DIGGING UP THE EARTH IN NEW YORK CITY:
A COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

by

Yoko Ikeda

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Professor Ida Susser

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Professor Gerald Creed

Date

Executive Officer

Professor Louise Lennihan

Professor Jane Schneider

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Ida Susser

Community gardens are an important green asset to New York City, helping to improve the urban environment and provide accessible open green space to residents and visitors. The unlikely presence of numerous community-run gardens in the midst of densely-populated, highly-valued property is the result of the community garden movement initiated in the 1970s in an effort to reclaim decaying neighborhoods by transforming garbage-filled lots into gardens. Examining the successes and struggles of the community garden movement along with everyday activities that occur within community gardens, this study provides insight into crucial elements required to sustain community-based conservation. Based on participant observation and interviews, this study highlights the oral histories and internal operations of two community gardens with different organizational structures located in two distinctive neighborhoods. The institutionalization of the garden movement and individual gardens, as well as the participation of available and willing volunteers who assume leadership positions are important factors in ensuring the longevity and strength of individual gardens and the community garden movement as a whole.

The community garden movement emerged at a time of New York City's financial struggle. The presence of gardens on city blocks has since affected the gentrification process of the neighborhoods in which they were originally founded. The community garden, once a symbol of a struggling neighborhood and resistance of people against urban decay has grown into a site that symbolizes resistance against overdevelopment and the loss of green space. At the same time, the gardens have become an attraction of a gentrified neighborhood. In the changing neighborhoods, community gardens are more than open green space; they are a democratic space where people of different economic and racial backgrounds come together and interact, a place for community building.

The community garden movement as a true grassroots environmental movement has created communally and voluntarily managed open green space. The creation and maintenance of community gardens attest to the strength of volunteerism in the United States. This study of community gardens shows the possibility of a bottom-up approach to greening an urban area and improving the quality of life in an urban city.

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Theorizing the Community Garden Movement

Introduction

Junkyards, drug-shooting alleys, rubble and garbage…these were what occupied many vacant lots before they were transformed into community gardens—the focus of this dissertation— through the hands of volunteers. The story of turning an eyesore, the sign of urban blight, into a little oasis of green open space has repeated itself many times over in New York City. It is difficult to know the exact number of the community gardens in the city since there is no one organization overseeing all of the community gardens; instead, a web of institutions exists supporting the different gardens. The number of gardens has fluctuated over time as some have been demolished and new ones created. Currently, there are probably over 600 community gardens throughout the city (GreenThumb n.d.).

Along with parks, community gardens, a place of nature, food production, as well as community activities and activisms, provide much needed green open spaces for New York City. They are an amenity put in place by people, not the government, through a grassroots, community-based movement to reclaim decaying neighborhoods by creating urban oases. The community garden movement represents a new type of environmental movement which, instead of seeking to defend livelihoods, seeks to improve the quality of life by creating a place of nature in the midst of an urban city.

Community gardens, along with other types of open public space, such as parks, have attracted scholarly interest across disciplines. Francis and Hester argue that gardens not only help individuals reflect upon their personal experience but also reflect an

"idealized order of nature and culture" (1990:2). The garden historically has been a symbol of political power, but it is also a place that nurtures ideas and action. Moor, Mitchell, and Turnbull (2000) show how architects have studied gardens and landscapes to find ideas reflected in them and the human-nature relationship pursued through design. Robert Louis Rotenberg (1995), one of the few anthropologists to study the significance of gardens, suggests that the landscape in Vienna has historically reflected power, status, and shifting social ideologies. Neil Smith (1984) claims that the "making of nature" cannot be separated from politics. In studying the open green space, scholars have addressed various issues such as people's struggle over changing ideas of nature, the democratization of place, and existing class differences (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992; Page 1999; Schuyler 1986). Some studies have looked at politics and conflicts involving community gardens specifically (Hassell 2002; Schmelzkopf 1995; Jamison 1985).

Community gardens in New York City are sites where power and ideology intersect with pleasure and leisure, and they contribute to the creation of community solidarity. The community garden movement, a hybrid of environmental and community activism dating to the 1970s, has integrated community gardens into the city's landscape. Institutionalization, environmentalism, and everyday life activities have contributed to the long-term success of the movement. Examining the successes and the struggles of the community garden movement along with everyday activities that occur within community gardens provides insight into crucial elements required to sustain community-based conservation. This study of the community garden movement takes a close look at the internal operations of two community gardens as well as the rise and fall of several other gardens in order to show the factors involved in their successes and failures. Such a

study of community-initiated and community maintained open green space explores the possibility of a bottom-up approach to greening an urban area and also contributes to the discussion of what a community is.

This is ethnographic research that looks at a particular environmental/social movement at a micro level. It focuses specifically on the day-to-day activities of garden members and the network of people and institutions that support the movement. Marc Edelman writes, "Ethnographic research on social movements, [moreover], tended to resist "grand theoretical" generalizations because close-up views of collective action often looked messy…" (2001:286). He points out the merit of anthropological studies of social movements based on ethnographic research in bringing out the nuance and the detail of activism in everyday settings that grand theorists would not recognize or would overlook. At the same time, however, he is concerned that ethnography alone does not illuminate a bigger picture, such as "the deep historical roots," "wide geographical connections," and "cycles of contention" of contemporary mobilizations (Edelman 2001:309-310). In order to circumvent these pitfalls, I will also pay close attention to "the historical and cultural processes" (Edelman 2001:309) that contributed to the formation of the community garden movement in order to place it within a larger sociocultural framework. In so doing, I will examine the community gardens' relation to the socioeconomic changes in New York City that resulted in gentrification of neighborhoods, and the role of volunteerism in making changes for the city.

What Is a Community?

The word community is used widely in everyday life as well as in academic literature. Gerald W. Creed (2006) argues that scholars need to pay attention to the community concept especially because it has become so internalized and is often taken-for-granted. He points out, at the same time, that the word has been defined so differently by so many scholars that it has so "many meanings as to be meaningless" (Creed 2006:7). In my study, I use the term community to mean a group of people who are associated with each other by proximity, by a sense of shared identity and ideals, or both. The unavoidable elusiveness of the community concept is attributed partially to complex component meanings such as "a group of people, a quality of relationship…and a place/location," each of which evokes various usages and meanings (Creed 2006:4). The elusiveness of the concept of community has long been overlooked in discussions in the environmental literature, where the idea of community-based conservation was initially popularized.

The community has become one of the key actors in environmental issues. Peter Brosius writes "…one could summarize the last thirty years of conservation as an extended encounter between the community and its antinomies: the state, transnational conservation organizations, and other powerful agents" (2006:227). The community-based approach to environmental conservation has been promoted and advocated by international organizations, including environmental nongovernmental organizations and donor agencies, addressing environmental and developmental issues within marginal areas in developing nations in particular. The discourse and the approach have become

popular partially in response to scholarly criticisms of large-scale development and the top-down approach to implementing environmental protection.

Anthropologists have contributed to the study of the negative social and environmental costs that marginalized populations incur as the result of development projects and imposed environmental conservation which sometimes lead to the worsening of poverty, forced relocation, and rushed transformation of culture and livelihood (e.g. Brosius 1999a; Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar 1998; Fisher, ed. 1995; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990). Anthropological studies of community-based conservation have mostly focused on national and global inequality in which local and indigenous populations are marginalized in environmental politics and the Western ideal of conservation is imposed on them. Some anthropologists argue that international efforts to create areas of nature preservation, such as ecotourism and national parks in developing nations, sometimes fail to acknowledge human history and subsistence activities by local or indigenous populations in the place preceding the preservation (e.g. Raynaut et al. 2006; West 2006; West and Carrier 2004; Chatty 2004; Ellis 2004; Frost and Wrangham 2004; Nygren 2004). International organizations, while adopting the discourse of community-based conservation and resource management, have been making efforts to make community an integral part of conservation and development planning. However, many studies have pointed out that while the community-based approach is a worthy concept, it is often poorly executed and falls short of bringing economic development to the community or achieving the goal of conservation as intended (e.g. Brosius et al. 1998; Novellino 2004; Sullivan 2004).

There are several major reasons why some community-based environmental conservation projects fail to achieve their intended optimal outcomes. First, counter-intuitively, the community-based approach to environmental conservation in remote areas of developing nations is often not initiated by the people of the community. Instead, it is frequently promoted and initiated by outside organizations, like environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from the North, which do not always have goals that match the needs and interests of local people. External advocacy groups may help to empower a local community by generating national and international interest in the developmental or environmental threats the locality faces. The interests of the parties involved, however, may collide when the advocacy group is focused on protecting the forest to remain pristine while the local people are much more interested in using the forest as an economic resource.

For example, Anja Nygren's research (2004) on conservation programs in Río San Juan, Nicaragua shows a diversity of interests among the participants. International aid organizations, governmental authorities, and environmental NGOs encouraged and expected local people living around or in a tropical forest conservation reserve to be its protectors. Nygren (2004:45-47) found that the people were much more interested in "taming the jungle," which implies keeping it under their control, and using it for natural resources rather than setting it aside for conservation. Outside organizations can help to empower local and indigenous people by providing them with political leverage to voice their concerns in environmental politics. However, there is often a gap between what outside organizations expect from local communities and what a local community desires regarding conservation and development.

In the community-based environmental approach, community is often treated as a unified entity in both theory and practice. However, in reality, what constitutes a community is a highly complex matter. Peter Brosius (2006:228) argues that international conservation efforts need to be aware of the construction of the concept of community, which is perceived to be a primordial unit, by paying attention to "the relationship between *how* communities get constituted in conservation discourse and *who* does the constituting." In conservation politics, defining and framing the makeup of a community affected which issues and claims received attention or whether enough money and support could be generated for specific environmental causes.

Scholars and NGOs often make the mistake of essentializing a local or indigenous population in environmental politics by viewing it as a unified community. For instance, indigenous groups are often depicted as environmental guardians who are knowledgeable of nature and live in harmony with it (e.g. "noble savage," "primitive ecological wisdoms") (Berglund and Anderson 2004:13; see also Frost and Wrangham 2004; Rolle 2004:145). Such essentialized images, however exaggerated or highly romanticized, can sometimes empower the indigenous population as a valid political actor in environmental politics (Brosius 1999b:281). Alternatively, people who are engaged in traditional subsistence practices (e.g. swidden horticulture) are sometimes viewed as being environmentally ignorant (see Escobar 1995:195; Novellino 2004:171).

John Oates (1999) points out that hierarchical structures within a community, such as in areas of rural Africa where he does his research, are often overlooked when international organizations promote community-based conservation. In his view, current trends intended to promote community development as a way of achieving conservation

are driven by a still prevalent myth that people in remote areas of Africa live in communities where people cooperate with each other and are in tune with nature, unlike people in industrialized nations. To the contrary, he witnessed in many parts of Africa diversity and a lack of a sense of community among people who live in and near designated sites of environmental conservation. Many of people in surrounding settlements are not indigenous populations who have been in the area for generations but rather are newcomers from urban areas in search of a new livelihood.

Oates (1999) argues that local communities in rural Africa, just as anywhere else, are influenced by the policy and politics of the nation-state in which they are located. They are affected by struggles among powerful individuals who have personal interests at stake in issues related to conservation and development. In his assessment, the increasing focus of international organizations on community development as a way to achieve conservation without compromising a community's needs to develop has mostly ended up failing to achieve both goals. Furthermore, paternalistic efforts to focus on community development, rather than conservation itself, has led to the weakening of conservation efforts in Africa while also failing to bring real benefit to targeted communities. This is because community development takes too much money and focus away from conservation. In addition, imposed community development often benefits local elites with the inflow of money, but fails to reach the larger local population.

While the idea of community-based conservation has spread widely, the conceptualization of what a community is has lagged behind. Brosius et al. (1998) point out there has been what they call the "genericization" of the concept of "community" and "resources" in the scholarly and advocacy work on community-based natural resource

management. Some scholars argue that community is a unit through which sustainable development can be pursued and achieved. In such an argument, people living in the same region are assumed to have "place-centered ethical and aesthetic norms" (Maida 2006:3). Weinberg, Pellow, and Schnaiberg (2000:36) study a Chicago community recycling program and its take over by big firms, pointing out that community development is a "conflictual process" since groups located within a community have "different motives and means" to compete for their interests.

Examining and defining the community concept is an important step in understanding the effectiveness of conservation efforts. In my study I argue that the sense of community—the sense of belonging—does not emerge in the demarcation of a space alone. It is nurtured by the interactions among people as well as between people and place in the context of the ever-shifting landscape of New York City, characterized by a tremendous ebb and flow of people and capital. A community garden is a place where people can interact with nature and with each other. The increased interaction among people living in the same neighborhood seems to help cultivate a sense of community. In my study of the community garden movement, I explore and scrutinize the concept of community. I avoid an essentialized notion of community by treating it as a process rather than a static unit. By providing an account of day-to-day activities and people's interactions, I examine the practices that contribute to community-building. A community is always in a state of evolution and renewal.

New York City as the site for this research is ideal in that the sense of "community" which emerged out of community gardening can be contrasted with the city's widely-studied boundaries and divisions of race, ethnicity, and class (Sanjek 1998;

Gregory 1998; Wojcicka Sharff 1998; Susser 1982). Community gardens provide a case study in which marginalized people caught up in urban decay reclaim their neighborhood. At the same time, both marginalized and wealthy people have gotten involved in the making of community gardens, seeking to be closely in touch with nature while building a cultural and communal place.

Community-Based Conservation

Many community-based conservation projects are driven by outside organizations which bring in large amounts of money. These organizations face pressure to show a positive outcome to the program so as to justify the substantial investment made for the project (Sullivan 2004). Pouring financial resources into creating a conservation project does not, however, make the project self-sufficient and sustainable. In the long run, conservancies and institutions created for conservation must find ways to finance themselves, and revenue must be generated to support people living in the community. However, it is difficult to achieve that kind of financial success through conservation once the donors' funding runs out (Sullivan 2004). Temporary inflow of a large sum of money and other resources for development or conservation projects do not often nurture local interests in conservation and instead can make local populations dependent on outside funding (Oates 1999). Sometimes, too large of a portion of the funding is allocated to hire foreign consultants or to accommodate the interests of bureaucrats in large-scale community-based conservation projects promoted along with the community development so that not enough funding is given to sustain daily expenses and the activities of conservation itself (Oates 1999:xiv).

In New York City, garden members do not rely on community gardens to be self-sufficient or to grow products to sell. Instead, they make efforts to generate funding crucial to sustain and maintain their garden. Labor is provided by volunteers, but supplies and maintenance costs may add up to the tens of thousands of dollars depending upon the scale and status (i.e. types of the land ownership) of the garden. My research looking at the backstage operation of two rather different gardens reveals that leadership and various skills contributed by some of the all-volunteer based members are essential in keeping the community garden running successfully and riding out threats to the existence of each garden.

While some people assume voluntary leadership positions, decision-making for the community garden involves the democratic participation of the members in exchanging ideas and reaching a consensus. Garden meetings highlight the difficulties and rewards of the community-based democratic decision making process. Examining such processes helps to illuminate the art of the bottom-up approach to an environmental project. Moreover, the way that people participate and interact with one another in meetings is informative with respect to what is expected and considered appropriate in democratic discussion in an American way.

Resource Management in the Commons

Environmental resource management has been studied widely. Provoking on-going debate, in 1968 Hardin suggested using the term "the tragedy of the commons" to express the tendency to overexploit resources when ownership is not clearly defined. Many view this as justifying privatization as an effective way of managing environmental

resources. Anthropological studies of resource management indicate that the commons actually works and is more effective in preventing over-exploitation than privatization (e.g. Berkes 1996; Bromley 1992; McCay and Acheson 1987). McCay and Anderson (1987) argue that Hardin's claim is simplistic and point out that common property is not necessarily a land of open access but often a social institution with some mechanisms for resource management. Bromley (1992:4) views property as a "social instrument". In his view, different types of property ownership, such as common or private, serve different purposes. Neither type is inherently better or worse for protecting natural resources. And privatization is not always a viable or ideal solution to replace a deteriorating common property (Bromley 1992:13).

Conflicting arguments about how the commons works for conservation appear to be rooted in different understandings of what the commons consist of. Other questions also arise: what resource management mechanism would be sufficient to insure sustainable resource use and conservation? Who is granted the authority to determine the allocation and the sustainable level? If the commons are treated not as open access to property for everyone, but as a social institution with some kind of mechanism that regulates people's relationship to the property, then, there must be clear explanations as to how the social unit of those who have access to it is demarcated and what prevents others from exploiting it.

In the discussion of the tragedy of the commons, the problem that most scholars grapple with is what happens when people over-extract resources. In the case of the community garden, however, deterioration does no occur because of the depletion of resources. Rather, it happens when people neglect their garden lot or fail to volunteer

their time and effort to maintain the garden. Peer pressure and persuasion as well as rules and regulations are important in preventing individuals from neglecting their commitment.

The community garden has an ambiguous status as land with a "hybrid" identity—an intersection of the commons and private land. A community garden usually stays open for people in the neighborhood to enjoy and/or join. It has certain regulating mechanisms, such as the need to become a member, or a gate that is open for certain hours. Nonetheless, many gardens could be viewed as private, as there are fenced enclosures, and keys to the gate may be allocated only to a limited number of people.

To further complicate matters, the ownership status of gardens varies. Some are private or incorporated while others have become incorporated into city parks. The variety of landownership actually is one of the ways the community garden movement has survived over time. It has done this by metamorphosing into different statuses. The study of the community garden offers a view of resource management that is neither strictly common nor strictly private.

Urban Gardening and Community Gardens: A Historical Perspective

Community garden movements are an example of a community-based environmental project started by community members for their own community. Human initiative was crucial in creating community gardens since despite the social and economic benefits associated with improving and maintaining amenities in cities, the market and the government often lacked strong incentives to provide them (Maruo, Nishigaya, Ochiai 1997). Community gardens are an environmental asset. According to Oberndorfer et al., green roofs—rooftops covered by vegetation—help improve the urban

environment with effects such as “improved storm-water management, better regulation of building temperatures, reduced urban heat-island effects, and increased urban wildlife habitat” (2007:823). Community gardens, like green roofs, increase green coverage in urban areas.

Participants in the community garden movement do not create and defend gardens to protect their livelihood. Many community gardens have vegetable plots, but the size of individual plots is small and not sufficient to yield enough vegetables to make selling them economically viable. Community gardens are a habitat for many insects and birds living in the urban environment, but these patchy, scattered pieces of land are not home to endangered species urgently needing habitat protection. Instead, garden members are creating and protecting a sound amenity along with communal cultures and social solidarity by allowing people to stay connected with the earth.

In environmental conservation, achieving long-term protection is crucial yet often difficult because of the need for long-term commitment and funding. In addition, a long term conservation effort can be wiped out if the interests of developers win over the area. Community gardens face the threat of development, lack of funding, and the waxing and waning of local interest. Located in the midst of a highly desirable real estate market, many New York City gardens are faced with the threat of demolition and sales, and some have not survived. Examination of the community garden movement provides insights into what it takes to preserve a community-based approach to conservation within the urban setting.

The United States has a long history of urban gardening. Malve Von Hassell (2002) lays out the history in several phases: Potato Patch Gardens from 1894 to 1917;

the Liberty Garden during World War I; the Relief Gardens associated with the Depression; the Victory Gardens during World War II; and the community gardens since the 1970s. In the period of Potato Patch Gardens, some major cities including New York provided land, seeds, and other necessary materials, as well as the supervision to the poor to grow food. Hassell points out that this garden program was "paternalistic" and imposed. While serving primarily as a mean to provide food, the city promoted gardening for mental and moral growth among its participants (Hassell 2002: 39). During the Depression, gardens sponsored by the states or industries helped the unemployed and the poor to grow food. According to a 1932 account from Indiana, there were over 45,000 Relief Gardens or the total of 6,000 acres of land cultivated to produced an estimated $2,000,000 worth of the food products in the state (Brown and Hoehler 1933). Wars generated the need to ship food overseas, which resulted in the need to increase domestic food production. The food produced in the Liberty Gardens during World War I made up around eight percent of the total value of agricultural commodities (Hassell 2002:39). There were roughly ten million Victory Gardens in cities, suburbs, and towns throughout the United States in 1942—the time of World War II (Rockwell 1943). According to Hassell (2002:40), the number of Victory Gardens went up to 20 million by 1944, and the vegetables produced in these gardens added up to 42 percent of the total produced in the United States that year.

The community garden movement that began in the 1970s started independently of the earlier urban gardening history. Unlike Victory Gardens or Relief Gardens, whose main goal was to produce food, the community garden movement focuses on the greening of urban areas for environmental and aesthetic purposes. Community gardens

have been created and maintained through grassroots efforts that initially started without government intervention or support. Moreover, aside from gardening, the community garden movement focuses on community-building.

There are different types of community gardens nationwide that involve various forms of ownership. Some are large farm-type gardens dedicated to producing food while others are ornamental gardens for sitting and viewing, like a mini park. Many community gardens in New York City have some space designated for growing food plants along with a space covered with flowering and leafy plants and trees. Some community gardens are geared more toward socializing than providing a place to plant. According to the American Community Garden Association (1998), some community gardens are on school grounds or part of a housing complex. Francis et al. (1984), in their study of community gardens in New York City, describe many types of ownership, including private, city, leased from private, leased from city, and owned by group (Francis et al. 1984:56-57). Many gardens started in the 1970s in New York City were "squatter" gardens that initially occupied vacant lots without official permission.

The community garden movement in New York City is an example of a community-based environmental movement. This study not only contributes to an anthropological analysis of a community-based environmental movement in an urban area of a developed nation, but also shows how such a community-based movement works and what it takes to make it successful. As a case study, the community garden movement demonstrates that green space can be maintained in a city setting. I focus on what is happening on the ground: the people who participate in the movement and who made and continue to make the garden an important green asset of New York City. The

case study illuminates the dynamics within community organizations held together on a voluntary basis. While preservation of an open green space in an urban area may not carry the same environmental urgency as conservation of remote wilderness with unique habitats and species, both efforts face similar issues such as the need to resist development semi-permanently, to maintain the interests of organizations who offer protection, and to gain necessary resources and funding to keep the operation running for the long term.

The Rise of the Community Garden Movement in New York City

The community garden movement in New York City that created the community gardens people see today began with squatters who turned empty lots into gardens in the 1970s. Gardens grew in number over time since the first one, the Liz Christy Bowery Houston Community Garden (originally named Bowery Houston Community Farm and Garden), was created in 1973. There are over 600 community gardens registered through GreenThumb, an assistance program for community gardens in New York City, and there are well over 100 gardens privately owned as a part of land trust and incorporated gardens. The movement has become more established and is now supported by a web of institutions. Maintaining a volunteer-based system of democratic participation, establishing structure within the garden—the institutionalization of the garden itself—and gaining support from various organizations have been crucial to the success and survival of many gardens in the city. Gardens have emerged as the hybrid of community activism based on a desire to take back neighborhoods from the urban blight into which they had fallen in the 1960s and 1970s, and an environmental movement that reflected people's

desire to stay in touch with nature even in the midst of a highly urbanized area. Against the backdrop of the emergence of the community garden movement probably were the remnants of a counterculture that sought to take an action for a better world and to challenge materialism.

The deterioration of neighborhoods in 1970s and 1980s that motivated garden pioneers to take action to improve their communities by planting flowers in abandoned and neglected city lots happened as the result of the city's fiscal crisis that lasted from 1973 to 1975. A telling headline in *Daily News* on October 30, 1975 said "Ford to City: Drop Dead" (Riper 1975) as the city's request to get a loan from the US government to keep out of bankruptcy was turned down by the Ford administration. The retrenchment of city services, such as those of the Department of Sanitation and the Fire Department affected the well-being of the urban community. An economic transformation further deepened the malaise. According to Ida Susser (1982), one of the problems that partially contributed to the fiscal crisis was the shift in the economic structure of the city from manufacturing to corporate-centered financial, real estate, and related services with accompanying shifts in investment. Banks first took away investments from the city, but later reinvested money in the real estate market, causing a spike in prices (Susser 1982:11). The fiscal crisis, the city's planned shrinkage, subsequent gentrification, and a price hike in the real estate market were all interrelated. Jagna Wojcicka Sharff (1998), who conducted her fieldwork in the mid 1970s on the working poor living in Loisaida, a part of the Lower East Side documents how the fiscal crisis with its underlying shift in economic structure and accompanying decline of services brought deterioration to the

area. Most dramatically, the decline of the manufacture-based economy in the city meant lost jobs for a large pool of unskilled laborers.

John H. Mollenkopf (1977) and William K. Tabb (1982) further argue that the fiscal crisis is a manifestation of a political phenomenon. Mollenkopf points out that fragmentation among city agencies made "cohesive and efficient policy making impossible" (1977:120). In Tabb's view, the city relied too heavily on encouraging the growth of private capital and did not intervene enough in the allocation of wealth to build social infrastructure. Such a strategy likely worsened the impact of the fiscal crisis on poor communities in particular. As Tabb (1982:14) puts it, lower income people faced "economic dislocation and social fragmentation" as a result. In this study, I will present an account of the time period when the city went through the fiscal crisis of the 1970s as told by garden members, emphasizing how they associate the situation with the beginning of the community garden movement.

Some scholars point out that protecting community gardens is an environmental justice issue. There is no one widely-recognized definition of the phrase environmental justice, but the term initially addressed the problem of uneven exposure to environmentally hazardous materials. Environmental law expert Michael B. Gerrard, for instance, captures the general idea by defining it as "the idea that minority and low-income individuals, communities, and populations should not be disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, and that they should share fully in making the decisions that affect their environment" (1999:xxix). The environmental justice movement in general aims to address and eliminate the problems of disproportionate impact of toxic exposure to marginalized communities, which may be rooted in

environmental racism, and to implement environmental equity and justice. Hassell (2002) associates community gardens with environmental justice since many community gardens were started in low-income neighborhoods of the densely-populated city. John Ferris et al. argue that community gardens can contribute to environmental justice by helping to restore economically and environmentally "damaged neighborhoods to ecological and social health" (2001:567). Environmental justice issues and environmental and racial discrimination are indeed relevant to aspects of the community garden movement in New York. As the following pages will demonstrate, the movement has also appealed to a wide range of people across racial, ethnic, class, and gender boundaries.

Environmentalism, according to Brosius, is "a broad field of discursive constructions of nature and human agency" (1999b:278). The presence of community gardens in cities like New York can be seen as reflecting people's interests in and longing for open green spaces throughout the city right in their own neighborhood. While the issues of concern to community gardens are inherently localized, the vision which founded them has had a far-reaching effect. It indicates one way in which open green space can be created and maintained in urban areas. In the age of globalization, no city exists in isolation and no community within the city exists on its own. In the case of New York, a global city (Sassen 2001), the past, the present, and the future of the community garden are shaped by the financial and sociopolitical climate of the city as well as by people's determination to claim and define their community and ideal living space in the midst of it.

Examining the community garden movement and everyday life activities in gardens reveals various forces shaping the urban social and physical landscape. As Eeva Berglund and David G. Anderson (2004:8) point out, "meditations on space can lead into discourses on political liberty and larger discussions of how to define the 'good life'." A vision for a better environment is always inseparable from a vision of society. A look into a local effort to create and maintain an open green space will, hopefully, shed light on a vision of society with a sound environment and how to move toward it.

Research Method

My research pursued community gardens in New York City on two fronts: one, I participated in community garden sites where gardening and community activities were happening; and two, I followed the New York City community garden movement by which people have created gardens and are still fighting to keep them. Community gardens, whether small ones attended by a few people or big ones with a formal organizational structure and a wide range of supporters, are located throughout New York City. In order to explore what happens to environmental and community activism as they evolve into an everyday institution, I became a fully participating member at two community gardens between 2004 and 2006. In the course of participant observation, I became involved in garden activities and organizational meetings. In addition, I conducted interviews and participated in events at several gardens besides the two main fieldwork sites to look at the constitution of the community garden movement in New York City from a broader perspective. The majority of interviews took place between

2004 and 2007. Besides participant observation, I also gathered documents such as brochures, newsletters, websites, and letters throughout the course of my fieldwork.

Finding Sites for Participant Observation

I searched for community gardens for my fieldwork in February 2004, walking through various neighborhoods in Manhattan. Among the five boroughs of New York City, I focused specifically on Manhattan since the extremely high cost of real estate makes it the most unlikely place for community gardens to continue to thrive and therefore the most significant. Manhattan's urbanscape is different from the rest of the boroughs, and from any other major city in the United States. Standing at popular tourist spots such as the observatory at the Empire State Building and the Top of the Rock Observation Deck in Rockefeller Center, one can see towering skyscrapers densely occupying a grid that runs throughout the borough, with the exception of the big green rectangular in the upper middle, which is Central Park. The density and height of these buildings make the urbanscape of Manhattan instantly recognizable and quite unusual. While other boroughs of the city are less densely populated than Manhattan, according to the Trust for Public Land, the vast majority of the residents of low income neighborhoods throughout the city do not have adequate open space, ideally, 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents.

I sought two gardens for my field sites, located in two distinctive neighborhoods, with active members and opportunities to engage in gardening and other projects on-site. Some community gardens resemble a miniature park with a few benches but devoid of gardening plots. Other community gardens are maintained by a small number of people

without much interaction with the public. Although community gardens are open to the public, at least in theory, the opening hours vary from garden to garden and some of them are not as inviting to the public as others. The Lower East Side, the birth place of the community garden movement in New York City, was an ideal location for my research since it was the neighborhood with the most community gardens and is the base of vibrant community garden activism. The Upper West Side, home to just a few community gardens, differs from the Lower East Side in terms of population make-up and the overall income level. For both community gardens, there is at least one major city-run park within walking distance. In the Lower East Side, there is Tompkins Square Park. The West Garden is located near Central Park and Riverside Park. Exploring why community gardens were built when there are parks nearby reveals not only the different functions a community garden fulfills compared to a park, but also the deteriorated condition of parks in the late 1970s when these gardens were created. I selected these two neighborhoods as my fieldwork sites to explore how differences between neighborhoods were manifested in gardens and to contrasts two different community gardens.

New York City's socio-economic divisions are complex and constantly changing. Within the city's five boroughs, Manhattan included, there are distinctive neighborhoods with specific names, such as Harlem and SoHo, each with a unique racial and ethnic demographic makeup and a wide range of income levels. Many of the neighborhoods have transformed over time. Historically, the Lower East Side, has been an immigrant and working-class community. In the 1970s, at around the time when the community garden movement started, the area was experiencing a high crime rate and a sense of

despair exacerbated by the fiscal crisis of the city. Since the 1980's, the area has gone through gentrification, but its average income according to the census of 2000 remains far below that of the Upper West Side. The median household income in the area of the East Garden is $37,371 (New York City Department of City Planning 2007a) while for the area around for the West Garden it is $71,969 (New York City Department of City Planning 2007b). The Upper West Side has also undergone tremendous transformation in the past twenty years. In the 1970's many buildings were abandoned but now this area is considered to be one of the most desirable real estate markets in the city. The two community gardens I chose as my main fieldwork sites have been contributing to, as much as they have been affected by, the making of a dynamic community in their neighborhood. One garden is located in what has been colloquially termed, Alphabet City, a part of the Lower East Side along avenue A, B, C, and D. Garden members there have told me that many residents living in the area in the 1970s did not feel safe walking alone in daylight in parts of their own neighborhood. Many longtime residents live in the neighborhood and come to the garden today, but there are signs of changes and gentrification as well. For example, while I was doing my fieldwork, an expensive condominium was being built right behind the garden.

The other garden I will focus on is located in the heart of the Upper West Side. This treasure of the Upper West Side is enjoyed by everyone, from people who live in the wealthy neighborhood along Central Park West, located just a few blocks away, to residents of public housing projects located near the garden. Following the anthropological convention of leaving people and places anonymous to protect the

privacy of informants, I will simply call these two gardens the East Garden and the West Garden.

The East Garden and the West Garden

I selected these gardens, one on the Lower East Side and the one on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in New York City, as the sites to do my participant observation in the same way that most garden volunteers find their garden. When I began my search for two gardens to join in late February 2004, I walked around some neighborhoods, stopped by many gardens, and started talking to gardeners I happened to encounter. It was still too cold to be sitting outside for extended periods of time, and there were not many gardeners visible. Many garden gates were tightly shut, some with a sign that the garden was open to the public between April and October. Others were open with no one in sight. Later I learned that some gardens open only on weekends.

The East Garden, in the middle of the block adjacent to a playground, is a well-established garden among many on the Lower East Side as noted earlier, the birthplace of the community garden movement in the city. The gate to the East Garden was open when I stopped by for the first time on a cold weekend in early March. The fire in the fireplace in the garden was a sure sign of the presence of people, and I saw a man cleaning the garden. The garden had no hours posted, but I later learned that the policy of the East Garden was to welcome visitors as long as a member was present in the garden. A soft-spoken man, whom I shall call Francis, introduced himself and a few other members who were there and answered my questions about the garden. After briefing me on membership fees and plots, Francis suggested that I come to the clean up

day the following week to meet more people. I was encouraged that the gate to this garden was open and garden members inside were friendly. Although it was still too early for the flowering season, I could see that well-maintained plots had a variety of plants. There were some decorated tables, wooden chairs and benches, and tall trees along with plots bordered with stones. I imagined that this would be a great gathering place when the weather got warmer. Feeling fortunate to have encountered such friendly people, I decided this was the garden to join for my fieldwork.

Unlike the Lower East Side, there are only a few community gardens on the Upper West Side. The West Garden, the other garden where I conducted my long-term research, was one of the largest and most accessible. Two garden gates, one to the North and the other to the South, are kept open during the daytime everyday throughout the year with very few exceptions. The garden in the spring is spectacular with the tulips and other flowers, but even during the winter, it is well-maintained, attracting visitors and passerbys regardless of the season. I started talking to people in the garden one day in early March and soon met someone who referred me to a board member. Filling out a form and paying my dues, I became an associate member—a member that does not hold a personal plot.

Besides getting hands-on experience in gardening as a rookie gardener and new member, I regularly attended meetings both at the West and the East Garden. The West Garden is well-organized with elected board members consisting of the president, vice president, treasurers, recording secretary and corresponding secretary along with several general board members. The board meets once a month. There are also several committees within the West Garden. The Flower Committee, for example, meets once a

month separate from the board meeting. The board and the committee at the West Garden meet throughout the year. The board of the West Garden kindly allowed me to attend their monthly meetings, although these are usually open only to the board members. I also attended the Flower Committee meetings whenever possible. At both meetings, I remained an observer taking notes but not actively participating in discussion. I did not record these meetings as doing so would have been more invasive than the board members wished.

The East Garden also elects a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer annually. However, compared to the West Garden, the East Garden is much more loosely organized. A meeting is called when the president or some members see a need for one and it can be attended by any members who show up. During the high gardening season, roughly between April and October, a meeting happens about once a month. Many members still come to the garden later in the fall and during the winter, but there are seldom meetings or garden events during the cold season. I attended as many meetings as I could, took notes during the meeting for my fieldwork, and recorded some of the meetings. In my second year of doing the fieldwork, when election time came around, I was nominated as secretary of the East Garden. The reasoning given for the nomination was that I was taking notes during meetings anyway. As at meetings at the West Garden, I avoided voicing my opinions during meetings, and I did not participate in decision-making processes at the East Garden. Voted into the position of secretary at the East Garden, I became more involved with the garden than before. However, I remained largely an observer.

My goal for attending meetings at both the West and the East garden was to see how the implementation of the community-based environmental movement works on the ground and how decisions are made to keep community gardens functional and operational. As an anthropologist conducting research, I did not feel justified in getting involved in decision-making processes in a manner that would contribute to shaping and changing the course of the gardens. Garden meetings are often heated with intense debates over any number of issues. At such times, people appeared to have seen me more as a quiet member than as a researcher.

I introduced myself to people at gardens letting them know I was doing my research on community gardens. However, people do not constantly remind themselves that a researcher is present at their meetings or during gardening activities. As a researcher, I seized as many opportunities as I could to conduct participant observation, and in turn, I was often commended for being a dedicated member who shows up to do work and to attend meetings more often than many other members. My presence as a researcher often became invisible as I was taken in as a fellow gardener. Being in the inner circle allowed me to look at and analyze the inner-working of garden politics through both outsider and insider points of view.

Exploring Community Gardens in New York City

While I spent most of my fieldwork time conducting participant observation at the East and the West Garden, I also attended events and collected qualitative data at a variety of other community gardens. I collected questionnaires, twenty-six in total, from members at the East and the West Gardens as well as from several other gardens in

Manhattan and one in the Bronx. I handed out the questionnaires in person and usually asked people to fill them out on the spot. There were many instances in which gardeners declined to participate in my survey, especially in gardens other than the East and West Garden, saying they were too busy tending their plots in the garden in the limited time they could afford to spend there. Some people were delighted to know that someone was interested in community gardens and doing research about them. Others did not want to be bothered by a researcher wandering into their garden. I asked gardeners I encountered to fill out the questionnaires whenever I could and whenever I felt it appropriate to do so. I collected narratives and learned about the internal operation of community gardens as well as about the community garden movement in New York City by casually conversing with members of various gardens and by conducting formal interviews. Participant observation, along with these informal and formal interviews, provided a solid grounding for understanding the community-based environmental movement within the context of everyday life.

Negotiated Relationships

Dorinne K. Kondo points out that the relationship between a researcher and informants is shaped in "negotiated understandings of one another" (1990:10). I presented my "self" as graduate student/anthropologist conducting research, as a new garden member seeking mentors in gardening, and as a Japanese person experiencing the American spirit of volunteerism by joining the community garden. I explored how community emerges out of community gardens and how a sense of community is cultivated in community gardens. I, a foreigner in New York City, experienced the

community firsthand by being introduced to and eventually becoming a part of it. While I emphasized my foreign self in establishing relationships with my informants, having been in New York for a long time and having been in the United States even longer, I was at ease doing what Kondo refers to as "[a]nthropological imperatives to immerse oneself in another culture" (1990:12). My construction of self, both as a visitor from Japan and as someone who is literate in American culture, has helped me to connect with people throughout my fieldwork. As I go back and forth between Japan and the United States, I feel that I am a stranger and at home in both countries at the same time. Carrying on an anthropological project with this hybrid identity was an experience in and of itself. My Japanese background is also interesting in that Japan is often treated as the "other" in anthropology, yet it is categorized as or included in the "West" for its economy and industrialized status. My identity and background add layers of meanings to doing urban anthropology away from home, in the United States.

My interest in community gardens is partially rooted in growing up in a house in Japan with a vegetable and flower garden. Home gardening aside, Japan has a long history of gardens as an integral component of architecture, reflecting cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and various aesthetic styles in different time periods. The oldest book on gardening was written in the later phase of the *Heian* Period in the 11th century. A World Heritage Site, the *Byodoin* Temple in the city of Uji, in Kyoto, includes a pond and *Hououdo* at its center, this being a magnificent Buddhist wooden structure, built in 1053 as part of a "heavenly/pure garden" (*Jodo Teien*) (Mitsui 1998). Hideki Mitsui describes the "heavenly/pure garden" as a "garden that captures the landscape and the beauty of nature as is" (1998:190, translation mine). Some Japanese temples are famous

for their rock gardens, like the one at *Ryoanji*, which was constructed in 1499, about 50 years after the temple was built (Ryoanji, n.d.). The rock garden is a gardening style known as *Karesansui*, which is translated as "dry landscape" (The whole word means "dry-mountain-water"). According to Wicks (2004), the prefix-*kare* implies the bareness of wintertime; the rock garden, he proposes, reflects the influence not only from Zen Buddhism as commonly noted, but also Chinese Daoism, Shintoism, and an earlier form of Buddhism that predates Zen Buddhism. Such gardens, with their well-planned aesthetic features, embody Japan's cultural heritage and people's view of nature. New York's community gardens, usually much smaller and much less aesthetically coordinated, also reflect people's ideals about nature. In Japan, community gardens like the ones in the United States—created autonomously among neighbors—are rare, though they do exist. The more common form of gardening consists of citizens' gardens or farms (*Shimin Saien* or *Shimin Noen*), which are usually organized by the municipality within which they are located. They provide plots for citizens who wish to grow vegetables there.

The United States has often been described as a country of individualism (Braun 2008; Mount 1981; Thomson 1992). Yet, the United States, especially New York City, which is known for its commercialism, became a prominent site for the community garden movement. According to Raymond Williams (1985:164) the concept of individualism is linked to "liberal political and economic thought." Alexis de Tocqueville (2000), based on his observation in the United States in the 1800s, explains individualism as a type of egoism that emerges as people experience a great sense of equality in new democracy. In his view, people then tend to overindulge in the idea of

independence, neglect communal relations, and end up becoming isolated from one another. Tocqueville (2000:511), at the same time, points out that "The Americans have used liberty to combat the individualism" and "have won." Instead of living in isolation, Tocqueville observed Americans joining associations in order to cooperate with fellow citizens. While Tocqueville sees people's voluntary associations as a sign of people overcoming individualism, some of today's scholars argue that American volunteerism is rooted in individualism, meaning that people are pursuing their individualistic self-interests (see Eckstein 2001). In this study, I was informed of the idea and the spirit of volunteerism in the United States through my conversations with gardeners. I find that individualism, which may have a connotation of selfishness and lack of interest in communal activities, actually has been an important component in the starting of a garden. People who decided to turn a vacant lot into a garden seem to be individualistic and driven to take initiatives to start things on their own. At the same time, the long tradition of voluntary associations in the United States is also evident in community gardens as people join the group by their own accord, not only to enjoy gardening, but also to take a part in running the garden.

Japan has a long and strong tradition of community volunteerism (Haddad 2007). According to Haddad, "91 percent of all Japanese households (115 million people) are currently members of neighborhood associations" (2007:417), and "They are often responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the neighborhood" (2007:423). In New York City, community gardens helped to improve the street blocks. In Japan, instead of community gardens, there is a tradition of neighborhood associations to take care of the neighborhood. The high participation rate in neighborhood associations in Japan, as

Hatada's data indicate, actually reflects not strong volunteerism, but a sense of duty and obligation to participate in the neighborhood association, especially in rural areas. While this particular study is not comparative, my knowledge and understanding about Japanese volunteerism and Japanese gardens intensified my curiosity about the community garden movement in New York City. My background helped me not to take anything for granted and to ask people questions even if the answers seemed obvious to people here.

My fieldwork took place between February 2004 and December 2007 in New York City. As I continued to live in the city throughout the dissertation writing process, I never truly left my field sites. My continuing relationship with the community gardens and people of the gardens made my writing experience a rich one. Some parts of the research for this dissertation were done in the phase of preliminary research. None of my research would have been possible if it were not for kind gardener members who welcomed an anthropologist to their gardens with open arms and a bit of curiosity.

Following this introduction, this dissertation explores the following: Chapter two looks at community gardens as an environmental movement; it explores the ways in which people resist the loss of green space in their neighborhoods. I look at various activisms that have helped to save the gardens. In addition, I will examine the institutionalization of the community garden movement as the key to insure its long-term success. In chapter three I examine the relationship between gentrification and community gardens while also comparing the gardens with other types of open green spaces in the city. In chapter four, I analyze the rise and fall of a few gardens as well as the different purposes gardens fulfill besides providing an open green space. Chapter five looks at the challenges and rewards in running a garden through a bottom-up democratic

approach, tracing both the history and the daily operations of the East Garden. Chapters six and seven are the story of the West Garden. I discuss in chapter six the beginning of the garden and the struggle to keep it running, citing the stories of individuals who played major roles at the garden's inception. Their stories reveal the importance of leadership, commitment, and luck in starting and nurturing a community-based project. Chapter seven depicts the garden and what it offers to the community throughout the four seasons. The organization and the structure of the West Garden will be examined with a focus especially on the role of the board. The East Garden and the West Garden chapters show two distinctive ways of organizing and managing a community garden; the former representing the loosely-structured organization and the latter the more structured one. But despite their differences, the two gardens also share many concerns, such as the need to raise funds, maintain community participation in activities, and to both solicit and retain volunteers and members.

Community gardens have become an important green asset for the city of New York. While some individual gardens have come and gone, the community garden as an institution embedded in the city is here to stay. This dissertation tells the stories of people who made it happen and the story of the community-based environmental movement that helps to keep the city greener a small patch on a block at a time.

Chapter 2

Community-Based Environmental Movements—Institutionalization and Activisms

Earth Celebrations: Performing a Movement

The environmental movement needs visibility in order to persist. Public exposure has helped garden advocates achieve their goal to save gardens by bringing attention and resources to the cause. Garden activists' protests, especially theatrical ones, help to raise public awareness and garner political support. The *Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens*, an annual event aiming to promote community gardens and to protest their demolition is one vivid example of collective action. The event is produced by a non-profit organization called Earth Celebrations, based on the Lower East Side. Earth Celebrations was started by festival artist Felicia Young in 1991. The group's brochure describes its mission as "fostering ecological awareness and reviving the arts at the center of community life" (Earth Celebrations 2004). The theatrical pageant is put together through the collaboration of artists, gardeners, and volunteers from local communities. Volunteers spend about three months making costumes, furbishing giant puppets, preparing floral wreaths, folding programs and so on to prepare for the event. The event is advertised by fax or e-mail to mass media outlets such as newspapers that announce community events. Flyers and postcards with colorful pictures of the procession in the front and a route schedule on the back are left at the gates of community gardens and at stores and cafes throughout the neighborhood.

Held in May, *Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens* is about eight hours long starting at ten in the morning and ending after six in an evening. People in garden-inspired costumes, giant puppets, musicians, and poets line up at a starting point

on the Lower East Side near Chinatown to receive and wear floral wreaths. As the event is open to all, one could decide to join in on the spot. The weather was unusually warm on Saturday, May 22, 2004 when I joined the parade. Many people were out in the area to enjoy the weather. Some appeared to be there specifically to view the event, but others were looking at the people in colorful and flowery costumes, simply curious about what was taking place. As a consequence of the location, many spectators in this area were Chinese. That day, about fifty to sixty people walked in the procession. Participants ranged widely in terms of their age, race, and ethnicity—reflecting the diverse population of the city. The pageant began with the sound of a drum and ritual chanting. The banner of the pageant was raised along with a big map of the Lower East Side hand-painted on a cloth. The procession stopped by each of the community gardens, about thirty-five in all. The participants looked festive, soap bubbles were blown, and many spectators, including those who just happened to be nearby, were drawn to the event.

The procession was highly theatrical and ritualistic. Each time it stopped at a community garden en route, a conch (shell) horn was blown and the map was marked. At each garden, a few gardeners greeted the procession to participate in the ceremony. At some gardens, the pageant participants were welcomed with refreshments. There were over twenty poetry readings, songs, and dance performances at various locations. Some poems were read as an oral history of a garden. For example, a poem on Albert's Garden depicted how Albert, an antiques dealer, started the garden to make it a "place of peace," how the place was threatened by the bulldozer several times, but now secured under the care of the Land Trust. Others reflected their feelings toward the garden. One poet described the garden as "an unhappy place for perfectionists."

The procession made a few stops at the sites where a community garden once stood. On the sidewalk in front of a building with a fading sign indicating the community garden which used to be there, a child played on a violin a requiem-like song in commemoration of its absence. At another bulldozed site, a singer sang a song which suggested how a garden was taken away by those who wanted higher rent and how children have lost a place to play.

One of the main events of the procession was a big production named "Birth & Marriage of Gaia." La Plaza Cultural, garden with an open theatrical space where the play was performed had about seventy spectators. The show opened with a protest/announcement that in May 1999, 114 gardens were preserved as Land Trust and in 2001 another 193 gardens were saved. The announcement reminded people that there were still endangered gardens in the South Bronx. It said, "Make sure gardens are preserved for generations to come!" A person dressed like a goddess came out to announce the victory of garden protest and the need for a continuous fight.

The opening was followed by kids running around with many plastic bottles attached chanting "recycle! recycle!" They were chasing a "trash monster." An opera singer standing on stilts covered with a long skirt began singing. Actors depicted that the city auctioning gardens to the highest bidder and gardens being destroyed. Gaia, representing nature, was kidnapped by the source of destruction. Spectators booed as Gaia was taken. The narrator told the spectators, "We can save Gaia! We can save more gardens!" Everyone shouted, "Save Gaia!" At that point, parade participants in various costumes joined Gaia at the center stage to dance to the beat of the drums.

Earlier, I was watching a children's drum troop getting ready for the event. The adult leader of the drum band asked drummers if they knew what this event was all about. I heard one drummer say, "Why are we here? To get out of the house…" The drum band was like an after school activity for these children. The leader of the band explained to them that the city may sell community gardens, and they needed to help save gardens. Right outside the garden, protestors were asking for signatures for a petition to save the gardens and to join the campaign to send letters to the mayor asking him to support their cause.

The procession continued accompanied by the loud sound of drums. Drums sent a strong vibration into the air, setting off some car alarms on the street. The ritual of marking the location of the garden onto the map with the blowing of the conch horn was repeated over thirty times. At some of the larger gardens, kids waited eagerly to see a colorful procession come their way. In one garden, Latino women and children wearing white dresses with bright red ribbons danced for the procession, and in another garden, dancers dressed as fairies/nature sprits blended in with plants and trees as moving sculptures. The procession also made a stop at All People's Garden, a garden I had visited a couple of years earlier to do research on community gardens before I began research for my dissertation. Olean who started the garden in 1979 in the midst of a drug-infested street had recently passed away. The garden had been much renovated since I last visited the site. The old willow tree was gone and a new mural was painted. The ground had been paved neatly with red bricks, and a new stage/performance space had been added. Olean's sister along with a few people from the garden awaited the procession there for the ceremony to honor Olean. A flower-decorated photo of Olean

which had been carried with the procession was placed on the stage at the garden. The procession also made a stop at a garden created in honor of a young firefighter who died on duty when the building where the garden now stands burned down. After over eight hours of music, ceremonies, theater, and walking, the procession reached its final destination: a garden where butterflies were symbolically released.

Rites of Spring by Earth Celebrations attracts not only garden activists and gardeners but also artists who are interested in making puppets and costumes and performers who find the event a good place to express themselves. The colorful festive procession turned people into activists who otherwise would not take a part in the community garden movement. Many of the participants in the procession were activists and gardeners. Many more were those who enjoy theater and those who enjoy artwork and costumes. Some people who took part were simply attracted to the spectacle or perhaps their friends were taking part in it. I asked a person pulling a big Muppet if he knew who was in the procession. He answered, "Earth Celebrations," but beyond that he did not seem to know much about his fellow participants. He did mention that participants get together twice a year, once in spring and once in winter for the celebration. Participants in this type of collective action do not necessarily have to familiarize themselves with the cause driving the activism: in this case, environmental justice. Nonetheless, they contribute to keeping the ritual going year after year, making theatrical protest still a part of the community garden movement.

Gise Oliveira (2005), who studied this very same *Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens* for her Master's thesis argues that the theatrical protest "has become the vehicle for the emergence of a new community movement" (2005:4). The Lower

East Side has been a location for many community theaters and small music venues which have attracted artists. The emergence of a form of protest that features art and performance is clearly a reflection of the rich cultural life of this neighborhood. Oliveira (2005) points out that the Procession is "a vehicle for political resistance" for the participants who oppose the loss of gardens to gentrification. She also depicts it as a form of social empowerment. Her research, however, shows that this act of resistance has been made possible through funding from corporations, the city, and various foundations. Getting enough sponsors and keeping the existing sponsors have been crucial for the event to survive, and it has not always been easy. As Oliveira points out, the ingenuity of the Procession as a project is that it cuts across the interests of many different groups—gardeners, artists, those who oppose gentrification, environmentalists, and so on. It combines environmental, communal, and artistic interests in its protest/resistance through an accessible form of colorful artistic performance. As a result, it does not necessarily fit into only one funding category from sponsors. The Procession, an act of protest and resistance, has survived for over fifteen years, first, because there has always existed the possibility that some community gardens may be lost to development. Second, the Procession has endured through its flexible approach to activism, adopting various goals and purposes which helped to attract not only garden activists but people who were interested in the theatrical and artistic aspects of the event.

Three Components of the Community Garden Movement

There are three main components that make up the community garden movement: activisms like the *Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens* and the letter writing

campaigns; institutions; and lawsuits. The institutionalization of the movement—by which I mean, both the emergence of community-garden related organizations and the extended support from existing philanthropic and non-profit organizations for community gardens—has helped to prolong the longevity of the community garden movement. Lawsuits have helped stop the city from auctioning off many lots where community gardens were located. Garden-related organizations are the backbone structure for the community garden movement and contribute to the long-term success of community gardens. Many gardens receive material and technical support from various organizations. These organizations have mobilized resources and intervened against the city's plans to convert garden sites into commercial or residential sites.

The success of the community garden movement depends both on establishing a dependable and long-lasting structure and on attracting people, gardeners and non-gardeners alike, to its various activities. A common argument during debates over the value of community gardens is that they are located in areas that can be potentially used for developing low income housing. However, many of those who are concerned about the community garden are also advocates for low-income housing. The real issue is not gardens versus housing but presenting people's and community's needs from the encroachment of capitalistic interests in development. The community garden signifies resistance to the establishment through a collective call to take control over the land and neighborhood development. At the same time, the idea and the place is appealing enough to attract support from various sources including corporations and philanthropic organizations.

Framing the Community Garden Movement

Scholarly studies of the community garden movement provide various frames through which to view the movement. One is the idea that community gardens represent a form of resistance to the loss of the commons under the advancement of capitalism. For example, Christopher M. Smith and Hilda E. Kurtz (2003) argue that community gardens as garden advocates' struggle against market privatization of the urban landscape under neoliberal capitalism. Devon G. Peña (2006), who studies a large community farm in South Central Los Angeles run by indigenous diasporic farmers from Mexico, similarly claims that the farm represents resistance to "neoliberal enclosure" and the privatization of urban common space. During my research, participants themselves hardly ever described what they did as resistance to privatization of land. Instead, I found through interviews, questionnaires, and casual conversations, that what community garden members in New York City value the most about their gardens are environmental benefits such as cleaner air and noise reduction, community building, and the personal fulfillment they get from gardening. Many viewed gardening as a personal experience, and they would not immediately see themselves as participants in a social movement. Nonetheless, when I asked whether they saw the community garden movement as an environmental movement, most seemed to agree. Participants viewed gardening as both personal and environmental. Through personal gardening, gardeners collectively created the vision of the common land in the midst of highly privatized urban land.

Other scholars have studied community gardens in light of food security issues. Two separate studies (Baker 2004; Johnston 2003) on community gardens in Toronto, Canada view them as a component of the community food security movement which

promotes the localization of the food system. Baker (2004) uses the term "food citizenship" to describe the community garden as a cultural and political space where marginalized groups, such as immigrants gain appreciation for the environment and their role as citizens. Johnston (2003) argues that community food security connects "red" concerns of social justice and equity with "green" concerns of ecology. He points out that growing one's own food "is a radical gesture against global food chains," although he also notes that some critics view it as being more middle-class-minded than radical. One study mentions community gardens as sites of social networking. According to Glover et al. (2005), community gardens are "leisure-oriented grassroots associations" whose resources and assets are social networking. Food security and production are not the central theme for community gardens in New York City as the size of a typical community garden and the individual plots contained within are not of sufficient size to produce a large amount of vegetables. However, as I will mention in later chapters on the West Garden and the East Garden, many gardeners grow vegetables as well as flowering plants. Some of them have told me that getting freshly-harvested vegetables is one of the great benefits of being a member of a community garden.

Jay Sokolovsky (2009) calls community greening "acts of 'civic ecology," which not only bring environmental and health benefits but also nurture "social inclusion". He points out, as I also observed in my fieldwork, that older adults are a core force in community gardening. According to him, the reasons for active participation of older adults are their available free time and gardening experience in their youth. I would also add to the list the timing of the emergence of community gardens. Many gardens started

in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. People who began gardening then have become experienced gardeners today.

The community garden movement in New York City has not only increased the green space in densely populated parts of the city, but also has given ordinary people a chance to voice their opinions on urban land use in the highly capital-driven commercialized city. In principle, the existence of community land with almost no economic activities is an anomaly in a city like New York, where land is highly sought out and valued. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the timing of the emergence of the community gardens during the financial crisis and neighborhood deterioration in the 1970s explains why land was readily available. Real estate was not in high demand and there was little incentive for the commercial development of property. The continuing success of the community garden movement is made possible by people's sustained interest in having open green space within their neighborhoods where they can interact with nature.

Institutionalization in the Environmental Movement

Community gardens would not thrive as they do today without the assistance of garden-related institutions and organizations. The institutionalization of the community garden movement has occurred on two fronts. First, there is a tendency for individual community gardens to develop formal membership and become more organized in their decision-making process over time. Second, organizations have emerged to offer support for community gardens. Many existing foundations have provided funding for community gardens as well. Hein-Anton Van Der Heijden, in discussing the

institutionalization of the environmental movement, defines institutionalization ([institutionalisation]) broadly as "the process by which originally personal norms, expectations, goals and values tend to form a collective pattern, a pattern by which interactions and communications are regulated and structured" (1997:31). Heijden (1997:31) uses professionalisation, most notably the emergence of paid staff members, as a variable of institutionalization. This particular understanding of institutionalization does not apply to individual gardens. I have not come across a garden that has a paid staff. However, institutionalization as a shift toward more structured and regulated interactions and communication happens at most of the successful gardens over time.

Originally disconnected individual efforts to improve neighborhoods, community gardens have become a staple in the New York City landscape supported by various institutions and organizations which emerged out of or joined to support community gardens. These organizations provide community gardens with funding/materials, educational programs, technical support, and research/community outreach. Many organizations help gardens in several ways. The organizations vary in size and goals. The organizations I mention here are either ones which were created with the sole purpose of supporting the community gardens or ones whose interests in conservation includes community gardens.

Green Guerillas, founded in 1973, is the most notable example of an organization created as part of and as a result of the community garden movement. Green Guerillas was created by a woman named Liz Christy, who started the Liz Christy Bowery Houston Community Garden in the Lower East Side. Green Guerillas offers grassroots support to community gardens by providing gardening materials, assistance, educational programs

for youth, coordinating and organizing various events for community garden volunteers, and by serving as an advocate for community gardens (Green Guerillas, n.d.). Green Guerillas' budget has expanded over time, and it has been one of the major forces in sustaining the community garden movement by providing support to many gardens over the years. In the first three years, the group was loosely organized without an office, and most operational costs were paid by members themselves. The total donations it received between 1973 and 1976 was $356.00, while the actual expense of running the organization exceeded ten-times that amount (Carmody 1976). According to the annual report of 2007, Green Guerillas has a total revenue of $357, 210 and total expenses of $315,505. Their revenue is raised thorough membership fees, private donations, benefit parties, and grants from foundations and so on.

Green Guerrillas is an example of a grassroots organization that has grown and become more established over the years. Another organization that was established with the goal of helping the community garden is GreenThumb. Established in 1978, it has been under the New York City Parks Department since 1995 and had over 600 community garden under its wing as of the year 2007. The program has been funded by Federal Community Development Block Grants since 1979. Initially, GreenThumb (its original name was Operation GreenThumb) existed solely to issue leases for "interim site" for garden use (Neighborhood Open Space Coalition, n.d.). Later, the lease turned into licensing. Not all community gardens are GreenThumb gardens. Some are incorporated or privately funded. GreenThumb gardens are required to open their gates to the public for a minimum of ten hours per week between April and October. In

addition to overseeing its member gardens, GreenThumb offers a wide variety of material and technical support for community gardens in the city.

The Neighborhood Open Space Coalition (NOSC), started in 1981 by Tom Fox, one of the original members of the Green Guerillas, is an advocacy and educational group promoting and improving open spaces in New York City. In the 80s, it created the community garden inventory of New York City and pointed out the effectiveness of community gardens as a cost-effective way to provide open green space to the city (Raver 1997). The NOSC provides information on community gardens and other types of open green spaces in the city on its website as well as electronic newsletter. The organization has long helped community gardens by offering them a group insurance policy.

There are some neighborhood-based garden organizations as well, some of them created especially when a large number of gardens were in great danger of being demolished. For example, in 1994 when many community gardens were under threat of demolition, Earth Celebrations initially launched the New York City Garden Preservation Coalition (also known as the Lower East Side Garden Preservation Coalition, as well as New York City Coalition for the Preservation of Gardens) to explore the possibility of forming a Land Trust through the coalition of gardens, schools, cultural and environmental organizations, community centers/associations and religious organizations to save gardens. The Preservation Coalition's plan to create a Land Trust never materialized, but the coalition provided the groundwork for organizing information on community gardens in the Lower East Side and actively engaged in a letter writing campaign. They mapped the Lower East Side community gardens with a description and status (e.g. bulldozed or endangered). They also produced online newsletters on an

irregular basis between 1997 and 1998 mostly to inform people about the threat of demolition that community gardens faced and to encourage people to engage in action to save community gardens. After four or five active years, the group became moribund aside from maintaining a web archive of its past activities.

At the national level, the American Community Garden Association (ACGA), a bi-national (including Canada) nonprofit organization founded in 1979, is at work to build community gardening networks and to promote community gardening through annual conferences, various publications and educational programs. The ACGA consists of members, volunteers, as well as gardening professionals who explore both the technical and social aspects of community gardening in their research.

Some organizations support community gardens as the part of their conservation effort to protect nature. For example, the New York Restoration Project (NYRP), started in 1995 by Bette Midler to reclaim and restore New York City's green spaces, intervened in the city's plan to auction off the land of 114 community gardens in 1999 by providing $1.2 million to purchase 51 of them (Lefer 1999). The annual budget of the NYRP is around $4.9 million, much of which comes in the form of donations from corporations and membership fees from the general public (Barron 2005).

The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a U.S.-wide nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to protecting a variety of natural spaces, holds titles for sixty-four New York City community gardens, most of them as the result of its effort to save these gardens from being auctioned off in 1999. This was accomplished by negotiating with the city and purchasing the gardens for $3 million—$1 million of which came from the NYRP. The TPL has been helping community gardens in the city since 1978 offering expertise

and funding for garden groups to purchase, maintain and improve community garden lots, as well as provide funding to create garden programs for the community (Trust for Public Land, New York 2008). The TPL-New York claims it is especially concerned that people living in low-income neighborhoods tend to lack access to the sufficient open space.

While community gardens were initially started under a very small budget, if any, many gardens today face various expenses that are covered by membership fees and fundraising events, as well as funding from garden-supporting organizations. The Trust for Public Land has created a committee consisting of donors like the Louis and Anne Abrons Foundation and the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust to allocate and oversee the annual funding of approximately $500,000 for community gardens throughout the city (Raver 1997). The Greenacre Foundation, founded by Abby Rockefeller Mauz in 1968, is another non-profit philanthropic organization that has been providing funding to various community gardens throughout the city. For example, when Green Guerillas collaborated with a New York City homeless shelter on Wards Island to create a wheelchair-accessible garden, the Greenacre Foundation paid money to cover some cost for the project (*New York Times* 1987). Funding provided by philanthropic organization continues to be an important supplement to operational cost for many community gardens in throughout New York City.

The list of the organizations mentioned here is not exhaustive but rather representative of the types of organizations that have helped and have been a part of the community garden movement. They range from philanthropic organizations with large budgets to volunteer-based neighborhood groups operating temporarily to deal with the

immediate threat to gardens. The creation of New York City community gardens with their communal use of land in a highly commercialized capitalistic city can be seen as resistance to privatization of urban land as Smith and Kurtz (2003) point out. However, it is worth noting that many community gardens receive funding and/or supplies from philanthropic organizations, which are often supported by private and corporate funding. While some aspects of a social movement, such as protests, usually dwindle as time passes or as it accomplishes its goal, organizations, once established, have interests and a stake in maintaining themselves. These organizations generate activities to further their purpose. Organizations created for the purpose of supporting community gardens, for example like Green Guerillas, help insure the long-term well-being of the community garden movement as a whole.

Institutionalization within Community Gardens

The institutionalization of the community garden movement is signified by the development and participation of non-profit organizations such as Green Guerillas since 1973, semi-governmental organizations like GreenThumb since 1978, and philanthropic organizations to support community gardens. These organizations have made available financial and material resources, as well as technical supports needed to maintain community gardens. That alone, however, cannot insure the long-term success of individual community gardens. Individual gardens need to be well organized to make a successful effort to tap into these resources and find more ways to cover the operational costs of running a garden. Glover et al. (2005) argue that the continual existence of grassroots associations like community garden depends on the resources brought in and

generated by volunteers. Social capital theory implies that higher the level of social capital in the community, the better off the community will be. The existence of community gardens bring people together and help people to build networks, which in turn nurtures social capital. While social capital theory highlights the potential of the community and the power of people's network, it does not sufficiently address the political economic root of the problems that devastate neighborhoods. Osterling (2007), for example, points out that existing social capital theory does not pay adequate attention to the context of communities—notably, the economic and political resources available to them. In poor communities, he argues, it is not necessarily the lack of a strong network, but a neighborhood-level socioeconomic disadvantage that causes social distress.

My research on community gardens demonstrates that they cultivate a strong network in many neighborhoods, whether they are considered rich or poor, and even when the neighborhood is experiencing hardships. Many New York City neighborhoods house people with diverse economic and class backgrounds. A garden in such a location is likely to attract participants and visitors from different class backgrounds, helping these people to become acquaintances and friends. The skills and manpower that members bring to the garden are what make the gardens possible. The benefits and the use of a community garden are extended to non-members who can visit and enjoy the garden, and gain an accessible open green space in their own neighborhood. Thus, community gardens are an asset to the community as a place to enhance social capital and environmental benefits.

Effective resource mobilization is essential in running a community garden. A close examination of the day-to-day operation of community gardens reveals that some

form of institutionalization—meaning some formalized decision-making processes and building of an organizational structure—is essential in keeping and running the garden. Moreover, volunteers who can take initiative and assume leadership are crucial in maintaining the community garden, even through difficult periods. As I discuss in later chapters about the East Garden and the West Garden, participation in gardens initially began haphazardly, and eventually became formalized with rules and regulations. For both gardens, in the beginning, the decision-making was carried out single-handedly by a founder or though discussion among a small number of friends. The decision-making process has since become formalized as the gardens created committees, the governing body, and by-laws requiring majority rule.

In the environmental literature, the idea of a bottom-up, community-based environmental conservation has gained much support. In later chapters, I examine the everyday life and the operation of community gardens. These chapters show that community-based approach is possible only when there is a pool of people with skills and education who are able and willing to offer the time and ability to participate in the process. Moreover, since people come and go due to various factors, such as age, changes in interests and situations, and the general fluctuations of a movement, there needs to be a self-sustaining structure, processes, and rules that newcomers can adopt to insure the continuation of the group and the movement.

Saving the Garden

Lawsuits are one of the key weapons in environmental movements, especially in the United States. The community garden movement was no exception. Lawsuits

combined with activism that raised public awareness of the threat of demolition that gardens faced helped to save many gardens. The community garden movement faced the biggest challenge when the city under Mayor Rudy Giuliani administration announced in January 1999 the plan to auction off 114 garden lots in May 1999 with the possibility of later adding more than 500 community gardens to the list to be auctioned. According to a New York Times article (Raver 1999), New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development selected "any city-owned properties not slated for housing or economic development" for the sale. These community gardens up for the auction were city-owned "vacant lots" on lease, and the city had the rights to get them back to sell.

The year 1999 was not the first time community gardens faced demolition. During the Giuliani Administration, the city made many attempts to take back the lots leased to gardens to put them up for economic and housing development. For example, in the period between 1995 and 1998 over two dozen gardens were bulldozed by the city (Coleman 1998). In 1997, the protest organized by the New York City Coalition for the Preservation of Gardens, included about 200 gardeners holding large puppets handing in letters along with vegetables and flowers to city officials to protest city's plan to close gardens (Raver 1997). The scale of the threat of the planned auction in 1999 seemed to have attracted numerous protests. On April 10, 1999, for example, approximately 500 gardeners both from within and outside of the city gathered at Bryant Park to rally against the auction (Raver 1999). In May, theatrical protests involving music, performance, garden-related costumes, and rose petal showers took place in the Lower Manhattan near the area where an informational session was held for those interested in the city

properties that were going up for auction. While the demonstration was peaceful, 62 demonstrators were arrested for disorderly conduct for blocking the street and interrupting rush-hour traffic. According to one account, the protest attracted over 500 onlookers (Herszenhorn 1999). These protests helped attract media attention and raise people's awareness. They helped to draw then the New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's attention to the community garden issue.

In reacting to the city's plan to auction off garden lots, over twenty organizations got involved in four separate lawsuits in state and federal courts to change and stop the plan (Stapleton 1999). The one filed by New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer in 1999 alleged that the city had not fulfilled the required environmental review by the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) (Smith and Kurtz 2003). When the State Supreme Court ruled that the city needed to show the environmental impact of closing down community gardens, it delayed the city's plan to auction, and pushed the city to come to the negotiation table with the garden-supporting organizations. As a result, as mentioned earlier, the Trust for Public Land and the New York Restoration Project gained the opportunity to purchase the lots for some of the gardens in order to secure them.

The deal TPL made along with the intervention of the NYRP helped preserve gardens destined to be auctioned, but some gardeners have criticized the elitism of the TPL for not consulting gardeners before the intervention (Lefer 1999). One of the possible reasons why the negotiation was made without much input from people at affected gardens is the technicality and the complexity of the process that led to saving of the garden. The TPL's offer to buy a number of gardens was rejected initially by the city

under Mayor Giuliani, who was not supportive of the idea of the community gardens from the beginning. The city became willing to negotiate only after the state Supreme Court's ruling required the city to assess the environmental impact of losing gardens and took up one of the offer by the TPL. The TPL, however, was not a part of any of the four lawsuits brought by various organizations that led to the state Supreme Court ruling (Stapleton 1999). In addition to coming up with the strategy to save garden lots up for the auction, the TPL also had to generate necessary funding to make a deal with the city.

The frustration of some gardeners feeling left out of the negotiation process was probably also rooted in the nature of the deal made in 1999, which stopped the auctioning of the 112 gardens, but did not offer any long-term guarantee for other community gardens built on city-owned lots. Such development was unlikely during the Giuliani administration since, as a Mayor, he showed little appreciation for community gardens. Referring to his plan to sell garden lots, he has said, "The era of communism is over" (Stapleton 1999). Various organizations supporting community gardens, including the TPL, shared the concern that there was no agreement then between the city and the garden community to insure protection of other community gardens. According to Stapleton (1999), Rose Harvey of the TPL said that the deal was not the end but "just the beginning" of the community garden issue.

Various involved organizations kept pushing for the long-term protection for community gardens, and in 2002, the city under Mayor Bloomberg, agreed to leave alone over 400 lots as community gardens. In contrast to Mayor Giuliani, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, interested in ending lawsuits against the city brought on during the previous administration, was much more willing to reach a compromise to settle the garden issue

(Steinhauer 2002) and has been much more supportive of community gardens. In September 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg reached an agreement with the New York State Attorney General, Eliot Spitzer. The agreement saved approximately 200 city-owned community gardens. Another 200 gardens became part of the Parks Department or of non-profit groups at no cost or with a nominal fee. As part of the same agreement, over 150 community garden lots were made available for development.

The compromise made between the city and garden advocates was described by Steinhouser of the NYT as the "end of a quintessential New York drama, pitting the two most common objects of longing for many New Yorkers—housing and unfettered green spaces—against each other…" (Steinhauser 2002: A1). The city, as well as the mass media, tends to depict community gardens as competing with city's needs for housing, especially low-income housing. Karen Schmelzkopf (1995) points out that in the Lower East Side, the gardeners and housing advocates both understood the need for the housing as well as desirability of the garden for the neighborhood. Indeed, according to her, many participants in the housing-advocacy groups there were garden members and supporters themselves, and many gardeners themselves were seeking low-income housing. Community gardens terminated in the past had not always been replaced by low-income housing. Some of them were turned into "parking structures, high-priced condominiums, and apartment buildings" (Schmelzkopf 1995).

The shortage of affordable housing is an ongoing problem for New York City especially in recent years with continuing increases in rent. That does not necessary mean, however, that community gardens have to be viewed as in competition with low-income housing. Lenny Librizzi from the Open Space Greening Program argues, "It's

not either garden or development. You can have both. There are many vacant lots in the city besides gardens, which are not truly vacant lots. There are other vacant lots that are just garbage, illegal parking lots, those could be built on" (in-person interview, November 22, 1999). The Open Space Greening Program, a part of the Council on the Environment of New York City, has been helping people since 1975 to create and manage community gardens. Many gardeners and garden supporters shared the frustration that community gardens were endangered while the city had many other abandoned vacant lots that could have been developed instead (Coleman 1998).

Lawsuits became one of the key components of the community garden movement when they were used to challenge the city's plan to auction off lots on which community gardens were thriving. However, lawsuits alone did not resolve the situation. Activism and protests helped shed light on the possible loss of many community gardens and created the support and the momentum that led to lawsuits. Lawsuits slowed down the city's auction plan and pushed the city to come to the table to negotiate a deal with the TPL and the NYRP, who helped to buy lots to save them as community gardens. The change from the Giuliani to Bloomberg administration also helped the garden community secure the future of many gardens, as Mayor Bloomberg showed much more understanding and appreciation for community gardens than his predecessor did. Lawsuits, activism, and institutions were all necessary and important in saving the gardens this time around.

Conclusion

When the words social movement are mentioned, the image that comes to people's minds is that of people gathering and protesting. Protests and demonstrations have been a part of the community garden movement, especially when a specific garden or gardens have been under threat of being demolished. That, however, is only a fraction of what makes up the community garden movement. The institutionalization of the movement—both the emergence of the various organizations in support of community gardens and formalization of the internal structure of community gardens—mark the transformation of the community garden movement from ad hoc individual efforts to a well-established and recognized long-lasting effort to maintain communal open green space in New York City. Even a type of theatrical protest, as seen in the *Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens* by Earth Celebrations, has become more of an institution—a bi-annual, well-organized event that reminds people of gardens that were lost to the development, threats of demolition gardens still face, and the beauty of the community gardens. It sometimes includes a memorial service for garden activists and gardeners.

While many aspects of the community garden movement are marked by resistance to encroaching development and gentrification that threaten the environment and characteristics of the community, the garden movement is also supported by the city, corporate money, and foundations. The community garden movement itself is sometimes unfairly depicted as an obstacle to people's need for low-income housing. The structure and involved interests of the community garden movement are far from simplistic. It has been flexible in accommodating and attracting a great variety of participants from

revolutionaries in the community to mega corporations interested in funding an environmental community-based project. The longevity and sustainability of the community garden movement relies on its institutionalization as well as its flexibility.

The community garden movement is like a mosaic made up of different components. In this chapter, I have examined the institutional aspects of the garden movement by underscoring the importance of various garden-related organizations in holding the movement together, rescuing some gardens from demolition, and offering continuous technical and material supports crucial to sustain gardens. Many individual gardeners as well as garden advocates have been involved in some form of garden activism besides simply gardening, but interestingly, individual gardeners do not always see themselves as activists or participants in a social movement. The community garden movement has given people the choice to do gardening in the city, and most of them do gardening for personal fulfillment rather than intending to make social statements. Yet their daily efforts, backed by organizational support and occasional protests to secure the site of community gardens, together have maintained community-based open green space in New York City for over three decades and counting.

The environmental benefits of community gardens in New York City are one of the driving factors behind garden activism. One of the most significant roles of the environmental movement is its contribution in shifting environmental discourse. Kay Milton refers to environmental discourse as "not just communication about the environment, but also the process whereby our understanding of the environment is constituted through such communication" (1993:8). The influence is exerted in many ways including reaching out to the media, educating the public, and lobbying (Milton

1993:9). With its success, the community garden movement has demonstrated that it is possible to maintain a place for nature in the city. The community garden movement has opened up a dialogue, suggesting the needs and possibilities for more green amenities in urban cities.

Chronological Table of Some of the Key Moments in the Community Garden Movement in New York City

1973: Liz Christy started the Liz Christy Bowery Houston Community Garden (originally named Bowery Houston Community Farm and Garden), the first garden that marked the beginning of the community garden movement in New York City

1973: Green Guerillas was started by Liz Christy and her friends

1974: The City Office of Housing Preservation Development granted a lease to Liz Christy Bowery Houston Community Garden for $1 a month

1975: Open Space Greening Program of the Council on the Environment of New York City was created

1978: GreenThumb was eatablished initially to oversee the leasing of city lots for community gardens

1991: Earth Celebrations was created and put on their first *Rites of Spring: Garden Pageant* and *Winter Pageant*

1994: Earth Celebrations launched the New York City Garden Preservation Coalition

1995: GreenThumb became a part of the New York City Parks Department

1995-1998: Over two dozen community gardens were bulldozed by the city

1997: The New York City Garden Preservation Coalition, along with 200 gardeners, held a protest against the city's plan to close some gardens

January 1999: New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development announced the auctioning off of city lots where 114 community gardens were located

1999: Four separate lawsuits are filed by various groups to stop the city from auctioning off the lots. The auction plan is delayed when the State Supreme Court ruled that the city needed to demonstrate the environmental impact of closing down community gardens

May 1999: Theatrical protests in the Lower Manhattan and some people were arrested

May 1999: 114 gardens on city lots set for auction were saved by the New York Restoration Project, which paid 1.2 million dollars for 51 lots, and by the Trust for Public Land, which paid $3 million to purchase the rest of the 114 gardens

September 2002: The city under the Michael Bloomberg administration agreed with the State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer to keep over 400 lots as community gardens

Samples of Organizations That Support NYC Community Gardens
(as discussed in chapter 2)

*I only mention the activities of each organization that are pertinent to community gardens. The list of funding sources I mention are not exhaustive.

The Greenacre Foundation
Type: non-profit corporation (philanthropic)
Founder: Abby Rockefeller Mauz
Year: 1968
Activities: provide funding to various community gardens throughout the city

The Trust for Public Land
Type: a U.S.-wide nonprofit land conservation organization
Founder: Huey D. Johnson, Martin J. Rosen
Year: 1972 (involvement with gardens in the city sine 1978)
Activities: protect a variety of natural spaces including community gardens, provide expertise and funding for garden groups to purchase lots, offer garden programs for the community, holds title for 64 gardens in the city, acquired as a part of NYRP-TPL efforts to stop the city's auction of community garden lots in 1999.
Funded by: land contributions, charitable trusts, investment, grants, corporations, foundations, individual donors

Green Guerillas
Type: non-profit organization
Founder: Liz Christy, an artist
Year: 1973
Activities: provide community gardens assistance, educational programs, gardening materials, various events for garden volunteers, advocacy for community gardens
Funded by: corporations, foundations, members, individual donations, benefit parties

Open Space Greening Program
Type: a program of the Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC), which is a semi-governmental organization—privately-funded, non-profit citizens' organization in the Office of the Mayor.
Founder: CENYC, which was created by an Executive Order of Mayor John Lindsay
Year: Open Space Greening Program: 1975; CENYC: 1970
Activities: Help people in New York City neighborhoods to create and maintain community gardens, provide expertise, materials, and plants, and rent tools
Funded by: grants, foundations, corporations, government, individual donors

GreenThumb
Type: a program of the New York City Parks Department (since 1995)
Founder: The City of New York
Year: 1978

Activities: assist neighborhood groups involved in community gardening, provide materials and technical support, offer workshops and small grants, set guidelines for community gardens under GreenThumb
Funded by: Federal Community Development Block Grants

The American Community Garden Association
Type: bi-national nonprofit corporation
Founder: the US Department of Agriculture
Year: 1979
Activities: building US as well as Canadian community garden networks; promoting community gardens by holding annual conferences, publishing, education
Funded by: conferences, memberships, individual donations, publication sales

The Neighborhood Open Space Coalition
Type: environmental organization
Founder: Tom Fox, one of the original members of Green Guerillas
Year: 1981
Activities: advocacy and education, promotion and improvement of open space in the city
Funded by: corporate donors, foundations, the city, individual donations

Earth Celebrations
Type: non-profit organization
Founder Felicia Young, a festival artist
Year: 1991
Activities: put on annual theatrical pageant called *The Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens* and offer pageant-related art workshops
Funded by: corporations, foundations, individual donations, membership, the city, awards, benefit party

The New York City Garden Preservation Coalition
Type: neighborhood organization
Founder: Earth Celebrations
Year: 1994
Activities: to explore the possibility of forming a Land Trust through the coalition of gardens and other community organizations (never materialized), provide information on community gardens in the Lower East Side, protests against the closing of gardens

The New York Restoration Project
Type: non-profit organization
Founder: Bette Midler
Year: 1995
Activities: Reclaim and restore New York City's green spaces, purchased 51 gardens in 1999 for $1.2 million and turned it into Land Trust, retained the title to six more gardens since 1999, provide education, materials, and management support
Funded by: corporations, individual donors, charitable trusts, foundations, memberships, special events, investments

Chapter 3

Community Gardens and Gentrification

Many community gardens, which started on unattractive vacant lots in a not well-maintained city in the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, stand today in thoroughly gentrified or rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. What is the relationship between community gardens and the gentrification of the vicinity in which they are located? The literature on gentrification focuses on the impact of global economic forces and the housing market in precipitating gentrification, which is associated with increases in property value and rents. Gentrification viewed in a positive light is a process of urban renewal, rejuvenating the area with new businesses and residential development. However, it has also gained notoriety as a process in which external forces squeeze long-term low-income and working-class residents out of their own neighborhoods. Increasing the property value of their own neighborhoods was not the intention of those who participated in building community gardens in the 1970s and 80s; they wished to make their neighborhood a safer, cleaner, and better place to live. The communal effort to clean up streets and neighborhoods certainly has contributed to making the areas more attractive to newcomers and businesses, even though, paradoxically, community gardens also symbolized resistance to encroaching development.

Community gardens are communally-managed land. It is open for the public to enjoy and join but, at the same time, kept behind a locked gate. The place represents a hybrid between public and private space. On the one hand, it is a community space kept away from commercial developers. On the other hand, community gardens often appear

private and secluded compared to city parks for the ways they are used and operated. The actual land status of land varies. While most of them started on city-owned lots, various efforts to save the gardens resulted in gardens acquiring various land statuses, as I mentioned in Chapter 2. Some gardens, like the East and the West Garden, became incorporated. Over 600 GreenThumb community gardens belong to the New York City Parks Department. They must act in compliance with some NYC park rules such as a minimum opening hour requirement, but day-to-day operations, decision-making, designing, and the use of the garden are determined by garden members. In a sense, they, private citizens, are entrusted with the maintenance of public space. Over 150 gardens became land trusts as the result of the New York Restoration Project and the Trust for Public Land purchasing the lots to save gardens. Staeheli et al (2002:203) point out that community gardens owned by land trusts face blurred boundaries between public and private space for serving public interests but being owned by "private entities." Interestingly, during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s that gave rise to the community garden movement the city also let some prominent public parks become privatized to save the city money. Privatization of the park shifts the meaning of the park as a public space. The city and the people are still exploring effective and long-lasting ways to maintain open green space in New York City, but hybridization of private and public space is already becoming a significant factor.

Global and Local Factors of Gentrification

Deterioration or gentrification of neighborhoods is the manifestation of changes happening within and beyond. In the early 1980s, Ida Susser (1982) and Sharon Zukin (1982) offered some of the earliest studies of the gentrification of New York City and its

relation to deindustrialization. Zukin (1982) examines the conversion of manufacturing space into loft apartments in the 1970s and the association of the space with art and artists. She argues that the conversion functioned as "a vehicle for deindustrializing local capital," which reshaped the nature of urban space to cater more to upper and middle-class populations (Zukin 1982:192). Susser (1982) points out in her study of a community of the poor working class of Greenpoint-Williamsburg in Brooklyn, New York during the mid 1970s, that high unemployment rates reflected a major shift in the city's economic structure from a manufacture-oriented to a corporate-centered one. The former, which provided many jobs to unskilled workers were replaced by the latter, which created jobs for middle-class, white-color workers. Saskia Sassen (2001) calls New York a "global city" to describe the interconnectedness of the city with other major cities under the global economy. She indicates that the connection can influence each city's work cultures, infrastructure, and gentrification processes, among other things. According to her, economic globalization is not only about the intensification of capital flow but also about the interconnectedness of global cities in terms of services and market operations.

Studying gentrification on the Lower East Side, Neil Smith claims that gentrification of the area is connected to "a series of wider global transformation" (1996:6). According to him, gentrification replicates a new global order which he views in the context of local and global class conflicts. Smith refers to the Lower East Side as the "new urban frontier." It is where the encroachment of international capital and a globalized workforce result in squeezing out resident working-class people, changing the characteristics of the neighborhood, and producing a rise in homelessness.

Lees (2003) sees gentrification as a continuous process. In her study of Brooklyn Heights in Brooklyn, New York City, she points out how the neighborhood has not only become gentrified but has gone through second and third waves of gentrification, attracting residents with higher incomes each time. Super gentrification turns an already upper-middle-class neighborhood into a more exclusive and expensive one. According to her, the phenomenon has been driven by individual wealth generated in Wall Street's global finance and corporate service industries (Lees 2003).

Some scholars argue that the city government in the past played a role in promoting gentrification in some areas by first letting the deterioration of a neighborhood run its course. Delmos J. Jones and Joan T. Turner (1989) understood that declining services to the Lower East Side in the 1970s was a part of an "unofficial policy of 'planned shrinkage'" to drive out lower-income communities to later attract more white-collar taxpayers to the area. Susser (1982) notes that such a practice was actually official city policy. According to her, many poor communities lost their neighborhoods due to the city's policy of urban development and its neglect of people in poor, struggling communities. Whether "planned" or the result of "unofficial policy," parts of the city, like the Lower East Side in Manhattan, were indeed deeply affected by budget cuts to public services including police, fire fighting, sanitation, and recreation (Schmelzkopf 1995). As a result, the area witnessed an increase in the number of abandoned properties and arson. Streets were dirty and vacant lots were filled with garbage. While the city lacked the means or the interest to clean up these empty lots that attracted garbage and drug users to the area, some people who lived there wanted to improve their neighborhood's environment and to make them safe. The emergence of the community

garden movement on the Lower East Side reflected both the poor condition of the neighborhood in the mid 1970s and people's wish to do something to change their neighborhood to counter the city's neglect. The city then had also encouraged people to participate in sharing the responsibilities to clean up their own neighborhoods (Susser 1982).

Clearly, urban renewal does not come solely from the investment from outside sources. Communities have contributed to improving their neighborhoods and beautifying them. The idea of community self-help was encouraged and promoted during the fiscal crisis, especially by the then Mayor, Abraham Beam. Volunteer-run community organizations were asked to take up various tasks for neighborhood services which the city had reduced due to budget cuts (Susser 1982:108). For example, Susser (1982) depicts in her ethnography that volunteers in Greenpoint-Williamburg, a low-income community back in the 1970s, formed a community group. Like many who volunteered for community gardens, the volunteer for the community group cleaned a rubbish-filled vacant lot in their neighborhood, hoping to eventually turn it into a children's park. In the end, however, the lot was auctioned off after the clean-up without any notification to the group regarding when the auction was happening. Instead of a park, the space became a parking lot, which it still is—a cement and eyesore in the middle of the block in 2009. The community group also worked to improve the reputation of the block by planning a street fair. The event was not a big success due to the low attendance and lack of any profit after the cost. The group dissolved after about a year. Susser (1982) attributes its short lifespan to poorly structured meetings, a discrepancy of power between volunteers from different classes and educational

backgrounds, and racial divisions in the neighborhood that prevented white volunteers from seeking support and advice from a nearby well-established black tenants' association. This example shows how people worked together to take action hoping to turn things around in their neighborhoods, but also how difficult it was to keep a community-based organization running in the long-term despite ambition and good intentions.

In New York City, neighborhood politics and community activism have always been important in shaping the city's development. In Corona and Elmhurst, Queens in New York City, communities composed of residents with diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, mobilized under a shared black identity to gain political leverage (Gregory 1998). While identity politics help people to unite, the wealth and power of a community can be even more effective in influencing the city's developmental planning, as seen in the mobilized opposition to the plan to expand LaGuardia Airport facilities, which included the building of an elevated light rail system to enhance access to the airport (Gregory 1998). Upper East Side activists collaborated with block and civic associations from Corona and East Elmhurst to oppose the plan. Initially, the Port Authority, which operates La Guardia Airport, planned to build a terminal on the Upper East Side for the elevated light rail system that runs through Queens to reach Manhattan. Opponents claimed the expansion would compromise the quality of life of the local community and cause environmental problems. The Port Authority argued that convenient access to the airport was necessary to improve the global competitiveness of the city.

Residents of the Upper East Side, the wealthiest neighborhood in New York City, effectively opposed the project, forming alliances with elites in the public and private

sector, hiring an attorney, and drawing media attentions. Queens activists, in comparison, did not have as many resources—time, money, and political power to shape the discourse surrounding the project. However, the project was significantly modified partly for reasons of cost, but also as a result of local activism in Queens, which forced the Port Authority to come up with a compromise. The effort by politically powerful Upper East Siders helped halt the plan to extend the light rail to Manhattan (Gregory 1998).

The community garden movement is unique in serving specific communities while simultaneously being a city-wide movement. Community gardens have been created in various locations throughout New York City, and people with different class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds have been involved as gardeners and activists. Their perceptions of gentrification vary depending on how gentrification has affected them. Some garden members in the East Garden and the West Garden were people who came to live in the location before and during the first wave of gentrification. That is, people moving into the area attracted to cheaper rent starting the mid 1970s. They are now witnessing an increase in property values and higher rent in their neighborhood as a new wave of gentrification reaches the area. The Upper West Side underwent gentrification in the 1980s, which intensified in the 2000s. The Lower East Side went through its second wave of gentrification starting in the mid 2000s. While grassroots activism for the community gardens spread, reaching across racial and socio-economic divisions within and across communities, community gardens today face a challenge to gain appreciation from old-timers and newcomers alike, whose perceptions toward the garden may differ depending on their views of the transformation of the neighborhood. Community

gardens continue to work to reach out to the people in the community by welcoming them to join and visit and by maintaining the space to create a hospital environment.

Community Gardens and Gentrification

While the existing literature on gentrification does not focus on the local dimensions of the phenomenon, local initiations clearly matter. The presence of a well-kept community garden can certainly contribute to gentrifying a neighborhood. The relationship between the community garden movement and gentrification is a complex one. On the one hand, community gardens can serve as precursors to gentrification. The presence of well-maintained open green space can make surrounding and nearby properties more attractive to potential residents. Many researchers have noted that urban deterioration is sometimes intentionally left alone to open a ground to build a new gentrified neighborhood (Jones and Turner 1989; Smith 1984; Susser 1982). Thus, community gardens created to ease the impact of deterioration may have been laying the path toward such a transition. On the other hand, the community garden can be seen as resistance to gentrification—resisting the encroachment of private capital to communally-held land.

Those people who were involved in starting a community garden know how it helped to turn around their neighborhood, transferring a garbage-filled lot into a little oasis. I had a chance to meet Olean, one of the founders of a garden in the Lower East Side before she passed away in 2005. In 1978, along with Liz Christi from the Council on the Environment, Olean started a garden to clean her block with drug problems. Newspaper articles from the late 1970s and the early 1980s (Brozan 2000; Williams

1995) and ethnography conducted in the area by Jagna Wojcicka Sharff (1997) depict widespread drug problems and related crimes in the Lower East Side. Statistics on crime in the 9th Precinct, in which Olean's garden is located, indicate that the area has seen a significant reduction in crime in all categories: murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, burglary, and grand larceny from 1990 to 2007. In 1990, reported crimes totaled 5,991; in 2007, the number was 1,523 a decrease of 74.58% since 1990 (Police Department, City of New York 2008).

I visited her garden on a rather warm December afternoon to chat with her. She closed the garden to the public during the winter but went there often to take care of things. On the day I visited her, she was sweeping fallen leaves from a couple of large trees. I asked her how the block was when she started the garden. "Honey, it was bad!" she said. Liz and Olean together, Olean told me, asked people on the street to come to help them to make the garden.

Not everybody in the neighborhood appreciated her effort: "It was too beautiful for drugs," she said. According to her, she felt that drug dealers did not want the garden there. However, she stood up to save her garden and to keep a safe place for kids to visit in the neighborhood. Standing in the garden in front of the mural, drawn by a homeless artist, which says "Love Your Neighbors as Thyself," she told me that she had wanted to encourage the residents to join the garden and gain an appreciation for their own community.

Community gardens in the Lower East Side beautified the neighborhood before gentrification reached the area. Yet gated gardens in a gentrifying neighborhood sometimes give the impression to some passerbys that gardens are for the exclusive use

of a few select people. Community gardens are open to the public for certain hours or when members are present. And membership is open to people who fulfill each garden's requirements. When no member is available to watch the garden, many gardens keep their gates closed. One day, as I walked past a big signature garden on the Lower East Side with a decorative fence that itself looks like an art object, I saw their sign was painted with graffiti which said, "This is yuppie catering." The garden is the one that usually stays open for much of the day. I wondered if the graffiti perhaps reflected misunderstandings toward community gardens and frustration over gentrification in the area. Such graffiti would be erased soon to avoid attracting more graffiti. Vandalism is not common in community gardens, especially since they take the precaution to lock the garden at night. Ironically, a garden that once mobilized many neighbors to join now faced criticism for being exclusive and selective. Once established, a garden tends to become stable as core members work hard to do the necessary tasks to maintain the space. Reaching out to the people, newcomers and old-timers alike, however, remains essential to promote the ideal of the community garden and to prevent further misunderstandings.

When I talked to passerbys or people hanging out in nearby parks to find out what non-gardeners thought of community gardens, many said they enjoyed having the gardens in their neighborhood. However, some people expressed concern about gardens appearing to be exclusive and private. Maria, who lives a couple of blocks down from a community garden told me that the garden was always locked. She said that she would understand if they have to lock out people who want to drink or who do drugs there. But she didn't understand why someone like her who just wanted to have a soda or read a book was locked out. She said, "Those gardens, I believe, are for the community. It

should be open to community then. But no. It's like private property. Just like a private house… I know many people who are upset about it… I hope the city closes these gardens. There are people who need apartments. The city should build housing there."

Community gardens are open to the people in the neighborhood to join, usually, for a membership fee of around $30, and a commitment to do volunteer work to maintain the garden. However, for someone like Maria, who wants to enjoy gardens as a visitor, finding gardens open when she wants to visit could be a hit or miss prospect, especially during the winter. The required open time for GreenThumb gardens, gardens belonging to city's urban garden program under New York Park & Recreation, is ten hours per week. The requirement can be fulfilled by keeping the garden open for five hours a day on Saturday and Sunday, for example. In that case, the garden would be closed to the public five days out of the week. There is no requirement during the winter months from November to March. Most community gardens remain open to visitors if members are present, but this seldom occurs during the winter. Questions of insurance liability and concerns about vandalism and theft lead people to lock the gates in the absence of members. As the neighborhood becomes more gentrified, the gate and fences of a community garden that were once deemed functional come to be viewed as exclusive and distancing. Without a good balance between its ambiguous role as public and private space, the community garden could face loss of support from the community. While some gardens stay open even without a gardener being present, including the West Garden, many community gardens do not see that as an option. Scheduling members to be in the garden at different time to insure long opening hours is impractical since many members work day jobs and most gardens close after dark. Moreover, such a

requirement undermines the sense of the freedom that key-holding members have to enjoy the garden as they wish.

Although Maria mentioned that the neighborhood needed housing more than gardens, the comment seemed to reflect her frustration with locked gardens. "I love gardens. We need to have some fresh air, too," Maria told me. I mentioned to her that some people had told me that gardens must be locked to protect them from thieves and vandalism. She responded, "I don't see nothing good there. What are they going to steal? Maybe a plant? Maybe roses? Give me a break. Maybe a very few people might do that. But all of us are locked out!" Although a member would have a key to the garden, Maria did not think people in the neighborhood should have to pay for their garden membership since community gardens were meant to be for the public.

"Locked gardens are an issue," a park-regular Jose pointed out. "Friends of mine are kind of upset that gardens are locked certain hours. They feel that people who are in charge of gardens are trying to keep out certain types of people. They don't want Blacks or Hispanics to come in. They (his friends) look at it as a racial issue." Nonetheless, he was not upset, unlike his friends, about gardens being locked especially at night. "I know, at night, we have drug addicts, etc. I know if you have a place like a community garden open, they (drug addicts, etc.) gonna do their things." He also pointed out that even parks close at night. Referring to Tompkins Square Park, he said "Long time ago in New York, parks stayed open all night. Then people were afraid to come into park. In most of the 80's, people wouldn't come in here. The place was overrun by drugs and stuff. It was really bad. Unfortunately, that's the city. If you leave it open, you are looking for trouble. That's how it is."

Anthony Marcus (2006) as well as Neil Smith (1996) depict the time of unrest in the Lower East Side in the 1980s, focusing specifically on a riot in the area surrounding Tompkins Square Park that took place on August 6, 1988. The clash between police and protesters, which Marcus refers to as "probably New York's largest and most destructive urban riot since the 1977 blackout" happened when the city's attempt to enforce the regulation to close down the park at 1:00am brought hundreds of people and protesters to the park and about 450 police in response (Marcus 2006:127). Key players in the resistance effort were said to be anarchists, squatters, and "troublemakers" from outside of the Lower East Side. Marcus argues that they had the support of many neighbors who viewed the homeless living in Tent City in the park as "Christ figures for a neighborhood bound together by housing panic and real estate fear" (Marcus 2006:129). Neil Smith argues that the clash of 1988 and the protest against the mass evictions of homeless people from Tompkins Square Park in 1991 were antigentrification struggles pursued by the largely neglected working class against "suburban expansion" in the "urban 'frontier'" (1996:6). Interestingly, in 1995, when hundreds of police in riot gear came to an area in the Lower East Side to remove squatters from tenements, there was no significant protest against the action. Marcus attributes the lack of action by former protesters to "a sense of defeat about being able to collectively shape the community" (2006:136).

I often strolled down Tompkins Square Park during my fieldwork in 2004-2007, which has a popular dog run and playground for small children as well as many benches and tall trees. In 2000s, there was no reminiscence of the riot or the tent town that once occupied the park. It was hard to imagine that the park once went through the period like

that. John Kifner describes Tompkins Square Park back in 1989 in his New York Times article as "a center of drug abuse, prostitution and crime," with "[r]agtag huts and tents, many of them surrounded by garbage or piles of broken grocery carts…." (1989:B1). The same article has the comment of then Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern who said, "The initial sympathy many had for the plight of the homeless was sorely tested by the reality of an occupied park" (Kifner 1989:B1). In another New York Times article in 1992, Betsy Gotbaum, Commissioner of New York City Parks and Recreation wrote that before the renovation of the park in 1991, it was no place for children or their parents to enjoy, as hundreds of people were living in the crime-ridden park in unsanitary conditions (Gotbaum 1992). As time goes by, neighbors have gotten used to the idea of a clean and orderly park. There was, in a sense, a change in perception toward the park, specifically Tompkins Square Park as a public space since the 1990s, after the city began enforcing the open hours between dawn and 1am. Tompkins Square Park became a much more family-friendly place and gets crowded on sunny weekends. Jose did not seem to mind at all that Tompkins Square Park has become a very different place from what it was in the 1980s as we kept talking in the park.

Listening to Jose, I got the feeling that many residents were ambivalent about the riot and the change that gentrification was bringing to the area. Jose was sympathetic to the cause of the riot, but he preferred what the park has become today. As we continued to chat about the community garden and the changing neighborhood, Jose expressed his feeling that developers were only concerned with high-income people, and Manhattan was no longer for people of the middle class. He told me that long–term minority residents, like himself, view gentrification of the area with skepticism. New restaurants

and stores were not so affordable to many longtime residents, and moreover, he claimed, these new places had an "attitude" in the treatment of minorities. He has friends who think community gardens are a part of gentrification pursued by "yuppie"-like newcomers who are not necessarily communicating with old neighbors, especially the minority neighbors.

The term yuppie refers to young, highly-paid professionals. According to the definition provided by the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2001), a yuppie "likes to show that they have a lot of money by buying expensive things and living in an expensive way." The use of the term yuppie by Jose and his friends seems to show that they distance themselves from the newcomers with the assumption that these newcomers are not only economically-better off, but also have some kind of attitudes toward long-term residents. Such feelings are not based on their communication with individual newcomers, but rather, are cultivated through the pressure they feel when the neighborhood becomes more expensive to live in as the result of gentrification. The Lower East Side has witnessed a diverse range of newcomers at different time periods.

Irish, Jewish, and Eastern European immigrants comprised the original population of the Lower East Side in the late 19th century. African-Americans and Puerto Ricans who moved to the area began witnessing "yuppification" or "yuppie invasion" by young professionals beginning in the 1980s (Marcus 2006:121). Those who moved there in the early 1980s are facing the frustration of rent hikes and yet another wave of gentrification by new and richer "yuppies" of the younger generation.

Since the Lower East Side has been going through a new wave gentrification and its demography is changing. Gentrification has been making the neighborhood more

upscale while the image of rubble-filled empty lots is becoming distant memory. Community gardens, without sustained efforts to continue reaching out to old-timers as well as newcomers can be seen as an exclusive location reflective of a new, gentrified neighborhood. Since community gardens rely on volunteers and community involvement for their existence, it is crucial that they reach out to all members of the broader community. Yet as Jose and Maria pointed out to me, the locked gate at a garden can keep out potential visitors.

The Symbolic Meaning of A Place of Nature

Physical space holds ideological and metaphorical meanings which convey social order and reinforce socioeconomic boundaries (Low and McDonogh 2001). Low (2000), in her study of the plaza in Cost Rica, argues that the homogenization of public space, which results in the exclusion of certain people, encourages and is encouraged by racial and class segregation. Open green space is a place for negotiation where the ideologies and societal ideals of public space are tested and conceptualized. Mitchell writes that public space conveys two different ideas. On the one hand, public space is an "unconstrained space" where anybody can join and take part. On the other hand, it is viewed as an orderly and controlled place for recreation for an "appropriate public" (1995:115). The conflicts in the ideologies of public space do not get resolved in the community gardens of New York City. Many gardens were created by demarcating space from deteriorating, abandoned city lots to restore some order and to revitalize the area. Unrestricted open access was not what was intended for the space from the beginning. I have not come across gardens without fences. The East Garden, for

example, did not have a fence around the garden in the beginning, but instead had one around each plot to protect plants from vandalism. Fences helped people to claim the area and pursue the greening of the neighborhood, creating a safe space that people could enjoy.

A place of nature in the city is not only functional but also symbolic. In the United States, the motivation behind the creation of national parks and major city parks was driven by people's appreciation for the scenic beauty of nature, as well as by the idea of nature's importance for people's morality and spirituality (Olwig 1995:385). In the city, nature is not a wilderness devoid of human interaction, but the product of human interaction. Francis and Hester argue that the garden and the surrounding landscape signify interrelatedness of "thoughts, spaces, activities, and symbols" (1990:2). The garden connects human activity with wild nature in what Francis and Hester calls "nature-under-control" (1990:2).

In the history of the landscaping of New York City, places of nature have held physical and ideological significances. Availability and access to open green space has in the past reflected the class and social hierarchy that existed among people in the city. In the mid 19th century, New York City was turning into an industrial city and going through rapid urbanization. Overcrowding and the chaotic conditions of the city were viewed by many as "the source of poor health, poor morals, and insanity" (Schuyler 1986:28). Many urban reformers believed that parks would mitigate poor conditions in the city by bringing a piece of the country into the city. Park pioneers like Frederick Law Olmstead, the main landscape architect both for Central Park in Manhattan and Prospect Park in Brooklyn, expected that the park would nurture the "democratic condition of

society" by providing a place where the poor come into contact with well-to-do people (Schuyler 1986:66). Central Park initially was mostly enjoyed by the wealthy, those who had access to a horse carriage to reach the location easily, though people of every class eventually joined in (Page 1999:189). Olmstead envisioned the park to be beneficial to all people, providing harmonizing effects to "the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city" (Schenker 2003:388). He considered that well-maintained nature in the city reflected the well-being of the societal condition (Page 1999:192).

Issues of race and class are an integral part of Central Park's history and the history of open green space in New York City in general. The land where Central Park is located was acquired by the city using the right of eminent domain. According to the Institute of Learning Technologies' (ILT) web-based project on the city's park history done by Teachers College, Columbia University, approximately 1600 residents were forced to relocate by the mid-1800s with insufficient compensation; the displaced had little voice in politics and economics. Regarded as "tramps," "squatters," and "thieves," living in "disease-ridden shantytowns," they had little voice in politics and economics (Institute of Learning Technologies, n.d.). The chief engineer of Central Park, General Egbert Ludovickus Viele was said to enter the area designated for the park with "cudgel and deodrizers in hand to protect himself" from unsanitary conditions and from the people he perceived as having "very little respect for the law" (Miller 2000:61).

Among the people living in the area that has become Central Park were African-Americans in Seneca Village. Seneca Village, started in 1825 was a community of African American landowners, which, later, was joined by Irish immigrants. The community was thriving with three churches and a school until it was removed for park

construction. It had become long-forgotten until recently (Wayman 2006). In their archaeological study of Seneca Village, Dina diZerega Wall et al. (2008) point out that one of the ways in which African-Americans coped with the discrimination they faced was by forming their own communities. According to Wall et al., Seneca village was "a comfortable, established community" of the "black middle class," more prosperous than another African-American community, Little Africa, located in today's Greenwich Village. Archaeologists have started looking at and excavating the site. The history of African-American New Yorkers buried under the Central Park is likely to be revealed in the future.

The idea of creating a large park with a naturalistic landscape open to public was innovative back then. The public in New York in the mid-1800s had access to "squares" and "commons," but small parks, according to the ILT project, were for residents of the surrounding area given a key to the park behind the gate. Community gardens, if they do not provide open hours and the chance for people to join, would end up being like an exclusive park back in the 19th century. Central Park has become one of the most well-known open green spaces within an urban area in the world. Its meaning and roles have shifted over time from the playground of the wealthy and solution to the sanitary problems of the city to a place of nature for everyone. A place of nature in the urban scape had gone through a transformation to be more open to public—to be the place for everyone. However, in recent years in New York City, there has been a shift in privatizing some open green spaces as a cost-cutting measure. I discuss this in the following section.

Private vs. Public—the Parks and the Gardens as Hybrid Space

The community garden is a communal way of maintaining land. Individuals put their own resources—time, energy, some money, and knowledge to maintain the communal land. In many gardens, the gardening space is divided into individual plots. It allows individuals to have freedom over what to plant and how to design the space with certain limitations. At the same time, it helps to mark who is responsible and accountable for the specific area in the garden to ensure the maintenance of the garden as a whole. Ultimately, however, the goal remains among people who maintain gardens to keep a treasured garden open to public view and open for volunteers to work there.

The hybridization of public and private space has become a model for New York City parks to save the cost to the city while improving the condition of the park. By using the term private and privatization, I do not mean that the land of the parks I discuss here has been privatized. Rather, a part of the management and funding sources have become privatized to supplement and ease the city's burden to maintain the green space. The Central Park Conservancy, a private, non-profit organization established in 1980, for instance, has been in charge of caring for the park and generating 85% of the $25 million annual operational cost of Central Park (Central Park Conservancy, n.d.). The money comes from private sources such as individual donors, foundations, and corporations. The program is largely credited with restoring Central Park from its wretched condition in the mid-1970s to what it is today—a well-kept green space with renovated infrastructures that attract millions of people every year (Martin 1997). Semi-privatization of the operation of Central Park has also had the interesting effect of increasing public participation. Central Park Conservancy has made the maintenance of

the park more of a public communal activity. It offers various programs that encourage people's participation in maintaining the park.

Partial privatization of parks' funding, however, has its critics and problems. While some prominent city parks, such as Central Park, Bryant Park, and Union Square Park attract donors, many other parks located throughout the city and in need of repairs, improvements, and maintenance do not share the spotlight and are not likely to attract big-time donors. Hartcollis of New York Times (2005) points out that the city's Parks Department has been cutting down on both personnel and budget over the last 15 years while privatization of some parks has saved the department money. If the city relies on or expects private intervention in park management, the further cut in the budget may hurt all parks. Acknowledging the point that not all parks evoke the passion of philanthropists, Michael Seth Benn (2006) argues for a different type of management for city parks; one that is based on "free-market environmentalism." This assumes that market mechanisms such as incentives and fees work better in maintaining and protecting green space than bureaucratic decisions and regulations. He suggests that the operation of parks should be entrusted to entrepreneurs who will be "*willing* to operate parks in exchange for licenses and the right to collect use fees" [emphasis in the original] (Benn 2006:228).

The problems with Benn's argument is that, first, there is no guarantee that parks that cannot attract philanthropist intervention would attract private entrepreneurs to invest in the business of running the park. Second, market incentives only work as long as the operation is deemed profitable. Parks are not the kind of assets that people of the city can afford to lose. Creating a dependency on private money in operating parks may put them

in danger when times get hard for the entrepreneurs. And lastly, charging fees for people to use city parks can compromise their access to open green space. Lack of funding for city parks is a problem and could be even more so as the city faces budget cuts as a result of the crisis in the Wall Street in September 2008. There is certainly a need to keep the discussion alive for the importance of open green space for the city and innovative ways to maintain them.

The concepts of communal land management and privatization are intertwined in the maintaining of the open green space in New York City. What does entrusting park funding and management to private sources mean to the public and democratic nature of open green space? Bryant Park, located along 42nd Street between Fifth Avenue and Avenue of the Americas, is financed solely by private money and is run by the Bryant Park Corporation, a not-for-profit, private management company, with help from the area's businesses. Privatizing the operation of the park helped it to transform itself in the 1990s to become a popular park where many people came to enjoy lunch outside—quite a change compared to the park's severely deteriorated condition in the late 1970s when people concerned with their safety avoided walking through it. The excellent maintenance and high attendance has led to the reduction in crime rates. Bryant Park Corporation states in its mission statement that one of its goals is to "help prevent crime and disorder in the park by attracting thousands of patrons, at all hours, thus fostering a safe environment (Bryant Park Corporation 2007). Full privatization has given greater autonomy and policymaking power to the Bryant Park group over what supposed to be a public space (See Martin 1997).

Setha M. Low writes, "During the past twenty years, privatization of urban public space has accelerated through the closing, redesign, and policing of public parks and plazas" (2008:88). Just as the community garden is a hybrid of public and private space, some public parks are also becoming hybridized. How far would the trend continue and what would be the long-term consequences? On the one hand, privatization has helped revitalize some of the major parks in New York City when the city could not afford to do so. On the other hand, as I pointed out above, there are concerns that the model of privatization may not work for much less prominent parks or parks located in poorer neighborhoods with fewer potential donors. And there is always the question of what is the goal and purpose of public space and whether that can be fulfilled through privatization. In the twentieth century, the idea emerged that everyone should be entitled access to open green space. There is still no one answer as to what is the best way to ensure this and to maintain such spaces, but, at the very least, community gardens help increase the number and diversify the types of open green space available to city residents.

Community Gardens in a Global City

A place of nature in the city once symbolized the ideal of rural beauty away from the ill-ridden image of the urbanized city. Open green space is no longer viewed as a luxury but as a necessary amenity for the city, both environmentally and socially. Community gardens are important in increasing accessible open green space per capita in the city. They beautify streets and neighborhoods. While gentrification in large part is driven by global finance and the economy, communities' effort to beautify their

neighborhoods by converting abandoned lots into community gardens seem to make an area more susceptible to gentrification, whether it is desired or not. The source of gentrification is not only global but also local. The dynamics of gentrification are often contradictory. The precursor to change may benefit from the increase in property value and in business potential. The old-timers and long-term residents often face the pressure to pay higher rents and the sense of loss for a neighborhood that was once so familiar to them. When the next wave of gentrification comes around, then new residents who came to the area during an earlier period of gentrification could feel the pinch of increased prices of everything around them. People generally welcome safer, cleaner neighborhoods, a condition that seems to accompany gentrification, but often, along with it comes a loss of charm and personality of the neighborhood, as well as a loss of affordable housing. Community gardens, once the symbol of a struggling neighborhood and resistance of people against urban decay, may be viewed as an attraction of a gentrified neighborhood. Community garden members can keep the community garden a communal place appreciated by people of the community at large when they continue their efforts to keep the gate open as often as they can to attract more people.

Community gardens are a hybrid of public and private space in which volunteers holding individual plots make communal efforts to maintain the open green space for the public. The community garden has become a model for creating and maintaining open green space at minimal cost to the city. Within the past two decades, some major parks in the city have gone through different degrees of privatization, commissioned to an organization which raises the operational cost of the park either partially or entirely through donations. These parks have improved dramatically and are attracting more

visitors. At the same time, there is a concern that the public nature of the park is eroding as specific organizations gain more control and power over how to run and what is allowed in the public space.

New York City is global and is interconnected to other big financial cities like Tokyo and London (Sassen 2001). Shifts in global finance could threaten existing community gardens with rapid gentrification, but at the same time, the interconnectedness also means that these cities influence each other in many other ways besides finance. As many parts of the world are rapidly urbanizing, New York City's citizen-led, community-maintained way of creating and keeping open green space in the form of the community garden might inspire other cities to explore a similar option. Community gardens are an intriguing common space with its hybrid identity—neither strictly private nor strictly public. The place is also a hybrid in the sense that it is located at the intersection of nature and the city. Finding a way to green as much space as possible is one of the practical ways to seek betterment of the environment in the city and to let people stay in touch with nature. The history of the community garden in the city suggests that a bottom-up approach to create a garden by flexible volunteers has worked well in cultivating sporadic patches of green space throughout the city.

Chapter 4

Keep the Flowers Blooming: The Rise and Fall of Gardens

In New York City, there are many gardens with different characteristics. They all contribute to the greening of the city and community building in their own way. Most gardens share similar, origins in terms of neighborhood conditions and the circumstances that motivated people to start gardens: an abandoned lot filled with garbage and a person or a few people who wanted to change it. At the same time, there are as many stories as there are gardens about how and why a garden was created and how it grew or diminished over time. In my fieldwork, I became an active member of the East and the West Garden to learn about the everyday activities and the internal politics of community garden to understand from within how the community-based environmental movement operates. These two gardens are both examples of well-established gardens which are enjoying the longevity and have actively participating members. Community gardens in New York City are diverse with various goals and interests. I talked with people who were involved with other gardens besides my two main fieldwork sites. Some people I talked to had participated in creating a garden that was later demolished or had been a part of a garden that suffered from internal conflicts. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the support is available for the community garden from various organizations. Nonetheless, not all community gardens last. Some people were attracted to the garden as a social space much more than to gardening itself. In this chapter, I look at the diversity among community gardens, and what can undermine efforts to maintain the community gardens.

The groups of people volunteering to run and maintain community gardens illustrate one of the many of the ways civil society has made a difference in the city's environment. This chapter also looks at what motivates individuals or discourages them from volunteering in a garden, especially focusing on conflicts of interest. I came across some garden members who were once avid volunteers but decided to no longer participate in the garden group. Understanding group dynamics is important in studying any voluntary group. Individuals' narratives about joining or quitting a garden provide a glimpse of some aspects of these group dynamics.

Multi-purpose Use of Community Gardens

Community gardens are not merely open green space, but also a place for the neighborhood residents to gather and nurture their sense of community. Indeed, almost all community gardens I have come across during my research held open events, many of them using the garden setting to increase people's appreciation of nature as well as to attract people to work in the garden. Some gardens have a performance space or a weekly non-gardening program. While some events in community gardens are fundraisers, many others are free and open to public. Events include poetry readings (6th & B Garden), craft workshops (6th & B Garden), weekly Tai Chi and Yoga lessons during summer (Dias Y Flores, 6th & B Garden), live music performances (6th & B Garden), movie screenings, educational programs, and numerous BBQ parties and picnics. Notices for the events are usually posted in a newsletter or flyers that many well-established gardens post on a bulletin board near the gate. Many garden events are quite small scale due to limitations of space and budget. They fit the characteristics of typical

gardens which tend to be an intimate space known to those who live in the vicinity but not so much to those who live outside of the area.

As was the case for the West Garden, however, some gardens offer events that attract bigger crowds. One of the bigger in-garden events I have attended besides the ones at the West Garden was the annual summer solstice block party in the Clinton Community Garden established in 1978 in Hell's Kitchen, an area in Manhattan. Although this garden has a membership rule that only those who live in the close vicinity can join, the party itself is open to everyone. The event is fun and informative and looked more like a small street fair. A band played music on a stage created on the sealed-off street right outside of the garden; food and garden t-shirts were sold on balloon decorated tables; and children were offered face painting and amulets made of herbs harvested in the garden. The brochure handed out at a table informed the guests about the beginning of the garden. The narrative claims that in an abandoned lot, a tomato plant somehow began growing on its own, and people who had spotted it were inspired to start a garden there (Clinton Community Garden). Some garden-related goods were sold such as t-shirts and tote bags. The tote bag on display featured a picture of a tree with the words: "Green Thumb Gardening—The Roots of Strong Community." Inside the garden, small pots of herbs which had been grown there were given away. To celebrate summer solstice, a big tin bucket filled with water and colorful rose petals decorated the place and sweet-smelling incense was burned. This event not only reminded the community and informed newcomers to the area about the garden and its history, but it also celebrated the city's natural resources.

Such free events allowed people from different classes and backgrounds to meet and interact with one another. Robert N. Bellah et al. claims, "But residential segregation is a fact of life in contemporary America" (1996:xxiv). Vast differences in average income as well as the racial and ethnic makeup among neighborhoods in New York City may support such claims. Bellah et al. also point out that, "voluntary activity tends to correlate with income, education, and occupation" (1996:xxiv). Given these points, Bellah et al. argue that "a small-scale and voluntaristic understanding of community" (1996:xxiii) would not offer the solution to what they call "the American crisis" (1996:xxxii)—structural inequality and moral deterioration enhanced by the culture of individualism. Political scientist Jack Turner (2008) similarly argues that the American ideology of individualism disguises structural inequalities along gender and racial lines in the United States. Bellah et al. call for transformation toward "a new level of social integration" (1996:286). They suggest that a prescription for American malaise is to get back in touch with a life rooted in the biblical and republican tradition. However, their argument is based on the assumptions that, one, the people of this diverse nation share or want to share the biblical tradition, and, two, that reinforcing it somehow brings progressive change. In my view, the challenges of social integration in the United States are more a matter of political and economic inequality than declining moral traditions. My observation at community gardens informs me, at least, that increasing opportunities for social interaction among people with diverse backgrounds may be a small, but important step toward making society more integrated.

At community gardens, individualism does not undermine or contradict collective activity. People often join gardens out of self-interest; gardening is a leisure activity for

individuals. People who started community gardens were individualistic and independent thinkers with the initiative to enact change through action. As I have mentioned elsewhere, however, the founders of the community gardens were not solely motivated by selfish interests and a desire to gardening space. Rather, they were envisioning the betterment of their street and block by independently pursuing a sometimes lonesome act of planting. Eventually, more and more people volunteer, thus transforming gardening into a collective act to create a space of nature for the community.

Community gardens are not a vehicle through which to eliminate the structural inequalities people face in their day-to-day lives, yet gardening opportunities often appeal to people across race, ethnicity, gender, and class divisions, and encourage interaction among them. The community garden, in turn, helps nurture a sense of a community that goes beyond class and racial boundaries. An inviting beautiful garden, moreover, attracts people from different neighborhoods or even visitors and tourists from outside of the city who happen to roam through the neighborhood. Many gardeners seem to greet visitors who come into the space, perhaps because a garden is like a backyard to gardeners. Different activities and events catering to the interests and needs of the community make community gardens an important and integral part of a community, much more interactive and personal than the outdoor public spaces provided by corporate buildings throughout the city. The intimate landscape of the community garden such as the narrow passageway, as well as gardeners' acknowledgement of you entering the space, often creates the opportunity to exchange greetings or start a small conversation. Corporate public space, in contrast, which usually includes benches or chairs and tables, are great for people who are looking for a place to sit down to eat lunch. People who are entering

such public spaces usually are not in the mindset to communicate with strangers, and the design of such spaces usually allows for strangers sitting in close proximity to comfortably ignore one another.

Events and programs are supplemental in most gardens; in some gardens, however, these attractions are equal to gardening in their importance. Some gardens, for instance, have theatrical or performance stages built into them reflecting some garden founders' vision of the garden as a multi-function gathering place from its inception. A relatively new garden in the Lower East Side is, the Film Garden, started in the year 2000 with the aim of providing performances and film screenings on regular basis. Tony, a bilingual speaker of Spanish and English who has lived in the Lower East Side all his life, happened to know people who were involved in starting the garden, and became one of the founding members himself. The Lower East Side in the year 2000 was no longer an area of abandoned lots and buildings. Still, there were some remaining empty lots. This one was small and probably not attractive to developers. Building a stage was the first thing Tony and his friends did after removing the debris and garbage from the empty lot.

> Tony: We built a stage, but the foundation of the stage is built out of tiles, cork tiles. So we went to all the tile shops in the community and we asked them if they could donate their tiles. And the storage bin was a refrigerator. Then we broke up some stones and we laid the paths we also put on some bricks and we led another path. We also bought about twenty chairs because we had this idea of showing films during the night. So eventually we got a projector, and we started showing films every Monday night—mostly independent films which are great. This is basically ideas for certain members that they wanted to do something for the community. And we also discussed about opening up the garden to the community and to the people in the neighborhood. They can come and they can join in and they can do either birthday party or … they can use the space for some sort of event….. We started the garden so we could have events and we could show films and so we gonna have place to go to and to sit down and to gather around people, to meet people and to plant and to perform.

Tony and his friends, all six of them, worked on carpentry. Having two female architects in the team made the process of designing and building easier. Tony viewed the garden as a great setting for art-related activities; he said, "During the night when you have a projector running, you can see plants, you can see butterflies… It's much nicer than being in a theater because it's outdoors and you are in the garden."

The Film garden was off to a good start with many attractive events and communal planting—the planting area was not divided into individual plots but instead, people could plant anywhere. Tony and friends planted some trees like peach and cherry to make the garden attractive yet easy to maintain. The list of events at the Film Garden expanded beyond showing films to include poetry readings, music performances, and theatrical performances by local youth groups. These events are well-attended, many of them by artists, poets, and playwrights themselves from the Lower East Side. The Film Garden was built with an ambition to create a place for community with the dual purposes of nature and art.

Education is at the center of the interest at Elisa Garden in the South Bronx. The South Bronx in the 1970s experienced a large scale dislocation of its residents, around a quarter million of them, due to "housing abandonment, arson and disinvestment" (Moritz 1998). The depopulation resulted in further deterioration of infrastructure and mounting problems (Breslin 1995). The area began changing for the better in the mid 1980s with the efforts of grassroots, community-based organizations (Breslin 1995) and city-led efforts to revitalize the area including a housing innovation program (New York Times 1995a). Mrs. Smith, a retired educator and crochet artist, has recently become a volunteer at Elisa Garden in South Bronx. I first met her with her husband, both of

whom were wearing colorful hats she had made at the Summer Solstice celebration at the Clinton Community Garden. (I refer to her by her last name here because she did not like to be addressed by her first name. She felt it was proper for adults to be addressed by their last name.)

Mrs. Smith was not much of a gardener. Her husband was. Her main interest in joining the garden was to teach math and English to children and adults in a hut adjacent to the garden. "As an educator, my dream is to see that children have a place to go off the streets where they don't get into a trouble," said Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith recently "discovered" the garden herself after living near there for ten years. She explained that she had assumed that it was a private garden until one day she thought of offering some workshops on the art of crochet for people in the community at the garden site. She worried that there were not sufficient places for children to find after-school activities in the neighborhood.

For Mrs. Smith, joining the community garden was a great way to serve her community, and her interest in serving her community brought her to the garden. She took much pride in her work helping others. When I asked her about gardening, she laughed and told me:

> Mrs. Smith: I am a city girl, although I was born in Kentucky, but I am a city girl myself. Only thing I do really is to water the garden, because I don't know what to do, you know. I am used to being on concrete all my life.

Besides volunteering to tutor, Mrs. Smith also enjoyed preparing BBQ with fellow garden members during the summer. Her own children were grown up, and with her husband, she was interested in finding a meaningful way to spend their retirement. She also told me that she was attending a college in the Bronx for continuing education.

As Mrs. Smith had hoped, Elisa Garden was growing to be a community outlet. People began reaching out to help children study there in a hut after school. Parents of children often gathered to chat or simply to appreciate the plants. Mrs. Smith's neighborhood in the South Bronx has more open space than most Manhattan neighborhoods. Right in front of the garden was an open area left undeveloped and covered with overgrown weeds. Elisa Garden is an example of how unused land can become a resource for the community.

Both Film Garden and Elisa Garden fulfilled dual functions. By promoting the garden as a performance/film space or as an educational/tutoring space, both gardens were likely to attract participants who might not be interested in gardening or who did not have time to volunteer.

Community gardens have served as ideal spaces for educating city children about nature. The small but well-used community space attached to the Elisa Garden in which children could obtain academic assistance was unique. Many community gardens offer educational and fun activities as a way to inform people of the garden and its potential, and ultimately to attract people to join.

The Time of the Community Garden Movement—Gardeners' Perspective

The Flower Garden

The Flower Garden is located one street block away from the East Garden on the Lower East Side and also started in the late 1970s like the East Garden—the empty lot was looking and becoming unsafe, and some people decided to change it. Dana is one of the founding members of Flower Garden. She is a cheerful and talkative woman in her

60s. She works in an office but also as a ceramic and glassblowing artist. These objects are popular items at garden fundraising events. Dana, a long-term resident of the Lower East Side, moved into her current apartment near the East Garden and the Flower Garden back in 1972. Flower Garden has been an integrated part of her life in the city, where she met her ex-husband, visited with her child, and cultivated friendships.

In my interview, she attributed the beginning of the community garden movement in New York City to the Liz Christy Bowery Houston Community garden.

> Dana: She [Liz Christy] was the one who started the first community garden that we know of on public land and her group was really the catalyst for the city saying this [community gardens] was the resource,… And they can transform a neighborhood. I don't think they knew how largely the garden can transform a neighborhood, but you know, the community efforts can transform a neighborhood

Many old-time core people in community gardens knew the story of how Liz Christy and her garden marked the beginning of the community garden movement in the city. However, it also appeared to me that people knew the story because they have heard it before. It is also written in many places where the community garden movement in New York City is discussed (e.g. see the website of Liz Christy Community Garden, n.d.; Loggins 2008). When I asked Dana specifically whether she knew about the Liz Christy Bowery Garden and whether it inspired her, she answered that she learned the story of Liz Christy and her garden after she got involved with her own community garden.

Dana attributed the reasons she got involved in her community garden to several factors. Living in an apartment a couple of blocks away from the East Garden, she witnessed the formation of the East Garden. Dana, however, did not think of joining the group of people working together to build the East Garden. "I moved to New York City to be anonymous," Dana, who grew up in a rural area on a farm, said. At the same time,

her frustration as a political activist against the war in Vietnam, without the power to affect the Johnson administration's policy on the war, made her think of how she could better her immediate environment instead. Searching for a way to do so, she joined the food co-op movement, which she remembers as being wide spread in the Lower East Side in the early 1970s. Living near the East Garden, Dana could see yet another empty lot, this one right outside her own window. Being involved with a food co-op and having a background in farming, she began contemplating the idea of planting something in the lot which seemed empty.

Dana had learned that the Street Block Association on her block had organized to clean up the lot, and had built some of the plots and fence to start a community garden only to lose the momentum when a woman, the leading force for the garden construction, developed allergies and could not work in the garden anymore. The lot remained fairly unused after the initial clean up until Dana began working in the garden and got to know three women, two of them elderly, one of them with limited English, who were also working in the garden. Seeing Dana in the garden, her neighbor who was involved with the East Garden told Dana that she should contact the Green Thumb, an urban gardening program in New York City, if she wanted to start a community garden.

Dana followed the advice, went there and learned that she could sign a lease for a lot for one dollar a year with the city with some basic agreements such as prohibiting people from living in the space or using it for parking. She signed this first lease for the garden in 1981—a time when the city did not have an antagonistic relationship with community gardens. On the contrary, leasing unused land for a community garden was a win-win situation for both the city and people of the community wanting to garden; the

city got people of the community to do major clean up of the lot and help the area to stay safer and cleaner while people got the land to cultivate. Many trees in the Flower Garden were actually donated by the city when the garden started. All Dana had to do was to borrow a truck and pick them up from a nursery in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

When Dana and her friends started cleaning up the lot to make the garden in the spring of 1981, she counted the number of hypodermic needles. She found fifty eight of them along with many pieces of broken glass. The Lower East Side had problems with drugs and was not the safest neighborhood to live in at the time. Dana recalled an old lady who later became a garden regular initially did not believe that Dana's efforts to put in trees and plant shrubs would make any difference to the community. The lady said to Dana, "What are you doing that for?! Nobody cares about this! Why would you bother to plant trees?" Community gardens were still relatively new ideas then. In five years, the lady and her best friends made the garden a place where they always met and hung out. Dana began building connections with people as they began connecting with the garden. People who lived on other blocks made a detour to pass by the street of Dana's community garden telling Dana, "We make a point of walking down the street to see how your garden is doing."

Like the East Garden, the Flower Garden is thriving to this day. Unlike the East Garden, however, the Flower Garden is not incorporated. It is still on lease from the city. During the Giuliani administration, the garden faced the possibility of being auctioned off to the highest bidder for the construction of a high-rise luxury apartment house. In a successful effort to save the garden, Dana worked with the community board, arguing for the importance of the garden to the community in speeches and in a booklet she and other

garden members prepared. The booklet contained the history of the garden, the list of gardeners, and pictures that showed how the garden has turned around the ugly lot. Along with many other gardens, the Flower Garden became part of the city parks, protected by the city's agreement in 2002 to save community gardens, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Dana credited the city for allowing the garden to stay despite the lease agreement which clearly stated that the land was to be given back to the city. She said, "I would say the city didn't realize that they had a problem with people not willing to give up." She signed a one-year lease agreement, and the city lent two city lots for the garden for a dollar. She continued that while she understood the contract, once she saw all trees she planted and how much of an impact the garden was having on children in the neighborhood while the garden itself was becoming a vibrant community, she could not see the place as anything but a garden.

Dana pointed out that one of many benefits of having Flower Garden at the location was that her daughter, who went to a public elementary school in the area had the chance to visit the garden with her class every year. Community gardens offer hands-on learning opportunities for New York City children to explore nature in the vicinity of their school and home. A gardener whose child is a student at a school nearby can ask fellow gardeners if a group of students from the school could come over to the garden. A teacher who happens to be a gardener may decide to bring her students to the garden for extracurricular activities. Dana recalled the visits her daughter and fellow classmates made.

> Dana: I would have very structured things for them to do, because I would have ten to twelve of these kids in the place. So, they all did things. When it was time for everybody to dig, they all dug, and when it was time for everybody to plant, they all planted. When it was water, they all watered. And

> when it was time for everybody to look for insects to take back to classroom to entertain themselves, they looked for insects. And I would say that insects for that age group and that group of kids… Insects were the exciting part. Who would've thought? But the learning power, the educational possibilities for the community garden have been amazing.

Her daughter has since grown up and no longer lives in the area. The tradition of using the Flower Garden as a place of learning, however, has continued. One day, I saw it myself when I encountered twelve students and a teacher from a nearby school there. They came into the garden to look at insects, to water plants, and to learn a bit about horticulture. A few volunteers from the garden were there to answer the children's questions and gave them instructions for activities.

Dana's story about the Flower Garden suggests that once a community garden is established, gardeners and visitors become emotionally attached to the land, and it becomes a defining element in the neighborhood's landscape. Garden members, as well as visitors who enjoy the garden have protested and written petitions to save gardens. Some succeeded. Some gardens still disappeared. The Flower Garden has managed to overcome the threat of demolition with the efforts made by Dana and fellow gardeners. Dana recalled how important it was for her daughter and some of the children in the neighborhood to have a place to explore nature. Looking at the neighborhood today as it is becoming more and more gentrified, it does not seem that unusual that the garden is visited by children from school. The area has changed a lot since the garden started, and the garden itself has been a part of the change.

A Garden that Had a Limited Run

Nancy and Charlie, a married couple who are both highly educated and socially conscious, started a community garden in Chelsea in 1975. As the garden was built on a city-leased lot, it could be taken away anytime the city needed the lot again. The garden lasted only four years, after which the city took back the lot to expand a library building next door. Despite the limited life-span, Nancy and Charlie felt that it left a mark in the community and helped the neighborhood improve. Like the Elisa Garden in South Bronx, the garden Nancy and Charlie helped to build had dual functions. The garden made the next door library more attractive at a time when the city could not allocate many funds for library activities due to the fiscal crisis.

Nancy and Charlie moved into Chelsea in the 1970s when the city developed an apartment complex for middle class people. Chelsea today is a charming neighborhood of mixed commercial and residential space. The area also is a happening place with many art galleries and night clubs. In the 1970s, however, the area was struggling under the city's fiscal crisis like many other parts of the city.

There was a garbage-filled lot next to the library building near Nancy and Charlie's apartment complex. The city owned the lot and had a plan to build the extension for the library. However the lack of funding during the fiscal crisis had kept the lot empty and unattended for several years. Nancy, walking past the lot everyday before she turned it into a garden explained that she felt "we got to do something about the lot" because "it was such an eyesore and had been for three, four or more years…. All we wanted to do was to turn it into some place that looked better."

The lot became a garden when Nancy met Lisa, a city employee, who also wanted to do something about the eyesore lot and shared the idea of turning it into a garden. Lisa was knowledgeable about the city's policy, and told Nancy that she needed to find a sponsor for the lot. According to Lisa, the city was not going to give the control of the lot to individuals.

> Charlie: I asked why a sponsor was needed. And they said they were afraid that private people will take over the lot and use it as a parking lot. They wanted a recognized church or charity group sponsor it, then they would give it. Otherwise, they would not give it to individuals. This was in the mid-1970s. It had to be sponsored by a recognized group, so it would not be used for commercial purposes.

Nancy and Charlie found a priest from a Lutheran church who agreed to become a sponsor. The city gave him control over the lot for a dollar a year, and he handed the lot to them. Nancy, Charlie, and Lisa began working on turning the lot into the garden. They soon found other people interested in joining the effort. Charlie said, "People kept coming on from the neighborhood. And not only people from the neighborhood. We had bunch of methadone clinics for treating heroin addiction here. We had a couple of people who were on methadone. They came over to work in the garden." "It was quite lovely," Charlie says implying that people got along pretty well in the garden. Charlie remembered that many people in the neighborhood objected to methadone clinics, which they believed brought heroin addicts to the area. It was remarkable to Charlie that ex-heroin addicts and people in the neighborhood worked together.

Nancy and Charlie told me that they encountered the kindness of many strangers who helped in their efforts to make the garden. For example, they got major help to clean up the lot from construction crews who happened to be working on the same street as the lot. The foreman spotted Nancy's and Charlie's efforts, came over and offered to help,

saying he and his crew had just finished their work for the day. With their help the cleaning was finished rapidly and the lot was ready for gardening.

Nancy envisioned the garden as the place that helped out the library next door. Working with the librarian, she came up with various garden events to bring in people both to the garden and to the library.

> Nancy: We advertised around the neighborhood that we will have scary story hour for Halloween. And every child who came to the story hour would get a pumpkin. This was in the library. So, this was also a way to bring children to the library. So they had place all dark, and we had it sort of spooky (library). Then, they came downstairs, came through the garden. Then they each got pumpkin and apples. At a Christmas time, we had Christmas story in the library. We had Christmas tree lit up. We did that for four years we had the garden.

The garden attracted participants who cared about the library and well-being of children in the neighborhood. Many of them were retired women and some of them had been teachers. One of the concerns Nancy and Charlie had at the time was that the public school their daughter attended had no librarians. The city could not afford the budget. Some people who worked in the lot decided to volunteer to keep the school library open for a year and a half until it got new librarians. Nancy looked back and said that many participants in the garden actually were more interested in the well-being of the library than they were interested in getting an individual plot. So they had a couple of fundraising events not just for the garden itself but for the library next door as well.

Charlie pointed out that what attracted people to the garden was not really the desire to cultivate plots, though people did that too. People in the neighborhood back then, as Charlie recalled, had the feeling that they could not rely on the city to improve their neighborhood.

Charlie: You must remember that in the 70s, it was the time of relative deprivation in the city. The city almost went under. It was the time when there was less and less here that was nice. You couldn't turn to the city to make it nicer. You had to do it yourself. Not only city, but everything… Most people thought that NYC was going to disappear.

Like Dana, Nancy and Charlie were involved with a food coop prior to starting a community garden. According to them, their involvement with a food co-op was mostly out of necessity as they could not easily get fresh food in their own neighborhood back then.

Me: Why was that? Were people not interested in fresh food?

Charlie: People were leaving (the neighborhood). Stores were vacant.

Nancy: This whole area, just above us…this was all slum, really.

Chelsea's transformation from a low-income neighborhood to a high-income one started in the 1960s. Two short New York Times articles from 1972 (New York Times 1972a; New York Times 1972b) point out that over 4,000 low-income housing units, which translates to housing for 10,000 low-income people, were lost to luxury housing in the 1960s. When Charlie and Nancy moved in, the area was still going through the transformation.

Growing food was not really the main interest at the garden since it received limited light, rendering it mostly insufficient for growing vegetables or many flowering plants. In the part of the garden where very little could grow, Charlie did lots of landscaping. With the help of people in the neighborhood, he built paths leading visitors from the shady front toward the flower-blossoming back. In the shady part, they built something like a Japanese Zen stone garden with white pebbles and beautiful stone.

Nancy and Charlie knew that the community garden they had built with fellow gardeners on a city-leased lot could be taken away once the halted construction project was resumed. The day came abruptly after four flourishing years for the garden. Charlie recalled that a notice came from the city on a Friday that on Monday the place was going to be chained and construction on the site would begin. Charlie and Nancy along with fellow garden members scrambled to save as many plants as they could by pulling plants out for relocation. Instead of remembering the end with the bitterness, however, Charlie mentions how the garden which began with the help of construction crews lending a hand ended with construction workers helping them in their efforts to dig out plants to save.

> Charlie: They [construction people] saw us still working there, desperately trying to pull last of the plants out. They had to move equipment onto the site. And they took this huge earth mover and move it around the plants that were still there so we can get out the plant.
>
> Nancy: Like threading a needle,
>
> Charlie: They did everything they could not to damage the plants. They were very nice.

I asked Nancy and Charlie how they would explain such unexpected kindness from strangers. Charlie said that for the duration of their participation in the community garden, "Lots of things like that happened. You will be surprised." Nancy and Charlie believe that an act of kindness leads to more acts of kindness, pointing out to me that community gardens contribute to greening of the city in more than one way. They argue that having a community garden helps people to think about community and how to make place greener. When they had their community garden, volunteers of the garden also got involved in getting trees planted on the street. People who liked the community garden became active in starting other community projects to make the surrounding area greener.

As Charlie puts it, “When it’s green and it’s lovely, you walk and look at it. You want to walk and look at it. It makes you feel nice. It puts a smile on your face.”

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the city’s plan to shutdown many community gardens in the late 1990s to the early 2000s drew great protest. The garden Nancy and Charlie worked on ended without fanfare or bitterness. There are several reasons why that was the case for this particular garden. First, the garden, from its inception, had dual functions: as a garden and as an unofficial attachment to the neighboring library. Many of its activities aimed at encouraging people to enjoy both the library and the garden. Thus it is understandable that while people would miss the garden, they would also welcome the land being used to improve the library, as had been planned before the garden started. Second, the end came suddenly and was unannounced, so there was not much time for people to react to the news. Moreover, the key people of the garden, Nancy and Charlie, understood that the area needed a good library as much as it needed the garden. Finally, unlike the time when the Giuliani administration announced the auctioning off of many garden lots, there was no momentum within the community garden movement to unite and fight against the closing of individual gardens. In the late 1990s when the garden community faced the possibility that a large number of gardens were to be demolished, the community garden movement as a whole was threatened. That resulted in mobilization of activists, gardeners, and visitors alike to take some action.

Charlie and Nancy were not bitter about the demolition of the garden. Instead, they carried on the idea of greening the community by starting other projects. Charlie began working on greening a bare concrete plaza of a large apartment complex in which he and Nancy reside. He planted the plants that had been removed from the garden.

Until then, the plaza in the apartment complex for mostly middle-class residents was lacking green and looked uninviting. The project of greening the plaza, which was a space open to the public, was initially carried out by Charlie and Nancy who put in their time, money, and effort. It has since grown and is now maintained by more volunteers and supported by funds from the complex. Charlie summed up what he saw happen for the garden and for the plaza—"When you were talking about environmental movement, this is how awful lots of environmental movements get started. People were doing one thing, then other people like it and do it themselves. It is a small thing, but it makes a nicer environment."

Charlie's and Nancy's comments on their efforts to build a community garden and to improve a plaza at their apartment complex reflected their idea of the importance of volunteerism. They are also believers in setting examples to make a small change for the community to attract more people to join the effort to make a larger impact. Community-based approaches to improve neighborhoods became widespread in the mid 1970s, especially in the form of block associations. The city administration back then was encouraging neighborhood- and voluntary-based efforts to improve neighborhoods while the city cut down basic services it provided to deal with its fiscal crisis (Susser 1982, 108).

Previously, I had heard a long-term gardener from another community garden complain that nowadays people in the city do not want to do things unless they get paid. I asked Charlie and Nancy whether they thought people in the 1970s had more of a volunteer spirit than people today. Nancy said she did think that in the seventies, there was a feeling of "we were all in this together," as they tried to figure out the way to

improve their neighborhood. For Charlie, creating an open green space was not so much a question of altruism or civic mindedness. In the 1970s, most people in his neighborhood could not escape the heat of the city during the summer by going to a second house in the Hamptons. A community garden provided such an escape from the bustle of the big city. In my surveys and casual conversations with gardeners from the Lower East Side, several of them pointed out that community gardens gave children whose families could not afford summer camp a place to go and to be in touch with nature. A gardener in the East Garden on a summer day told me that she was glad she has the garden to visit when she cannot afford to go elsewhere. The community gardens give everyone who wander in—poor, working class, middleclass, rich, and so on—the sense of being in one's backyard, a luxury and rarity in New York City. For those who lack the means to get away from the city during the summer, it offers a nice space for temporary escape.

In most cases, community gardens were created in economically struggling neighborhoods with many empty lots that were attracting problems like dumping and drug use. Nancy and Charlie also witnessed and were a part of the transformation of their own neighborhood. While they identified themselves as being middle class in the 1970s and still do so today, the context of their class identity—the city and the neighborhood—has changed a lot in the past thirty years. The heated real estate market of New York City today has made the city much less affordable not only for the poor and the working class, but also for those who would consider themselves as middle class.

Falling Apart from Within—Internal Conflict and the Lost Vision

While many gardeners talk about how community gardens bring people together, the community garden sometimes becomes the center of community politics and personal conflict. As I discussed in previous chapters, successful community gardens with a group of committed core members seem to survive changes a garden faces over time as members come and go. When does a core member face the decision to stop participating in the community garden she or he cares about so much? Aging and health issues are one of the common reasons some of the long-term members stop being active in the garden. Sometimes, people burn out or lose interest in gardening as they get busy with other aspects of their lives. For some people, especially for younger members, relocation within or outside of the city can end their participation in a garden. Lastly and importantly, personal conflict, often rooted in the differences in what one expects from the garden and fellow garden members, can cause one to quit the garden. Often, community garden members work out their problems and differences through communicating with one another and having meetings to address issues, but talking things over does not always work.

I met Cindy, an invigorating, down-to-earth woman in her early sixties with long silver hair at a benefit event for the West Garden. She lives further uptown, about twenty blocks from the West Garden. She was not a member of the West Garden, but knew some people there so she usually came to annual benefits. She once was a core member at a community garden in her own neighborhood, but at one point, she decided to stop being part of the garden group over continuing personal clashes and disagreements with another core member of the garden.

Cindy has been active in her community as a chair of a block association and a founder of a neighborhood organization which watches over changes and major constructions in the area. For over three decades, she has been involved in various projects to help improve her neighborhood. Despite all she does for the community, she does not view herself as an activist or an advocate for the neighborhood. Instead, she considers herself a committed volunteer. In the mid 1990s, Cindy joined the Fountain Garden located near her apartment. One of the major reasons she was attracted to the garden was that she found the tranquility comforting when she was recovering from a major illness. Gardening provided rehabilitation for her body and mind. As the committed volunteer she had always been, she put her heart into working for the garden. Another core figure of community politics in the area, Mr. Stonefield, was in charge of the garden. Cindy began feeling that Mr. Stonefield was purposefully antagonizing her to insure his control over the garden.

Mr. Stonefield, a founder of a neighborhood association, was a vocal participant in community politics and had been in charge of the Fountain Garden, though he himself had not been gardening there, as far as Cindy knew. Cindy first heard of Stonefield and his association with the garden when she joined the garden over ten years ago. It was, however, long after she turned around the garden, which was looking shabby and abandoned when she joined, that Stonefield, who had lost or had not shown much interest in the garden, raised an objection to Cindy.

Already volunteering for many things for a long time for the community, Cindy was looking for something new to do when she came across an elderly man, Ethan, who was cleaning up the Fountain Garden, which had been deteriorating and full of garbage

for some time. Ethan, Cindy describes to me, is one of the original participants of the Fountain Garden and his interests in deep ecology made him uneasy seeing "that piece of ground totally going to waste." When I asked Cindy why the garden had deteriorated over time, she guessed:

> You know, it is, if it was dying, partly dying a natural death. As the original squatters got further and further away from their roots, you know they really didn't want to farm or garden—you know that was their past life.

Having been living in the community since the early 70s, Cindy has heard the story of buses full of Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants showing up one day at a site of a demolished building and starting a garden as squatters. Beyond this, the history of the garden is not well known. According to Cindy, Stonefield has claimed that the garden is designated as a Green Thumb Garden and actually belongs to two buildings surrounding it. Cindy, as the leader of the block association, had conducted the title search and sought the record of transfers of deeds. She wonders how the ownership was established, but could not trace the garden's origins.

Cindy joined Ethan in the clean up efforts. The cleaner and better maintained garden attracted community members to stop by there, and soon Cindy and some gardeners started having meetings. Cindy volunteered to coordinate the group and two years after this small but committed group of ten to fifteen people formed and began regularly working in the garden, the garden was transformed into a pleasant place. The group was diverse in age—from twenty to eighty something, backgrounds—different socio economic statuses, and two languages—English and Spanish. The neighborhood has a highly educated, middle and above middle class population as well as many college students who attend universities and colleges in the area. It is also an Hispanic area

where first- and second-generation immigrants reside. Cindy had a chance to relearn her Spanish; a neighborhood alcoholic became a good worker there and coincidently straightened out. Funding, which the group used to purchase lots of plants, topsoil, and to fix up the garden, came from the nearby university to the block association Cindy leads to improve the neighborhood's amenities. The total amount given to the block association was around $30,000, part of which could be allocated to the garden.

Cindy suspected Mr. Stonefield did not like somebody else having control over a big project with a big budget. Stonefield mobilized some people in the tenant association of the adjacent building to complain about the garden "takeover." Flyers were posted all over the neighborhood claiming that some residents were attempting to "steal the community garden." Cindy thought that Stonefield was upset that he was not in charge of the fund, since in her view, "He thinks he runs the neighborhood."

I asked Cindy whether Mr. Stonefield had come to garden meetings. She replied, "Of course not. They weren't *his* meetings. We were the alternate leadership." Stonefield mobilized people in the two adjacent buildings to the garden to create a steering committee for the garden. Cindy, who was spending around thirty hours a week in the garden up until that point, did not recognize any faces of those who filled the meeting.

After the creation of or reclaiming of leadership by Stonefield's group, "It became impossible," as Cindy puts it, to continue being the devoted gardener she had become at the Fountain Garden. The Fountain Garden is still there today, but Cindy sees the place going down again. Walking by there sometimes, she sees signs of neglect and wonders how long it will be before someone falls in the garden tripping over degrading paths and

decided to sue the garden. She no longer sees the sea of marigolds. There are no more peach pie parties featuring pies made with fruits harvested in the garden. The place, in her words, has become an "attractive nuisance." The garden is inactive and beginning to attract rats. A while after Cindy left the garden, she ran into someone who knew Cindy was a gardener there. The lady asked, "What's with the Fountain Garden? You know, my granddaughter was here and we went over there to sit in the garden. It just felt so bad that we left." Cindy says, "It is such a shame," but she could not see herself going back there again to volunteer, not after what she had gone through with Mr. Stonefield. It seems that people who wanted control over the garden fought to get it back from Cindy and her friends and were, after all, not so much interested in gardening and maintenance.

In my interview, Cindy still appeared bitter toward Mr. Stonefield. However, she remained interested in beautifying and greening the city. Recently, for instance, she coordinated efforts to put flowers in window boxes and installing benches. Meanwhile, when I passed by the Fountain Garden in 2007, the garden was back in a great shape, appearing neat and well-kept. A garden as an institution, if it is already a well-established machine, survives its ups and down like the disconcerting departure of one of its core members/leader. In the case of the Fountain Garden, Mr. Stonefield's power struggle with Cindy not only reflected the group dynamics within the garden, but also the broader sense of community politics within which they were involved. They both were for the betterment of the neighborhood they live in, yet they got into a disagreement over how the garden should be run or who should be in charge of it. Cindy left the garden disillusioned and tired of all the politics involved. But as an active community leader, she has since been planting flowers and plants in the small green spaces located in the

middle of the crosswalks. Streets in her neighborhood are well-maintained with beautiful flowerbeds bursting in colors reflective of different seasons thanks to her labors at planting.

Pursuing Different Ideals: Personal Conflicts

Tony, a founding member of the Film Garden discussed earlier talked about the garden with affection, but he told me later in the interview that he had just quit being a core member of the garden. He still liked the Film Garden and planned to visit. However, he had become wary of personal conflicts and arguments over the issues of garden operation. The Film Garden had no formal organizational structure. Everyone was welcome to join or just visit. Tony believed in the idea that the garden was for the community and should be as open to the public as possible. As more people joined the garden, however, more people began voicing opinions as to what the garden should be like. Some people did not want the garden to be kept open except for required open hours by the Green Thumb as they worried about not being able to supervise visitors otherwise. Tony disagreed and suggested they should have more faith in visitors.

> Tony: Basically, some people keep that garden closed…. Some people didn't want it open. They want somebody to be there to supervise people who come in, like if we were little kids or something. But we are not little kids. We are grown ups. If you walk into a community space, you respect it, you respect flowers, you are a citizen, and you have to act moral.

The openness of the community garden appears to be a source of contention in the community garden movement in New York. Moreover, Tony claims that "some members began thinking that the garden belongs to them." He reiterated his view that the garden belonged to the community, not to the gardeners. As Tony is more concerned

with the Film Garden as a community place, he was frustrated with those members who appeared to care more about their plants. "Some people were complaining all the time "basically about nothing," he said, over things like "Oh, someone stepped on my plants" or "someone took my flower." Those issues over plants are actually important for many gardeners who care about and love their garden plots as I learned talking to gardeners in various locations. Tony reiterated his view that he believed that the community garden was not solely about plants, but about the community, making people come together.

The structure of some community gardens was fluid and not well-established. Sometimes, core members themselves did not know the status of their garden, as was the case for the Film Garden. Tony mentioned Green Thumb several times during the interview but when I asked whether the Film Garden was under the Green Thumb, Tony was not sure. The official members consisted of the original four to five people who started the garden. Recently, they discussed recruiting more members, but disagreed over conditions. Tony felt everyone who wanted to join should be able to join right away and get full access. Others felt new members should prove themselves first by putting in hours of volunteer work. Tony, who spends a couple of hours a day in the garden regularly decided he did not have time to be arguing over "administrative stuff." Since the garden had no official structure, he or anybody else had no specific post assigned, but he took himself out of the circle of the original members who gathered to discuss the garden.

Tony promised to go back to the garden as a volunteer to work there, unlike one woman who quit the garden for good over disputes over planting territory in the all communal-area garden. She, according to Tony, uprooted everything she planted and

took it with her when she quit. The clash of egos among members was not uncommon though a departure like hers was unusual. Tony summed up, "Even if you form a group, it is not easy to become friends…. Some people just don't get along, just like in regular life (as compared to the community within the garden)." He expressed his view that internal conflicts were typically the reason behind the dissolution of a group, though Tony's garden was likely to survive through the efforts of the remaining group members. It is hard to establish a garden, but it is even harder to continue it.

Tony had a vision of the garden as a place of freedom open to everyone. Other core members sought some order and structure. The conflict of interest on this matter appears to be common, as the topic came up sometimes among members of the East Garden, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Instead of struggling to make policies according to his belief, Tony chose to leave his position as an executive member. He was not interested in administrative tasks to begin with. When differences in opinion became apparent, he did not want to deal with them on top of the physical labor and time commitment he was already making for the garden. His departure may not end the garden, but inability to resolve the conflict may have been an indication of the weakening of the garden's operating body. When I stopped by the garden on some weekends, the garden was open but scarcely and briefly attended by a few passer-bys wandering in. Another time I went there, it was locked with nobody in sight during the posted open hours. There may be signs of the dwindling of interest in this new garden. Only time will tell if it survives the decades to come, like the Flower Garden.

What Keeps the Community Garden Flourishing

In this chapter, I looked at an example of the end of a garden as well as one of the major sources contributing to the weakening of gardens—unresolved personal conflicts and conflicts of interest. Long-lasting and successful gardens, like the East Garden and the West Garden, are not free from conflict, but as will be discussed in next three chapters, they have organizational structure and communication channels that help resolve issues. In the case of the garden Cindy and Charlie started, the end came suddenly when the city took back the land for construction. Many factors contributed to make the end of this particular garden more acceptable and not protested, including the timing. The change happened in isolation when the community garden movement as a whole was not facing a threat, and there was no momentum for organized efforts to challenge their shutdown.

The stories of the gardeners and their gardens discussed in this chapter demonstrate the diversity within the community gardens of New York City. Some gardens intend to provide much more than a green space. Some of them are cultural, artistic, social, and/or educational spaces decorated with plants. The strength of the community garden movement in New York City does not come from unity among gardens. There are usually no inter-garden relationships, although people of the community gardens have solidarity in their love for gardening and their interests in keeping the garden for them and for the city. Instead, the diversity in structure, goals, and interests helps to strengthen the community garden movement, making each garden unique. Each community garden reflects and accommodates the interests and needs of the neighborhood in its own way. This flexibility has made community gardens a

successful social institution in different areas in New York City from an expensive neighborhood in Manhattan to a working class community in South Bronx.

Chapter 5

The East Garden

The increasing awareness of global warming in recent years has inspired interest in "greening" big cities like New York City. On Earth Day 2007, Under the leadership of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, PlaNYC launched various initiatives to cut down its carbon footprint and to improve environmental quality. One of the green initiatives is to plant one million trees by 2017. An overlooked fact is that New Yorkers have embarked on greening initiatives since the mid-1970s in the form of community gardens. The only difference is that people did not start community gardens with the greening of the city as their main concern. The community garden movement was started by people who sought an innovative solution to a problem in their communities: unattractive abandoned empty lots that were attracting trash and drug users. As some of these lots became converted into gardens, the aesthetics of the street improved. Moreover, many gardeners and visitors claim that the presence of the community garden has also helped to improve the community by making the street feel safer and by serving as a communal place to bring people together. The next three chapters are stories of the East Garden and the West Garden, and the people who were/are involved in making them. Oral histories about people's participation in the community gardens bring to light how community-based environmental movements function on day-to-day basis, as well as the rewards and challenges they face.

Strolling through the Alphabet City—a nickname given to the part of the Lower East Side delimited by avenues A, B, C, and D—one will find innumerable patches of

green space behind gates and between buildings. The green spaces vary in size and design, and each one tells a different story of urban renewal and transformation. These are community gardens created by volunteers—in many cases, squatters—who took over neglected city lots. The concentration of community gardens in the Lower East Side reflects the condition of the area back in the 1970s and the early 1980s, a time of economic hardship in New York City, when abandoned buildings and empty lots proliferated. The city's decision to cut down on various services such as sanitation contributed to deteriorating neighborhood conditions. The gardens fit in well today with the trendy cafés and newly built condos. This chapter presents the story of the East Garden, looking at both the role it has played in changing the community, as well as the garden's internal politics and everyday activities. The East Garden is volunteer-based and loosely organized. It is an example of a bottom-up, democratic approach to making and keeping a green space in the city. While people join to fulfill their personal interests, together, they have contributed to changing the neighborhood for the better and to making the city a bit greener.

History of the Lower East Side

The Lower East Side, the area in which the East Garden is located, is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Manhattan. It encompasses several distinctive neighborhoods including Chinatown, Two Bridges, Little Italy, Loisaida and the East Village. The area stretches from 14th Street to the Brooklyn Bridge. The FDR Drive marks its Eastern end and Pearl, Baxter, and Bowery Street, as well as Fourth Avenue are on its Western border (Hassell 1998; Zimmerman et al. 1995). Community gardens

comprise a significant source of open green spaces in the Lower East Side along with Tompkins Square Park, a 10.5-acre space that has been for public use since the early 19th century and designated as a park in 1878. My research focuses on the Loisaida/East Village part of the Lower East Side as the location of the East Garden and many other community gardens.

The Lower East Side has been a working class community populated by immigrants. Immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, including Italians, Jews, Germans, Hungarians, and Poles, began to densely populate the area, living in poor, crowded conditions between the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Chinese immigrants also lived in the area, forming "bachelor societies", until the law changed in the mid 1940s which allowed men to bring their families (Gottfried 2004). An account of the Lower East Side from the early 1970s describes the area around Tompkins Square as a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood with a small Polish and Ukrainian population (Cavallo 1971:79). Some Hispanic people were on the forefront of the community garden movement in the Lower East Side, evidenced by the Hispanic names of some of the community gardens today. Latinos are still the largest population group in the Community District 3 of Manhattan, the district of the Lower East Side, but Asian populations, especially Chinese, have been growing rapidly since the 1990s (Zimmerman et al. 1993:5). In the late 1960s, artists were attracted to the area for the affordable rent (Abeles et al. 1970:4; Schwartz 1973:11). The area today is also populated by students from nearby New York University. Some residents of the Loisaida viewed students moving into the area both as the source and the result of gentrification of the neighborhood.

Decaying Citiy

The Lower East Side has gone through transformations many times, attracting people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Mele (2000) observes that people with different cultural, ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds lived mostly in separate communities in the Lower East Side in the 1950s. The relationships among people of different origins were sometimes antagonistic. According to Mele (2000:146), crimes, gang violence, and drug dealings became a problem in the late 1950s in the Lower East Side and in other impoverished neighborhoods. Around that time, landlords, losing middle-class tenants to suburbanization, were largely uninterested in making investments to improve housing conditions for the influx of working-class and poor people that had been squeezed out of urban renewal areas (Mele 2000).

The 1960s did not bring much improvement to the neighborhood. Abeles et al. (1970:70), for instance, depict the Lower East Side in the 1960s and the 1970s as a poor neighborhood with "an overwhelming sense of ugliness and neglect," polluted with litter, fumes from outdated heating systems, and car exhaust. Lack of job opportunities and an absence of better economic alternatives intensified the problem of drug infestation in the impoverished neighborhood. Jagna Wojcicka Sharff's ethnography (1998) captures the lives of people, especially children and young adults in Loisaida, the neighborhood in which violence and poverty were part of the reality. Yet in the story she tells, what emerges as most significant is people's resiliency and a sense of hope that helps them navigate through hard times.

The Lower East Side in the 1960s and the 1970s was diverse and versatile in many ways. It was the site of urban movements where various coalitions and

organizations mobilized to demand public housing or to protest displacement at different times (see Sites 1994). The community garden movement spread here as the resistance to the fate of urban decay. In a brief period in the mid 1960s, the area became the major weekend and summer gathering place for hippie youths (Mele 2000). In the 1970s, the area became an epicenter for the New York punk scene with the famous music venue CBGB.

The wide-spread appreciation for counterculture probably contributed to the spread of the community garden movement in the Lower East Side. Physical conditions of the neighborhood brought by economic problems and poor city planning created many empty lots that were converted into gardens over time. The area witnessed massive "disinvestment and abandonment" of buildings by owners who either failed to pay taxes or lost buildings to arson (Zimmerman et al. 1995:20). Some suspect that landlords gave up on their buildings and resorted to collecting insurance money by loosing a building to "arson" rather than pay tax arrears (Abu-Lughod 1994a:2; Wojcicka Sharff 1998:139; Sites 2003:77). The growing number of vacant lots at that time motivated people to take action to take back their neighborhood by starting community gardens on these lots. Firemen's Garden was created at a site of a tenement building lost to arson and was built for and dedicated to the memory of a young firefighter named Martin R. Celic who lost his life fighting the fire. Today the garden is dedicated to all New York City firefighters who have lost their lives on the job (NYC Department of Parks & Recreation 2001).

The repeated incidence of arson left people feeling insecure and stressed in their own neighborhood (Sharff 1998:139). On a weekend afternoon in the East Garden, I encountered two women, former tenants in the building next to the garden, who told me

about the neighborhood in the late 1970s to early 1980s. They said that back then, no one felt safe walking alone at night in many parts of the neighborhood. According to the women, there were some organized efforts by tenants in the neighborhood buildings to patrol the areas infested with shooting galleries. Some people, like long-term East Garden member Lenore, moved into the Lower East Side around that time because of affordable rents. She told me that her apartment was robbed several times after she moved in. Many low-income residents lost their apartments to the abandonment or demolition of their buildings. Later many of them were squeezed out the area as the result of gentrification and rise in real estate prices beginning in the 1980s (Zimmerman et al. 1995:20).

Gentrification is a process in which higher-income people move into a lower-income neighborhood with resultant increases in property values in the area (Zimmerman et al. 1995:21). It usually results in displacement of many low-income people in the area. The infrastructural deterioration of the neighborhood in the Lower East Side in the 1970s, many scholars believe, was an orchestrated prelude to gentrification. Wojcicka Sharff (1998), for instance, claims that "[f]rom the real estate point of view, one of the most successful 'slum clearance' operations had been quietly accomplished" (1998:177). Sites (1994) points out that gentrification could be devastating for the poor who were displaced from their own neighborhood by new occupants of higher class (Sites 1994:198). Mario Maffi associates gentrification with the sense of the "collapse of community" as the "cultural and social unity/identity" (1995:291) of the neighborhood is challenged by process of physical decay preceding gentrification. Community gardens were emerging

at the same time when the urban decay and the quiet beginning of gentrification were happening in the neighborhood.

The East Garden: The Beginning

The East Garden, incorporated since 1978, has become one of the well-established community gardens in the Lower East Side. It now occupies three city lots upon which apartment buildings once stood until they were lost to fire. The founder of the garden, Georgia, passed away during my fieldwork, and I had not had the chance to meet her, but her son Matt, who has become a member of the garden, told me a bit about his mother. In 1972 Georgia, a German/Irish-American, moved into a building right across the street from the East Garden. She had always lived in the Lower East Side, but moved to this particular location after she remarried. Matt recalls that the lots across the street still had a building barely standing.

Most current members of the East Garden have only heard the tale of the beginning of the garden from other members who also heard the story from somebody else, but no one, including some of the long-term members, seemed to know the full story. Georgia, who got remarried to a Latino man, started the East Garden with her two Latina friends living on the same block. Matt joined the Marine Corp soon after his mother relocated to the street and did not participate in the making of the garden. He became a member much later in life. When I asked if he had asked his mother why she wanted to start a garden, he responded, “It was just a time and age when there were so many abandoned lots in NYC that people were just trying to spruce up their neighborhoods.” Original members, many of them Puerto Ricans, started the garden against the backdrop

of the deterioration of the Lower East Side, which generated two opposing forces—a widespread feeling of apathy and a growing community activism. Neither Matt nor anybody else could tell me the specific year the garden was started. It existed informally until it became incorporated in 1978. In 1980, the Trust for Public Land helped to purchase the lots from the city in 1980 for $2,500 under a condition that the garden maintains the land as an open space for the community (Karen's handout 2005).

One of the community projects that preceded the East Garden was an effort by a Puerto Rican youth group to install a windmill and panels to harvest solar power in a building to generate electricity in the early 1970s (Karen's handout 2005). Matt and some other garden members remember seeing the windmill and solar panels on the building behind the garden. While people of the East Garden were not directly involved in building the windmill, such an occurrence in their neighborhood in the early 1970s reflected a wide-spread interest in nature and a growing environmentalism. According to Matt, his mother also got some help from Glad, the manufacturer of garbage bags, which sponsored a cleanup of the lots, providing free garbage bags and t-shirts. He did not recall the specific year that the clean up happened. Glad, according to the website, to this day donates trash bags by working with Keep America Beautiful, Inc.—"the nation's largest volunteer-based community action and education organization" to help neighborhood cleanups (Glad® n.d.; Keep America Beautiful, inc. n.d.).

Georgia and her friends envisioned the East Garden as more than just a garden. They hoped it would become a place where people gathered to enjoy each other's company. The garden today has a locked gate and is separated from the bustle of the street by a beautiful decorative black fence. In the past, instead of the garden itself, each

plot was separated by chicken wire. Only one of such caged plots remains in the garden today guarding a rose and other plants of one of the founders. The rest of the garden plots are marked with various stones along their borders. The East Garden as well as the neighborhood has undergone many changes over time. Just as Georgia and her friends did, people still gather to plant and BBQ in the garden. In the beginning, it was just a handful of friends. Today, it is a structured community organization with membership. But still, members of the East Garden make efforts to keep the place as friendly as it has always been.

Welcoming the Community People

The status of community garden landownership varies. Some gardens started by volunteers have become city parks and many gardens have been integrated into Green Thumb, the urban gardening program under New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. As noted in Chapter 2, Green Thumb gardens receive material supports such as garden supplies and are required to be open a minimum of ten hours per week. Unlike Green Thumb gardens, the East Garden has no obligation to have specific open hours posted for the public. Instead, the garden is open whenever a member is present there, and if a member is there, visitors are welcome. The East Garden may be open to the public for longer hours compared to some of the city-owned or -managed community gardens with obligatory open hours per week between April and October. However, there is no way of knowing in advance when the garden will be open.

The East Garden attracts various visitors throughout the seasons, but especially in late spring and early summer when the weather is pleasant. It is hardly ever overcrowded.

Though the number of visitors to the garden may vary depending on time, season, and many other factors, I usually encountered about four to five visitors over the course of a few hours on a sunny weekend. People visiting the garden enjoy a serene and intimate moment with nature, taking a walk to view plants throughout the garden or sit on one of the benches to chat or read. On weekends, a variety of visitors, ranging from young couples to families with small children, stop by. It is not unusual for people to inquire about the garden, especially about how to join. Visitors often compliment the gardeners on their work. Birds chirping is the kind of pleasant sound one may least expect to hear in New York City. In May, one can hear mocking birds mocking the sound of a cardinal or a cell phone, as one garden member told me.

Getting the Garden Going: Everyday Activities

There are a variety of tasks required besides gardening to maintain a community garden as a pleasant place for plants and people. Since a community garden is a place to gather as much as a place to grow plants, benches and tables are important aspects of the East Garden. A round table under a tree at the center of the garden was beautifully decorated with colorful tiles by Natalie. Tina, who is an expert in carpentry, made and repaired some benches, and has taken care of redoing paint for the fence and the gate. The incorporated garden is responsible for maintaining the sidewalk in front, like any other property owner in the city. So, sweeping and shoveling snow off the sidewalk is also a task for gardeners. Picking up trash, often blown into the garden from the street, is also important for keeping the garden tidy. There is no one person assigned to do such

tasks. Garden members voluntarily assist as they see the need. Owen, who works and hangs out in the garden almost everyday, often volunteers to do these miscellaneous tasks.

Putting water in water barrels is another task members undertake whenever they see these barrels empty. A few people, including Owen, always volunteer to do this task. There is no water faucet within the East Garden. The refill has to be done often in the midsummer when water usage and evaporation rates are high. Water is obtained from a faucet of a nearby playground with which the garden has an informal arrangement.

The Organizational Structure of the East Garden

The East Garden is run and maintained by volunteers who pay an annual membership fee of $20 or the recommended amount of $25 (as of the year 2005) to become members. There is a one year trial period for new members as I will discuss later in this chapter. There are approximately 40 to 50 active members (Karen's handout 2005), though I have never seen even half that number of members gathered at once.

The East Garden holds elections every year during one of the meetings in early spring to select people to fill four administrative positions: president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. There appeared to be no clearly written rules for how to carry out the election, but there was a consensus that more than ten members should be present—excluding those trial members who are with the garden for less than a year and attendees who have yet to join the garden—to make the election official. A person can be nominated for a position by a fellow garden member or can recommend him/her. Most members who enjoy gardening do not seem eager to run for any of the positions.

At one election, no-one showed interest in running for any positions, especially that of the president. The common excuse was “I’m too busy.” The current president at the time showed no intention to continue in her position. Having been the president for a couple of years, she was ready to hand over the responsibility. It is common for people to hold a position for several years or longer when no other garden members show an interest in running for the position. The vice president agreed to continue his role once people in the meeting asked if he could. When there is an opening, people casually nominate fellow members for the position. Diego became president upon such nomination, accepting it with the condition that garden members would help him out.

During my fieldwork period, I witnessed one competitive election in which Lenore, a long-term treasurer, decided to quit the position after some bitter arguments took place between her and a few members over garden-related issues. Tammy, another long-time member, decided that she would run for the position. At first, there appeared to be no competition; then a man, the owner of nearby store, who was new to the garden decided to run for the same position. On the day of the voting, each candidate made a speech explaining his or her qualifications for the position. Both were well-qualified for the job itself, having experience in finance and accounting. As a long-time Lower East Side resident and garden member, Tammy knew much about the garden already. Some members who personally knew the other candidate thought he would be a great addition to the garden. The vote, however, was interrupted with discussion about whether the other candidate was even eligible to run, since he had not even started going through his one-year trial membership period. His supporters argued that he was a frequent visitor to the garden and that they all knew him. In the end, to the dismay of some members, he

was declared ineligible for the position. Tammy, who became the new treasurer, told the other candidate he would have made a good treasurer and was more than welcome to run for the position the following year, when he became a full member. As is often the case with a newcomer, though, he hardly came back to garden meetings.

Becoming a Member

Some people become members because they know somebody who is already a member at the garden and learn about the place through that person. Most people, however, become members because they happen to like the place after visiting many times. Newcomers to the neighborhood, often young professionals that are part of the gentrification wave, ask about the garden and how to join. In some cases, a garden member from another community garden in the same neighborhood comes to join. Very few people choose to be a member of more than one garden simultaneously. In the rare cases when someone wants to switch community gardens, the reason is often related to strained relationships with other gardeners or dissatisfaction with the way the garden is run.

Some community gardens actively seek fee-paying associates or full members to join the garden to support it both financially and structurally. The East Garden always welcomes new members but they do not actively seek them out. When someone is interested in joining, he or she usually talks to members present in the garden who show him or her around the place and suggest that the person come to the next meeting. The meeting is announced in advance with a flyer attached to the gate at the entrance for any passerby who might be interested in attending. At each meeting in spring when the

garden is especially beautiful and impressive, there are usually some new people introducing themselves and expressing their wishes to join. Unlike some community gardens, there is no mail communication among members at the East Garden. The membership fee is paid in person to the treasurer who gives out the receipt and puts the money into the garden account.

Besides paying the membership fee, what newcomers need to do to take part in the garden has been the subject of repeated discussion in meetings every year. A garden by-law states that a newcomer has to volunteer in the garden for one year before becoming a fully incorporated or real member who is entitled to a key to the garden. However, there is no detailed description of what or how much a newcomer has to do as a volunteer in the garden to qualify for the full membership. The do's and don'ts of the garden are not well-presented to new comers or to existing members. Such rules are only communicated orally during meetings, usually when someone complains about something. On several occasions at different meetings, I heard the suggestion that the group provide a copy of the East Garden rules to newcomers, but this has not actually happened. I myself have not seen one.

Another most frequently suggested but never systematically implemented issue regarding newcomers is mentorship to help them learn garden activities. If a gardener feels like helping newcomers, he or she will take on the role of an informal mentor. I was introduced to gardening with the help of Natalie, who acted as my gardening mentor. Natalie, an experienced gardener, often gave me and other new members a tour of the garden to show what needed to be trimmed and which plots needed extra help. For instance, she showed me how to prune roses. Having a mentor-like figure is helpful for

new members, especially because having no assigned plot of their own, it is difficult to figure out on which part of the garden they can work. One of the well-understood rules in the East Garden and any other community garden is that one shall not interfere or change anything in another person's plot without permission or request from the plot holder. New members at the East Garden, therefore, find common areas to work on by asking existing members.

When I joined the East Garden, I was lucky to find an abandoned spot right along the wall in the back of the garden to make a new plot I could claim as my own. The spot next to the compost area remains shady mostly because of the wall and canopy of a large tree in the garden. The compost at the East Garden simply consists of a pile of leaves that are gathered in a wooden box. In my first meeting at the East Garden, I met a fellow new comer named Kirk, a student at New York University. Together, we turned the neglected area into a plot nicely bounded by red bricks, planted with some perennials and impatiens. I purchased these plants myself. At the East Garden, members usually purchase, bring, or share plants they put in their own plot. Major purchases, such as trees in common areas, are made using funds from the garden's budget. The process of creating my own plot and planting there helped me to feel more involved with the garden. Fellow gardeners often complimented the plot. The flowers we planted grew to fill the plot nicely for the entire summer and into the fall. Kirk, however, stopped coming to the garden in the summer and never came back.

As noted, it is typical of the East Garden to attract newcomers in the height of the spring when all kinds of flowers blossom profusely making the place look and smell like a true oasis in the city. It is not that unusual to stop seeing newcomers within a couple of

months. Newcomers often tell everyone at the meeting how excited they are to be a gardener. However, the frustration of setting up a plot—find a way to do gardening such as finding a mentor-like gardener and figuring out the area on which to work—can undermine the initial enthusiasm. More often, though, people realize how much time this volunteer work can entail in attending meetings, weeding, cleaning, pruning, planting and so on. Their visits to the garden as members become infrequent when they are caught up in the busy daily life outside of the garden. In some cases, a newcomer comes back to be a full member a year later after a quite infrequent appearance in the garden. Since there is no clear definition about how much and what type of volunteer work actually has to be completed over the course of the year, the trial period may not necessarily function as a garden training period.

One inconvenience I experienced as a new member was that I sometimes could not get into the garden when I wanted to because only a full member was entitled to a key to the garden. Since most gardeners work elsewhere during the day, the garden was often closed on weekday afternoons. On weekends I could rest assured that someone would show up at the garden if I waited long enough. Nevertheless, the inconvenience could deter some newcomers from coming often and give the impression to some visitors that the garden is not as accessible to the public as it might be.

Many long-term members are avid gardeners, probably because those who are committed and who enjoy gardening end up staying as members year after year. The amount of time a member spends gardening does not necessarily correspond to how much time she or he spends in meetings and for other administrative matters. Some

gardeners mentioned that they preferred not to get involved in the politics of the garden and would rather concentrate on caring for their own plot.

Control and Order: Making the Garden a Democratic Place

Gardeners are usually united in their love for the garden, but often disagree about gardening policies. The garden politics involve democratic decision-making and reflect the difficulties of implementing policies through a bottom-up approach. The source of contention at the East Garden was over how much freedom people should have to use the garden and how much control should be imposed in the garden.

During a meeting some members pointed out that sometimes, a friend (or friends) of a member or even strangers stay in the garden while members are out. Sometimes a member wants to leave but wants to let a visitor stay. A member said, "When I was about to leave, a woman came in to breastfeed her baby. She was nice so I said she could stay there." Other members argued that if we let a visitor stay without a member present, then the visitor ends up being responsible if someone else wants to come in. We cannot let the visitor to be responsible for other visitors.

The rule is clear: no one can be in the garden unless a member is present in the garden. However, as a member at the meeting pointed out, there was no sanction when the rule was broken. The question was raised about what should be done, if a rule is broken. A general consensus emerged that someone must talk to the person who breaks the rule. Someone suggested that if a member needed to step outside for a moment, but wanted to let his or her friends stay meanwhile, the member could lock the garden so no

one else could come in. This idea was quickly rejected for safety reasons as almost everyone thought locking in people was a bad idea.

Some members did not like being too strict about visitors. One said, “We have a reputation as an unwelcoming place.” Others agreed that, “We may be seen as a little private club.” Members wondered if having open hours would ease the tension. This idea, however, quickly dissipated since coordinating to have someone there at specific hours on specific days of a week would be too much trouble for members who already have to find time to volunteer in the garden in their generally busy schedules.

At another meeting, some gardeners began complaining that children were running around the garden without parental supervision and were creating a safety hazard. Some people argued that they came to the garden to enjoy the quietness and the sense of privacy—though it was supposed to be a public place, the garden felt much more private than a city park. Others argued that they did not mind having children around, and actually like the fact that we had such lively visitors. Similar discussion sometimes occurred regarding dogs in the garden.

Sometimes members had to be reminded that any problem in the garden should be solved within the garden in a civil, respectful manner. Announcements were made in meetings reminding people that they were not allowed to pick anything from other people’s plots. Sometimes a gardener may unknowingly interfere with another’s plants, especially in a communal area. Addressing the problem, a motion was passed for a new rule stating that sticks stuck in the soil would indicate where seeds were planted. However, some rules created during meetings in one season can easily be forgotten by the next garden season.

I had a chance to think of the issue of control and freedom in the garden when my plot was nearly ruined by some people, whom many fellow gardeners suspected to be children, just being careless. Some gardeners told me that the shady area in the back where my plot lies was a favorite playing spot for some children. I did not realize how much I was attached to my plot until I found my plants trampled on and partially destroyed. *Mrs. Moon*, a perennial, looked distressed almost to the point of disrepair. A fern on the back had lost half of its gorgeous leaves. Out of six flowering impatiens I had planted a week earlier, only one was still flowering. Other plants like bleeding heart were also stepped on, covered by the soil, or simply gone. The only thing left untouched (or unharmed for its sturdiness, perhaps) were the leafy bulb plants which had always survived in this shady area even before I claimed the long neglected area of the garden and turned it into a plot.

When I told other members what had happened to my plot, a member kindly suggested that I select a better area this time to work on. I felt that I was not interested in starting a new plot. I had happened to get this plot, and I was only interested in protecting plants which I had cared for rather than wanting to get a plot in a better area of the garden. I was frustrated, but the only thing I could do was to find a piece of wood to write a message "Respect Plants. Do Not Step on Them." Fortunately, some of the plants proved to be much more resilient than I had expected and survived the ordeal.

On different occasions, garden members and visitors I chatted with mentioned that one of the benefits of having a garden on the city block is to give children the chance to get in touch with nature. In that sense, children are one of the important reasons why community gardens are appreciated in the city. At the same time, gardens are usually

much smaller than parks and filled with various obstacles like different plots, making it a less than ideal place for children to run around and play. Garden members are divided as to how many rules to make and their degree of enforcement in order to control the place. As much as garden members may feel entitled or obligated to decide how the garden should be used and enjoyed, the public aspect of the community garden makes such decisions somewhat a matter of negotiation among themselves and their visitors.

Meetings

East Garden members usually gather for meetings at least once a month during the gardening season, usually holding the first meeting at the beginning of April. Meetings may be held more frequently if an event, such as a fundraising party, is approaching. Instead of having a set date, meetings are called by the garden president as needed and the subsequent meeting schedule is decided at the end of a meeting. Notices of meetings are posted at the gate. At the East Garden, some people preferred to hold meetings on a weekend afternoon, while others preferred it to be in the evening on weekdays. Sometimes meeting dates were alternated to accommodate both preferences, but in either case, it was not possible to find a date that everybody could attend.

Meetings were held around a small round table under a big tree. The table had been decorated by Natalie a while ago with pretty tiles. A seasonal flower from the garden is sometimes placed in a vase on the table. Topics discussed during the meeting include membership, plots, garden maintenance (equipment, infrastructure and plants/trees, and cleanup), fundraising, and any other issues or problems facing the garden. The number of the people who attend the meeting may vary from less than ten to

over thirty. If the number of full members attending the meeting is less than ten, no motion will be passed or a meeting will be called off. As garden members are interested in making the garden more than just a place to do gardening, suggestions are sometimes made to start something new and different, like starting a lecture series on plants and gardening once a month. This particular suggestion, like many other ambitious ideas, disappeared when no one actually followed up on it.

While some new ideas are entertained during a meeting, there were also recurring issues that were consistently raised at meetings throughout the years of my fieldwork. One such topic was allocation and maintenance of garden plots. The problem arises when a plot-holding member neglects to pay membership fees or stops being active and neglects the plot, or when a new or existing member wants to switch plots. When a plot-holding member fails to pay his or her annual membership fee, the issue is eventually called to attention at a meeting. Usually, the first step taken to address the problem is for someone who knows the unpaid member to agree to call the person. When such an effort yields no result, the next action must be taken. However, there is no specific policy that dictates the nature of this subsequent action, so it frequently becomes a topic of debate at meetings. For instance, members at a meeting can agree on how much of a grace period one should give to the person before any further action is taken. Once a plot is assigned to a member, there are some difficulties in taking it away.

Neglect of a plot is another problem. During the summer, weeds can easily take over a plot, especially if the plot does not have many plants to begin with. In one summer, Tito's plot was so overgrown by particularly aggressive weeds that the seeds of the weed were beginning to spread into other's plots and pathways. Looking at the weed-

driven plot with Owen, I asked him why he thought Tito neglected his plot like that. Owen replied, “Some people don’t want to admit that they’re lousy gardeners. He is too proud to ask for help.” Next time I visited the garden, the plot was entirely cleared except for two shrubs. The issue was resolved when Tito at last completely cleared the plot along with the weeds except for a shrub. A garden member who used to have Tito’s plot before she got another plot was upset by the way Tito almost wiped all plants off the plot as she herself had planted many of them, hoping they would thrive under Tito’s care.

Evidence of neglect does not automatically mean that another person can take over the plot or take the plot away from the holder. No one will object if a plot holder cannot take good care of his or her plot temporarily due to a health condition or because they will be away from the city for a while. The person can ask other members to watch his or her plot. Natalie, for example, took care of a plot in the back of the garden when the holder developed a back problem and could not keep up with all of the necessary garden work. However, sometimes a plot holder neglects the plot without asking for any help, yet refuses to give it up when asked. Some members suggested in a meeting that it should be reiterated again that it was mandatory for members to take care of their plot. This issue became urgent especially when the garden developed a rat problem, and members suspected overgrown plots were making the problem worse. Others simply argued that it was unfair that some people have large plots which they do not take care of while other committed members were allotted small plots. The rat problem was discussed at several meetings and members agreed to have a few all-out cleanup events to get rid of overgrowth. Some members pointed out that the root of the rat problem actually was attributable to the open trash bins of the apartment building next door.

Others pointed out that the landlord of that apartment building argued that the vegetables grown in the garden were responsible for the rat infestation. In reality, rats are a common problem throughout New York City and the garden has to do its best to keep rats away.

In a meeting, members passed a motion to make it a rule to take away a plot from a member who has neglected it. After the vote, Natalie said she actually wanted to move to one of the neglected plots. Lenore, who has been member here longer than anybody at the meeting, did not think the matter was so simple. She suggested that a list of available plots need to be made first and it had to be officially documented. She insisted that we had the responsibility to do so because of the status of the garden as incorporated. Other members got slightly irritated by her emphasis on formality. One claimed, "We need to be elastic!" Members at the meeting voted to allow Natalie to move into the plot. Lenore kept insisting on contacting the current plot holder before voting on the matter. Lenore told the group that she had heard the plot holder say before, "If they're voting me out of my plot, I'll go to the court." Henry, the vice president, said he did not think there was any rule that said members could not be removed from a plot. Nonetheless, members agreed to assign someone to contact the plot holder to make sure the plot holder accepted the development. Lenore, a long-time member, remembers when a garden member sued the garden to regain access to a plot. She had to go to court to deal with the problem. So, Lenore had a reason for being extra cautious and kept reminding others that the garden could indeed be sued over such matters. While I was doing my fieldwork, such drama did not happen. But allocation of plots was a recurring topic at meetings.

An unwritten rule regarding a newly available plot is that when it becomes available, it will be reallocated on a first-come-first-served basis. The matter again raises

some complications. New members are waiting to get a plot, but existing members who already have plots sometimes want to move onto a new plot, as different plots in the garden have different potential and desirability. In one particular meeting, a suggestion was made to make a rule so that a new gardener with limited experience could only get half a plot and to give priority to new plot selection to existing members with their own plots. Members agreed that there was a need to make a written waiting list both for new members and for the swapping of plots. A motion was passed to make new plots available to existing members first, and to make the plots that the existing members gave up available to new members. A comment was made at this meeting that the goal of joining the garden should not be solely to get a plot. There is much work needed to be done in general areas as well. In the midst of the heated debate on plot distribution, a member pointed out that only a few new members come back after a year anyway, since the excitement for gardening in the spring often dies down as the season changes. While each issue appears to be resolved, the same problem often arises a year later in the beginning of another gardening season. No one follows up on each matter to make written by-laws, and the existing by-laws that already address many of the issues repeatedly discussed in meetings remain unheeded at the next meeting.

Community garden meetings are one of the examples of how a loosely organized volunteer-based organization works. It reveals both the possibilities and the limitations of a bottom-up (as opposed to a top-down) approach to the decision-making process. Because no one person is in charge, discussions tend to go around in circles. People struggle to reach an agreement or compromise in the face of an array of conflicting opinions. Sometimes members take a vote on important issues. During meetings a

secretary writes minutes. However, there is no system at the East Garden to format minutes in a consistent manner or to look back on past minutes to prepare for new meetings. A lapse in meetings during the winter, along with changes in membership make it difficult to carry on all rules discussed or made in a previous season into the next one. Some rules get lost due to lack of implementation. The process requires persuasion rather than enforcement, since no one person has more power over the other. Despite some of these difficulties, the garden goes on. Flowers are planted, weeds are cleaned, plots are watered, and fundraisers are held. Its non-hierarchical, voluntary-based approach has held the garden together all these years through people dedicating extra time to discuss the nitty-gritty of garden operations and sharing their ideal for the common space.

Operational Expenses

Even though garden members put a lot of their own time and a bit of their own money in keeping the garden a beautiful place, maintaining a garden involves a variety of expenses. First, there are expenses directly related to gardening. Those include purchasing of soil, fertilizers, tools and some plants and trees. Keys to the garden must be purchased for new members and the lock to the garden is changed from time to time. Second, there are garden maintenance costs such as painting jobs and hiring exterminators on the rare occasion that rats become a problem in the garden. When a tall tree dies and needs to be taken down or if a tree needs pruning, a professional may be required. Occasionally, the garden encounters a major cost such as fixing the sidewalk which is the responsibility of a property owner. So far, when the garden has been

required to get the sidewalk repaired, an expense of around $7,500, the garden managed to get funding from the Trust for Public Land and from the Council on the Environment. Third, there are operational costs. Garden liability insurance is one such expense. The coverage varies and can change over time, but during my fieldwork, one estimate I saw was around $2,500 for the East Garden. As of the year 2004, the garden was covered under the group plan from the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition. The cost for all of the above is paid through a common fund, the budget of the garden.

The property tax for the East Garden, a not-for-profit group, is abated. Several forms must be filed annually for the city and the state to maintain the garden's status. Much of the administrative paperwork had long been done by the treasurer at the East Garden. She recalls that in the mid-1980's the garden was held responsible by the city for non-payment of property taxes for the tax year 1981-1982, soon after which the garden lot was officially purchased. It jeopardized the garden's status as the city took back the ownership of the property temporarily until the matter was sorted out by the Garden. They managed to raise funds through membership fees, support from the Trust for Public Land, and through donation from the owner of the tenant building across the street (Karen's handout 2005). The sources of the operational costs for the garden come from membership fees, fundraising events, and, most importantly, from various garden-supporting foundations like the Trust for Public Land and the Greenacre Foundation.

A kind of expense not significant in terms of cost, but which got a lot of attention during the time I was doing my fieldwork, was the purchasing of firewood. The East Garden has a small, round fire-place made of stones. It is enjoyed by its members who do some BBQing during the summer or to get some warmth during the fall and winter.

Whether firewood is a necessary expense for the garden or not became an issue of a heated debate in several meetings. Lenore strongly opposed buying firewood using the garden budget, especially when the garden, according to her, was already scrambling to pay for insurance. Others argued that firewood was a necessity for the garden and money should be raised and set aside specifically for that purpose. While the fire place had always been the signature of the garden, the discussion developed into the question of whether having an open fire was even legal (the matter was not investigated further after the meeting). While some members argued that the firewood is for everyone, others argued that they have been used only by a few for fun's sake. There are a few people who do BBQ often while there are others who hardly do. BBQing in the East Garden is not an organized, announced event, except for a few occasions of fundraising parties. People spontaneously decide to do it sometimes and ask their garden friends if they want to join. There were differences of opinion as to whether firewood has always been included in the budget or not.

The disagreement over the firewood triggered Lenore's decision to end her many years of service as the treasurer at the East Garden. She did not run for the position when the election came. Her decision to leave the position over a seemingly minor disagreement may be also due to the sense of discouragement she felt. Filing necessary paperwork and doing bookkeeping for the garden annually as a non-paid volunteer can be time-consuming, yet other members do not always realize or pay attention to the administrative efforts in maintaining a garden.

The discussion regarding firewood and BBQing in the garden reflected different interests and ideals garden members have about the garden. Some people value the

aspect of socializing and fun while others seek more order worrying that the lack of it could result in the loss of the garden. Since the East Garden is not a public park, alcohol is allowed inside. Some people worried that some drinking activities by its members could tarnish the reputation of the garden. Those with the latter opinion comprised a relatively small group of people. Core members of the garden, who have been living in the area for a decade or more, did not seem to differ vis-à-vis these issues on the grounds of class background. In other words, people's class or ethnic/racial backgrounds did not seem to affect their opinions on what kind of activities should be allowed in the garden. If I sense any tendency that may have differentiated their opinions, it would be age. In my casual observations, those who voiced the opinion that garden should be freer were younger, but nevertheless, the difference in age seemed negligible. A community garden is more than a garden; it is a social space. Making rules for what are acceptable behaviors and what are not is an important task that garden members take on together.

My analysis of the activities and interaction at community gardens does not emphasize gender relationships. I started the fieldwork with an open mind, noting issues I encounter as I see them. Gender roles and relations were not raised as an issue by members, and I did not observe notable gender-related issues during my fieldwork both at the East and the West Garden. Parry et al. (2005:180) argues gardens, for "the collective and collaborative nature," are a leisure arena at which the reproduction as well as resistance of traditional gender roles takes place. I observed casually that there always seem to be more women present at meetings and working in the garden. There seem to have been no gender biases on assigning gardening and decision-making tasks. The

power relation I occasionally witnessed was not between genders, but between long-standing and new members.

Building a Community

An incident in the garden showed a divide among members over their preference for freedom and order in the garden. At a meeting, someone mentioned that after-hour trespassing in the garden by teenagers, one of whom appeared to be a son or daughter of a garden member was a serious problem. Members have witnessed teenagers getting into the garden and hanging out even when they do not have the key to the garden. They have somehow figured out how to open the gate without the key. One of the ways to deal with the problem which everyone agreed was to change the lock to the garden, but that alone was not a real solution.

The question was raised as to whether the kids should be allowed to join the garden if they wanted to officially join. Lenore and one of the other long-term members strongly opposed the idea, arguing that the current rule clearly states that no children under 16 are allowed to become members. She had told these teenagers to leave the garden before when there were no parents supervising them, but, according to her, they just kept coming back. When she suggested that they help with the garden chores if they wanted to enjoy the garden, the teenagers failed to show up. The members' opinions ranged widely about whether to somehow accommodate the teenagers or to evict them. One member said, "All these kids are born in this garden, basically" implying that these children have always been around, and the garden has been an important place for them. Others suggested "give some chores to do to these teens." Tonya, the former president,

pointed out, “This brings up the issue of what this garden is all about.” She argued that the members had to engage in gardening, not simply helping out with some chores. Lenore argued that some parents were using this garden to let their children hangout. She was concerned that having unattended children leads to serious liability issues for the garden.

Diego, the president, tried to come up with a motion about the conditions under which teenagers should be in the garden. Tonya pointed out that kids in general in the garden were very well behaved. Some members argued that we should establish rules for kids in the garden while others suggested having meetings with the parents. Lenore reminded everyone again that the current rule states that no kids under sixteen are allowed in the garden without adult supervision. She pointed out that this garden was private property, implying that if anything happened to unsupervised children, the garden could be held responsible. Another member spoke out, “I still think we should let them (children) help the garden.” She preferred to incorporate the teens into the garden community to help them appreciate the place, instead of viewing them as problematic. At the end, the mixture of both approaches was utilized. Garden members at the meetings were reminded that children in the garden had to be supervised and could not be given a key. If members saw children behaving inappropriately or teens hanging out in the garden, then they most likely had to say something to the children or to their guardians. Whether members wanted it or not, each of the key-holding members shared the responsibility for what went on in the garden.

The members of East Garden have been ethnically and racially diverse from the beginning. Race and ethnicity are rarely perceived as major issues and are not really

mentioned. One of the few exceptions was when a member brought up that he heard how a godson of another member, a tall Puerto Rican man, was asked to leave by an unnamed member. This member was leaving the garden and the non-member could not be left there in his absence. The godson was said to have been unhappy about the incident. The story was mentioned during a meeting when members were talking about how the garden might have been perceived to be "an unwelcome place." The godson may have been upset because the member who asked him to leave did not realize that he was affiliated with the garden even though he was not officially a member. That could easily happen, since the garden continues to grow in membership but without mandatory meeting attendance, there are members who do not know other members, let alone their children or godchildren. The members who mentioned the story perhaps felt that the godson, being a tall male of color, might have been a factor in someone asking him to leave when closing the gate. The other members at the meeting did not dwell on this particular aspect of the story and instead moved on to discuss the openness of the garden and the policy of locking the garden when members were not present.

On another occasion, there was a discussion about how teenagers who broke into the locked garden to hang out after dark were told to leave by one of the long-term members, who is an African-American woman, and how they talked back to her using a racial slur. That raised concerns about the balance between keeping the garden open and securing the place to make sure no further incidents like that could happen. These incidents, however, are rare. Garden members did not seem to prefer to frame such issues in terms of racial and/or ethnic conflict. Instead, they treat it as an opportunity to discuss and work on garden's relationship to people in the community. The membership

of the East Garden reflects the diversity of the neighborhood though there were hardly any Asians active in the garden at the time of my fieldwork. While people's class background was not apparent, the majority of them seemed to be middleclass professionals. Some people were unemployed or underemployed at one point, during which they seemed to spend more time in the garden. Sometimes perceptions can be deceiving, however. One person I thought to be unemployed for a long time was actually a landlord who rented a house outside of the city. Compared to the West Garden, members of the East Garden gave me the impression of being Bohemian regardless of their professions. Perhaps that reflected how they felt and behaved in the garden or the atmosphere of the Lower East Side in general.

Many garden members, as they live in the community themselves, care about what is going on in the community inside and outside of the community garden. The garden may not be an oasis devoid of problems, but when the problem happens in and around the garden, the community is here to work together to address the problem. The garden not only keeps the community beautiful by maintaining a place that offers a great amenity, a sense of nature and peacefulness on the city block but also by offering a place where people from different backgrounds and interests can come together and communicate to create a sense of community. The day-to-day activities and the decision-making processes that keep the East Garden flourishing may sometimes be mundane and repetitious. However, garden members are rewarded by the compliments they get from community members who appreciate the place and by the enjoyment they get staying in touch with the land and nature right in their neighborhood in Manhattan.

Fundraising Events

A fundraising event at the East Garden, which happens once or twice a year, is not only a great way to raise some money for the garden but an effective and fun way to introduce the garden to the people in the community. Diego, the president, started a meeting by saying that the fundraiser event was not solely about raising funds, but also to promote the garden in the community as well. Once members agree to hold a fundraising event and set the date, members meet many more times to work on the details of the event. For the fundraising party in the year 2005, members initially suggested to charge an admission fee (in the name of voluntary contribution) at the entrance and to provide guests with a garden tour, a small gift, and, of course, food. A contribution of eight to ten dollars was initially considered for admission.

Although members who attended the first fundraising meeting agreed that there should be a cover charge, they later began wondering if it was such a good idea. Some members argued that by charging a cover, the event will be nothing but a fundraiser. Others thought that a cover charge will reinforce the idea that many people in this community have (according to some members) that this garden is elitist. By eliminating a cover charge, they argued, we could show that this garden was open to the public. In the end, they decided not to have a cover charge at the entrance, but charge people per food item or per plate. As charging people upfront could deter many from walking in, letting people buy food items (note: it was referred to as donation) as they wished was seen to be more profitable as well.

The food was to be prepared by member volunteers and also to be donated by nearby local food businesses. Wanda, a new eager member, volunteered right away to

make Polynesian chicken wings, pasta salad, and her famous sangria. Other members kept volunteering to bring food for BBQ, salad, and so on. I was thinking about making something as well, but was a bit afraid to say it right there, worrying about making a commitment. The idea was that all members should bring something, though the agreement was made only among eight members who happened to attend the particular meeting. Items like wine, beer, and ice were needed to be purchased by volunteers and the treasurer would reimburse them once the receipts were submitted. Members spent much time during the meeting discussing what brand of beers should be made available. The contribution price for the drink and food was set low in general, partially because some argued that people in the community would not pay high prices when they know they can get the same thing just around the corner at a cheaper price. This argument was objected to by some garden members who reminded everyone that this was a fundraiser, after all. Eventually, people agreed that this was as much of fundraising as a service to the community. They were aware that one of the justifications for the garden to keep existing in the midst of now highly-valued real estate was the idea that the garden was there not only for those who enjoy gardening as members, but also to serve people in the community—the fellow neighbors. In planning the fundraising, members imagined old-time neighbors as the main guests who would come to the event, but this also was the chance to introduce the garden to some of the newcomers to the neighborhood.

There were some ideas suggested during the meeting, such as selling the garden t-shirt, which did not happen in the end, and selling raffle tickets, which did happen. Some stores in the neighborhood donated prizes for the raffle ticket or food for the event. A few members were enthusiastic about the idea of giving the garden tour as a way to

introduce people to the wonders of the garden and to raise money. Many garden members knew business owners in the area either as frequent customers or friends. Having such personal connections helped some members to get food donations from businesses for the garden.

The event attracted many visitors who came to enjoy the food, the garden, people, and music provided by local bands, some of whom were garden members themselves. On an occasion like this, I witnessed the diversity of people attracted to the garden. People of different age groups came. The event brought together some old-time residents who had stayed with the ups and downs of the Lower East Side and some newcomers who moved to the area as the result of the recent wave of gentrification. There were even some famous people like a movie director stopping by to mingle with fellow neighbors and regular garden visitors all enjoying the place. Regular garden visitors were there as well, enjoying the garden that was a bit more bustling than usual. I have often seen members of the garden running into each other and neighbors from nearby apartment buildings on the streets. They greet and talk. Watching them, I felt that the neighborhood seemed friendlier when people knew each other. In the big city like New York, people do not get to know each other by merely living in close proximity to one another. The community garden offers people a chance to interact: to become a familiar face.

Pleasure or Resistance?

The East Garden is a community itself and is an imbedded part of a community. Abu-Lughod (1994b:37) points out that residents of the Lower East Side had no

"preexistent 'primordial' ties' or "dominant shared identities of race, class, or ethnicity" which bound them together as a traditional definition of neighborhood or community' may suggest. Instead, she argues, the neighborhood of the Lower East Side is more of a product of its historical background of conflicts which bound the residents together (Abu-Lughod 1994b:37). The Lower East Side has been depicted by scholars as the site of social movements and resistance to poor housing conditions and gentrification (Mele 2006; Sites 2003; Smith 1996). Mario Maffi (1995:293) suggests that community mobilization, including community gardens, are a form of "a daily battle of resistance" against gentrification in the Lower East Side. It is likely that such an atmosphere encouraged people in the Lower East Side to take over littered abandoned lots to turn them into community gardens. Having talked to the garden members about the past and the present of the East Garden and their personal stories about their participation in garden-making, however, I did not sense that these gardeners viewed what they do as some sort of resistance. The founders of the garden wished to do something about the eyesores on the block, and more importantly, sought to create a place where people could hang out and enjoy nature and each other's company. What they have accomplished may be viewed in the long run as resistance or a movement, but the sense of leisure and pleasure was more important in uniting people to act on creating the garden.

The area surrounding the East Garden has become a happening place with hip shops, restaurants, and bars attracting college students and yuppies alike. Gentrification was occuring at a rapid pace during the time of my fieldwork. The Lower East Side, once an ethnically diverse residential neighborhood, by 2008 had become a place where people from all over New York City came to enjoy great restaurants, some of them pretty

upscale. Construction of new condos and apartments with much higher rents are likely to attract people with higher incomes, and younger generations who are attracted to the busy, happening feeling of the area. When students rent apartments, they tend to move in and out a lot. The landlords can increase the rent every time someone moves out. Frequent turnover of residents could lead to higher overall rents for the area. Many garden members of the East Garden are long-term residents living in rent stabilized apartments. While their rent may not go up rapidly, the rising costs of neighborhood amenities can raise their living expenses. Many newcomers face higher rents than what long-term residents pay.

The East Garden has developed into a place of community building. It has become a part of everyday life in this neighborhood. The East Garden itself has been a force of change for the neighborhood, making the place safer and vibrant. Welcoming and accommodating newcomers strengthens the East Garden. It also helps provide a place where newcomers and old-timers become acquaintances, an important factor in community building since lack of interaction is a big source of misunderstanding and possible contention. Recruiting new members, moreover, will help pass a story down to the next generation of residents that the East Garden is not a product of gentrification, but an achievement attained through the communal efforts of people of this formerly mostly working-class community.

Chapter 6

The West Garden I: The Beginning

The East Garden I discussed in the previous chapter is an example of a long-running community garden that depends on communal decision-making where all members are welcome to attend meetings. The West Garden is the largest community garden in size on the Upper West Side. While both gardens were started by a concerned individual and grew into grassroots organizations, the West Garden has a more formal structure than the East Garden and has a board of directors and several committees. Both gardens are located in neighborhoods that have been affected by gentrification. Today the Upper West Side has become one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the city, much more so than the Lower East Side.

Like the East Garden, the West Garden was started in the 1970s on an empty lot that was functioning as a junkyard at a time in which the surrounding community was facing halted development, a slow economy, and drug problems. There are as many stories and memories of the beginning of the West Garden as there were people involved in the process. The process of winning permanent status required persistent and strategic efforts by those who believed in the idea of the community garden as well as the cooperation of some powerful figures, some of whom originally seemed like unlikely supporters of the West Garden. The story of the West Garden shows how chance, persistence, and timing, in addition to people's dedication to the cause, helped to get the garden started and ensured its longevity. In the next two chapters, I will discuss the origins as well as the everyday activities of the West Garden to explore what it takes to create and maintain this community- and volunteer-based organization.

The Upper West Side Today and in the Past

Today, mall boutiques, gourmet food stores, confectionery and pastry shops, cafes—a stroll down the streets of the Upper West Side gives one a sense that there are still many mom-and-pop stores there amongst a few chain retail stores. The Upper West Side is defined as the area above the West 59th Street and below Cathedral Parkway/West 110th Street. The western edge consists of Riverside Drive and Riverside Park, and Central Park West marks the eastern boundary of the area. Riverside Drive is a quiet residential area overlooking the Hudson River. There are no commercial establishments along the drive. Central Park West is a wealthy neighborhood overlooking Central Park. Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue are the commercial arteries of the district with uninterrupted lines of stores and restaurants on both sides.

The Upper West Side is not overwhelmed by skyscrapers or dominated by megastores like one sees in Midtown, and it is not full of the high-end brand shops that dominate the Upper East Side—the area that used to be the most expensive residential neighborhood in the city. The Upper West Side now matches the reputation of the Upper East Side as one of the most desirable and expensive neighborhoods to live in the New York metropolitan area. At $90,633, the median household income of the Community District ranks 3rd of the all districts in the city (Armstrong et al. 2007). The median monthly rent is $1,269 as of 2007 (Armstrong et al. 2007). The market prices of townhouses and large condominiums in the vicinity of the West Garden as of April 2007 easily topped $7,500,000 (New York Magazine n.d.).

Historically, the Upper West Side has been a socially and culturally vibrant area. According to Peter Salwen (1989), a distinct social geography of the area began to take

shape in the late 1800s. The neighborhood had a mixture of mansions, tenements, small businesses selling daily necessities, apartments for the middle class, and houses for well-to-do families. The construction of Lincoln Center in the 1960s made the area a major cultural hub in New York City, but even before that, the Upper West Side had had a large, elegant, but short-lived theater, the *New Theater* (later renamed the *Century Theater*) which was built in 1909 and demolished in the early 1930. Salwen (1989:197) points out that starting in the early 1900s, the Upper West Side began attracting wealthy artists who specialized in portraits and illustrations. Many writers and musicians have also visited or resided in the area over the past century-and-a-half. Edgar Allan Poe stayed in a cottage near West 84th Street from 1843 to 1844 (Salwen 1989:212). Today, a part of West 84th street is named Edgar Allan Poe Street and Edgar's Café on it commemorates his stay. One of the most famous buildings associated with a musician is the Dakota on West 72nd Street at Central Park West, designed in 1884. John Lennon who lived there was shot and killed in front of the building on December 8, 1980.

The Upper West Side has many faces. As a whole, it is viewed as more liberal than its counterpart, the Upper East Side. In the year 2000, 66.3% of the total population of Upper West Side residents identified themselves as White Non-Hispanic (Community Board 7, Manhattan n.d.). Residents of Hispanic origin comprise 16.7% of the total. The third largest group is Black/African American Non-Hispanic at 9%. Asian or Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic is fastest growing group though still small in number compared to other groups. It made up 3.5% of the total in 1990 and, by 2000, the figure went up to 5.6%.

Salwen poses the question, “Will rampant gentrification destroy the diversity that made the neighborhood attractive in the first place?” (1989:285) and argues that the Upper West Side is “no longer the liberal-intellectual, artistic neighborhood of ten or even five years ago…” (1989:285). One of the factors that contributed to shaping the Upper West Side was large numbers of single room occupancy (SRO) hotels, many of which came into existence at the end of World War II to accommodate returning veterans as well as “students, the elderly, and the working poor” and “large numbers of unemployed, single minorities, ex-offenders, and released mental patients” (New York SRO Project 1980:1). SRO hotels were created by dividing up the interior of large, old apartments or hotels into small, single rooms. In my interview, the former chairperson of the Community Board 7 explained to me that those who stayed at SRO hotels ended up residing there permanently rather than temporarily. She said that the place used to be “unsafe.” Many SRO hotels suffered from overcrowding and lack of proper maintenance. They seemed to have deteriorated in the 1970s (New York SRO Project 1980:2). SRO hotels still exist, but they are no longer prominent on the Upper West Side. When SRO hotels were in the news in 2007, it was about a court decision prohibiting the landlords of SRO hotels from renting out rooms to tourists (The City of New York, Office of the Mayor 2007). According to the New York Times (1995b), 15,000 SRO units were replaced by expensive housing during the 1980s.

Looking at the Upper West Side today, one might wonder why there is a community garden in the midst of such an expensive neighborhood and with two major parks nearby. Many people who walk by the West Garden might assume that the city developed it as a park. The West Garden does not belong to the city’s Park Department,

however. The West Garden began in the mid 1970s at the site of the giant city-owned vacant lot-turned-junkyard which stretched to occupy about half of the long stretch of a block between two avenues. There was much more affordable housing in the neighborhood back then, and down the street from the garden, there was a building occupied by squatters. In the 1980s, when developers agreed to set aside part of the lot, the area was turned into a much smaller, but still sizable garden. The presence of the community garden in this highly-prized real estate location reflects an earlier era, before the full-scale gentrification of the neighborhood. It is also a testimony to community activism. The West Garden would not be there today if it were not for the people who envisioned it over thirty years ago and for the community that came together to build and maintain it.

Making the West Garden

Each individual who has participated in the making of a community garden has a unique recollection of what the process was like. In particular, the experience and the contributions each one made are different depending on the time s/he got involved. I reconstruct here the beginning of the garden mostly from interviews I conducted. The stories of the garden's beginnings are shared through oral tradition, and most members seem to have at least some idea about how the garden came into existence. Some core members at the garden have expressed interest in creating archival records of the West Garden to make sure that the story of the garden survives along with the physical space long after original members are gone. The founder of the garden asked her friend Naomi to videotape interviews of some people who were deeply involved with establishing the

garden, hoping to turn the material into a documentary. Some of the interviews and quotes I use here, in addition to my own interviews, come from the unedited raw footage of the interviews Naomi did. She kindly shared the tape with me. The stories of the creation of the garden illustrate how a grassroots movement succeeded in creating a community green space. They also suggest that the history of the garden is entangled with the gentrification process of the neighborhood.

Elise

The idea of starting a community garden which became the West Garden came initially from Elise, a middle-class woman of Scotch-Irish-English descent. Around 1974, she was about forty, and was taking time off from her profession as film editor to raise her children. She often walked by a huge and ugly vacant lot near her children's school. She had an idea that the place would be much better if she could turn it into a garden for children instead of leaving it as a huge eyesore full of garbage and stolen cars. One day, when she visited a nearby senior center to look for volunteers for her children's school, she met a senior citizen advisor, to whom Elise happened to mention her interest in starting a garden in the empty lot across from the public elementary school. The advisor also saw the value in starting a little garden there. Indeed, the senior center had already rented the space from the city but had nobody to coordinate the effort to start one. Elise volunteered to start a garden. Gaining the support of teachers at the school who agreed that children would benefit from this resource, Elise began the process of transforming the giant vacant lot.

Many community gardens on the Lower East Side began when volunteers squatted the lot. That was not the case for the West Garden. The lot had already been rented by the senior center, which allowed Elise to work onsite to turn it into a community garden. The Community Planning Board 7 (today known as the Community Board), which consisted of unpaid members appointed by the borough president to represent the community district, was supportive of the idea and was willing to provide financial support, but with a few conditions. Most importantly, it was meant to be an interim site project—meaning there could be no permanent garden there. For the interim site project, Elise was informed, the city was willing to provide funding of $25,000. She attended a Community Planning Board meeting and asked, "Where do I go? What do I do, and with whom (to get the money to start the garden)?" She was also told that the garden had to be for the community as a whole, not just for school children, in order for the city to fund the project.

A person Elise contacted in the Community Planning Board advised her to contact block associations and set up flyers to get the community involved. She called a number of block associations. Elise posted flyers all over the neighborhood to let people know about the first meeting. One hundred-fifty flyers were put up and about twenty people came to the first meeting to discuss what their community garden would be like. A gardener from the West Garden told me that he remembered that there were various networks and groups of people in the area who were attracted to the project partially because they knew Elise. Collecting money to get insurance for the site was Elise's other important and difficult task. The insurance was mandatory to develop the site into a garden. So Elise had to convince people of her vision of the beautiful garden while the

site was still nothing but a vacant lot and an unofficial landfill. The insurance money, which Elise recalled as around $600, came in the form of donations from block associations and street associations.

According to Elise, the most difficult challenge emerged after she had collected the money for insurance and held several community meetings to decide what the garden should consist of. By the time Elise was ready to start making the garden, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), which had initially supported the plan to start an interim site garden, placed the lot for bidding for housing development. Elise was told in a phone call from HPD that a community garden could not be built there anymore. However, she had invested too much time and energy in preparing for the garden to simply back down and quit. "I had not heard anything like this. I had collected all that money, and had done all the things, and here they were telling me just like that? So, I went to the meeting. I got up (to speak up) because I had worked on this diligently for nearly a year, making hundreds of phone calls doing everything."

Elise was given two-and-a-half to three minutes to make her case at a Community Planning Board meeting to save the garden project. In an interview with me, she looked back on that day as a personality-changing experience. "My shyness was over that day," she said. She made the argument that even if the lot was given to a developer right away, it would be a few years before any construction could start on the site. She insisted in the meeting, "You have to do it (allow a garden to be built) because it could take four or five years before the housing can be put together. And for the interim time, we can use it as a community garden, which is what this was for, an interim site garden." She continued,

"somebody knows who did it (canceled the plan for a community garden). Somebody did it. This community has been lied to, it has been cheated." Elise remembered a rush from the crowd supporting her position after she made the speech. The next morning, she again got a call from the HPD telling her that it was going to reinstall the community garden project. She thought the whole process was very political, and as "a sort of shy person", she managed to overcome her fears, taking a stance and speaking up for the cause. When I asked her why she was so committed to starting a community garden, she answered, "I guess I worked so hard so long, so diligently… I was obsessed with it." She laughed a bit. "Once you put that much involvement in there, there is no way to stop."

Forming a garden requires consensus building. Some of the community members originally resisted the idea of creating a garden at the location. To Elise's surprise, not everyone was happy about it. Some people told her, "Oh, you cannot do anything to this neighborhood; that's a waste of time," and "Oh, we don't want a garden here. We want housing, we need housing here," she recalled in her interview with Naomi. The city was going through a tough time and many did not feel any optimism for turning the neighborhood around.

The open gate policy, in Elise's opinion, has been the key to the success of the garden in blending in with the community and attracting more and more people to join. When I asked if she thought the garden has become a bit elitist over the years, she said yes, explaining that it appears that way only because the neighborhood itself has changed. "It used to be a much more mixed neighborhood. It was a poorer neighborhood. [Changes in] the garden represent [changes in] the neighborhood. The neighborhood is much more affluent than it used to be."

The beautified vacant lot became a symbol of the community. The West Garden has become an indispensable amenity much appreciated by those who live nearby. People who come across the garden are amazed by this green treasure. The interim garden became a semi-permanent garden. Elise was hired by the Board of Education and taught gardening to school children in the area. "Teachers and children were very enthusiastic, so it became a whole community thing." She told me. "As recently as like 5-6 years ago, a guy came up to me and said, 'You won't remember me. He is my son. When I was his age, you were the one who taught me about gardening and I never forgot about it. That's why I always bring my son around here'." She remained active in the garden as long as her health permitted her to do so. She has since retired from gardening, but her name is passed down from those who know her to those who newly enter the garden as a member.

Ms. Sally Goodgold

Sally Goodgold is an animated, powerful figure whose determination and ability to seize opportunities were crucial in securing the West Garden's permanent status in 1981. She was the chair of the Community Board 7, the district in which the West Garden is located. While the Community Board is an advisory body, it plays a crucial role in advocating neighborhood interests and shaping the land use and budgetary needs of the district. Borough Presidents appoint each board member based upon advice from a City Council Member. Goodgold was appointed as the chair by the Borough President based on her reputation in the community. She described the community board as a

"non-partisan, independent, apolitical body. Every human being in the city is entitled to representation on the community board."

The Community Board 7 had its say in the development of the Upper West Side Urban Renewal Area under the federal urban renewal program. The plan had come into an existence in the late 1950s. In the 1970s, the community was deeply involved in the development of the site in an unprecedented way from the beginning in planning and developing the area (Lamberg 1981). Goodgold referred to the power given to the community as "a new era of civic participation." The Community Board drew up the guidelines for the Urban Renewal Areas. It worked with the developers to examine competing proposals and to choose winners. The existence of the Community Board helped to give the voice to the community to be heard and to draw up the vision of the community. In the late 1970s, New York City gave community boards the power and responsibility to oversee various city's measures including land-use and zoning. Community boards help residents voice their concerns to the city through public hearings. Community boards have played an important role in challenging overdevelopment in their district (Erlanger 1987). Goodgold and her community board took up the opportunity and they knew how to proceed with the power granted to them by the city.

As some sites in the Urban Renewal Area were slow to be developed, they deteriorated into what looked like junkyards and garbage fields. "Rather than living in a wasteland," Goodgold told me, people decided to take the space and turn it into a garden. In her words, it was "strictly a civic movement" by "a group of people, rich, poor, Black, White, you name it; it didn't matter."

Because the Community Board was supportive of the garden it secured some initial funding with the understanding that the garden was on interim land. It was designated for development. Sometime in between 1980 and 1981, the developers won the contract to develop the site of the West Garden, and its future became uncertain. However, gardeners and many people in the community argued that it had become too important an asset to the community for it to be simply bulldozed over to make room for new buildings. The Community Board, especially Goodgold who was very much in favor of the garden, explored the possibility of maintaining the garden by having it incorporated into the development plan for the site. In 1981, Goodgold's efforts to save the garden included negotiations with a local tenant association and even a presentation in Washington, D.C. before the Secretary of Housing.

Goodgold saw that the garden flourishing in the interim site had been positive for the neighborhood not only for aesthetic reasons, but also as place in which people, regardless of their backgrounds, came to work together. She viewed the garden as being "a sort of metaphor for democracy." The original developers' plan was to build a 330-unit building using public money. The apartment building the developers were going to build was subsidized affordable housing. They were to be part of the government subsidy program called the Section 8 Program (City and state initiative to provide financial incentives to developers). Under this 80/20 program, the developers were required to set aside 20% of the housing units for low-income tenants both in the large apartment building and small townhouses. However, the available funds for the Section 8 were running out and the developers could not secure enough tax credits to insure the low-income housing units. As the result, the plan was changed to build sixteen

townhouses instead. However, the federal regulation still required the developers to set aside 20% of the townhouses to be low-income housing.

Goodgold saw a possible lever to negotiate with the developers to secure a piece of land for the garden; she explored the possibility to get an exemption for the 20% rule for the townhouses the developers were going to build in exchange for leaving the land for the garden. The first thing the Community Board did was to sell the idea of the garden to the people who were sponsors of the low income housing, such as tenant leaders. Goodgold argued that the garden was providing children a place to play and learn about nature. She suggested that tenant leaders agree to a one-time exemption to the 20% subsidization rule for the townhouses in exchange for the developers setting aside a parcel of land for the garden. While keenly aware of the need for affordable housing, tenant leaders ultimately agreed that a garden was also valuable. They promised Goodgold they would not fight against the one-time exception of the 20% rule for townhouses if she could get the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to agree to the arrangement. The promise she earned probably reflects Goodgold's negotiation skill and ability to persuade others as well as the affection the residents in the area had toward the garden. More importantly, since the development plan was to build townhouses, and not a huge apartment complex, the one-time exemption of the 20% rule did not add up to the loss of large numbers of apartment units. Everybody, however, thought that it would be nearly impossible to win the exemption from HUD.

Making an appointment with the HUD's Secretary Samuel R. Pierce Jr. was not an easy task for a Community Board leader from New York City. While Goodgold was

quite prominent in city politics, she was not well-known outside of it. She had called the office so many times trying to make an appointment that the administrative assistant of the HUD's Secretary knew her by name. Then, what Goodgold referred to as "a small miracle" occurred in August 1981: the federal air traffic controllers' strike. A stand-off between the Reagan administration and air traffic controllers meant a significant reduction in air travel. HUD's Secretary all of a sudden had an open schedule because many people could not make it to their appointments with him, especially in the morning. His assistant mentioned Goodgold (who had been trying to get an appointment for over a month) to him and he agreed to meet her for a 15-30 minute appointment. The Commissioner of the Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) of New York City insisted on sending a deputy with Goodgold. She told him, "You can come, but you can't talk. It's my appointment."

Instead of a mere fifteen to thirty minutes, the meeting with HUD's Secretary took up the entire morning. Goodgold was asked many questions by people present in the room, and she had prepared her answers well. In Naomi's interview, Goodgold claimed, "I had made all the plans of all the bills that still needed help including this one, but not just this, this was a part of it. This was the most difficult because this was the exception, I showed them everything, and I asked them for this. And I told them what we wanted and why we wanted it and how we have solved problems with tenant organizers." She made a convincing argument for the importance of having an open green space within walking distance in the community.

By helping to save the garden, Goodgold also helped the site to remain as the Urban Renewal Areas which include some affordable housing. According to her, there

were some people in the city who much preferred to allow commercial development of the sites. They could have had their way if the deal with the developers fell through. Besides tenant groups, Goodgold communicated with the famous developer of the area, who is known as Mr. New York, and got his support for the developers to build the townhouse with the exemption. Goodgold knew that he was a well-respected large-scale developer who cared about the community he invested in. More importantly, he would have faced the devaluing of his properties around the sites if the Urban Renewal plan was terminated. That would have meant the presence of huge, undeveloped, unsightly sites near his properties for many years to come while developers who had been assigned for the Urban Renewal plan would fight in court to challenge the termination. The statement of support for Goodgold from the big name developer seemed to have impressed the people at the meeting, many of whom surely recognized the name. Mentioning the initiative's pro bono lawyer's name probably was also helpful in winning people's support for her cause. She told me that there were people in the meeting who used to work for the pro bono attorney when he held a public position (a former planning commission deputy). She felt that pointing out his support for the garden helped to convince many who knew him to give her their support.

Goodgold showed the people in the meeting that the urban renewal program and the community garden was backed and supported not only by low-income people needing housing but the powerful figures that the people in the meeting knew and highly regarded. She made a convincing case and HUD's Secretary was on her side by the end of the meeting. He mentioned to her that the President of the United States read an annotated editorial in the New York Times on housing. Goodgold, well-prepared as usual, already

had an appointment to see an editorial writer on the garden/housing issue. The Secretary was genuinely impressed with her, and told her, "Good for you!" A day after making her case to HUD's Secretary, Goodgold met the writer from the editorial board of New York Times. She made her case to him knowing that whatever would be written could "either make us or break us." While the writer remained stone-faced and said he would check everything out, a positive editorial for the garden appeared. Goodgold's efforts in negotiating with tenant organizers, talking to HUD's Secretary, and meeting with the writer from New York Times all worked in favor of keeping the garden space.

This episode suggests that the community board was, at least at that time, an important part of New York City's neighborhood policymaking process, even though it was only an advisory body. Delmos J. Jones and Joan T. Turner (1989) write that in New York City, the community board plays important role in gathering information on problems in the neighborhoods and using political pressure to persuade institutions and agencies to improve their conditions. Goodgold helped to save the garden not simply because she held the position of community board chair, but because she used her personal political skills to promote causes and to convince people through networking. She is not a political figure; she is not interested in public office. But she has been known to get results for her community, and in fact, the former Mayor Ed Koch said to her, "Do you think you are the mayor?" She told me that she said to Koch, "I never thought of that. However, I know every inch of this territory; I know every building, all the rules and regulations. You cannot possibly do that. No mayor can know all the districts." Goodgold's experience suggests that the community-based approach to solving problems can work, especially when those capable of taking the lead are involved.

During the interview, as I wondered how she managed to get so much done for her community, she said this: "I learned one thing. If I do something right, you [usually politicians] take the credit; if I do it wrong, I take the blame." She takes pride in the West Garden she has helped to save. She believes that the garden helps bring people together. "We wanted all different people there together. That's what it made it better. Who benefits from this? Rich people? Poor people? Same way!" She said in the interview with Naomi. "It's such a good thing to have in the community."

Charles

Charles, a well-spoken, reserved and gentle retiree who was a leader of a labor union in New York City, is a long-term member and the current vice president of the West Garden. He joined the West Garden in its initial development phase. In those days, he was working for city-planning dealing with educational, welfare, and health issues. One day, as part of his work duties, he attended a meeting to talk to squatters who had moved into a building a couple of blocks down the street from the West Garden. A woman at the meeting mentioned the garden to Charles and informed him that all he had to do to join was to show up and carve out an area for himself. He joined the garden. He remembered people mainly growing flowers at that time. Later on, separate sections for flowers and vegetables were carved out.

Some people actively participated in the negotiations among the gardeners, the developer, and the city, while others gardened. At first, Charles simply gardened. He did not want to get involved in the garden's politics, largely because of his job with the city. He remembers that the issue of making the garden permanent was a controversial one in

the community because some people felt that the need for housing was greater than the need for a garden. Like many garden members here and at other gardens, Charles does not insist that the garden comes before housing needs. However, as the garden became established over time and is now, as he sees it, an irreplaceable landmark on the block, he would likely to defend it and protect it if it is ever threatened with housing development. For now the West Garden is secured as long as the place remains the open green space for the community. He attended some meetings while the garden was still in its infancy. Charles gave credit to Elise for taking the initiative, networking with different groups of people in the neighborhood, and knowing how to call up the city to utilize city agencies when the garden needed some help.

When I interviewed Charles in 2007, he had been vice president for at least five years. People run for various positions in the annual election of officers. Charles admitted that he ran for the vice president position because he did not see others wanting to take up the job. People do not often compete over official positions. Such a position requires long unpaid hours spent negotiating and meeting with people. Sometimes officers are caught up in heated debates over various issues the garden faces. Charles said to me that the reward he got for being the vice president was the feeling of satisfaction knowing that he was doing a good thing for the community. The tasks he undertakes as vice president vary. Charles is the also the chair of the constitution committee which oversees bylaws and rules. The committee meets when called for by the board to negotiate on issues regarding current practices, rules, or bylaws. He substitutes for the president when she is not available and also organizes a garden picnic in the summer.

The most important tasks Charles takes on as the vice president are getting people involved in the garden, and acquainting himself with the people who are involved. He pointed out that everyone who joined the garden signs a letter promising to work at least four hours a month in the garden in addition to maintaining his or her own plot. This rule was not always enforced, and Charles found it important to call up people to encourage them to come out to work. He also worked persistently on investigating the mystery of the unusually high electricity bill the garden had been incurring for months.

He expressed his admiration for the president for what she accomplishes and the stress she endures, though he might not always agree with her. Charles viewed the president's tasks as extremely time-consuming and demanding. Before the current president assumed office, he said that the turnover rate for the president's position was every one to two years, given that the position was highly intensive. He also felt that it had become harder to find somebody else who wanted to do the job. He told me that the least the board members could do was to show support to whoever became the president. Sticking together, after all, has been important when the garden faces a threat or outside criticism. He brought it up because officers often become targets towards whom the board members direct their frustrations.

Charles was also concerned that the garden was not attracting as many committed younger newcomers as it should:

> You know there are a group of people who are in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. They started out with the garden and they are sort of like the backbone. One of the problems we have for the future: These people who have really done the work, which is not a big group of people, are no longer able to do it. So, we need younger people to be able to move in and to do this. We are pushing to encourage people (to join)

He agreed with my suggestion that the dearth of new younger volunteers might be due to a lack of interest in doing volunteer work in the community. Charles suggested that those who join do a lot of work for a year or two and then seem to move to a new location, or perhaps move on to engage in some new activities elsewhere. "I think in our garden, we can always count on certain core people," he said. Members like Charles serve as the backbone of the garden, holding it together even through rough times. He was concerned for the future of the garden, however. A dynamic member who is a great fundraiser for the garden is in her eighties now. The main writer of the monthly newsletter for the garden has recently been through a serious illness. As the first generation of gardeners are growing older, Charles hopes that current and new members become interested in assuming core roles in the garden. He feels somewhat discouraged that there used to be more people interested in running the organization in the past than there are today.

Victor

Victor, who came to New York City in 1965 from the Midwest to attend a prestigious music school, had been active in the city's community garden movement from the beginning. A knowledgeable and expert gardener today, Victor did not know much about gardening when he joined. He first got involved with community gardening when he heard about Liz Christi, the founder of the first community garden in the Lower East Side in the 1970s and Greenguerillas, a garden organization she started. Victor became a volunteer for some of their projects. He said, "You know, that was what you did in the 70s—be counter-culturally active." Liz Christi told Victor about a woman on

the Upper West Side who was interested in starting a garden there. Through Liz, Victor met Elise and they worked together with others to clean up the site, removing many dumpsters full of stuff. He recalled that until around 1977, the arrangement of the clean-up and gardening effort was more informal. The garden was much bigger than what it is today. People were assigned to variously-sized vegetable plots proportionate to the size of their family.

When Victor and others got the news that developers were submitting proposals to develop the site, they joined the bid by making their own proposal to rehabilitate existing housing and build new housing while keeping a part of the garden. Their vision was to build mixed-use housing for senior citizens and living/working spaces for artists. "It was such an attractive proposal," recalls Victor. Victor's proposal did not win, as the developmental rights in the end were granted to Mr. Lindley and his partner, a developer who had a plan to build a large apartment complex there. The community board was involved in examining different proposals for the site.

After the developers were selected, a deal was made between them and the garden to split the cost to construct the garden. The garden successfully raised the half of the construction cost and the developer paid the rest. While the garden had been in existence since the mid 1970s, it was not developed into the current format until the end of the construction in 1987, according to Victor. In the late 1990's, the garden had major work done rebuilding its amphitheater. The cost of this, Victor recalls, was the same amount as the construction of the garden in 1987. Victor pointed out that the developers also paid for the landscape architect and related expenses. There was also a grant awarded for designing a part of the garden.

The garden is flourishing today, but Victor was concerned for its future. "Truthfully, I feel that the garden is now very much at a crossroad because we live in the different time," he said. He has seen a decline in the number of new eager volunteers working for the garden nowadays. He attributed the decline in volunteerism partially to increasing economic pressure and long work hours for people. Allocating time to do volunteer work was becoming more difficult. Moreover, he saw more optimism and idealism driving people in the 1970s. There was "the idea that people could actually take control of their own environment, their own world. This was when we started the garden." He was referring to something more than the idealism of his own youth. He believed that his generation had a sense of hope: the feeling that succeeding generations can do better than a preceding one. He remembered the time when the city was much more affordable. His first apartment here was under $100 a month. Since they spent considerably less on rent than today, he felt that people could afford more time for volunteering. He told me, "Now, it's not clear to me how the garden will continue for the next thirty years." Volunteerism is widespread in the United States. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor (2008), a little over one-quarter of the entire US population has volunteered for an organization at least once in a one-year period since September 2006. Their data shows that people between the ages of 35 and 54 are the most likely to volunteer among any other age group, and the higher the education level, more likely the individuals to volunteer. The bureau provides no statistics on the relationship between income and volunteering, although a higher level of education might imply a higher income level. While there is no data available to confirm or contradict Victor's concerns that higher rents may lead to a decline in volunteers, it is

possible that the need to work more to afford higher rents can take away time that can be spent dedicated to non-paid volunteer work.

The issue of declining volunteerism is one of the focuses of Robert D. Putnam's book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). He argues that busyness and financial pressure associated with shifts in the economic climate are some of the reasons for the decline in "civic engagement," but not significant ones. He reaches this conclusion because there also exists a decline in participation among affluent people with few financial worries. Putnam attributes an across-the-board decline in civic engagement among people of both genders and various socioeconomic statuses to multiple factors, including time and money constraints; allocation of more time to leisure activities, such as watching television; and the increasing individualism and sense of disconnect from politics among new generations. The shift in political climate in 2008 and 2009, such as invigoration of young volunteers for the presidential campaign for Obama and the drastic recession during the same period, may put a different twist to Putnam's analysis today. In his book, Putnam (2000) mentions the role of women in social movements and volunteering, but women do not come across as main actors in his analysis. In the community garden movement, both genders are present and important, but women have often been in leadership roles. In the gardens I've visited, women appeared to make up the majority of volunteers as well.

Putnam's metaphoric and literal use of the image of "bowling alone" helped advance his argument that there is a decline in the social capital—the social networks—and thus the community in the United States. Yasushi Watanabe (2007) points out, however, that Putnam's arguments appear to be rooted to his "nostalgic view of the past,"

which overlooks the role of capitalism and globalization in the changing social relations within communities. In my view, people's longing to belong and connect with one another remains but the options of how and where they achieve it may be becoming more diverse. Toward the end of the book, Putnam writes, "To build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves" (2000:411). The community garden may well be one of such places where the mingling of people unlike one another is nurtured.

Mr. Lindley

Mr. Lindley is the developer, along with his business partner who won the rights to develop the lots where the West Garden had been located. Every June, he is invited to the West Garden annual benefit banquet by gardeners as a gesture of appreciation for saving the garden. After long negotiations, he agreed to set aside a lot for the garden to continue. If he had not agreed to keep the garden, the garden would not be there today. Some people in the garden nearly worship him for saving the garden. Others are a bit more skeptical and believe that "We got the (garden) space in spite of him." One member told me that he thought Lindley was forced into the position of saving the garden by losing the battle and had to make the best of the situation by helping to develop it. The person suspected that Lindley thought the garden would not succeed, thereby allowing him to annex the place to his development. Another person shared the same feeling, "It was the developer's contention all along that we would never be able to sustain a community garden. We wouldn't be able to manage the site." The assumption

was understandable given that the early ‘80s was the time when many city parks were also poorly maintained.

The lots on which the West Garden was built were set for development by the city, which technically owned them. Whether Mr. Lindley entered the deal to keep the garden with reluctance, he and his development partner nevertheless provided half of the initial construction costs of the garden. Mr. Lindley recalled that negotiation with the community board was “mostly friendly, but sometimes acrimonious.” Once it was a done deal, Mr. Lindley contributed to building the garden: “we worked it out and…we gave the land, we gave a substantial amount of money as a contribution toward the construction of the garden, and we actually managed initial construction and over time” (in Naomi Mankowitz’s video interview footage n.d.). Living in the neighborhood himself, Mr. Lindley became fond of the garden he helped to preserve. He used to come to plant tulips with his grandchildren. During the annual benefit banquet, Mr. Lindley made a speech expressing his satisfaction with how the garden has turned out for the community. He said in Naomi’s interview that this community and the garden have become part of his life: “It is just a great space.”

Katie

Katie, originally from Great Britain, is a photographer and one of the original members of the West Garden. She saw a parallel between her own life struggles and how the community pulled itself out of decay to flourish. She found the garden as her anchor: a place that made her feel the city was her hometown. She was photographing the scenes of abandonment and urban decay in the neighborhood when she first met Elise. In an

interview with Naomi, Katie said that when Elise first introduced her to the idea of building a community garden in the wasted lots, “a chill went down my spine.” Growing up in a small village in England, the natural landscape has always attracted her as the subject of her arts and as a source of peace. While she was with the garden from the beginning observing and photographing it, she did not participate as a gardener for the first five years. She simply felt that she was too busy. But she remembered the great feeling she got once she started planting. “Then I got hooked and it became an essential part of my life,” she told Naomi. “You know it really changed my life and my experience of living in New York. It wasn’t just about growing things. It was about people as well who came together.”

Katie, who grew up in England, told me that, to her, the idea of a garden as a place where neighbors come together and help each other appeared “a very American thing,” perhaps because European gardens were more about aesthetics than communal work. “We felt like we were really pioneers,” she added. Katie pointed out that taking over the devastated open space to turn it into something positive gave her a feeling of freedom. With the freedom, came the responsibility to keep growing the garden and maintaining it. Depending on a group of individual volunteers, this process has not always been straightforward. People needed not only to learn to negotiate and compromise with outside forces, like developers, but also among themselves. Katie was asked to make a slideshow capturing all the features of the garden so that people in the meeting could discuss what they wanted to keep and what they wanted to change when the garden was transformed into its semi-permanent status. Being on the design committee herself, she remembers a long process and a lot of screaming fights as people

passionately debated their vision of the garden. Flower boxes functioning both as flower plots and benches surrounding the amphitheater at the center of the garden were one of the innovative ideas which came out of the meeting to maximize the use of the space.

The West Garden was in its infancy, and members needed to figure out the best way to raise funds, promote the cause, work with the elected officials to secure the garden's status, and deal with those who wanted to develop the site. Individual members with different backgrounds brought the skills and help needed to work on these issues. Some members had been activists in housing and education issues, and a few had participated in the civil rights movement. Katie pointed out that those people knew how to speak up for the garden and defend it. She gained a sense of empowerment going through the process of defending and establishing the garden against those "who wanted to invalidate us."

The garden has withstood the test of time and the changes surrounding it. Along the way, Katie has gained the sense of belonging to the city in which she was once a stranger. She was reminded of the significance of the garden and the sense of the community it nurtured in the face of the September 11th 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. The garden had the annual Arts and Crafts festival planned for the weekend after the tragedy hit the city. Like others in the city, Katie, in charge of the visual art exhibit for the festival, was devastated, and wondered whether it was appropriate to go on with the festival as planned. Then she thought of her experience during World War II in London where a concert for the public was held in the city daily as a way to bring people together during hard times. "I decided that it was very important that we went ahead (with the festival)," Katie said in Naomi's interview tape. "I do consider a garden to be

an art form, like a community art from. They are formed and planned together. So, I feel it really expresses something in our lives, something very deep. Anyway, as part of this, we do the art festival. And we did it. And people were very glad." The garden helped Katie during a difficult time of her life, and she witnessed the garden helping the community heal when the entire city was devastated by the World Trade Center attack. She remarked, "We feel continuing the garden is for ourselves, but it is for the community service."

Changes in the Neighborhood

Those members who have been with the West Garden since the 1970s and the 1980s have not only seen the transformation of the garden but also changes in the neighborhood. The garden created informally on huge lots with freely claimed plots has turned into a much smaller neatly organized, well-maintained space with assigned boxed plots. All members agree that the garden has been an asset to the neighborhood. Like many community gardens in New York City, the West Garden was a precursor to and a factor in gentrification because of its role in cleaning up and beautifying the area, which made the surrounding property much more desirable. Many old-time garden members were starting out in their profession and early in their careers when they sought an affordable residence in this neighborhood. Katie said to Naomi in the interview,

> In 1975, it was a community that was really in devastation. A lot of people were on welfare…..There was also influx of people like myself and my husband, you know, a sort of middle class professionals who were on their way up but needed a cheaper apartment, a larger place to live. And that was the beginning. Now, it's a different story because we have all these fancy condos, high rents, everything is very densely developed. We have enormous growth, a renaissance on the West Side.

Despite the change, many garden members argue that the garden remained as a place of diversity, attracting people from all walks of life, as reflected in some of the members' interviews mentioned earlier in this chapter. Katie viewed the garden as "a microcosm of the U.S." "Coming from the very class-ridden society (of U.K.)," she said, a garden attracting participants cutting across class and racial lines was fascinating and great. Maria, a garden member who has lived in the neighborhood since the early 1980s agrees that the garden brings people together, but she is also concerned about the increasing homogenization of garden participants over the past two decades. When she moved into the area, she was able to find affordable housing despite the fact that it was beginning to be gentrified. Maria is a successful professional who comes from a working-class immigrant family. "I am always straddling two worlds," she said, referring to her socioeconomic background and her race/ethnicity. People often wonder who she is, and according to her, what they guess changes, depending on how she dresses and what neighborhood she happens to be in.

She was concerned about the segregation of living spaces based on race, class, and ethnicity, as well as mostly covert racial tension, still very much affecting U.S. society. In her view, the garden was no exception. When any social group congregates, Maria believed that the group acts as a microcosm of the larger society. Compared to the beginning of the West Garden, she argued, today "There are less and less people of color; there are less and less people of lower socioeconomic class." While she attributed demographic changes in the gentrified neighborhood partially to the decline in diversity as she perceived it, she thought what was more significant was a suspected reluctance among some members to welcome newcomers from socioeconomic backgrounds other

than their own. Maria pointed out to me that even most liberal people hesitate or avoid discussing racial issues in general. She viewed that members' tendency in avoiding the issue of declining diversity in the garden was problematic. I felt a similar sentiment that people were hesitant to discuss race in the East Garden. The East Garden, like the West Garden, had diverse members with various ethnic/race backgrounds, but race was hardly ever mentioned. And if it was mentioned, people did not dwell on the topic.

At the West Garden, I came across a few members who expressed similar concerns about garden membership becoming less diverse. Maria is not alone in thinking that there used to be more people from various backgrounds joining the garden. The West Garden, open like a park, is attended by a great variety of people. Who decides to become a fee-paying member, agreeing to work in the garden for specific hours per month, as required, depends on many factors. The information regarding membership can be found on the garden website, but most people seem to find out about how to join by talking to garden members. If the garden member happens to be unfriendly, then the potential member may be discouraged from pursuing anything further. Some garden members like talking to neighbors about the garden; some like to focus on gardening and do not enjoy mingling.

The garden provides a relaxing and friendly atmosphere that is likely to encourage people to communicate and interact with neighbors they do not know, yet who share their appreciation for the space. At the same time, it is naïve to assume that people from all walks of life get along simply for the love of the garden and for what the physical space generates. People build relationships with each other, just as gardeners build the gardens, over time and with great care. Some people enjoy the dynamic process of welcoming

new people and being involved in a group invigorated with new ideas and new people. A few people who talked to me mentioned that some people in the garden like the current social network of the garden and hope that it does not change much in the long run. Like Maria, another member worried that they are concerned that there are quite a few people who do not actually like the idea that the garden is kept as open as possible to the public. I asked why the person thought some people wanted to keep the garden more closed. The reply was, "People have lots of reasons, and many of them are not stated." Sometimes, a member gets irritated by occurrence such as a shirtless man sunbathing in the garden, or people walking a dog and letting the dog urinate on the plants, or loud music coming from a block party in housing across the street. People easily agree on what is considered as unwelcome or unacceptable behavior. Yet, occasionally, watchful and thoughtful members quietly wonder if somebody complaining about others' behavior in the garden reflects an undercurrent of prejudice towards race, class, and/or ethnicity, or (sometimes) age (e.g., toward youngsters hanging out).

Members generally join a community garden out of an interest in gardening. People I talked to did not join the garden with the hope of pursuing social justice or as a form of resistance to something. Individuals' stories about how they got involved with the West Garden reflect the fact that participation in community gardening means something different to each individual. Gardening is, indeed, often a solitary activity that allows lots of time for personal reflection. At the same time, there seems a common thread that connects the garden stories of individuals—people often refer to their vision and understanding of the community and of society in general as they discuss the community garden. Issues of race, class, and prejudice are not often overtly discussed in

the United States in general, and in keeping with this trend, the liberal residents of the Upper West Side—like most members of the West Garden—tend to avoid these topics of conversation. However, as I discussed in the East Garden chapter, the community garden is a place where interaction among people of different backgrounds happen, and this interaction nurtures dialogue. It in turn raises people's sense of awareness toward others—their shared commonalities rather than differences, and perhaps, their own biases toward other people— the biases people tend to hold on to until they get to know each other.

There is always negotiation occurring in the democratic space of the open garden as to what is acceptable, what is tolerable, and what kind of behaviors need to be corrected or excluded. Depending on how these concerns are voiced, a person could seem overly exclusionary in the eyes of the other members. Such dialogue often reflects social issues, be it covert racism or class division in society. The garden is an asset in bringing people together to generate conversations over these unspoken issues. Charles and many others believe that keeping the garden as open as it is now is very important and essential for the West Garden. For them, the garden is about people's freedom to participate in their community activities; it is like a metaphor for democracy. Just as it was the case for the East Garden, the West Garden needs to remain as open and friendly to newcomers as it is to residents of the community. Even more so, in the present moment as the area is becoming an expensive neighborhood. Doing so will allow the West Garden to remain an important asset to the neighborhood both socially and environmentally.

Beating a Path

The story of the beginning of the West Garden shows that it was created by people who were willing and capable of negotiating with various parties and seizing opportunities at the right timing. Instead of an antagonistic and confrontational approach, those who helped the garden to take off used strategic persuasion to earn the support of power players, such as federal bureaucrats, tenant leaders, and developers to turn a temporary garden from an interim site to a permanent fixture. It is up to the current and the future garden members to keep it that way. Some members I interviewed expressed concerns that they have sensed that there was dwindling enthusiasm to volunteer not only in the garden but in the community in general. Perhaps such change was due to the economy and high rent that force many newcomers to work long hours or to move more often.

Just as in the East Garden, people tend to view the West Garden as a democratic space where people of different economic and racial backgrounds come together. However, like anywhere else, there seemed to be occasional racial or class tensions covertly mentioned especially toward those whom the garden members do not know very well, such as infrequent visitors. Mostly, race and class are topics that hardly surface in the garden or in the garden meetings. As far as I experienced, the garden members of different backgrounds do enjoy participating in the garden together.

To those who never knew the history of the West Garden, it would look like the product of a well-thought out city planning that was strategically located in an open green space at the right location to serve the people in the community. It is hard to imagine the area without the garden. The area around the West Garden that once had many empty,

open sites waiting to be developed is thriving today with uninterrupted buildings. The garden that was once appreciated for easing the looks of urban plight by beautifying the sites is now appreciated for providing a beautiful space to sit and relax in the middle of the block. This open green space was not originally in the Urban Renewal plan. The people of the community put it there. The success and the benefit of the garden shown by the West Garden should serve as a model to include more open green space in urban planning, especially in areas dealing with urban blight. At the same time, the unique experience of the each garden implies that a top-down approach to organizing a community garden may not work. The next chapter will look at day-to-day activities in the West Garden, focusing especially on the core group of people whose efforts keep the garden running.

Chapter 7

The West Garden II: Everyday

The Upper West Side of Manhattan, with a population of 207,699 as of the year 2000 (Community Board 7, Manhattan n.d.), is like a city within a city. Over 200,000 people are living in a total land area of 1,222.7 acres or 1.9 square miles (New York City Department of City Planning 2007b). Past anthropological studies of US cities have depicted and addressed the division among races and socioeconomic inequality (Low 1999). In previous chapters, I have pointed out that the East Garden and the West Garden bring people of various backgrounds together. Besides adding open green space to provide a sense of relief from congestion, the West Garden has become a space for the community.

The community garden provides people with a sense of belonging and association. Many of my interviews with garden members have reflected this feeling. The tie to the garden and to the each other does not solely depend on the physical space. Rather, it is nurtured through engagement in activities that take place at and for the garden. As it brings people together and creates a sense of the community that is not solely defined by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class, the West Garden becomes a place where racial segregation and class divisions are mitigated. This chapter depicts the West Garden as a place of nature and as a communal center throughout the course of a year. The West Garden is one of the better organized community gardens with the decision-making process entrusted to the board of directors. I examine their style of running the garden and argue that individuals' contribution of knowledge and skills in practicing their leadership for the garden has been crucial in keeping this community garden long-lasting

and relevant to the community over the years. It is the organizational structure and regularly scheduled meetings, as well as people's tireless dedication that has helped the West Garden to overcome challenges in order to not only survive, but thrive..

Different Faces throughout the Year

Unlike the Lower East Side, there are not many community gardens on the Upper West Side. Among the few in the area, the West Garden is the biggest and the most accessible. The garden paths provide a walk across from one street to the next in the middle of the block. It has a park-like flower plot section and a vegetable section, which is only open to the plot holders. In the vegetable section, there are a tool shed and compost bins. The West Garden also has a greenhouse—a nursery in a separate location in upper Manhattan to grow and keep many plants for the garden.

The garden gate remains open during daylight, even during the winter. The place is seldom empty as long as the weather is tolerable. There are benches and chairs located throughout the garden to welcome visitors to relax. The raised wooden borders of flower plots also function as benches. The garden has two sections: vegetable plots and flower plots. The vegetable section is fenced off, to be accessed only by plot holders, but the flower section with a lawn, flower pits, two paved paths, and surrounding trees is open to the public. Flower plots are assigned to garden members to take care of, but the area itself is open to public. The garden has a different face during each season. The board of the garden also plans various activities and events for visitors to enjoy throughout the year.

Spring

In April, plum trees and magnolias are in bloom. Some early-blooming tulips are out here and there, and plots are colored by hyacinths. Shady areas are plotted with shady plants such as oxalis. One day in April, the air was a bit breezy and cool, but the garden was decorated with early blossoms. While I worked in the garden as a volunteer, a longtime member Brad said, “Isn’t this beautiful or what!” The sun was bright, the air was still crisp, and the garden was quiet except for the chirping of the birds.

Spring is an attractive season for any community garden, but for the West Garden, it is the time in which the garden transforms itself into a magnificent tulip field after a well-coordinated effort in the fall to plant new bulbs for the spring. In late April through early May, the garden displays its “tulip festival” every weekend. Although there is no official event, members sit out in the garden with donation jars and brochures to welcome hundreds of visitors. Passersby are drawn into the garden by the flood of color and sheer magnitude of the tulips in the valley in between the buildings on a Manhattan street. Amazed visitors fill the donation jar quickly with one-dollar bills and more. Wanda sitting in front of a jar thanked everyone for their contributions. Visitors often comment on the beauty of tulips in the garden. I heard many “wows” and “ahhs.” Many visitors bring their cameras to take pictures, especially with their children. Even on weekdays, tulips in full-bloom attract many viewers. I heard people saying, “oh, my god! Can this place be any more beautiful than this!” Children were running around the garden excited by the beauty of the garden. I heard one kid claiming, this is “my garden!” Sometimes, children compete to find the best tulip. Visitors often comment, “You should charge admission for this!”

Children visiting the garden not only enjoy the beautiful flowers, but also may enjoy their encounter with insects and birds. Not all children behave in the garden as the gardeners would like. Once, a child kept hitting bugs he saw in the garden with a rolled-up newspaper. Members who happened to see this asked why parents did not take their children to a playground instead of the garden. Victor, a board member of the garden, who happened to be there as well, patiently told the child, "We like our insects here. We let them live a good life." Children stopped bothering bugs after that. In the middle of a highly urban area, a community garden is an interactive place to learn about nature. Besides the opportunities for the hands-on experience, children and their guardians are likely to communicate with gardeners who pay attention to visitors.

Spring is not only the time to begin gardening, but also the time for the West Garden Annual General Meeting. This annual event, which is open to all garden members, takes place in an evening in April in a building where board meetings are usually held. The meeting gives members a chance to learn more about gardening and the West Garden and enjoy the free seeds and door prizes. Not all members show up for the annual meeting. However, the board members and core members who are avid gardeners and regular attendees for various garden events are usually there.

The Annual General Meeting I attended had about thirty members and two guest speakers. One speaker was from a garden-related organization and gave some gardening tips. The other speaker was state assembly member Scott M. Stringer, who later became Manhattan Borough President. He commended the garden members for keeping the neighborhood beautiful with the garden. He said he was fighting to make sure that the people who built the garden community would not be replaced with wealthy newcomers

investing in the hot real estate market on the Upper West Side. He concluded his remarks by saying, "You make this community wonderful." The West Garden is well-maintained and enjoyed by many. The value of having the garden in the neighborhood is recognized not only by the people who live nearby, but by politicians as well.

Summer

Kathy, the president of the garden, once told me that the West Garden was not just a garden, but much more. Various events offered at the garden prove her point. The garden is vigorous, especially during the summer. Every year in mid-June, the annual fundraising dinner known as the Spring Benefit—the biggest fundraising and members' event of the year—is held right in the garden. At the East Garden, as I discussed in the previous chapter, garden members set low prices for food sold at the fundraising party to keep it affordable and attractive to people in the neighborhood. In contrast, the West Garden fundraising dinner is an upscale event where the guests enjoy an evening of great food, music, and the flower-filled garden for a donation of around $60 (for garden members, the suggested donation is around $30). The event also includes a ceremony to honor those who are important to the community, to the West Garden, or to community gardens in general. The board members select three people every year who have helped in the advancement of community garden causes and give recognition during the event along with a framed picture of the West Garden. The developer, Mr. Lindley, who "saved" the West Garden is always acknowledged and thanked during the event as well. He commented at the party, "I want to be remembered for this garden."

While the Spring Benefit is open only for those who make donations, the rest of the events offered at the garden are free and open to public. In July, the garden hosts a picnic where people in the neighborhood are invited to enjoy a barbecue grill and food prepared by garden members. Over a hundred people attended the summer picnic. A Shakespearian play performed throughout several weekends in July and August has been a great attraction for the community. Children and adults alike enjoy seeing and sometimes participating in the play in the great outdoors. The stage is decorated naturally by flowers and plants. The day I attended the play in 2004, there were approximately 150 visitors at the performance.

During the summer, besides attending events, those who hold a plot in the vegetable garden are also busy working on their plots. The produce gives gardeners a sense of pride in eating locally-produced organic vegetables. While doing my fieldwork in the West Garden, I decided not to sign up for my own plot and decided instead to work as a volunteer to take care of the general area of the garden. This gave me a chance for more diverse participation in garden activities. Moreover, at the West Garden, one has to sign up on a waiting list to get a plot, and it can take several years for a plot to become available. Fortunately, even though I did not have a plot, I had the chance to taste the vegetables produced in the garden when Nora shared her kale with me. The kale coming freshly out of the soil tasted much sweeter than the ones I purchase from stores. In the vegetable garden section, all gardeners grow vegetables. All non-vegetable plants are grown in the flower garden section surrounding the amphitheater. All vegetables grown are organic. Each plot is small. People do not grow vegetables there to sell but strictly

for personal consumption. Each person picks whatever vegetable they want to grow, but tomatoes seemed one of the most popular choices.

Fall

A big community event in the garden for the fall was the annual Arts & Crafts Festival in September. This two-day weekend event consisted of a craft sale and poetry readings. In 2003, the Arts & Crafts Festival took place on a crisp autumn day. On the sidewalk at one end of the garden, used books donated by members were sold. On the other side, local artists sold their artwork and crafts. One of the artists told me she participated in the event to help the garden she enjoys. The Saturday programs, catered more to children, including craft tables where children could create their own art, ballet and theater performance, and a children's book sale.

On Sunday, there were readings by local writers in the center pit of the garden. Visitors could sit on the frames of the flower plot, which also function as benches, to listen to the readings. Local writers read their own work at this event. About thirty-five people—young and old, including families—sat around the bench to listen. Some writers were private high school students whose teacher would bring them to the garden to write poems. The teacher read his haiku style poems and said that he saw this as his way of thanking the garden. He said, "Think of all the poetry being lost, if the garden is not open." Some writers read short stories. Others shared personal or political poetry especially regarding the Bush administration's policies on the Iraq War. A garden member also read her poetry about her plot in the garden. Local writers and poets of various age groups got the opportunity to share their work with a captivated audience.

Moreover, the poetic garden became a community space where ideas were shared and appreciated. On the same day, there was also a performance by the New York String Orchestra. The day ended with a wine and cheese reception with the performance of a local folksong duo.

The fall is an important time to plant bulbs in preparation for the spring. Tulip bulb planting held on the Saturday and Sunday before Thanksgiving week in November is the biggest all-out gardening event for volunteers and members. Combining the tulip bulb planting with a Thanksgiving celebration, some board members bring Thanksgiving specialty food such as roast turkey, turkey chili, and side dishes such as corn bread and coleslaw along with coffee and sweets to serve to fellow members and volunteers. Lunch time was a great time to meet some members I had never met and chitchat with people I got to know through my garden activity. As I talked and enjoyed some food, I felt I have found a community to which I feel I belong. Joining the West Garden, I had the chance to mingle with New Yorkers of different age groups. Age-wise and life-wise, these were people I might not have otherwise come across. While I had been living in New York City as a Japanese graduate student for several years before I started my fieldwork, joining the community garden helped me meet new acquaintances—familiar faces to say hello to in that neighborhood.

The garden is planted all over with bulbs of tulips for spring. Flower plot holders are responsible for planting tulip bulbs in their plot and helping out with planting in the general area. The help from neighborhood volunteers who are not members of the garden was crucial in planting such large amounts of bulbs. The number of the volunteers present in the garden varies depending on the time of the day, the weather, and other

chance factors. In 2004, the tulip bulb planting fell on a chilly, rainy, windy November weekend. The number of volunteers was fairly small. The following year, when the weather was much nicer, more people came out to plant.

The large turn-out helps the event, but having an avid gardener who knows how to plant quickly and effectively also was a big help. Aiko was such a gardener whom members always counted on in the time of tulip bulb planting. Originally from Japan, Aiko was known at the West Garden for her extensive knowledge of herbs and her efficiency in tulip planting. Sadly, she fell ill one day with an unknown illness and passed away. In 2004, tulip-bulb planting day began with the memorial service for her. Some members who knew her well told me that they were plant tulips in Aiko's memory this year. I did not have the chance to get to know her well before her untimely death. I would have loved to interview her, especially since I am also from Japan. She was known to bring sushi for the annual fundraising dinner. She seemed to be in her late 50s or early 60s, but I did not know the exact age. I did not have the chance to formally interview her and in my casual conversation with her, I never asked her age. I thought about Aiko and how people have described her efficient bulb-planting technique as I planted tulip bulbs. The area I was planting had trees with extensive roots, and that made it a bit more difficult to dig holes deep enough—about six inches—for proper planting.

During tulip planting, many volunteers from the neighborhood who are not garden members join the effort. This is the day neighbors can get hands-on experience. Depending on the weather, the garden gets more non-member volunteers to come out. They mostly help planting bulbs in common areas with advice from garden members on how to plant and which bulbs to plant. The garden orders a great variety of bulbs for the

occasion, and depending on the year or the area, the bulbs are coordinated by color or mixed in colors and varieties. The tulip planting requires repetitive movement of digging holes, and some members complained of back and hand pain. Overall, however, people were in good spirits during the occasion, even though weekends in November in New York are often cold, which was the case when I was there. Neighbors help planting tulips for the garden, and they all enjoy the spectacular tulip garden in spring.

Winter

Even in February, the garden attracts visitors who enjoy being in a sunny spot in cold weather. The plots are mostly vacant, but underneath the soil, thousands of tulip bulbs await spring. The lawn in the center is covered to protect the ground. If it snows, people from the garden are responsible for removing snow from the sidewalk, as is any property owner in the city. Not much is done in terms of gardening during the winter, but maintenance is required for the garden to open year around. A December issue of the West Garden newsletter urges gardeners to do a "neighborly thing" by cleaning up their vegetable plot and removing dead plants to keep them looking neat (WG Newsletter, December 2004). The flower committee and the board continue to meet during the winter. The flower committee continues to oversee planting activities in the greenhouse. There is also a winter holiday party in early January, which is an indoor potluck party. An annual membership meeting and election is also held in January. The board of directors is elected at the meeting. Working more on administrative tasks makes sense during the cold season when there is not much gardening to do. Moreover, off-season activities and meetings keep gardeners involved with the garden. Making sure volunteers

remain engaged year-round is probably one of the ways the West Garden keeps them over the years.

The West Garden welcomes visitors and members throughout the year. The garden gates are opened daily around eight in the morning by volunteers. If the weather is nice, there are easily ten to thirty people on a weekend relaxing in the garden. People come to the garden to read the newspaper or books, to walk infants, or to chat with friends. This garden is also often visited by people in wheelchairs. School children often come to the garden as part of the class or after school with their parents. The garden attracts people from all walks of life—different age groups, races and ethnicities, as well as income levels. The garden is within walking distance from Central Park West—one of the streets in New York City where very wealthy people reside. Across the street from the garden are housing projects. Many elderly people visit as well as toddlers with their parent or nanny.

During my fieldwork, based on casual observation, I saw that middle-age or older white people made up the majority of garden members. While I have heard that many original members included African-Americans, there seems to have been a shift for the garden members and non-member volunteers to be increasingly white. During the ten years spanning 1990 to 2000, there was an 18.5% reduction in the population of Black/African American non-Hispanic and a 10.4% reduction in the Hispanic population of the Upper West Side (Community Board 7). Fewer newcomers to the area included minorities (except for Asians, more of whom are moving into the area), which might partially explain why the garden is not attracting more minority members and volunteers. Many people join the West Garden or any community garden through word of mouth. In

addition, the African American (*the source I was using the word “Black”) only makes up 9% of the whole Upper West Side population, and Hispanic origin 16.7%. Thus, the number of minorities the garden attracts may simply reflect the changing demographic of the Upper West Side. The West Garden has diverse visitors, but perhaps less diversity among the members and volunteers, at least among the more active members. Just as in the East Garden, the West Garden is interested in community outreach and recruiting neighbors to become garden members. It maintains a webpage, which includes listing membership information and downloadable application forms alongside spectacular seasonal pictures of the garden. The most common way for people to become members, however, is to visit the garden and talk to the gardeners there.

The Board

The West Garden is a volunteer-based organization like the East Garden, but it has a more complex organizational structure. The governing body of the West Garden consists of a board of directors, several committees, general members who have plots, and associate members who do not have plots. The board of directors consisted of thirteen people with the positions of president, vice president, treasurer, recording secretary, corresponding secretary, and newsletter staff. The board of directors is crucial in running the garden as they make all major decisions, oversee the finances and see to its general well-being. The East Garden also elects the president, vice president, and treasurer, as I discussed in the previous chapter, but they do not hold sole decision-making power or responsibility. They function more as chairpersons to steer meetings and to seek consensus among members. Unlike the East Garden, where elected officials

only convened at the general meeting, the board members of the West Garden gather for a formal meeting every month. The East Garden represents a direct democracy where every participant can voice his or her opinions at every meeting if s/he chooses. At the West Garden, the great amount of decision-making power is entrusted to the elected board members, who themselves are avid gardeners and well-acquainted with fellow gardeners.

In both the East Garden and the West Garden, garden officials are all volunteers who took on the extra tasks of running the garden to secure its stability and success. As the East Garden and the West Garden have similar beginnings as gardens started by volunteers on wasted land, it is interesting to trace the different management/decision-making structures that developed in these two gardens. One possible explanation is the process the West Garden went through to secure its semi-permanent status. As I discussed in the previous chapter, various power players got involved in negotiations to save the West Garden. Being well-organized was probably necessary to deal with the situation. I sensed differences among people who are involved in making the East Garden and the West Garden. The active members of the East Garden seem to be younger than the West Garden. The Lower East Side appears to be more bohemian in comparison to the Upper West Side. Perhaps reflecting the high median income level of the Upper West Side, the core members of the West Garden also appeared to be highly educated and holding (or retired from) a professional career. These factors might have contributed to the West Garden's greater institutional structure compared to that of the East Garden.

The board members hold meetings on the first Monday of every month at night for about two hours. The board meetings were not generally for associate members like myself, who are not considered part of the board. However, the board directors kindly allowed me to sit in on their meetings for over a year. As was the case in the East Garden, I eagerly took notes but did not participate in any discussion and remained there strictly as an observer. Attending meetings helped me not only to learn the dynamics of the meetings and decision-making processes involved with the West Garden, but helped me to get to know board directors well. This in turn helped me to feel like a part of the West Garden community.

Tasks for the Board of Directors

Keeping the West Garden an attractive open green space requires a large amount of labor and finance. Members provide the work and they raise the money needed for the operation. Community Gardens, like the West Garden, could be a model for maintaining an open green space in an urban area without costing the city much money. There is, however, a prerequisite to making the voluntary organization effective and long-lasting—capable, willing, and knowledgeable leaders who can execute many tasks ranging from writing a letter to dealing with complicated legal matters. The model may also worked well for the West Garden because it is today located in a well-off community in which supporters of the garden would and could make contributions to the garden.

One of the requirements for the board members is to attend the monthly meeting. Meetings I observed were always organized. They began with the distribution of the agenda and minutes from the last meeting. The agenda varied from meeting to meeting

depending on conditions and planned events at the garden. Included on almost all meeting agendas were correspondence, updates on the garden's ongoing fundraising efforts, treasurer's report on expenditures, flower committee report, newsletter, and membership issues including plot maintenance. The treasurer detailed statements of monthly expenses and income for every board meeting. One of the important responsibilities of the board was to make sure of the financial well-being of the garden by checking the expenses and raising money for the garden.

Operating a community garden costs more than one might imagine. One year during my fieldwork, the garden had an annual budget of $39,500.00. Some of the monthly costs include: purchasing of plants, electricity bills, printing and sending out newsletters, and insurance. The annual costs include but are not limited to: purchasing food for fundraising benefits, purchasing tulip bulbs ($2,000+), sending out holiday cards to major donors, and pruning. Moreover, occasional and/or incidental costs include: curb and sidewalk fixing ($8000+), tree pits ($147), general maintenance such as restructuring wood around vegetable plot, raising bed, redoing path to plot, and so on. The East Garden, as I discussed chapter 5, also had to spend money on insurance. At the East Garden, there seemed to scant funds allocated for purchase of plants because members bought and brought their own plants for their plots. The West Garden has electricity and water, but the East Garden does not. The fix-up jobs for the East Garden were mostly done by members, but the West Garden is likely to hire a professional to repair or build something in the garden. Overall, the annual budget and costs are considerably higher for the West Garden than the East Garden.

There are several sources of funding at the West Garden, including fundraising events, grants from various organizations, donations from individuals, and membership fees. Various events at the garden not only allow the garden to raise funds for the continuing success of the garden, but also to bring the community together. The Spring Benefit, which receives contributions through ticket sales, is a major source of funding, but free events throughout the year also help the garden raise money, as people usually donate some money during the events. As noted earlier, these events include picnics, theatrical performances, arts and crafts festival, book sales, the annual tulip planting and festival, and holiday party.

Fannie, the corresponding secretary, is in charge of seeking grants. She is skilled at grantwriting and is devoted to raising funds for the West Garden. The funding, grants, or donations either as money or garden-related materials come from various sources. Some come from governmental sources such as New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Fundraising Council of New York. Philanthropic organizations such as Greenacre, Trust for Public Land, America the Beautiful, and Arbor Foundation support community gardens. The garden may occasionally receive a grant from private corporations interested in community improvement. Some of the funding provided by these organizations is designated for specific use, such as fixing the sidewalk, while others are general contributions.

Membership fees and grassroots donations—donations from individuals, especially from those who reside in the nearby building and appreciate having the garden in their neighborhood—are an important source of funding as well. The membership fee is thirty dollars for those who hold plots and fifteen dollars for associate members who

are new to the garden or do not have a plot there. Many individuals make additional contributions when they pay their membership dues. The membership, especially associate members, fluctuates from year to year. During my fieldwork in 2004-2007, I estimate that there were approximately one hundred members. The board discusses changes in memberships during the meeting, and if there are less people joining or renewing their membership, the board took action such as sending out recruiting letters for those who are on the garden mailing list—those who provided their information when they came to the garden as volunteers, for example—reminding them about the garden and discount they get for the Spring Benefit as a member.

In addition, instead of passively waiting and hoping for a donation, Fannie conducts a fundraising campaign by sending or leaving, if she can, "Dear Neighbor Letters" in neighboring buildings to promote the garden and encourage people to contribute to the cause. Some buildings collect donation money for the garden to show appreciation for the place. Sometimes, however, individuals donate money to the garden and get a sense of entitlement to the place in a misguided way. One episode I heard about during the board meeting involved a donor who gave money to the garden and therefore felt entitled to pick flowers to make himself a bouquet. When a member complained on the spot, he got upset, although he ultimately yielded. The board discusses ideas to encourage donations, such as sending letters to buildings to let them know how much money they have given out to the garden and to give first to third prizes for buildings that raised more money.

Without the effort and the success of the board members to raise all the money necessary to maintain the garden, it could fall apart. The semi-permanent status of the

garden as incorporated land can remain as such only as long as the effort continues. Fannie is a vibrant woman, whom I estimate to be around 80 years old. Currently, her fundraising skills have helped the garden to maintain sufficient funding to keep operating strongly. If she decides to retire one day, finding someone with matching skills, connections, and willingness to work for the garden may not be easy, although such a person is essential for the garden to continue. The monthly bookkeeping for the West Garden requires a treasurer with good accounting skills. Fortunately, the West Garden has a great treasurer, the only Black woman on the board of directors, to execute the task flawlessly.

Core members, which in the case of the West Garden are also the board members, are the greatest asset a community garden has. In one meeting, a board member expressed concern that the board eventually needs to get younger people involved to ensure the continuation of the garden's success. The member, who holds a Ph.D. and has a professional career said, "I am in my sixties, and I am the youngest one here!" As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the core members of the West Garden, many of whom have been active since the late '70s or the early '80s, are aging, and recruiting younger generation into the board will require some adjustment. I do not sense that the board is reluctant to accommodate new board members. However, at the same time, members of the board have not changed much in recent years. The group of people has learned about each other and how to work well together. Newcomers to the board of directors must first adapt to the existing group dynamic.

Putting an Event Together

Besides financial responsibility, the board of directors is also in charge of creating, preparing, and organizing events to attract people to the garden. The board members care a great deal about the success and improvement of various garden events as it would help the garden to thrive in a long run. The biggest event for the garden is the Spring Benefit—a fundraising dinner that takes place in early June. The board members spend long hours in meetings to prepare for the benefit every year. There are many things to be decided. For example, figuring out what kind of alcohol to serve led to a heated discussion. One member strongly opposed serving beer, insisting that serving wine was a much more sophisticated option. There was no explanation as to why he thought wine was more sophisticated than beer. Serving wine and cheese is common at cultural gatherings in New York City. Preference for wine may be a reflection of one's idea that wine represents high class. In this specific case, though, it could be that the member simply preferred wine over beer. While there might be an implication that wine was more "sophisticated," it might have also be preferred over beer at benefits because of its potential cost-effectiveness. If the garden can get reasonably priced bottles of wine at a discount price by buying it in large quantities, then it can turn out to be cheaper than serving cans of brand-name beers freely to people. In the East Garden, in contrast, people did not even question the option of serving beer at the fundraising. The only discussion there was which brand to serve and how cheaply they could get it. The inclination toward beer seemed natural, as beer was the beverage some gardeners often consumed while enjoying BBQs there. The board of the West Garden as a whole took a vote and in the end beer was served along with wine at the benefit that year. How to

decorate the garden for the benefit also led to some conflict among members. Some board members suggested using balloons while others dismissed the idea immediately claiming it was too childish. The disagreement appeared to stem from the differences in personal taste, but what is important was to work out the differences in order to come to an agreement.

Discussion can go on for a long time about what food to serve and how to serve it as well. The food served at the benefit comes from a combination of food contributions from neighborhood restaurants and stores and food cooked and brought by members. For two benefits I attended and assisted with, I cooked *Yakisoba*, Japanese stir fried noodle. Some people who knew I made it complimented me for it (although it did not require much of cooking for me since the noodle and seasoning came in a package). The *Yakisoba* went pretty quickly, and I figured people were enjoying it along with various other food available at the benefit. The board must also think of using donated food effectively to get maximum servings. For example, in a board meeting, members discussed the best way to use the shrimp that was to be donated for the event. While people liked shrimp cocktails, members agreed that paella would maximize the amount of the food as a shrimp dish. Besides food, the board makes decisions on music performance, the number of tables and chairs needed, the number of the paper goods and so on. The Spring Benefit seems to turns out a big success every year, but at times the board worries about attendance and slowness in preparation before the event.

Through attending meetings both at the East Garden and the West Garden, what I found in both places is passionate and heated discussion over garden-related and fundraising-related topics that might appear mundane to outsiders. There is also

repetitiveness in topics and discussion from year to year. The board members may argue about the same thing they argued about a year before; they may draw a new plan for the same process they followed the year before. That is not because of the lack of good recordkeeping. Efficiency is not the goal. Instead, the discussion process is what helps them to shape their ideas about the garden and keep developing their vision for the space. Long and regularly-scheduled meetings are one of the key factors in holding the garden together as a community for both the East and the West Garden.

Attending board meetings for over a year, I learned firsthand how much commitment it takes just to devote time to be at these meetings in addition to their jobs, gardening, and the volunteer work many of the volunteers do outside of the West Garden. Within the board, decisions are made in a democratic way. Every so often, I witnessed a discussion heating up, where taking turns to speak up became competitive, and people expressed their irritation for being interrupted while speaking. No matter how heated the discussion gets, the board of directors remains a team unified by the common goal of keeping the garden a place of beauty and a place for the community to gather. No one resigned in the middle of the term while I was doing my fieldwork. Moreover, during my two-year fieldwork period, the board members remained mostly the same. This was different from the East Garden in which the president, vice president, and treasurer all changed during my fieldwork. The passionate meetings seem to me an indication of their devotion to the garden. At the East Garden, people who held the position worked in cooperation with other general members. At the West Garden, each board director, I saw brought his or her expertise to the table, whether it was writing skills, knowledge of laws, negotiation skills, accounting management, investment tactics, and so on. It amazed me

to see how the board members who engaged in confrontational discussion at one point in the meeting remained friendly afterwards. The board members did not hold a grudge against each other even if they had some heated debate during meetings. The knowledgeable and skillful leaders have helped the West Garden survive and thrive as a community place located in the midst of highly valued real estate property.

The Flower Committee

The Board of Directors meets once a month to cover a multitude of issues. Since there is not enough time for the board to cover everything at the board meeting, the Flower Committee exists to meet once a month to discuss plant- and flower-matters. The Flower Committee is led by Victor, who is also a board member. Flower Committee meetings can be attended by any of the garden members. It meets once on the first Sunday of the month in the garden, when the weather is nice, or in a meeting room in a nearby apartment, when it is cold or raining. The number of the people who attend the meeting varies, but it is usually ten or less. The committee is in charge of overseeing flower plots and is open to anyone who is or wants to become a member. Individual flower plot holders decide what to plant in their own plot, but the Flower Committee makes decisions on what kinds and colors of tulips to plant for the annual tulip festival. One year, the committee decided to fill each plot with one color tulip to produce a stunning color scheme; the next year it mixed colors of tulips for each plot to make the entire garden vibrant with a wild flood of color. While the committee coordinates the overall allocation of tulips for the tulip festival, each plot holder chooses what kinds of tulips they want to order from a catalog for their own plot. Victor is quite knowledgeable

of plants, and if members had any plant-related questions, he was the person to talk to. The Flower Committee provided a forum to discuss plants.

While plot holders are free to select their own plants for their own plot, there are some rules. For example, vegetable plants are not allowed in flower plots. Vegetable plots are designated only for vegetables and not for ornamental flower plants. The Flower Committee makes plans to make sure that there will be some kind of flower or plant all year round. Victor leads the discussion during the meetings about which flowers to buy, where to buy for a better price, what to plant, and when to do so. The flower committee also discusses the price of tulip bulbs from different sources. Since they purchase the bulbs in such a large quantity, finding a good price is important. However, the gardeners also make sure that they get a great variety of tulips, including many unusual and pricey kinds, as the tulip festival is one of the major attractions of the garden to draw the community people into the garden. The division of labor between the board of directors and the Flower Committee is one example that attests to how the West Garden has evolved to become a well-structured organization. The West Garden is hierarchically structured in a sense that it has the assigned leaders who are entrusted with decision-making powers. However, just like the East Garden, enforcing the rules or addressing problematic issues requires members to use the power of persuasion. That is not always easy to do. For example, one time, the Flower Committee discussed whether a corn planted in someone's flower garden is acceptable. The committee decided to not to regulate it, since it happened to look pretty. In reality, I also sensed that committee members were also uncomfortable telling someone to remove something from his or her plot.

Distribution and Maintenance of Plots

There are overlapping issues that the Flower Committee and the board of directors look at together. Maintenance of plots is one of them. As I discussed in the chapter on the East Garden, individual plots are at the heart of community gardens, and it can become a source of contention.

Plot holders have the responsibility of maintaining their own plot, but there are times when a plot holder neglects his or her plot. It is a job of the Flower Committee and then the board to remind people to take better care of their plot. In an instance when a flower plot holder left the plot with nothing but weeds, a board member contacted the long-term member by calling many times, but was unable to reach the person. The board member decided to give the person another chance. Instead of taking away the plot, they assigned a caretaker.

Dealing with neglected plots is one of the major recurring problems in a community garden. Many efforts are made to remind plot holders about their responsibilities. Although there are people on the waiting list for both flower and vegetable plots, board members make a decision to take away a plot from a member only as the absolute last resort. Plots are distributed according to the waiting list. It could take several years on a waiting list before a person actually gets a plot. Though there are people who would gladly take a plot, the board of directors has a difficult time taking away plots from those who neglect them. How to deal with plot neglect is a topic repeatedly discussed before the planting season. One strategy attempted was to assign a caretaker for a plot until the plot holder can take care of the plot again. One year, as the problem with neglected plot by a few member persisted, the board agreed to write a plot

maintenance policy and letter. The purpose was to "twist the arms of people who refuse to work on their plots more effectively." A by-law committee was formed to carry out this task. At a board meeting, we went over the letter written by the committee. The letter had to cover the board to do whatever it needs to do to ensure the board's rights to remove plot owner.

When people knew the plot holders personally, being forcible in implementing the garden bylaw regarding neglected plots could be difficult. Policing one another's plots was also uncomfortable. At one meeting, an issue was brought up that a member had not planted anything in her vegetable plot for two years. Some board members suggested evicting her. Kathy, the president, was trying to be nice about it. Others complain, "Why do we bend over like that for people who don't keep garden well?" Kathy replied, "Because they're nice people!" The board members agreed that there was a need to make rules clear for resolution. The board agreed to have a bylaw committee meeting to write the eviction letter. No matter how well the bylaw is written and a procedure is drawn to deal with neglected plots, the issue is likely to come up in meetings again in the future. It is difficult for the board to be cold-heartedly systematic when the board of directors tries to accommodate people, as well as policies, in dealing with the problem.

Troubling Issues

The community benefits from having a well-maintained community garden like the West Garden in their neighborhood. Children from nearby schools have a place to visit, do volunteer work, and get hands-on experience in gardening as they learn about plants. Residents in nearby buildings can appreciate the view. Everyone in the

community benefits from an open green space where they can visit and relax or participate in events for fun. However, community garden being a much appreciated place does not mean it is free from problems. The garden sometimes experiences the problem of stolen plants, chairs, or light bulbs. Vandalism is not all that common in this community garden, but it still happens. One time, all of the plastic chairs allocated throughout the garden to supplement other seating areas such as stone and wood benches were vandalized. It appeared that someone (or some people) used something like a screwdriver to crack the plastic. Members told me this had never happened here before. At a Flower Committee meeting during which this incident was reported, members decided the incident should be reported to the police.

Behaviors of some neighborhood youths also have become a cause for concerns among the gardeners. For instance, a few members witnessed teenagers getting into the garden after dark holding flashlights. The garden is locked after dark, but the adjacent playground is not. They appeared to have climbed up the fence facing the playing ground. At a board meeting, members wondered if "some kids were about to go wrong." Some members also have witnessed kids throwing sticks at an old lady. The gardeners wonder whether they need to call police on such an occasion. The member concluded that as a community, they needed to work together to help those kids by keeping an eye on them. During the Arts and Crafts Festival in the garden, several children ran across the garden and grabbed a donation jar placed on a small table. They quickly exited the garden smiling, passing me. They seemed to be around 12 years old or younger. I stood still not knowing what to do. A couple of quick-thinking garden members ran after the children. A member soon came back with the donation jar. She got the jar back, but looked

slightly distressed about what happened. Police officers came over as the incident unfolded.

During the board meeting, when discussing the incidents of youth, Fannie said, "Kids are like that. We need to help them." The board members who have children or grandchildren themselves seemed to show some understanding and concern for these incidents involving children. These members believe that the garden is a positive place in the neighborhood. At the same time, they felt frustrated that vandalism and negative incidents with children happened sometimes in the garden. A few garden members mentioned to me that they were concerned and irritated that some residents of neighboring buildings to the garden quietly expressed that they worried that intruders may gain access to their building by climbing the locked garden fences. Everyone I have had the chance to talk to at the West Garden is someone I would comfortably categorize as a liberal. They are also mostly well-educated people. I find, in general, these people do not speak about race or class if they can avoid it. I had some reasons to wonder, however, whether some of the neighboring residents' concerns about the garden affecting their safety were not also reflecting the division between condominiums and apartments on the one side of the street and the housing projects on the other. At least, in the garden, while the gate is open until dark, everyone from the neighborhood walks through the garden, enjoys sitting down the bench, chatting around the table, or looking at flowers together in the space.

Disagreement Over What Is Allowed in the Garden

Since community gardens are shared by many with different ideas about what they want to do in the garden, gardeners sometimes witness something that causes them disapproval. People walking dogs through the garden seem to annoy many gardeners as they worry about dogs ruining plants either by messing with them or urinating on them. Nora got very irritated when she saw an owner letting three dogs run loose in the garden. She told the owner to leash up, but was ignored by the owner. Nora suggested at a Flower Committee meeting that they should post a sign indicating that no dogs were allowed in the garden. However, prohibiting owners with dogs from walking into this open garden was not possible, nor did all members feel negatively about dogs in the garden.

A man who feeds pigeons irritates many more garden members. The man is a frequent visitor to the garden during the summer. He would often sunbathe shirtless and feed pigeons in the garden. While a sign in the garden states, “do not feed pigeons” he did not seem to take notice. During the Flower Committee meeting on a sunny Sunday people discussed whether or not to tell the man not to feed pigeons as they saw him in action. Someone pointed out that this man for the past seven years kept feeding pigeons despite the warning he got from members. In the end, we decided to ignore him this time. One person suggested cleaning up crumbs in front of him to show their irritation. The others said it had already been done without any success.

Small children sometimes want to pick flowers, fascinated by their beauty. Members try to explain that if everyone thought he or she could pick a flower from the garden, soon there would be no flowers left for anyone. A member pointed out that

sometimes parents get upset at such incidences, viewing their children as being "scolded." Garden members agreed that if parents are around, they need to talk to parents to prevent that kind of misunderstanding. One garden member pointed out that sometimes children are with a helper or nanny who is paying no attention to what they are doing. In any case, gardeners concluded that they should not treat anyone badly, especially since they do not know who may be a potential member.

People found no easy answer as to how to approach those who break rules in the garden. The board as well as Flower Committee discussed the issue. They concluded that scolding others was not a good option, though frustration does sometimes make people confrontational. The board members discussed that when someone is doing something not good for garden, they should kindly explain the garden's philosophy, rather than yelling at someone. If they yell at the wrongdoer, everyone in the garden will begin to view the garden negatively. They argued that they needed to approach these people to kindly remind them that these activities are against the garden rules. Showing they care about the garden and approaching people kindly, they concluded, could even be a tactic to encourage people to join the garden.

In discussing what acceptable behavior is and is not, garden members are learning tolerance. Ideally, the community garden would be a place that represents flexibility and openness compared to city parks since the garden often nurtures more communication and interaction. In reality, however, because it is an enclosed space, the garden users also feel more personal about it. And there easily could be a conflict of interest in the vision on what the ideal garden should be like. Learning to share the space and communicating

with each other to do so, in the end, have contributed to the process of building a sense of community.

Protecting the Garden

The West Garden is an incorporated property that is secured like a private property as long as it remains a community garden. This does not mean, however, that the gardeners can take the place for granted. One spring, the garden was notified that the building located adjacent to the garden on the southeast corner needed repair. The board held a meeting in the garden to talk with the contractors and the building owner. The contractors wanted to close off the south path of the garden for two to three weeks for five days a week. This closure meant that the access to the garden from its northern entrance became temporarily unavailable. Charles spoke up. "This garden relies on volunteers. If the garden is closed for that long, volunteers could easily loose interest. We could lose them."

Besides loosing volunteers, the board worried about the damage that the construction may cause to the garden. As community gardens in New York City are often located in between or right next to buildings, there are possibilities for construction damaging the garden, especially trees that cannot be easily replaced. The problem is exacerbated as building owners and construction workers often do not view garden property as having the same value as building property.

At a board meeting, members exchanged opinions about the repair next door. Charlie said that people next door benefit from the garden since having open green space increases the property value of their condominium, yet they take the garden for granted.

Some board members who are knowledgeable about construction regulations and negotiation processes pushed hard to deal with the contractors and next-door neighbors. Without such negotiation, the garden could be vulnerable to the careless erection of scaffolding without much protection to the well being of the plants. Charlie complained that people in charge of repairing the building have not treated the garden people as equals and made the negotiation difficult. The garden happened to have a board of directors who are knowledgeable and skillful in negotiating a situation like this. I saw that their pride in having built and maintained the garden made them tough negotiators and spokespersons for the garden, not easily backing down to let other people take advantage or view the place as mere open space.

The garden faced another problem when it temporarily lost its insurance coverage. Open to the public for various hours, community gardens need insurance to protect itself against lawsuits in case of an accident (such as a fall) onsite. The long process the West Garden went through to find an insurance company to cover the garden suggests that the community garden in New York City is somehow seen by some outsiders as a place of potential danger. This is ironic, considering that it is a place that has helped to improve the community and neighborhood.

The West Garden had long been covered by a group policy along with many other community gardens in the city through the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition. Yet, unceremoniously, the insurance company decided to no longer cover the community gardens in New York City, without stating reasons or sending out notices. The West Garden, well-organized and precise with its bookkeeping, found out about the situation when the treasurer noticed that it had stopped receiving the insurance bill. Finding a

company to cover the garden turned out to be a harder task than the board members initially imagined.

There was no way of knowing for sure exactly why some insurance companies decided not to offer an insurance plan for the garden, but some of the concerns the president of the garden heard from these companies included the potential of poisoning by agrochemicals. The president addressed such concerns by explaining that the garden is organic and no pesticides or herbicides are used. The garden even makes its own compost with fallen leaves, horse dung from the stable of a riding club nearby, and worms. An insurance company that offers policies for a variety of outdoor activities such as rock-climbing and white water rafting decided that insuring a garden was not worth their risk. A member told me that he wondered if community gardens in the city lost their insurers and had a hard time replacing them because of 9/11. In his view, 9/11 made New York City a place of fear and risk in the eyes of outsiders, including all of the insurance companies with which the garden was dealing. The garden, embedded in the landscape of the city, was inherently viewed as potentially dangerous as the city itself.

During the search for coverage, the garden closed its gates to the public for the first time ever. For more than three months the public was denied admission because one mishap could cause a lawsuit which could, ultimately, result in the seizure of the property as restitution for injuries incurred. The West Garden in the end found an insurance company partially owing to a personal connection a member happened to have with the company.

Even well-established gardens with a secure status can be vulnerable when a construction or building renovation happens next door. Gardeners and garden activists

must make extra efforts to guard a garden when the boundary is threatened. Without a protest or proper negotiation, a garden can easily be treated as a conveniently open area upon which to build scaffolding. When such a renovation was about to happen to the building right next to the West Garden, what prevented scaffolding from damaging the long standing trees and plants along the edge of the garden was the negotiation the board members demanded from the reluctant building owners and the construction company. The negotiation skills some board members had from their professional life (e.g., one was, a lawyer), worked well to protect the garden as they volunteered their time and efforts for the cause.

The garden can remain prosperous only so long as everyday activities keep the place alive. There also have to be constant organizational efforts to resist the unseen forces attempting to take over or compromise the place. Just as it is often the case for any type of environmental movement, whether the community garden as a whole continues to exist depends on continuing activisms and mobilization when necessary, and even more importantly, on nurturing outside interest in the community garden by keeping the place attractive. Community gardens in the highly urbanized area of Manhattan may still be seen as an anomaly and temporary, but generations of garden members and visitors from all walks of life are envisioning the open green space of community gardens as a necessary and enriching amenity for the city.

The Future of the West Garden

The West Garden, located in the now prestigious Upper West Side, is one of the most well-organized and well-budgeted community gardens in the city. However, this

does not make the place elitist. To the contrary, the place is one of the most open community gardens in the city. Just as the East Garden, having core, driven members with various fields of expertise helps the West Garden continue to exist and grow. Volunteerism is crucial in maintaining community gardens. The board of directors has expressed their concerns sometimes that they do not see that many younger generations of volunteers are joining. One of the original garden members at the West Garden told me that she used to see many more people gardening all the time. Whether it is natural fluctuation of interest in the community garden movement over time or whether it is symptomatic of an overall decline in volunteerism in New York and in the United States remains to be seen. There is also a possibility that volunteerism has declined in the Upper West Side as increasingly expensive rent forces newcomers to spend more time working and have less time for community activity. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, scholars like Robert D. Putnam (2000) might view the decline in volunteerism as a worrisome sign of the prevalent shift toward disengagement from the community. In the case of the community garden movement, the maturity of the movement—that is, the garden becoming well-established and embedded in the community—may decrease people's sense of urgency in considering to participate in it. In gardening, individualism does not go against community-building. Individuals' initiative in engaging in the mostly solitary activity of gardening is, after all, what keeps each garden blossoming.

The West Garden started on a makeshift junkyard when the neighborhood still had rooms for working-class people and younger newcomers who were looking for reasonable rent. People recall when the garden was a place where diverse people gathered together for one goal of planting and growing vegetables and flowers. Some

garden members express their concern that today, the West Garden has become more established but less diverse, perhaps reflecting the change in the community surrounding the garden that has become more upscale. The West Garden remains a beautiful garden. It offers a unique atmosphere and variety of activities that attract various people from the neighborhood. Having this place for interaction gives people from the community who may not otherwise come across one another the chance to meet and communicate.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Greening the City

Toward a Better Urban Environment

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (2004) estimates that about half of the world's population live in urban areas, and project that the growth of urban populations much exceeds the rate of total population growth. Accordingly, environmental and quality-of-life factors endemic to urbanized areas such as congestion, air quality, noise pollution, and lack or loss of vegetation profoundly affect the physical and mental health of people worldwide. The increase in global urbanization, moreover, means that improving and attending to environmental issues that impact urban areas will be an important and urgent task in many areas of the world, both now and in the future. Securing open green spaces in congested cities is one of the ways to improve people's lives. New York City, one of the most prominent urban centers in the world, with the world-famous Central Park at its center, has witnessed the birth of community gardens many times over. The existence of communal space in the form of community gardens against the backdrop of a highly capitalistic and commercial city seems almost like an anomaly. Community activism thus plays an integral role in the establishment of community gardens in the city as a countercurrent to commercial development.

Coming into being in the midst of an economic crisis from the mid 1970s to early 1980s, the garden movement coincided with a time in which investing money for greening projects was not a priority to the city. Nevertheless, the community garden movement helped to increase the availability of open green space for the city of New York. When the first garden was created in 1973, there was no long-term planning or

top-down command to guide people through the process. The sluggish economy left many city lots—some of which came into the city's possession due to tax arrears—vacant and unattended. At around the same time, the increase of drug using in many neighborhoods, coupled with the city's cutting down of services such as the police and the fire department in the face of a declining budget, led many residents to feel unsafe in their own streets. Planting trees and flowers in a vacant lot was one of the ways some citizens worked to reclaim their neighborhood.

In this study, I provided accounts of two community gardens in Manhattan: the East Garden on the Lower East Side and the West Garden on the Upper West Side, discussing how the initiatives of pioneering individuals have led to a true grassroots movement to create communally and voluntarily managed open green space. The East Garden and the West Garden were both founded in the mid to late 1970s by individuals who were concerned about neglected city lots filled with rubble, attracting garbage and unwanted activity in their deteriorating neighborhoods. People's choice to turn these spaces into community gardens was not necessarily rooted in the U.S.' history of urban gardening before and during the World War II, but instead was associated with a narrative of counterculture, environmentalism, and community activism.

While the East and West Gardens are both community-based organizations that depend fully on volunteer participation, they are run differently. The East Garden takes a bottom-up approach to organizing and holds participatory meetings during the gardening season. The West Garden has a tight organizational structure that includes a board of directors, which meets every month throughout the year, several committees, general members, and associate members. Both gardens are similar, however, in that a small

number of committed, long-term members with varying gardening and administrative expertise have helped to hold the garden together over time. In both gardens, there is an annual election to fill administrative positions. Holding such positions does not necessarily mean that elected officials have more prestige or privileges than other garden members. On the contrary, it means that they must adhere to longer volunteer hours in addition to gardening. Those elected to leadership positions took care of the budget, dealt with problems, and made sure that the garden was well attended, even though the availability and enthusiasm of regular garden members fluctuated. As my fieldwork has indicated, the presence of leadership within the community garden helped to ensure its longevity. Available, willing, and capable leaders appear to be one of the crucial elements for the long-term success of a community-based environmental program.

The creation and maintenance of community gardens attest to the strength of volunteerism in the United States. Some scholars (e.g. Putnam 2000; Bellah 1996) claim that volunteerism is on the decline in the United States. They attribute this partially to the rise of individualism, which they argue diminishes the strength of the community. I have found that, at least within the context of the community garden movement, individualism serves as a driving force for the development of communal garden space within a highly commercialized and urbanized city. Individualism has connotations of selfishness, but it also implies independent thinking and the ability to act on one's own initiative rather than following others. Without independent thinking and action undertaken at the individual level, community gardens would not exist. Yet at the same time, the presence of a community garden helps people cultivate a sense of community, as the activities and the garden attract people from various socioeconomic backgrounds

gather together. Some long-term garden members commented that they were seeing fewer volunteers than they did in earlier days. Possible explanations include the economic stress that individuals face with rising rents and working longer hours; the fluctuations in interest that seem to characterize many environmental movements; possible generational differences in attitudes toward volunteering; and the fact that the appearance of well-maintained gardens may give the impression that additional volunteers are not necessary for their survival.

The East and West gardens, although the latter is more organized and structured, are similar in that, ultimately, the implementation of garden rules and decisions is achieved through persuasion and communication among members. When gardens face challenges, such as neglected plots or vandalism, garden members address them in the meetings. The negotiation process through group discussion played an important role in community-building. In order to ensure the longevity and success of the community-based environmental movement, there have to be willing and capable participants who can take the initiative in assuming leadership while remaining committed to helping the cause and improving the community. Such leadership is not something that outside organizations can provide or create.

In addition to the East and the West Garden, I discussed examples of other community gardens: the Film Garden and the Flower Garden on the Lower East Side; the Elisa Garden in the South Bronx; a garden next to a public library in Chelsea; and the Fountain Garden in uptown Manhattan. Each garden has a unique history and identity. The Film Garden and Elisa Garden are examples of community gardens that use the space not only for gardening, but also for community activities, such as film screenings,

poetry readings, and education/tutoring. The Flower garden, like the East and the West Garden, is a garden that became an important green amenity on the block. Dana, the founder, whose involvement with the food co-op piqued her interest in gardening, learned many prerequisites for creating and maintaining a garden as she encountered each situation. She pointed out that she and other people in the community became emotionally attached to the garden over time.

The garden in Chelsea was an example of a garden that had a limited run; the land was ultimately overtaken by the city in order to expand the local library. Nancy and Charlie, who founded the garden, remember how people from all walks of life supported and helped the garden. They remember fondly how the garden positively influenced the block as a place for community activities and gatherings. Their story was not only an example of the spirit of volunteerism, but also of the desire to take action to improve their community during the economic crisis of the 1970s. The Film Garden and the Fountain Garden have gone through some ups and downs. One of the major causes for the deterioration of these gardens was the internal conflict among garden members. While the East and the West Gardens had organizational structures that worked to resolve internal strife or motivate people to remain interested in gardening activities, some of the other gardens fell apart or declined when core members split due to disagreement or loss of interest in the garden. Such examples are indicative of some of the challenges faced by volunteer-based groups, since participation is neither obligatory nor contractual. Friendship motivates gardeners rather than a sense of duty and obligation. In addition to the love for the garden and gardening, friendships that people built in the garden ranked as one of the primary reasons that members frequently came to the garden.

One of the ways community gardens have improved city blocks is by providing aesthetically-pleasing green space. Such improvements can make the block attractive to visitors, residents, and businesses. In Chapter 3, I pointed out that while the relationship between global economic forces and gentrification is well-studied and documented, I also found that the beautification of blocks through community gardens contributed to the gentrification of the area. Gentrification, however, is often a consequence of community gardening, not the intention. To the contrary, the community garden movement has been at the forefront of the fight against overdevelopment and the loss of green space. The relationship between community gardens and gentrification is thus ambiguous; one could both help and impede the other. Many of my informants expressed ambivalent feelings about this interconnection between gentrification and the community gardens. For example, in Chapter 3, Maria, who liked the idea of having open green space in her neighborhood, claimed that the community garden she wanted to visit was often locked. Maria seemed to have the perception that the locked garden signified the marginalization of old-time residents like her from the new gentrified community. Other informants pointed out, however, that locked gates encircling the community garden were necessary provisions for avoiding liability and safety issues. In contrast to Maria, some community-garden participants who are long-term residents of their respective areas, like Olean in Chapter 3, talked about how their efforts in building a community garden, in turn, helped to turn around the community and improve the aesthetics of the area.

Open green space has a symbolic, environmental, and social significance. Community gardens increase the availability of green space in the city, but the gate that surrounds community gardens gives some people the impression that community gardens

are not as accessible and open to the public as they should be or as they actually are. As I discussed, community garden members attempt to negotiate the gardens' intermediate status as both public and private space, figuring out the balance between keeping it open and maintaining the sense of safety and closeness that the place offers. The blurring of public and private status is also occurring in some city parks in terms of their management and funding. Partial privatization of park funding has helped in the revitalization of parks, but raises concern over how much decision-making power over a public park can be entrusted to private entities. Both community gardens and parks are important in the greening of the city. Exploring sustainable management models for both parks and community gardens are important in assuring that the city retains safe, accessible green space for the future.

Throughout the study, my interest has been to understand and analyze how community-based environmental programs work, especially once they have passed the initial creation phase. I first identified three main components of the community garden movement: activism, institutions, and lawsuits. I pointed out the need for the environmental movement to retain visibility in order to receive attention and resources for the cause. As an example of activism that helped to voice the concerns of the garden community, I discussed Earth Celebrations' *Rites of Spring*, an annual theatrical procession that celebrates community gardens, mourns demolished gardens, and raises the awareness of the threat of demolition some gardens face. Institutionalization, I argued, is crucial for the long-term success of the community garden movement and for individual gardens. I discussed two forms of institutionalization: the increased organizational structure within individual gardens and the emergence of supporting

networks of organizations for community gardens. The community garden movement today includes various organizations and institutions that support the garden community by providing resources such as funds, materials, technical support, and education. Over one hundred gardens in the city have been directly saved by philanthropic interventions to purchase the land on which they are situated. For the institutionalization of individual gardens, I depicted how the East and West Gardens became more structured both as physical garden spaces and as organizations. Lawsuits, both indispensable and unavoidable elements in the environmental movement in the United States, played a key role in the community garden movement to save many gardens from the fate of being auctioned off. The community garden movement is also characterized by resistance—resistance to the encroachment of developers, resistance to over-commercialization, and resistance to the artificiality of the urban environment. However, what keeps community gardens and the garden movement strong is the collaboration of people from different racial, class, and ethnic backgrounds, as well as various types of organizations, ranging from small non-profits to corporate-funded foundations, to create and protect green space in the city.

While this study has focused on the community garden movement in New York City, the community garden movement extends across the United States. The gardeners I talked to often pointed out that community gardens helped to disseminate educational values to city children. One of the benefits associated with the community gardens is hands-on experience in learning about fresh produce and plants. Such knowledge empowers those who garden and increases their appreciation for the environment. The educational benefits of having community gardens are widely recognized in other cities

as well. For example, a child center in Columbus, Ohio uses an organic garden to educate children about food and plants. In Buffalo, New York, there is a garden where at-risk youths are given education and training on sustainable urban agriculture and marketing of harvested products (Meyer 2009).

Besides education, community gardens are often recognized and promoted for their environmental value, food supply, and as a venue for leisure activity. In Chicago, there are more than 200 gardens. Gardens, along with community-supported agriculture, contribute to the city's Urban Heat Island reduction plan (Ivanko and Kivirist 2003). Community gardens are found in many different cities throughout the United States. Ferris et al. (2001) look at community gardens in the San Francisco Bay Area and describe the various and overlapping functions of gardens, classifying them according to terms such as "entrepreneurial gardens," "crime diversion gardens," and "healing and therapy gardens/quiet gardens" (2001:561). In Seattle, the Department of Neighborhoods, in conjunction with a not-for-profit trust, provides 68 gardens to its residents, especially supporting the involvement of low-income and immigrant populations as well as youth (Department of Neighborhoods n.d.). Ferris et al. also point out that community gardens have gained recognition from international organizations like the United Nations as one way to improve the ecological and social health of urban cities (Ferris et al. 2001).

My study of the community garden movement in New York City began with the origin of the movement, examining the relationship between the timing of its emergence and the socioeconomic condition of the city. I emphasized that it was the community members themselves who initiated the movement and eventually established the community garden as a legitimate fixture in the city. Meanwhile, the New York City

garden movement continues as a community-based environmental movement, drawing its strength from the diversity among gardens and their participants. Further studies on the specific economic, social, cultural, and historic contexts that ushered the emergence of various garden movements throughout the United States and beyond will help us understand the potential of the community-based greening of urban cities.

In the beginning of 2009, as I write this, New York City, as well as the rest of the United States and beyond, is in a recession again, that by some accounts, is possibly the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Grynbaum 2008). Signs of an economic decline are showing up as some restaurants and stores are closing down and there are more empty storefronts, although not yet to the degree that it resembles what happened to the city in the mid 1970s. The city is again facing the need to cut the budget. One can hope that the empty lots of the 1970s, strewn with garbage and hypodermic needles will not return—that community gardens will remain as beautiful healing spaces despite and regardless of the economic ups and downs the city faces. Many U.S. cities today are witnessing the rapid deterioration of neighborhoods due to the foreclosure crisis, which has left many of them half-empty with boarded up houses lost to owners who could no longer afford their mortgage payments (Kotlowitz 2009). This widespread problem forces us to consider new visions for how the city should maintain its vibrancy and build active communities. Community gardens seem to be gaining recognition from some cities for their health and social benefits. For example, the City of Miami, Florida has devised a plan to support community gardens using funds from local developers (Mannion 2009). Milwaukee is leasing some vacant lots left after foreclosures for community gardens with the hope that they will revitalize the area (Mannion 2009). The

community garden movement in New York City is an example of how people triumphed over adversity. It started out small—one plot at a time—but over time, it created community hubs throughout the city.

This study has examined the factors that gave rise to New York's community garden movement and contributed to its long-term success. I have demonstrated that maintaining a community garden takes a great deal of work. Participant observation helped me to capture the everyday activities in community gardens and their politics. The result may be a mere ethnographic snapshot, but in my view, the mundane and rather messy details of this close-up view has revealed the multitude of bottom-up efforts to improve the urban environment through greening.

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