

Finally, the book shows how this and other relevant questions regarding water use in and beyond Mexico City can be explored through a praxeological and relational approach such as the one developed here. Of particular promise is Schwarz's methodological tool of habitat biographies, which can be useful in understanding how changes in infrastructural conditions related to meso and macro processes are experienced in the space of the dwelling. In this book she develops such an approach by querying the impact of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City on water practices and imaginaries. As she notes towards the conclusion, exploring the history of water usage in relation to historical moments—both material and discursive—can shed light on how urban changes are experienced and how they shape everyday life. Certainly, such an exploration can go beyond the question of water, allowing researchers to understand the historicity of space and practice and the ways in which they might (or might not) be related.

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**Chiara Tornaghi and Chiara Certomà (eds.) 2019: *Urban Gardening as Politics*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge**

Urban gardening is more than the act of cultivating plants and vegetables in the city. It is a 'political gesture' (p. 1) which connects ecological, social, environmental and economic pillars with processes of subject formation. This is the transversal reading of *Urban Gardening as Politics* that introduces the narrative of the book.

Urban natures have historically functioned as structuring elements of urbanization. In particular, from the 1970s onwards, the phenomenon of urban gardening has played a pivotal role in the restructuring of many post-industrial cities in the global North. The promotion of different initiatives of garden activism and food sovereignty—such as community gardening, guerrilla gardening, allotment cultivation and other urban agriculture projects—have in fact constituted an answer to long-term processes of property abandonment and urban decay through the conversion of many derelict spaces into edible, desirable gardens.

In the face of manifold environmental crises, the awareness of the positive effects of gardening and agriculture in urban contexts has consistently increased. The idea that urban gardening represents something that cities must foster has become indeed a universal assumption in political planning debates about the sustainable city. However, critical scholars have also highlighted that many gardening initiatives have contributed to the neoliberal enclosure of urban open spaces through institutionalization, co-optation and domestication. These processes have undermined the social and emancipatory potential of such initiatives and projects by transforming what was initially a subsistence practice or a radical, critical act of place and community-making into a middle-class leisure space and a lifestyle for the wealthy.

In light of these contradictions, the aim of the book is to address the contentious and controversial aspects of public life in the garden by bringing out the grey zone or border that exists between gardening understood as an emancipatory mechanism and its conceptualization as an exclusionary practice co-opted by neoliberal institutions.

The editors' aim with *Urban Gardening as Politics* is to foster an understanding of the heterogeneous and contradicting identities of urban gardening projects in the post-political age. In doing so, they look beyond a normative representation and idealization of urban gardening as something that is always good. The result is a rewarding integration of empirical research and theory which provides a valuable contribution to the literature on urban gardening and activist scholarship in the domain of urban agro-food movements and collective writing activities.

In fact, through their edited volume Chiara Tornaghi and Chiara Certomà help to explore and support food justice scholar-activism that builds on existing theoretical work at the intersection of critical geography, political ecology and post-environmentalist theory. While the opening and concluding chapters discuss political gardening through the lens of the most recent debates in post-political literature, the other chapters seek to generate a diversified interpretation of gardening initiatives through the use of various theoretical frameworks: from the Lefebvrian ‘right-to-the-city’ discourse, the environmental justice approach and DIY citizenship theory via community economy theory to urban political agro-ecology.

The practices and meanings of gardening—including the relationship between grassroots movements, gardeners and institutions—are therefore explored through a number of different dimensions: property relations, public perceptions, material practices, discursive realms, systems of accessibility and patterns of sociocultural integration. Each chapter is based on empirical research that has been conducted in a number of cities of the global North, including the UK, Italy, the USA, Germany, Canada and Ireland. The book is in fact organized geographically, according to the area of investigation and the sociospatial specificity of the gardening projects.

Although space, rather than time, is prioritized in the urban gardening studies examined in this collection, the authors’ attempts to highlight the multiple political meanings of urban gardening are exemplified by their attention to the temporal dimensions of ‘the political’ in relation to urban gardening, namely as a daily practice that intersects, sometimes in discontinuous ways, with the historicity of sites, subjectivities and social relations.

*Urban Gardening as Politics* therefore provides a useful lens for understanding the political role that urban gardening plays in our contemporary city. By looking at how processes of abandonment—in which gardening initiatives initially take form—are negotiated by different political agencies, the book considers the values, needs and requirements of urban gardening projects over time. This negotiation occurs through forms of solidarity, but also through social divides and clashes among professionals, administrators and gardeners who have often become activists. In this sense, the process of turning a derelict site into a garden highlights the fact that the terrain of the garden appears as a meta-space, where it is possible to give an active response to the larger transformations of urban areas and to re-appropriate the production of space by making abandonment a public thing.

Two minor criticisms, however, need to be made. First, although the book contains a few comparisons with other contexts, the contributions gathered here are mainly developed from an American and European point of view. A broader perspective taking into account non-Western case studies would have been able to draw attention to the plurality of property regimes and to the way this affects the types of limitations on (material and symbolic) access to land in order to grow food over time.

Second, the book promotes a human-centred understanding of urban gardening, which undermines the potential to explore the role that the relationship with non-human bodies plays in the formation of new political subjects. From this perspective, questions about whether and how people share space with the materiality of terrain itself can help to problematize notions of the organic and the non-organic, the rural and the domesticated. Moreover, it can enable us to rethink the heterogeneity of political gardening according to the ways in which the life of terrains may diminish or expand the human capacity for action and socialization.

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