



Culture, community and sustainable food practices: a study of community gardens in Blacktown LGA – Major Report

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Major report



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This is a collaborative study between:



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Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this research study takes place, the Darug people of the Darug Nation, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that Darug people were the first people of the Blacktown area and have strived to retain their culture, identity and special connection with country for more than two centuries of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settlement. We recognise the valuable contribution made by Darug people to the local community in working towards a future of mutual harmony and respect.

We would also like to acknowledge all the community garden members and organisers that participated in this research study.

This study forms part of a collaborative research project with WESTIR Ltd and University of Technology Sydney, investigating “everyday multiculturalism” in community gardens in Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA). A blog about the project can be accessed at: <https://blacktownsustainablefoodstories.wordpress.com/>

WESTIR Ltd has engaged in other research under the theme of “everyday multiculturalism”, for example “Dementia Care for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in Blacktown LGA”. This report can be accessed at: <http://www.westir.org.au/new/index.php/publications>

Executive Summary

This report outlines the research findings from the study entitled 'Culture, community and sustainable food practices: a study of community gardens in Blacktown LGA'. The study is a collaboration between WESTIR Limited (Western Sydney Information and Research Service) and University of Technology Sydney.

The research aims to examine community gardens as social sites where people from culturally diverse backgrounds interact. The practice of gardening at these sites allows people to negotiate their cultural differences and build community as well as develop their knowledge and skills in sustainable food practices. A total of four (4) community garden sites were explored within Blacktown LGA, studying a mix of government, non-government and community-led initiatives. Fieldwork, including participant observation and 28 semi-structured interviews, was undertaken through 2016 and into the first months of 2017.

The report contains a literature review of key literature in the study of community gardens, sustainability, and multiculturalism. The findings of this study present a valuable insight into the social impacts of community gardens in Western Sydney, adding to a growing body of research in Australia and around the world.

Analysis of the fieldwork is presented across five themes:

- Theme 1: Purposes of the gardens
- Theme 2: Community and place
- Theme 3: Encountering and negotiating cultural diversity
- Theme 4: Food and environmental sustainability
- Theme 5: Future role of gardens

The major findings were:

- The community gardens studied had a broad range of purposes which differed across sites due to age, cultural background, gender and ability. Gardeners across all sites strongly expressed that the garden was an important space to socially connect and build relationships, and to a lesser extent, network for employment opportunities and develop language skills.
- For some garden sites, a wider focus of building community was a core vision while for others it was a by-product of their weekly gatherings. The gardens were also important spaces in promoting food security, improving the physical and mental health of gardeners, and educating current and future generations on food growing and other environmentally sustainable practices.
- The construction and experience of 'community' was complex at each of the gardens studied. One garden, which was community initiated and driven, had strong connections with the local community and had a strong desire to recruit members, while the others seemed in many ways 'exclusive' sites where new members were difficult to recruit and there was limited interaction with non-garden members from the local community.
- Community was created through members sharing skills and knowledge with one another, often from childhood memories or past experiences. The temporal nature of the gardens was both a source of strength and conflict, with tensions appearing between long term gardeners and those who came for shorter periods, usually on short-term visitor visas.
- The gardeners from all sites had a range of cultural backgrounds, with some identifying with crops and recipes native to their homeland while others felt distant from cultural practices that had been lost over time. Expressions of cultural diversity

were widely appreciated for the way they allowed people to learn about each other and about different parts of the world, as well as for the opportunities to share foods, gardening tips and recipes.

- There was difficulty connecting with some gardeners due to language and cultural barriers, leading to the need for cultural mediators to alleviate the tensions that arose in the spirit of everyday conviviality. For some, the garden was also an important space to express themselves spiritually, either through growing religiously significant plants, getting closer to a higher power or finding peace and tranquillity in the confines of the garden space.
- Discourses around sustainability across garden sites ranged from formal discussions and knowledge to more indirect, unspoken practices. Most of the gardens studied had a well-established sustainability ethos, either driven by their leadership or their core group of members. When asked about sustainability, many linked the concept to personal health and organic growing practices, environmental land practices and resilient communities.
- Sustainability was also associated with the cycle of life, with the gardeners seeing themselves as part of a broad network of connections between human and non-human. When gardeners spoke about increasing urbanisation in the area, they spoke of these connections being threatened. Through their everyday understandings of the term sustainability, gardeners were found to have developed an ethics of care, for each other, for themselves, and for the natural environment.
- The future role of community gardens differed across different locations and organisational structures. For Council-led gardens, many participants believed that the sites were as established as they could be in the space allotted. It was not a real priority for gardeners to recruit members, however they were open to visitors as a way of showing off their accomplishments. For the non-government driven garden studied, most participants also believed there was not much room for expansion in regards to adding garden plots or welcoming new groups, but they were interested in developing the garden for programs such as therapy activities for dementia patients. In contrast to the two types of gardens above, the community-driven garden studied had a desire to keep expanding their space and membership through activities such as further developing their after-school children's program and building an onsite kitchen. Gardeners across all sites expressed a desire to keep being involved in their respective community gardens, unless they were prevented by age, health, family commitments or moving away.

Overall, this study shows that community gardeners are engaging in everyday practices of conviviality and multiculturalism, interacting with people from a range of cultural backgrounds, abilities, and age groups. Community gardens are sites where people can engage in activities that enhance their health and wellbeing, access fresh produce, and maintain green spaces in an urbanising region. They are important sites for building and maintaining local, sustainable practices, and for developing social capital.

Introduction

This report outlines the research findings from the study entitled 'Culture, community and sustainable food practices: a study of community gardens in Blacktown LGA'.

The study was originally a collaboration between WESTIR Limited (Western Sydney Information and Research Service) and Macquarie University. However one of the primary researchers has since moved on to the University of Technology Sydney. Fieldwork, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews, was undertaken through 2016 and into the first months of 2017. The research aims to examine community gardens as social sites where people from culturally diverse backgrounds interact. The practice of gardening at these sites allows people to negotiate their cultural differences and build community as well as develop their knowledge and skills in sustainable food practices.

Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA) is the second largest LGA by population in New South Wales (NSW), home to 301,099 people in 2011. It has a thriving culturally diverse community, with approximately 184 countries and 156 languages represented across the LGA. Large non-English language groups in Blacktown include Filipino/Tagalog, Hindi, Arabic, Punjabi, Samoan, Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian and Croatian. In past years, Blacktown has been a principal destination for the largest humanitarian settlement of Sudanese refugees in the country. More recently, the area has welcomed newly arrived immigrants from Sinhalese, Urdu and Dari language backgrounds. Amidst immigrant diversity, Blacktown LGA also has the largest urban population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (8,195 people, 2.7%) in NSW (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2013; Blacktown City Council 2016).

Blacktown LGA has several community garden sites used by a variety of community groups. This research explores and compares four (4) community gardens within Blacktown LGA to better understand the diverse range of users, activities and stakeholders in each community garden, which impact the expression of culture, community and sustainable food practices. The community gardens studied were a mix of government (site 1 and 2), non-government (site 4) and community led initiatives (site 3).

This report presents a literature review of key literature in the study of community gardens, sustainability, and multiculturalism. Following this, analysis of the interviews is presented under five themes:

- Purposes of the garden
- Community and place
- Encountering and negotiating cultural diversity
- Food and environmental sustainability
- Future role of the gardens

This report shows that that community gardeners are engaging in everyday practices of conviviality and multiculturalism, interacting with people from a range of cultural backgrounds, abilities, and age groups. Community gardens are sites where people can engage in activities that enhance their health and wellbeing, access fresh produce, and maintain green spaces in an urbanising region. They are important sites for building and maintaining local, sustainable practices, and for developing social capital.

Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative framework to collect data from the four (4) community garden sites. Data was collected from March 2016 - February 2017 using the following methods:

- **Semi-structured interviews:** A total of 28 interviews were conducted across the four (4) community garden sites in the following manner:
 - *Site 1 (April 2016 – March 2017):* 1 interview (including 1 with Council representative).
 - *Site 2 (October – December 2016):* 6 interviews (including 1 with Council representative).
 - *Site 3 (August – October 2016):* 11 interviews.
 - *Site 4 (March – May 2016):* 10 interviews (including 2 interviews with community garden organisers).

Questions asked revolved around garden functions, stakeholder interaction, food sustainability and culture. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure reliability in the analysis. Thematic coding and analysis were undertaken on all interview transcripts to help formulate the findings of this report. Names of the participants have been changed to protect their privacy. The main variation across the interviews carried out in these sites is that Site 1 was principally based on participant observation which gathered narrative data primarily through informal conversations.

- **Participant observation:** The researchers participated in gardening activities and observed gardeners 'in action' while using the community garden and during related community garden events. Informal conversations with gardeners were also documented as part of the observation method. Informal conversations were transcribed as part of the field notes.
- **Photographic documentation:** Photographs were taken of the garden as a visual record to complement written observations.

Ethics and Limitations

This study forms part of a collaborative research project with Ms Amy Lawton and Dr Olivia Hamilton from WESTIR Limited and Dr Kristine Aquino from University of Technology Sydney, investigating culture, community and sustainable food practices in community gardens in Blacktown LGA. The project was developed in collaboration with Dr Kristine Aquino during her appointment at Macquarie University, and continued following her move to the University of Technology, Sydney. The Human Research Ethics Approval for this study was obtained from Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (Human Sciences & Humanities) (Approval No. 5201600093).

There are some limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. Firstly, interviews could only be undertaken with participants who were proficient in English, as no interpretation resources were available to the researchers. Secondly, interviews were restricted to adults, meaning that potentially interesting perspectives from child participants were not explored in detail. However, some perspectives from children were captured through participant observations. Finally, there was no research done in community gardens located in the lowest socioeconomic areas of Blacktown LGA since no gardens in these areas agreed to participate. Nonetheless, the findings present a valuable insight into the social impacts of community gardens in Western Sydney, adding to a growing body of research in Australia and around the world.

Literature Review

The term 'community garden' has many definitions in the literature, all which share the basic component of providing a shared space for people to garden. In the context of this study, a community garden is best understood as "a defined area of tillable land made available to groups of individuals, households, classes, and others to garden. Within this broad definition, the size, location, age, participation and programmatic elements of a community garden can vary widely" (Hou, Johnson & Lawson 2009, p. 11). While the community gardens in this study were created in vacant land in neighbourhoods to primarily grow food crops, they can also be found in parks, housing developments and places of work and can also include flowers, theme gardens and playgrounds (Firth, Maye & Pearson 2011; Glover, Parry & Shinenew 2005; Hou, Johnson & Lawson 2009).

One of the complexities in the term 'community garden' is in defining the term 'community'. Community has been defined as groups of people formed through proximity in space (communities of place) and shared activities, beliefs, experiences (communities of interest), leading to a 'shared identity and reciprocity over time' (Adams & Hess 2001, p. 14). The idea of 'community' that underpins a community garden will affect the garden's management arrangements. For example, many gardens are started by community members who seek a place to garden personally or collectively, while others are initiated by schools, non-profit organisations and government agencies that consider the benefits to their participants (Hou, Johnson & Lawson 2009; Turner & Henryks 2012). This study aims to explore a variety of community gardens across management styles and settings and highlights that different types of 'community' may form in and around these sites.

Community gardens, as defined sites, highlight the importance of the connections between people (the community) and place (the garden). Much has been written about these connections, be it in discussions of urban environments, responses to the landscape, health and wellbeing, or migration (Amin & Thrift 2002; Ingold 2000; Hamilton 2017; Kearns & Gesler 1998; Massey 2005). Places are not static but involve constantly changing negotiations, power struggles, and encounters with others (both human and non-human) in what geographer Doreen Massey (2005, p. 141) describes as the 'thrown-togetherness' of place, 'the event of place... in the simple sense of the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing'. Such a view of place as event is useful in understanding what is happening in the community gardens studied in this research project. In western Sydney, the relationship between people and place is undergoing transformation as the population increases, backyards get smaller, and market gardeners face an altered planning landscape that threatens agriculture in the Sydney basin (James 2016; Strong & Lee 2006).

At the same time, as is happening in many suburbs across Sydney, Blacktown's population continues to change as newly arrived migrants join established migrant, Anglo-Australian, and Aboriginal Australian populations, leading to sometimes creative, sometimes troubling exchanges (see, for example, Cassity 2007; Gannon et al 2016; Hage 2000; Noble 2009; Roberston 2014; Watson 2016; Wise & Velayutham 2009). Across the world, migration patterns are changing: on the one hand, new technologies make travel and communication easier, while on the other, states seek to curtail travel across their borders. As a result of these changes, 'migration research increasingly acknowledges the transnationality and the temporal fluidity of diverse kinds of migrant subjects, from elite knowledge workers... to low-skilled contract labourers' (Roberston 2014, p. 1915). Studies of everyday multiculturalism focus on the interactions of people from diverse backgrounds that occur in sites as diverse as shops, food courts, parks, streets, and so on. Such studies seek to better understand conviviality, or 'how it is we *live* with difference' (Wise & Velayutham 2009, p. 2). In this context, backyard and community gardens are important sites of engagement, as people share knowledge about the environment, plants, food, and other cultural practices both in the

place where they live now, and in the places they have left behind. (Head et al 2004; Morgan et al 2005; Shan & Walter 2015). Such sites, however, are not free of prejudice, and some researchers have pointed out that community gardens can themselves operate as racialised and class-based spaces where some people are excluded from participating, while some (racialised and classed) food and gardening practices are perceived to be healthier and more sustainable than others (Alkon & Agyeman 2011; Bowens 2015; Dixon & Isaacs 2013; Slocum 2007). This study examines how some of these tensions play out in practice.

Existing literature documents a range of health benefits to participating in community gardens (Alzheimer's Australia SA Inc 2010; Armstrong, 2000; Block et al 2011; Clatworthy et al 2013; Frumkin 2001; Hale et al 2011; Milligan et al 2004; Pretty et al 2005; Wakefield et al 2007; & Whatley 2012). Studies with community gardeners in Toronto and New York found gardeners participated in order to access fresh food, to improve nutrition, to enjoy nature, and to engage in physical exercise (Armstrong 2000; Wakefield et al 2007). In addition to providing opportunities for physical exercise, engaging with green spaces has been shown to produce an emotional response that increased self-esteem and overall wellbeing (Pretty et al 2005). Through the involvement of many members of the local community, community gardens can also improve the overall health of an area, by enabling broader neighbourhood issues to be addressed (Armstrong 2000). Gardening is increasingly recognised as an important contributor to improved mental health (Clatworthy et al 2013; Frumkin 2001). People with dementia, for example, can benefit from specifically-designed gardens that provide 'therapeutic activities designed to maximise retained cognitive and physical abilities and lessen the confusion and agitation often associated with the condition' (Alzheimer's Australia SA Inc 2010, p. 4), while people living with mental health challenges were shown to benefit from a targeted program that focused on social inclusion through gardening (Whatley 2012).

There are a number of studies that have also explored the social benefits of community gardens. In addition to the physical and psychological health benefits, studies by Glover (2003; 2004) highlight that gardens are a source of social capital, social connectedness and social support. In other words, community gardens are a place where participants from different backgrounds are brought together to find a greater sense of belonging, friendship formation and an expression of democratic values. It is important to note that the formation of social capital within community gardens does not always translate beyond the garden (Kingsley & Townsend 2006) although Teig et al (2009) suggest that relationships formed within the garden can lead to an overall stronger sense of community.

Another purpose or benefit of community gardening is access to food to promote food security. Food security is defined as a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO 2003). An increasing number of studies are mentioning food production as a benefit or motivating force for community garden participation (Draper & Freedman 2010; Hannah & Oh 2000; Pudup 2008). For many community gardeners in Australia, Lilith (2008) and Nettle (2014) also note that food security has been linked to a range of ideas around seasonality, relocalisation and threats to overall food supply in the face of climate change, peak oil supplies, uncertain water supplies and the environmental impacts of industrial agribusiness. While community gardens are commonly seen as contributing to food security through increasing local food production, these sites also go beyond providing access to land to grow food by building skills and expertise within communities to improve food knowledge and networks.

Finally, community gardens have been identified as a model of sustainability and sustainable urban living. Sustainability has been defined as meeting human fundamental needs while preserving the natural systems that sustain life, with discourses around sustainability increasingly seeking to understand the interactions between nature, society and place (Kates

et al 2001; Sneddon et al 2006; Barkemeyer et al 2014). Holland (2004) and Turner (2011) suggest that community gardens have the potential to promote sustainability in three key ways: firstly, the local growth of foods, often organic, which provides people with fresh safe foods which are fundamental to physical and ecological sustainability; secondly, the making of community provides an opportunity for social and cultural interactions and the evolution of socio-cultural sustainability; and thirdly, community gardens are dissemination sites for research, development and demonstration to current and future generations which points towards economic sustainability. Listening to, and engaging with, the everyday life experiences of community gardeners is vital to understanding the way these spaces can be used to promote more sustainable lifestyles.

Findings

Theme 1: Purposes of the gardens

The participating community gardens had a broad range of environmental, social, food growing and educational purposes. The intersection of these purposes differed across garden sites due to factors such as age or generation, cultural background, gender and ability.

The four community gardens where this research was undertaken had different organisational structures, which reflected their different approaches to the concept of 'community'. Community has been defined as groups of people formed through proximity in space (communities of place) and shared activities, beliefs, experiences (communities of interest), leading to a 'shared identity and reciprocity over time' (Adams & Hess 2001, p. 14). This temporal aspect of community and place will be discussed further below; first, it is important to understand some of the decisions made about the organisational structure of the gardens.

Sites 1 and 2 were managed and mainly used by a core group of gardeners; site 3 was run with a bottom-up, community-driven approach; while site 4 was attended by participants in specific social programs. These different organisational structures led the gardeners to speak about their involvement in contrasting ways. At all sites, gardeners expressed a sense of ownership and pride in the garden, commenting on the beauty of the plants, and the sense of achievement when produce was shared around at the end of the day. However, sites 1, 2, and 4 seemed in many ways to be 'exclusive' sites: new members were difficult to recruit; there was limited interaction with non-garden members from the local community unless through organised fair days or garden competitions; and at site 4, research participants stated outright that other groups would not be invited to garden there as there was no more space in the garden beds. In contrast, site 3 had strong connections to the local community, with people dropping in to buy seedlings, joint activities organised with local artists and a nearby café, and a democratic organisational structure that allowed all garden members to be involved in decision-making.

"Originally my feelings were that garden groups could become self-sufficient and incorporated or collectively and we are just playing that by ear.... [For now] it's a Council project supervised by Council, garden supervisors supervise it when Council is not here, trained by Council safety section, so it is very much a Council project."
(Diane, Site 1)

"We are an incorporated not for profit association and I guess we just felt that this would be the cheapest easiest way of getting a community driven structure but that also gives us by definition, it gives us that structure of a committee, of having a democracy, of having the ability to vote, of being a member right not a volunteer..."
(Peter, Site 3)

"It's very important to the committee that everybody has their say. They never do anything unilaterally, they always ask the group of people, 'What do you think about this?' And it's done without pressure and without autocratic attitudes." (Barbara, Site 3)

Gardeners across all sites strongly expressed that the garden was an important space for participants to socially connect, build relationships, and to a lesser extent, network for employment opportunities and develop language skills. Many interviewees commented that they appreciated the social connections they had made due to being involved in their respective gardens, ranging from nice acquaintances to more intimate friendships.

"I don't like my own garden. It's just me by myself. But here, people help you maintain the garden. You have people to talk to while gardening." (Alice, Site 1)

"That's why I wanted to volunteer. I need to meet people. Maybe Diane (garden organiser from Council) will give me more information about jobs at the Council. Something like that." (Meera, Site 1).

"I came here first thing I came to see the people and meet the people, I talk about what to do, where are you from, what to do, what we can plant and take some advice and give some advice." (David, Site 2)

For site 3, building community was a core vision of the garden while for the remaining garden sites it was a by-product of their weekly gatherings.

"I think there has been a community that has developed in the people that come and that is lovely, they help each other and pick each other up and drop each other off and that is really nice." (Diane, Site 2)

"When we actually sat down to write our vision, as a group we realised that it was a lot more than just growing vegetables and learning skills, there was this issue of gelling our community and how do we build community... Our forefront has always been this sense of just initially just building this community up and connection and just enjoying, creating a community space." (Peter, Site 3)

"I actually think the whole, the whole idea of the garden is to socialise, it is an open space, it is a nice place to be in, it makes everyone feel comfortable." (Linda, Site 4)

While many saw the predominant reason of coming together as social, it appeared the gardens also played a role in growing local food and promoting food security. The gardens had varying degrees of impact on the food needs of its users and the surrounding community, ranging from members taking very little produce home due to having their own backyard gardens to selling excess produce or seedlings at local festivals. Site 3 explicitly mentioned that their space was important in promoting food security and sustainable food production by being a centre of local food knowledge that decreased the community's reliance on the industrial food system.

"And also gardens are so important from a food production point of view, so many people don't have gardens anymore or they don't know how to garden, so they come in and ask us questions, they love the idea of gardening but they have no idea... But also too... food gardens from a point of view of food security as well and local food, so I think supporting local growers and less transportation and less refrigeration of food, all those sort of things." (Jennifer, Site 3)

All the community garden sites studied were significant spaces for educating their participants in food growing and other environmentally sustainable practices. The garden sites were places where skills and knowledge could be developed and shared amongst members formally and informally, with a culture of learning through doing. Some gardeners considered themselves more avid gardeners than others, informally sharing skills they have developed in their childhoods, past professions (for example, horticulture) or from their own home gardens. There were many interviewees across all garden sites who were constantly expanding their gardening knowledge through mediums such as television, radio, internet, Council seminars or other people.

"Because a lot of people when they enquire about gardening, they say 'I don't know anything about gardening', it's okay you don't need to know anything about gardening, just come along and join. So maybe it starts out as social and then it turns into skills." (Diane, Site 2)

"I learnt so many things about the fertilisers the soils, how to water, I never used to know how to water." (Lakshmi, Site 3)

"Oh I used to watch the ABC, you know quite often for years and years but also there's talkback gardening on a Saturday morning... So I've accumulated a little bit of basic knowledge." (Denise, Site 3)

While all garden sites were committed to maintaining knowledge, some were more actively involved in passing this on to future generations. At sites 1 and 2, there was no active move to involve younger generations, however the gardeners, and their gardens, remain important as green oases in the urbanising context. In contrast, sites 3 and 4 both actively engaged in the education of younger generations. Site 3 had a dedicated program for children, ranging in age from newborn to upper primary school. Children were involved in directed gardening activities, art making, and free play. Parents stressed the importance of such spaces for children's learning, development of motor skills, interaction with the natural world and with other children. At site 4, the education program is aimed at young adults with learning difficulties who are involved in a post-school, job-readiness program. Prior to their participation in the program, these young adults were largely unaware of how food is grown; their participation helped to focus their attention, teach them about the natural world, and gave them confidence in their skills.

"I think the main reason is to get the children out and about, away from the computers and the iPads and interacting with the other children, learning about you know the garden and what's involved, and how everything evolves in a garden." (Rita, Site 3)

"The point is to host it in the garden to give kids a reason to get outside and to be in a healthy outside environment, you know it encourages them to run around and grab spinach and eat it... there was this mound of dirt there and the kids were in it, in with all the water and everything and it was so cute, but all of that is very very healthy for fending off allergies and the immune system and it is also very social for them." (Serena, Site 3)

"The kids [with intellectual disability] that come in, what really gave me a real boost the other day was one of the chaps that actually comes in with the kids, he says it's good to bring the kids in here, because he said, we watch them, and within a couple of hours after they've been here, they're silent when they come, and after a couple of hours with some of the guys that come out here, they're starting to talk." (Leon, Site 4)

There are an increasing number of studies highlighting the purposes and benefits of community gardens. Scholars point to positive community building outcomes, including benefits to creating social capital, improving human health and promoting food security. Community gardens also create opportunities for community development through informal skills and knowledge transfer to more formalised educational activities (Draper & Freedman 2010; Firth, Maye & Pearson 2011). Glover (2004) and Glover et al (2005) suggest that community gardens can mobilise and empower community groups, resulting in a greater sense of pride and motivation to develop the surrounding neighbourhood. The fieldwork in this research indicates that garden spaces driven from the community can facilitate greater democracy and more active participation in community issues. At the same time, the

gardens' collaboration with government, business, community stakeholders, or social programs allows them to think more broadly about their impact in the local area.

Theme 2: Community and place

This section discusses the different gardens' approaches to community and place, through a focus on the organisational structure, temporality and urban change. Through analysis of the observations and interviews conducted at each site, a picture emerged demonstrating the close links between understandings of community and of place. Tension appears between the use of the garden by members who are short-term visitors to Australia, and long-term residents, perhaps exacerbated by the temporal nature of gardening: plants take time to grow, mature, and produce food. The gardens also clearly have an important place in the broader life of the area, as development in the region leads to an ever-increasing need to maintain gardens as sites of knowledge and green space in an urbanising environment.

One aspect of gardening that was both a source of strength, and a source of tension, was that of temporality. Plants take time to grow, but are in a permanent state of change, growing from seed to bud, flowering and bearing fruit, losing leaves, with the seasons. In a study of the transitory gardens of homeless people in New York City, Balmori and Morton (1993, p. 1) argue:

More than any other art, landscape is positioned in impermanence. This, in fact, is its strength, not its weakness. Gardens that are consciously and purposefully preserved may be, perhaps, more recreations than gardens. But even those landscapes that have a program of preservation built into them are ultimately subject to the limits of time, in that their living materials complete a cycle of life and death. Unlike buildings, gardens and landscapes are fleeting forms that live and die, though they do leave an imprint on their sites.

While the garden sites studied in Blacktown LGA were more permanent than those in Balmori and Morton's study, this passage highlights the cycles of life and death inherent to gardening. The temporality of plants is accompanied by the temporality of people: the gardeners interviewed made a time commitment to garden at the sites regularly, for long periods of time. This was especially true for gardeners who had retired from paid work, as they then had more time available to spend gardening. Planning also went into the planting, to ensure that the produce did not go to waste, although it often took a few seasons to find the right balance between producing crops and sharing out produce amongst the gardeners.

"Marina has too much papaya – she's been cutting them down (not by the root) trying to trim them. Teresa says she has too many pumpkins – they should trade. She also has some mangoes and she can bring them in. Richard mentions that would take too long to grow, "5 years". Alice joins in saying she has an avocado plant, "takes even longer, 7 years but I'll bring in the seeds anyway." (Site 1 fieldnotes, 3 May 2016)

"I am now interested in becoming one of the caretakers or supervisors... I am retired so I am happy to give my time." (Juan, Site 2)

"When we first set up our own shed garden, we made quite a few mistakes in the process of producing the garden. We put in a couple of dozen tomato plants, we had so many tomatoes we couldn't give them away. So over time, I developed part of the garden where I'm only growing perennial crops... So we have asparagus, and mint, and anyway, there's small little plots of perennial plants that can be harvested all year round. Ginger's another one I think we've got there. And we now grow, because of the take away problem, we now only grow small quantities... we've had to learn how to grow a crop that we now can get rid of." (Paul, Site 4)

However, not all gardeners could give equally of their time. When gardeners had low mobility, or mental illness, or learning difficulties, for example, their contributions were

welcomed and supported by other gardeners. In other cases, gardeners who took time off due to illness or for a holiday felt that the remaining gardeners would take over in their absence, and the garden would still be going strong when they returned. At site 4, some of the more physical jobs were taken on by a volunteer who was participating as part of Centrelink's job seeker "Work for the Dole" program.

"Alice talks about the strawberries – they were planted by another gardener who is disabled – the group tends to the garden bed for him but he barely comes to look after it as he can only come in when he has his helper. "We don't mind looking after his plants, he's disabled so it's our way of helping him out. We look after it and put some of the harvest away for him when it's time and we get to take some home too!" (Site 1 fieldnotes, 19 April 2016)

"Oh it's very friendly and the people treat you properly, treat you well really, like we are a part of a team. And we all help each other, if they have difficulty in handling things, they ask for your assistance and you just go and help them. It's quite good really." (Nick, Site 2)

"Like the garden here, when I'm away with my husband, somebody else is here watering and planting so that the garden is sustained and healthy." (Barbara, Site 3)

"A bit of gardening... some weeding, or planting or something so that's another job... chaps do certain things, they like to do certain things... some of them got a bad back or something and they don't like getting back and the weeding and what not, so I get down there while I still can, and so makes it a little bit easier for the others." (Mark, Site 4)

In contrast, tensions were visible between long-term gardeners and those who came for short periods, when visiting relatives on short-term visitor visas. These gardeners, mainly from India, were perceived by other gardeners as less committed to the garden, although their own perceptions indicated a longer-term engagement with the garden over multiple visits to Australia. At the same time, language barriers were exacerbated by the short periods of time they were able to spend in Australia, as they often left before developing strong English skills. Other cultural differences also contributed to tensions between gardeners, but these will be discussed further in the following section.

"Now I speak very good English. I am now able to speak English and now I am able to talk with you all... I am coming here for past two years. Three month stay in Australia and then six month stay in India. Then I will come back. I have a tourist visa." (Hashana, Site 1)

"There were times at the beginning... where we had quite a few local people, Indians come in and there was... difficulty with the language barrier, I couldn't get through to them you know. It was hard for them, it was hard for me to try and direct them and doing something when they couldn't understand what they were saying... But they are not here anymore and they came for a little while and some of them were only here on holiday visas so they were here for three months and they went home to India or wherever." (Felicity, Site 2)

Another important element in the joy of gardening expressed by participants was the way that they were able to align their current activities with childhood memories. Across all four sites, most gardeners were older, and remembered being involved in gardening or farming practices from an early age. This embodied knowledge contributed to their enjoyment of gardening in the present day, as they describe their pleasure in digging in the dirt, moving around, and watching plants grow. At site 3, it was also imparted to children, where an

important element of the children's program was the development of an embodied engagement with nature.

"I've always been a gardener and I had my first garden when I was eight because I grew up on a farm, it was obvious that I was going to be a gardener...I just love gardening and I've always had a garden and when we moved back to [the area] my backyard was so small, I've only got a small garden area so this feels the need to dig in dirt and plant and grow." (Felicity, Site 2)

"I love to work and in Fiji, I was a farmer, I was a farmer in Fiji, I can't sit down I have to work." (David, Site 2)

"It is my hobby, it so happen that my dad was an agriculturalist and I learn the trade from him." (Juan, Site 2)

"I think the main reason is to get the children out and about, away from the computers and the iPads and interacting with the other children, learning about you know the garden and what's involved... It's funny because when she first came here, she was afraid, she really hated getting dirty and like wouldn't touch anything, like she would have to bring her gloves if she was going to pick anything up and probably just six months after she settled in, she gained a lot of confidence and really enjoyed getting dirty looking for snails and worms." (Rita, Site 3)

"I had to learn [about gardening] when I was [young], because I've come up through the depression. So we grew a lot of our own plants." (Leon, Site 4)

These acts of embodied remembering became, in some ways, acts of resistance to a changing landscape. In an era of increasing urbanisation and the subsequent loss of knowledge about food systems experienced by people who live in cities, community gardens, allotments, guerrilla gardening, and other forms of food production in urban spaces have an important role to play. Such sites can become hubs where memories of how to grow food and how to survive through food shortages in times of crisis are maintained for future generations (Barthel et al 2013, p. 14).

Community gardens in a suburban environment, by their very nature, are bounded sites: their extent is limited by the buildings, roads, parklands, and other man-made structures that surround them. This study recognises that community gardens can play a strong role in both connecting with the past and facilitating a continued way of life through gardening. Like recent research undertaken on local market gardens, there is a need to further examine community gardens through a heritage discourse to see how they can be a part of rather than an incidental feature of Sydney's urban growth (James 2016). The four sites where this research took place sit within larger green spaces: three are located adjacent to or in the middle of parks, while one sits next to an open paddock, in an area that was historically home to small-scale farms but is likely to be urbanised in the near future. Gardeners spoke about the need to maintain these areas, to safeguard them from development and to ensure they remain as physical spaces where knowledge about gardening can be shared.

Theme 3: Encountering and negotiating cultural diversity

Community gardens have the potential to foster everyday practices of conviviality ('affectively at ease relations of coexistence and accommodation' [Wise & Velayuthum 2013]), and the transnational sharing of ideas when gardeners travel back and forth between Australia and their home countries. At the same time, discussions with gardeners shed light on how cultural practices change over time, and on the 'unmarked' category of white Australian culture in food practices (see, for further discussion, Carey & McLisky 2009; Lockie 2013; and in the American context, Slocum 2007). In all of the gardens studied, cultural diversity was encountered and negotiated on a daily basis, in everyday moments of conviviality.

The gardeners encountered at the four research sites had a range of cultural backgrounds, including (but not limited to) Anglo/Celtic Australian, Bhutanese, Chinese, English, Filipino, Indian, Italian, Lebanese, and Maltese. Some gardeners identified strongly with their cultural background, sharing recipes and planting crops native to their homelands, while others, especially those born or raised in Australia, felt that some of those cultural practices had been lost over time, as their families adjusted to life in Australia. Although two gardeners identified as having Aboriginal heritage, they described themselves as more closely practising white Australian culture, since their families had both been affected by the stolen generations and cultural genocide of previous government policies.

"I understand it, I have done a little bit of work with them, ah but no I just think we are all Australian. I'm me, I grew up just being me and with my family, I always knew, when we were kids we never mentioned it because we were told not to and that was from my grandmother [who] was from the stolen generation." (Felicity, Site 2)

"Right down to Aboriginal background right in the Blacktown area... really it's only this generation, my generation... prior to my mother's generation [it was] a huge scandal, you don't talk about that. It was hidden, Aboriginal, Mediterranean, any connections were severed." (Jennifer, Site 3)

"I was born in Philippines and we came to Australia when I was two years old... I wouldn't even know, I don't even know how to cook, I can't even speak the language unfortunately." (Lisa, Site 3)

Participants at the garden sites were not necessarily representative of all of the communities who live in Blacktown. This is partly due to geographical variations in where certain groups tend to live: for example, the gardeners of Maltese background encountered during the fieldwork were concentrated at one site, in an area historically characterised by small-scale market gardens run by post-war European immigrants. Other sites closer to the Blacktown CBD were more likely to be frequented by those from newer migrations from the Philippines and India. Only at two of the four sites did interviewees comment on the lack of involvement from some of Blacktown's other communities, such as Indigenous Australians and Sudanese or South Sudanese refugees. This indicates that the cultural mix in the gardens is not a product of concerted effort to engage people from diverse backgrounds, but rather came about because of the diversity of the population in the local area.

The question of whether the gardens acted as racialised zones that excluded people from specific backgrounds was beyond the scope of this research. What can be noted, however, is that the exclusions and micro-tensions that occurred within the garden spaces were directed most often at gardeners of Indian background, perhaps because of their visible difference, perhaps because Indian gardeners were the most likely to be in Australia on short-term visas, thus limiting the length of time they could commit to the garden activity. In all gardens, researchers observed at least one gardener who took on the role of cultural mediator, an important role in alleviating tensions that arose between gardeners of different

backgrounds. Amongst other things, cultural mediators would explain the reasons someone may dress in a particular way, assist in interpreting garden conventions for speakers of other languages, or discuss how to use the produce with people who are used to different varieties of vegetables.

"Well you can't ask him to do anything because he's too dressed up like he's going to the office."

"I think that's his culture. If his friends see him, he has to look nice. You see a couple of them drop by sometimes? They dressed the same too. They're men and they need to dress a bit formal." (Conversation between garden member and researcher, Site 1 fieldnotes, 12 April 2016)

"So the point that I was making is that when Indians come here they will say 'no we get those vegetables but taste is not Indian', it is different taste and actually I don't find any difference but they feel it maybe no, they are not criticising but they feel that. But then I told them this is Australian spinach, they have three varieties we use that English spinach in India, but we don't call it English spinach, it is our spinach." (Lakshmi, Site 3)

In discussions about gardening, elements of the 'unmarked' and 'unremarked' white Australian culture emerged. Gardeners clearly expressed a strong care for the land and its natural resources, an interest in sustainability and health, and a can-do attitude. While such practices are not exclusively Australian, they are present in a specific mix in the Australian culture, and in the culture of the garden. This can be observed most closely when gardeners of Australian background compared their attitudes and cultural practices with those of gardeners who have moved to Australia from overseas, or when gardeners recalled ways of doing things that were more prevalent in the past.

"From a permaculture point of view, I find that over the years that shifts from year to year, and it tends to be, like we've had some Africans and Indians and we've had um ah, they were refugees from Laos, very minimal language, but once they come in and realise that is not a problem because they bring their own gardening skills, we are very interested in how other communities and cultures use plants." (Jennifer, Site 3)

"It's probably not so much of where [my parents] were from but the timeframe that I grew up in and the three veggies and it was much the same... the variety that has come in from different countries, different cultures as well and things that you will try that you wouldn't have tried as a child because you just didn't see it." (Ruth, Site 3)

For the most part, those who used the gardens were happy to talk about their cultural heritage and to share knowledge and discuss differences with other gardeners. Many gardeners shared knowledge about how to cook with certain plants, or how to companion plant, for example growing taro with bananas.

"I don't know how to harvest taro and she had that knowledge and we planted it under the bananas and they are coming up now and it is great and they are actually doing really well. She said that they grow together really well, she has an Islander cultural background knowledge of how those two plants work together nicely and that is great." (Diane, Site 1)

"Yes, the things that are in our garden, it is the same thing in Fiji, I learnt in Fiji. I plant the sugarcane and the banana also... That's why I never miss my garden. Never miss." (David, Site 2)

"I have one gourd that I plant outside, this is something that was only planted this year and I have also at home." (Juan, Site 2)

"There is a number of Indian ladies and men that come here and they are very good at sharing their recipes, they even bring in the recipe written down or they already bring in the dish already made... then we get into a discussion about what the dish is and whether you liked it, what was in it, that sort of thing, yeah certainly there is a fair bit of sharing of the culture." (Ruth, Site 3)

Of course, other aspects of diversity, such as gender, age, ability, and class, were also encountered and negotiated in the gardens. In some cases, these differences intersected with cultural diversity, for example when expectations about motherhood or ageing differed between gardeners from different cultural backgrounds. In other cases, community support services targeted at specific groups brought people into the garden space who might not otherwise have participated. This was especially apparent at sites 1 and 4, which will be discussed further below.

In some of the interactions observed across all gardens, it was clear that gender roles and expectations impacted on gardeners in the activities that they undertook, in their interactions with other gardeners, and in their expectations for the garden sites. At site 1, discussions of gender focused on the tasks that each person might be assigned, with the men tending to take on the heavier labour. One male gardener was resentful that another man seemed less willing to follow this unspoken rule, and viewed the other man as a shirker. At site 2, gender did not emerge as an issue, perhaps because the smaller size of the group and the role of the garden supervisor allowed any possible issues to be dealt with quickly. At site 3, overt sexism was not tolerated, and one gardener recounted an incident in which someone had been asked to stop attending after making some of the female gardeners feel unsafe. At the same time, women at this garden developed intercultural understanding through discussions of their different approaches to motherhood. At site 4, the Bhutanese gardening group also tended to follow a gendered division of labour whereby the women did most of the weeding and planting, however this was not viewed negatively by other gardeners, since at that site, each group gardened in their own discrete plot. Thus, cultural differences in gender roles were felt more keenly when the spatial arrangement of the garden called for shared labour, as happened at sites 1 and 3; were alleviated through the spatial separation of different groups at site 4; and were not found to be an issue at all at site 2.

"And apparently he is quite good, while the other gentleman that comes was very out there about the fact that he doesn't do that, that is women's work and they should do everything. And he wanted to take all the good things home, that is, how do we negotiate through that... I don't know." (Diane, Site 1)

"People have had different ideas about how things are going to run... it's over conduct... a new member came in and was sort of behaving in a way that was making some of the women uncomfortable... he was actually paid back his membership, you know to sort of preserve a culture which makes people feel safe because that was the idea of the garden, to make people feel welcome." (Serena, Site 3)

The regular gardeners at all four sites were, for the most part, older retirees, part-time workers or full-time carers. This is due in large part to the time commitment required. Some gardeners had less mobility, so others would take on more responsibility for some of the more difficult tasks. Whereas cultural differences in attitudes towards work caused tension, these differences in people's ability were accepted and accommodated without question. Other gardeners took on the heavier tasks, or took care of plants while members were off sick or because of their care duties. One gardener described being appreciative of the

Australian attitude to ongoing activity and engagement while ageing, and the community garden's flexibility and welcoming attitude to people of all abilities. This message was taken back to India by a journalist who had come to Sydney to visit family, and had become involved in the garden during his stay here, demonstrating the transnational potential of community gardens as sites of information and exchange.

"When I come here some Indian visitors come.... And they like it so much. Some of them have been working also sometimes and one of them, he came here, he is a journalist from India so he wrote it, he didn't tell me but he wrote articles in local language, vernacular, in Indian newspaper.... And he gave a catchy title in the newspaper saying that all seniors can also work. And he had photos because most of them especially in the remote areas also, after you are 60, 65, you are told also and one doesn't want to work." (Lakshmi, Site 3)

Sites 1 and 4 included programs aimed specifically at certain groups within the community. A Chinese women's group attended site 1, though little interaction was observed with other gardeners except for one case where a woman who began gardening through the group, joined the general membership. The main reason given for the group to maintain its own scheduled hours separate to the larger group of garden members was the language barrier, with most members of the Chinese women's group speaking limited English. Site 4, though, was the garden most clearly dedicated to specific community groups, with plots set aside for different gardeners. One group included young adults with learning difficulties, who were participating in a ready-for-work program. These young adults learnt skills that would be transferrable to the workplace, while also learning about where their food came from. Another group that gardened here included people living with dementia and their carers. These gardeners did not attend as regularly as other garden members, however they clearly benefited from their time in the garden. At the same time, carers were able to interact with others and to gain knowledge about gardening, which they could then apply at home.

"[My husband] was diagnosed three years ago... he's been diagnosed with dementia and we came here with the dementia people... I have to admit it's not for [him], he's not a gardener, he doesn't like gardening... but basically to be with the dementia people and stay in touch with them because there is a lot of feedback... I like being here too and [he] comes." (Maria, Site 4)

"Western Sydney Dementia Advisory Service suggested it to me around 3 years ago. For the first twelve months, I came with my wife and then for 14-15 months after that I started coming with the Anglicare Dementia Group... I like to get out. I have always been self-employed and I like the outdoors." (Thomas, Site 4)

At site 4, the garden was able to provide a space for Bhutanese gardeners to transfer their traditional agricultural practices into the local context, remind them of their homeland, and provide them an opportunity to propagate and harvest plants native to their homeland for themselves and their families. It was also noted that many of the elderly Bhutanese refugees using the garden had limited to no English proficiency but used their produce (and other traditional foods) to communicate with other users of the garden.

"These [Bhutanese] groups they had been in refugee camps for 15 to 20 years so there are traumatised there, leaving behind their families so now they are recovered now, getting together with families and getting in touch with new communities who have the same stories to tell, so they hear stories from others when they meet and they garden, they think they have the same problem and they don't feel so much... Their background is farming, they had their own farms back in Bhutan so when they go to garden, they feel better working in the garden, you must have seen their friends in the garden, they planted

some seeds and made seed beds and all, they feel like they are working back at their home so they feel happy to go to the garden.” (Sanjay, Site 4)

Another important aspect of cultural diversity encountered in the gardens was the role that plants, and growing things, plays in people’s spiritual lives. Across all sites, gardeners spoke about their connection to the soil and to green, growing things. For some gardeners, this was explicitly linked to their religious beliefs. One gardener, a self-identified Christian, said that she was motivated to garden, to dig in the earth and to help plants grow, in order to feel closer to God. Other gardeners emphasised that the plants that they grew had religious significance. This was especially true for the Indian gardeners, who spoke about the sacred nature of mangoes, chili plants, and so on.

“Yes [it’s a holy tree], it is coming for the prayer of God. If you have mango tree it will be peaceful. It will be bringing peace. This is believed in India.” (Hashana, Site 1)

“[I like] mixing with people, seeing things grow, and feeling close to the earth and God.” (Barbara, Site 3)

“I have a fruit tree, lemon, lime, orange, I believe we should have one coriander, some bananas. I believe we should have those, in India we always had it... We should have coriander because coriander certainly, then curry leaf, banana because it is linked with the religion, auspicious plant, so any of our religious prayers, we allow that and it becomes more pure... and we should always have lemon or lime always. Because when we are cooking, everything has either lemon or lime and mint. Chillies, but mint certainly.” (Lakshmi, Site 3)

Across all sites, expressions of cultural diversity were appreciated, for the way that they allowed people to learn about each other and about different parts of the world, as well as for the opportunities to share foods, gardening tips, and recipes. There has however been difficulty connecting with some gardeners due to language and cultural barriers, leading to the need for cultural mediators to alleviate the tensions that arose. These difficulties are best understood as signs of ‘engaged relationships’ (Nettle 2014, p. 119) and ‘everyday conviviality’, since they tended to be dealt with through ongoing communication and the development of a shared understandings of how to negotiate difference within the garden space.

Theme 4: Food and environmental sustainability

The environmental sustainability ethos of the community gardens differed depending on the policies, systems and processes set up at each of the gardens. For the Council-driven gardens (sites 1 and 2), chemical-free, organic processes (such as composting, worm farming and water retention systems) were adhered to through the direction and leadership of Blacktown City Council. Similarly, the community-driven garden (site 3) also made the decision to follow organic processes, however this was a decision made collectively by group members rather than a directive from their leadership. Finally, the non-government driven garden (site 4) did not have an explicit sustainability ethos like the other gardens studied. Only one participant talked about how the garden's processes were mostly chemical free, but established systems (such as composting) were not in place or actively sought after by garden members or organisers. The development of a sustainability ethos was found to be linked to an ethics of care (Dowler et al 2009), where gardeners care for themselves, each other, the community, the plants, and the planet.

"All the gardens are chemical free, they are not certified organic but there are no toxic chemicals used here, we use things that are made up, brews ah and things like Eco Oil which is, which allows organic inputs and composting..." (Diane, Site 1)

"Ah, it's really a unique garden to me because it's not only gardening, there's a small chook house where we get eggs, there's a worm farm which is marvellous because we water all the plants and vegetables and flowers with wonderful nutritious food, and nothing gets sprayed, and there's an abundance of many flowers and many different vegetables." (Denise, Site 3)

Discourses around sustainability differed across garden sites, ranging from more formal discussions and knowledge to more indirect, unspoken practices. Sustainability was discussed in personal, social, and environmental terms, however was not necessarily linked to broader environmental or political movements. Sustainability was associated with the cycle of life, with all aspects of the garden feeding into its ability to continue: labour is shared, so that any one person might be away but the watering and weeding will still get done; the plants are harvested but their seeds collected so they can be grown again the following season; worm farms, compost, and chickens contribute to processing green waste into compost; and so on.

"Well for me, it is an ongoing thing, so um you know, like we grow a plant here and it doesn't just have the life of just six weeks, so then I think it is a really good circle of life here at the garden. So that plant is harvested, produce eaten and the rest of it goes to the chooks and then it goes to the worms and after the worms, they process that and then it goes back to the garden. So it's that whole circle of life thing. So that's the whole sustainable thing to me." (Jennifer, Site 3)

Many gardeners linked sustainability to health, both personal (growing food without chemicals) and environmental ("looking after the land").

"I like gardening. Especially because you know what you are putting in the plants. You know, the chemicals. You know what you put. Like in the vegetables. But when you buy, you don't know what they put." (Estella, Site 1)

"Living off the land, producing what you need and as much as you need and looking after the land." (Felicity, Site 2)

"[Sustainability is] growing vegies without chemicals." (Nick, Site 2)

"Sustainability is continuing, continuing life through agriculture." (Juan, Site 2)

"Sustainability is a very valuable word. It means that if you live the right way and do the right things, your life will be a lot less difficult because you know how to eat good food, you know how to have good attitudes, and like the garden here, when I'm away with my husband, somebody else is here watering and planting so that the garden is sustained and healthy." (Denise, Site 3)

"It's an ongoing thing, as far as it, that's what the word [sustainability] would mean to me. It's sustained and we just keep going and going with it, it's not as though it's the one thing this year and finished, you know, that's the way I look at it." (Leon, Site 4)

Health was also understood in terms of the psychological and physical benefits of gardening. Such benefits are supported by research that finds that gardening can reduce diabetes, combat high blood pressure, reduce stress, increase positive moods, and bring communities together (see, for a summary of many of these research projects, Ferguson 2016). Gardeners experience "greater life satisfaction, enhanced self-esteem and fewer feelings of depression and fatigue than non-gardeners" (Wood 2015). For the gardeners encountered in this research, spending time in the garden was an important element in sustaining their own physical and mental health. One community garden organiser also observed that the community garden had helped people with depression and that they had not seen any significant cognitive decline in the dementia group participants over the three to four years they had been attending the garden.

"We eat the produce but also we plant things that are beautiful to look at, to create you know spaces where people can feel, it's a good place to enjoy being outside and of course to enjoy the health benefits... the idea of the garden making like healthier, not only about being outside but also eating healthy plants and I mean it's all organic, we use no pesticides and we grow quite a bit from seed and so on." (Serena, Site 3)

"[The garden means] peace, calmness, [and] and escape from everything." (Mona, Site 4)

"We have guys that come in here that are depressed and you know, they're looking just for something, sometimes they just come in and sit inside, sometimes they'll come out here and just do a bit of weeding and nice and quiet, but come in and join in with a coffee when they feel they want a bit of company." (Leon, Site 4)

"Um from the men, yeah we've had some tragic stories here um and but they keep coming back and they keep trying you know, they find this a good outlet yeah and we don't judge... Our onset dementia [participants], their memory seems to be fine when they are in the garden, in the three or four years that I have worked with them, I have never seen any progression when it comes to the garden." (Linda, Site 4)

For site 3, the community-driven garden, the concept of resilient communities was paramount to the sustainability of the garden. The sustainable principles applied to the garden were also applied to their group, with many commenting that the project needed to be respectful and inclusive to everyone in the community in order for the project to continue for many years to come. Many saw the garden as sustainable as it was resilient to changes over time (Holland 2004), with some commenting that they were relieved the garden had enough active and passionate members to keep operating if they were away for a significant period.

"I mean sustainability means that you keep going and it just doesn't mean you use chemicals, like we need to sustain our ability to work together as a group... I was out of action for at least six months and I didn't come, I didn't come to the garden for six

months. But you know what, it kept going, it didn't stop, it means there is plenty of knowledge, plenty of people, there is a resilience... It's great to come back and it's still going.” (Peter, Site 3)

“There is sort of like this gardener's creed, it doesn't matter who you are, where you have come from, how much you know or what you do for a living, you all respect plants and that's a baseline respect for life. And you tend to respect people as well and you've got you know nice values but it all comes from respecting your natural environment.” (Serena, Site 3)

“So I can put this down and know it'll keep going, and when I come back it still keeps going so it's wonderful.” (Denise, Site 3)

The community gardens were also spaces where the disconnect created by the industrialised food system could be redressed. Participants expressed a joy in reconnecting with the landscape and reducing dependence upon external forces (cutting food miles) to promote food security (Turner 2011). At site 2, the equitable and fair distribution of labour and produce was of paramount importance to members, suggesting the desire of participants in creating a food system where inequalities of dominant market forces are not perpetuated.

“You want someone to put their heart and effort into it and to build your garden rather than just coming and sharing your produce. It's fair because whoever comes to work it's kind of equal amount of vegetables.” (Julia, Site 2)

Such understandings of sustainability indicate that gardeners see themselves as part of a broad network of connections between human and non-human (plant, animal, earth, water, air). When gardeners spoke about increasing urbanisation in the area, they spoke of these connections being threatened. This was especially apparent in the interviews and observations at site 4, and to a lesser extent at site 2; both gardens were in areas that had been mostly rural until recently, with site 2 now surrounded by new housing developments and site 4 facing a similar fate as farmland continues to be purchased by developers. At the same time, gardeners recognised that urbanisation was part of a different set of needs, as a rising population in the Sydney area seeks somewhere to live, and as rising house prices in the inner suburbs push more people towards the urban fringe. In this context, community gardens become an essential element in maintaining green spaces close to where people live, and community gardeners are proud of their contributions to this.

“I'm a bit annoyed that this [suburb] did not remain as greening corridor which is what it was meant for, it was meant to be open space for all of Sydney to come to.” (Felicity, Site 2)

“They're going to need community gardens for people to go and do little things for themselves, to get out, you know so they're not cooped up in their little apartments and things like this. I think they really need it, a little bit of a green area with things.” (Leon, Site 4)

“[Community gardens] should be encouraged because land is getting less so I think that these sort of things will be more important because they will be an oasis in the middle of a concrete jungle.” (Cheryl, Site 4)

Through their everyday understandings of the term sustainability, gardeners were found to have developed an ethics of care, for each other, for themselves, and for the natural environment. The gardens were places where people came together to engage in a healthy activity (being outdoors), to socialise (building community), and to care for the earth (or at least, this small patch). The idea of gardening as caring resonates in other research into food

production and consumption systems, where researchers have identified 'interlocking "cares" which...were evident in concern for people, food, animals, soils and ecosystems' (Dowler et al 2009, p. 212).

Theme 5: Future role of gardens

The future role of community gardens differed across different locations and organisational structures. At sites 1 and 2, which were both Council-led gardens, many participants believed that the sites were as established as they could be in the space allotted. It was not a real priority for gardeners to recruit members, which may be related to issues around ownership, however they were open to visitors as a way of showing off their accomplishments. Interviews with Council organisers also highlighted the difficulty of recruiting members, but suggested this could be differing priorities of surrounding residents (such as work and bringing up young children) rather than any resistance from current members in expanding their volunteer base.

"They are promoting this garden to their community who are newly moving in as a place to come and grow food... I don't know how that will play out because as far as I am concerned, in regards to people joining, it is walking distance given that people in a new home are really busy for at least the first year and settling in and getting things worked out, they may not have time in their busy working lives to join a garden"
(Diane, Site 1)

"Yeah three more gardeners and a group of ten would be ideal for this size garden because now all the construction work is done, it is only a matter of planting and maintaining the stuff" (Felicity, Site 2)

At site 4, the non-government-driven garden, most participants also believed there was not much room for expansion in regards to adding garden plots or welcoming new groups. Due to its program driven nature, this garden did not attract passers-by off the street and organisers focused instead on developing the garden for programs such as therapy activities for dementia patients, but this would be dependent on time constraints and attracting additional funding.

"Hopefully in the future I think garden therapy is the way to go especially with mental illness, especially with the different cultures coming together, so that's one area."
(Linda, Site 4)

In contrast, site 3, the community-driven garden, had a desire to keep recruiting more members from the community and keep extending the space that they had acquired. There was a strong belief that a strong and active membership base would make the garden resilient to changes and keep the garden going for many years to come. As a result, participants were keen to expand their after-school children's program and build an onsite kitchen, as a way of teaching local community members and the future generations about sustainable food practices and healthy eating.

"I think that you will notice that we are already starting to dream up 'how are we going to cook up'. I think community gardens particularly when you incorporate heart for cooking within that, it is going to be a great way of emoting, modelling healthy eating so I suspect that is only just started, that ethos of healthy eating and healthy cooking."
(Peter, Site 3)

"We'd love to see more people with craft ideas coming along and going 'yes I can do this on a Tuesday' because sometimes I don't get there. Like today I didn't get here until late. ... So more interaction, more volunteers for craft. ... And not necessarily craft, any ideas that the kids might be interested in to do. ... At one stage, we had cooking one week, craft one week, planting the next week and it just rotated, but it just fell into kind of a heap, depends on who is available." (Rita, Site 3)

Gardeners across all sites focused on the desire to maintain the green and food producing spaces in the increasingly urbanised environment of Blacktown LGA. This was not about resistance, but rather to be centres of reclaimed and embodied knowledge that can be safeguarded for the future.

"These are lost skills. So for a lot of people it is about 're-learning'" (Diane, Site 1)

"There is a place for community gardens as a place where knowledge can be sort of kept, local knowledge. Now at the moment, look at all this space we have, if there was a situation of social breakdown and we couldn't get our food, places like this become centres where you can sort of take that knowledge out into the community." (Peter, Site 3)

"Well with all the development, you look around there is so many houses coming, I only hope that people will take advantage of it [the garden]. Because I think that this generation, and I sound like my mother when I say that, this generation is one of fast food and things like that and I really, I think everyone is in a hurry... they'll buy flowers if they want them, they won't grow them, you know, and it's a shame, I hope that through the schools, that's why we try and keep contact with the schools to bring the groups down as well, um to show the kids to grow" (Cheryl, Site 4)

Most interviewees expressed a desire to continue being involved in their respective community gardens, unless they were prevented by age, health, family commitments or moving away.

"When we all come in, it will last." (Julia, Site 2)

"There seems to be a good future here because people seem to be enthusiastic. Those that are volunteering are actually garden lovers, I think this will progress well." (Geoff, Site 3)

Overall, site 3, the community-driven garden studied had a greater focus on recruiting members and had more overt discussions and practices around sustainability, environmentalism and community capacity building than gardens initiated from the top down approach. This places them in a good position to assist communities in the long term as it employs community empowerment and a food justice discourse (Holt-Giménez 2011), although all gardens studied will continue to play an important role in maintaining green space as their areas attract new urban development.

Conclusions

The community gardens studied had a broad range of purposes which differed across sites due to age, cultural background, gender and ability. Gardeners across all sites strongly expressed that the garden was an important space to socially connect and build relationships, and to a lesser extent, network for employment opportunities and develop language skills. For some garden sites, a wider focus of building community was a core vision while for others it was a by-product of their weekly gatherings. The gardens were also important spaces in promoting food security, improving the physical and mental health of gardeners, and educating current and future generations on food growing and other environmentally sustainable practices.

The construction and experience of 'community' was complex at each of the gardens studied. One garden, which was community initiated and driven, had strong connections with the local community and had a strong desire to recruit members, while the others seemed in many ways 'exclusive' sites where new members were difficult to recruit and there was limited interaction with non-garden members from the local community. Community was created through members sharing skills and knowledge with one another, often from childhood memories or past experiences. The temporal nature of the gardens was both a source of strength and conflict, with tensions appearing between long term gardeners and those who came for shorter periods, usually on short-term visitor visas.

The gardeners from all sites had a range of cultural backgrounds, with some identifying with crops and recipes native to their homeland while others felt distant from cultural practices that had been lost over time. Expressions of cultural diversity were widely appreciated for the way they allowed people to learn about each other and about different parts of the world, as well as for the opportunities to share foods, gardening tips and recipes. There was difficulty connecting with some gardeners due to language and cultural barriers, leading to the need for cultural mediators to alleviate the tensions that arose in the spirit of everyday conviviality. For some, the garden was also an important space to express themselves spiritually, either through growing religiously significant plants, getting closer to a higher power or finding peace and tranquillity in the confines of the garden space.

Discourses around sustainability across garden sites ranged from formal discussions and knowledge to more indirect, unspoken practices. Most of the gardens studied had a well-established sustainability ethos, either driven by their leadership or their core group of members. When asked about sustainability, many linked the concept to personal health and organic growing practices, environmental land practices and resilient communities. Sustainability was also associated with the cycle of life, with the gardeners seeing themselves as part of a broad network of connections between human and non-human. When gardeners spoke about increasing urbanisation in the area, they spoke of these connections being threatened. Through their everyday understandings of the term sustainability, gardeners were found to have developed an ethics of care, for each other, for themselves, and for the natural environment.

The future role of community gardens differed across different locations and organisational structures. For Council-led gardens, many participants believed that the sites were as established as they could be in the space allotted. It was not a real priority for gardeners to recruit members, however they were open to visitors as a way of showing off their accomplishments. For the non-government driven garden studied, most participants also believed there was not much room for expansion in regards to adding garden plots or welcoming new groups, but they were interested in developing the garden for programs such as therapy activities for dementia patients. In contrast to the two types of gardens above, the community-driven garden studied had a desire to keep expanding their space and membership through activities such as further developing their after-school children's

program and building an onsite kitchen. Overall, gardeners across all sites expressed a desire to keep being involved in their respective community gardens, unless they were prevented by age, health, family commitments or moving away.

This study has shown that community gardeners are engaging in everyday practices of conviviality and multiculturalism, interacting with people from a range of cultural backgrounds, abilities, and age groups. Community gardens are sites where people can engage in activities that enhance their health and wellbeing, access fresh produce, and maintain green spaces in an urbanising region. They are important sites for building and maintaining local, sustainable practices, and for developing social capital.

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