to buy food. You know because it’s just much more labour intensive to grow organic vegetables than, you can buy tomatoes for three dollars a kilo in summer. And grow, I couldn’t grow them for three dollars a kilo. But for me it’s not about saving money, it’s about the quality of the produce and also the leisure experience of growing food for me is just a really pleasurable part of my life. So. It’s not an economic thing at all. (Daisy, Highfield)*

To Daisy, community gardening is a hobby, which costs rather than saves money. When gardeners realise that they have less time than is necessary to attain large goals, they adjust their gardening practices to fit gardening into their everyday routines. Claire for instance indicates that she does not have enough time to produce a large quantity of food and that this is why she focuses on plants that do well in the Sydney climate:

*I think you have to be quite involved to get huge yields and I don’t know enough about gardening to do that. So I put kind of different things in and lots of things don’t survive. So the things that survive I tend to work on because I figure they must be hardy and work in this environment. (Claire, Stanley Road)*
Because gardeners are constrained by resources such as time and skills, they choose what to grow based on those limitations and their personal reasons for being involved in the garden. People grow things that can survive without frequent watering. The result is that gardeners give free reign to plants such as parsley and mint because those grow in abundance with little maintenance. Steve connects the communal organisation of the Park Street garden to the kind of work it requires and the quantity of food that is produced:

*there’s not a structured, systematic vegie garden where things really need to be tended for [...]. If you had a garden like that you would need to be quite organised and structured in terms of who’s doing what [...]. I mean when you just have parsley lying rampant, it doesn’t really matter does it?* (Steve, Park Street)

Steve appreciates the unstructured, ad hoc organisation of this garden, but he also laments that it produces more herbs than food. The growing qualities of herbs however lend themselves to gardeners with irregular timetables. They self-sow which makes the garden sustain itself regardless of how much time gardeners have. Because self-sowing plants such as herbs require little watering, pruning and other intensive gardening practices, they allow gardeners to come into the garden as often as is convenient to them. The biophysical growing capacities of these plants allow gardeners to remain involved in food production in the community project in a way that suits personal circumstances. The way gardeners manage their involvement in the garden confirms Hitchings’ (2003) and Power’s (2005) observation that gardeners and plants shape each other’s involvement and performances and that plants use their qualities, such as aesthetics and promises of low-maintenance, to remain part of the garden performance. These scholars also point out that different qualities and aesthetic sensibilities of plants shape different attachments of people to their plants. Gardeners value self-sowing plants and plants that require sowing and watering differently. Stephanie explains
this difference when she talks about a special relationship she has with the cabbage plant in her plot. She took the plant home when it needed nurturing after a hot, dry period in the garden and she sees this plant as different from the plants that self-sow. When a plant self-sows this communicates to Stephanie that:

*the plant doesn’t need too much care. So if I plant it in my plot I’m not going to need to care for it too much, because it self-sows. But as for the cabbage over there, haha, poor thing is not going to self-sow and spring up everywhere. It’s gonna keep growing on the one stock.* (Stephanie, Stanley Road)

Besides a general preference for low maintenance, gardeners also choose plants that offer them a sense of excitement, wonderment or accomplishment such as Stephanie’s cabbage. Plants can be special to gardeners for various reasons, for example because they are expensive in shops and therefore seen as a treat, or because they are challenging or interesting to grow. Ivy who gardens with her children at Highfield explains this saying:

*What I try to do in the garden is I try to grow things that are more expensive to buy in the supermarkets. So I wouldn’t grow potatoes for example because they are so cheap. I probably wouldn’t grow carrots because they are really cheap too, except that [my son] really loves growing carrots so I just do that for him because he really likes it. But things like the herbs are more expensive, and strawberries you know, sort of special things that are like more of a treat.* (Ivy, Highfield)

Although saving money is not a motivation for Ivy to be involved in the community garden, she chooses crops based on supermarket prices and their associated desirability as a treat, which generate pleasure in growing them. Her statement also shows that gardeners choose to plant crops that they enjoy because it excites their children or because they have never grown that particular crop before. When people decide to cultivate a particular crop and nurture
particular plants, such as Ivy and her son do with the carrots and Stephanie does with her cabbage, this creates a distinct relationship to those plants.

Relationships to plants that emerge as gardeners take care of them and learn how they grow arguably are the very reconnections to food that gardeners seek to experience in these kinds of community gardening projects. Experiences of learning and reconnection are illustrated by gardeners at Park Street who talk excitedly about greens such as dandelion leaves that they learned to eat at the garden and that they would not have considered eating before, and by gardeners who speak enthusiastically about the growing processes of plants formerly unknown to them. For example, Stephanie has started planting her leftover potatoes and shares her amazement with how they reproduce:

> Have you seen what a potato looks like? When they're growing? Underground? Have you seen what they look like? Round potato. They have the baby potatoes growing. They look so cute. *(Stephanie, Stanley Road)*

And at Highfield Nicole enjoys seeing and showing her children how vegetables grow:

> I for example didn’t know that Brussel sprouts grew on, did you, have you seen that? [...] when I first started coming to the garden I was, I had regular moments like that. Like oh my god, look at those, and what is that and what is that? So like artichoke plants, just huge and amazing, and Brussel sprouts, who knew they grew like that? All around the outside. Incredible. *(Nicole, Highfield)*

This sense of excitement goes back to people’s desire to know where food comes from and this desire is satisfied regardless of the size of yields.

In line with the objective to learn about food, gardeners at Highfield continuously try to grow new crops each time they re-plant their plot. This while the communal areas of this garden
accommodate plants such as citrus trees and lemon grass that take longer to bear fruit. This way different areas of these gardens accommodate plants that meet gardeners’ different objectives. These places and functions of plants also shape different relationships. Because self-sowing plants do not require great efforts, gardeners are less likely to attach to these plants and because they also defy plot boundaries, they are more easily taken and freely shared. I now turn to the gardeners’ relationship to plants and how these intersect with community dynamics.

7.4.3 Relating to plants and food

Although gardeners say they value the community aspect of the garden project either as a key motivation or as an additional benefit, gardeners also value the personal sense of satisfaction and accomplishment related to growing their own food:

_There’s the satisfaction of knowing that you grew it yourself; [...] Even though, I mean quite frankly, you put something in the ground and three months later something is there and you might not have contributed too much skill. But it’s the fact that it’s your garden, you grew it, you ate it, you prepared it, [...] with your own hands, you planted it with your own hands, you watered it, you watched it grow. It’s really satisfying._

(Dylan, Highfield)

The sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction that Dylan expresses is directly related to practices of growing food autonomously. For Dylan, it is important that the plants grow in his garden and to know that he grew the plant himself without help or interference from others. Gardening, although practised in a community setting, is in this sense very much appreciated as working towards personal goals.
In the gardens with plots but also in the communal garden, people prefer not to interfere in other people’s projects:

*I try not to take from someone else’s plot cause I don’t even know very many of the people here. So I’ll take whatever has come out or if they have a lot I’ll take a little bit and I’ll come and I’ll water to try and pay back.* (Stephanie, Stanley Road)

Gardeners recognise other gardeners’ personal investments of effort and money into plots and this shapes how gardeners share garden space and plants. Hellen for example says:

*It’s not quite sharing. Hahaha. Sharing the space but not plants. Because everyone is paying for their own things too. So it makes sense.* (Hellen, Stanley Road)

Plots and individual investments offer gardeners a sense of autonomy and this allows gardeners to engage in personal gardening projects and experiment with growing different plants. Through these practices gardeners strengthen personal relationships to plants, and this generates excitement but it also carries potential for conflict. A good example of this is Lucas’ excitement about his pumpkins which he is growing for the first time. When I ask him whether he has been sharing food, he answers:

*Well not deliberately. Someone stole my pumpkins over Christmas. Which I was pretty upset about, because they weren’t even ripe. Maybe it was a misunderstanding or whatever, but yeah that upset me a bit. But and I, yeah got on Facebook and sort of said look please, whoever has been borrowing my pumpkins could you please not, because I’ve never grown pumpkins before and you know. I am very happy to share. Take as much chilli as you want or spinach or anything like that, but just because I’ve never grown pumpkins and you take at that stage they were my only two pumpkins.* (Lucas, Highfield)
Although food growing and community engagement are strong motivations for the gardeners in this study, sharing becomes problematic when things are taken that are of special value to a gardener. This illustrates that it is important for sharing to be practised according to certain unwritten rules which might not be known to all because they depend on emergent and changing relationships between gardeners and plants. Plants that self-sow and that grow in abundance are allowed to be taken but other plants have to be given away, because the effort and anticipation that goes into the garden makes the produce the gardener’s to decide to give away. Lucas wrote on one of his pumpkins, ‘don’t take me 😊’. (see figure 7.5).

Lucas likes sharing food, but not his pumpkins because it is the first time he grows them. The first pumpkins are a symbol of his personal accomplishment and the pumpkins being taken rather than given away detracts from his sense of achievement and enthusiasm. This shows

Figure 7.5: One of Lucas’ remaining pumpkins (February 2015)
that social interactions over food are shaped by gardeners’ feelings of achievement, their attachments to plants and the specific circumstances under which food is taken or given away.

Relationships to plants can lead to conflict between gardeners. Stephanie, who values the cabbage plant that she nurtured back to life differently from plants that self-sow and take care of themselves, recollects being upset about someone taking a cabbage from her home garden:

_There was cabbages here that I talked about and I took them out because the snails kept eating them. I took them home. And that was another thing someone stole a whole cabbage. I don’t even eat cabbage. I don’t like cabbage. I just thought it was nice to bring a cabbage back to life. Because it was one of these ones, here, like this one here. It had shrivelled to the point where. The poor thing._ (Stephanie, Stanley Road)

The caring for plants creates a relationship to plants that sits uneasily in the context of a community project in which people freely take things from plots. Gardeners are happy to share, but also become afraid of freeloaders. I observed this tendency at all three garden sites. At Stanley Road a gardener recently ceased to be a member because the disappearance of a plant was too upsetting to him. At Park Street the code to the numeric padlock is changed periodically to stop neighbours accessing the garden. According to Ben this is done out of fear that plants might be stolen. At Highfield Lucas’ writing on the pumpkin expresses the anxiety of losing plants without consent. These practices illustrate a sense of nervousness and mistrust that is easily overlooked when researchers focus on the communitarian aspects of community gardens (Tornaghi, 2015).

Although relationships to plants can lead to group conflict, when food is understood as one gardener’s personal achievement, being given a part of the produce can also create a sense of
community belonging. Zoe expresses this at Highfield. Being included in the sharing of food makes her feel part of the community:

_The other nice thing that has started happening and that I think is probably connected to having your own plot, is that when we were here the other day the working bee people would come over and say ‘oh have some of this’ […]_. And another woman there said ‘pick some of the lemons’ and I guess that’s another really nice social aspect that I do, sharing and, not so much bartering but you know like giving stuff and hopefully one day I’ll be able to give something back. (Zoe, Highfield)

Zoe experiences the offering of food as a gesture of welcome and her quote illustrates that sharing is motivated by a ‘desire for connection’ and that it contributes to feelings of community, belonging and inclusion (Belk, 2010, p. 716).

Similarly, although Lucas is concerned about the disappearance of his pumpkins, he also appreciates communal food production and sharing practices:

_For example, I’m going to pick some kaffir lime leaves before we go, from the kaffir lime leaf tree, and if I had to buy them it would probably cost me three or four dollars to buy a packet of ten lime leaves. I only need three. And there’s a whole tree down there that produces enough leaves to support everybody in the whole plot for nothing, for the cost of the plant when they put it in. So you know that’s communal and very, it just seems smart to me to kind of be able to do that rather than that everybody goes down and buys a little tray wrapped in plastic with four leaves in it where we end up throwing away most of them. (Lucas, Highfield)_

In this segment Lucas applauds sharing in the garden project because through the sharing of communally grown food the community challenges the power of supermarkets to determine
how food is offered for consumption. The moments in the garden with gardeners such as Lucas show that they produce food for various reasons, that they have different relationships to different plants and that these relationships both complicate and enable the communal aspects of these projects.

7.5 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter provides insight into the motivations and practices of gardeners who are involved in community gardens to feel connected to nature, learn how to grow food and be part of their neighbourhood community. The chapter demonstrates how these motivations intersect in gardening practices in ways that provide potential for community building and political resistance. However the research also reveals tensions in community groups around food growing practices as rules change and emerge with the development of community and human-plant relationships.

The chapter shows that although gardeners want to feel connected to nature, learn how to grow food and be part of a community group, gardeners prioritise these motivations differently. Gardeners have different reasons for wanting to grow food and make gardening choices based on these undergirding motivations. Because these community members do not garden out of necessity but out of leisure, they compromise their goals to fit gardening into personal routines. In order to do this, gardeners enrol plants into their gardening that suit personal goals such as enjoyment and resistance to the corporate foodscape.

The chapter revealed that the three gardens’ different management models play a part in shaping relationships to plants and gardeners. At Park Street Community Garden, the absence of plots and the idea that the garden serves a greater environmental good results in an understanding of food production as selfish and detrimental to the community aspects of the
project. At Stanley Road, plots allow people to go to the community garden when it suits them. As a result of limited investments of time, plants such as mint and pumpkin have taken over garden space. Their capacity to spread defies the gardeners’ plot boundaries, which results in the availability of food that people do not feel ownership over and which is widely shared. At Highfield Community Garden the plots make it clear which plants belong to which gardener. When a gardener donates surplus produce this is seen as an inviting community building gesture, but when a plant is mistaken for communal produce gardeners are easily upset.

Part of the distress over plant theft is informed by the limited time gardeners have available. Despite sincere interests in sustainable local food, gardeners have busy lives and struggle to arrange their routines in ways that allow them to be involved in the community garden in ways that substantially contribute to their political ideals. Many gardeners cannot find time to fit food production into their everyday routine, and therefore settle for picking and sharing weedy herbs and treasure the little food they have grown themselves. The gardening practices people do incorporate into their lives generate different relationships with plants. People choose plants based on characteristics such as hardiness and self-propagation, and in this the plants demonstrate some agency in their ability to be part of the project and in shaping how gardeners interact with each other and the garden space.

When gardeners enrol low maintenance plants into their gardening, these are regarded as communal, but when gardeners choose challenging plants that require closer attention, this can lead to attachments that make a gardener personally feel ownership over the plant. Encouraged by distinctive qualities of plants, this sense of possession then informs swapping and gifting practices that create a sense of community belonging, but it can also translate into defensive or property affirming practices. Scholars working on domestic gardens have
previously observed the agency of plants to be enrolled in gardens in particular ways, and their capability to inform gardening practices (Hitchings, 2003; Power, 2005). This chapter expands those observations and shows that plants also have some agency to shape what is regarded as communal and what as personal possessions. Plants affect community practices such as gifting, swapping and protecting food and play a role in shaping a sense of community. The chapter also expands our understanding of community gardens as spaces where people grow things for themselves and for the group, and reveals the tensions that might arise when these two different enterprises intersect and are not signposted clearly enough.

In focusing on community gardeners’ relationships to food and plants, this chapter contributes insight into the desires of gardeners to know where food comes from or to feel connected to nature and food sources. Community gardens allow people to become aware of the efforts required for food production and of the biophysical characteristics of food crops. The gardens also provide an outlet for food waste and room for people to deny supermarkets the power to singlehandedly determine the offer and prices of food. Focusing on gardeners’ relationships to plants and food also demonstrates that the balance between personal and communal interests in the projects can be fragile. Assumptions about the benefits of community gardens based on their understanding as communal (Tornaghi, 2015) or natural spaces (Classens, 2014) overlook the personal stakes of individual gardeners and distinct relationships to plants that meet gardeners’ different objectives. The deeper understanding of community gardens as spaces constituted of various socio-natural relationships opens up possibilities for recognising the conflicts and challenges involved in aligning personal and communal objectives.
Chapter 8: Managing a shared resource: a relational approach to water use practices

8.1 Introduction

Water is an essential requirement in community gardens. Water infrastructures, people’s water use practices and water itself are visible in the gardens, because people garden in the same space and collectively construct and adapt water infrastructure. The visibility of water and the imperative that water has to be managed collectively, makes these spaces promising locations for the study of the meaning and use of water in a community context. Through the study of water use and related norms and infrastructures, the decision making processes in the community groups are also made visible.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, community gardening research has paid ample attention to the opportunities these projects afford residents to produce fresh food in cities (Holland, 2004), how this might positively impact residents’ health, and how citizens are provided with opportunities to gain social capital in the process. When practices and sustainability outcomes of community gardens are assessed these are mainly measured in terms of food production and strengthening of social capital. Watering practices are being overlooked in community garden research and this is an important oversight because community gardens can shed light on how resources, including water, are valued and managed collectively. Studying water use practices and meanings attributed to water by a group and its individual members illuminates how a sense of community and collective goals and values are both contested and shared through practices and how these practices take shape in relation to non-human matter such as water and technologies.
In this chapter I focus on water use practices in the gardens to understand how these practices are shaped in the context of social relationships and in relation to infrastructures and practices that extend beyond the community garden fence. I build on work by Turner (2011), who points out that personal beliefs and practices are available to public scrutiny in community gardens, making these spaces particularly suitable for the study of the experiences, norms and social relationships that shape the meaning and value attributed to water. I also build on research on community food production that shows that gardeners who are committed to the environment value sustainability firstly as efficient food production, and are willing to sacrifice sustainable water management as a means to that end (Kortright and Wakefield, 2011; Turner, 2011). In this chapter I broaden the approach taken in these studies in that I include external dependencies such as home infrastructure as well as internal dependencies such as community infrastructure and decision making practices.

In what follows I unravel the water use practices of community gardeners as constituted by the valuing of water, water infrastructure and social interactions in garden groups. In order to do this I mobilize existing geographical work on water use practices and particularly work on the valuing of water and water use in domestic gardens. After a brief reiteration of the most relevant aspects of the methods for this chapter, I provide an outline of the key water use practices in each garden. I then discuss three patterns that shape the gardeners’ water use practices throughout the case studies. These are: the goals to which gardeners aspire; expectations and values related to water; and the infrastructures and practices that are employed to manage water. Together these patterns show that gardening practices are shaped by values, social relationships, routines and infrastructures that extend beyond the garden space. Community relationships can encourage practices of thrift through policing and altruistic intensions, but pressures on time and access to multiple water sources and
infrastructures can also shape practices that might be intended as community-minded or sustainability practices, but that do not have those effects.

8.2 Water use practice in a variable climate

Many water studies take as their point of departure that infrastructural circuits regulate the flow and use of water in ways that reproduce a particular social organisation of power (Gandy, 2004; Linton, 2010). These studies emphasise that discourses and rules reproduce the meaning and value of water in society and that, to understand the workings of power in water infrastructure and distribution, attention has to be paid to infrastructures but also to those discourses, ideas and meanings that help construct particular social practices related to water (Linton, 2010). One way in which scholars have done this is in approaching urban infrastructure from a metabolic theoretical perspective to critique the distributive forces of institutions and their infrastructure and technologies (e.g. Swyngedouw, 2004; Gandy, 2004; Kaika, 2005; Loftus, 2006). Scholars in this line of work also critique a focus on supply in water management discourses, rather than thinking about ways to curb use and demand (Ward, 1997; Kaika, 2005; Allon and Sofoulis, 2006). These studies of urban water employ relational dialectics and political ecology perspectives grounded in Marxism to draw attention to the normalising forces of the capitalist discourse’s insistence on progress, development, efficiency and profit (Bakker, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2004; Loftus, 2006).

Literature on watering in gardens (Head and Muir, 2007b; Chappells et al., 2011) builds on a wider water literature that focuses on practices as constituted by cultural norms related to cleanliness and comfort (particularly see Shove, 2003). A key argument in this wider literature is constructed around the invisibility of water networks in modern homes and the
unwillingness of people to engage with less than pure water (Kaika, 2005). The invisibility of infrastructure disengages people from water management and renders people powerless in the face of disruptions such as droughts.

Disruptions in the modern urban systems that regulate the supply of water have been identified by many scholars as potential moments for change (Allon and Sofoulis, 2006; Head and Muir, 2007b; Chappells et al., 2011; Moy, 2012). Theory of water practices start from the argument that practice is partly technologically, partly socially produced. The use of water is steered by material and institutional systems of water management that include taps, drains, watering cans, hoses, meters and bills; but also by social norms that require clean clothes and a green lawn for the achievement of respectability. Social scientists reflect on the usefulness of the concept of sustainability as colleagues working in various disciplines use different definitions that acknowledge the social dimensions of sustainability in varying degrees (Vallance et al., 2011). These reflections include the realisation that sustainability policies tend to ignore the social context and uneven consequences of these measures on people’s lives.

A more nuanced outlook on these matters is generated by scholars who point out how things such as social norms (Askew and McGuirk, 2004), water infrastructures (Chappells et al., 2011) and habits and expectations (Allon and Sofoulis, 2006) equally work to hold water practices in place. Scholars see disruptions to the water supply system as potential moments of clarity in which social change of water practices can occur because people then see the limits to supply of water and the necessity to change water practices is felt more urgently (e.g. Chappells et al., 2011). However it is also recognised that people find ways to sustain their water use practices despite disruptions caused by drought or water restrictions (Moy, 2012; Sofoulis, 2015).
Greater willingness to change practices has been observed in the context of gardens, where domestic water systems are often visible. Head and Muir (2007b) argue that people are quite willing to handle and re-use grey water to curb water consumption, but that these practices always exist in a tension with a yearning for the pleasure derived from water; pleasures that require water consumption. Their research shows that gardeners are active water management agents rather than passive consumers. Gardeners adjust the plumbing and carry grey water from baths and sinks to gardens to keep their plants alive. Head and Muir (2007b: 902) write that ‘it is in the relationship between house and garden that people see, understand and participate in the network of water storage and distribution. They know their own power and they understand where and how to make a difference’. This research shows that gardens are sites where social relationships and relationships with the environment are made visible. Greater flexibility enables home owners and tenants to make changes to water infrastructure that can help save water (Head and Muir, 2007b; Mee et al., 2014).

The visibility of water is also important because it generates appreciation and an alternative mode of valuation. Gibbs (2006; 2010) argues that the value of water in the arid Australian landscape is created by variability such as the temporary absence of water and that this variability affects human-water relationships. In work that focuses more on urban water and water infrastructure it is often pointed out that the valuation of water through a process of commodification reduces the value of water to an abstract price tag (Ward, 1997; Strang, 2004; Heynen and Robbins, 2005). This in contrast to more visible water systems in which people value water based on the labour that was invested in capturing and carrying it (Ward, 1997; Linton, 2010). In addition to exchange and use value, water also has an embodied value that is ‘encoded in an object by the investment of human agency in it’ (Strang, 2004: 23).
The value of water is a reflection of water’s material properties. Aside from the fact that it is a vital resource for the creation and sustainability of life, its value is closely related to water’s mutability, its constant motion and the sensory experiences those qualities offer (Strang, 2004; 2005; Gibbs, 2010). Nonetheless, the valuation of water continues to centre on monetary value (Ioris, 2013; Sofoulis, 2015) and on the false construction of the common domestic water user as a *homo economicus* who makes rational decisions (Browne, 2015; Sofoulis, 2015). This scholarly practice and policy strategy overlooks the insight from social sciences that people attribute symbolic value to water, that water use is a vehicle of distinction and that people engage in practices that sit in tension with economic rationality (Askew and McGuirk, 2004; Head and Muir, 2007b; Pearce et al., 2014; Sofoulis, 2015).

A monetary approach to the valuation of water also encourages water users to ground their moral approach to water use in affordability. Social scientists analysing the adaptations people make in their water use in times of drought reveal that consumers who invest in water saving devices or in rainwater catchment do not necessarily reduce their mains water consumption (Moy, 2012). Rather than constituting change, these investments are aimed at sustaining water consumption. People feel that tank water is *their* water to use as they see fit, and that therefore consumption of this water is safeguarded from public scrutiny or judgement, and from government control (Moy, 2012). Moy found that water users with access to tank water carry on as usual, watering the lawn and washing the car in times of water restrictions. Infrastructure is used as a way to sidestep the variable availability of water and allows people to continue to believe in the ‘fantasy of an unending, seasonally invariant flow of water’ (Sofoulis, 2006: 48). However, where rainwater tanks do not necessarily incite direct change towards water saving practices, scholars do recognise their potential for sparking community and household conversations about water conservation (Sofoulis, 2015). As such water tanks are being identified as enablers of transformative social interactions.
Reflections in the literature discussed above on the private-public transgressions of water infrastructures are important for the analysis and the arguments presented here. Moy’s (2012) study of water tank use shows that ‘private water’ that is collected in tanks is meaningful and valued in how it is different from mains water, particularly when the use of mains water is restricted. The crossing of water from the public into the private realm is also discussed by Allon and Sofoulis (2006) who emphasise that the invisibility of pipes that deliver water to the private home makes people see water infrastructure as a public service for which they are not personally responsible. These studies show that water’s boundary crossing shapes values and practices regarding water. In the remainder of this chapter I apply these insights to community gardening as a set of practices in which gardeners employ a range of water infrastructures and in which most people have to make do with limited access to mains water.

8.3 Researching water use practices

The three case study garden groups access water in contrasting ways and employ different kinds of infrastructure to catch and distribute water.

At Stanley Road Community Garden gardeners have no direct access to mains water. Because the gardeners here do not have security of tenure and are not allowed to build permanent structures, they cannot build a shed to catch rainwater. Gardeners managed to purchase a small tank with the help of a local supermarket’s fundraiser, but because they cannot catch rainwater they top up the tank using a neighbour’s tap (see figure 5.8 and figure 8.1 below). Gardeners also carry water to the garden from their home connections to mains water.
Figure 8.1: Water tank and watering cans at Stanley Road Community Garden (April 2014)

Figure 8.2: Buckets and tubs used to retain water at Park Street Community Garden (May 2014)
Gardeners at Park Street Community Garden have a tap on site. Gardeners use this tap and a hose connected to it to water the garden. The water bill is waived by Council. Gardeners have attempted to implement a system that would allow them to harvest rainwater but have been unsuccessful so far. In the meantime gardeners attempt to retain water on site in buckets, bathtubs and other kinds of pots while the majority of watering practices continue to focus around the hose (see figure 7.2 and figure 8.2 below).

Highfield Community Garden has a shed with a large roof to catch rainwater, and large rainwater tanks to retain and distribute water. During the dry summer of 2013 the gardeners struggled to make do with limited water and purchased three additional 1000 litre tanks (see figure 5.16 and figure 8.3 below). During this dry spell, gardeners carted water from home, which some gardeners continue to do. This garden also has access to the adjacent school’s mains water and recently had a tap of its own installed to manage the garden through dry spells. However, the core group of gardeners does not advertise this to the larger group. The occasional topping up of water tanks with mains water remains undisclosed to many of the gardeners.

Because infrastructure and water management are organised in very different ways at these gardens, water is valued differently across the three projects as well. Interviews and participant observation revealed these differences. This chapter particularly draws on responses to interview questions related to water use and the gardens’ sustainability. For example, I asked the gardeners to reflect on their garden project as a sustainability exercise and on their water use practices. In two gardens without a visible tap I asked: ‘the garden does not have a tap how do you feel about that?’ Studying three gardens with different management models allows me to shed light on how decision making is differently distributed in these three groups and how this affects watering practices.
I now discuss water management in the three gardens and I then focus on three patterns that emerged in gardeners’ reflections on values and water use in the community garden: community gardening goals, water values and expectations, and practices and infrastructure. Together these themes show that watering practices in community gardens are shaped on the intersections of values and infrastructures, and that water is simultaneously approached as an integral part of garden ecology and as an instrument that facilitates garden maintenance and gardeners’ sense of connection with nature. The chapter shows that gardeners express their community mindedness through their watering practices which can result in thrift, but that monetary valuing of water can nonetheless help perpetuate expectations of endless supply.

Figure 8.3: Water infrastructure at Highfield Community Garden. Note the large tanks connected to the shed in the far left corner and a smaller 1000 litre tank in the foreground (December 2014)
8.4 Water infrastructure and practices in the community gardens:

8.4.1 Stanley Road Community Garden

Due to the limited amount of water that is available to the gardeners at Stanley Road Community Garden and due to time constraints of the gardeners, people adopt different water saving practices to keep their gardens alive. A common strategy is to plant hardy species and avoid annuals. For example, we heard Alice speak in chapter 6 about her choice to plant things ‘that didn’t need to be crazy watered all the time’. Other gardeners aim to collect water on site or carry water from home. Claire for example says:

> Well we have a, one tank which is only 400 litres. We have that wheelie bin which is 120 litres. So we fill this tank with a hose from a neighbour but also we have that lid upside down to capture rain if we can but it doesn’t capture a lot. And the wheelie bin we reverse the lid with holes in it so that rain can actually filter into it. But we use that and then we bring our own if we can. Which I do. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Ellen: So you don’t use the water from [the tank]?

> I try not to. Because I live closer and it’s easy to carry up a water can. Just to save [the tank water] for longer. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)

And a direct neighbour, Henry, throws a hose over the fence. He talks about a member in the garden whose gardening he admires when he brings this up:

> This guy, I’ve noticed he’s been here for years this plot. And he takes good care of it and I see him even bringing buckets of water in himself, which is hard work. At least it’s not so hard for me. I can connect the hose here from the unit and put it over the
back fence. And get a little bit of coverage in this area. And other people can’t do that so they bring in . . . Now of course this helps [knocks on the new water tank]. (Henry, Stanley Road Community Garden)

In this quote Henry also refers to the new water tank and the arrangement with another next door neighbour, who is not otherwise involved in the project, that the community gardeners can use her mains water to top up the tank. Gardeners at this project appreciate the convenience of having water available on site. In not using water on site gardeners who live close to the garden express community mindedness. This shows that gardeners keep their own and other gardeners’ abilities in mind when they adopt water use practices. In this way a sense of community is enacted through people’s practices of bringing water to the garden.

8.4.2 Park Street Community Garden

At Park Street Community Garden water use practices are mainly performed during communal hours. Gardeners use a hose to water the vegetables and the trees. These practices express the tensions in the garden around the values that are attributed to trees, perennials and annuals. Ben articulates this tension when he says:

But some people have been growing veggies here and they never get watered. And some people say don’t worry about anything which isn’t a perennial or a tree. Because it sucks the nutrients out of the soil. So when you come in, like for example [the watering hose] was here [under the tree], it’s usually under the tree and these [plants on the veggie patch] are bone dry. And when I’ve been watering the garden, certain people roast me and say you shouldn’t be concentrating on the vegetables, water the trees. (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)
Water use is here practised in support of certain visions of how the community garden project should function and to express preference for plants that support that vision. This also goes back to the dynamics in this garden, described in chapter 5, in which gardeners use plants to respond to perceived tenure insecurity. Besides differing ideas regarding which plants should be prioritised, Ben also explains that gardeners want fellow gardeners to water in certain ways:

The pressure is to not water overhead. If you're caught watering overhead you get told off. You're told to put the hose in the ground and that's all you can do. But I've been watering seedlings which you're always supposed to water from overhead not to cause the soil to bubble. I've had a few choice words to say to the older members who've told me off and basically [made me] go “look, I've been doing this for many years and I'm doing this for a reason. I'm watering from overhead because the seedlings need to be given a fine spray, blablabla”. And I wasn't, I tried not to swear, I didn't swear but it's that tense . . . (Ben, Park Street Community Garden)

The expectation that gardeners do not water overhead is undergirded by the knowledge that watering into the soil causes less evaporation. This is deemed necessary particularly since the weekly communal hours take place from 11 am until 1 pm, times when watering leads to greater evaporation. Ironically, gardeners who express their discontent with the practice of watering overhead leave the hose underneath fruit trees and native trees such as Casuarinas. This is double irony as these established trees are equipped to flourish in dry environments and because the watering hose is widely conceived – formally during water restrictions at times of drought and by gardeners in the other community gardens – as facilitating wasteful water use practices.
Watering is one of the key activities that keep people occupied during working bees, alongside raking leaves and turning the compost heap. Charles for example mentions it as a reason why more people should join the garden:

*For lots of reasons because it’s a great thing, because more people, equals more hands, more people to hold a hose between Sundays.*  (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

Alex mentions that often when he spends time at the garden during the communal hours he does not know what to do other than water:

*Sometimes I’m still looking for someone to tell me what to do. One thing I used to do all the time was I used to do a lot of watering. I was like oh I’ll take that on because plants always need a lot of watering. But I have found that lately I haven’t needed to do that as much because other people have been doing it.*  (Alex, Park Street Community Garden)

Although ideas of how watering should be practised are quite established at this garden, most gardeners expressed a wish to invest water saving infrastructure. Ways to save water were exclusively sought in the realm of investment in infrastructure such as water catchment and water tanks and not in adjusting the groups’ planting or watering practices. The gardeners drafted a plan for example, to catch water from the adjacent school’s roof and to retain storm water run-off. Gardeners were disappointed that Council did not fund these initiatives. Charles says:

*We had a proposal to become completely water self-reliant and solving the issue of flooding across the road when it pours all in one go and it was going to cost several*
thousand dollars and the Council had no interest in supporting that. (Charles, Park Street Community Garden)

At the same time the gardeners overlook opportunities to be more water wise with the infrastructure and the people who are already part of the project, such as being more conscientious while using the hose or coordinating when people come into the garden to water which plants.

8.4.3 Highfield Community Garden

During the short lifespan of Highfield Community Garden many changes have already occurred in how the gardening group manages water on site. The first infrastructure that was installed was a large, 3000 litre tank. This tank was delivered with water in it and the gardeners used this water while they were still planning a connection between the tank and the roof of the chicken coop to catch rainwater and maintain water levels in the tank. The garden’s first summer was extremely dry, and despite the gardeners’ efforts to be water wise by using watering cans, installing inventive drip irrigations systems and keeping to early mornings and late afternoon watering to prevent evaporation, the tank water was used up rapidly (see figures 8.4 and 8.5).

During walking interviews gardeners recalled how, in response to the realisation that the water on site was not sufficient to help them through the summer, they carted water from home. Gardeners used old plastic milk bottles and other containers to scoop water out of the sink or the bathtub. Other gardeners brought water in from their tap. These developments made the gardeners realise that the water provision was not sufficient. Sophie recounts this realisation when I interview her:
There just wasn’t enough water. We realised we had a water management issue; we had to get more water. So it was quite hard. That was just the first year when we were building the beds and we had the three thousand litre tank. I’m pretty sure it was three yeah. And um and then we realised that we had to provide more water. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)

One of the responses of the gardeners was to connect the water tanks to the chicken coop roof. Another decision was to buy three additional one thousand litre tanks filled with water.

The gardeners negotiated with the school to use their water connection to top up these tanks when they are almost empty. A last decision was to install a tap on the border of the school grounds and the garden for the garden’s use. This connection has not been advertised to all
members but instead is used by a core group of informed members when the tanks run dry to top these up for communal use.

At the same time gardeners continue to employ water saving practices. Many gardeners mix water retaining crystals into their soil and cover the soil with mulch to minimize evaporation. Gardeners are mindful to water at the most suitable times and use watering cans rather than a hose. Some gardeners continue to bring water from home in dry periods, to make sure the tank water is available to people for whom it is a greater challenge to cart water from home. Gardeners at Highfield Community Garden continue to use water from various sources.

8.5 Discussion

While water use practices and infrastructure in the three gardens differ substantially, a number of patterns emerged that shed light on the entanglements of practice and infrastructure in these urban gardens. The goals that gardeners aspire to in their community gardening, expectations and values surrounding water supply, and the water management infrastructures and practices that are available to individual gardeners and to the group, shape how the gardeners manage their water use and aim to make their gardens flourish in the city’s varying seasonal conditions.

8.5.1 Aspiring to community garden goals

Community gardens have different goals and community gardeners get involved in these projects for different reasons. Most community gardeners in the study expressed an affinity with the environment and mentioned this as one of their reasons to get involved in a
community garden. The ways in which they understand the potential contribution of their gardening to more sustainable relationships to the environment differs. Some gardeners think the garden contributes to sustainability because the composting that is practised there prevents household waste from going to landfill. At Stanley Road Community Garden I ask Claire if she could reflect on the garden as a sustainability exercise and tell me about the value of the garden as a sustainability project. She responds to this:

Well I think with the composting if people use the compost instead of their garbage because it just goes to landfill and creates carbon, whereas in composting you put it back on the garden and it enriches the soil, so that has to be if anything, one of the best factors. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Gardeners such as Claire emphasise that recycling and composting contribute to a circulation of resources which reduces waste and encourages biodiversity.

A larger group of gardeners approaches community gardens as sites for sustainability practices because of the opportunity they present to produce local organic food. When I ask Alex at Park Street Community Garden for example what motivated him to start gardening, he answers:

Sometimes I get worried about the environment and that sort of thing. And so eventually that got me interested in growing vegetables and growing food and stuff like that. And that got me interested in permaculture and that got me interested in volunteering in a permaculture garden. (Alex, Park Street Community Garden)

At Highfield Community Garden Sophie also connects sustainability to food production in the garden:
It really is about creating food and reducing food miles and all those sort of bigger ideas. We really do want to do that, it’s not just a social space, it’s you know we want to try and um you know have local food. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)

These different ideas regarding what the community garden is for and how the community garden might contribute to sustainability translate into how water is managed and which water use practices are encouraged. For most gardeners water is instrumental in realising other things such as food production.

When the garden is valued as an ecological system or as a site for food production water is understood as instrumental as it is needed to keep the garden alive. This means that the goal for a community garden to flourish trumps the goal to manage water in thrifty ways. The water that is required to care for trees trumps the urgency to save water on site, hence the forgotten hose underneath the trees. Gardeners tend to imagine the environment as soil and plants, and not necessarily as an ecosystem that includes flows of water and soil moisture.

At the same time, how water and sustainability are perceived and approached depends partly on the behaviour of plants. We already heard Alice say in chapter 5 that she chose to put plants in her plot that do not require a lot of water. Also at Stanley Road Community Garden, Claire reflects on the absence of mains water and how their group managed to keep the garden alive:

For five years it’s not been that bad, it could be better but we still manage to have things growing and the things you see growing, like all along that front we don’t water that. That is growing by itself because it’s become, maybe drought tolerant... or hardy. Because it’s pretty, it gets sort of hot and windy along that fence line so they have to be quite hardy to survive that. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)
Claire has come to appreciate the capability of some plants to live without water and endure the harsh conditions in the garden. These insights illustrate that people are willing to plant natives and other drought resistant species to minimise the amount of water that is required to keep the garden alive (Head and Muir, 2007b).

Similarly, at Park Street Community Garden gardeners attune their watering to the behaviour of plants and prefer watering plants that contribute positively to the garden project. They take great care of trees and perennials because those secure a diverse habitat, the circulation of resources and the perpetuation of the garden into the future. Water use is instrumental to people’s interpretation of sustainability as biodiversity or as food production. This finding is in line with the insight put forward by Turner (2011) that gardeners who produce food consider water use, carbon footprint and food miles when they reflect on the sustainability of their plot.

At Park Street Community Garden tensions occur regarding watering practices because people have different understandings of what this community garden’s objectives are. For example, people who understand biodiversity and the quality of the soil to be the garden’s greatest contributions perceive watering food producing annuals as wasteful. The resulting policing of water use practices causes frustration with those gardeners who would prefer to grow food crops such as tomatoes that require more water. This illustrates that water practices take shape in relation to plants’ behaviours and in relationship to other gardeners. Water practices also depend on how water is valued and how much water is available. These are the topics of the next section.
8.5.2 Expecting and valuing water

Allon and Sofoulis (2006) sketch the modern water user’s expectation of endless and seasonally invariable water supply and the allocation of responsibility for this supply with national or regional governments. Although scholars observe great willingness of people to be active agents in water systems in their gardens (Head and Muir, 2007b), these expectations of steady supply, also arise in the three community gardens, yet in slightly different ways. Ideas about whether water should be available relates to gardeners’ ideas of the project’s goals and to the water infrastructure available to them.

At Park Street Community Garden, some gardeners see themselves as volunteers who work for the good cause of providing biodiversity and green space in the city. Council provides this garden with water and because gardeners feel that they are doing volunteer work they feel that this is how it ought to be. In the past, Council disconnected this garden’s water supply, which led to great consternation. The gardeners would like to be able to have a more sustainable water management strategy but place responsibility for funding and installing water infrastructure with Council.

Similarly, at Stanley Road Community Garden, the gardeners depend on Council to approve a water catchment system or the installation of a tap. Some gardeners at this garden expressed the wish to build a shed and create roof surface from which to catch water. The gardeners however realise that this infrastructure is unattainable in the context of their uncertain tenure and problematic relationship with Council. I asked Claire for example if she would like to have a hose available in the garden to which she says:

Oh yeah. But that would be something that Council would have to agree to and do and they won’t at this point. (Claire, Stanley Road Community Garden)
As a result people at Stanley Road Community Garden are focused on what they can organise themselves, independent of Council approval. Some carry water into the garden from home, or direct neighbours throw their hose over the fence into the garden space. The new water tank that was installed with the supermarket fundraiser money made these practices less necessary. Most water is now provided by the immediate neighbour. Gardeners pay her to top up the water tank from her tap. Gardeners appreciate the option of having water available against payment. Stephanie, who used to cart water from home for example says:

*Having this is better than me going around the block with buckets and then [...] every time you pour a bucket over your plants you have to go back and get the next one. [Claire] said ‘my daughters are happy to babysit’, I said ‘I’m happy to pay them to cart water here’. I can then not feel guilty using the whole water.* (Stephanie, Stanley Road Community Garden)

Stephanie expresses a relationship between the infrastructure that makes water supply reliable and infinite, and relationships with other gardeners which make her aware of its limited supply. If it was possible for the water to run out she would feel guilty using the last of it.

A similar situation emerged in Highfield Community Garden. There, many gardeners expressed an appreciation for the experience of having to cart water, but ultimately gave in to the convenience of paying for unlimited and steady supply. For example, when I ask Daisy how she feels about the garden not having a tap she says:

*Ah I think it’s really good actually because it makes you incredibly conscious of the amount of water that you use. We have decided that we will. We have decided that if the tanks run dry we will now buy water from the school and fill up the tanks from their taps. And pay them for the water. Which we didn’t do last summer and the tanks were dry and we had to carry water from home and bring it here. Which I think was actually*
not a bad thing because it makes people very very conscious of how much water they are using and how much, and about saving water. Like if you have to carry it from home, [chuckles] you are really careful about not wasting it. And watering at the right times of day and all of that. (Daisy, Highfield Community Garden)

Like Daisy other gardeners say they appreciate how the practice of carting it made them value water differently. To the same question Nicole responds:

Well I think it’s, I don’t mind really. I think it’s, I don’t know it makes us use the water better in summer when it hasn’t rained for a while and you know Sydney had a drought for many years and everyone just got very much more conservative with their water use. You know there were restrictions in place and so it’s just good to. I don’t know. It’s just good to be aware of using it better and using you know waste water from home and bringing it up to the garden. (Nicole, Highfield Community Garden)

The gardeners’ efforts functioned to validate the project as a sustainability effort. The gardeners not only carted water, they also connected the roof of their shed to a new water tank and gardeners have drip systems and water retaining crystals in their plots. This is why it surprised me to learn that despite the positive experience of carting water and the investment into tanks, the group decided to install a tap. Sophie explains that the garden has to have water available on site:

Particularly when people were paying membership as well, because they are entitled to keep their garden going. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)

I then asked: ‘If there wasn’t a membership fee involved then the water thing would be . . . ?’ Where Sophie interrupts to explain:
No you still would have wanted to get more water but I think that if people are paying then there is a greater degree of expectation. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)

So although there is some willingness to cart water and to live with the seasonal variability of the Australian weather, the idea of water as a commodity that is available against payment is also present, and is entertained parallel to the desire to live with environmental variability.

The introduction of commodified water to this garden project is the outcome of a realisation that the garden cannot thrive without steady water supply, and an unwillingness to face the option of letting plants die during dry periods. This finding shows that even within community gardens where people aim to engage in the sustainable production of food and where people value the changing availability of water through the embodied efforts of carrying it from home to the garden, water also continues to be valued along dominant monetary lines (Ioris, 2013; Sofoulis, 2015). The unwillingness to let plants die, in combination with gardeners’ different goals and beliefs together result in sets of practices that support particular plants and water regimes that align with those goals and objectives. Sometimes this leads to less than transparent management of water supply, which I discuss in the next section.

8.5.3 Water infrastructure and practices towards availability and sustainability

The realisation that sustainable water management might be at odds with a continuously operative garden puts gardeners at Highfield Community Garden in a problematic situation. As a solution gardeners use water from different sources and as we observed in the above section this leads to multiple sets of practices that are geared towards different goals. Highfield Community Garden gardeners hold on to some aspects of their sustainability
rationale while they do what is necessary to sustain the leisure experience that the garden is as well.

Gardeners’ practices evolve in relation to the water and the infrastructure that is available, and also in relation to their perceptions of other gardeners and what their values and expectations might be. For example, a core group of gardeners assumes that members expect unchanging and unconditional access to water to keep their garden alive because they pay a membership fee. They also assume, or fear, that other gardeners will engage in wasteful practices if water does not appear scarce. This is why the core group chooses not to tell the rest of the group that there is a tap on site. Sophie explains:

> It’s just that some people are really wasteful with how much water they use. They overwater. And I think that they just don’t need to know haha. [...] No it’s not a big secret it’s just that Jason put it in, I know where he put it. A few other people know where it is. If anyone walks by and sees it, and turns it on, fine, it’s just not that we’re saying oh by the way there’s a tap, attach a hose, pshhhhh. It’s like a lot of things in the garden. The people who actually are active and concerned and involved in the garden they find things out. (Sophie, Highfield Community Garden)

Water is imagined as a resource that should be available to people who pay for membership, but access to information and decision making surrounding water management is limited in an attempt to encourage resourcefulness. The result is a paradoxical situation in which sometimes tanks get filled with water from the school without the wider garden community being informed. Even when it does not rain, the rainwater tanks might be full and gardeners either do not notice or choose to play along. This goes beyond what Pearce and colleagues (2014) have called the prestige of sustainable living, in that gardeners use sustainability practices to mask unchanged expectations and practices.
Similarly, at Park Street Community Garden, people have a tap available to them, but gardeners also try to collect rainwater to use it on the garden. Water retaining pots, buckets and bathtubs are placed around the garden in attempts to retain water on site. This collection of water is not used to water the garden directly, but is often mixed in with compost or manure and then put onto the garden. At the same time the gardeners use a hose to water the vegetable patch as well as the trees. During one working bee, one of the gardeners leaves the hose running underneath a tree and forgets about it while explaining to me the importance of being water wise. Rainwater use functions here as a token of sustainability that gives gardeners peace of mind while they maintain established gardening and water use practices. It is a challenge to conserve water because watering is the practice, or the glue, that keeps the project together. As discussed above, watering is an important activity that gives gardeners a sense of purpose.

A further way in which gardeners live with limited and varying water supply is by carting water from home. This practice illustrates how community gardens are not isolated pockets of nature and practices, but are intricately entangled with the wider urban environment. The position of individual gardeners in the group and their specific practices are shaped by their connection to that wider environment. Most pointedly, most people who live close to the shared garden space or who have the means to transport water express a great sense of responsibility to cart water.

Interestingly, at gardens with tank water this social practice even leads to tap water being preferred by some gardeners over tank water. Dylan says:

*But when we go through a dry period I have a tap at home and I bring water from home rather than use the tank water to try and manage it a little bit better.* (Dylan, Highfield Community Garden)
Note that Dylan lives a few suburbs from the garden and drives the water from his home tap to the garden. To untangle this seeming contradiction I then asked Dylan ‘so even though there is tank water that has been collected in the garden you bring your water from home?’

Yeah because what happens is if we’re going through an extended period [of drought] if people don’t bring their own water, people just think it’s a resource that doesn’t end so we’ve had situations where the tanks have been empty and there’s just no water. So it’s good to get into the habit of either recycling and bringing recycled water back from home like dishwasher water and all the rest of it. I have a tap at home and I will fill up tanks of water and bring them in rather than use the tank water here. (Dylan, Highfield Community Garden)

Rather than being at risk of running out of water, Dylan prefers to bring tap water from home preventively. Previous research on people’s relationships to tank water in Sydney in times of drought demonstrates that people experience pride from a full water tank (Sofoulis, 2015). And that rather than use water and create space to catch more when it next rains, people prefer to hold on to tank water. Research in the community context of the gardens studied here adds sensitivity to social relationships to those insights. Like the sense of guilt Stephanie previously described regarding using up a shared, limited water supply, Dylan is conscious that other people need the water too:

Ah yeah but also it’s just being uhm yeah, it is a community consideration. I will use the tank water because it’s been raining a lot, but I’m just conscious of the fact that we only have three thousand litres and that goes at the drop of a hat. So if I don’t need to, if I can bring my own water I will. And that is a community kind of thing. (Dylan, Highfield Community Garden)
This shows that the community aspect of water management in a community garden can make people conscious of the availability of water, the possibilities offered by different infrastructures and the ways in which their water usage affects other members in the community.

8.6 Conclusion

To bring this all to a conclusion, this chapter sought to understand water use practices as shaped in relation to public and private infrastructures, everyday routines and social relationships that extend beyond the community gardens. The chapter has shown that community gardeners’ water use practices are shaped in relation to their position in a bureaucratic landscape, in relation to various infrastructures, in relation to weather conditions and in relation to each other. I showed that people notice or have expectations of other gardeners’ water use practices and that these interactions over water shape practices and water management choices. I showed that this can lead to parallel sets of practices that are potentially counteractive as they aspire to different goals, but also that social relationships enacted through water use can make people more aware of their connections to the environment and each other in a community garden. People are willing to curb their own water use to enable other people to have flourishing gardens as well. The presence of fellow gardeners also leads to thrift through judgement and policing. People expect others to be less water wise or to waste water even when they hold on to water consumption habits themselves.

The politics of rainwater tanks has previously been problematized as anarchist for its location in private homes and lack of centralised control in contrast to mains water which is produced,
managed and distributed in the public domain (Allon and Sofoulis, 2006; Sofoulis, 2015). The inability to control rainwater tank usage has led some water technicians and policy makers to perceive rainwater tanks as threats, while other see their potential to encourage community conversations (Sofoulis, 2015). Bringing these insights into the shared spaces of community gardens reveals that, when collectively managed, water tanks and other pieces of water management equipment do spark conversations and awareness of water usage and add a community dimension to conversations that are traditionally focused on the household level.

Researchers on water tanks also identify the popularity of tanks as promising because rainwater tanks challenge the emphasis on economic rationality exemplified by large scale water management (Sofoulis, 2015). Applying these insights to community garden projects shows that when water is collectively managed the community and economic rationale are both present. People treat water differently when it is paid for, but still recognise the necessity to curb usage. This leads to the situation at Highfield Community Garden where committee members use their power to keep information from others in an attempt to both secure a steady supply and limit community water consumption. It is also notable in the water use practices at Park Street Community Garden where water is used as a medium to express preference for certain kinds of plants and the kind of community garden certain members are working towards.

This chapter has shown then, that the goals and values of gardeners are mediated through decision making processes in the groups and materialise in the groups through the enrolment of water infrastructure and practices. These are not exclusively enacted through the infrastructures in the garden. People enrol home infrastructures as well and use combinations of water sources and infrastructures to enact their ideas of how a good community garden
functions. Although some of these practices are directed by community mindedness, these varying infrastructures and practices can create complex situations in which a tank enables people to carry on watering their garden as usual because it is filled with tap water. Water infrastructures allow gardeners to enact multiple agendas that include ideas of the garden as a sustainability and community project, and these agendas can lead to practices that sit in tension with one another. The chapter then also strengthens the observation made by Turner (2011) that water use is particularly visible in community gardens and that this creates potential for community gardens as spaces that generate environmental awareness. The chapter complicates this insight because in it I observe that the co-existence of multiple goals and the uneven distribution of access to decision making processes can complicate water use practices to the point where it obscures the water politics that shape practice.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

I started this thesis with the observation that scholars have focused on the community-building potential of community gardens and that, for this reason, they have advocated for the protection and promotion of community gardens. In aiming to understand the practices which constitute community gardens, I have attempted to put forward a more critical approach to these community projects. I have paid particular attention to the practices that shape community gardens and to relationships with spaces, plants and infrastructures that shape community gardening practices. I have sought to move away from the premise that community gardens are good in themselves, and have aimed instead to understand how the community-building potential and barriers associated with community gardens are produced through wider relationships to communities, institutions, spaces and materialities.

In this concluding chapter I discuss the research questions and reflect on the contribution of the relational approach developed in this thesis to community garden scholarship. I do this in two separate sections. First I discuss the outcomes of the thesis thematically, including the relational and practised constitution of community gardens and the tensions between community building and personal interests of gardeners. Second I reflect on the contribution of the thesis to existing scholarship and develop potential avenues for future research.

9.1 Relationality

This thesis started from a relational understanding of space in two ways. It took inspiration from spatial relationality as put forward by geographers such as Massey (1991; 2005) in which the meaning of a place is understood as the outcome of its relationships to other places. And it took inspiration from material relationality (Hinchliffe et al., 2005; Anderson, 2009) in
which theorists emphasise the importance of non-human and human others for our constantly changing and emerging sense of identity. A relational approach to community gardens developed in this thesis has revealed that relationships between the community garden and external dependencies, most importantly government and land-owning institutions, and gardeners’ homes and non-human organism and infrastructures, strongly shape the internal functioning and politics of these community projects. The thesis showed that the concepts of community and ownership direct gardeners’ practices in ways that allow individual gardeners to strive towards community and personal goals at the same time. While engaged in practices such as plotting, planting self-sowing plants, and installing drip-irrigation gardeners mobilise the concepts of ownership and community to weave community work into a personal routine. In their efforts to incorporate community gardening into their lives, gardeners reconcile the challenges of gardening in a space that is not physically connected to their home, as well as those posed by pressures on their time and ideas of what ‘community’ is and requires. Community gardeners develop practices in response to these challenges and strategically respond to the agency and capacities of non-humans such as fences, plants and water tanks to assist them in obtaining personal goals while maintaining a community project. Combining a spatially and materially relation approach, this thesis creates nuanced insight into ways in which practices takes shape in relation to different people, places and matter.

In chapter 6 the thesis showed that community gardening takes shape in relation to the wider urban environment, and are informed by ideas, values and expectations people bring into them. The chapter revealed that community gardening practices are strongly shaped by the concept of property and by relationships to properties in the neighbourhood in the form of the gardeners’ homes. The location of a community garden in relation to a community gardener’s home, or the school their children attend, plays a fundamental role in the way gardeners engage in community gardens. The thesis revealed a strong belief in private property among
gardeners even when their community gardening project equally relies on shared management and community building. The gardeners in this study associate private plots with productivity and some gardeners regarded plots as a way to prevent tension and frustration in the group. However, in one garden plots are understood as individualist and as undermining larger environmental goals and benefits. I observed throughout the case studies and their respective models that understandings of community and autonomy shape practices. The knowledge that fellow gardeners will not interfere on one’s plot, allow gardeners to weave a community project into an otherwise busy personal routine.

In chapter 7, the relational constitution of community gardening was explored through a focus on gardeners’ desire to feel connected to nature and their relationships to plants. I revealed that gardeners have different understandings of plants and food as nature, and that their objectives regarding good gardening practices differ accordingly. I observed that people enrol plants with certain growing characteristics that support a desired gardening routine and that they will alter their plantings in response to changes in personal lives. Relationships with plants acquire different meaning depending on the plants’ qualities and requirements. High-maintenance plants growing in a private plot are understood as personal property and are subject to different exchange rules than commonly owned plants. Gifting, swapping and taking are plant exchanges that contribute to a sense of community belonging. Adjusting plants to personal routines and exchanging plants with fellow gardeners based on personal relationships to plants is a process in which external dependencies shape the community building practices that take place inside the garden.

In chapter 8, I probed the relational constitution of the garden community through the lens of water and water technology. Being attentive to the ways in which gardeners engage with water and how gardeners enrol technologies such as buckets, taps and pipes that are available
on site and in gardeners’ and neighbours’ homes, revealed a ways in which practices take shape in relation to spatial and material externalities. The chapter demonstrated that gardeners water practices are informed by their ideas of what sustainable practices are and that practices express relationships to other people in the group. The limitations and affordances of certain infrastructures shift these practices, for example, the introduction of tank water makes people adjust water practices with the needs of other gardeners in mind. At the same time however, economic rationales that are prominent outside the garden find their way in, for example in the idea that water has an objective value and that it is expected to be available invariably. These overriding ideas and relationships to people and infrastructures both shape how water is managed collectively by a group.

Together, these chapters show that practices take shape in a wide set of relationship to matter, people and places. A common pattern in the strategies that gardeners develop in relation to plants, infrastructures, policies, each other, etc., are related to the pressures on individual gardeners’ time. The thesis revealed that the practice of gardening in plots allows people the flexibility to attend to matters in their personal lives and to orchestrate their community gardening with other people’s schedules. The research revealed that community is not necessarily enacted by a group of people who are present in the garden at the same time, but that people acquire a sense of community belonging because they feel partial ownership in a community space. Gardeners practise community by attending communal hours, and also by engaging in community minded practices such as the sharing of a plant or of scarce water while keeping the interests of fellow gardeners in mind. They do this even when fellow gardeners are not there or when they have never been introduced.

Another prominent pattern that re-emerged throughout the thesis is the balance community gardeners seek between their personal objectives and community goals. These might be
discussed and agreed upon in the group, or exist exclusively in the imagination and expectations of individual gardeners. Tensions between community and personal objectives have made visible how people understand and practice community. Where urban policies tend to subscribe to broad assumptions about the inclusiveness of community gardens, this thesis has produced empirical insight into how the idea of community is enacted, felt and valued by the people involved. I noted that sense of community is a strong driver for many community gardeners, but we also saw that people struggle to find time to spend in the community garden and to build a sense of familiarity and cohesion.

The insights from this thesis complicate ideas about community cohesion and inclusiveness that are associated with community gardens. The thesis showed that the Sydney residents involved in these gardens enact and value community in ways that do not require co-presence. Gardeners engage in the community project relatively autonomously through practices related to land, food and water in ways that communicate community mindedness. Concurrently, we see that community gardens allow their members to work towards a combination of their personal interests and community objectives. Early on in the thesis I demonstrated that the sense of ownership that facilitates sense of community also functions to legitimatise exclusionary practices. The research outcomes indicate a need to be cautious to not lose sight of what these projects might mean for communities beyond the garden groups. Based on these insights I see a necessity for policy makers to reflect on the kinds of inclusion they would like to accomplish with their community gardening policies. The thesis also presents the scholarly challenge to generate a more progressive and critical approach to what community and inclusiveness might mean in this kind of urban community context. I end the thesis with some further reflection on the implications of its findings, and suggest some directions for future research.
9.2 Contributions, implications and directions for future research

Opening up the research field to include the ways in which people incorporate community gardens in their daily lives has allowed a grounded understanding of these spaces as a continuation of already existing ideals and practices. The step away from the two established points of view – community gardens as community building exercises and community gardens as projects that foster neoliberal subjectivity – has revealed that community gardens function in a complex field in between those viewpoints. Scholars have started to develop the nuanced perspective that alternative food projects have contradictory objectives and effects (McClintock, 2014), and that community gardens with different models will shape community (Veen et al., 2015) and gardener subjectivities differently (Barron, 2016). This thesis adds to these insights that a single community garden can encompass multiple objectives and that individual gardeners develop several practices to foster sense of community and pursue personal objectives at the same time. Community gardeners are not then, for example, either entrepreneurs attempting to access fresh food at affordable prices or volunteers who are aiming to contribute to community well-being, but rather they embrace multiple goals and develop multiple sensitivities as they engage in community gardening practices.

The results from this thesis reveal a second contribution. Throughout the thesis the community gardeners demonstrated a keen sense of their responsibilities, duties, property and entitlements, and they enacted these in their gardening and community building practices in various overlapping ways. Considering that in the community gardens studied here, personal claims and interests are enacted in ways that facilitate community building and community mindedness in the same space, the thesis opens up questions about how private incentives or objectives are implicated in common goals and claim-staking. The thesis particularly opens
up avenues towards understanding how both private and community properties can contribute in constructive ways to inclusive urban community spaces. In this way, the insights from this thesis will be useful for understanding other community initiative, events and projects such as cooperative ownership of buildings and infrastructure such as solar panels, and community volunteering projects that require relationships to non-human organisms and technologies such community policing and landcare groups. At the same time, the thesis urges critical reflection on the exclusive potential of community gardens. I observe a tendency not only for community gardens to function as exclusive spaces in terms of membership and access, but also a tendency for these projects to engage in relationships with funding bodies, skilled residents and Councils to strengthen already existing unevenness between skill sets and competencies of different garden groups. Considering the sporadic enrolment of existing and planned community gardens in attempts to block urban development initiatives such as densification of housing or the construction of care facilities, this thesis contributes a constructive approach that enables scholars to argue against the innocence of these projects without losing sight of their potential merit.

This brings me to a note on the intended contribution of this thesis to policymakers’ debates and deliberations about the accommodation of community gardens in their cities. In Australia, debates about community gardens in planning literature focus on how to accommodate rather than on whether, where and when to accommodate community gardens in local plans and policies. In writing this thesis I hope to create awareness of the ways in which community gardens might function to put certain communities and individuals within those communities in positions of power. This kind of awareness might generate more critical thinking about the specific contexts, communities and strategies which allow community gardens to have positive impacts on people’s wellbeing and sense of inclusion.
The thesis offers detailed insight into the ways in which seed funding enables a garden’s start-up and shows how government support can encourage or impede a project to grow and flourish. Beyond funding, the thesis also reveals that seemingly common sense interventions, such as the policy requirement for groups to install a committee, can provide the basis for one community group to function in an inclusive way, but might have disruptive effects in another. The thesis provides a cue for developing more explicit community gardening goals, as the study makes evident that gardeners do not uniformly identify with the aims listed by the City of Sydney in their current community gardening policy. The thesis also demonstrates that it is important to acknowledge the challenges people face when incorporating community work in their personal lives. It shows the value of relationships to other community groups, neighbours and domestic spaces in overcoming these challenges. It is my hope that the insights provided in this thesis might generate more realistic expectations of community gardens and that as a result they will be valued more sincerely and critically for the small yet powerful changes they do engender.
References


http://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2016.1169518


http://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2015.1101433


Appendix 1: Recruitment letter

Dear Ms., Mr.,

I found your garden on the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network. I am working on a research project on community gardens for my PhD in Human Geography at the University of Wollongong. I write you because I would like to tell you about what I do, why I am doing this and also because I would like you to consider participating in my project.

The reason I am interested in community gardens is because they could provide solutions to many contemporary challenges. Urbanisation and other environmental pressures stimulate the desire and the necessity for communities to live more sustainably and independently and community gardens could be part of such a life. As well as environmental advantages, community gardening could help foster a sense of community and belonging and stimulate social inclusion, which could contribute to community resilience. For these reasons, urban gardening is becoming increasingly popular and the number of community gardens is growing in many places around the world. Yet, gardeners face challenges when initiating and planning a new garden because shared gardens can sit uneasily with planning regulations, property laws and neighbours’ ideas of what belongs in an urban environment. This is why in my project I explore how community gardens sit in the built environment, how they came about, and how both gardeners and neighbours regard them.

I will explore these issues by the method of walking interviews. This means that if your garden were to become a case study in my project I would walk with gardeners and neighbours through the garden and the neighbourhood while we talk about the origins of the garden, its management, the practice of gardening and such things. These interviews would take place in February or March and each interview would take about an hour.
If it turns out that you and other members of your garden are interested in participating I will send you more information about my project and about participating. For now I would like to know if there is a working bee or another event at the garden that I could attend, because I would like to visit your garden to learn about how the garden came about and how the garden is managed.

I can be contacted at the email address emvh894@uowmail.edu.au, or if you prefer my mobile number is 0401740654 to set up a time. Also feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding the project.

Thank you very much in advance,

Ellen

Ellen van Holstein
PhD candidate
Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research
University of Wollongong
NSW 2522
emvh894@uowmail.edu.au
0401740654
Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet introducing the research project:

‘The urban nature of community gardens’

Ellen van Holstein

This is an invitation to participate in a research project.

Purpose of the research

This project seeks to better understand how community gardens sit in the urban environment. How do both gardeners and neighbouring residents relate to the garden and how do planners response to the emergence of gardens.

We plan to ask participants about:

1. attitudes towards the community garden. (e.g. Can you tell me about how the garden was started and how you got involved? What do you think of the present appearance of the garden and what would you like to change about that?)

2. views on how the garden relates to the neighbourhood. (e.g. Can you tell me about what the garden means for the neighbourhood and for the people gardening and living here? How is the relation between the gardeners and other groups such as neighbours, the local council and other communities?)

Your involvement

If you are willing to be involved in this research I will conduct an interview with you that is likely to last between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on how much time you have available. If you agree, I will record the interview. The only people who will hear the recording and see the transcript are me and my two supervisors.

You may choose to be identified in my research by name or by a pseudonym.

You may choose to allow photos being taken and used in which you are identifiable or to object to this.

You may withdraw from the project at any time, and you will not be negatively affected in any way.

Expected outcomes

Findings from this study will be published as scholarly journal articles or book chapters which will form part of a thesis by publication. They will also be presented as part of verbal conference presentations.

Questions or complaints

If you have any questions of concerns, you may ask me at any time before, during or after the interview. The supervisors of this research project are also available to answer any questions you may have. Please find their contact details below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the way the research is conducted, you should contact the University of Wollongong Ethics Officer on 02 4221 4457 or rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you very much for considering being involved in my research.

Ellen van Holstein

emvh894@uowmail.edu.au

Supervisors:

Lesley Head
lhead@uow.edu.au
+61242213124

Leah Gibbs
leah@uow.edu.au
+61242981547
Appendix 3: Consent form

Consent Form for Research Participants
‘The urban nature of community gardens’

Ellen van Holstein

I have discussed this research project with Ellen van Holstein, and have been given information about the project. I understand that Ellen is conducting this research as part of her PhD candidature at the University of Wollongong.

I have been advised of what is involved in participating in this project, including how much time will be required, and I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. If I choose to do so I will not be negatively affected in any way.

If I have any questions about the research, I can contact Ellen by email (contact details below). If I have any concerns or complaints I can contact the Ethics Officer in the Research Services Office, University of Wollongong, on 02 4221 4457 or rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to:

- participate in an interview, likely to last between 30 and 60 minutes; and
- have the interview recorded, so it can be transcribed.

I understand that the information collected during the interview may be used for a written journal article or book chapter, and a verbal conference presentation, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

In this research project I wish to be identified by:

- name;
- pseudonym (I do not wish to be identified).

I understand that Ellen may take photos during her visits to the garden and that she might want to use these to illustrate the written journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations:

- I object to photos being used in which I am identifiable.
- I do not have a problem with my photos featuring in articles, chapters and presentations.

Name:  
Signed:  Date:

Ellen van Holstein  
emvh894@uowmail.edu.au  
Faculty of Science  
School of Earth & Environmental Sciences  
University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia  
www.uow.edu.au
## Appendix 4: Background questions

### Background questions for Research Participants in the project:

‘The urban nature of community gardens’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes I have children age(s)......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of tenure do you hold?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I am an owner-occupier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you lived at your current residence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you live with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Housemates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other, namely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you affiliated with other neighbourhood or community organisations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes ,namely..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the highest level of education you have attained?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your occupation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your country of birth and/or ethnic identity?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia
emvh894@uowmail.edu.au www.uow.edu.au
Appendix 5: Interview guide 1

Section 1: the start of the garden
- Can you tell me about how you got involved?
  - How did you know about the garden?
  - What was the first contact or visit like?
  - Is the garden community open or relatively closed?
  - What motivated you to enquire?
  - Have you gardened previously?

Section 2: the current garden
- What do you think of the present appearance of the garden?
  - Do you feel the garden is sufficiently being looked after?
  - Do you feel that the garden changes the aesthetic appeal of the area?
- What do you think about how the garden is governed?
  - How is it decided how the garden is designed and managed?
  - Who are involved in these processes?
  - Are there differences of opinion between members?
  - How is consensus reached?
  - How do you feel about how decisions are made?
- Is there anything about the garden’s organisation or look that you would like to change?

Section 3: the garden in the neighbourhood
- Can you tell me about what the garden means for the neighbourhood and for the people gardening and living here?
- Does the garden have educational, productive, and/or aesthetic value, for example?
- Is the garden important to you and your community and if so why?
- Can you tell me about how gardeners relate to other groups such as neighbours, the local council, businesses, schools and other communities?
- How is the garden connected or separated from the fabric of the neighbourhood?
  - How are the boundaries of the garden managed?
  - Does the garden connect to other green spaces?

Section 4: garden use and garden practices
- What do people grow and why?
  What types of edible and decorative plants are grown?
  Is nativeness, for example, taken into account?
  How are weeds and other unwelcome others treated?
- How are resources managed?
- Is the garden used in ways that go beyond gardening?
  How?

How would you like to see the garden develop in the future?

Is there anything we haven’t talked about that is important to you with regard to the garden?
Appendix 6: Interview guide 2

**Getting started:**

**Getting involved:**
When did you get involved?
How did you get involved?
How do you become part of the group?
   Is that a fairly straightforward process? Or have there been barriers either for you or maybe for others?

**Motivations:**
What motivated you to get involved?
Why did you choose this garden?
Does it meet your motivations?

**Value:**
What is important to you in this garden? Why do you keep going? What do you value about it?
   If they don’t bring it up themselves, what do you think about the experience of setting up the garden?
   Can you reflect on that?

**Private versus communal**
Have you gardened in other places?
Do you have a garden at home?
Do your private garden and the community garden play different roles?
Do you do different things in the two gardens?
Do you plant different things?
Do you garden with family or friends in either or both?

At the garden

Plot
Do you have a plot?
Yes:
Can you tell me about your plot?
  How did you get started? Did you put in soil and compost, where from?
  Where do things come from such as the plants, the stakes etc
  What do you grow? Why those things?
What are the special characteristics or requirements of your plot?
Are you bothered by any kinds of pests?
  How do you respond to those? With which tools or practices?
No:
Can you tell me about being a garden member without a plot?
  What are your reasons for not having a plot?
  What do you like/dislike about not having a plot?
  What kind of things do you do when you come into the garden?
Can you tell me about how you see your responsibilities towards the garden?
  Are there parts of the garden you want to look after more than other parts?
  Do you imagine membership to be very different for people with a plot?

Routine/gardening time

Is the community garden part of a daily or weekly ritual?
  How does gardening fit in with other, weekly routines?
Can you show me and tell me about what you normally do when you are here?

How often do you go to the garden?

How much time do you spend there?

Do you go by yourself or with other people?

Do you go to working bees or/and independently? How are those visits different?

Do you spend more or less time at the garden than you would like to?

**Time pressure**

Do you plant differently when you know you have less or more time you can spend here?

Do you ask people to water or look after your plants for you when you are away?

**Sharing plots, resources, responsibilities and rewards**

How do you share responsibilities and rewards of gardening with other people on your plot or in the communal areas?

How do you share your plot, decide what you are growing and who looks after things when?

How do you make sure the plot gets watered and not overwatered?

How do you share the harvest?

Who gets to pick the produce?

Who gets produce from the communal areas?

Could you tell me about the resources that have gone into the garden and your plot?

Where does stuff come from? Where does money come from?

What is the proportion of things bought and things recycled or sourced from elsewhere?

**Water**

The garden does not have a tap. How do you feel about that?

Can you tell me about your **watering practices**?
How do you water? Cans or drip? How often?

Where do you take water from?

Which areas do you water?

Do you have experiences of scarcity to water?

Can you tell me about how you have experienced those periods?

How have you responded to that in your gardening?

Are you anticipating summer drought in any way? Different plants for example?

Who waters the communal areas? How do people know when to and how much to water?

How is the tank water shared between the gardeners? Are there norms or rules?

**Food**

Why do you grow food? Can you tell me about what it means to you?

Do you feel what you grow is different from what is available in shops?

Is growing food like you imagined it to be?

Is it difficult/easier, more or less time-consuming, etc.

Can you tell me about harvesting food?

When do you harvest? How do you know when to? Who does it? Is it something to look forward to?

Is it a different experience eating things you have grown yourself?

Is food from the garden a constant and substantial or more a sporadic addition to your family’s meal?

**Garden in the neighbourhood**

How does the garden relate to the neighbourhood?

Does the garden work with other neighbourhood organisations?

How do you think the garden is perceived by neighbours?

What is the importance of those opinions to you?
Do you feel responsibility towards neighbours to keep the garden tidy? Why and to what extent.

What does the garden add to the neighbourhood in your opinion?

**To close**

How do you see the future of the garden?

Are there things you would like to develop or change?

What do you plan on doing on your plot?

Is there anything you would like to add?