

**COMMUNITY GARDENING
AS SOCIAL ACTION
THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY GARDENING MOVEMENT
AND REPERTOIRES FOR CHANGE**

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The problem is not only to know what is occurring in the world, but to understand it and derive lessons from it—just as if we were studying history—a history not of the past, but a history of what is happening at any given moment in whatever part of the world. This is the way we learn who we are, what it is we want, who we can be and what we can do or not do.

Marcos 1997

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DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

An earlier version of Appendix 1 was published as

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Signed

Date

ABSTRACT

There has been a resurgence of community gardening activity in Australia over the past decade. This coincides with increasing concern about food security, urban sustainability, social isolation and the preservation of community space. Community gardening has been adopted by divergent actors, from health agencies looking to increase fruit and vegetable consumption to radical social movements seeking symbols of non-capitalist social and spatial relations. This thesis contributes to a systematic research account of the Australian community gardening movement by considering community gardening as a site of collective social action.

Drawing on a tradition of activist research, the analysis focuses on ethnographic case studies of three key organisations within the Australian community gardening movement. These case studies portray community gardening activity at three scales: a garden, an organisation supporting and promoting community gardening at a city-wide level, and the national community gardening organisation.

Drawing on social movement theory, the thesis investigates the ways community gardeners in these organisations approach environmental and social justice issues and considers the relationships between community gardening and wider movements. In particular, the thesis considers the political logic of community gardeners' collective practices, revealing the specific methods community gardeners use to enact social change. It then considers whether community gardening can be seen as a form of political praxis. The thesis shows that community gardening is used strategically and intentionally as a performance to make collective claims. In some contexts and to the extent to which it is so used, it argues that community gardening can be understood as a social movement practice. Finally, the thesis contends that community gardeners' strategies are part of a repertoire of collective action, which offers both a contribution to existing understandings of collective action and a critique of current conceptualisations of activism.

The thesis foregrounds community garden organisers' analyses of the change they wish to see, the tactics they choose, and the role 'constructive' and prefigurative repertoires play in movements for change. In doing so it makes a unique contribution to the existing literature on both community gardening and environmental social movements.

Keywords: Community Gardens; Alternative Agrifood Movements; Repertoires of Contention; Social Movement Tactics; Activist Research; Ethnography.

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