

**DEVELOPING COMMUNITY IN THE GARDEN:  
THE SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF SOCIALIZATION IN THE  
SHEBOYGAN COMMUNITY GARDEN**

By

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## Introduction

Nestled in neighborhood lots, stretching along bike paths, and tucked away behind rows of houses you can find 50 community gardens within the city of Madison, Wisconsin. The city has a rich history of community gardening that has developed into a strong community garden culture supported by neighbors, politicians, and city planners. Interest in community gardens rose in the late 90's after the loss of several gardens in the 80's and early 90's.<sup>1</sup> Established by the city of Madison in 1997, the Community Garden Advisory Committee (renamed Committee of Community Gardens in 2005) was tasked with advocating and preserving new and existing community gardens.<sup>2</sup> Today, the Committee continues to “raise the visibility of community gardening and create better understanding of its many benefits.”<sup>3</sup>

In Madison, community garden members vary in age, ethnicity, and economic background. The gardens are a place for people of all walks of life to come together and share in the experience of gardening. The activities of the gardeners are not limited to watering and weeding but extend into social interactions, networks, and relationships. As Francis and Hester observe, “The garden exists not only as an idea or a place or an action but as a complex ecology of spatial reality, cognitive process, and real work.”<sup>4</sup> The garden is an intricate system of body, space, work, and socialization. I wanted to study

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<sup>1</sup> Geoff Herbach. *Harvesting the City: Community Gardening in Greater Madison, Wisconsin. Madison Food System Project Working Paper Series*, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Committee on Community Gardens. “Committee on Community Gardens Report 2008-2011” (City of Madison, 2011) <http://www.cityofmadison.com/residents/communitygardens/documents/CommunityGardensReport2008-2011.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Committee on Community Gardens. “Committee on Community Gardens Report.2008-2011” (City of Madison, 2011, <http://www.cityofmadison.com/residents/communitygardens/documents/CommunityGardensReport2008-2011.pdf>), 1

<sup>4</sup> Mark Francis and Randolph Hester. *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), 7.

community gardens because of the rich body/space relationships that form in a shared landscape. Compared to traditional backyard or private gardens, equal ownership of land in community gardens cultivates a tradition of collaboration among members as they manage the garden space. For example, this type of property requires shared responsibility and maintenance by the members setting it apart from public spaces such as plazas or parks, which are maintained by city governments. As a shared space the garden offers a unique setting for community development. This study seeks to understand how the spatial dimensions of the garden relate to the social interactions in the Sheboygan Community Garden (SCG). Social interactions are the building blocks for community development in the garden and the surrounding neighborhood. My research explores the ways in which the spatial aspects of the garden encourages or hinders social interactions. Community development and social interactions extend beyond the physical space of the garden and into the larger community; however, for the purpose of this study, I focus only on the individuals in the garden and the physical garden space.

The Community Action Coalition (CAC) for south central Wisconsin is an advocate of community gardens. They support existing community gardens in Madison and provide resources for the development of new gardens. CAC's mission is "to develop economic and social capacities of individuals, families, and communities to reduce poverty in Dane, Jefferson, and Waukesha Counties."<sup>5</sup> The CAC recognizes the community garden as a source of fresh, affordable food, *and* a place where community can develop. There is wealth of data available on the amount of food grown and

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<sup>5</sup> "Mission." Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin Inc., last modified 2012. <http://www.cacscw.org/>.

harvested in community gardens.<sup>6</sup> The economic benefits of the community gardens are therefore well documented, but there is a gap in the community gardening literature (and in our knowledge base) about the impact of garden design on social interactions. The purpose of this project is to improve our understanding of the social role such spaces play in community building. This research provides a resource for the CAC as they pursue their mission to develop social capacities in individuals, families, and communities, specifically in the community gardens of Madison.

### *Literature Review*

The literature on community gardens is growing, particularly within the fields of psychology, health sciences, and urban planning. The focus of each study varies but several main themes emerge: health, recreation, neighborhood organization, and socialization. As Hilda Kurtz notes, “contributors to the community gardening literature laud community gardens as effective vehicles for neighborhood organization and revitalization, as valued sources of supplemental nutrition, and as a viable recreational alternative to public parks.”<sup>7</sup> However, the literature pays little attention to the spatial layout of the garden and the social spaces the garden creates.

The first set of studies I reviewed examined the impact of community gardens on social capital of its members and in the surrounding neighborhood. A 2004 study in New York City found that community gardens were an important place for community

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<sup>6</sup> Vincent Smith. “Socioeconomic Value of Food Production” (presentation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, July 8, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Hilda Kurtz. “Differentiating Multiple Meanings of Garden and Community,” *Urban Geography*, no. 22 (2001): 656.

members to interact and exchange ideas and support.<sup>8</sup> The study focused on the *casitas*, small structures that provide shelter and a place for people to meet. The *casitas* were the central focus of the garden's social activities, offering a physical location where the gardeners and their families can socialize and develop community.

Glover et al. identified three social outcomes of community gardens: agreeable obligation, the production of social capital, and a context for political and social engagement.<sup>9</sup> The study found that community gardens functioned like other grassroots organizations in that one of the main goals of the organization is to gain more participants. Thus, garden leaders are directly involved in recruiting and socializing new members. This type of social interaction is formed around a specific goal based on the needs of the organization rather than the individuals. This research indicates there are varied causes of socialization in the garden based on the different motivations of the organization, the individual, and the neighborhood.

The type of socialization that occurs in community gardens results from the physical spaces of the garden, the goals of the garden community, and the makeup of the garden members. Community gardens share common factors (shared land, food, etc.) but individuals help shape the specific socialization patterns of each garden community.

More widely, community gardens impact the neighborhood at large and can help members develop a greater sense of neighborhood attachment.<sup>10</sup> Garden members tend to

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Saldivar-Tanaka and Marianne E Krasny. "Culturing Community Development, Neighborhood Open Space, and Civic Agriculture: The Case of Latino Community Gardens in New York City." *Agriculture and Human Values*. 21, no. 4 (2004): 399-412.

<sup>9</sup> Troy Glover, Kimberly Shinew, and Diana Parry. "Association, Sociability, and Civic Culture: The Democratic Effect of Community Gardening." *Leisure Sciences*. 27, no. 1 (2005): 75-92.

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Comstock, Miriam Dickinson, Julie Marshall, Mah-J Soobader, Mark S. Turbin, Michael Buchenau, and Jill Litt. "Neighborhood attachment and its correlates: Exploring neighborhood

have increased neighborhood involvement and community empowerment.<sup>11</sup>

Neighborhood involvement is an individual-level outcome because the individual is taking action. Community empowerment, on the other hand, is a community-level outcome because many individuals are involved or impacted by the empowerment. Community development begins on an individual level so every individual's culture, age, level of participation, and other personal factors help shape their community and therefore, the scope and impact of community-based action varies widely.

#### *Study Site: Sheboygan Community Garden*

The Sheboygan Community Garden is located on the west side of Madison, Wisconsin in the Hill Farms Neighborhood (*Figure 1*). The garden is perched on a small hill with a protective row of pine trees lining its eastern edge. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation building towers further south of the pine trees. Large parking lots wrap around three sides of the garden from the west, east, and south providing adequate parking for gardeners. Oaks define the northern boarder of the garden providing a visual screen and an auditory buffer from the traffic on University Avenue.

As you approach the garden from the southern parking lot, the ground slopes upward; the majority of the garden plots sit on top of the leveled hill and the remaining plots line the bottom of the hill on the western slope. The garden is divided into 110 plots. Two main parallel aisles running north to south divide the garden plots into three columns: each with six rows of plots. Each row is divided into either 4 or 8 individual

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conditions, collective efficacy, and gardening.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30, No. 4 (2010): 435-442.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Alaimo, Thomas Reischl, and Julie Ober Allen. “Community Gardening, Neighborhood Meetings, and Social Capital.” *Journal of Community Psychology*. 38, no. 4, (2010): 497-514.

plots (*Figure 3*). All of the plots are at ground level except a cluster of raised bed plots that occupy the southwest corner of the garden. These raised beds were built in 2010 to accommodate the physical needs of older individuals who still wish to garden.<sup>12</sup> The SCG bulletin board and welcome sign, located at the front of the garden, list upcoming events and workdays. To the right of the bulletin board sit two picnic tables. Eight blue water barrels are positioned evenly along the two main paths (*Figure 4*). These water barrels are kept full at all times so that gardeners have access to water when the hose is not turned on. A tool shed and a compost pile are located at the back of the garden nearest to University Ave.

SCG signs a yearly permit which allows for their continued use of the land but in 2007 their 30 year occupancy was threatened when the Department of Transportation proposed selling the land for development. Members advocated preserving the SCG as a part of the development and the City of Madison's Committee of Community Gardens offered their support for the continued existence of the SCG in the Hill Farms neighborhood. A preservation committee was formed by SCG members in response to the development issues. Tension between development and community illuminates differing perceptions on use of space and the value of land. Attachment to the land and the value or meaning of the land differs from who use the land for gardening and those who do not.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "March 22, 2010, Meeting Minutes." Sheboygan Community Garden, last modified 2012, [http://www.sheboygancommunitygarden.org/uploads/3/8/3/2/3832970/march\\_22\\_2010\\_meeting\\_minutes.pdf](http://www.sheboygancommunitygarden.org/uploads/3/8/3/2/3832970/march_22_2010_meeting_minutes.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Mark Francis. "Some Different Meanings Attached to a City Park and Community Gardens." *Landscape Journal*, (1987): 101-112.

Other community gardens in New York City, for example, have faced similar threats of eviction and in many cases were demolished.<sup>14</sup> Problems of property, land use, and development are a real concern for gardeners in the City of Madison but removing a community garden has larger implications in the wider community and ripple out into the surrounding neighborhood.<sup>15</sup> Although, community gardens have a far reaching effect on the members and the neighborhood, the threads of community that run in and around the garden are not always understood. In this thesis I unpack the socialization patterns of gardeners and the role of spatial design in the garden, in order to engage to the larger dialogue surrounding the role of community gardens in community development.

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<sup>14</sup> Karen Schmelzkopf. . "Incommensurability, Land Use, and the Right to Space: Community Gardens in New York City." *Urban Geography*. 23, no. 4, (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Geoff Herbach. *Harvesting the City: Community Gardening in Greater Madison, Wisconsin*. (*Madison Food System Project Working Paper Series*, 1998).

## Methods

From the 30 community gardens in Madison I chose to study the SCG because of the diversity of its members and its size. The SCG is compact and you are able to see the entire garden from anywhere you stand. This was important when I conducted my behavior observations because I could see everything that was going on in the garden at any time.

Two research methods were used in this study: on-site behavior observations and individual interviews. On-site behavior observations took place at the garden every one to two weeks during May-August 2011. I visited the garden a total of 15 times during the garden season. During this time I used behavior mapping to record the movements of individuals in the garden. Behavior mapping is a “direct observational method for recording the location of subjects and measuring their activity levels simultaneously.”<sup>16</sup> This method involved using a site map of the garden to record observations, marking gardener locations and recording their activities (e.g. weeding, watering, talking to a plot neighbor, etc.). The behavior maps and observations were the first step in understanding how the gardeners used the Sheboygan community garden space. The observations provided initial information about the gardener’s socialization habits and movements. This part of the study helped me to develop my interview questions and inform the interviews I conducted.

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<sup>16</sup> Nilda Cosco, Robin. Moore, and Islam Mohammed. “Behavior Mapping: A Method for Linking Preschool Physical Activity and Outdoor Design.” *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*. 42, no. 3, (2010): 513-519.

I spent the months of September and October 2011 in the garden interviewing garden members. There were 10 interview questions revolving around open-ended themes of social interaction, community, and garden space (See *Appendix A*). In order to achieve a varied sample of observations I went to the garden during different times of the day and on different days of the week. During each visit I approached members who were presently working in the garden and asked for an interview. I interviewed a total of 18 individuals, 9 of which occurred in the garden. One interview was conducted over the phone for convenience of the member because she did not have time when I approached her in the garden, yet still wanted to participate. Another interviewee responded via e-mail to my questions after voicing similar time constraints when first approached in the garden. As the garden season slowed down in the fall there were fewer and fewer members present in the garden, which created a challenge for continuing the interviews. To overcome this obstacle, I sent out an e-mail to the Sheboygan Community Garden list-serve asking for more participants in December. 7 people responded and were interviewed over the phone. They were all eager to share their views on the garden. One limitation with contacting gardeners via e-mail is the unintentional exclusion of individuals who do not use e-mail regularly. Also, individuals who use English as a second language may have felt intimidated responding to an e-mail or participating in an interview without a translator. Therefore, the data I collected does not fully represent the views of all of the garden members.

I analyzed the data from the interviews using a coding method. I created an Excel spreadsheet and transferred all of the interview responses into the document. I broke the responses down by question, giving each response a separate cell. I analyzed the

responses by pulling out common themes or recurring words. Next, I compiled a list of about 10 common themes or codes. Each coded response was then coded with one of the ten codes. This process was repeated by advisor, Sam Dennis. We compared our coded data and agreed on common themes.

## Results

Based on my interviews and observations I gathered data on the garden participants, events, actions, and socialization. The results of this project fall into 3 categories: members, sharing, and events. This section provides an overview of these results. I created these three main categories by pulling the most common umbrella themes from my coded data. These categories were selected because they encompass the other codes and most broadly represent the results of the data.

### Umbrella Codes with Sub-Codes

<b>Members</b>	<b>Sharing</b>	<b>Events</b>
Diversity	Food*	Potluck
Bridge Members*	Knowledge*	Workday*
Communication	Responsibility*	

\* Indicates spatial observations

### Members

Members were a central component of my behavior observations and individual interviews. As I gathered my data categories began to form around central themes. The code ‘members’ emerged from the data I gathered which described traits, habits, and characteristics of the individuals. Garden members are the foundation of this research because their actions, socialization, and opinions about the garden are the data for this study. Within the umbrella code “members” I am able to encompass the sub-codes: diversity, bridge members, and communication.

## *Diversity*

For the purpose of this study diversity is defined as the variation in cultural, ethnic, and personal identity. Individual plots reflect the taste, creativity, and ingenuity of the gardener. Even when a gardener is not present at SCG, their plot reflects the unique qualities of the gardener. Some gardeners grow all tomatoes while others cultivate an array of kale, garlic, and carrots. One member devotes her entire garden to flowers. Gardeners employ a multitude of methods to tie up unruly tomato vines, fence in their plot, or offer their pole beans more support (*Figure 5*). Diversity among gardeners contributes to a variety of cultivations methods but it also informs the value and process of gardening.<sup>17</sup> Members enjoy walking through the garden, curious to see how other gardeners shape their personal spaces and to gather potential tips. Each plot is an experiment in gardening. New members often receive tips from more seasoned gardeners on methods of planting, pruning, and weeding. Gardener 46A told me her plot neighbor gave her advice about planting marigolds by the tomatoes to keep away the rabbits. Gardener 37 described how a Korean gardener taught her about growing native Korean vegetables and then gave her advice on preparing and eating them. Long-term gardeners may have more established garden routines but even they learn about new plants and growing techniques from other members. All of this plot diversity serves as a catalyst and context for socialization.

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<sup>17</sup> *Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, s.v. "Gardens and Gardening," by David Crouch, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00572-1>.

### *Bridge Members*

“Bridge member” is a term I use to describe those members in the garden who act as connectors between other members. Often they are involved in the SCG committee, are socially active in the garden, or have been a member for several years. Bridge members are more likely to help physically bridge the gap between gardeners by introducing new members to others in the garden. 46A explained how some members introduced her to others in the garden. Introducing gardeners to each other and supplying garden knowledge are important traits of a bridge member. They are also more likely to circulate on the path to see other people in the garden rather than staying in their plot and waiting for others to come to them.

Bridge members may also link the external public community with the garden community. Several individuals described how they talk to non-SCG people who may stop by the garden to explore. Most gardeners seem willing to engage the public and teach them about the community garden. “The ambassador of the garden” was a positive description 56C used to describe members in the garden, including herself, who are excited to share and promote the garden to the public.

Potential gardeners commonly learn about the SCG from current garden members by word of mouth. Several individuals I interviewed described how a friend or apartment neighbor who was a current garden member recommended they join the garden. This is one example of how SCG members are a bridge between the external community and the current garden community.

### *Communication*

There are twelve languages spoken in the garden, and the language barriers that exist were mentioned by several gardeners.<sup>18</sup> For example, I observed members speaking Russian to each other when gardening. This created an ephemeral social boundary in the garden that excluded non-Russian speakers. These verbal spaces, however, were temporary and fluid throughout the garden depending on the participants.

E-mail is a common form of communication among the larger gardener network. Updates and announcements are sent to the SCG list serve. Member 24 commented, “There was a mailing registration last year but this year there is only e-mail [registration] and that leaves some people out who do not use computers.” This comment points out one of the failures of e-mail based communication. I have identified two problems with e-mail communication based on comments by garden members, (1) the potential alienation of older individuals who are less comfortable with this technology and (2) failure to communicate with individuals who use English as a second language.

### Sharing

Sharing is an intrinsic component of a community garden due to the communal nature of garden resources such as land, tools, and organization. The three varieties of sharing I observed at SCG included food, knowledge, and responsibility.

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<sup>18</sup> Raja, S. “Preserving community gardens in a growing community: A report on the community gardens planning process in madison, wisconsin.” *Madison Food System Project Working Paper Series*. (2000) 1-71.

### *Food*

Not surprisingly, food was a common theme in the garden. Members often mentioned sharing produce from their garden with other members or sharing/receiving food. In some cases members received food from a plot neighbor with instructions for cooking or a specific recipe. The cultural diversity of the garden is reflected in the diversity of vegetables grown in each plot. But the vegetables are more than a source of nutrition; they are an essential component of the development of community and are a bridge that unites people of varying backgrounds and cultures.

Sharing vegetables is also driven by the desire to share an abundant crop which the gardener does not want to waste. At the height of tomato season, for example, I commonly observed gardeners handing a plot neighbor a fistful of cherry tomatoes. Finally, seed sharing offers another means of sharing food in the garden. Members share seeds to save money, to try a new species, cultivate or preserve an heirloom variety. I learned from a member that the heirloom tomatoes in her plot originally came from a Russian member whose relatives brought the tomato seeds over from Russia years ago. She planted them in her plot and ended up sharing them with other members of the garden and now those heirloom tomatoes from Russia are a part of many SCG plots.

### *Knowledge*

There are two distinct categories of communication that take place in the garden. The first involves casual talk. For example, during my observations I noticed one gardener pass a member working in their plot and greet them before walking on to their own plot. Casual talk usually involves greetings, comments, or compliments about another member's garden. These casual conversations are not limited to garden related

topics; often members discuss their families, activities in the community, and life events. Causal talk strengthens friendships and allows members to get to know each other on many different levels.

The second form of communication involves shared knowledge: a specific dialogue that takes place among gardeners when they exchange information and share tips about gardening. Gardener 25 stated,

People stop by each other's plots and ask what they are growing. People give compliments and offer others a taste of something they are growing. People discuss what works in the garden, animals ruining the plants, fences that work etc.

Here the member describes casual conversation ('compliments'), shared food ('offer others a taste'), and shared knowledge ('animals' and 'fences that work'). Clearly, sharing is formed on many levels and multiple types of sharing can take place in one interaction.

In the interviews, garden members gave several examples of shared knowledge. Common examples included discussing weed control, tips on growing a certain vegetable, or asking another member if they have encountered pest problems recently in their plot. In an interview, 56A describes a time when he was working in his plot and another garden member brought some friends over to his plot. The member wanted to show their friends the hops 56A was growing because they were curious about the uses of hops and how it is grown. 56A answered their questions and showed them the plants. This interaction illustrates shared knowledge and the impact it has in social situations within the garden. The shared element of gardening gives the members a common bond. Shared knowledge about gardening, thus, provides a foundation of simple socialization from which gardeners have the opportunity to build stronger social relationships.

There is also an element of support that results from sharing knowledge and asking others for advice or help. For example, 9A described:

I went out there [SCG] with my daughter because we needed to water and pick tomatoes in July. [A] woman in [the] other half of our plot was there watering. I found a nest of baby bunnies in the middle of my garden. She coached me through moving them. Sort of traumatic. She offered words of encouragement and sympathy. Sparked a conversation about pests and what to do about them.

This is a textured example of a garden incident that began unexpectedly but ended in a discussion embedded in shared knowledge. The garden, as a natural landscape, contains surprises like weather, weeds, and in this case, rodents. These surprises are an integral part of a gardener's experience as they consistently interface with the landscape through manual garden labor. Struggle, joy, and surprise await each gardener in their veggie patch and in a community garden these events are a source of mutual understanding between members. Gardening can be a solo pursuit but in SCG due to the proximity of the plots, gardeners offer advice and support to fellow members who share in the trials and tribulations of garden culture.

### *Responsibility*

The SCG members share responsibilities in the garden such as controlling weeds, picking up trash, and filling water barrels. The blue water barrels located throughout the garden are shared by all; therefore, members are expected to help keep these barrels filled when the water from the nearby fire hose is turned on during the evenings. During days when the fire hose cannot be used, the water barrels are the only source of water in the garden. In an interview one member describes:

My husband was over there [at the garden] not too long ago filling [water] barrels early in the morning. A dedicated Korean gardener asked him if he needed help with the barrels... People offer to help with watering when other gardeners are out of town...

These types of interactions are examples of shared responsibility in the garden. In my behavior observations I witnessed members filling water barrels by themselves while they were gardening or right before they left. Often a solo activity the gardeners were none-the-less participating in shared responsibility for the maintenance of the garden. I was surprised that I did not observe collaborative efforts between members during a normal day at the garden. However, examples of shared responsibility were given in interviews like the example mentioned above. This suggests that shared responsibility does occur between members though less frequently than I would have originally guessed.

Members are also required to complete four hours of garden work a year. This work may include weeding the paths, attending a workday, picking up trash in the main garden area, or general maintenance. Everyone helps keep the garden clean and orderly. For example, members are expected to maintain their plots and to keep the borders of their plots tidy. Several garden members that I spoke with mentioned their dislike for empty, neglected plots because of the increase in weeds and rodents. When a plot is neglected the burden of maintenance falls to others in the garden and may cause tension in the garden community. Shared responsibility is a mechanism within SCG to keep order and provide everyone with an equal opportunity to participate.

## Events

Two types of events took place at the SCG: potlucks and workdays. Events disrupt the ordinary work day rituals but they provide their own set of social dynamics and are therefore an equally important part of the study.

### *Potlucks*

SCG hosts several different types of events throughout the season. Gardeners mention these events often when asked about social interaction. Three potlucks are held during the Spring, mid-Summer, and Fall. During each potluck gardeners have a chance to get to know each other, share food, and exchange gardening knowledge. The potluck I attended, which celebrated the SCG 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, included a wide array of dishes with a special Korean barbeque. This was one of the few instances when the picnic tables were used to hold the food and the area around the tables was occupied by gardeners talking and eating. During the event I was approached several times by garden members who asked if I had a plot in the garden. I was initially surprised to learn that individuals did not know more of their fellow garden members but upon reflection and through my behavior observations I realized this is not out of the ordinary. Members come and go at different times of the day and week so that it is likely that some of the gardeners never meet. During my visits I rarely saw a member twice at the garden except for some of the regulars. In the interviews I asked members how well they knew their garden neighbors. Their responses varied, but commonly people responded with a simple “I do not know them very well.” These comments confirm my observations of varied garden members working at the garden. The potluck I attended also took place in late June, fairly early in the garden season; therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that people were still getting

to know each other and the new members. Potlucks offer a central gathering time for deliberate socialization of members through a friendly meet and greet. Members who socialize at a potluck may be more inclined to stop and talk in the garden later in the season if they happen to run into each other again. By celebrating food, culture, and friends in the space of the garden networks are formed and initial socialization occurs.

### *Workdays*

Every month, during the season, gardeners have the option to participate in a workday. Workdays are scheduled for a few hours on the weekend. Members are instructed by supervisory members to help with certain tasks. Tasks could include weeding the front communal beds, helping with the shed, planting, and picking up trash. During a workday in June, for example, gardeners were planting flowers in the shared garden bed that runs east and west along the front edge of the garden. This long, narrow strip of the garden requires shared responsibility of maintenance (*Figure 6*).

Workshops are sometimes held during workday events. While observing a workday event in July, I attended a garlic harvesting workshop. One of the older garden members taught me and several others about the differences in planting, harvesting, and storing certain types of garlic. We were each given a handout and listened while she explained things on the sheet. We sat at the picnic tables for this workshop which was one of the few times I saw the picnic tables in use. For the last ten minutes the workshop group toured a garden plot to see examples of garlic ready for harvest. The individual whose garlic we were looking at gave us more instruction on garlic harvesting and planting without prompting from anyone. She was eager to share with the group what she had learned.

## Discussion

### *Space and Place*

It is necessary to first define space and place because these concepts frame my discussion of the SCG. Yi-Fu Tuan best describes space and place as intertwined ideas.

The ideas of 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, we if think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, space is the unfamiliar and abstract but when space becomes familiar place is formed. The SCG carries both space and place within its boundaries providing comfort through 'pause' and the freedom of movement that is associated with space. There are identifiable spaces within the garden: the paths, the plots, the borders in-between, the shed, and the compost. These spaces are theoretically bounded by collective rules of shared and private spaces. All the land is shared but the space is divided into plots, which the members then respect as private space. The SCG also embodies place because the gardeners have developed attachments to the garden, the land, and other members. Through the act of gardening and socializing the members are turning space into place. I observed 'place making' in the forms of gardening, socialization, and collaboration.

### *Shared and Private Property*

The shared spaces and the collective responsibility of the garden members, offer a special approach to gardening because the needs of the individual and the needs of the community are woven together in the space of the garden. Traditional backyard gardens

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<sup>19</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.

maintain a level of separation and privacy.<sup>20</sup> The SCG offers each gardener a plot to manage, guaranteeing a spot of personal land, but the garden paths and the connection to other garden plots deviate from the traditional backyard approach, facilitate movement among the private garden spaces. There are no visual barriers in the garden. Although fences mark the borders of each plot, they do not reach higher than three feet. Thus private spaces are visually accessible. This is contrary to traditional backyard gardens surrounded by a much higher fence, preventing physical and visual access.

### *Circulation*

Studying the SCG, I was able to observe the social interactions play out spatially in the garden and in turn understand how the spatial design of the garden influenced social behavior. Data from these observations, coupled with interviews, helped ground my work in the spatial and social dimensions of the garden. What spatial features of the garden promote socialization and interactions, the fuel that runs the engine of community? Through my study I found the garden paths were the conduits for social interaction. Paths were the most significant physical support of socialization in the garden.

The unique and curious aspects of a community garden are the connective spaces throughout the garden, knitting the individual garden plots into a patchwork of community. The paths provide both space and place depending on the context in which they are used. When a gardener circulates through the garden by way of the garden path

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<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Blomley. "The Borrowed View: Privacy, Propriety, and the Entanglements of Property." *Law & Social Inquiry*. 30, no. 4 (2010): 617.

they may be walking from the entrance of the garden to their plot or from their plot to the water barrel and back again. During these movements the paths operate in the definition of space, providing the gardeners a physical means to move from point A to point B. However, during this movement I observed gardeners stop along the path to talk to another individual. When I asked gardeners question 8 in the interview (where do people socialize in the garden?) many responded, “on the garden path.” This pause in movement provides the gardener a place for socialization and a brief respite from the labor and attention of the garden. Place is formed through pause and socialization.

Paths run throughout the garden separating plots physically, but also connecting plots to other garden features like water barrels and the shed. I often observed gardeners move along the garden path towards these features or their own plots, greet other members who were working in their plots. When asked where people socialize in the garden 44A responded, “At plot or walking past [they] take a quick comment.” The ‘quick comment’ fall under the casual conversation I classified earlier. More importantly, this remark identifies two critical spaces where people socialize, in their plots or on the paths. “People interact when they are walking by, they stand by the garden [plot], or walk by there. There are a variety of ways to interact” stated one gardener. “Greet them when passing their plot” and “People talk when they walk down the path” were examples given by gardeners of path circulation and casual conversation.

The garden provides several shared spaces: the connective tissue of the paths, the borders between the plots marked by fences and weeds and the shared visual and auditory spaces which are at times ephemeral. Place grows out of these spaces through an attachment to the land and an established sense of community. In an ever-globalizing

world, desires to connect to place have increased in our culture.<sup>21</sup> The hostility and alienation of urban environments are softened by the cultural and community ties of place broadly created in neighborhoods, cafes, and community gardens or specifically created in garden plots or our favorite armchair.<sup>22</sup>

### *Circulation Barriers*

The compact nature of the plots is one barrier to the socialization of members. Plots on the outside edges and the back half of the garden have less foot traffic than those plots nearer to the garden entrance. Plots that do not border a main pathway also do not receive as much circulation from gardeners and this reduces the amount of social interaction. *Figure 2* and *3* represent the layout of the garden and it is in these figures one can see the plots on the far eastern edge are furthest away from the main path compared to the plots on the western edge of the garden. Similarly, when I walked around the garden I found the plots on the interior of the middle garden plots were not as easily accessible on foot. Finally, those plots on the far north-west and north-east corners of the garden were also more isolated from the rest of the garden. Gardener 30B remarked:

It was so lonely on the sloping side of the garden, didn't feel like it was a community garden (in her old garden plot). Now moved to new plot "on the main path" which makes a big difference.

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<sup>21</sup> Keith Helphand. "Leaping the Property Line: Observations on Recent American Garden History." In *Perspectives on Garden Histories*, edited by Michel Conan, 137-159. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan. *Space and Place: The perspective of experience*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

She goes on to describe how she sees more people and talks with more people in her new plots than in her old plot. Another gardener had a similar experience with a plot near the garden entrance they experience more social interaction.

Casual garden talk like this often involved brief conversations or comments that were friendly in nature. The main garden paths were used more often by gardeners as they are the most direct, wider than the smaller paths, include the water barrels, and were most well maintained. Unless a gardener had a plot on the inside of a patch of plots they were less likely to use the smaller garden paths. Thus, the interior plots received less foot traffic next to their plots. Providing circulation in and around the garden would promote socialization.

### *Plots*

As I noted earlier many of the gardeners do not know their plot neighbors very well and often there are different members working in the garden everyday of the week. Yet, even with the varied times and interactions of individuals there is a sense of place shared by all. There are common elements of the garden which thread the members together in a flexible network of interactions and relationships which provide a sense of place.

Working the soil to produce vegetables requires working on your hands and knees and digging your hands into the soil. Transforming the plot from bare ground to a flourishing garden requires an intimacy of body and space. Gardeners know their land from the tethering of tomatoes, the thinning of beets, and the removal of weeds; this is their plot of land. They decide who enters their plot, the design of their plot, and the

variety of vegetables that call their plot home. The gardener is the gate-keeper of their plot. The garden plot is more than a total yield of vegetables but a demonstration of passion, experimentation, and ingenuity. The plot reflects the gardener's culture, interests, and practice.

When asked in the interview "what spaces in the garden are most important to you" almost every gardener responded, "my plot." Other spaces, like the front flower garden and the water, were mentioned as well but by and large the plot was the single most important space for gardeners. At face value, this is not surprising since the gardener spends most of their time and labor in their plot. Sense of place is built from lived experience as Emma Schroeder describes,

We form place out of our physical surroundings and the meanings we ascribe to specific spaces. We tangibly interact with our environments- our experiences within places shape our understanding of them.<sup>23</sup>

Plot proximity also supports the socialization of members nearest to each other. Cross-plot talking was common, but not as common as circulation socialization. The varied schedules of the gardeners provided very little opportunity for gardeners to see each other with much frequency. When I visited the garden I noticed the gardeners were often spread throughout the garden working at their individual plots. Those gardeners who worked in the garden often socialized more often. Each member chose the level of personal information to disclose. Members socialize on many different levels. People who are excited to make friends, have the time, and are at the garden often socialize differently than people who are more interested in just gardening.

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<sup>23</sup> Emma Schroeder. "Dead Zones, Weed Nests, and Manure Mishaps: How Gardeners Cultivate Collective Place in Eagle Heights Community Garden," (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011), 4.

### *Participation*

Gardeners join the SCG for different reasons-some wanted more space, others a sunnier spot to grow- yet all have a passion for gardening. In joining a community garden, members were able to pursue their hobby, produce food, and build a social network of fellow gardeners. Their level of participation in the SCG community is determined by individual choice. Yet, the community garden space is built on principles of shared responsibility for the land. All of the members, therefore, participate in community building to the same degree. Variations in the level of participation changes depending on

In interviews and my conversations with gardeners during my behavior observations, I was surprised that many members voiced the opinion that the SCG did not have a strong community. The comments varied but three times in the course of my research members mentioned that they did not feel the SCG members had a community. One gardener cited the discontinuity of gardener's schedules as part of the problem. People are gardening at varied times throughout the week and the lack of consistency or overlap between schedules means that many gardeners never meet. The social interactions then are limited by who is in the garden at the time you may be working. Conversely, the gardeners are not held to any social standard or expectation because socialization varies. This informal social structure is appealing to some gardeners because they can socialize when they want but they are not expected to socialize more than they want. There may be no formal cohesive community unit within the garden but all the gardeners socialize on some level.

Language barriers are another hurdle for gardeners and it was repeatedly mentioned in interviews and conversations. One gardener described how language barriers limit her ability to socialize with some of the gardeners. She is less likely to try and start a conversation with a fellow gardener if there are language differences, so she limits her socialization to a nod, wave, and/or smile. Another gardener who speaks English as a second language voiced her opinion that overall the garden community was not making an effort to include ESL members. SCG does have a translator, but she felt it was not enough and the garden needs to take more inclusive action. She suggested adding members to the garden committee who represented a wider range of nationalities and backgrounds.

## **Conclusion**

My data revealed circulation on garden paths as a major support of socialization among garden members. Passing by other members and taking time to “pause” on the path to talk was the most common form of socialization and the most accessible. The division of land into shared and private space is another socialization support. Paths, fences, and plots form a patchwork of shared and private spaces. Low fences surrounding the plots allow full visual access to the entire garden providing visual aid to the socialization process because there are no visual restrictions. Lack of sitting space within the garden is viewed as a small physical limitation to socialization.

I have two recommendations to address the barriers to improved socialization in the garden. The first involves increasing the number of resting/sitting places in the garden to provide stationary spots where gardeners can rest and ‘pause’ in their place. Additionally, older gardeners may benefit from resting places along the paths in case they tire while carrying water or mulch. Currently some of the gardeners have small chairs or stools in their plots where they can sit while they are weeding or harvesting. The two picnic tables at the front of the garden are the only shared sitting spaces in the garden. Gardeners use the picnic tables but they are located on the side of the garden, removed from the central garden activity. Unfortunately the SCG is limited on space and, understandably, they prefer to devote as much space as possible to plots. The main paths are fairly wide but when you factor space for water barrels, foot traffic, and easy movement of wheelbarrows there is little room left to add benches or other types of seating. When I asked a few gardeners their opinion on benches or sitting spots they agreed that it would be nice but voiced concern about lack of space.

My second recommendation is to add small areas of shade. A few gardeners mentioned umbrellas or some form of shade protection in the garden. Providing shade where people could sit or stand and socialize on hot July and August days. The location of the shade would have to be strategically placed because you would not want to block sunlight from reaching any of the plots.

When community gardens are designed in the future, members may want to take path width into consideration so that benches may be added at a later time. A circular pattern would also provide the most circulation options in the garden. If people can move around in a circular motion they will pass by the most plots thus increasing the potential for socialization in the garden. The Committee for Community Gardens in Madison has written a short report on the Universal Design principals for community gardens.<sup>24</sup>

Universal design is rooted in equality and access to all people to community gardens regardless of age, ability, or physical strength. Additional seating, like benches, is one of the recommendations of the report. Also, it states the importance of wide paths for easy access and wheelchair use. Through this report it becomes clear that the committee views design and garden layout as a means to make gardening accessible, comfortable, and enjoyable for all community members who wish to partake in community gardening. Ultimately, these should be the foundational goals of all community garden design. The city of Madison and local neighborhoods can work together to strengthen community through accessible and spatially cohesive gardens.

SCG represents one sample of community garden socialization but there is room for more study of this topic. The richness of community gardens is tangible in the

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<sup>24</sup> Committee for Community Gardens. "Madison's Inclusive Community Gardens." City of Madison. Last modified: 2011. [http://www.cacscw.org/downloads/CommGardensFinal\\_UnivDesign.pdf](http://www.cacscw.org/downloads/CommGardensFinal_UnivDesign.pdf).

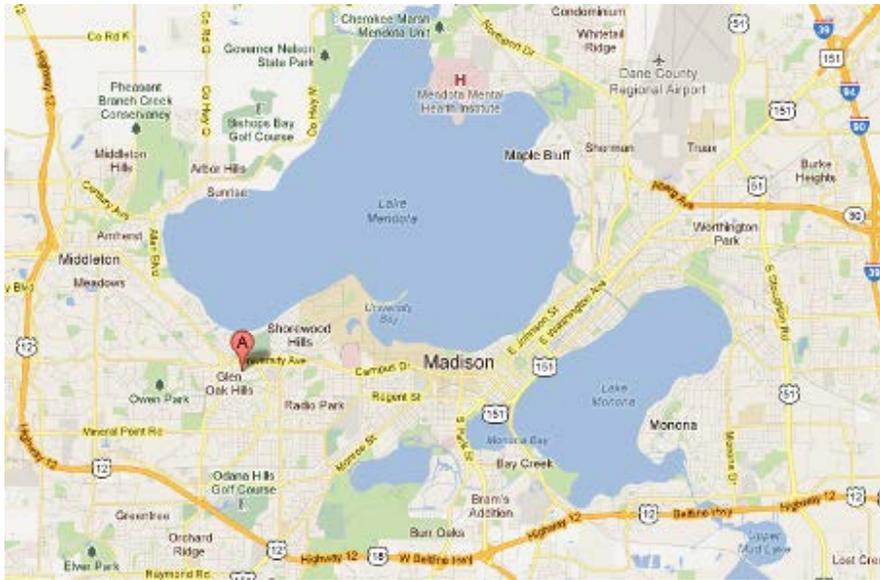
abundance of fresh produce and visible in diversity of participants. But not all of the benefits of community gardens can be measured in the weight of veggies or the health of the members. Socialization and community development are not easily quantified but their presence in the garden and the effects on its members are equally important to study as the measurable components of the garden.

The CAC acknowledges the value of community gardens as a method for growing community. Studies recognize social interactions are building blocks to community development but it was unclear what specific social interactions were taking place in garden communities. Through my study I was able to investigate the types of social interaction as they related to the space and design of the garden. Community development and socialization are rooted in physical space and contribute to the process of place making. Having identified social interactions and connected them to the physical environment of the garden the CAC may take this knowledge and apply it to the development of future and existing community gardens in Madison.

## **Appendix I. Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been a member of SCG?
2. How far away do you live from SCG?
3. Why did you want a garden plot at the SCG?
4. What are the benefits of gardening in a community garden? The disadvantages?
5. How well do you know your garden neighbors (those individuals who share a plot that is nearest to your plot)?
6. How do gardeners welcome new members and the public?
7. How do social interactions change or stay the same during SCG weekend work days?
8. Where do people socialize in the garden?
9. Could you tell me a story about an interaction you had in the garden recently...
10. Finally, can you give me a tour of the spaces in the garden that are important to you?

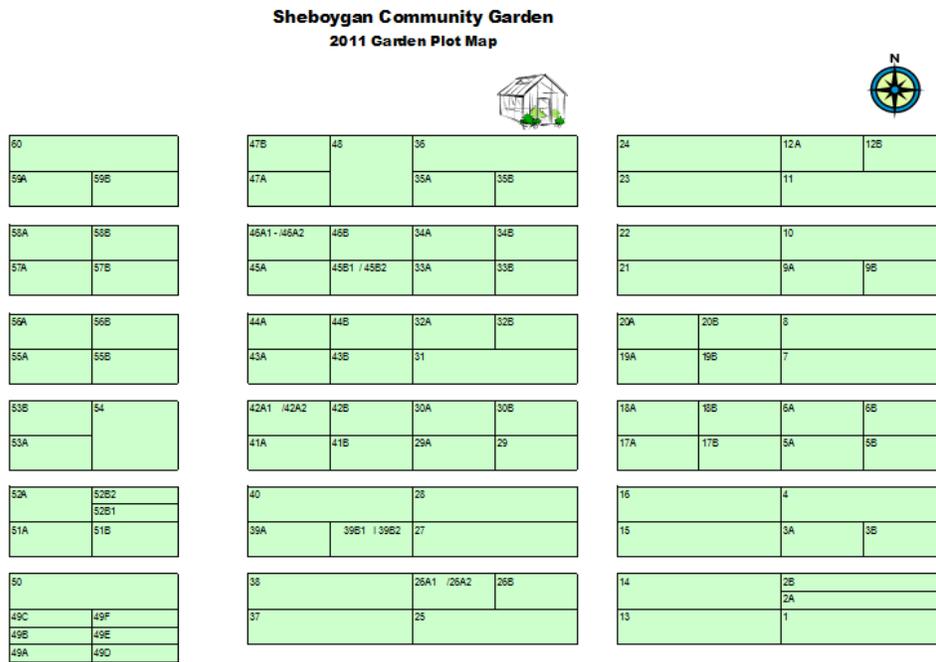
## Appendix II. Figures



*Figure 1.* The Sheboygan Community Garden is located on the west side of Madison Wisconsin. Google Maps.



*Figure 2.* Ariel photograph of the Sheboygan Community Garden. Top of the photo is North and shows the edge of University Ave. Google Maps.



*Figure 3.* Plot Map of Sheboygan Community Garden. There are two main garden paths and several smaller paths that divide the plots into groups. Cindy Statz.



*Figure 4.* One of the main paths in the garden with water barrels. Garden paths facilitate circulation patterns in the garden and help promote socialization between gardeners, July 2012. Kellie Schweich.



*Figure 5.* A hand-built gate marks the entrance to this gardener's plot. Shared and private space are an important part of the SCG landscape, July 2012. Kellie Schweich.



*Figure 6.* The long, narrow stretch of garden space shared by all members at the entrance of the garden. Members help maintain these shared spaces thus contributing to the shared responsibility found in the garden, July 2012. Kellie Schweich.

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