

Sustainability in the City and Beyond

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Community Garden as a Third Place: On Neighborhood Spatial Dynamics and Social Cohesion

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Building on theories of third place, this research explores how community gardens frame neighborhood dynamics by favouring informal interactions that could improve social life and instill social cohesion at the local level. Neither the workplace nor within the domestic sphere, third places are “sociable spaces where users can relax and rejuvenate on neutral ground, where people from diverse groups can interact on equal terms and feel a sense of belonging” (Thompson et al., 2018, p.12). Oldenburg and Brissette (1982) express concerns about the disappearing of places for casual social interactions in American societies, which shed light on the importance of facilitating informal public life so as to build social structures of communities. Having access to a third place enhances people’s perceived quality of life in their community (Jeffres et al., 2009). Hooper (2015) illustrates how third places in the everyday environment affect people’s social life positively by supporting different modes of neighborly engagement that affect health-enhancing social opportunities. Marshal et al. (2017) demonstrate how gardens and other third places contribute to develop a compassionate community. This research aims to analyze how community gardens contribute to the everyday social life, while enhancing quality of life at the neighbourhood level. It wishes to verify the hypothesis that community gardens act as third places, while documenting how they support social interactions. It conceptualizes community garden as material, spatial and social platform for informal gatherings, leading to what Putman (2005) calls *bridging and bonding social relationships*. Unlike some other third places, such as pubs or cafés, community gardens do not entail formal economic transactions. Community gardens support reciprocal and non-hierarchical interactions, as well as the exchange of tangible and intangible resources (such as gardening and culinary knowledge) in a non-market sharing context, as Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) would put it. Sustainable development calls for responsible use of resources as well as for social, economic and environmental equity. As a space for the production of food, for the sharing of knowledge, and for meaningful social interactions, community gardens can be seen as a prototypical platform for sustainable urban living. Case studies conducted in Montréal will allow the investigation of how the material and spatial layout of community gardens support social interactions, while contributing to shape social bonds. Spatial analysis, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and surveys will be used for such purposes.



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