

Political engagement in urban agriculture: power to act in community gardens of São Paulo

André Ruoppolo Biazoti ¹
Marcos Sorrentino ^{II}

Abstract: In the municipality of São Paulo, the institution of community gardens has led an innovative social process of self-management of public spaces by citizens, using social networks to organize interventions in an activist way. The research sought to investigate political engagement in community gardens in São Paulo, bringing a perspective based on the concepts of power to act, present in Espinosa's philosophy, and of commons, based on the work of Dardot and Laval (2017). The methodology consists of an ethnography based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation in community garden joint-efforts, meetings and events. In these meetings, it is possible to consider that there are affections empowering the subjects to engage in significant changes for territorial management, enabling the formation of an expanded collective of action that establishes unique forms of management confronting institutional powers.

Keywords: Urban agriculture; Community gardens; Political engagement; Power to act; Commons.

¹ Study Group in Urban Agriculture (GEAU), Institute of Advanced Studies (IEA), Universidade de São Paulo [University of São Paulo] (USP), São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

^{II} Laboratory of Environmental Education and Policy (OCA), Escola Superior de Agricultura 'Luiz de Queiroz' [Higher School of Agriculture 'Luiz de Queiroz'] (ESALQ), Piracicaba, SP, Brazil.

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Introduction

Urban agriculture is a multidimensional concept carrying a broad spectrum of perspectives with regard to sustainable local development. A community garden within a neighborhood provides a space for coexistence and social interaction transcending the assurance of food security in the region. In addition to environmental and health benefits, the urban garden can be configured as a space for political articulation and community development involving deep dimensions in the creation of bonds of trust and the enunciation of utopias.

Based on the review of the Strategic Master Plan (PDE) that recreated the Rural Zone in 2014, the municipality of São Paulo started to consider agriculture in the organization of urban space, bringing to light the discussion on food security, qualified occupation of the public space by citizens and the role of agriculture, in its multifunctionality, in the production of urban territory. The experiences of community gardens provided a new form of activism for the occupation of public spaces, going far beyond institutional spheres and deepening discussions about urban development and spaces for coexistence and dispute in the city (NAGIB, 2016).

In this regard, the general purpose of the article is to investigate the political engagement existing in individuals involved with community gardens in the municipality of São Paulo from the conceptual perspective of Spinoza's philosophy, aiming to observe whether there is variation in the power to act of these individuals and if there is expansion for an organized collective action impacting the management and production of the city. Therefore, the individual is the main focus of analysis herein.

The experiences analyzed show an expressive desire of the citizens to participate in the construction of a more sustainable, accessible city, focused on quality of life. The creation of new collectives of action, composed of people who do not know each other, connected by virtual social networks, enables dialogues contributing to the capacity-building of individuals in a mutual learning process, mediated by the gardens.

Methodology

To carry out this research, it was decided to develop a mixed methods research, with a design based on "classical" ethnography (CRESWELL, 2005), aiming to describe, from subjective individual experiences, the behaviors and social interactions transforming the daily lives of these individuals. The ethnographic design aims to obtain "a holistic approach of the study subject, emphasized on the description of people's daily experiences, observing and interviewing them" (CRESWELL, 2007, p.203).

In an ethnography, the researcher is usually deeply involved in the analyzed group or community, spending long periods of observation and even becoming part of the group. The collectivity analyzed has a certain profile, involving more than one person, maintaining regular interactions and sharing beliefs, values and behaviors that have the same purpose, according to a specific way of life that is shared (SAMPIERI, 2013).

Thus, in the first stage of the research, were used techniques of field log, participant observation and action research, with the participation of the researcher in about 74 joint-efforts in gardens, 2 of which in Horta das Corujas [Garden of Corujas], 40 in the Horta do Centro Cultural São Paulo [Garden of Centro Cultural São Paulo] (CCSP), 2 in the Horta da Saúde [Garden of Saúde] and 30 in Horta das Flores [Garden of Flores], held between 2017 and 2019. The joint-effort activities and workshops were observed during their time of completion, with approximately 4 to 6 hours of duration. The researcher was directly involved in the proposed activities as a volunteer from the visited vegetable garden, informally talking with other volunteers and observing the interaction between them.

The observation also took place in the gardens' virtual discussion groups, as public groups on Facebook (for all 4 gardens visited) and restricted groups on WhatsApp (for the Gardens of CCSP and Flores), where it was possible to understand the decision-making on certain issues, the organization of activities and the interaction between volunteers. Furthermore, participant observation activities were carried out during 12 encounters of the União de Hortas Comunitárias de São Paulo [Alliance of Community Gardens of São Paulo], from May 2017 to October 2019, in which volunteers from the analyzed gardens participate from time to time to exchange experiences and information with volunteers from other gardens in the city.

From the observation, 15 semi-structured interviews were carried out, which made it possible to learn with more details the motivations for participating in the garden, the political involvement of the subjects and the feelings that are born from this action. The research method is to describe in depth a group sharing similar characteristics (SAMP-IERI, 2013). The definition of the persons to be interviewed was made on a convenience sample, based on perspectives reached through participant observation. People were also selected by the technique of chain-referral sampling or "snowball sampling" (SAMP-IERI, 2013, p.411), with indication of new persons by the interviewees in the first stage.

Individuals belonging to 8 community gardens were interviewed, 3 volunteers from Horta das Corujas (Vila Beatriz, West Zone), 3 from Horta das Flores (Mooca, East Zone), 2 from Horta da Saúde (Bosque da Saúde, South Zone), 3 from Horta do CCSP (Paraíso, South Zone), 1 from Horta Madalena (Vila Madalena, West Zone), 1 from the collective Batatas Jardineiras (Pinheiros, West Zone), 1 from Roça de Nossa Senhora (Jardim Bonfiglioli, West Zone) and 1 from Horta da City-Lapa (Lapa, West Zone). The sample size had no probabilistic importance, as it sought to qualify and deepen the understanding of a specific practice of a social group until the saturation of analysis categories.

This research focused on analyzing the experiences of community gardens with activist expression, as presented by Nagib (2016, 2020). This expression of urban agriculture does not necessarily aim at food supply and "has become a mechanism through which civil society organizes itself in a more autonomous and independent way from the State, materializing actions and projects capable of promoting effective urban reform" (NAGIB, 2016, p.131). These gardens are characterized by autonomous practices independent of the State, offering dimensions that challenge the current socio-spatial order, permeated

by ideologies inspired by the so-called *green guerrilla* (NAGIB, 2016, 2020). These are gardens that comply with urban functions beyond food supply, with a pedagogical focus and aimed at producing discourse and visibility for the political agenda of urban agriculture, located in more central regions of the city (CALDAS; JAYO, 2019).

For such, gardens created in the period between 2012 and 2019 that use digital communication tools and are located in the expanded central region of the municipality of São Paulo were analyzed, restricting the diversity of the interviewed public and deepening the analysis for a specific social group related to middle class, endowed of a high level of education, prone to civil participation and to the active search for information that enables a better understanding of the general political dynamics.

As a theoretical-conceptual framework, the subjects were analyzed based on the concept of *power to act*, present in Spinoza's¹ philosophy and in the works of his interpreters, with emphasis on Marilena Chauí, Antonio Negri and Gilles Deleuze. To approach urban gardens as spaces for the construction of commons, the work of Dardot and Laval (2017) was considered. The critical analysis of urban agriculture was based on the work of McClintock (2014), Tornaghi (2014) and Follmann and Viehoff (2015).

The power to act and commons

The work of Spinoza allows for several interpretations and different methods of analysis. Several authors have focused on his works and look for meanings that make it possible to conceive reality and social phenomena from Spinoza's concepts. Spinoza consolidated a science of affections, in which he analyzes the movements of desire in an intelligible manner, subject to moderation as an expression of the constitutive power of individuals in their search for happiness. In the expression of the individual power, Spinoza identifies in ethical and rational action the core of his conception of politics, in which the union of humans in a common life occurs through the guarantee of the exercise of their natural right, of their freedom, through civil law constituted from the collective power of the multitude. It is by acting together that political institutions emerge and found the civil law guaranteeing the individual freedom of persons (CHAUÍ, 2011).

The concept of *conatus*, defined as the singular essence of beings to persevere in existence, assumes the characteristic of resistance to the destruction of the body by external forces, which impel it to act in certain ways (CHAUÍ, 2011). Chauí shows us that, according to Spinoza:

(...) defined by *conatus* as *potentia agendi*, or power to act, individuals define themselves by the incessant variation of their internal proportions of movement and rest, or variation of their internal force for conservation, so that the effort of self-preservation aims to maintain the internal proportion in the confrontation with external forces (...).

1 - Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Dutch philosopher considered one of the forerunners of modernity and philosophical materialism. Questioning the religious and political order, he was the author of several works, the most relevant being *Ethics*, *Theological-Political Treatise* and *Political Treatise*.

(CHAUÍ, 2011, p.48)

It is in the relationship with other bodies that we persevere, resist and become empowered for our action in the world or not for our action in the world and for the understanding of what we are, since the more a body has the capacity to affect and be affected, the better the mind will be to perceive the things that happen to this body and exercise its power to think (SPINOZA, 2015, p.163).

Desire, herein, is the very impulse causing us to exist and act, being part of our unique human essence. Joy is the affection expressing the increase in a subject's *conatus*, that is, when we rejoice, our power to act expands and increases, while sadness is the directly inverse affection, decreasing the *conatus*. This will to exist is always affirmative, as it urges us to persevere in existence, to always seek relationships with what strengthens us and undo the ties with what weakens us (CHAUÍ, 2011).

The principle on which Spinoza's ethics is based is the recognition that our action does not move from a purpose external to us, but from our desiring essence strengthening our effort to persevere in existence. The *conatus* strengthened in this way is an expanding power, which finds in itself the power to expand without depending on anything external to itself, internalizing the causality of its affections (CHAUÍ, 2011).

Deleuze (2017) develops an analysis based on the encounters enabling the expansion or restriction of the power to act of individuals. According to the author, humans agree with each other by nature, as they seek to realize their power based on what is useful to them and what suits their connections. It is, therefore, imperative for humans to organize encounters in order to increase the power to act while guaranteeing the maximum number of joyful affections:

It is he, therefore, who strives to get away from fortuitous encounters and the chain of sad passions, to organize good encounters, to compose his connection with connections directly matching his own, to be part with what is convenient with him by nature, to compose the rational association among men; all this, in order to be affected with joy. (DELEUZE, 2017, p.291)

From the encounter and composition between connections, a greater individual is created, with amplified power and with shared desires, increasing the possibilities of action and the capacity of this collective body to affect and be affected. The affection of a body becomes common and collective, although the natural right remains preserved. According to Spinoza's perspective, this collective body is called a multitude, developed from the collective power, in which the human desire to govern and be masters of themselves is emphasized (NEGRI, 2016).

In Spinoza, the sovereignty of the State is not presupposed by the law or by the constitutional order, but derives from a continuous process of legitimation and institution by the multitude. Democracy is founded on the multitude, to the extent as it allows each singular individual to bring their own desires for freedom to the community regarding the

development of their power, establishing the commons (NEGRI, 2016).

Common is configured as a political principle based on the creation of institutions with rules and agreements determined collectively by those who appropriate a given resource and manage it from a collaborative logic based on reciprocity. It is mandatory to consider that common use is linked to the codecision of the rules and the co-obligation resulting therefrom. Common arises with the recognition that there are institutions beyond the structure of the State, based on a self-organized collective regulation. It is not a good or a resource, as it is not constituted from the intrinsic qualities of a certain thing, but as a principle of self-government over rules for the use of certain resources and services. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2017).

Community gardens are considered one of the first collective actions to be conceived from the perspective of urban commons, in which citizens organize themselves in the territory of cities to produce their food and manage natural resources autonomously (CASADEVANTE KOIS; MORÁN, 2016).

Organized by the population for their own benefit or for local trade or for local trade, the gardens represent the struggle for the collective use of land, with the principle of promoting public spaces aimed at building communities. In addition to food supply, it is the intensity and quality of social relationships and their ability to generate interaction between different groups that make community gardens to be spaces offering alternatives to the social erosion caused by the capitalist system and neoliberalism (CASADEVANTE KOIS; MORÁN, 2016).

From the political perspective of Spinoza and his interpreters, a possible analysis of the political involvement of volunteers from community gardens should consider the affections made possible by joint work encounters and the extent to which they increase or decrease the power to act of individuals. Furthermore, it is possible to assess the constitution of collective agencies establishing the common through the practical action on the territory, confronting the hegemonic logic of urban space production and the public management of city resources. It is from this perspective, inspired by Spinoza, that urban agriculture in São Paulo will be analyzed.

Urban agriculture

Urban agriculture has been recognized as an important factor in promoting food security around the world, with relevant references in Latin America (FAO, 2014, 2018, 2020; CABANNES, MAROCCHINO, 2018; TEFFT, JONASOVA, ZHANG, ZHANG, 2020).

Urban agriculture can be understood as a social practice, located inside or on the edges of a city, which cultivates or raises animals, processes and distributes a variety of food and non-food products, using human and material resources, products and services found in the urban area. In this regard, urban agriculture is permeated by several features and motivations, which can serve individual or family self-consumption or serve for the commercialization and supply of food, medicinal herbs and other purposes such as orna-

mentation and fiber production (MOUGEOT, 2001).

In addition to the clear linkage to public food supply, both in relation to self-consumption and trade, urban agriculture has also been linked to benefits in the sphere of public health, territorial planning, sustainability of cities, environmental conservation, strengthening community, the promotion of environmental citizenship, among other aspects (TRAVALINE, HUNOLD, 2010; CARPENTER, 2009; COCKRALL-KING, 2012; DEELSTRA, GIRARDET, 2011). Several authors seek to understand to what extent urban agriculture experiences are able to go beyond immediate food production towards the construction of sustainable societies, especially with regard to the urban population and its relationship with life maintenance systems (BARTHEL; ISENDAHL, 2013; CASADEVANTE KOIS; MORÁN, 2016).

The productive aspect is, in many cases secondary, with priority given to other functions as, but not limited to, education, social development, preservation of the landscape. Scale is also a relevant factor, which may consider small experiences, such as production on a terrace or in pots, as large extensions of production in the interior of the city. There is a great diversity of initiatives and models bringing complexity and a series of controversies to the concept.

In São Paulo, agriculture as a social practice has been present in the city's development since before the urbanization process (LANGENBUCH, 1971; AZEVEDO, 1945). Despite that, it lost its importance throughout the development of the industrial city and was continually relegated to invisibility, as a primitive remnant on the way to extinction (PETRONE, 1995; SEABRA, 1971; OLIVEIRA, 2004).

There are several types of agriculture found in São Paulo, such as family farming, indigenous peoples, small agricultural companies, urban farms and gardens, community gardens, institutional gardens, productive backyards and livestock production. To a certain extent, this diversity represents different forms of relationships with nature and the appropriation and production of urban territory by citizens.

In a survey carried out by the Municipality of São Paulo in 2020, through the *Projeto Ligue os Pontos* [Connect the Dots Project], 735 agricultural production units were identified, 104 urban gardens and 170 gardens in public institutions in the city, in addition to 9 Guarani indigenous villages and more than 500 commercial farmers, located mainly in the South Zone of the municipality (SÃO PAULO, 2020)².

Several authors have produced research on urban agriculture in São Paulo, seeking to show how this practice can be characterized (NAKAMURA, 2016; ROSTICHELLI, 2014; VALDIONES, 2013; CURAN, 2021; SANTOS, 2019; CALDAS, JAYO, 2019; BARON, 2017; AMATO-LOURENÇO et al, 2021; FERREIRA, 2015; GIACCHÈ et al. 2020), its interface with specific matters, such as health (GARCIA, 2016; COSTA, 2015; RIBEIRO, 2013), environmental preservation (BELLENZANI, 2001; MIKETEN, 2013) and politics (MACHINI, 2017; NAGIB, 2016, 2020; OLIVEIRA, 2017). Such

2 - The survey carried out by the Local Government of São Paulo is available on the Sampa+Rural platform, available at <http://sampamaistrural.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/>. Accessed on 03/29/2021.

research contributes to a broad understanding of how the practice has been developed in the municipality.

Political engagement in urban agriculture

The performance of the groups and the results of their practices in the territory directly point to the relationship between urban agriculture and its political importance in several dimensions, such as the production of the city, the development of urban-rural linkages, autonomy and self-determination in the food system, political participation, social control of public policies and institutionalization of practices. Research has shown a connection between urban farmers and activists for food sovereignty and ethics, showing the embryo of a broader movement to promote food democracy from a practical perspective of strengthening social bonds (GOTTLIEB; JOSHI, 2010).

Not all urban agriculture practices, however, point to these paths, revealing a contradictory character of urban agriculture experiences in Brazil and abroad. Some of them are identified as citizen practices promoting the right to the city and adequate food, while others are identified as promoters of neoliberal structures of production and commodification of the city. Certain initiatives promote access to land for certain social groups, but have difficulties and limitations in ensuring this access to the entire population. In other cases, urban agriculture is merely a tool to generate resources in times of financial crisis, focused on the production of small businesses without being able to radically promote alternative ways of life and urban sustainability (McCLINTOCK, 2014; TORNAGHI, 2014).

In this regard, Follmann and Viehoff (2015) understand it as necessary to address issues of class in order not to restrict themselves to what they call “lifestyle-revolts” of the middle class. To what extent do community gardens mobilize the engagement of the oppressed and disadvantaged classes in their claim for the right to the city? Does the consolidation of community cohesion ensure that it is inclusive, open and promotes commons between different subjects of the social spectrum? The class framework, therefore, is essential to understand what kind of city and community is built and how much it actually strengthens the struggles for social justice (FOLLMANN; VIEHOFF, 2015).

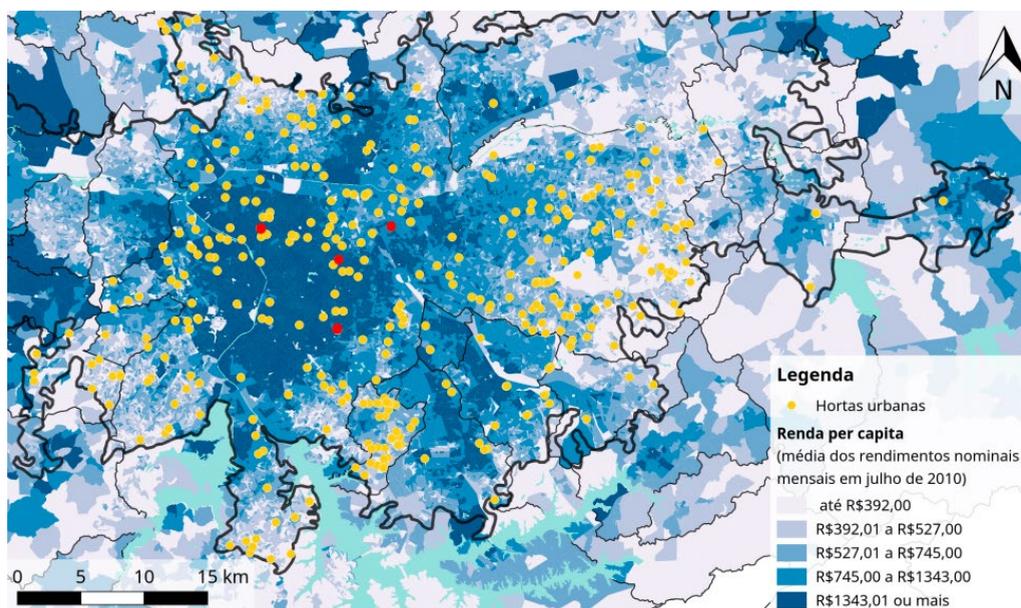
Urban agriculture can be considered a promoter of common to the extent that it establishes the rediscovery and appropriation of abandoned spaces, and enables people to perceive the disastrous effects of neoliberal urbanization and the interdependence between the private and the public. Managing the garden as common challenges the city to renounce the neoliberal logic for the full promotion of the right for more productive green spaces and the direct involvement of the citizen in promoting the city. Thus, there is what is considered *political gardening*, which seeks to claim the right to the city by creating a community garden as an actually existing common (FOLLMANN; VIEHOFF, 2015; EIZENBERG, 2012).

Structuring and micropolitics of community gardens

It will be presented the results of the field research, obtained through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Community gardens analyzed by the research (Horta do CCSP, Horta das Corujas, Horta da Saúde and Horta das Flores) have common characteristics assigning them a profile that differs from other gardens in the municipality.

Using the map developed by Baron (2017), which relates the gardens mapped by the author with the income data per capita of the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP), the four gardens taken as references for the research are pointed out, in order to highlight the scope of the social group considered.

Figure 1 – Urban gardens and average income per resident in households in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP), emphasis added in red for Horta da Saúde, Horta das Corujas, Horta do CCSP and Horta das Flores.



Source: Baron (2017), adapted.

The activities carried out by the volunteers in these gardens are organized through specific groups on Facebook and WhatsApp, where the days of joint work, the activities to be carried out, the division of tasks and the resolution of problems are decided. It is also on these social networks that happens the mobilization of actions carried out in the garden, as well as the general exchange of information.

The volunteers carry out, from time to time, joint-efforts to maintain the gardens, including the removal of weeds, construction of garden beds, cultivation, manuring, planting, pruning, treatment with natural pesticides and harvesting. The joint-efforts³ are, in many cases, the only moment of encounter between volunteers and it is the main space

3 - *Mutirão* is a word of both Portuguese and indigenous Guarani etymology denoting collective work/joint-effort based on solidarity and mutual help. For this article, it is translated as joint-efforts.

where exchanges, affections, political exercise and community work take place. All work performed is voluntary, with rare exceptions for specialized work. Gardens do not have funding and expenses are shared by the volunteers themselves as needed.

From the ethnographic work carried out between 2017 and 2019 in the joint-efforts in the gardens, it is possible to observe three different levels of engagement of volunteers and to estimate the following number of participants in each garden. The first, the core (also called by the subjects as “garden guardians”), has from 3 to 7 participants, who organize the activities and take care of the garden more intensively, coordinating actions, effectively managing the group, solving problems, making strategic and political decisions, buying tools and supplies and carrying out daily garden maintenance.

The second, the group of participants, is dynamic and encompasses approximately between 20 and 30 people, who often participate in joint-efforts and engage in specific actions, being able to become involved with greater intensity according to the type of activity and time required. The third, the support network, is the most dynamic group, involving approximately 50 or more people who support the garden and occasionally participate. Many of these people participate in more than one garden, and some volunteers from the core or group participating in one garden participate in the support network of another.

These different levels of participation directly imply the involvement and engagement of participants with the garden, which generates an overload on the core and conflicts about the decision-making of each level. The leaders are recognized, mainly, for their time spent working in the garden, for their proactivity in obtaining resources and for their ability to dialogue with volunteers, promoting a horizontal space for decision-making on the space, as well as with the Government and external partners. Clearly, there are decisions that fall on the core, which sometimes extend the discussion to the participants and sometimes make decisions in a limited way. There is a constant concern with the involvement and participation of people, seeking to guarantee horizontality in the most strategic decisions for the group and guaranteeing access for anyone to the core of guardians.

Decisions on the tasks of the joint-efforts are carried out, at first, by the core of guardians and are submitted for evaluation, approval or modification by the members of the support network. This process is not always structured, taking place in virtual groups or informally throughout joint-efforts. As few gardens carry out proper group management meetings, these decisions are consolidated during joint-efforts, at encounter times, during lunch breaks and social events or casually during work. While this lack of decision-making structure (such as an assembly or special encounter for decision-making) can make it difficult for the new participant to understand how garden matters are decided, it strengthens the group’s horizontal decision, the experimental character and the involvement of volunteers.

Among the forms of political action, it is also possible to emphasize sporadic action, such as participation in public hearings, carrying out direct activism actions among other external activities, and more continuous action, such as participation in municipal councils, holding meetings with local authority, constant dialogue between garden volunteers

in the self-management process, among others. Political action arises as individuals have their power to act expanded, enabling a more suitable level of knowledge about reality and about their active role in the production of joyful affections deemed convenient not only for themselves, but for a community.

Variety in power to act and building of common

Observing the subjects' motivations when participating in a community garden, and recognizing the individual transformations occurring in it, is important to verify the elements increasing the power to act from personal perspectives.

The feeling of joy experienced in the garden recalls the past in which many individuals used to relate to gardens, small farms and country houses experienced in childhood and filled with meanings and interpretations. Urban individuals start to recognize, identify and value traditional knowledge of their families, emphasizing their cultural identity and enabling the updating of this knowledge in practical experience. This experimental characteristic of learning together with Nature from inherited and exchanged knowledge is seen as an important driver of the desire to participate in a garden. Still, there are joint-efforts in which the power to act of an individual may not vary or be reduced for various reasons, whether frustrated expectations, conflicts in relation to work and group management, or another affection that made it impossible the connection between bodies. Despite this, there is an effort by the groups of gardens so that the joint-efforts are good encounters, allowing the exercise of individual freedom and welcoming new members to the group.

By participating in collective joint-efforts in the public space, volunteers from the group of participants and from the core of the gardens recognize that there is an increase in the power to act, leading them to engage in political processes. From the private experience with gardens, which starts or intensifies an existing desire, there is a movement towards public space, to produce their food in larger places, with more people. They are no longer the same as before, but new individuals who see the city with different eyes, meet people from other social circles and experience new desires driven by the encounters and the connections that are built. Thus, the gardens become “schools for democracy” (ROSE, 2000; LEVKOE, 2006), in which the expansion of the joint power of individuals enables shared knowledge about the functioning of political institutions. As stated by N., a volunteer at Horta City Lapa, “if someone is part of the joint-effort, they are already participating there and have a voice and decision-making power”.

The political capacity-building existing in the spaces of the garden starts from the:

- recognition of the different, in which the mediation of conflicts and the negotiation of meanings and worldviews essentially comprise the exercise of dialogue;

- knowledge about the operation of the public machine of the State, empowering individuals for a qualified relationship with the instituted powers;

- movement from the private towards the common, in which the notions of public action are challenged from a individual's collectivizing perspective;
- constitution of a multitude, citizens with common principles and purposes strengthening their powers in a collective political body and;
- recognition and struggle for citizen rights legitimizing social practice and instituting new forms of territorial management.

Engaging with unknown people enables the creation and strengthening of bonds of trust and the exercise of solidarity. The feeling of union built in collaborative work helps to form a common horizon of action based on mutual assistance and reciprocity, in which the final purpose transcends individual benefit and opens up collective action. Political engagement from the collectivity suggests the germination of the multitude, the beginning of an instituting process adding to the set of counter-hegemony powers that seek to produce the city. As explained by G., volunteer of Horta do CCSP,

(...) what I found in the garden was something else, it was a way of connecting me with ways of thinking different from mine, but which interested me. I was able to dialogue with a public institution, for example. That I could use a public space, which I hadn't even considered before, so that started to impact me to the point of saying "I can do more, in the space where I'm part of". I thought that before I had a much more passive posture, and then I started to realize that maybe I could be more of an agent of things around (...).

The development of actions from the public's perspective brings security to citizens and strengthens their performance in the community, as they are not acting for themselves, but for an expanded collective. Still, the existing issues with the instituted powers make them develop their own perspective of what it actually means to act in a public space, building rules for the use and appropriation of the territory's resources, defining forms of access and establishing a space for political decisions about the garden.

This institution of commons, however, does not arise without raising conflicts with regard to the management of public space. Community gardens face constant insecurities about their permanence in the space, where many of them only have an informal authorization and public opinion in their benefit. What can be observed is a tension between community interests, represented both by the collective of volunteers and by local associations, and state interests, which alternate with each new municipal administration and which little consolidates a structuring action for the promotion of agriculture in the territory, although there is a legal and technical structure for this.

The participation of individuals in municipal councils and the desire for shared responsibility for the space reinforces the development of citizenship for the construction of public policies, rather than merely giving access to the garden by a small group. Their engagement in building a relationship with the local Government and demanding

specific actions for the maintenance of public areas, in addition to allowing access by the community in a broader way, strengthens the fight for the right to the city and builds paths for similar interventions.

Despite the progress in local forms of involvement and political organization, community gardens do not manage to change the established political culture, reinforcing clientelism relationships based on personal contact with people within the public machine helping the progress of certain processes in a personalistic way. The absence of a specific document and a clear bureaucratic process for the institution and recognition of community gardens reinforces social injustices, makes it difficult for the citizen to be involved and restricts public policy according to the interests of specific groups that exercise their political and economic power in the territory.

Figure 2 – Graphical panel with a summary of the results found by the research.



Source: Biazoti (2020), adapted.

Final considerations

In the experience of the municipality of São Paulo, the research reported that community gardens have been presented as places of involvement of citizens in favor of

participatory management of public spaces and activist engagement in the face of urban issues. Gardens change the relationship of users with space and with each other, creating subjectivities and personal relationships enhancing common action and directly contributing to the formation of the individual, in the construction of their autonomy and in the expansion of their power to act.

Aligned to the construction of commons, the individuals collectivize themselves in multitudes, affecting and being affected by the joy of the encounter and being instigated to a movement from passivity to action, from the private to common and from the individual to the collective. The current cohesion of Spinoza's philosophy is amazing, to the extent that it makes it possible to unveil the reality of the desires and affections of joy as the primary source of political and ethical determination of the individuals. The revolutionary task of organizing good encounters that expand the connections between bodies and life projects is the essence of a joint-effort in a community garden. It is expected that these results can help the progress of popular groups and collectives towards the construction of sustainable societies that go far beyond the capitalist system. In the end, it is always life, during its progress and persistence, that has to be emphasized and instituted.

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André Ruoppolo Biazoti

✉ andrebiazoti@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7132-0376>

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Marcos Sorrentino

✉ sorrentino.ea@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4394-1655>

Engajamento político na agricultura urbana: potência de agir nas hortas comunitárias de São Paulo

André Ruoppolo Biazoti
Marcos Sorrentino

Resumo: No município de São Paulo, a instituição de hortas comunitárias tem conduzido um processo social inovador de autogestão dos espaços públicos pelos cidadãos, utilizando redes sociais para organizarem intervenções de forma ativista. A pesquisa buscou investigar o engajamento político em hortas comunitárias existentes em São Paulo, trazendo uma perspectiva a partir dos conceitos de potência de agir, presente na filosofia de Espinosa, e do comum, a partir da obra de Dardot e Laval (2017). A metodologia é composta por uma etnografia baseada em entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação participante em mutirões de hortas comunitárias, reuniões e eventos. Nesses encontros, é possível considerar que há afetos que potencializam os sujeitos a se engajarem em mudanças significativas para a gestão territorial, possibilitando a formação de um coletivo ampliado de atuação que institui formas únicas de gestão que se confrontam com os poderes instituídos.

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Palavras-chave: Agricultura urbana; Hortas comunitárias; Engajamento político; Potência de agir; Comum.

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Participación política en la agricultura urbana: poder de actuar en huertos comunitarios en São Paulo

André Ruoppolo Biazoti
Marcos Sorrentino

Resumen: En el municipio de São Paulo, la institución de los huertos comunitarios ha liderado un innovador proceso social de autogestión de los espacios públicos por parte de los ciudadanos, utilizando las redes sociales para organizar intervenciones de manera activista. La investigación buscó investigar el compromiso político en huertos comunitarios existentes en São Paulo, aportando una perspectiva basada en los conceptos de potencia para actuar, presente en la filosofía de Espinosa y en las obras de sus intérpretes, y los comunes, a partir de la obra de Dardot y Laval (2017). La metodología consiste en una etnografía basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas y observación participante en los trabajos colectivos, reuniones y eventos de huertos comunitarios. En estos encuentros, se puede considerar que existen afectos que empoderan a los sujetos para emprender cambios significativos para la gestión territorial, posibilitando la formación de un colectivo de acción ampliado que establece formas singulares de gestión que enfrentan los poderes instituidos.

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