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Looking at community gardens through neoliberal lenses

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Looking at community gardens through neoliberal lenses

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis examines the practice of community gardening using neoliberalism as a theoretical tool. The word community gardening probably evokes positive images to many people. Images such as children digging up the soil or people gathering around a vegetable garden in the middle of a city cannot seem to be controversial. Community gardens, where people share a piece of land to produce food, are increasingly attracting interest. In addition to providing fresh vegetables and fruits or outdoor recreations, community gardens are often portrayed as an agent of social change to address issues related to food security, the environment, or community building. However, this thesis aims to identify possible neoliberal notions in the practice of community gardening. The interviews conducted with on-site leaders and outside supporters of community gardens in this case study revealed both the traits of neoliberalism and the resistance to it. While it is hard to deny the benefits that community gardening might realize for its participants, community gardening cannot replace safety net programs such as food stamps or school lunch programs that address food insecurity. I conclude that public policy should tackle fundamental issues of inequality and poverty and hunger because community gardens can only be part of the solution, if at all, for food insecurity among low-income households.

Chapter 1. Introduction

What is a community garden and why examine it?

Community gardening has become more than just a leisure activity for people who are interested in the alternative agrifood movements. Community gardening and urban agriculture have recently been discussed and practiced as a means to address social, environmental, and economic issues in this rapidly changing environment.

On February 12, 2009, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) intends to create community gardens at every USDA facility worldwide (Harless, 2009). Shortly thereafter on March 20, 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama began a vegetable garden in the White House lawn, inviting students from a local public school to participate in the groundbreaking and speaking to them about the importance of local food production (Burros, 2009).

In addition to concerns for food safety and environmental issues, the current global financial crisis may be a contributing reason to the growing number of people who have started to garden and grow their own food (Marsh, 1998; Stegemoeller, 2009; Woolsey and Biggart, 2002). United We Serve is a summer 2009 initiative launched by the Obama administration to address the economic recession by way of volunteerism and community rebuilding. Among other things, it encourages Americans to start community gardens to improve health issues based on the belief that community gardens can provide access to traditional and nutritional produce that may not be available to low-income families and individuals (United We Serve website, 2009). While claims that community gardens provide better access to healthy food may hold true in some places, this thesis will explore a wider range of circumstances, benefits, and even drawbacks associated with the practice.

What exactly constitutes a community garden? The American Community Garden Association (ACGA) uses a broad definition of a community garden, which is simply “any piece of land gardened by a group of people” (American Community Garden

Association (ACGA) website, 2009). This thesis will use this definition of community garden. To be more specific, the term community garden refers to a place where food is produced. Therefore, a flower garden is not included even if a group of individuals maintained it together. In terms of the structure of the garden, different forms will be discussed throughout this work, such as neighborhood gardens, school gardens, and low-income housing gardens. The key criterion is that the garden is maintained collectively.

The idea of growing one's own food or cultivating urban spaces for food might spring forth positive images such as independent citizens feeding themselves. Locally based food production appears to be an ideal solution to address today's food-related issues, such as hunger and environmental degradation. Alternative food practices such as community-supported agriculture (CSA)¹, farmers' markets, and community gardens may indeed contribute to health, environmental, and/or social benefits. However, there is a danger in romanticizing alternative agrifood movements and failing to see their shortcomings. Advocates of community gardening, in particular, often celebrate its ability to connect people, food, and the land. While there are many studies that critically challenge alternative agrifood movements, they tend to look at more entrepreneurial practices, such as CSA and farmers' markets (Allen, 2003; Guthman, 2008; Hinrichs, 2002; Holloway et al., 2007; Jackson et al., 2007; Rosin, 2007). There are still few studies that critically examine community gardening (Pudup, 2008; Weisman, 2009). Instead, academic papers on community gardens tend to focus on their benefits (Baker, 2004; Blair et al., 1991; Ferris et al., 2001; Garnett, 1996).

The notion of community gardening tends to be viewed as a self-evident "good," which everyone supports (Maxey, 2007). However, in reality it is contested and complex. When discussing the construction of sustainability, Maxey (2007) argued that if alternative agrifood studies fail to rigorously scrutinize sustainability, we will not be able to nurture sustainability's potential (Maxey, 2007). Similarly, while community gardens

¹ While CSAs take different forms, in general a CSA involves a direct relationship between producers and consumers based on an agreement between them. Shareholders or members of a CSA pay a farmer upfront for a season's share so that a farmer can plan and operate a growing season with the secured market (Cone and Myhre, 2000). In return, CSA members receive produce ('shares') every week.

may in fact reify social, economic and environmental benefits, Lawson, author of *City Bountiful*, argues that it merits further inquiry to make it more rigorous and sustainable (Lawson, 2005). This thesis aims to contribute to fill this gap - the lack of critical studies on community gardening - by examining the complexity and contradictions that may exist in the practice of community gardening.

Goal for this study

The purpose of sociology is not to simply document and analyze the conditions of the social world. The goal is to highlight them so that they can be improved (Allen, 2008). Even if one study by itself cannot change social structures, conditions, or policies, it may shed new light on issues that challenge existing views and help change the way social conditions are perceived and understood (Allen, 2008). Based on such conviction, my main goal is to critically examine the community gardens in an Iowa city to gain a new perspective on community gardening. More specifically, this thesis will investigate the neoliberal traits that may exist within community gardens by asking the following research question:

Do community gardens exemplify the traits of neoliberalism?

To answer this question, I aim to:

- a) determine which outside entities provide assistance to the community gardens
- b) examine the reasons and motivations behind the outside supports
- c) understand how the on-site leaders and the participants view the purpose and benefits of their gardens.

These three sub-questions help probe the overarching research question as they aim to investigate the existence or absence of neoliberal traits in community gardening both at the structural level and the individual level.

Neoliberalism is the theoretical framework that serves as a research lens through which I observe community gardens for this particular study. I chose neoliberalism as my guiding framework because although some scholars raised critical questions about community gardens in light of community gardens, these questions have not widely probed in existing literature (Guthman, 2008; Pudup 2008).

Neoliberalism includes a wide range of ideas and practices (Beeson and Firth, 1998). Larner (2000) defined neoliberalism as “both a political discourse about nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance.” (p. 6). She further classified three main types of neoliberalism: neoliberalism as a policy, neoliberalism as ideology and neoliberalism as governmentality.

Neoliberalism is most commonly conceptualized as policy. In this capacity, the state makes a shift away from welfare activities and let the market take more control on public goods and services. Using neoliberalism as ideology, the state tries to approach a diverse population to influence dominant political thought and discussions. By doing so, the state tries to create neoliberal hegemony to increase market control. Neoliberalism as governmentality reminds us that while neoliberalism may entail small government, it does not mean that there is less governance. Under neoliberalism, the state indeed governs both institutions and individuals to increase the individual responsibilities for social conditions (Larner, 2000).

Among different ideas and practices that neoliberalism incorporates, I focus on the characteristic of neoliberalism as governmentality, which tries to manipulate individuals to follow the idea of personal responsibilities to care for themselves (Lemke, 2001). The goal of such governance is to reduce the responsibilities of the state for providing welfare services.

In relation to the agrifood sector, neoliberalization may be present when individuals are held responsible for the existence of hunger as welfare responsibilities are shifted from the state to individuals. Another neoliberal theme in alternative agrifood movement can be identified when alternative agrifood advocates incorporate entrepreneurialism and use of market mechanisms to achieve their goals of improving the agriculture and food system (Guthman, 2008). In this study, however, I especially focus on the first characteristic of neoliberalism, which Guthman calls responsabilization (Guthman, 2008).

To explore the research question, I conducted a case study of four community gardens in an Iowa city. The case study method was selected to provide me with an in-depth picture of community gardening in a particular place at a particular time. I interviewed ten people (four on-site community garden leaders and six from public and private institutions, which supports or have supported a city's community gardening effort) between November 2008 and February 2009. In addition to one-on-one interviews, I analyzed secondary data, including media that covered stories of the community gardens in the city as well as the city's website.

An overview of this study's site

The study site for this thesis is located in Iowa, a state with a strong agricultural background. This heritage shapes the state's identity economically, culturally, and environmentally. In the U.S., Iowa is ranked third in total value of agricultural products sold in 2007, and it is the nation's top producer of corn and soybeans (in terms of acres), milk and other dairy products (in terms of sales value), and layer hens, hogs, and pullets (in terms of number of inventory items) (USDA, 2007). In addition to being the home of Pioneer Hi-Bred International headquarters, Iowa hosts facilities of transnational agribusiness giants such as Cargill, Archer-Daniel Midland, and Monsanto, antagonists to the alternative agrifood movements. Critics of these large-scale food industries are concerned with their business practices that involve overwhelming market control, negative impacts on the environment, and compromise health of citizens and animals.

Despite a monolithic presence of conventional agriculture, there are also alternative agrifood movements thriving in the state. Non-profit organizations, such as Practical Farmers of Iowa and Iowa Farmers Union, address the issues of sustainable agriculture by providing supports to farmers through research and education to encourage them to achieve agricultural practices that promote the health of the environment, community and their lives. There are about 70 CSA farms (Local Harvest website, 2009) and 186 farmers' markets (USDA, 2009) in Iowa. Although alternative agrifood movements are gaining momentum in Iowa, there are not many studies on alternative agrifood initiatives in the state (Hinrichs, 2000; Hinrichs, 2003; Otto and Varner, 2005;

Wells et al., 1999) and there are no studies that look at community gardening in particular.

I chose to look at one Iowa city for my case study for several reasons. First, the city has several community gardens with different structures including a neighborhood garden, school garden and fruit tree garden. Second, the city's Parks and Recreation Department has taken the initiative in developing and assisting community gardening efforts. The level of the municipality's involvement in this case is comparable to other US cities with active community gardening programs (Bjornson, 2006). The City Parks and Recreation Department initiated a community gardening program in 1998, when Sophie, the community garden coordinator obtained a job with the Department to pursue her vision of creating community gardens. The Department remains the main vehicle for this program with the collaboration of other private and public entities. Although the community garden program was originally a top-down decision and the city continues to provide resources, the Parks and Recreation Department also emphasizes the importance of each neighborhood's sovereignty to determine and to organize the kind of garden the community would like to establish.

In 2003, the city received a USDA Community Food Project Competitive Grants Program (USDA- CFPCGP) grant to increase community food security through developing edible landscapes and backyard/community gardens. The main goal of the project was to increase food security in low-income neighborhoods in the city by helping low-income residents establish raised bed gardens in their backyards or in open common areas and by creating edible landscapes with fruit trees. Specific project goals were to build backyard kitchen gardens in low-income neighborhoods, to create fruit tree orchards in community spaces, to provide families open-pollinated heirloom seed for their gardens and to assist existing community gardens in marketing produce and developing a business plan.

The grant project coordinators mailed letters to all neighborhood associations in the city to announce the possibility of receiving free gardens on a neighborhood-wide

basis. The coordinators met with applicants and explained the commitments needed from the recipients. For example, recipients of gardens were required to attend workshops on basic garden knowledge, such as choosing the proper location, preparing soil, weed and disease control, and harvesting. Those who were accepted received a raised bed garden (4ft x 8 ft wooden frame) in April 2004, as well as soil and seeds. By the end of the project, the project delivered a total of 99 raised beds to individual homes and institutions in addition to nine edible landscapes and community gardens that were created or enhanced through this project.

Since the project ended in 2006, the city has not kept in touch with most of the groups and individuals who received plants or raised bed gardens. Community gardening is still a small portion of all the programs that the city's Parks and Recreation Department conducts, and there is only a single person in charge of this particular program. Without outside financial assistance, the city does not have enough funds to keep track of the project after USDA funding ended.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Following this introduction, the literature review chapter discusses previous studies on community gardens in the U.S. to provide a historical background of community gardens and to lay a foundation of what has already been studied on this topic. Alternative agrifood movements are discussed, which are often associated with community gardens. Moreover, the discussion of neoliberalism in alternative agrifood movements sets up the backbone for this study as the theoretical framework. Studies on neoliberalization of the food system by scholars are reviewed, such as the work of Guthman and Allen. The research methods chapter discusses specific steps taken to conduct this study. The results and discussion chapters examine how community gardens in this study exemplify neoliberalism by emphasizing individual responsibility to feed oneself. These chapters also capture the resistance to neoliberalism surrounding community gardening. In the conclusion chapter, I revisit the steps I took in conducting this research and summarize the key findings. I also note limitations of this study and suggest future research questions.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

To understand community gardens in the US, a discussion of alternative agrifood movements is important. The concept of community gardening is often categorized under the overarching umbrella of alternative agrifood movements, which is broadly divided into two different foci—sustainable agriculture and community food security (Allen, 2004). Community gardens are often viewed as part of community food security movements because of their ability to provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables without the use of commercial market systems (Allen, et al., 2003). Therefore, I first address the notion of alternative agrifood, followed by a discussion of community food security and community gardens. The literature in this chapter aims to help explain how my research question - how community gardens might exemplify the traits of neoliberalism - can fill a gap in existing studies on community gardens. At the end of this chapter, I introduce the notion of neoliberalization in alternative agrifood movements.

The notion of 'alternative' agrifood

From university classrooms to the popular media, there has been an increasing number of discussions about the current food system in response to the growing concerns about food safety, the environment, and other issues related to the agriculture and global food system we have today. The conventional food system relies on industrialized agriculture and the global marketplace. Under industrialized agriculture, farms focus on specialized commodity crops with high input of fertilizers, pesticides and machinery as well as technologies such as genetically modified genes. With mass production of fewer crop varieties, the crop prices remain low. As a result, farmers who specialize in main monoculture or biculture crops, such as corns and soybeans in case of the US, have to depend on federal subsidies because they do not make a profit that covers the cost of inputs (Strange, 1984). Alternative agrifood advocates, who find the current food system problematic, include scholars, political activists, journalists, educators and chefs. They encourage us to make the connection between greater social, economic, or environmental issues and the way we purchase and eat food everyday. To oppose conventional, industrialized and global food systems, they call for creating and participating in

alternative agrifood systems (Kloppenburger et al., 2000). Critics of the conventional food system contend that environmental problems, health problems, and decline in local economies and rural communities are rooted in industrialized agricultural model (Jackson, 1984).

Allen defines social movements as “efforts to change existing political, economic and cultural conditions” (Allen, 2004, p. 3). Alternative agrifood movements, as a social movement, try to change the existing structure that controls how food is produced, processed and distributed. While alternative agrifood movements have identified their foes, the notion of ‘alternative’ itself is contested, complex, and ambivalent (Maxey, 2007; Maye et al., 2007). The alternative agrifood system does not have a set of ingredients or formula. It usually aims to achieve short supply chains and more direct relationships between producers and consumers (Maye et al., 2007). In the US, alternative agrifood movements take the form of social and oppositional movements, sharing a political agenda to create food systems that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially just (Allen et al., 2003; Holloway, 2007; Maye, 2007). To achieve these goals, alternative agrifood movements advocate initiatives such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), farmers’ markets, community gardens and small-scale processing and enterprise (Kloppenburger et al., 2000).

Although the term ‘alternative’ originally emerged to address agricultural sustainability, alternative agrifood movements today encompass a broad range of issues, including social justice with a focus on hunger, class, labor, and race (Kloppenburger et al., 2000). In fact, alternative agrifood systems are not just about improving the quality of food or the environment. Alternative agrifood advocates seek to address issues at both systemic and individual levels. While they problematize the corporate control and globalization of the food system or the environmental degradation caused by the food production and distribution system, they are also concerned with people’s lack of knowledge about health, cooking and nutrition, and lack of experience growing and preparing food (Allen et al., 2003).

Similarly, while alternative agrifood advocates try to address larger issues such as agriculture, trade or environmental policy reforms, the recommendations for specific actions tend to be focused on individuals. In the popular media, phrases such as “voting with your fork” or “changing the food system one meal at a time” (Kristof, 2009; Pollan, 2006) suggest that our everyday eating choices can impact the politics, agricultural practices, and the food system as a whole. In academia as well, scholars encourage us to change the way we eat in order to address environmental, economic, and social maladies (Berry, 1990; Ikerd, 2005). By conducting interviews with leaders from California alternative agrifood initiatives, Allen et al. (2003) found that the most common solutions for contemporary food system problems, suggested by leaders, were neighborhood and community-oriented, hands-on programs, including community gardening by food consumers themselves (Allen et al., 2003). Another emphasis found was education for personal change, helping people realize that they can grow some of their own food (Allen et al., 2003).

Food system localization is a key component of alternative agrifood movements both as goal and strategy (Allen, 2003; Allen and Hinrichs, 2007; Kloppenburg et al., 1996). Locally based food systems are said to have a number of benefits, such as improving the environment and revitalizing the local economy and community (Ikerd, 2008; Perkins, 1999). By stressing localism, alternative agrifood advocates try to pay attention to the specificities of space and place and oppose the neoliberal model of a uniform and global economy, which always prioritizes economic growth and profit over health of people (Chomsky, 1999; Maye, 2007). While localism is presented as the oppositional alternative to globalized food system, some scholars raise alarm, noting that the simple local versus global, or alternative versus conventional binary is problematic as it may fail to highlight the concepts in complex and relational ways and therefore encourage reductionist thinking and practice (Hinrichs, 2003; Holloway, 2007; Maxey, 2007).

While a diverse population celebrates alternative agrifood movements as agents of social change or political action (Allen et al., 2003), some scholars are not convinced that the movements are indeed seeking to create a new structure to produce and distribute the

food. They are concerned that the movements are merely operating within the same political-economic structures that they oppose, perpetuating a system that privileges those with power while oppressing the poor (Allen et al., 2003; Hinrichs and Kramer, 2002; Guthman, 2008). Guthman conducted a study on the alternative food institutions in California based on the interviews with CSA farmers and farmer's market vendors (2008). She argued that existing research on alternative agrifood institutions such as CSAs and farmers' market suggested that people of color, especially African Americans, tended to not participate in these markets (Guthman, 2008). Other studies have shown that it is difficult to attain alternative agrifood initiative participants who are diverse in terms of income, education and occupation. Alternative food initiatives were less inclined to meet the needs of lower income households or individuals (Hinrichs and Kremer, 2002; Slocum 2007). If alternative agrifood movements are to address social issues including equality, it is problematic that they are only benefitting certain groups of more advantaged people.

Community food security

The USDA defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (Nord, Andrews and Carlson, 2008. p.2). Demographic characteristics of food insecure households and reasons for food insecurity differ among urban, suburban and rural residents. Food insecurity can be caused by different reasons including income or employment constraints and store availability (Garasky, Morton and Greder, 2004; Morton and Blanchard, 2007). The USDA definition of food security does not seem to sufficiently capture the complexity related to this issue. To cover the limitation of USDA definition, Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC)² came up with its own definition of community food security. According to Hamm and Bellows (2009): “Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food

² CFSC is the largest organization in the US that advocates community food security. It is a non-profit organization with almost 300 members from diverse organizations that address community food security issues with different approaches, including sustainable agriculture, anti-hunger, and community gardening.

system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.” (Community Food Security Coalition website).

The concept of community food security is rooted in both the political economy critique of the industrialized food system and the environmental movement (Power, 1999). It emerged in the mid-1980s in response to economic downturns (Wekerle, 2004). Similar to the alternative agrifood system, community food security advocates criticize the industrialized food system in which a few multinational corporations hold considerable power and control over how and what people eat (Heffernan and Hendrickson, 1999). In 1996, the National Community Food Security Coalition was created, which demonstrated an increased interest in the community food security approach on a national scale. In the same year, the 1996 farm bill allocated \$16 million for the creation of the USDA’s Community Food Projects Grants program partly due to increased public pressures for community food security movements (Allen, 1999; Hinrichs and Kramer, 2002).

Community food security movements share similar goals and strategies with alternative agrifood movements. It seeks to address the fundamental causes of food insecurity by addressing a variety of issues such as social justice, sustainable food systems and economic viability (Allen, 1999; Pelletier et al., 1999). It does not aim to simplistically appease food insecurity by providing short-term solutions such as entitlement programs by means of the industrialized food system. The industrialized food system delivers consumers a wide variety of inexpensive food from all over the world with the help of chemical and technological inputs, transportation and global market. However, critics argue that industrial agriculture is not energy efficient as it produces less energy (calorie) of food than the amount of fossil fuels used (Lovins, et al., 1984).

Being the predominant movement within the alternative agrifood movement as a whole, the community food security movement stresses alternative models to the industrialized and global model of food systems by re-linking production and consumption, and re-bestowing power and control to local and regional food production

(Wekerle, 2004; Allen 1999). Other proponents of community food security argue that this concept can replace the piecemeal approach in addressing food related issues. Community food security, they argue, aims to ensure affordable, appropriate, nutritious, accessible food for all residents at all times but not by means of short-term or stopgap approaches—using charity or welfare entitlement— but by empowering consumers and strengthening local food networks (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999).

Some scholars, however, express some concerns with community food security movements. The most fundamental issue with the term community food security, Anderson and Cook (1999) argued, was the vagueness of the term ‘community.’ If community is understood in abstract terms such as a group with shared values, community may contain a small group of people and the concept of community food security may not be effective in practice to actually influence policy. For the movement to be effective, people in the community, not scholars or policy makers need to define what ‘community’ is (Anderson and Cook, 1999). Similarly, Allen (1999) pointed out that community is never homogenous and it is very difficult to bring together people with diverse interests.

Community food security movements promote community gardening as part of a broader strategy to increase food security by enabling people to grow fresh fruits and vegetables for their own consumption or sale (Baker, 2004; Community Food Security Coalition website; Lawson, 2005). While community food security can be part of efforts in meeting the food security needs of the population, Allen (1999) argued that it could not replace basic food programs that ensure regular food access (Allen, 1999). The self-reliant food system is important, however, it is not sufficient to achieve food security. Food security requires justice and equity. For this reason, political efforts to reform policies that privilege the wealthy and oppress the poor are crucial (Allen, 1999). For example, reduced safety net programs are hurting the poor. In the mean time, trade policies that favor transnational corporations let them gain more control and decision making power over the food we eat (Allen, 1999). If structural issues such as inequality are ignored, a community-development approach to food security may reinforce the idea

of ‘victim blaming’ which will offer little long-run advancement for either antipoverty or sustainability movements (Power, 1999). Similar to alternative agrifood movements, the notion of community food security needs to be examined to determine if it is indeed addressing food insecurity issues. In the next section, I discuss the community garden, the subject of my thesis.

Brief summary of community gardens

Community gardens have a long history in the US. They can be traced all the way back to the 1890s to the first community garden effort in the US (Lawson, 2005). Although community gardening space is primarily for the cultivation and production of food or flowers, throughout its history it has not been about simply growing food. Its goals have also included social, educational, or economic functions (Lawson, 2005).

In the 1890s, social reformers in cities started to utilize vacant lots for cultivation, providing land and technical assistance to unemployed laborers. During World War I, millions of Americans gardened in their backyards or in community gardens to support domestic food supply. The federal government also encouraged school children to garden by forming the US School Garden Army. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, private, municipal or state agencies gave support to people to participate in depression-era relief gardens. Under the umbrella of a nationwide campaign to plant ‘victory gardens’ during World War II, each state also developed its own victory garden program. During each different era, gardening was used to contribute to war efforts or combat social and economic disruptions. After each period of crisis-induced garden boom, the momentum or support for community gardens waned. For example, after World War II, most of the land that had been borrowed to create community gardens was returned to its original use or used for development (Lawson, 2005). This ephemeral nature of community garden still seems to exist.

In the midst of an energy crisis, rising food cost, and increasing environmental concerns, gardening gained renewed interest in the mid-1970s (Lawson, 2005). In the 1970s and 1980s, participants started to be more involved with planning and development

of community gardens and community gardening has become an expression of grassroots activism (Lawson, 2005). It has become more than a way for participants to achieve subsistence, but a venue to express their political stance by becoming less dependent on the market system. The USDA initiated the Urban Garden Program in 1976 to help low-income people in cities to grow and preserve food. As a result, many cities enhanced their community garden programs (Allen, 1999; Lawson, 2005). In 1979, the American Community Gardening Association was officially launched with the mission to promote community gardening and foster networks among different garden groups (Lawson, 2005). Similar to the disappearance of victory gardens after World War II, some community garden sites were lost to development when the economic situation improved at the end of the 1980s (Lawson, 2005).

However, the overall community gardening movement continued to evolve in the 1990s, and increased its role as an agent of social change by offering a space for activists to experiment with different strategies and practices (Lawson, 2005; Shepard, 2009). For example, activists can cultivate food by themselves to address food security issues rather than depending on existing channels such as food pantries or soup kitchens. Proponents of community garden have argued that such gardens offer a unique space where people could meet and act together for social, political or civic purposes (Shepard, 2009).

Alternative agrifood advocates often herald community gardens as a means to counter the existing industrial food system, to raise awareness of food related issues, and to address food insecurity (Hinrichs, 2002). The current industrialized food system has significantly lowered the cost of food. The average US food share of total expenditure in 2007 was 6 percent, lowest among the high-income countries (USDA-ERS, 2008). However, when the external costs such as health care due to diet related chronic diseases or environmental impacts are considered, critics argue that this cheap food cannot solve the problem of food insecurity. Moreover, even with the prominence of cheap industrialized food, food insecurity is still a serious issue. In 2008, 49.1 million people in the U.S. lived in food-insecure households (USDA, 2009)

Proponents of community gardens argue that participation in community gardens can have an impact not only on an individual's everyday life but also on policy change or democratic practices (Wekerle, 2004). Supporters claim participation in community gardening may empower poor people. As a result of participation, those who are poor can develop their own knowledge base and improve their lives by themselves, rather than by following an imposed set of solutions (Wekerle, 2004). Wekerle (2004) discussed forms of 'soft opposition' to the globalization of the economy or everyday acts of resistance that Development scholar Fantu Cheru (1997) has identified. By harvesting their own produce in a community garden and reducing reliance on the capitalist market structure, gardeners may be able to participate in this soft opposition. However, it is not clear how everyday acts of resistance in community gardening can relate to greater social movements that involve policy or structural changes (Wekerle, 2004). These arguments do not take into consideration how alternative agrifood movements may not be representing the interests of a wide range of people. Moreover, by focusing on individual improvement, the above arguments are making neoliberal assertions about community gardens.

People become involved in community gardening for various reasons. Common motivations include economic reasons, viewing a garden as a resource to help save money for a food budget (Schmelzkopf, 1996). One study has estimated that a community gardener can save from \$50 to \$250 per season in food costs (Armstrong, 2000). Other common reasons include health benefits and improvements in environment or community building (Armstrong, 2000). Not only do community gardeners save money on food, one study reported that gardeners eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and eat less sweet foods and drinks compared to non-gardeners (Armstrong, 2000). Community gardens also lead to neighborhood organizing beyond gardens by providing a physical location for residents to meet each other, socialize, and learn about other organizations and activities/issues in their local community (Armstrong, 2000; Glover, 2004). Gardens can be a space for creative learning, allowing individuals and groups to exchange their knowledge, skills, and experience (Twiss et al., 2003). With a common interest in gardening as the medium, a garden can provide a safe ground for neighbors to talk and network. Furthermore, by gathering together and fostering social networks

through gardening, participants may be able to address issues outside of gardens such as the crime rate or neighborhood improvements (Glover, 2004).

Community gardens also appeal to newly arrived immigrants who use them to help maintain cultural traditions by continuing skills and identities as farmers or by cultivating vegetables from their home countries that are not readily available at major grocery stores (Twiss et al., 2003). Finally, members of community may foster reciprocity. It is quite common for community gardeners to share their produce with others, or donate excess harvest to local food pantries, creating a source for reciprocity (Armstrong, 2004; Glover, 2004).

Although community gardens may generate numerous benefits as stated above, there are some challenges and limitations as well. A common criticism of community gardening by food system scholars is that community gardens tend to be ephemeral and lack support from public policy makers or municipalities (Allen, 1999; Lawson, 2005). Local and federal governments have often subsidized community gardens. However, the typical problem for community gardens is that they are created on land that does not have high value, and when the land value increases, governments tend to withdraw their support and focus on more profitable projects, developing the land for real estate purposes or selling it (Schmelzkopf, 1996).

Budget cuts in public spending also raise concerns that the cities that have provided support for community gardens might cut down such programs. Historically, until the Reagan-era budget cuts, the USDA funded urban community gardens in many cities (Kameshwari and Kaufman, 1999). In recent years, even in cities that provide financial support to community gardening, community gardens have tended to rank as a low priority in comparison to other food assistance programs such as food stamps and school lunches. This is due to funding restrictions, which tend to favor entitlement-oriented programs. While it is crucial to keep these governmental safety net programs, some scholars have argued that community food security efforts such as community gardening can be important additions (Allen, 1999).

Power issues are a concern in community gardening as well. The study of community gardens in New York City by Schmelzkopf (1996) revealed that even though gardens were located in ethnically diverse neighborhood (with Anglos, African Americans, Dominicans, Asians, but especially Puerto Ricans) and participants were diverse as well, the leadership tended to be well educated and mostly white (Schmelzkopf, 1996). Research has shown that organizers of community gardens in poor neighborhoods tend to be middle-class people who usually come from outside the community (Schmelzkopf, 1996). Community gardening is often said to empower the poor by allowing them to grow their own food. However, if those with more privilege are making decisions without acknowledging or incorporating other visions to address the issues, the practice cannot be as liberating or empowering.

Finally, though ideas about growing your own food, or beautifying the neighborhood with a garden may seem like a great way to address a wide range of concerns, from crime to food security, Lawson (2005) warns that community gardening cannot be a panacea for society. It is important, she argued, to remember that community garden alone could not solve all the food-related problems. For example, while community gardens address different social, cultural and environmental needs of neighborhoods, the ability of community gardens to meet the food security needs of low-income people is limited. Therefore, we ought to look at larger structural problems that create unequal access to food (Allen, 1999).

Community gardens should have specific goals, but also recognize limitations (Lawson, 2005). Moreover, in reality, tending a garden and producing food takes a lot of planning and physical work. The success of most community gardens (read, producing food) requires many players and their combined efforts including gardeners themselves and outside supporters such as non-profit and city agencies (Schmelzkopf, 1996). It is easy to romanticize the power of gardening, but reality likely involves constant battles with weeds and/or personality conflicts among gardeners. As Lawson (2005) argues, community gardens can use more constructive criticism so that they can generate more benefits to those who are involved and to the environment (Lawson, 2005).

Neoliberalization of community gardens

Geographer David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005. p. 2). As the definition suggests, discussions of neoliberalism often revolve around politics and the economy. We see neoliberalism in privatization of public services or expansion of free trade agreement. At the same time, the notion of neoliberalism exists in different realms of our everyday practices as well. Guthman (2008) argues that the food sector could be a key site to study neoliberalism and resistance to it (Guthman, 2008). It is because the current food system has an ambivalent relationship with the notion of neoliberalism. While the food system embraces neoliberalism (e.g. a food and agriculture system that heavily depend on free trade), it also rejects it (e.g. role of national-level agencies in environmental and health regulation) (Guthman, 2008).

To answer my research question, I use the concept of neoliberalization as my theoretical framework. In an academic discourse of alternative agrifood movements, community food security, or community gardening, neoliberalism is frequently a focal point of debate. This indicates the political nature of the current food movement. Some argue that neoliberalism can be a useful analytical lens to critically examine the notion of alternative agrifood. International bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), corporations and governments try to create neoliberal governance of the food system, which prioritizes the market over health of consumers and societies (Maxey, 2007). Others, however, argue that while the alternative agrifood movements oppose the notion of neoliberalism, they end up reinscribing it in practice (Brown and Getz, 2008; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008). In this study, I especially look at the neoliberalization of community gardens, an area in which there has been little study. While there are many studies on neoliberalization of the alternative agrifood system (Brown and Getz, 2008; Guthman, 2006; Guthman 2006; Hayes-Conroy, 2008), there are

only few studies that specifically look at community gardens using neoliberalism as a theoretical lens (Pudup, 2008; Weisman, 2009).

Neoliberalism promotes a “growth-first” approach to urban development. Within such a framework, development needs to embrace competition, and social welfare concerns can come only after growth, jobs, and investments (Tickell, 2002). Neoliberalism functions as a political economic order, which facilitates capital accumulation (Brown and Getz, 2006). According to Heynen and Robbins (2005), we should not understand neoliberalism as a “thing” but neoliberalism as an on-going process. The neoliberal state favors strong private property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005. p. 64). Private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative are crucial as the keys to innovation and wealth creation (Harvey, 2005). While the neoliberal state protects personal and individual freedom in the marketplace, each individual is supposed to look after his or her own well-being. It is understood that individual successes or failures owes to individual actions and the government should not be held responsible for them (Harvey, 2005). Such neoliberal governmentality may exist in alternative agrifood systems as well as community gardens by stressing the importance of individual actions in feeding ourselves.

The neoliberal characteristic of community gardens is identified by some studies. Some scholars criticize community food security projects including community gardening as a patchwork approach to address food security as a whole because they do not tackle structural issues of poverty and inequality. Instead, such projects are merely shifting people’s focus away from greater problems, putting the onus on individuals for their food insecurity or other issues (Johnston, 2007). Johnston (2007) further questions if poor people should obtain their food staples by working in community gardens while middle-class people enjoy gardening simply as a recreational activity. To address the shortcomings of alternative agrifood movements, and to avoid neoliberalizing community gardens, critics call for more comprehensive public plans that involve streamlined effort and commitment by a government body to address social justice issues (Pothukuchi, 1999).

Using the studies introduced above as my guide, I analyzed my data with the neoliberalization of community gardens as my theoretical framework. Before discussing the analysis of my data, the next chapter will present the research methods for this study.

Chapter 3. Research Methods

Every research project has its distinct purposes (Crotty, 1998). To achieve a goal, a researcher needs to craft a plan for his/her research journey. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of neoliberalization is the theoretical framework for this study. It provides the backbone of my study, underpinning my data analysis and conclusions discussed in the later chapters. The idea and practice of neoliberalization, which place individual responsibilities for social welfare and not of the state, has penetrated different realms of our everyday life. For this thesis research, I look particularly at the neoliberalization of community gardens. In this chapter, I will explain the specific steps I took to explore my research question, which is to examine the possible traits of neoliberalism in community gardening.

Case Study of selected community gardens in an Iowa city

I conducted a case study for this research. My goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved at a specific location and a specific time, and the case study was appropriate for achieving such a goal (Merriam, 1998). Case studies produce rich descriptions and analyses of a certain unit or bounded system (Merriam, 1998). In my case, the social unit I studied was community garden on-site leaders of three neighborhood community gardens and one school garden, as well as representatives of four private/public organizations that support or have previously supported community garden programs in a city in Iowa.

The most common criticism of the case study method is its limited ability to produce grand generalizations (Blaikie, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2004). Critics argue that a single or a few cases can only produce poor representation of a population (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Another common criticism is that case study tends to produce biased findings (Blaikie, 2000). However, while a single or a few cases may not generate grand generalizations, a single or a few cases *can* raise questions about a grand generalization we take for granted. By doing so, a case study can challenge and refine existing theory, reveal complexities of an issue and help incite further investigation (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Stake, 1994). By looking

at the case of the community gardens in an Iowa city, I aim to challenge common views on community gardening and alternative agrifood movements contended by previous studies. The popular media and government policy are increasingly portraying community gardens as an agent of social change (See Allyn, 2009; McDonald, 2009).

In response to the criticism that case study often produces biased findings, Flyvbjerg (2004) argued that bias towards verification is not inherent in case study methods per se. Rather, it applies to all other methods as well. Moreover, as with other methods, case studies have their own rigor as it enables a researcher to closely look at the real-life situation. The intense observation that case study methods require often challenges preconceived notions and theories rather than fortifying biases (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

Brief overview of the community gardens in this case study

In this section, I will provide a brief profile of each community garden in this study in alphabetical order.

Cedar School Garden

Cedar School Garden was a school garden for a public elementary school located in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. In this school, the percentage of the students who qualify for free or reduced lunch programs in the school year 2008-2009 was over 90%, one of the highest among all the public schools in the city.

The school started its garden and edible landscaping with fruit trees more than a decade ago under the leadership of the then school principal who had a strong interest in gardening. Cedar School Garden further improved its vegetable garden through the USDA's Community Food Program Competitive Grant Project (USDA-CFPCGP) operated by the city and a nonprofit organization between 2003 and 2006. The school received fruit and nut tree seedlings, as well as perennial plants such as strawberries and asparagus to plant on the school's campus through this grant.

However, school leaders have changed over the years and the strong gardening background of the school has waned. From summer 2008 to summer 2009, the school underwent renovations and the fate of the garden and its edible landscape was unknown when I interviewed Liz, on-site garden coordinator in January 2009. It was not communicated to the construction company to ensure these plants were protected and preserved. When I visited the school in October 2009, the area where the garden had formally located was converted to lawn and I could not spot any perennial crops. Some fruit trees were still in the schoolyard, but the only tree that was bearing fruits, persimmon tree, looked as if it had not been picked.

Elmwood Community Garden

Elmwood Community Garden is the city's biggest community garden (approximately one acre with 90 plots) located in a neighborhood with the moderate median household income. The city's Parks and Recreation Department owns this land located right next to the public library. It is an open area by a well-traveled street, so people can see the garden easily as they walk, bike, or drive by the area. Plotters do not have to pay for the plot or water as the city covers these costs. When the garden started in 2001, the first set of participants collectively decided to make it an organic garden. Therefore, one of the rules for plotters is to apply organic methods, which prohibit the use of genetically-modified seeds and synthetic pesticides or fertilizer (Iowa State University University Extension, 2003).

Being the most popular garden among the four, there were over 20 people on the waiting list in the 2009 growing season. Although most of the participants are families and individuals, some garden plots are maintained by groups of people, such as church fellowship and boy/girl scouts. Most of the participants reside in the general vicinity.

Laurel Community Garden

Laurel Community Garden began in 1999 in a residential neighborhood. It is a small patch of open space (about 60 ft x 60 ft) surrounded by houses. The land is the property of a nearby private college and plotters do not have to pay for the land or water.

Laurel Community Garden is an organic garden. The garden does not have a set number of plots. Instead, they adjust the size and number each year, according to how many people sign up annually. For example, if there are less people signed up, each gardener will get a larger plot. In a year when many people request for a garden plot, each space will be smaller and there may be a waiting list as well.

For the 2009 growing season, there were 27 plots (10 ft x10 ft each). Although garden use is not restricted to the residents of the neighborhood, participants tend to be people who live close to the garden. Laurel Community Garden tends to have a diverse population in terms of age, race, and occupation. Gardeners include children to seniors, including a group from the Boys and Girls Club, college students, as well adults in their 30s to over 60. In terms of occupations, some examples of gardeners during 2009 growing season included teachers, professors, librarians, retirees, homemakers, and restaurant wait staff. Among the 19 people who were present at the 2009 growing season's first meeting at the end of April, there were four indigenous Mexicans (Yaquis), seven Whites, and eight African Americans.

Walnut Community Garden

Walnut Community Garden is run by Walnut Housing Services, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing to low-income citizens in the downtown area. In addition to housing, it offers various educational programs for its residents.

The garden is located on a nearby public elementary school property, about a five-minute walk from the housing units. Gardeners can access the school campus and garden anytime during the growing season. Walnut Community Garden is accessible for free for residents of Walnut Housing Services. Walnut Housing Services cover the cost of water for its residents and the only cost the gardeners have to pay is for seeds. The garden is open to other residents in the neighborhood as well. The only difference is that non-Walnut Housing residents pay a small fee (\$10 per season) to Walnut Housing Services to help pay for the water.

For the 2009 growing season, there are 40 plots (12 ft x 18 ft). About 30-32 gardeners are residents of Walnut Housing Services and eight of them are from the neighborhood. While all participants from the Walnut Housing units are refugees from African and South East Asian countries, such as Sudan, Liberia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, all eight people from the neighborhood are White. The city's botanical center used to prepare the ground every spring, and has also provided gift certificates for participants to purchase gardening materials at local stores in the past. However, Walnut Community Garden has taken over most of the responsibilities for its garden and does not receive any assistance from the city anymore, except for the permission to use the land at a nearby school, which is owned by the city's public school system.

**Table 1. Profiles of the gardens (2009 growing season)
(in alphabetical order)**

Garden	Number of plots³	Waiting list	Size of the garden
Cedar School Garden ⁴	1 (communal plot)	0	Approx. 8,100 square feet
Elmwood Community Garden	90	20+	Approx. one acre (=43,560 square feet)
Laurel Community Garden	27	0	Approx. 3,600 square feet
Oak Grove Edible Landscape	N/A	N/A	Approx. 400 square feet
Walnut Community Garden	40	0	Approx. 7,000 square feet

³ A small piece of land that community gardeners cultivate. Each plot in the garden for this study is usually marked with stakes.

⁴ Cedar School Garden does not exist as of November 2009. The information listed here is from the year 2008.

In-depth interviews

My main data came from in-depth interviews. In-depth interview was chosen as the approach since the nature of the study was exploratory. Miller and Crabtree (1999) state, “the in-depth interview is a powerful qualitative research tool when the focus of inquiry is narrow, the respondents represent a clearly defined and homogeneous bounded unit, the respondents are familiar and comfortable with the interview as a means of communication, and the goal is to generate themes and narratives” (Miller and Crabtree, 1999). Because the above requirements and goals match the conditions of my study, I conducted in-depth interviews.

At the beginning, I contacted Sophie, the community garden coordinator of the City Parks and Recreation Department. Sophie was an ideal key informant for this study because she has always been at the center of the city’s community garden program. Sophie met the requirements for a good informant as she has had over 10 years of intimate experience in the city’s community garden effort and is still involved (Neuman, 2000). Indeed, Sophie created the program and has been involved with it since its inception, which enabled her to refer me to other interview participants. Sophie helped me connect with on-site community garden leaders from all four gardens for this study to gain insight into daily operations of maintaining a community garden.

By reading/watching media about the City’s community gardens I was also able to identify other entities that have helped with the programs. For example, I learned about the involvement of the Iowa Nutrition Network in community garden program by watching a documentary film titled *Food for All? The Status of Hunger in Iowa -- Iowa Food Security, Insecurity, and Hunger*. Interviewing outside supporters was important to learn what kinds of assistance they provide/have provided and their rationale for helping community gardens.

Ten people participated in my study. Of the ten interviewees, four of them have served or are serving as an on-site garden leader for one of the four gardens in this study. Six of the ten interviewees are representatives from public and private institutions that

support or had supported the city's community gardening program. The six included the director and community gardening program coordinator from the city's Parks and Recreation Department, and the executive director and former staff member from a private non-profit organization that had collaborated with the city to enhance the community gardening program through the USDA-CFPCGP. Also interviewed was the CEO of Walnut Housing Services, which hosts the Walnut Community Garden for its residents as well as the residents who live in the vicinity. The last interviewee from the policy side was a representative from the Iowa Nutrition Network. The documentary film entitled, *Food for All? The Status of Hunger in Iowa -- Iowa Food Security, Insecurity, and Hunger*, introduces Iowa Nutrition Network as one of the partners that promotes the community gardening program in the state. The Iowa Nutrition Network is part of the Department of Public Health, whose main objective is to promote health among the people in Iowa, focusing especially on low-income individuals and families. The primary funding for the Iowa Nutrition Network comes from the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly referred to as the Food Stamp Program (Iowa Nutrition Network website). Below table provides the overview of the interview participants for this study.

Table 2. Interview participants: outside supporters and on-site leaders of five community gardens (in alphabetical order)

Name⁵	Relationship to the community gardens	Occupation
Danielle	Outside supporter	Coordinator, Iowa Nutrition Network
Dean	On-site leader (2008-2009 growing season), Elmwood Community Garden	Claims and fraud specialist, a non-profit organization for student loans
Greg	On-site leader (since 2001), Laurel Community Garden	Freelance translator
John	Outside supporter	Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Liz	On-site coordinator (since 2001), Cedar School Garden	Family development specialist, a non-profit organization for children from low-income families
Lynn	Outside supporter	CEO, Walnut Housing Services
Nicole	Outside supporter	Executive director, a non-profit organization that was part of USDA-CFPCGP
Sophie	Outside supporter	Community garden coordinator, Parks and Recreation Department
Tony	Outside supporter	Former food systems program specialist, a non-profit organization that was part of USDA-CFPCGP
Trang	On-site coordinator (since 2002), Walnut Community Garden	Asian case manager, Walnut Housing Services

I determined that the ten interviews I had were sufficient to reach theoretical saturation point. While there is no single set of measurements to know where the saturation point is for a research that uses in-depth interviews, I decided that I had interviewed enough people after identifying recurring themes among the participants (Johnson, 2001).

I conducted interviews in places the participants designated—a public library, coffee shops, and interviewees' offices. I asked them to decide where to meet so that they might feel more comfortable talking with me. One of the participants could not meet me in person, so I conducted the interview over the phone. Each interview lasted for about an hour and I recorded all the interviews with their permission. In conducting interviews, I tried to reinforce the important trait of a qualitative researcher, which is a good

⁵ All the names are pseudonyms.

communicator. A researcher should have a conversation with a purpose, always keeping in mind the research question (Merriam, 1998). While reminding myself of such tactics, I tried not to be intrusive or manipulative. In order to probe my research question, I prepared an interview schedule (see Appendix 1). Many of the questions were open-ended and therefore interview participants mainly led the conversations. Other than making sure that I covered all the interview schedules, I did not intentionally change the direction or topic unless an interviewee kept talking about something irrelevant to community gardens.

Secondary data collection

In addition to one-on-one interviews, I analyzed several secondary data sources to better address my research question. The secondary data was especially useful for obtaining statistical information on social and economic profiles of different neighborhoods. My objective for using secondary data was to achieve more validity and gain multifaceted information on the community gardens by triangulation. Triangulation is the method, which looks at the same phenomenon or research question in light of more than one source of data. Utilizing information from different angles, triangulation helps limit personal and methodological biases (Decrop, 1999).

I analyzed newspaper articles related to the city's community gardens, the City Parks and Recreation Department website, the USDA-CFPCG proposal, the USDA-SNAP guidance, the Iowa Nutrition Network website, and the Iowa Department of Health website. Newspaper articles helped me understand how the general public viewed the community gardens. I also listened and transcribed the phone conference on community gardens hosted by International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in December 2008 when two representatives from the city in this study presented the initiative on community garden program and took questions from participants from across the US who were interested in learning more about municipal involvement in community gardens. The recording was available to the public and enabled me to learn more about how the city values its community garden program.

Non-participant observation

I visited all four of the studied gardens two to five times each. I attended spring planning meetings and visited their workdays. In each visit, I mainly observed the garden and gardeners, talked with gardeners, and took notes on the physical characteristics of each place. My field notes from these visits are included in my data analysis chapters. I went to each of the gardens to compare maintenance differences. Although I had obtained the demographic data of gardeners from the interviews with on-site garden leaders, I also visited each garden to gain a sense of demography in terms of age, gender and race. By visiting the gardens, I could familiarize myself with on-site leaders and some garden participants, which helped me start conversations when I had one-on-one interviews.

Data analysis

The importance of data analysis lies in creating meanings from the data. Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall argues that meaning equals interpretation and is always contextual (Hall, 1997). Similarly, the interview data I collected can potentially have many different meanings. Thus, my task as a researcher was to fix the meanings using the theoretical framework of neoliberalization. In other words, I tried to identify traits of neoliberalization by analyzing the narratives I collected.

As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, I recorded all the interviews with a digital recorder and prepared transcriptions for each interview. Transcription required me to listen to the interviews at least twice, which furthered my acquaintance with the data. By reading the transcripts multiple times, I identified emerging themes that provided clues for answering my research question. After highlighting key terms and phrases in my transcripts, I created a word file which contained different emerging themes related to my research question such as “funding,” “land access,” “local and interest-based leadership” “and “entrepreneurial interests.” Under each theme (see Appendix 3), I pasted the quotes from the transcripts of ten people. I assigned different colors to all the interviewees and highlighted the quotes in these colors so I could quickly identify who said what. In analyzing the secondary data, I applied latent coding, which looks at the data for the underlying or implicit meaning or

themes in the content of the text (Neuman, 2000). In this case study, I examined the newspaper articles, the transcript of the telephone conference and census data for themes related to the neoliberalization of community gardens. For example, I looked for the terms such as economic development, property values, and self-responsibility in describing community gardens when reading different texts.

Data analysis for case study methodology includes a detailed description (Creswell, 1998). Illustrating my data in depth was a part of my data analysis. Therefore, writing was a crucial tool for data analysis. Writing this thesis was important for me not only as a venue for sharing my findings, but also way to further process and analyze my data. Richardson (1994) argued that writing is a way of knowing, as well as a method of discovery and analysis. Following her claim, I viewed writing this thesis as part of the process to find out the answer to my research question. By transforming my data into analysis chapters I organized them into different themes while consulting previous studies as well as my theoretical framework. Through this process, I learned about my data and constructed meanings from them.

Validity

As this is a qualitative study, I focus on giving a fair, honest account of community gardens from the viewpoint of my interview participants (Neuman, 2000). I included many direct quotes in my data analysis chapter so the participants' perspectives are included in my report. To make sure that the quotes from participants were accurate, I sent the transcripts to each participant so that they can check if my transcriptions contained any misunderstandings or wrong information. I also applied triangulation to increase validity. As mentioned earlier, I referred to the secondary data and site visits in addition to the in-depth interviews to examine the community gardens in light of the research question. By consulting with various different data about the phenomenon, I tried to increase validity in this study.

I took an inductive approach in this study and as I collected data and analyzed it, I refined and developed the concepts in relation to neoliberalization of community gardens.

To achieve validity, I focused on transferability of data rather than generalizability. Transferability refers to the process in which the readers determine whether the findings are applicable to different but comparable situations (Denscombe, 2007; Hoepfl, 1997). I present the findings from my data in detail so that the reader can determine if this study is transferable to other situations (Denscombe, 2007).

When I visited the gardens, gardeners were well aware of the presence of a strange person taking notes and talking with people. Although I acknowledged the impact I had by simply being present in the gardens, I tried to avoid building a relationship in which I was the researcher, expert or the one who is in control, while garden participants were mere subjects for my study. In order to achieve such a goal, I did not make comments on my impressions of the gardens unless they asked me. Instead, I always asked them questions so they could be teachers and active participants in my research. I have established some connections with some of them. In Walnut Community Garden where most of the participants are retired Vietnamese people, they were more inclined to open themselves up, probably because I am also Asian. They invited me for their summer harvest dinner where they cook traditional South Asian dishes using their fresh garden produce. In Laurel Community Garden, Greg, the on-site leader, gave me some garlic chives that were left in someone's old plot for me to plant in my own garden. Because the on-site leaders and some of the outside supporters share the same passion for gardening with me, it seemed quite easy to start a conversation. At the same time, I was aware that my own interest in gardening might have created some biases. I focused on listening and tried not to lead the conversation or let my biases speak in my data.

Confidentiality

The study site for my thesis is not revealed and it is simply referred to as a city in Iowa. All the participants in this thesis are referred to by their pseudonyms to protect their identities and confidentiality. I also assigned pseudonyms to the gardens, schools or non-profit organizations. I saved the sound files of my interview recordings and word files of transcripts in my own computer. The files are password protected. At the

completion of my thesis, I will send the draft to all the participants to make sure that their confidentiality is protected in my report.

Ethics of research

To avoid unethical conduct in this research, I completed the human subjects review form to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I started my interview process only after the IRB Chair had approved my application. In conducting my research, I followed all the procedures I specified in the form. I also used the initial contact letter and informed consent form that I submitted to the IRB to explain the purpose and process of my research to potential participants. The voluntary nature of the study and the standing option for withdrawal were also communicated to the participants.

Chapter 4. Reasons and Motivations for Supporting Community Gardens

In the next two chapters, I present my analysis of interviews and secondary data. In this chapter, I identify public and private entities that provide or have provided assistance to the community gardens. Furthermore, I examine their reasons and motivations for their supports. Exploring these two questions revealed that although the community gardens in this study receive or have received some financial supports from public and private sectors, the state is not pushing neoliberal idea of responsabilization through community gardening. While all the outside supporters recognized the potential for the community gardens to address food insecurity issues to some extent, none of them viewed community gardening as a means to replace existing safety net programs. Moreover, outside supporters expressed their willingness to let the participants define the purposes and values of community gardening.

On-site leaders' views on the city's assistance

Although enthusiastic community gardeners are an integral part for a community garden to thrive, it often needs other resources as well. Regardless of the type or location of a community garden, outside support from surrounding residents and other institutions, such as municipalities, public school boards, universities, and neighborhood associations are said to be crucial (Twiss et al., 2003). Similarly, on-site garden leaders for my study all stressed the importance of municipality support. In this section, I discuss how the on-site leaders perceive the assistance the city's Parks and Recreation Department provides to their community gardens.

All the on-site leaders for this study were positive about the city's assistance for their community gardens. They expressed their appreciation for the city's Parks Department's assistance for their gardens. None of them viewed the city's assistance as something that was imposed upon them. Rather, the on-site leaders view the city's assistance as nice extra service to its citizens.

In response to my question, “if the Parks and Recreation provides enough support,” Dean, on-site leader for Elmwood Community Garden said, “Absolutely. To me, I am getting something for free. I am not going to complain much. And as a leader, when I went to them with a problem, they were so supportive of my role as a leader and my decisions. So I am very happy with them.” Dean also recognized the importance of municipal assistance because “it [gardening] is expensive as an individual to do on your own.” As a leader, Dean has experienced many occasions where he had to temper gardeners’ expectations or frustrations with the city. He had quite a few people come and ask when the city was going to bring another load of compost. In response, he tried to tell them that it cost the city quite a bit of money and reminded gardeners of the fact that they did not have to pay for anything except for their own seeds.

Lynn, CEO of Walnut Housing Services, echoed his view. Walnut Community Garden uses the land of a nearby public elementary school because they do not have an adequate space for gardening on their own property. Access to a nearby public school property to garden helps Walnut Housing Services continue its community gardening program. The City Parks and Recreation Department has helped the garden to remain on this land. Lynn said, “If we were to develop [a community garden] on the property that we own, we would have to do a lot of work to prepare the land.” Trang, on-site leader for Walnut Community Garden also acknowledged the importance of the municipal support as well. She said, “The City has always been supportive. Without the support from the City, I think it will be difficult to continue.”

As Dean, Lynn, and Trang recognized, gardening can be an expensive activity especially in an urban area. The cost of land access, and lack of good quality soil and water resources were the reasons why urban residents obtained less food from their own garden compare to rural respondents in the study conducted by Morton et al. (2008). For this reason, on-site leaders mostly expressed their appreciation for the city to support the cost of gardening.

In addition, some on-site leaders viewed community gardening program as an extra service of the city. They did not expect for the city to provide such service as supporting community gardens. Therefore, whatever the community gardens receive from the city is a nice surprise and easily appreciated. Sophie, community gardening program coordinator of the Parks and Recreation Department, acknowledged that there might be such low expectations for the city from its residents. When people saw her helping with community gardening efforts, some people were surprised that she was from the city. That is when she learned some sense of residents' perceptions about the city. It made her rethink about what they expected for a service and what the role of the city should be.

The role of the city's Parks and Recreation Department in community gardening

In the previous section, I discussed how well the city's involvement was accepted by the on-site leaders. In this section, I investigate the city's motivation for assisting community gardening. Specifically, I examine whether the promotion of neoliberal governmentality is behind the city's involvement in community gardening.

Studying two community gardening projects in California, Pudup (2008) argued that organized garden projects (she used this term instead of community gardening) were designed as spaces of neoliberal governmentality, saying they are "spaces where individuals are put in charge of their own adjustments to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies centered on personal contact with nature" (Pudup, 2008, p. 1228). Pudup carefully chose to use the term "organized garden project" instead of community garden because she finds the term community to be problematic. She argued the term community could be used to enforce moral responsibility by deeming a group of people to have shared life circumstances or values (Pudup, 2008).

Guthman used the term "responsibilization," to refer to the increased personal responsibility by shifting caring responsibilities from public welfare to self-help (Guthman, 2008). While garden-oriented projects may try to encourage individuals to

empower themselves by producing their own food, it may be simply exemplifying what Guthman called responsabilization, which is to depoliticize hunger by shifting focus away from structural inequalities to individual responsibilities (Guthman, 2008). Pudup (2008) echoed Guthman by arguing that stresses on individual transformation through gardening indicate the existence of state power and authority, not absence of the state. The state exercises its power and imposes the idea that personal responsibility, empowerment, and individual choice are cause and cure for social problems, including hunger and poverty.

Similar to their arguments, the goals of the USDA's Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (USDA- CFPCGP) that the city and a non-profit organization received between 2003 and 2006 represent some characteristics of responsabilization. The main purpose of this grant was to enhance the city's community gardening program. Some goals that resonate with the idea of responsabilization are:

- Increase food security activities by families in central city low-income neighborhoods.
- Develop capacity among existing community food resources in low income and underserved communities.
- Improve economic self-sufficiency by expanding economic activity associated with existing community gardening.

(Excerpts from the grant proposal document, 2003)

While USDA-CFPCGT seems to have incorporated the notion of responsabilization, the state in this case study is not exercising its power to utilize community garden as neoliberal tool. Since the end of USDA-CFPCGT, the city's involvement with its community garden program has been limited and the focus of the program has shifted from addressing food insecurity to improving city's image and economic opportunities through community gardening.

When the on-site leaders commented on the City Parks and Recreation Department, they all stressed their appreciation for Sophie. A strong presence of Sophie

suggests that the city's community gardening program depends largely on her vision, rather than the state power that pushes neoliberal governmentality.

When Greg, the on-site leader of Laurel Community Garden, was talking about outside assistance, he listed three institutions that have been helpful - Laurel Neighborhood Board, City Parks and Recreation Department, and a private college located near the garden. Especially emphasizing the significance of the first two institutions, he said, "We have always received adequate support from those two organizations." When Greg described the Laurel Neighborhood Association, he did not mention any specific person. He simply said "Laurel Neighborhood Board has been great, terrific about supporting us in having enough to maintain the garden." In contrast, when Greg commented on the city's support, he emphasized Sophie's name, saying, "It's been a unified effort between the neighborhood board and the city's Parks and Recreation Department. We have received a tremendous amount of support from Sophie." Greg's comment suggests that for him the Parks and Recreation Department means Sophie and vice versa.

Similarly, Dean, who was the on-site leader for Elmwood Community Garden between February 2008 and February 2009, expressed his appreciations for the assistance he received from Sophie as well. Later in the interview, he told me that one of his concerns with regard to the community garden was about Sophie. He was worried if the city would reassign Sophie with other projects and not community gardening. Dean underscored that the community gardening is her project, saying, "Sophie is really good. I know this gardening project is her project." He shared the story when he saw a name other than Sophie in the monthly newsletter he received from the Parks and Recreation Department. He was worried if Sophie had left the program, saying:

Well, see they have even got somebody new for a volunteer at the city.

There was even a point of time when I didn't know if even Sophie was still being involved with the gardens. I got this e-mail, their monthly newsletter, from the city, which is sent to all the volunteers. And in it, they had a different name than Sophie. So I was like "Wow." But Sophie

reassured me that she was still in charge of it for now. She is pretty influential.

Her strong influence on the program can be better understood by learning the origin of the city's community gardening program.

Sophie, who is the Community Gardening Coordinator at the City Parks and Recreation Department, initiated the community gardening program in 1998. After graduating from college with a bachelor's degree in environmental science, she started working for the Parks and Recreation Department, creating her own job to work on a community gardening program. She remains in this position, in addition to handling other responsibilities that she has gained over the years. She is the driving force behind the continuation of the program.

The City Parks and Recreation Department supports community gardens by supplying materials, such as composts, woodchips, or manure to the gardens located on city-owned properties. The department also performs the initial site preparation, such as soil testing and tilling when requested. Moreover, it collaborates with other public or private institutions so that community gardeners can access other necessary resources. For example, the city's water utility cooperates with the Parks and Recreation Department to provide meters so that community gardeners can utilize the fire hydrants. Community gardeners can take advantage of the tool lending library for free from a local non-profit corporation. Other assistance provided indirectly by the city includes workshops on gardening, nutrition, or tree pruning by Extension, Master Gardener Programs, and a local botanical center. For example, staff members from the botanical center used to come to Walnut Community Garden to till the land and give tips on gardening at the start of every growing season.

John, the director of Parks and Recreation Department explained the community gardening program is very close to the department's philosophy of valuing preservation and conservation efforts. However, although John emphasized the importance of community gardening, there is only one staff member who actually works with the

program. Sophie recognizes the community gardening program largely rests on her shoulders. According to Sophie, although John has a good understanding of the program, the idea of community gardening is still not understood very well among staff members at the Department. Discussing the sentiment toward the community gardening project within the Department, Sophie said, “I would say by and large, there is not a huge understanding. It is anomaly for it to exist in the city structure as a first player.... It is just not a type of recreation that Parks and Rec does, so I am not understood by a lot of people in the Department with what we are doing.”

Sophie thought that as long as she allocated her time to other programs that were better understood and received, the Department would not have a problem with her spending time on the community gardening program. Community gardening is not the first priority that Sophie is expected to perform, even though she is the sole community gardening program coordinator in the Department. Not only does the community gardening program seem to require extra time for Sophie, she also sought for outside financial support to pay for the program. As the director mentioned in our interview, Sophie has put together various grant programs that helped the Department buy seed, and provide materials and tools.

Moreover, the Department does not receive any support from state and/or local legislation for community gardening. There are no municipal or state laws, or Parks and Recreations Department Codes, that stipulate conditions for community gardening. John explained how the Department organized its community gardening program as follows. “We’ve been careful not to have it be so bureaucratic and so structured that it would be difficult for individual citizens to participate. [We do not have] lots of lengthy forms and liability or insurance requirements, things that could be impediments.” This somewhat loose structure of the community gardening program may make the program flexible to meet the participants’ needs. In addition, the lack of structural support for community gardening by the public sector might be because community gardening, compare to other safety net programs such as food stamps or school lunch program, may not benefit the greater city residents because the participation is limited. In fact, John recognized during

the interview that “community gardening program is relatively a small program, serving 90 or 100 people or so.”

The absence of state power over community gardening to promote neoliberalism is also evident in how the USDA-CFPCGP ended. When I interviewed Sophie and Tony, it had been three years after the end of the grant project. Neither of them knew the location of the grant project’s final report to the USDA. At a non-profit organization’s office one afternoon, they let me go through the electronic files related to the project. Although I could find bits and pieces of information related to the evaluations of the project, there was no “final report.” Reflecting on the collaborated grant project, Sophie commented, “Things fell apart in the last, in the third year...People’s personal connections and personalities play in the work, so those things got lost as well.”

Originally, Tony and Sophie came up with the idea to apply for the USDA- CFP through their friendship, as they shared a common vision for urban agriculture and fruit production. Their strong interests in food security issues through community gardening pushed the grant project.

In response to my question about whether he thought the USDA-CFPCGP was useful to improve food security issues in lower-income neighborhoods, Tony, former staff member in charge of USDA-CFPCGP, replied “No.” He said, “In general, the dominant culture does not place much value in self-sufficiency in food. There is nothing we can do that would make a significant difference in thinking in this dominant culture. Even if you spend 100 million dollars, [it] still [would] not have an effect that would be culturally changing. I am sure that it provided opportunities to some individuals to think about where their food came from or the value of raising some of their food by themselves... but I think it is hard to change people’s outlook towards food.” Tony’s statement suggests the notion of responsabilization, arguing that people’s mindset is a stumbling block for solving food insecurity, while he did not mention the issue of inequality or poverty, or the responsibility of the state.

While Sophie and Tony gained some help on the grant project from others, Tony recognized, “it was probably a lot more work than two people could do effectively.” His comment suggests that these two individuals remained main players of the grant project, instead of their parent organizations or other supporters taking over more control. Again, this suggests the absence of state authority that pushes community gardening for the neoliberal agenda.

The city’s reasons for supporting community gardening

Even if a community garden does not directly generate financial profits, it might be more likely to receive some kind of support from public or private entities if it contributes to a greater economy. In the interview with Tony, former staff member at a non-profit organization that worked on the USDA- CFPCGP, he recognized that one of the ways to get people in public services interested in a community garden project would be to assure there are “economic benefits to the city, ” such as increased business, investment or land value. In fact, the purpose of the community gardens in this study seems to have shifted from addressing food insecurity issues to bringing in more business opportunities to the city by using community gardens to improve the city’s image. The following two examples illustrate an interesting trend regarding the city’s reasons and motivations behind supporting the community gardens.

In the early days of the city’s community garden program, the city emphasized its focus on decreasing food insecurity. However, interest in addressing food insecurity is not as strong as it used to be since the end of USDA - CFPCGP, which specifically targeted improving community food security. Instead, there seem to be more interests in the city’s community gardening program for economic purposes.

Maple Community Garden illustrates how the focus of community gardens has shifted away from food security to economic issues. Maple Community Garden is the city’s newest community garden - established in a gentrified neighborhood. Because the garden was established after I finished my data collection, this garden is not included in this thesis. However, its background adds some insights to this study. The Maple Hill

neighborhood, where posh stores and restaurants saturate the city's once rundown area, calls itself "a progressive neighborhood," which "appeals to a younger, creative group of people as a funky, functional, safe place to live, shop, and gather" (The neighborhood association website, 2009). The community garden may contribute to the image this neighborhood wants to portray. During the interview, Sophie described the neighborhood and its community garden as follows; "Maple Hills is known to have more young adults and artistic kind so it [community garden] fits well with their kind of image."

While the neighborhood is also a home to some lower income populations, Maple Community Garden thus far seems to be attracting mostly middle class, young professionals from observing the social networking website created for community gardeners to organize events and exchange information. Sophie also commented:

I would say it (the neighborhood) is middle to upper income. But, there are also some lower-income apartment buildings though. There are a lot of immigrants. I don't know if we reached out to them yet. We probably need to figure out some translation issues for them.

Although the overall demography of Maple Hill may include a more diverse population in terms of race, ethnicity, income, and education levels, the members of Maple Hill Community Garden for its first year in 2009 seem to represent exclusive bodies. It may be because of the way it started. A non-profit organization, with the goal of promoting the Maple Hill neighborhood businesses, was initiated to create a community garden with a group of interested people. Therefore, the initial group of people tended to share the same entrepreneurial interests in improving their neighborhood's image.

The study by Been and Voicu (2007) found that community gardens had a positive impact on property values in the surrounding neighborhood. Such impact may generate interest in community gardening for economic reasons. In the interview, Sophie explained how the Economic Development Department is also helping with Maple Community Garden. According to Sophie, the main reason why the Economic Development Department was interested in this particular community garden is because

it is “an interesting feature to have in the downtown area.” Sophie doubted if the Economic Development Department understood the food-related issues or not.

Similarly, during the telephone conference hosted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), John, the director of the City Parks and Recreation Department stressed economic value of the community garden program in the city. One of the participants asked John and Sophie if the city had any data on the impact of community gardens on the gardeners’ diets. Specifically, she was wondering if the students at schools with garden program consumed more fruits and vegetables. In response, Sophie admitted they had not completed evaluations and acknowledged the need to begin evaluating its impact. John, on the other hand, responded by sharing how the city was now ranked as one of the most livable cities in the US by business magazines, such as *Forbes* and *Business Week*. He credited community gardening, planting, and landscape beautification efforts for achieving such a reputation. He said the community garden program has become an important part of the city that it survives every budget cut. By switching his response from the concerns with access to fresh vegetables and fruits to the city’s reputation, John showed how the community garden program is valued for other reasons than addressing food security issues, such as attracting more people and businesses to the city.

The above examples illustrate the absence of neoliberal governmentality of responsabilization in the reasons for promoting community gardening.

Supports from other public and private organizations

In addition to the Parks and Recreation Department, I identified two organizations, both public and private, that have assisted the community gardening program in the past. One is Iowa Nutrition Network and the other one is a non-profit organization that collaborated with the city on the USDA-CFPCGP. Both organizations do not provide assistance to the community gardening program anymore. Their reasons for not supporting community gardening program are mostly because of the restrictions in funding. Difficulties in funding community gardening program in this case study also

suggest the absence of state power to utilize community garden to pursue neoliberal governmentality.

During the interview with Danielle, a representative from Iowa Nutrition Network under the Department of Public Health, she repeatedly emphasized how the funding guidelines by the USDA disallow them to spend money directly to help community gardens. Iowa Nutrition Network receives funding from USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The program recognizes the benefits of gardening and it supports the cost of educational supplies, curricula, and staff salaries to teach gardening concepts. However, the program cannot support the “cost for the rental or purchase of garden equipment (fertilizer, tractors), the purchase or rental of land for garden plots, seeds, plants, and other gardening supplies (USDA-SNAP, 2009. p. 61). This is an example of how legislators are not ardently advocating the city’s community gardening program as a means to address food insecurity issues.

Tony had worked on the USDA-CFPCGP as a food systems program specialist at a member supported non-profit organization, which assists farmers with sustainable practices and economic possibilities through education and research. The personnel as well as the focus of this organization have shifted since the time Tony was working for the organization. The current executive director, Nicole, does not encourage the staff members to gain outside grant only to pursue their personal interests. Instead, she stressed her commitment to the organization’s members. Therefore, if member farmers are interested in addressing food security issues, the organization would assist them by helping them become a better producer or to help them network with other famers who share the same interests. However, the organization does not have any structured program to address food security issues through community gardening as they used to during the time when the USDA-CFPCGP was in operation. Again, this non-profit organization’s attitude toward community gardening indicates the absence of neoliberal governmentality.

Another potential supporter identified during the interviews is the city's school board. Liz, the on-site coordinator for Cedar School Garden emphasized the need for a paid staff person, who can be in charge of the school garden program. Although Liz had worked at Cedar School in the past, she now works with a non-profit, which oversees different schools in the city. Therefore, the time and effort she can spend at Cedar School Garden on a volunteer basis is very limited. Recognizing the limitation of her involvement, Liz expressed Cedar School was missing a lead person who could integrate the school garden into the curriculum and maintain the garden. She said:

Everyone is very busy with other initiatives and there just wasn't one lead person. I could have or should have been that lead person, but I was doing other works and I wasn't able to do that... Gardening is a huge endeavor. We need a staff person to focus on that and I wasn't that person. I couldn't do that because of my other jobs and responsibilities... We really needed some dedicated staff or paid staff person. It has to be somebody who has skills with gardening and the academic experience to help bridge them...It would really have to take a special person to be able to set up the right way, I think.

However, with the current hiring freeze, Liz does not think the district will fund a paid staff person, who can oversee the school garden program. The lack of support from the school board suggests that it does not share or support Liz's vision for Cedar School garden. At the same time, this is another example where the state is not exercising its power to promote neoliberal governmentality through community gardening.

Conclusions

Lack of structured outside support for the city's community gardening program as described above suggests that the state is not pushing neoliberal agenda through community gardening. The state is not exercising its authority to tell people that they should cultivate on their own. Instead of receiving structured public or private funding, the community gardens in this study essentially rely on a single community gardening coordinator within the city as well as several volunteers.

The city's attitude towards its community gardening program does not seem to embody neoliberal idea of self-responsible individuals. The purpose of the community gardens in this study is not to replace other social welfare programs. Its purpose and use are left to each community garden participant. Sophie, community garden coordinator of the city's Parks and Recreation Department said that some gardens did not focus on food related issues, in which she has been most interested. At the same time, she expressed that she was fine with people having different interests in community gardens. She showed her understanding and openness towards people who like to garden for different reasons, whether it is educational or recreational purposes. Similarly, John listed different benefits of community gardening, such as beautification and environmental conservation rather than viewing community gardening strictly as a means for citizens to produce their own food.

In the next chapter, I will further examine if the traits of neoliberalism exist within the community gardens in this study at the individual level, especially looking at the views of on-site leaders in light of neoliberal governmentality.

Chapter 5. Traits of Neoliberal Governmentality among Individuals

Neoliberalization has penetrated our everyday lives (Tickell, 2002) and in this chapter, I first examine if the neoliberal governmentality is incorporated and/or disseminated among the garden participants. Second, I discuss the cases of Cedar School Garden and Walnut Community Garden, where the community and the participants resisted the notion of neoliberalism in their gardens. Finally, I identify the reasons why neoliberalization of community gardens may sometimes fail. The presence or absence of neoliberal ideas within the community gardens impacts the statuses of each garden. For example, when an outsider promotes the neoliberal idea through gardening, as in the case of Cedar School Garden, the community might resist it and negatively affect the fate of a garden. On the other hand, when a leader makes sure that the purpose and values of community gardening remain within the hands of participants, as in the case of Elmwood Community Garden, Laurel Community Garden and Walnut Community Garden, the communities are more likely to continue actively engaging in their gardens.

Neoliberal governmentality among the on-site leaders

A quick glance at community gardening may generate the idea that it opposes neoliberalism by enabling participants to reduce dependence on market economy and empowering them to grow their own food. Dean, on-site leader of Elmwood Community Garden, for example, said that by participating in community gardening, he tries to “reduce dependence upon a commercial budget.” He stressed that it will be even more important this year with the current state of economy. Nevertheless, his comment can at the same time reflect the notion of neoliberalism as he internalizes and understands his responsibility to adjust to the current economic system, rather than addressing the problems within the system that create the global economic downturn.

There is a fine line between addressing food security with community gardening and depoliticizing hunger. The depoliticization of hunger occurs when private institutions, such as charitable foundations, lift the political responsibilities of the government for the issues of hunger (Riches, 1999, p. 205). A trace of depoliticization of

hunger and poverty was present in Lynn's comment, who is the CEO of Walnut Housing Services:

One of the things that becomes important especially for people who are living in poverty is ways they can stretch their resources and the way they can better utilize what limited resources they have.

During the interview, Lynn did not mention the responsibilities of public welfare to address poverty or hunger. Instead, she only commented on individual responsibility for coping with limited resources within the existing structure, which demonstrates the notion of responsabilization by enhancing personal responsibility, while reducing public responsibility.

In this section, I examine if the on-site leaders in this study embody the neoliberal notion in practicing their leadership roles. I then compare how the statuses of the community gardens differ in relation to the existence or absence of such neoliberal governmentality.

Liz, a family development specialist, serves as the on-site leader for the Cedar School Garden Club on a volunteer basis. She has helped the garden since 2001. Liz saw the potential of the school garden to address the food insecurity in the community. She said, "I think the need is for people to be able to have opportunities to plant by themselves. They can rent some garden spots. [There are] plenty of garden spots in the city. So some of the folks could probably use those garden plots but they need to know what it means and they need to have an experience." Her comment suggests that people should take initiatives on their own to learn about food and produce on their own. This is similar to what neoliberal governmentality advocates, by making the poor hold responsible for feeding themselves. The trace of neoliberal governmentality that Liz embraced might be the reasons why her vision could not appeal to other people in the school, which ultimately impacted the status of Cedar School Garden as I discuss in the later section.

Dean took an on-site garden leadership role at Elmwood Community Garden for the 2008 growing season (from February 2008 to February 2009). In Elmwood Community Garden, a new on-site volunteer leader is assigned in February. Sophie, community garden program coordinator of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, reminds the leader that she/he must find a new leader when her/his term approaches its end.

When I interviewed Dean at the end of January, he had sent out the e-mail to everyone with e-mail addresses asking if anyone was interested in becoming a leader for the next year. He had already had a volunteer for the 2009-2010 gardening year to replace him. Despite a bad gardening year, with so much rain in the summer 2008, Dean expressed positive experiences being an on-site leader, although he was reluctant to assume that position in the beginning:

I actually am very happy that I did it. It was much better than I thought it was going to be. It was very interesting...If I didn't find anybody for next year, I was willing to do it again.

His comment reflects how he was passionate about serving as a leader.

Not only was Dean enthusiastic about his leadership role, he has also been an active community gardener himself since he obtained several plots in Elmwood Community Garden in 2005. During the interview, he listed many benefits that he found with community gardening. In response to the question, "what do you like the most about community gardening?" Dean said he liked the serenity. He tries to spend an hour or two hours in the garden every evening during the growing season because it is "a nice way to unwind from a busy day at work." He then added that he also liked to interact with people with a common interest. Finally, he said that gardening was part of carrying on the family tradition because his father has been a gardener ever since he has known him.

Dean did not bring up the issue of food security until I mentioned it in the question. He said that he saves money from growing his own vegetables. He also shared stories about community gardeners donating their produce. He knew some gardeners who

were willing to deliver extra produce for donation to places, such as homeless shelters, churches that provide meals to the homeless, or family shelters. At Elmwood Community Garden, one group of women, followers of St. Francis who try to imitate his simple life, rents two plots specifically to grow food to donate to local food pantries.

His answers however was focused on his own enjoyment of sharing his produce with others or learning new way of cooking or preserving food. He did not stress food security aspect of community gardening. His attitude therefore was very different from that of Liz in Cedar School Garden. Dean's attitude toward valuing multifaceted benefits of community garden might have a positive impact on Elmwood Community Garden, which has had more than 20 people on the waiting list every season for the last few years.

Greg has been the on-site leader of the Laurel Community Garden since 2001. He said his general responsibility as the leader included preparing the soil every year, taking care of forms and sign-up sheets of gardeners, explaining and enforcing the rule of no application of any types of chemicals, pesticides or insecticides, as well as helping the participants with growing plants by sharing his gardening knowledge or extra seeds. Greg said that he goes to the garden everyday during the growing season; "I try to oversee whatever the gardeners might need. And at the same time, there is a presence necessary all the time for pretty much the security of the garden." In addition, Greg expressed how he was "learning more about what the garden needs relative to the community." His comments suggest his strong commitment as an on-site leader. Moreover, he expressed how he wanted to learn the needs of the gardeners instead of "teaching" what he thought is good for the garden or the participants.

Although Greg touched on the food security aspect of community gardening, it was not the main purpose he saw in gardening. Only when I asked if anyone in their garden donates their produce, Greg told me that he indeed donates some produce from the garden to community centers, churches, and to people who live in the neighborhood. In addition, Greg did not suggest that others should follow his practice. Moreover, he stressed how gardening has been personally important part of his life as being a

vegetarian. He has always had a garden wherever he had lived, and he enjoys being able to “live off the produce from the garden” during the growing season.

Similar to the case of Elmwood Community Garden, Greg’s strong commitment as an on-site leader and the absence of neoliberal governmentality might be part of the reasons why Laurel Community Garden seems to be functioning and maintained very well. I visited the garden four times between July 2008 and October 2009 (only during the growing seasons), and every time I went, each plot was crowded with vegetables and the overall garden was kept neat – no overgrown nor rotten vegetables, and few weeds.

Trang has been an on-site leader for Walnut Community Garden since 2002. Being an on-site garden coordinator is part of the job for Trang, who has been a case manager at Walnut Housing Services for almost 10 years. She essentially helped create the garden by asking elderly residents in Walnut Housing Services to bring up some ideas for outside activities. Their response was to have a vegetable garden.

As the initial reason for establishing a garden was for physical activities for the elderly, Trang stressed the importance of Walnut Community Garden in terms of providing the opportunity for the participants to get some exercise outside. In addition, Trang said that garden has been a space for the gardeners to exchange gardening ideas, knowledge and skill. The gardeners also share their produce among themselves as well as a greater community of Walnut Housing Services. Although Trang does not have her own plot, gardeners often give her their produce, indicating the relationship of trust between Trang and the garden participants. Similar to the case of Elmwood Community Garden and Laurel Community Garden, the absence of neoliberal traits in the leadership of Walnut Community Garden may have resulted in sound establishment of the garden in the community. The plots are always occupied in Walnut Community Garden and the gardeners organize events, which feature garden produce, such as summer solstice dinner or harvest festivals.

Resistance to neoliberal governmentality

Gardening requires physical work and commitment. If participants themselves are not interested in developing and maintaining a community garden, a garden may not last long (Lawson, 2005). When outsiders present the idea of creating a community garden and assign people to work, the value and purpose of gardening is questionable. For example, some alternative agrifood scholars doubt the value of community gardening when working class people with limited resources of time and money are forced to buy into the idea of feeding themselves by cultivating on their own (Johnston, 2007; Pudup, 2008). This issue also relates to responsabilization.

Lawson (2005) argued that a community garden requires local and interest-based leadership to sustain itself. Cedar School Garden in this study illustrates the case where such leadership and interests did not exist in the community. Cedar School Garden took part in the USDA-CFPCGP to enhance its gardening program. The USDA-CFPGP sent an announcement about the project to approximately 40 neighborhoods in the city identified as being marginalized or low-income. The respondent self-selected if they wanted to become involved with this project. Tony, then program coordinator for USDA-CFPGP, explained the application process as follows:

We went through the process with them, where we said these are the things that we can do and we are offering, here are the commitments we need from you. From that point, we whittled down or pooled down to the ones that we thought were good.

The principal at the time of Cedar School was interested in the grant to receive perennial plants and fruit trees and applied to be part of this grant project. The school's application was accepted. However, Liz commented how there was not strong support within the school or the community as a whole: The school was notified to receive the grant without a lot of community involvement or school involvement from the grassroots up. So, it sort of came down this way, instead of up this way. So people weren't saying, "Yes this is what we need."...It needs intensive community support to make it work and we didn't have it.

Even though Cedar School struggled to receive enough community or school involvement in their garden, they did get some assistance from the neighborhood association at the very beginning. They had a mass-planting day, when they received perennial plants and fruit trees. However, the excitement faded quickly. According to Liz: There were a lot of people. So the neighborhood association helped them. They helped with the installment – how they would like to see things, put up the signs, but as far as maintaining the gardens, we did not get that help. When I looked for secondary data, I found information on the planting event at Cedar School. However, there was no coverage about the achievements of the school in relationship to its edible landscaping project. Instead, Liz shared her frustrations about the lack of community support:

My dream would have been just to have the neighborhood really become the active participant in it so that it is a respectful place, a place that they can come. But we had high school and junior high school kids who would get off the bus and see these little maple trees and trash them. So that was really frustrating because we really needed the community endeavor to why this was going to happen and I think it could have happened with the community neighborhood association.

Cedar School had had a vegetable garden for over 10 years before it expanded its garden further in 2003. USDA-CFPCGP provided the school with more plants, landscaping, and other technical assistances to make its campus an edible landscape. However, since the summer of 2008, Cedar School Garden experienced renovation. Due to a lack of communications between the school and the construction company, the garden lost some fruit trees and perennial plants. When I interviewed Liz at the end of January, she did not yet know exactly how much of its edible landscape had been lost, as the school did not have rights to the property until July 2009. Accordingly, she described the situation as follows:

[The] asparagus bed is gone, the wild flower suite garden on the whole west side and the whole west side are gone. We lost one-third of the grapes and I don't know about the raspberry bed because I cannot see. They are still covered up with snow.

Liz said the first task after the school reopens would be to rediscover what is left. Depending on the extent of damage done to their edible landscape, they might need to re-landscape the school yard with a vegetable garden, perennial beds, and fruit trees. However, that will require a lot of additional cost. Liz does not think the school board would have money for it as it does not even have money to fix the parking lot that needs to be completed. Although there was some discussion about the garden and edible landscape before the school's renovation, it is obvious that preservation of the on-campus edible landscape was not considered thoroughly. Failure to incorporate its edible landscape into the renovation plan, or to sufficiently communicate its existence to the construction company, suggests that the school did not value the edible landscape program very much.

As Liz mentioned earlier, there was not a strong interest in or support for Cedar School Garden within the school or the surrounding neighborhood. While some teachers and parents supported the school garden and edible landscape idea, others did not find the program appealing. Liz said the difficult part for connecting school curricula or nutritional feeding with the school garden program was that many teachers had no experiences with gardening and soils: Some people were like "Oh, yeah, I can do this, do that" and others were like "Why do I get dirty. Why would I take the kids out to the garden? I don't want to sweat. I don't want to get dirty." It is really hard to convince folks who don't have interests in agriculture, don't have interests in getting dirty."

The lack of excitement in the community negatively affected the sustainability of Cedar School Garden. Lawson (2005) argues that "handed-over" gardens, even if they were developed with the best intentions, often end up being abandoned because the communities are not involved in their development. The case of Cedar School Garden exemplifies her argument. While a few people were indeed interested in enhancing a school gardening program, Cedar School did not have enough interests from the community to sustain itself. This, too, relates to the neoliberal critique of community gardening. Neoliberalism is not merely a political-economic project, but it also tries to instill particular ideas on individuals. For example, neoliberal advocates try to argue

individuals and the market should solve social problems (Allen and Guthman, 2006). In the case of Cedar School, its garden project seems to have tried to sell neoliberal governmentality of individualist solutions. However, such message did not travel well among the students, teachers, parents or the neighborhood community in the case of Cedar School Garden.

In contrast to Cedar School Garden, gardeners collaborated in the creation of Walnut Community Garden. It was not based on the vision of a single interested person or group. Instead, the garden participants themselves initiated the project because they wanted to have a community garden. Neither Walnut Housing Service nor the City Parks and Recreation Department told the residents that it was “good” for them to grow their own food. When Trang, a case manager at Walnut Housing Services, asked the senior residents what activities they would like to do to get some exercise outside, residents responded they would love to garden.

Many of Walnut Housing Services’ residents were farmers in African or South East Asian countries before coming to the United States. They wanted to use their gardening skills and knowledge they brought from home. I asked Lynn what she thought was the best thing about having a garden for Walnut Housing residents. She said that while access to fresh vegetables was important, the best thing that garden provided was the space for the community to come together and for the gardeners to preserve their own cultures. Lynn described:

Given the agrarian nature of their native country, I think it really gives them a way to stay connected, but more importantly, to utilize their skills they developed years ago.

One of the goals in USDA-CFPCGP was to help existing community gardens market their produce. At one point, the staff of Walnut Housing Services asked its community garden participants if they would like to try setting up a booth at a farmers’ market. However, people were not interested in that option. Lynn said, “they do it [garden] for the enjoyment of gardening, kind of the avocation.... So when we talked to

them about whether or not they want to market their product, they were kind of like, ‘why would we want to do that?’ ... I think it [community gardening] was initiated because it was something they like to do. They can grow the things they like to eat and they can have something to do with their time. It really wasn’t intended to be a profit sort of activity.” In the above case of Walnut Community Garden, the purpose of community gardening is in the hands of participants instead of being a tool to advance neoliberal practices or impose neoliberal governmentality.

Limitations in neoliberalizing community gardens

In alternative agrifood circles, agrarian ideology, such as “knowing where your food comes from,” “food with a farmer’s face,” or “getting your hands dirty in the soil” conveys positive images (Guthman, 2008). USDA has recently launched a new initiative called “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” which promotes regional and local food system by reconnecting consumers with local producers (USDA, 2009). Community gardening is often showcased as an example that challenges the industrialized food system, by “creating an opportunity for people to dirty their hands, grow their own food, work with neighbors, and generally transform themselves from consumers of food into “soil citizens” (Baker, 2004, p. 1). However, values associated with community gardening merit further inquiry. In fact, Guthman (2008) argues that such agrarian ideology tends to be romanticized more easily by whites than others. Lawson (2005) similarly cautions us to remember the history of American agriculture includes slaves and tenant farmers, not just white yeoman farmers. Depending upon one’s background, American agrarian nostalgia may not appeal to everyone, and sensitivity to cultural context is necessary for a successful garden program (Lawson, 2005).

Similar to agrarian nostalgia, the narratives I collected during the interviews and my visits to the community gardens were sprinkled with alternative agrifood rhetoric, such as “*Fresh* fruits, it’s healthy and a lot of people cannot get enough of it,” “I just think any chance to get people to eat *local*, healthy food is wonderful,” or “I’m completely into *organic* food. And the fact this was an *organic* garden made me really feel even better.” I am not judging or deeming these comments as elitists, but sentiments

expressed in these quotes tend to be shared by similar-minded people, who are well-educated and economically well-off (Hinrichs, 2002). It is worth noting all the above quotes came from on-site leaders of the community gardens in this study, meaning they all are well-educated and have stable jobs as well.

Even if the agrarian ideology tries to sugarcoat the neoliberal idea of placing responsibilities on individuals, the message might not travel too far if such ideology is not accepted by the potential gardeners in the first place. Another reason why the neoliberalization of community gardening might fail is because the poor do not simply have enough resource to act up to it.

When working on the USDA-CFPCGP, Tony experienced some difficulties in working with some people. Tony witnessed how it was difficult for some groups of people to maintain a community garden or edible landscape. The lack of basic resources inhibited them from incorporating the ideology of “growing own food.” He said:

Some of the groups that I worked with, who had the least resources, did struggle to maintain land that we had planted, and even to communicate and work together or to be interested in the project. I would guess that it probably had a lot to do with people’s income levels. They were working a lot of hours with low wages and [they] just [had] a general feeling of dissolution. It is really hard to see what differences the gardens were going to make. It is hard to make a change.

As Tony’s comments above reflect, some people only have limited resources such as time and knowledge, which prevent them from participating and benefiting from alternative agrifood movements even if they are interested.

Conclusions

The community gardens in this study demonstrate their complex nature. From some interviews, I identified some neoliberal traits in the practice of community gardening. In the case of Cedar School Garden, I saw how some people resisted

neoliberalism, by refusing to buy the idea of addressing food security issues through community gardening. However, in other cases such as Walnut Community Garden, community gardening did not seem to exemplify the traits of neoliberalism. In addition, none of the interviewees suggested their strong belief in solving food insecurity by community gardening alone. While some saw a potential for community gardening to address some food security issues, none of them thought that it could be the sole or major solution to improve food insecurity. Rather, the on-site leaders and participants valued community gardening for various different reasons. For the gardeners at Walnut Community Garden, the value of their garden was the source of exercise and cultural preservation. Dean valued his garden as a space between work and home where he could restore himself. In summary, while some voices suggested that the community gardens in this study tried to embrace some characteristics of neoliberalism, other voices demonstrated how the community gardens also resisted neoliberalism.

Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

This chapter completes the study by evaluating the proposed goal for this research, which was to critically examine the community gardens in an Iowa city using neoliberalism as the theoretical framework. I will review the steps I took to answer the research question: “Do community gardens embody the traits of neoliberalism?” By revisiting findings from in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis, I will summarize the key points of this research. In addition, I will note the shortcomings from my research and present some suggestions to further strengthen this study by introducing possible future research questions on community gardening.

Investigating neoliberal characteristics of community gardens

The main objective for this study was to investigate possible traits of neoliberalism in community gardening. As discussed in the literature review chapter, while there are numerous studies that look at alternative food movements there has been a lack of studies that critically examine community gardening. This research aimed to fill some of this gap. In doing so, the study contributed to a better understanding of community gardening, by identifying how the practices of community gardening promote, incorporate or resist the neoliberal ideas.

At the beginning of the research process, I first consulted previous studies on community gardening to structure the framework for this study. Through this process, it became clear that there were not many critical studies on community gardening, especially in light of neoliberalism. Guthman (2008) and Pudup (2008) introduced interesting insights by asking whether community gardens are sometimes used to reinforce the neoliberal idea by telling poor people to cultivate and feed themselves. Their arguments merited further inquiry, because if neoliberal governmentality indeed infiltrates the practice of community gardening, the state may successfully reduce or eliminate its responsibility in addressing structural issues of hunger, poverty and inequality. Moreover, neoliberalization of community gardening can threaten existing food security safety net programs such as food pantries or WIC program (The Special

Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) by undermining their meanings.

Once the research question and the theoretical framework were defined, I conducted interviews and collected secondary data. I analyzed the data through the lens of neoliberalism, especially focusing on the notion of responsabilization. After identifying emerging neoliberal themes in my data, it became clear that the answer to my research question would not be a black and white one. Instead, the data in my study revealed that while community gardening may advocate or integrate neoliberal ideas, people may also resist such force.

On the personal level, some of the outside supporters, such as Liz, Sophie and Tony expressed their belief in addressing food insecurity through community gardening. They seemed to have replaced the issue of structural inequality or poverty with the issue of individual responsibility. However, I did not identify any structure within the public or private sectors to support and promote their views. After examining the community gardens in this case study, it became apparent that Sophie was the one who has been advocating and sustaining the community gardening program. Unlike the study by Pudup (2008) on the organized garden projects in California, the state in my case study is not exercising its power to govern individuals or to promote the neoliberal idea of responsabilization through community gardening.

Among the on-site leaders, Dean and Greg expressed some sympathy for neoliberal aspect of community gardening. They talked about how they try to save money on food by eating the produce from their gardens. Both of them also mentioned some activities within their gardens where people donate the garden produce to charity organizations or neighbors. However, neither of them suggested that other people should also follow their practice. Moreover, food security issue was only a small part of many other benefits they identified from their participation in community gardening.

I also identified some resistance to neoliberalism. These examples included Cedar School Garden, where the surrounding community did not show much support in the gardening initiative. In fact, as of November 2009, Cedar School Garden does not have its garden anymore. Another example was from Walnut Community Garden, where the gardeners did not follow the idea of improving their economic sustainability. Despite the suggestions of outside supporters, the gardeners at Walnut Community Garden declined to sell their produce at the farmers' market.

The most important point from this study is that community gardening, although alternative agrifood literature often argues it provides multiple social, economic, and environmental benefits, does not automatically mean it addresses the social justice issues within the food system. Instead, by incorporating neoliberal ideas in practice, community gardens might actually increase the burden on the poor, by pushing the blame on individuals for food insecurity. As Morton et al. (2008) contends, public policy should remain an important player in addressing fundamental causes of food insecurity. Community gardens should be used in addition to, not in place of the food security safety net programs.

Future research questions

In this section, I discuss future research possibilities on community gardens. While I interviewed on-site community garden leaders as well as outside supporters, the backgrounds of my interviewees were somewhat alike. Most of them seemed to share similar economic backgrounds while I had three people of color among all the ten interview participants. In order to gain a more complete view of the community gardens, future research could include a more diverse group of people with different backgrounds in terms of occupation and education level. In addition, I did not include the voices of those who did not participate in the city's community gardens. Listening and analyzing views on community gardens from those who do not participate may provide more diverse perspectives on how a community garden can meet the needs of its residents more widely in the surrounding neighborhoods. I also recommend interviewing other public

sectors, such as the Planning Department and Food Policy Council, who have not assisted community garden programs to hear what their views on community gardens.

Social inclusion is a concern for alternative agrifood movements (Hinrichs and Kremer, 2002; Guthman, 2008). Examining social justice in the U.S. agrifood system, Allen (2008) argued that alternative agrifood institutions were more accessible to relatively more privileged people, despite their intentions to the contrary. In the study of Midwestern CSAs, Hinrichs (2000) found that some farmers' markets and CSAs in the U.S. have intentionally or unintentionally served educated, middle class consumers. By doing so, the alternative agrifood geography ended up vesting more power to the already privileged. In the case of the community gardens in this study, the participant's income level was not an issue in a direct sense because there were no costs to obtain a plot. However, the locations of these gardens can affect who takes the opportunity to garden for free to grow their food. Moreover, people who are motivated to get a plot to cultivate may share certain attributes, such as similar values or access to information. Community gardening in this case study may be limited to the extent of social inclusion in their gardens.

As Donald and Blay-Palmer (2006) argued, community gardens have a potential to become a space of social inclusion. The first step to become such space is to recognize where they fall short in achieving social inclusion and explore the possibilities to fill these gaps. To identify the shortcomings in social inclusion for the community gardens in this study, I suggest to obtain the demographic data of the participants from each garden and compare them with the demography of the neighborhood that the garden is located. By doing so, one can grasp how well the garden reflect the interests and needs of the neighborhood.

Although community gardens are increasingly praised as a possible site for community development and revitalization, the neighborhood context of many community gardens may limit their potential class mix. In a study based on in-depth interviews with community gardeners, Glover (2004) found some participants observed

issues of social inclusiveness. Glover's study identified both pros and cons of community gardening. While a community garden realized social networking and collective activity, it also created an unequal access to social capital created through community gardening. For future research, interviewing non-garden participants in the neighborhood where a community garden is located would be useful, to include the perspectives of non-gardeners on community gardening, especially in terms of social inclusiveness. It will also be useful to determine if the neighborhood, indeed, wanted the vegetable garden in the first place. It seems community gardens are often positively received, but it would be informative to hear views from non-participants and what they think about having a vegetable garden in their neighborhood (Glover, 2004). By doing so, this will help examine the existence of local interests in gardening.

Another concern related to social inclusion is visibility of the program. Some people may simply not be notified about community gardening. On the city's website, there is a list of four community gardens where people can obtain a plot for free with its respective contact information. However, only those with access to the Internet can find them. All four gardens have signs with phone numbers, but one must encounter these gardens to know they exist. Except for Elmwood Community Garden, none of the gardens are by major streets or well-visited commercial areas. Currently, the community gardens seem to be catering to the interests of likeminded and the more privileged, who already have passion, knowledge, and willingness to learn more about growing their own food. In fact, Greg recognized the need to make an intentional effort to disseminate their community gardens.

In addition to comparing community garden participants and non-participants in the neighborhood, another recommendation for future research is the question of inequalities among gardeners. In this study, I only interviewed on-site garden leaders to obtain an overall picture of the city's community garden program, rather than specific issues that exist within each garden. However, to understand the complexity of maintaining a community garden, it will be insightful to examine the power relationships among community gardeners by interviewing greater participants.

It will also be worthwhile to examine different variables, which might have caused various situations that the community gardens in this study experienced. For example, difference between bottom-up or top-down approaches to create a garden may have impacted the status of each community gardens. While bottom-up versus top-down binary may not be sufficient to evaluate a development project, examining different development approaches will provide another perspective and depth to the study of community gardens (Keare, 2001).

Finally, another valuable study on community gardens would be to compare the notion of neoliberalism and government's social agenda. For example, during the 30s, 60s and 70s in the United States, community gardens appeared as a part of strong social agenda. Community gardening was not to address economic ideology but to emphasize social ideology (Lawson, 2005). Pudup (2008), in her study of the neoliberal state's involvement in the organized garden projects, also emphasized how community gardens of the 70s and 80s were different from the gardens that she studied in recent years. Unlike the subjects of her study, community gardens of the 70s and 80s did not encourage individuals to increase their responsibility for social conditions.

Cuba is another example where community gardens are utilized as part of social agenda. While the Cuban government has incorporated urban agriculture and community gardens to address food security crisis, the government has simultaneously been focusing on other issues related to social equality by facilitating wage and employment policies, health care, education and social security (Nieto and Delgado, 2001). By doing so, a boom in community gardening in Cuba has not meant the advancement of the neoliberal agenda. The government has achieved to address food insecurity with community gardening, and did not use it as a political tool to shift the state's responsibilities for social risks to individual subjects (Lemke, 2002).

Conclusions

We are seeing the increased popularity in community gardening. Community gardens continue to depict and disseminate positive images of themselves, such as

independent individuals who produce their own food or nature-based educational opportunities. However, community gardening may not always produce a success story as in the case of Cedar School Garden in this study. Moreover, even if a community garden showcases a vibrant alternative agrifood movement at a quick glance, it may also be incorporating and trying to enforce the neoliberal ideas. This study found that community gardens have complex and ambivalent characteristics. Community gardens are epitome of our complex society and pose us challenging questions. If we are willing to listen, community gardening may give us deeper insights into the social and economic injustice we face today.

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Appendix 1. Sample Interview Prompt

I changed the questions according to the person I was interviewing. Here is the list of sample questions in most interviews.

- Please tell me about the organization that you belong.
- What are your responsibilities with the garden?
- When did the garden start? Was it part of the program with the City Parks and Recreation Department?
- When did you start getting involved with the garden?
- Are there on-site leaders who coordinate/organize the garden? How do people decide who will be the leader? Is it difficult someone to volunteer?
- What kinds of crops are grown in the garden?
- Approximately how many people are involved with the garden? Do gardeners know each other well?
- Is the garden divided into plots? How do participants distribute the resources and harvests?
- How do gardeners pay for water, tools, and other resources necessary for gardening?
- What are some of the difficulties to maintain the garden?
- What is the best thing about having a garden?
- What are some of the difficulties that people face in the garden?
- Have you changed the way you eat? Do you think that participating in the garden help (you) people eat better, such as increased consumption of fresh vegetables?
- Do you receive any supports from the city or other entities to maintain the garden?
- How much do you spend for the garden?
 - during the growing season
 - other time
- Do gardeners know each other well?
- Do you think that the Parks and Recreation Department provide enough support?

- What are some of the things you would like the municipal government do in terms of community gardens (yours and others in the city)?

- Who participates in the garden? Everyone is from near the garden, or do people commute, etc.?

Appendix 2. Key Themes in Analyzing Interview Transcripts

Below is the list of themes I used to analyze the interview transcripts.

- Benefits (what, for whom)
- Demography
- Difficulties/challenges
- Economic benefits
- Food security
- Funding issues
- Issue of permanence
- Lack of interests
- Land access
- Local interests
- Municipality involvement
- Outside support
- Public outreach
- Self-improvement
- Social inclusion
- Universalism