Abstract

Community gardens are a unique and often quick solution used by planners and designers to solve social, economical, and sustainability issues. Do community gardens have a positive or negative impact on the surrounding communities? Would northside and South Cumminsville have more positive or negative impacts from a community garden in their proposed green corridor? I plan to use a number of books and articles to examine the effects community gardens have had on a number of different types of communities, as well as find an accurate and all inclusive description of what a community garden is and should be to an American city. I have found a number of books that have been useful in my investigation that include: "A Patch of Eden", "Meaning of Gardens", and "Visionaries and Planners". I have also found a number of articles which contain case studies from all types of situations, including:” Some Psychological Benefits of Gardening”, “Weeding Out Failed Practices”, and “Diversity and Connections in Community Gardens”. I found major advantages and disadvantages present in both the articles and the books. This research could all apply to a specific study area, or could have no relevance at all. It is up to the planners and designers to apply the research as a subjective guideline of possible, but not all inclusive, outcomes. Although these situations may not be true for all urban gateway neighborhoods in the United States, there are some implications that can be drawn from them.
Introduction

Community gardens are often seen as a luxury of urban upper-class neighborhoods. With the proposed I-71 and I-75 improvements, nearby Cincinnati neighborhoods are in desperate need of unique identities and a widespread way to connect former joining neighborhoods that were disconnected by new highways. One of the ideas discussed last quarter was a green corridor to reconnect Northside and South Cumminsville. This green corridor would not only reconnect the two detached neighborhoods, but it would also give passing travelers a unique and relaxing first impression of the city of Cincinnati. When I first decided upon my topic of interest, I was able to recall past experiences with proposed community gardens and green corridors. The term “community garden” is very debatable and rarely defined and interpreted. Planners and architects often realize and appreciate the important role nature plays in a community’s health, but they rarely analyze or take into consideration the social aspects of nature in relation to a community. Not only can a green corridor and community garden be a wonderful connection for locals to nature but can possibly connect the community as a whole through cooperation and involvement.

My intention within this report is to analyze how a community garden could socially impact gateway urban neighborhoods. Would community gardens have a positive social impact when incorporated with a green corridor? Would they create more problems socially than they would be socially beneficial? Through a diverse selection of articles and books, I plan to shed some light on just how realistic a community garden is for a gateway urban neighborhood. This topic first sparked three main questions: How are community gardens defined?, Are community gardens socially beneficial? and how are community gardens socially hindering? Many of my resources explore and compare community gardens with other forms of urban agriculture. I found, in particular, that this was the best way to determine how these different authors define a community garden. All three of these questions are ones that are hard to definitively answer without any uncertainty. Every neighborhood is going to have its own issues and situations. This analysis of other studies and written literature is to be used just as a basis for understanding how a community garden could impact an urban community.
How can we define community gardens?

As planners, architects, and engineers, we all like to think that we can define community garden. The fact of the matter is the term “community garden” is incredibly difficult to define. Many of my sources try to define the term for their purposes in order to explain them in more depth. Since the term “community garden” is such a broad term it can be applied to many situations. This means that the variety of types of gardens could be interpreted as community gardens, which would further add variances in the results depending on how the study defines their community gardens.

My first sources, “Weeding Out Failed Practices” and “Some Psychology Benefits of Gardening,” have very diverse study groups that they call “community gardens”. They not only accept public plots of land as a community-use garden, but they also include private plots with individual owners. This inclusion of private lots not only widens their survey area but also varies results greatly. The “Weeding Out Failed Practices” study has a primary focus of determining what women are using these plots and how they are benefiting both economically and socially. The Psychology Benefits of Gardening survey examined the variety of people who used these gardens in order to survey them and determine what impact the gardens had on them socially as an individual and as a community. By including a wider variety of gardens and plots, they are adding in those participants who are growing on their property, which can skew the results to rely more heavily on private plot gardens.

The article “Diversity and Connections in Community Gardens” has the same type of relaxed approach to their definition of a community garden. The researchers first define community as “a collection of people with differing but harmonious views, skills, perceptions who can, with some outside intervention (funding, professional advice, associated bodies), develop in a cooperative way to achieve agreed outcomes” (Holland 288). The authors (write in last name et. al) define a community garden as “a green space managed (and may be developed) by a neighborhood community in which urban agricultural activities take place” (Holland 291). Their definition allows their study to include many types of gardens as long as the neighborhood or community is managing or developing it. All of these sources had their own take on how they determined what a community garden was, but they all had a consensus as to what the underlying definition was. For my purposes, I am going to define a community as a area for agriculture use that is used, managed, and determined by the community's needs and aspirations. My various sources take slight variations of this definition, but they all are primarily concerned with the communities' desires and needs as they relate to these common agricultural areas.
What advantages socially do community gardens have?

By analyzing the advantages of community gardens, we are able to directly compare and contrast how beneficial a similar community garden could be to an urban neighborhood. The first study, “Weeding Out Failed Practices,” was able to use their experiment in rural Mali to show what advantages and disadvantages the women gained by participating in the experiment. They studied a number of women in this rural area to determine how heavily they could rely on their involvement in the community garden economically. Along the way they discovered a number of social impacts the women encountered when participating. The table below, Table 1. Comparative Advantages and Disadvantages of Community Gardens, shows some of the advantages they observed from their study. Socially, there were many aspects that were beneficial. The women were able to work cooperatively as well as create better

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for cooperative work and socializing among women</td>
<td>Small and congested plots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources and inputs including seeds, chainlink fence, and irrigation wells provided by NGO</td>
<td>Limited women's ownership over gardening due to centralized decisionmaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor of the men's association available to women working on community gardens</td>
<td>Plots distributed to relatively young women who are married, excluded other women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garden produce utilized during times of food insecurity</td>
<td>Restriction by NGO in type of vegetables and fruits cultivated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent source of income</td>
<td>Prevents women from participating in other development activities such as literacy classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional support for women provided by NGO project staff</td>
<td>Increased women's financial responsibility within the household</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased women's workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project lacked education component on nutrition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Limited potential for sustainability</td>
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In the book “Visionaries and Planners” the author, Buder, analyzes the impacts of the Garden City Movement. He discussed what the Garden City Movement was as well as it's current impacts and future impacts. Buder's first observation of Americanized urban planning was that they devote themselves to “the creation of the City Beautiful” (Buder 157). This observation was quite shocking to him. Being from Britain, he saw urban planning as a profession trying to eliminate urban blight, which meant his perception of the discipline was focused on the housing sector. When he first observed
the American planner's focus on open space and green ways, he started to think differently about the dynamics of a city. He saw many benefits of thinking like the American planners. One of these benefits was that these American planners “welcomed the Garden City Movement as an extension of their own interests in environmental and social innovation” (Buder 158). This focus on an ideal Garden City allows for more social innovation in relate to these wide spread green way projects. The American planners were more focused on getting the communities involved and working together than their British counterparts. Buder goes on to say one more thing that the American's seemed to capitalize on more so than the British: this “movement represented the potential for attractive communities comprehensively designed in terms of health and a full social life” (Buder 160). This movement has created plenty of opportunity to enrich American cities by investing in adequate and unique open spaces to, as Buder says, be comprehensively design for the communities health and social life.

In his article *Diversity and Connections in Community Gardens* Leigh Holland takes a exploratory approach to sustainability and how it relates to community gardens. He explores all elements of sustainability (environment, social, and economic) and gives a good insight into how community gardens could impact a community socially into being more sustainable. She states “we must build landscapes that heal, connect and empower, that make intelligent our relations with each other and with the natural world” (Holland 290). His suggestion is right along the lines as Buder. She also states that we will only achieve social sustainability “by communal interaction” (Holland 292). He is saying that the only way we will achieve sustainability is by working together as a community. This is a key focus to many cities today and is yet another advantage of what can be accomplished by a united group of citizens focused on a community garden. She gives us a few more examples of what a community garden can do positively in a neighborhood, one of which is that they have “developed as a response to such issues as social exclusion and poverty, environmental degradation and a lack of local facilities for play and recreation” (Holland 292). Community gardens have been proven to provide a service as recreation or local facility that a community was once deprived of. She also observes that “there seems to be a connections between social and environmental purposes, since wildlife schemes also had an element of education, leisure and community involvement” (Holland 297). Community gardens could serve not only as a source of local agriculture and social interaction but a source of education about locally grown foods and food systems, as well as natural habitat. After his diligent study of the sustainability benefits of community gardens Holland concludes that “communities are not homogenous, and will respond to local conditions and influences” (Holland 303). If a community garden introduced to a urban gateway community it has
been shown that the community will react positively and the garden would possibly become a gateway for education, leisure, recreation, and be a vital local facility.

**What disadvantages socially do community gardens have?**

Although there are plenty of possibilities to the improvements a community garden could have on a community there also has to have downfalls to every advance. The table in the above section (page 3) from the article *Weeding Out Failed Practices* outline a number of disadvantages created by the community gardens. One of these disadvantages was the lack of ownership the women felt of their plots. This was caused from the centralized ownership that community gardens are ran by. Although the case study given in this article is set in an extreme opposite to many situations we are use to confronting it is still a valid source of social issues. One of the social issues plaguing rural Mali is adult illiteracy. The community gardens implemented in the study area negatively effected the current adult literacy programs. The women were spending too much time growing their crops in the community gardens to attend their literacy classes. In this situation this one was of the social downfalls to community gardens. The other issue with the study was the way in which the plots of land were distributed. The plots where given out first-come-first-serve which was shown to be inefficient. A majority of the plots were given to younger women who had young families. This excluded a section of the population which created barriers socially in the community.

Leigh Holland also finds many downfalls in his article *Diversity and Connections in Community Gardens*. One of these observations was the fact that “environmental action may not be effective in tackling community social deprivation” (Holland 289). You cannot expect a community garden to solve all social issues. In fact, there is no guarantee that it will solve any. Every situation is different which means the outcome is always a gamble. Holland also notes that the “late 20th-century urbanization has removed the possibility of widespread farm ownership, and city life discourages activities that re-engage humans and nature” (Holland 289-90). The fact that city life discourages activities that involve nature discourages the community garden idea from the beginning. Socially many people who populate the neighborhoods in need of these gardens have never had experience with them. The lack of education about local food growth and community garden would be a social barrier from the start. Throughout the study Holland noticed that “growers often plan for seasons ahead and may regard lack of tenure as a barrier to garden development” (Holland 291) which would cause a social barrier between serious growers and the governing community. Holland also gives a specific case where there was a negative social impact on the community due to one plot.
“One garden, an ecologically managed churchyard, was run single-handedly by a local man who, having been married at the church in connection with the state. In effect the garden is run for the community rather than by it; the manager sees the garden as ‘my hobby’ and has no plans to pass the work on when he is no longer able to carry on.” (Holland 301)

Although this man meant well by wanting to provide a beautiful scenery for the community, which was appreciated by the public, he was undermining the basic social intentions of the community garden. By keeping the plot completely separate from the other he is creating a barrier that, when he is gone, will be hard to relinquish. To some this would be domineering and would have a negative social impact on the whole of the community garden.

The study done by Rachel Kaplan called *Some Psychological Benefits of Gardening* found only one negative social impact on the community at the end of their experiment. She states “one's intuition that gardening one's own place, conveniently located, and when it is one's own responsibility, leads to greatest satisfaction” (Kaplan 153). Her observation is correct for most of the population. Most of the people living in US cities would prefer to garden when they have sole access and responsibility for their plot. By allocating all plots to access and responsibility of the whole community you are limiting the amount of satisfaction based on Kaplan's observation. The decrease in personal satisfaction would create a negative social effect compared to private garden growers. Overall there are plenty of disadvantages to a community garden. No matter what type of sustainable solutions to unused corridors planners suggest there are going to be downfalls.
Conclusion

Like many other often proposed solutions to social problems community gardens is going to have its advantages and disadvantages. The only way to find out if a community garden in Northside and South Cummins ville is feasible is by trial and error. The information gathered from these studies and books have led me to rethink my questions and create new questions such as: What would the impacts be on a declining industrial city much like Cincinnati? Questions like these can only be answered through the implementation of a community garden in Cincinnati or other similar city.

There are four main social advantages and disadvantages I found in my research of community gardens. When a community garden is implemented it allows for a cooperative work environment between races, age groups, and sexes. A community garden was found to be able to facilitate and spur on socialization between groups that were formerly unsociable and intolerant of each other. Community gardens also allow for a greater invested interest in the community. When a community is lacking in home ownership there can be social issues that arise. It was shown in my research that the investment of gardening in a common space with other community members there was a increased sense of ownership and investment. As well as improve social relations and other problems a community garden can improve outside impression of the community, city, and region. Everyone knows and quotes that first impressions are the ones that count and often we rely on this motto more than we realize. If humans weren’t genetically wired to think about aesthetics then our spousal selection would be unorthodox and random. First impression are what run the world today and for a city or community to have an advantage it needs to have a wonderful first impression. Many cities use this philosophy to their advantage and through a number of agricultural systems and community gardens coordinated in a green corridor Cincinnati could have one of those advantages.

Along with these advantages came four disadvantages to consider. One of these disadvantages was the amount of satisfaction gained by each individual participant. The less ownership and individual responsibility the participants feel over their plots the less satisfaction they feel. The other disadvantage observed was the types of people participants in these studies. Many of the studies experienced a problem in obtaining a diverse group of the population having an active role in the experiment. The third disadvantage experienced was the lack of generational convergence and involvement. Many of the participants had no intentions of pass their plots and techniques down from
generation to generation. This means that the following generations are going to have no education or individual connection to the community garden which would cause a barrier for future innovations and improvements. This would also mean, in the worst case situation, the days our community garden is in use are numbered and slowly will dwindle down to the last determined grower. The last disadvantage found was the lack of tenure. Many of the participants felt they couldn't plan ahead due to the loss of tenure and the fact there was no guarantee they would be able to return to the same spot as in the past.

These social advantages and disadvantages are just a selection of what could possibly occur in a situation here in the United States or in a Cincinnati community but these situations are some that should be carefully considered. I did find the same number of disadvantages as I did advantages but I feel the advantages make a community garden feasible in an area like Northside and South Cumminsville. These communities, and the City of Cincinnati, are in desperate need of a vibrant and unique first impression and a community garden infused green corridor just may be the answer. Planners and designers should allow themselves to weigh these possible advantages and disadvantages on their specific situations. Each community is unique and will react differently. This research has given planners an advanced look into the possibilities of community gardens as well as give a wide variety of situations as a basis for most of the compatible situations. A few limitations were experienced throughout this research. These included there not being a specific study in the Cincinnati area, not one of the studies solely focused on social impacts of the community gardens, and not all of the studies had the same definition of a community garden. Although these limitations made it hard to conclusively answer my problems I can accurately say that there are just as many advantages as there are disadvantages and that any community garden can have different social impacts based on the specific community and how it reacts to the community garden.
Sources


