

Connected Communities

Connecting health, health-behaviours and place through the work of community gardening

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Background

Executive Summary

Many claims have been made regarding the social and economic benefits of the recent growth in a number of countries of community gardens and households growing their own food.

Reviews of existing research suggest the potential impacts on health and the motivations for individuals becoming involved in food growing are not fully understood. Integrated qualitative and quantitative research generated findings that can inform future research into health, food growing and gardening using qualitative and quantitative methods. Analysis of the European Quality of Life Survey (EQoL) for the EU15 countries in 2003 and 2007 reveals self reported health was less strongly associated with food growing than was expected but there was good evidence that people who grow their own food tend to be happier. The qualitative research with community partners also highlighted that the health benefits of being involved in community food growing were taken for granted and people's motivations for involvement in food growing projects focused on identity, community development, social interaction and sharing. The study also reveals the importance theoretically of understanding that community food growing involves the 'occupation of space' through 'growing intimate publics', or what we term 'privatepublics'.

Researchers and Project Partners

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Community partners

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Likt Young Women's Health Project (Likt) a youth work project for Lesbian and Bi-sexual young women based in Manchester that has developed an allotment
www.likt.org.uk/activities/allotment

Rachel Hanney

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms (TPH): a community owned farm in West Sussex
www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

We are very grateful to all those involved in Likt project and the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms who took part in the many different aspects of the project.

Key words

Community gardens
Health
Household food growing

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Research context

Community gardens take many different forms but historically food growing has usually been a key component (Lawson 2005, Okvat and Zautra 2011). The recent growth in certain countries of community gardens and households growing their own food (National Gardening Association 2009) has been accompanied by contested debates over the reasons for their emergence and the impacts on individuals and communities. Community gardens have been linked to the emergence of neo-liberal politics but also are identified as offering opportunities for political resistance and individual transformation (Pudup 2008). Review studies of the benefits of community gardens and the motivations of people who become involved highlight certain methodological shortcomings in research design reflecting in part the dominance of qualitative research and case studies but also the lack of large samples in quantitative studies (Draper and Freedman 2011). Furthermore, whilst many studies have identified a range of social, economic, health and well being benefits for individuals involved in community gardens and food growing, far less is known about the role of health factors in motivating people to become involved in community gardening and food growing (Draper and Freedman 2011). There are also a number of unanswered questions regarding how the claimed health benefits of community gardening are mediated by individual health characteristics and the social and economic motivations for the initial involvement in community gardening (Draper and Freedman 2011, Okvat and Zautra 2011).

Aims and objectives

Given the limitations of existing research on community gardening (Draper and Freedman 2011) the overall aim of this project was to undertake integrated qualitative and quantitative research that could inform the nature of future larger scale research into the practices of community gardening and food growing and their relation to health and well being. The three specific aims of the project were:

- To examine what insights can be gained from existing longitudinal data sets into people's motivations for growing food and the impact on health and well being;
- To analyse lay community knowledges on the motivations for involvement in community gardening and food growing, and consider how these can inform quantitative and qualitative research;
- To develop theoretical insights that can inform further research into the health and well being benefits of community gardening and food growing.

Research methods

Qualitative methods

The community and university partners designed and undertook the following qualitative research methods:

- Participant observation and focus groups with participants in the Likt Young Women's Health Project (Likt) and the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms (TPH) projects to examine motivations for involvement in community food growing;

- A participatory community weekend exchange involving university partners and Likt and TPH participants to exchange food growing experiences and knowledges;
- Findings workshops of university and community partners to discuss qualitative research findings and consider how they should inform quantitative research.

Quantitative methods

The quantitative analysis of existing data sets was designed to take account of existing research and the findings of the qualitative research for this project. The first stage in the analysis was a search of secondary data sets which could describe the prevalence, distribution and correlates of either gardening or specifically growing your own food. The Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) website and other EU data portals such as Eurostat were used. Two survey data sets were identified of direct relevance; the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, 2003-2005, contains data about gardening, and food production, particularly what is grown. However, it sampled low income population only. The European Quality of Life Survey (EQoL), 2007 and 2003, identified households growing their own food. EQoL covers multiple countries across Europe including the 15 original EU nations (i.e. those pre recent expansion) (EU15), samples the whole population and has two waves of survey raising the possibility of detecting change in growing behaviour over time. The total sample size for the Eu15 was 17,674 and for the UK was 1,507. Following partner discussion, it was decided to focus analyses on EQoL.

Many variables, and the means by which the surveys were sampled, had altered between 2003 and 2007, making detailed analysis of

change over time for research difficult. Most analyses thus focused on the 2007 data only.

The outcome of interest was defined by this question in EQoL: *"In the past year, has your household helped meet its need for food by growing vegetables or fruits or keeping poultry or livestock?"*

Possible responses were: 1 *No, not at all*; 2 *Yes, for up to one-tenth of the household's food needs*; 3 *Yes, for between one-tenth and a half of household's food need*; 4 *Yes, for half or more of the household's needs*; 5 *don't know*.

'Growing your own' was defined as any response other than 'No, not at all'. Those who 'Don't know' were excluded from the analyses as were households where the occupation was farming. Analyses were weighted using the sample weights provided by the data managers to allow for both within country, and between-country sample bias. Models of the EU15 nations were multilevel.

Findings and analysis

Quantitative analysis

The search of the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) website used the keywords *gardening OR food production* and yielded 218 hits. Data sets identified tended to fall into two groups; those capturing gardening as a physical activity, and those focused on food production in an agricultural or economic sense. No data sets were found which reliably captured the role that growing one's own food outdoors might play in influencing health and wellbeing. An important conclusion for this part of the project was just how little quantitative data was readily available to describe the relationship between health,

gardening and food growing in domestic or community gardens.

The analysis of the EQoL, 2007 and 2003, did, however, reveal some important findings that can be used to inform further studies to address the gap in quantitative research into food growing, gardening and health (see illustrations overleaf).

Stark variation existed across the EU15 countries, in terms of who grows their own food. In 2003, the UK had the lowest level of grow your own in the EU15 at about 4%, but by 2007 its level was much nearer the EU 15 average of 14%. The UK had the fastest proportional increase in growing your own the EU15 (see Figure 1 in illustrations)

Among the EU15, older households, families and couples, those with greater financial problems and lower income, and those with poor education were more likely to grow their own (see Figure 2). However, some of these relationships were different in the UK, with age not related to growing your own after adjustment for other household and economic factors and, of particular interest, a quite different relationship to financial status and education. Growing your own in the UK is more likely to be the preserve of people with few or no money worries than those with great money worries, and more likely to be undertaken by those with high educational qualifications than with none (though this relationship was not significant once other confounders such as financial status were controlled for).

Respondent's health was less strongly associated with growing your own than was expected. In the EU15, there was little difference in levels of growing your own between those with good and poor health and in the UK, those most likely to grow were

also most likely to report health problems. In the EU15, people who grew their own were more likely to have more regular contact with their neighbours, though this relationship did not survive adjustment for other potential confounders in the UK. In both the EU15 and UK however, there was good evidence that people who grow their own also tend to be happier (see Figure 3). Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms that might explain these links between happiness and food growing.

Qualitative analysis

The qualitative methods produced a series of insights on the interactions between health, well being, food growing and community gardening that can guide future empirical research and theoretical discussion. What is challenging for policy, and related research, which emphasises the physical and mental health benefits of food growing and gardening is that health was not a core motivation for many of the participants when they chose to be involved in the community food growing partner projects. For some participants, especially those involved with the community farm, the health benefits were taken for granted but their motivations for involvement in the farm focused on community development, social interaction and sharing. For some of the young women working on the Likt allotment the experience had been transformational enabling them to develop a sense of community beyond the initial 'group' and a detailed understanding of the connections between different aspects of health but their decision to get involved in the project was linked to issues of identity and the social and economic pressures facing young people. Further research to examine

the health benefits of food growing will need to consider not only the before and after health characteristics of individuals but also their wider economic, social and cultural circumstances.

From a theoretical standpoint the qualitative analysis highlights the importance of understanding the public and private dimensions of communal food growing spaces. Community food growing can engage individuals in the occupation of space 'growing intimate publics', or what we term 'privatepublics', in ways which might be understood to offer a resourceful counter to tendencies towards privatising that which was previously public (e.g. urban public spaces), whilst at the same time bringing into the public domain that which was previously private (e.g. food choices). In particular the Likt project revealed how the mutually-imbricated worlds of sexuality, and women-only spaces, usually understood as private, manifest in apparently public contexts. Food growing projects also generate 'privatepublic' intimacies through the pragmatic sharing of the often private and domesticated practice of cooking and eating meals. The occupation of food growing spaces, therefore, involves individuals in mimetic, nostalgic, pragmatic and naturalistic 'modes of occupation' that relate to their food growing and gardening experiences (Church et.al. 2013). Neither public nor private seem adequate to the task of comprehending the occupation of community food growing space. The notion of *Edgeland*s is getting closer (Farley and Roberts 2011) but 'privatepublics' signal the fluidity and uncertainty of this occupation and resonate with Haraway's penchant for intense, compound neologisms with which to resist dualisms (Haraway 1992).

Project outputs (see references section below for details)

The project has contributed to the following outputs that have also drawn on other AHRC funded projects:

- One academic journal paper accepted for publication in *Environment and Planning A* (Church et.al. 2013)
- Two draft academic papers (Mitchell et.al. 2012, Moore et. al. 2012),
- Two workshop presentations (Moore, 2011a, 2012);
- Three conference presentations (Church, Gabb and Moore 2011a, 2011b, 2011c);
- One research report (Moore, 2011b)

Future research and contribution to the AHRC Connecting Communities programme

The co-operative relationships established between community and university partners for this project have proved fruitful and will be maintained as all partners are involved in the AHRC Connected Communities Demonstrator project that will be funded from March 2012 to March 2013 (PI Church) entitled 'Community gardening, creativity and everyday culture: food growing and embedded researchers in community transformation and connections'.

The academic and community partners have also formed beneficial links with the following connected communities projects due to run 2012-2103 researching issues relating to food growing, gardening and community engagement.

Moore is a co-investigator on the following AHRC Connected Communities Demonstrator Grants:

- 'Community as micro sociality and the new localism' PI Prof. Walkerdine, University of Cardiff
- 'Memories of 'Mr Seel's Garden': Engaging with historic and future food systems in Liverpool ' PI Dr Bastian, University of Manchester

- 'Tackling ethical issues and dilemmas in community-based participatory research: a practical resource' PI Prof Banks, University of Durham, also involves Likt Project

Church is also a named participant on the AHRC Connected Communities Pilot Project.

'Building Community University Partnership Resilience' PI Prof Hart University of Brighton.

Figure 1: Change and prevalence of growing your own food in the EU, 2003-2007

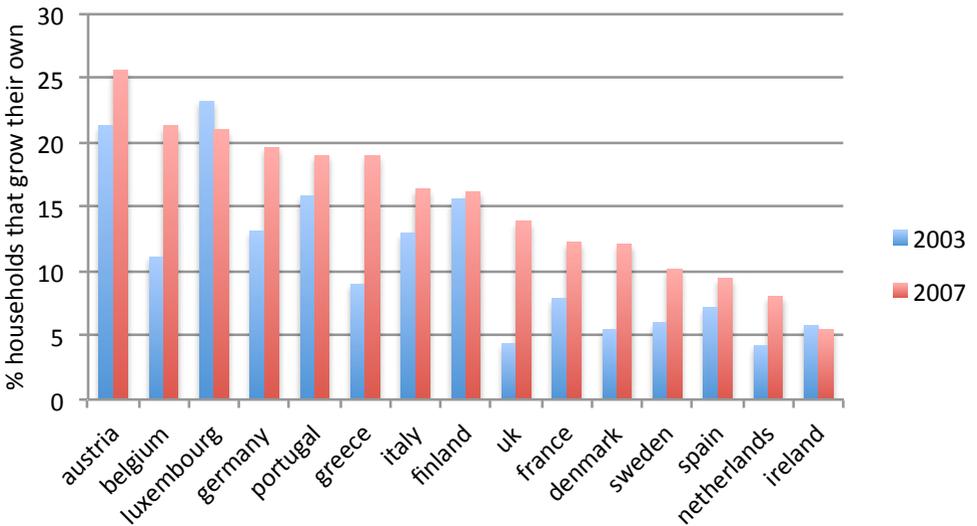


Figure 2: Relationships between growing your own and financial strain in the EU15 and UK specifically.

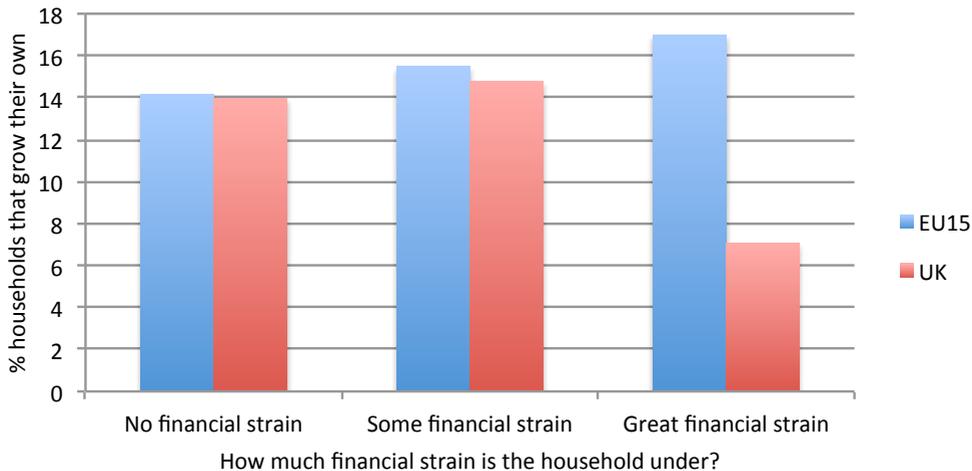
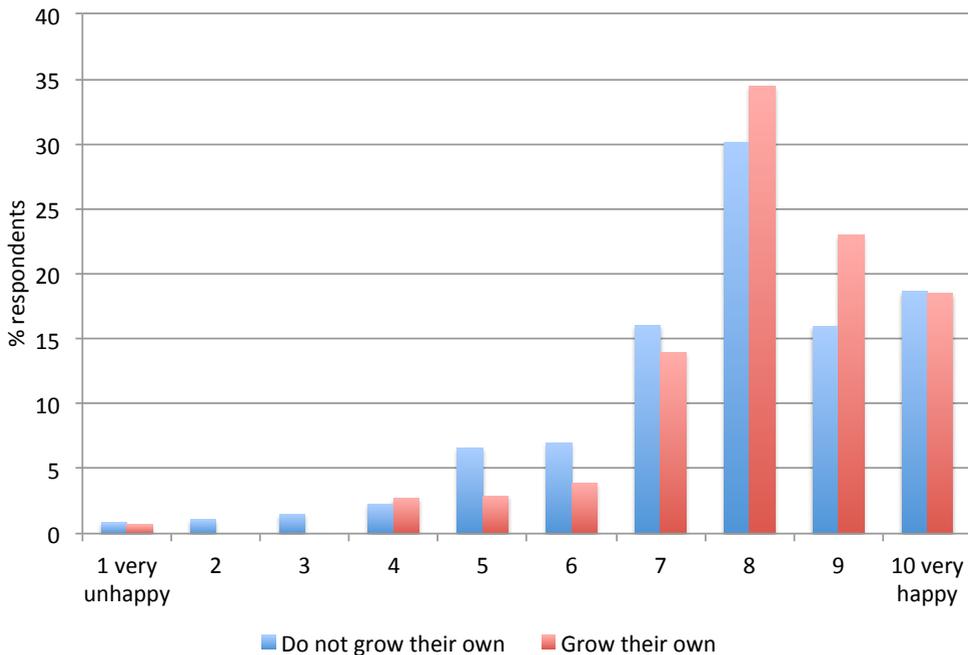


Figure 3: UK respondents' happiness, by grow their own food status.



References and external links

References to project outputs

Academic papers:

Church, A., Stenner, P. and Bhatti, M.

'Human-landscape relations and the occupation of space: Experiencing and expressing domestic gardens' *Environment and Planning A* (in press). 2013.

Mitchell, R., Church, A., Ellaway, A, Moore, N. And Ravenscroft, N. 'Grow your own? Food growing, health and happiness in Western Europe' Draft to be submitted to *Global Environmental Change*. 2012.

Moore, N., Church, A., and Gabb, J. 'Growing Intimate Privatepublics: The Material and Affective Practices of Community Gardening Projects', Draft to be submitted to *Social and Cultural Geography*. 2012.

Workshop presentations:

Moore, N. 'A Carrots and Non-Violent Sticks Approach to Public Engagement through an Allotment Project', Sociology Research Day, University of Manchester. 2011a.

Moore, N. 'A Carrots and Non-Violent Sticks Approach to Public Engagement through an Allotment Project', Workshop: Communicating your research: Younger Audiences, Outreach and Public Engagement, University of Manchester. 2012.

Conference Papers:

Church, A., Gabb, J. and Moore, N. 'Growing Intimate Privatepublics: The Material and Affective Practices of Community Gardening Projects', *British Sociology Association Annual Conference*, University of Leeds, 11-13 April 2011. 2011a.

Church, A., Gabb, J. and Moore, N. 'Growing Intimate Privatepublics: The Material and Affective Practices of Community Gardening Projects', *Reframing the City: ESRC Centre for Research into Economic and Social (CRESC) Annual Conference*, Manchester, 6-9 September 2011. 2011b.

Church, A., Gabb, J. and Moore, N. 'Growing Intimate Privatepublics: The Material and Affective Practices of Community Gardening Projects', *Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference*, London, 1 September 2011. 2011c.

Research report:

Moore, N. 'Growing Projects: Everyday Utopia in the Edgelands of a Manchester Allotment' *ESRC Centre for Research into Economic and Social Change (CRESC) News*, August 2011. 2011b.

Links to key project participants

Likt Young Women's Health Project

www.likt.org.uk/

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms

www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk/index.html

Professor Andrew Church and Professor Neil Ravenscroft (University of Brighton)
www.brighton.ac.uk/gardens/

Dr Anne Ellaway (Medical Research Council Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Glasgow)
www.sphsu.mrc.ac.uk/research-programmes/nh/

Professor Rich Mitchell (University of Glasgow)
www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/staff/richmitchell/

Dr Niamh Moore (University of Manchester)
www.manchester.ac.uk/research/niamh.moore/

The community partners along with some of the academic partners also worked closely with the Connected Communities Follow On project 'Connecting communities through food: the development of community supported agriculture in the UK'. This project produced a number of creative outputs and details are in the final report of the project.

Okvat, H.A. and Zautra, A.J. Community gardening: a parsimonious path to individual, community and environmental resilience' *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 47, 374-387. 2011.

Pudup, M. B. 'It takes a garden: cultivating citizen-subjects in organised garden projects', *Geoforum*, 39, 1228-1240. 2008.

Report Bibliography

Church, A., Stenner, P. and Bhatti, M.
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Draper, C. and Freedman, D. 'Review and analysis of the Benefits, Purposes and Motivations associated with Community Gardening in the United States', *Journal of Community Practice*, 18, 4, 458-492. 2011.

Farley, P. and Roberts M. S. *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*. London, Jonathan Cape. 2011.

Haraway, D. *Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others*. London: Routledge. 1992.

Lawson, L.J. *City bountiful: A century of community gardening in America*. Berkley: University of California Press. 2005.

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The Impact of Home and Community Gardening in America. South Burlington, National Gardening Association. 2009.



www.connectedcommunities.ac.uk