Spading the Field
Revealing societal lacks through social innovative practice

A study of urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht, the Netherlands

Vincent Walstra

Photos frontpage:

Left: Voedseltuin Overvecht; photographer Mark Verhoef

Right: The Koningshof; photographer Vincent Walstra

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Abstract

Worldwide small groups of people living in cities are gathering to practice gardening together, an appearance that has been defined as *urban agriculture*. This thesis is the output of three-and-a-half-month field research amongst urban gardeners in the city of Utrecht, the Netherlands, answering the question: How do micro urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht represent a social innovative movement offering a qualitative alternative to the contemporary capitalist mode of quantification of life? The gardening practice is studied as social innovation providing an answer to societal lacks. Urban agriculture in Utrecht is a response to processes of commodification, urbanization and individualization which are linked to a lack of socio-ecological connectivity, the inability to cope with an accelerated society and a loss of connection to self and the community. Using a Deleuzean method of tracing social practices into rhizomatic structures of interconnectivity between micro- and macropolitics, this thesis gives context and meaning to urban gardening within a local and global perspective. To expand the applicability of this research beyond the academic world, the position of the local government towards urban agriculture serves to incent a debate on the quantification of politics and the value of studying and supporting social innovative practice.

Keywords: *Urban agriculture; social innovation; micro- and macropolitics; socio-ecological relation; accelerated society; belonging; governance; capitalism*

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‘‘Social innovation takes place in areas of opportunity for contestation against the existing societal structures’’

Jean Hillier (2013, 170)

Introduction

After planting some flowers in the urban garden, I am having a conversation with two people who come here weekly. One of them is having health issues that she believes to be related with her mother passing away. She talks about positive and negative energy and how these relate the mental state with physical appearance. She believes that when something mental is bothering in the sense of concerns about family, about health, or anything else, energy is lost and this appears in physical malfunction. I shift my thoughts to a bigger picture in which I see that cases of depression and burn-outs occur to more and younger people. Is this the physical appearance of something mental bothering society? An ideology of progress and growth, which led to the technological innovations that mark the twenty-first century, creates a demanding society. There is a constant flow of information and expectations to live up to and biological diseases are increasingly having a social cause. The gardener in front of me, however, embraces her situation and tells me that her body will find a way to recover itself. She believes in the self-healing power of nature and therefore also of human-beings. To explain herself, she points at the garden and says the flowers we planted this morning add a positive energy to the garden, their aesthetics uplifting people who see and smell them. Moving this topic to the garden allows me to realize that this place, together with other urban agriculture initiatives, is a sign of the self-healing power of society.[1]

Urban agriculture as social innovation

This thesis discusses the appearances of urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht, the Netherlands, as social innovation. The theory on social innovation covers the bottom-up development of new ideas and practices that respond to lacks within the organization of society at a specific moment in space and time. According to Mulgan and colleagues (2007, 9), social innovation is a response to the inability of the dominant system to solve societal issues. In their account on social innovation, they emphasize that social, political, economic and other actors have a role to play in this process of innovation. Within this interactivity, there is an interaction between what they call the 'bees' and the 'trees' (Mulgan et. al. 2007, 20). The 'bees' represent individual agency, in this research those are the urban agriculture initiatives operating through bottom-up agency and shaping societal life by contesting existing structures. The 'trees' are the structuring organizations, in this research' context this is the (local) government, operating through top-down power-structures that create the systemic context in which

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[1] Field notes 17-3-17

social movement takes place. However, we will also see that there is an area of blurriness between both bottom-up and top-down.

It is a deliberate decision to use the organic metaphor of bees and trees, to make the research correspond to the organic practices of urban agriculture. I used Jean Hillier's (2013) Deleuzean method of analysis of social innovation. This approach fits the research context seamlessly in that it uses the organic metaphor of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome as to explain how social processes lead to the physical manifestation of urban gardens. Because the terminology for species of plants with a similarity in structure is that they share 'appearance', I will describe urban agriculture initiatives as *appearances* as well. The organic terminology of bees and trees, rhizome and appearances not only fit the research context because the gardeners are collaborating with nature. It also best explains the process of social innovation taking place in the urban gardens as a natural flow of activities that for many serve no social innovative purpose, but appears in that way all the same. Just as a bee has no intention to pollinate a tree, but still that is what it does.

Throughout this thesis it will become clear that the people in the urban gardens are part of what Tsing (2015, 22) calls 'world-making projects', which is the process of making ''workable living arrangements''. In other words, through practicing an alternative mode of life, people in the gardens counter existing societal structures centered around a capitalist mode of life, which itself has not been able to provide them an adequate environment to live in. In their existence, these gardens reveal both the lacks in contemporary society and their potential solutions. First, the lack of a socio-ecological connection explains why there is a need for sharing knowledge about plants and nature. It serves as a countermovement to the suggestion that we currently live in the 'Anthropocene' epoch, which puts forward the human as dominant species on the planet. In the urban gardens, humans and non-humans are equal. Second, Harmut Rosa's (2003) theory concerning the social acceleration of society states that the modern capitalist society centralizes efficiency, growth and productivity. In the gardens, such acceleration is absent and people can 'decelerate' from this pressure. This deceleration is a reaction to the inability of coping with the acceleration of society. Third, the physical manifestation of the urban garden proposes a connectivity and belonging to place and people. Processes of individualization and differentiation are characteristic for modernity and this has resulted in the exclusion of certain people from society. By enhancing connectivity within the community, the gardens facilitate making sense of the self and the community again.

Besides pointing out the societal lacks, a meta-analysis of *urban agriculture* is given which discusses the oxymoronic nature of the concept. It contests the meaning of both agriculture and urban space, showing a social movement in society towards the appreciation of qualitative stories and experiences over quantitative output. The micro practices in the urban gardens are put into a macropolitics of global movement. It is here that we see how the urban gardens are social innovations

that influence societal structures. This puts the debate on social innovation in the field of politics concerning the administration of everyday life. Therefore, I have analyzed how the bureaucratic system of (local) governance influences the development of urban agriculture. The negotiations between top-down structures and bottom-up movement is explained as an area of blurriness, in which a collaborative effort between the local government and its citizens can potentially change society.

Research

The research is conducted within the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Utrecht is the fourth largest city of the Netherlands with a population of about 350,000. Since the Netherlands is a small country for its seventeen million inhabitants, much of the country is urbanized and cities are dense populated, mostly consisting of terraced houses and apartment buildings. Utrecht is considered the 'central point' of the country. It houses many students and therefore has a relatively young population. The city is the 'entrance' from the eastern parts of the Netherlands, which are more rural, to the country's business hub in the west called the 'Randstad', consisting of cities like Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague. In the Netherlands, many people are moving towards the cities in the west, and Utrecht experiences a constant growth in population (Buizer et. al. 2015, 3). The process of urbanization is key to this research considering the position of the (local) government as regulator. On the one hand, there is a growing demand of living space in their city, but on the other hand they need to balance the quality of life for the present citizens. Although this research confines to the context of Utrecht, urbanization and overpopulation are global phenomena and thus the duality between quality of life and the influx of people into urban areas applies to a larger scale.

The interrelation between global social dynamics in the local context of Utrecht are central to understanding urban agriculture. Social innovations do not appear randomly, rather they are the result of specific circumstances in space and time. They respond to the local and global conditions in economic, social and political dimensions and subsequently these conditions shape the existence of social initiatives (Hillier 2013, 169). Considering the influence of these dynamics, the practice of urban agriculture in Utrecht is the appearance of what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have called rhizomatic structures. The rhizome connects the macro to the micro, the abstract to the concrete, and global structures to local specificities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7). Hence, studying the local appearances of urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht is done by tracing the origin of these appearances in societal dynamics globally.

My aim is to add to the academic debate around the meaning of urban agriculture as social innovative practice, and the societal debate considering the negotiation between the municipality of Utrecht and the urban gardens. With this I endorse myself as advocate anthropologist within the

paradigm of engaged anthropology (Low and Merry 2010, 211), by connecting both the academic and the societal discourse on urban agriculture, going beyond the ivory tower of the academic world and putting knowledge into practice. To do so, I will follow Geertz' (1973, 312) notion of *thick description*. Thick description gives a contextualized meaning to practice. Urban agriculture, being social innovative practice, conveys a message of societal dynamics. Therefore, the manner of enactment reflects what dynamics do and do not influence urban agriculture in Utrecht specifically. In acknowledging the meaning of practices, I follow the Heideggerian notion that practices are always oriented, giving them moral and social meaning and relevance (Nicolini 2009, 1402-1403). In other words, any morality, meaning and normativity is maintained through practice (Nicolini 2009, 1405). The majority of the practitioners of urban agriculture have no awareness of this morality and meaning at the level that is presented in this research. This does not however, mean that they do not convey this message. I would rather argue that the fact that they do not communicate the thick meaning through word but through practice, is the exact point being made in this thesis. Gardening for most people has no meaning, and serves no specific purpose, because the demands for such rationale is exactly what they want to get away from. Including the local government puts the research in a societal context, contributing to a mutual understanding between top-down and bottom-up actors, and triggering further debate between policy-makers, academics and social innovators. After all, it is a story of an interaction between 'the bees and the trees'.

This thesis is the result of a three-month field research amongst gardeners in urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht. The field work period lasted from the beginning of February until half May 2017. During this period, I spend at least two days a week at the Voedseltuin Overvecht, and every Saturday at the Koningshof as my regular field sites to get a thorough understanding of what these people practice and preach. I chose the Voedseltuin Overvecht for its location in what is considered to be a deprived neighborhood in the Utrecht with many socioeconomic issues to which the initiators wanted to create a countermovement in public space. Embracing the diversity in urban agriculture initiatives, I chose the Koningshof as the equivalent, being initiated by four landscape architects with a social entrepreneurial mindset and a private urban farm, attracting people with a higher economic position. Besides these two gardens, I visited multiple other gardens to get a notion of their existence, and be able to compare and conclude on a broader scale of urban gardening[2]. The research is built up around three subsidiary questions, being:

1) What societal dynamics can be perceived through the practices of urban agriculture in Utrecht?

2) What are the imperatives for people in Utrecht to practice urban agriculture?

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[2] See Appendix I for an extended overview of the gardens that are part of this research

3) What is the relation between the Utrecht municipality and the practitioners of urban agriculture in Utrecht?

Each question resulted in a different narrative to the urban agriculture initiatives. Respectively these narratives are 1) the embodiment of societal dynamics in practice; 2) the ideological motivation of the participants; and 3) the duality between policy-making and citizenship. The answers to these three questions, together with an extensive research in existing anthropological theory and literature, add up to answering the main question of this research:

How do micro urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht represent a social innovative movement offering a qualitative alternative to the contemporary capitalist mode of quantification of life?

To answer this question, I used the techniques typical for doing anthropological fieldwork. Within anthropology the 'explicit' explains people's own perception of the cultural meaning of their activities, the conscious. However, this does not necessarily comprise the entirety of the activity. Therefore, anthropologists acknowledge the 'tacit' element of culture, which is that which takes place outside of people's own awareness, in other words, the unconscious (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1-2). I took this duality into account when analyzing people's practice of urban agriculture. Therefore, the data for this research was gathered through both informal interviews, participant observation and hanging out, and semi-structured interviews with people I met in the field. The more formal settings, concerning policy-makers and policies themselves, I approached with similar modes of interviewing, added with document analyses.

Thesis structure

The first part of the thesis is a Methodological note, in which I elaborate on the methods used to analyze social innovation and related movements in society. At the very heart of this is the Deleuzean method of tracing rhizomatic interconnectivity between macro- and micro-politics. In Chapter 1, the stories and experiences of the urban gardeners are explained as practices answering to three dynamics within modern society. These concern the lack of ecological knowledge, the consequences of an accelerated society, and the loss of a sense of belonging within the community. Chapter 2 follows with a discussion on relevant theoretical issues concerning the urban space and agriculture practice, taking the debate towards a meta-analysis of the concept 'urban agriculture' itself. The Anthropogenic ideology, at the center of the contemporary scientific discourse, is discussed through the problematization of a human-nature dichotomy in relation to capitalism and environmentalism, positioning urban agriculture as social movement. Chapter 3 will take this discussion to the local

context of policy-making within a meshwork of local and global structures. Here we will see the arbitrariness of the separation between bottom-up and top-down, as I aim to describe how policy-makers operate within and in between what we call 'systems'. In this debate, urban agriculture shows how macropolitics are quantified, whilst at the same time the qualitative ideology enters micropolitics. In between the chapters, the reader will find Interludes. These are descriptive chapters that aim to put on paper my experiences in the field. They form empirical bridges between the chapters, reinforcing the statements made in the prior chapter, and laying the fundament for the following. I will conclude by stating the importance of analyzing and appreciating the guidance provided by social innovative practices, based on the lessons learned from understanding urban agriculture practices in Utrecht.

Methodological note

''(…) the nature of alternatives as a research question and a social practice can be most fruitfully gleaned from the specific manifestations of such alternatives in concrete local settings.'' (Escobar 1995, 223)

The purpose of science is making life understandable. As an anthropologist, the first thing to learn is that cultural relativism teaches us that all social activity is relative to the cultural and historical context of a group of people at a certain moment in space and time. What this means in theory is that generalizations are impossible to make, for all human activities are unique. This approach puts anthropologists in an awkward position, because human beings tend to categorize life to make it understandable, and categorizing comes with generalizations. When doing research on urban agriculture, this duality is something that keeps coming up. It depends on the context of the conversation whether to call it a worldwide 'movement' of urban agriculture, or initiatives that represent the 'diversity' in society. Similarities and differences both appear in the same situation. It is in this duality that the Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) theory on interconnectivity proves its value as one of the fundamental theories of social sciences. Appearances, according to them, do not have to show all similarities, their connections do not always present themselves but rather find each other 'below the surface' on a deeper level. Using the metaphor of the organic structure of the *rhizome*, they explain how seemingly random appearances can be traced back to a meshwork of interconnectivity. Applied to human activity, there is always a connection in some way. Doing anthropological research is looking for connections between particular (groups of) people, without denying their uniqueness.

Tsing (2000, 347) suggests that researchers should look at the particularity of globalization as what she calls 'projects'. Any global project should be regarded within a localized context and the particularity of local dynamics should be traced into history. It is this process that shows the contingent lineages that precede the existence of the local. Contingent lineages are central in Tsing's ethnography in Indonesia, Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection (2005). Her fieldwork on the island of Kalimantan consisted of tracing the local particularities, leading her to conclude that in the rainforests in Indonesia global capitalist influences had come to dominate local life and the other way around. From Canadian gold mining corporation Bre-X to the image of Brazilian rainforest activist Chico Mendes, it all influences the processes that are enacted on the ground in the rainforest. It is contingent lineages that she describes as the trace that precedes cultural specificities. The confluence of contingent lineages creates a patchwork of traces in which ''cultures are made and remade'' (Tsing 2005, 127).

Tsing's method is similar to the Deleuzean method of tracing the *line of flight* and subsequently mapping these traces to see a rhizomatic network representing the unconscious (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 14). Deleuze and Guattari argue that mapping is the open approach to any appearance, which cannot be seen apart from its multiplicities. This means that urban agriculture is not the result of a single development in either economics, politics, society or any other field, but that it is connected to all these fields at the same time. There is no single explanation of the emergence of social initiatives like urban agriculture, nor is there a single moment in time when they emerge (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12-16).

Hillier (2013) argues social scientists should use a Deleuzean methodology when studying social innovation. He uses Deleuze's concept of 'becoming' to explain that social innovation takes place in areas of opportunity for contestation against the existing societal structures (Hillier 2013, 170). Hillier names Grosz's translation of the Deleuzean method into the logic of innovation. This logic entails an understanding of the dynamics that flow from the transformation of relations as the ground for innovation, rather than seeing them as result of conscious choices of individuals and groups (Hillier 2013, 170-171). In other words, it is a confluence of contingencies that lead to social innovation. An important element in this process of social innovation is Deleuze's notion about difference in relation to becoming, which by Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010, 872-873) is interpreted as being fundamental for becoming or emergence. If something is different to other things, it becomes its own thing, for it is perceived differently and thus exists on its own.

Based on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), both Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010, 873) and Hillier (2013, 172) elsewhere discuss macro- and micropolitics. Macropolitics is a merely quantitative, top-down structure of social change that is enacted on the surface of society in hierarchical structures like governmental policies, by decision-making institutions like governments or large corporations. Micropolitics exist in less obvious areas like daily conversations and practices. They are the result of social interactions and the way people enact life. These are the local enactments of Tsing's projects discussed above. The macropolitics-micropolitics dichotomy brings us back to Tsing's theory of methodology. Tsing (2005) shows the reader how localities and globalities are not to be seen separated. Local creates the global and vice versa. Or to put it differently, all processes of place-making and force-making are both local and global, rather than having local place and global force interacting separately (Tsing 2000, 352). This process of scale-making, which at the same time is a scale-unmaking (Tsing 2005, 271), needs to be acknowledged by researchers to successfully capture and recognize globalization and its dimensions of change. I believe this is similarly applicable to Deleuze's macro- and micropolitics, which undoubtedly influence each other in their process of becoming. What both Deleuzean macro- and micropolitics, and Tsing's scale-making contribute to this research is their

methodological framework for connecting the abstractness of the neoliberal transformation of the global (food) system to the specificity of local urban agricultural practices in Utrecht.

In what follows, I will thus use Scott-Cato and Hillier in their Deleuzian method of *tracing* the lines of flight of urban agriculture to map its existence over time into their current being. In the first chapter, I will therefore focus on the practices that encompass urban agriculture in Utrecht, therewith applying the broad concept to the local context and show what dynamics are at play in these initiatives. The movements that are fundamental for urban agriculture in Utrecht will therefore shape the image of these appearances and lay the foundations of their further analysis within a broader context of societal dynamics. In other words, we must first analyze the appearance before delving into its rhizomatic structures that made it possible to appear. In the second chapter I will dive into these rhizomatic structures, unraveling the history of meaning of both agricultural practices and urban space, and their axis of unity into urban agriculture. Here I will also discuss the conceptualization of 'urban agriculture' itself as oxymoronic and therefore exemplary for the social innovation it represents. The third chapter provides the thesis with an applied approach of policy-making that concerns urban agriculture in Utrecht. This chapter is a practical analysis of policy concerning urban agriculture to reveal the political economy in which these initiatives emerge and (try to) maintain. To these chapters, I will add vignette-like interludes in between the chapters as a way to make the field of this research become more alive for the reader. Besides that, they also serve to get out of the overwhelmingness of theoretical conceptualization that sometimes seems to bypass the practices of small groups of people in the field. As the thesis will prove, the practice of urban agriculture by the people in the gardens must not be seen solely from the perspective of global structures, struggles for agency and social contestation, but also as the simple act of spending an hour or two with the hands in the ground without having to think about any of those mind-buzzling topics.

Chapter 1 – Gardening

''Every plant has its own story''[3]

There are always similarities and differences between (groups of) people. People do not belong to a single group, rather the individual's being consists of a patchwork of belongings. According to May (2011, 364), it is a matter of understanding the belonging to a specific group, the interconnections between the self and society, which leads to seeing connectivity and shared meaning. She argues that the activity of human beings should be approached with the notion of 'social practices' as a confluence of agency (what people decide to do) and structure (what people unknowingly do). Instead of emphasizing the influence of either structure or agency, the approach of society through practices studies the interaction, but especially the *relation* between structure and agency, between society and the individual. Lobel (2014, 11) acknowledges the structure-agency approach and claims that through studying practices the mutual constitutive relation between society and the individual can be studied. Following both authors, I use Shove, Pantzar and Watson's (2012) technique of studying social practices, through which I will be able to see the meshwork of social dynamics influenced by both structure and agency, unfold in urban agriculture practices. Shove et. al. (2012, 2) argue that when studying human activity, it is the emergence, persistence and disappearance of social practices that explain us what social dynamics are at play in a certain group, but also in society, at a certain moment and place in time. Their approach is resonates the Deleuzean method in that it traces social practices to unravel their meaning by looking at interconnectivities. The Deleuzean rhizomatic approach, and Shove et. al.'s social practice approach complement each other in that the rhizome emphasizes the study of underground structures, where the social practice theory is based on understanding appearances of agency.

The technique of Shove et. al. has led me to analyzing social practices that appear at the urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht. This includes the uncovering of materials, competences and meanings (Shove et. al. 2010, 14) that constitute specific social practices. Doing so allows me to trace the line of flight of social practices through the dynamics of society, unfolding the social origin that has structured a network of interconnectivity below the surface and now embodies itself through a physical appearance above the ground. In other words, the coming into being of the social practice of gardening in the urban space is the outcome of a set of developments over time, the line of flight, which together have made urban agriculture occur into its current being. These developments, as will be explained below, respond to what can be defined as a longing for ecological sustainability, social deceleration and a sense of belonging. By defining these values, I point out the societal *lacks* that are opposed to it.

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[3] Informal conversation with Joris 1-4-17

Hillier (2013, 171) uses these lacks, which are social desires that remain unfulfilled in the present functioning of society, to explain where the possibility of social innovation lays. By looking at to which lacks social innovations respond, we can see how lacks in society's structures are responded to as a form of agency of individuals and groups. The analysis of the emerging social practices represented through urban agriculture and the underlying rhizomatic structure of their appearance reveal to us the movement in and of society, based on the social desires of people to which society has not yet been able to respond. These lay the foundation for further analysis of the meaning of urban agriculture in Utrecht within a broader social and academic context.

In this chapter, I describe the appearances of urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht through three main elements that connect them. The similarities that form the roots of these different initiatives in Utrecht are explained by the analysis of social practices I encountered during my fieldwork in Utrecht. This analysis aims to present the fundamental social dynamics to which urban agriculture in Utrecht responds, which are a demand for understanding ecological processes, decelerating from society's pressure, and belonging to the community. It must be noted however, that these gardens do not operate as a common front of urban agriculture initiatives, but as separately organized gardens which together create a movement 'below the surface'.

Ecological knowledge

With the number of people living in urban areas surpassing the number of people living in rural areas in 2009[4], humanity moves away from the countryside where food originally is produced. Therewith the connection between the humans and food production decreases rapidly. Nowadays people associate food with provisioning supermarkets rather than with the natural provider. One of my informants who is occupied with the education about the origins of food told me that *''if you ask children nowadays where milk comes from, they reply saying 'Lidl or 'Albert Heijn'[5]. They don't associate it with a cow any longer because they have never seen or experienced the production process''[6]*. Besides the spatial distancing from the food industry, the traditional knowledge about plants is also being lost due to the global process of industrialization and homogenization of food production (Thrupp 2000, 273). The contemporary corporate-led food industry is replacing the traditional polyculture with monoculture crops, which according to Thrupp (2000, 270) creates an increasing food instability. The unnatural homogenization of species makes crops increasingly vulnerable for diseases from bacteria, spread by

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[4] Fact derived from: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/urbanization/urban-rural.shtml , accessed on 10-01-2017.
[5] Lidl and Albert Heijn are supermarket chains in the Netherlands
[6] Informal conversation with informant 16-2-17

insects, leading to situations of crop failures destroying land and starving people (Thrupp 2000, 272; Jansson 2013, 287). To prevent these monoculture crops from being susceptible for diseases, pesticides are spread over the crops. These pesticides however, target not only people who work with it, but also disrupt the ecosystem (Thrupp 2000, 271-272). The loss of knowledge in this way goes along with a loss of appreciating ecological processes. Thrupp advocates for new policies and practices that aim for sustainable agroecosystems, in which she acknowledges the importance of the incorporation of a natural transmission of farmers' local knowledge towards the next generations to enhance sustainable agricultural practices (Thrupp 2000, 278).

The expectation of food being on the supermarkets' shelves is typical for the loss of the awareness of human dependence on nature, or as Jansson (2013, 286) proposes it, the socio-ecological system. She argues that besides being aware of the ecology *in* cities, people should learn about the ecology *of* cities. In other words, people have to know how their urban life is dependent upon natural resources. By giving the opportunity to experience socio-ecological interactions again, gardens provide future generations with essential knowledge about the ecosystem (Jansson 2013, 289). Bringing 'traditional' agriculture to urban spaces provides both children and adults with the opportunity to have a first-hand experience of how nature works.

It is half April and a warm day which means that when I arrive at the back of the garden, I can experience the activity of bees flying in and out of the ten beehives that Food for Good possess. For a while I look amazed at the activity of these insects, not minding about me standing there for they are only focused at working. David joins me in watching. He is the garden coordinator of this urban garden in Kanaleneiland in the South-West of Utrecht. ''They amaze me. They form an essential part of this garden.'' David enthusiastic explains me that every beehive can house up to 70.000 bees, adding up to over half a million bees in total in this garden. The bees pollinate the fruit trees, he continues to explain, without the bees there would be trees, but no fruit in it. Excited by

1. The beehives at Food for Good

the importance of the bees he tells me that back in the days Mao Zhe Dong wanted to eradicate all the sparrows in China, and so naïvely they did. However, the extinction of the sparrow

disturbed the ecological balance, leading to the extinction of bees. As a result, the Chinese people now have to pollinate their trees themselves, manually, flower by flower.[7]

It is a commonality for urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht to include a beehive in the garden to mimic and create the ecological process of pollination. The initiators always address both the biological value of the garden and its educational purpose for the participants. Confronting them with the operation of a beehive creates awareness and knowledge about their ecological function, resulting in appreciation for their existence. The presence of these urban gardens, also Jansson (2013, 287) acknowledges, counters the movement of alienation from the other-than-human environment.

The greenhouse of the Koningshof is about forty meters long and for two entire days I have been planting garlic along the glass wall of the building. At a certain moment, I start to doubt about what I am actually doing. Why plant so many garlic? What is the use of it? Joris seems to understand this doubt and starts to explain why I and Adeline have been planting this garlic for so long. He tells us that along this glass wall there will be tomato, cucumber, bell pepper and kiwi planted. These are creepers meaning they will grow vertically against the glass of the greenhouse. However, these plants are very susceptible for diseases, spread by insects and bacteria. It is here where the garlic comes in as a natural protector of these plants. The smell garlic (and onion) spreads keep away these bacteria and insects and thus protect the plants from being infected. I stand surprised and I suddenly feel satisfied rather than useless having planted all the garlic. But Joris isn't done explaining yet. He continues telling us that planting the garlic here makes it possible for these creepers to grow a natural sun screen for that side of the greenhouse. In summer, he says, it gets really warm and since they want people to come into the greenhouse and pick their own products as a means of connecting the consumer to the production process, he believes the protection from the sun makes the place more pleasant.[8]

2. Tomato and kiwi plant surrounded by onions and garlic

The interaction between human and nature is a reciprocal process of giving and taking. When following nature, one can interact by listening, learning and applying the methods nature provides itself.

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[7] Field notes 18-4-17
[8] Field notes 8-3-17

Agriculture through interaction with nature is what Thrupp (2000, 266) calls *agrobiodiversity*. With agrobiodiversity plants are protected from diseases by other plants instead of pesticides, preventing pollinators like bees, or people working with plants, to get harmed. However, the food industry has pushed the usage of nature to such proportions that nature can no longer provide with solutions directly. To push nature, artificial means are used that have the expected short-term effects, but come with devastating long-term impacts on the ecosystem. The result is ecological deprivation of such proportions that humanity is already experiencing the consequences (Thrupp 2000, 269). Following Jansson's (2013, 289) argument about the relation between urbanization and ecological (un)sustainability, urban agriculture should be seen as a response to this relation as a means to restore the socio-ecological interaction. The urban gardens bring back the practice of agriculture into the everyday environment, creating a space for the transmission of local ecological knowledge. The hands-on engagements with plants teaches people the functioning of the ecosystem and how to maintain a sustainable socio-ecological relationship.

Oasis of deceleration

Whilst the disappearance of ecological elements from everyday life, resulting from a process of urbanization, is one of the dynamics fundamental for urban agriculture, another concerns the social element of society. Hartmut Rosa is a sociological researcher who studies the social acceleration of society due to technological and economic developments. He argues that there exists a bilateral impact between this social acceleration and the characteristics of modernization, being rationalization, differentiation, individualization and instrumental domestication (Rosa 2003, 4-5). These different elements of modernization reveal three categories of acceleration, added with three motors of acceleration (Rosa 2003, 6-14). First, there is technological acceleration. At the center of technological acceleration is the shift from 'space' as the main given in social reality towards 'time'. Technological acceleration has made it possible to transfer space, or in other words, space got dislocated. As long as someone has time, there is the possibility to move, which can mean either the movement *through*, or the movement *of* space. The second acceleration is that of social change, in which the rate at which social change takes place has moved to an intra-generational pace. As an example, whereas people's occupation used to be determined for a lifetime, even exceeding generations, nowadays most people change occupation multiple times within a single lifetime. The third acceleration concerns that of the 'pace of life', concerning the ''speed and compression of actions and experiences in everyday life'' (Rosa 2003, 8-9). This acceleration causes a general feeling of pressure and stress amongst people in Western societies. Practices that relate to the efficient use of the limited time in everyday life create

pressure to become more productive and efficient constantly (Lobel 2014, 19). Such pressure is driven by the *motors of acceleration*. The first of these is the *economic* motor, ran by capitalism and its continuous aim for profit based on competition and growth. The second is the *cultural* motor which is described as a growing notion of the necessity to 'fulfill' life, meaning that the realization of as much experiences possible is the central aspiration of the dominant culture. The third motor is the *structural*, based on the principle of functional differentiation to live a meaningful life. These time-efficiency related motors drive society towards an acceleration of everyday life. However, Rosa (2003, 15) also mentions certain forms of counteraction amongst which are the practicing of traditional forms of social practice and intentional movements of deceleration. Thus, whilst social dynamics have led to an acceleration of everyday life, at the same time there can be an anti-movement of deceleration caused by yet other social dynamics and represented in social practices.

Lobel (2014, 18) looks at the compression and acceleration of time being the mark of modernization. On the one hand, the macro-perspective shows how technological innovations that make high-speed communication possible come with societal structures of acceleration. On the other hand, from micro-perspective the individual is unable to cope with socio-cultural demands of acceleration. The relation between the structural and individual here result into an acceleration of everyday life (Lobel 2014, 19-20). The acceleration in everyday life is influenced by economic concerns that relate to the experience of time. The notion of production, and its efficiency, have become central to our society (Lobel 2014, 22).

Cycling through Overvecht I am surrounded by many concrete, 10-stories high, apartment buildings before I arrive at the Gagelpark. In this park, the Voedseltuin Overvecht is located. When I arrive, Mark (the garden coordinator) is as surprised as happy to see me. I hadn't communicated to be half an hour late today and in contrast to most other participants, I normally arrive at 13:30 when Mark opens the garden. I apologize, but Mark replies saying that there are no expectations of attendance. He tells me he is content with anyone who decides to come to the garden, regardless of how long or active one participates. As usual, I ask what to do and he gives me the task of turning the compost heap upside down to let it 'breathe'. The compost exists out of

3. Compost heaps at the Voedseltuin Overvecht

organic waste from the garden. Any leftovers or weeds from the garden are put on the compost pile and through the process of composting (aerating by turning it) microorganisms get into the organic waste. When spreading the compost with these microorganisms over the field, the microorganisms attract insects that move into the ground and their feces fertilize the land, making it useful for agriculture. Throughout the season the compost pile is made so it can be used for the next year. Between February and April, gardening in the Voedseltuin Overvecht mainly consists of preparing the fields by spading it to mix the soil with the compost. It is possible to do this with a milling machine, which could do it in a day, but at the Voedseltuin this never was mentioned. Pressure to produce does not concern them, it is quality that matters: ''We don't cultivate for production, we cultivate for taste''. Producing food in this way, one of the participants tells me, feels like going back to the basis of what it means to be human, it feels like a closed circle.[9]

The practice of cultivating the field through the time-demanding process described above shows how the value of efficiency and productivity are unimportant in the Voedseltuin Overvecht. This position counteracts the demands of society to spend time in an economic efficient way by enacting traditional and forms of social practice that enhance deceleration (Rosa 2003, 15). However, such individual acts should not be seen in contrast to societal structures, but rather in relation to them. In this gardening practice ''*self* and *society* are practiced together'' (Lobel 2014, 14). Decelerating is not something these people do as opposed to societal structures, it is an act of individual deceleration within a society where the process of deceleration becomes more apparent. Food production in these gardens is a secondary goal, it is a means to achieve what they really intend: Create a communal place where people can step out of the accelerated everyday life. Within the urban space as embodiment of social acceleration, the gardens are the embodiment of deceleration: ''*The green and tranquility work therapeutically, they create an oasis in the desert*''[10].

Belonging to place and community

The process of deceleration that is stimulated by the existence of and participation in green areas within the urban space, counteracts the movement towards a society increasingly characterized by individualism, differentiation, rationalization and instrumental domestication that Rosa (2003) described. In that sense, it creates a new dimension to the interhuman and beyond-human relationship. This movement takes place on a structural level of continuous social change over an

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[9] Field notes 15-2-17
[10] Informal conversation with informant 18-4-2017

extended period. In the present however, there is a social demand for immediate alternatives to an accelerated society. A consequence of an acceleration of society is a process of alienation from place, which results in a changing sense of belonging. To satisfy with everyday life one needs to be able to position himself within the world. May (2011, 371) explains that people with physical and mental health issues, like elderly, disabled, poor, homeless, refugees or socially disadvantaged people, need to be involved in society to prevent them from social exclusion and deprivation. This comes with a bodily presence and awareness derived from the connection to place, through which one creates identity. By moving within space, we become engaged with it and are able to identify with it, giving meaning to our existence. Besides arguing the importance of a connection to place in everyday life, May (2011, 368) also points out that a sense of self is created through relating to other people. She emphasizes the mutual relation between the 'self' and 'society', arguing that in fact they are the same, for society is the multiplicity of the self, and the self an implication of society. In line with this argument, I state that place and the self (and society) form a similar mutually constitutive relationship. *Place* is socially occupied space, so space given meaning to by people. In this way, place mirrors society, and following May, the 'self' can mirror to place (May 2011, 371). The urban gardens that are part of this research are socially occupied spaces where local people together give meaning and create a place of belonging. The meaning they give to it creates a shared being and sense of community and inclusion. By embodying this shared being, the gardens represent a place of connection manifested by and for the people of the community, rejecting any form of social exclusion.

Following the argument of social dynamics being reflected into space through the creation of *place*, individuals can become part of these social dynamics by participating and subsequently belonging to place. The deceleration that urban agriculture initiatives represent through their place, being the urban gardens, provides outsiders the possibility to participate and create a sense of belonging to this place and its attached norms and values (May 2011, 368). For people who suffer under the acceleration of society, these gardens thus create a place of rehabilitation and reconnection to society through a movement they feel connected to.

Jannes welcomes me with open arms: ''I didn't expect you'd actually come, how good of you to visit us!'' This eccentric and energetic guy had invited me to visit the Kasteeltuin in De Meern, an area that has only been part of the municipality of Utrecht since 2001. When he had heard about my research he enthusiastically told me I should come visit

4. The garden of Kasteeltuin Nijevelt

the garden and participate with them. Jannes works for the Salvation Army as a mentor of homeless people in Utrecht. The Kasteeltuin provides a place for these people, but also for other volunteers, to work in the garden and grow eatable plants. I recognize some of the homeless people I see walking in the Utrecht city center sometimes, but with whom I am now planting pumpkins. Jannes explains that they get paid a little which, together with the weekly routine, makes the garden represent an imitation of society without the high pressure and demands. Besides that, ''it keeps them from the streets for a couple of hours''.[11]

Most of the homeless people part of the story above are being pushed to participate, with the small financial compensation being a welcome reward for them. But I also learn that the gardening enthuses them, feeling meaningful because of achieving for something tangible, like taking care over a plant. Going to the Kasteeltuin on a weekly routine creates regular distraction from a life in which they depend on the charity of people with whom they do not connect. Working together in the garden takes away the socioeconomic differences between them and other volunteers, here they are all gardeners. The Kasteeltuin and Food for Good are part of the same project, where people who need assistance in everyday life (on different scales) and volunteers work together. A connection with nature is what re-establishes a connection to 'place' again, and by having this within the urban area where many people live together, a sense of community is established as well (Holland 2004, 290). The gardens and gardening itself are a means for social inclusion of people who lack a sense of belonging to society. Other examples of such opportunities of participation are the participation of physically disabled people at the Voedseltuin Overvecht, or the effort of social entrepreneur Renee to involve refugees to participate in the garden. These are people who depend on society to take care of them, but now are given the opportunity to give something back, to create a sense of meaning for their existence.

We should not diminish the importance of belonging to people with appointed physical or mental issues. All gardens in Utrecht show the importance of participation and connection with society and the community. When talking to one of the gardeners I ask her what the main goal of these gardens is. She responds saying that ''(…) of course we all want to have some yield from our gardens, so we can enjoy the energy we put into it. But it is more about the entire process. Working together, gardening together, that is at least as important as the yield. And 98% of the people will tell you the same. (…) It creates connectivity.''[12] The sense of belonging to a community is something that concerns all people. When looking at the map of gardens in Utrecht we see that they are spread out over the city. Every neighborhood appears to have their own community garden in which mostly people from the surrounding area work. Therefore, the gardens are, although not always completely

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[11] Field notes 6-4-17
[12] Recorded interview with Martine 1-4-17

representative, a reflection of the neighborhoods' inhabitants. Combining this fact with the belonging to place May discusses, it becomes evident that the gardens provide the people in the neighborhood with the opportunity to connect to the *space* they live in and the community with whom they share it. Connecting to both people and space, creates a shared *place* to which people feel they belong. Holland (2004, 289) comes to a similar conclusion in her research on urban gardens in the United Kingdom, stating that each garden represents different values embedded in the community's shared sense of belonging. She goes on to say that the involvement and participation in the community are a central theme in these gardens and that the food production in some cases is a secondary benefit (Holland 2004, 290). Although I do not aim to undo the value of the gardens as sources of food provision, non-economic aspects are at the core of the gardens' values in Utrecht.

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Society does not change at a specific moment or because of a certain event. Movement occurs over time, in which individual actions shape society and societal dynamics shape individuals. In this way, the everyday life is organized. Since there is no possibility of changing society by single events or thoughts, it is only further movement that will reshape the everyday. As a social researcher, it is the task of catching these movements and understanding them by analyzing their roots in societal dynamics over time. Being with these urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht, I found that reconnecting to nature, deceleration of everyday life, and social inclusion are the primary movements to which these people add. The next section will provide a better understanding of how these three movements are present at the Koningshof. After that, the second chapter will continue with a more theoretical understanding and meta-analysis of what urban agriculture represents.

Interlude: Knowledge-sharing at the Koningshof

Today was the first day of the 'Workshop Koningshof' to which the people with individual plots attend. The Koningshof rents out pieces of land and includes a workshop in which the gardeners are educated about gardening, nature and other related topics. When I arrive, many people are present already, including the initiators, volunteers and people who rent their own garden. Most individual plots have been milled by Jos so they are ready for use. Joris asks if I want to do something already and for about 15 minutes I harvest kale. When it is 11 o'clock, I walk to the kitchen, located in the greenhouse, where everybody has gathered for the workshop and Robert has already started with the introduction of his presentation.

It is a warm sunny day, so it is hot in the kitchen where about twenty participants (largely middle-aged women), four volunteers and the three of the initiators of the Koningshof have gathered around Robert. People sit on the floor, on chairs and stand drinking coffee and tea whilst listening. Using printed PowerPoint sheets that are pinned on the wall, Robert explains that the Koningshof aims to teach the new generation traditional local knowledge about farming that will otherwise go lost with the last generation. When they started the initiative, they knew there was a general interest in locally produced food and they felt they could jump in on this movement. The city government soon got in thinking ''This is good, we should do something with this'' and they supported them with grants. Now, almost five years later, they have thirty-seven individual gardens and therewith reached their maximum in size:

> The Koningshof provides people with a vegetable garden, so different than an allotment garden this is only for cultivating food-related plants. Although people can walk in every day, the workshop takes place on Saturdays, on which the initiators will be present to answer questions and help with the gardening. Also, people can see what happens in the greenhouse and watch how the process goes, for the greenhouse is warmer and therefore precedes the process of the outside gardens with about a month. Besides asking the initiators, Robert encourages people to help each other and share their knowledge, seeds and other things they have. They want to create a community here that shares above all knowledge. He also proposes that people with certain skill can teach others in workshops, for example if someone is good at winemaking. Other workshops that are organized by the Koningshof are also organized through acquaintances. For example, Joris' dad is a beekeeper and Joris is now learning to be one too. That's why if anyone wants to know more about bees, they can ask Joris and he will explain you about bees at the beehives in the back of the Koningshof. Besides the workshops, Robert explained the other function of the Koningshof. He called it

''Koningshof to go'' referring to the walk-in greenhouse they have created where people can pick their own food, therewith getting to know where it comes from and how it grows.

At a moment, I realized that probably my generation is the first one, maybe the second, that is raised without the necessity to know anything about food production, because everything is for sale in the supermarkets and other stores. It is therefore even more interesting that maybe one or a half generation after the supposed convenience of being able to buy everything pre-packaged in stores, people start cultivating their own food again.

5. The greenhouse at the Koningshof

Around one o'clock, the people of the Koningshof (initiators and volunteers) have their lunch-break and a buffet is pulled together by Akke to which also the individual gardeners can join. We are sitting outside around picnic tables and inside in the greenhouse there is a buffet with all fresh made foods to which people have added their own. We have fresh soup, home-baked bread, self-made humus and dried fruits and nuts. There is cheese, tapenades, fresh juice and eggs from the Koningshof's chickens. Gardeners can donate money and join the buffet. Outside, everybody is mixed, there are not enough seats so we have to huddle together.

At the end of the day the volunteers and initiators conclude the day with a drink. I ask Joris to explain me why they grow what they grow in the greenhouse and he shows me a thick book about ecological growing. When I ask about biological growing Joris tells me the Koningshof is not biological. He explains that to be biological you need the trademark, which they do not have because it is expensive, but also because they do not believe in these trademarks, ''they are just commercial tools for selling food''. However, the Koningshof is biological in the sense that they would get through all the requirements, they just do not have the trademark.

It is then that Jos takes over the conversation and I end up sitting with him talking about the Koningshof and the food industry. Jos, Robert's father, is the owner of the land on which the

Koningshof is located. The farm has been in his family for two centuries and has had different purposes over time. He points at a picture from that morning's presentation which shows what the farm and

6. The agraric area in East-Utrecht in the 1970's with the Koningshof delineated in red

surrounding areas used to look like. He tells about him going to the food auction every three days or so at the Jaarbeurs next to the Utrecht central train station. However, the auction moved away from the city when they started to cluster food sale over bigger areas. Because of that he had to drive afar to sell his products, which in the end was not profitable any longer. He then realized that it won't be able to sustain his farming company and that if he wants to continue he had to leave Utrecht and maybe even the Netherlands. To be able to stay at his farm and maintain a living, he started selling flowers, but eventually also this did not suffice and he had to look for work beyond his farm. Hence, the land behind his house became to lie fallow.

Jos explains that the purpose of producing has changed. Back in his day, farmers decided what to produce and people would buy at the auction. Nowadays people demand certain products and that is what needs to be produced, the supply-demand relation has turned around. Continuing about what developments he has seen in the agriculture business, Jos names two developments that changed the entire food industry: The invention of the microwave – giving rise to ready-made meals that only need a button to be pushed in order to be prepared – and the movement towards a social system of double-earners – resulting in the loss of attention for, amongst other things, food. These developments made food loose terrain in daily routine and got it to lose importance. In other words, people got distanced from food.

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On the edge of the city Utrecht, the Koningshof represents the former agriculture identity of the area. With its history, the farm is the embodiment of the outsourcing of and distancing from food production by people living in urban areas. The acceleration of society has made the human-nature and, consequently, the human-food relation less significant in everyday life. At the same time, the revitalization of the farm in the likeness of the Koningshof embodies another movement, which is one of reconnecting. In a time where societal changes discourage a natural transmission of knowledge about food production from one generation to the next, the Koningshof represents a new way of transferring this essential life knowledge onto the next generation. The greenhouse where most of this happens is therefore typically called the 'KasLokaal', carrying out the 'greenhouse' location ('Kas'), 'local' ideology and identity ('Lokaal') and the notion of transferring knowledge in a 'classroom' ('klaslokaal'). The Koningshof provides a platform for people to learn and practice skills that would have gone lost otherwise. They serve as a countermovement to the processes of modernization that cause quantity to overpower quality of life.

The above chapter and interlude show how practicing urban agriculture represents the social dynamics at play in local, micro-scale projects. The urban agriculture initiatives reconnect people to nature through the transmission of ecological knowledge that is lost with the increasing distance between people and nature. Besides that, an accelerating society appears to have exhausted humans by its constant aim of growth coming with social and economic pressure from which people step away by the slow and mindful practice of gardening. Third, a lack of community that comes with processes of individualization due to processes of globalization and technological improvements is being compensated by the gardens as places of connectivity and belonging. These three main processes of becoming represent the social innovation that takes place in society. The interlude shows how they mesh into the appearance of the Koningshof and how these lines of flight have come to create the initiatives that fall under the concept of urban agriculture. However, the conceptualization of this phenomenon deserves some explanation itself. The next chapter will delve into the meaning of urban agriculture. Here I will explain its roots in agriculture and urban space, the contradictions that come with this and how the conceptualization symbolizes social innovation.

Chapter 2 – Urban agriculture

''I don't know that much about plants, but I learn more here than I could have ever learned from any book''[13]

The separation of the agriculture industry and city life signifies the rural-urban divide in the modern society. It is this separation which makes urban agriculture a conflicting term, maybe even an oxymoron, in that agriculture is the exact thing that would be defined as a non-urban activity. Therefore, the concept urban agriculture displays a movement in society, bringing two opposing concepts together. The practice of agriculture in the city implies there is a need of reconceptualizing our understandings of the urban-rural divide. Urban space has been argued to be the embodiment of technological and scientific innovation (Davoudi and Stead 2002, 272). The urban-rural divide is built on an ideology of efficiency, where a surplus in food created in the countryside leaves people in the city to care about other businesses (Forni 2016, 95). Although a logic consequence would be a reduce of workload and surplus of time, Davoudi and Stead (2002, 272) argue that city-life has become characterized by a continual aim for economic growth, which is one of the motors of social acceleration that were discussed in the previous chapter (Rosa 2003, 11-12). At the same time, Davoudi and Stead also argue that urban space is known for its encouraging of a sense of community and therefore provides the structural fundament for Scott-Cato and Hillier's notion of social innovation (Davoudi and Stead 2002, 270; Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010, 871). The same potential is mentioned by Little (1999, 273) who sees the urban space as one of four environments with growing importance in future understandings of ecological analysis, due to humanity's increasing urban concentration. Therefore, bringing the agricultural practice into the urban space is a sign of societal movement that calls for a critical analysis of the urban-rural divide and indeed, that of the urban space and agricultural practices itself.

The first chapter and following interlude demonstrate that urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht represent neither the optimization of nature through agriculture, nor the aim for (economic) growth typical for urban space. However, they do represent the domestication of nature that typifies agriculture, as well as the community-life that characterizes the urban environment. Therefore, this chapter is build up to explain how these gardens on the one hand reproduce the notion of agricultural practices and urban space, but on the other hand contest the meaning of both *agriculture* and *urban* within contemporary society. By doing so, the societal dynamics that underlie the social practices discussed in the first chapter, are put into a broader framework of social movement within society.

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[13] Recorded interview with Martine 1-4-17

Agriculture and the human-nature relation

At the heart of agriculture rests the notion of a distinction of humanity from nature whilst at the same time accentuating their interaction. Little (1999, 258) names *natural agency* – acknowledging the independence and power of nature apart from humanity – and the *anthropomorphization of the biophysical world* – approaching nature as always human-related – as two extremes in the human-nature continuum within the scientific paradigm of ecology. This chapter, concerning agriculture, will focus on human-modified natural environments. However, this does not mean that I do not see the agency of nature, or the arbitrariness of the boundary between human and nature. Rather, this research is exactly about the re-appreciation of nature's agency and the obscurity of the human-nature dichotomy dominating the contemporary notion within the Anthropocene epoch. But to get to that point later on in the thesis, I will first discuss how the awareness of an interconnectedness between human and nature developed itself over time. Therefore, I will first focus on the representation of the human-nature relationship embodied in the practice of agriculture over time, distinguishing three phases and proposing a fourth phase to which the emergence of urban agriculture contributes.

Agriculture changed the relation between human and nature and over time. Technological innovations had the intention of making agriculture more efficient and therefore a process of mechanization signifies the human-nature relationship since the introduction of agriculture (Forni 2016, 95). However, both Forni (2016) and Rosa (2003) see the industrial revolution as the catalyst of the dramatic increase in productivity of human activity, resulting in a depletion of nature's resources. To avoid nature being understood as passive actor I approach agriculture as a bridging concept in the human-nature dichotomy. Therefore, I distinguish three phases in the human-nature relationship concerning the cultivation of plants, based on Forni's (2016) distinction of three different lines of thought[14] concerning food provision throughout history: 1) the pre-agriculture phase, 2) the early-agriculture phase in which the human-nature cooperation provided both with evolution, 3) modern-agriculture phase where humanity is trying to subject nature to its will, experimenting the extend of its usability. The third phase was triggered by the industrial revolution and expanded to its current scale with the rise of capitalism. Although both second and third phase concern the practice of agriculture and imply domestication of nature, the difference is that the productivity of the second phase depended on the input of human labor, where in the third phase fossil fuels, and thus natural resources, are mainly used for upscaling.

Tsing (2015, 40), having done research on the human-nature relationship within the modern capitalist society, sees the subordination of nature that characterizes the third phase as the result of

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[14] Forni describes three different lines of thought concerning food provision which are 1) thinking in the sign of the plant, 2) thinking in the sign of the plow, and 3) thinking in the sign of carbon.

increased technological knowledge and the following ability of expanding agricultural activity into a mass-production system. She states that this development is based on a philosophy of utilitarianism, central to modern capitalism. Instead of a human-nature cooperation, nature is being used for the accumulation of wealth, and therefore the main purpose of agriculture has come to be the creation of commodities rather than life. This process of commodification, according to Rigi (2007, 56), is typical for capitalism: the submission of life to the logic of capital. Rigi argues that the system of commodification brings destruction upon nature and life, threatening human existence. Instead of coming to a certain equilibrium in this commodification, the process has now moved beyond just mass-production into the patenting of nanoparticles of plants. Scrinis and Lyons (2007) discuss how nanotechnology, which allows people to modify the molecular structure of seeds, and the patenting of these genetically modified crops, is what currently occupies the food industry. This is what Scrinis and Lyons call ''(…) the *reconstitutive rationality* that has characterised the contemporary techno-sciences, and which can be defined as where the objects of nature are not merely used and exploited in their received form, but increasingly encountered as malleable and available for reconstruction (…)'' (Scrinis and Lyons 2007, 24). In other words, it encompasses the optimization of the extensibility of nature as a means to accumulate economic wealth. Little (1999, 256) connects this environmental destructiveness that follows this mode of capitalist accumulation to the rise of environmentalist countermovement, which form potential social barriers to the expansion of capitalism.

As an alternative to the rationalization of nature, recent knowledge about environmental degradation and the subversion of nature has led to a new dimension in the human-nature paradigm. Little (1999) reviews the discourse of *environmentalism* as a social movement that opposes the degradation of the ecological environment. A movement Grove-White (1993, 17) argues to be carried by different people throughout all layers of society due to the urgency of the environmental matter. We may therefore state that humanity entered a fourth phase added to Forni's trilogy of phases: That of respect or even slight humility towards the ecological environment, emerging from the acknowledgement of the dependency of humanity on nature. Although different actors have various reasons to support environmentalist developments – and indeed, amongst these reasons is also that of capitalist accumulation – this phase is characterized by a movement of reconnecting to nature, through the appreciation of its uncontrollability and self-sustainability, acknowledging the human dependency on it. In the 1970's, Holmgren and Mollison designed the notion of *permaculture*, a concept which represents a mixture of 'permanent' and 'agriculture' that aims to create sustainable practices and habits concerning agriculture. In his summary of their ideas, Holmgren (2012, 5) explains how their concept serves as an answer to the failure of the global market to protect the deprivation of nature and even their insulation of both citizens and governments to prevent this deprivation from happening. With permaculture, they aimed to create a human-nature understanding based on

responsibility and mutual reliance, which according to them must be grounded in community values. Their idea of permaculture is based on an ideology of people being connected to land and nature which was present in the pre-industrial era (Holmgren 2012, 7). The idea of mutual reliance between human and nature can also be recognized in what Lyson (2005) calls *civic agriculture*. He proposes this as an alternative to *conventional agriculture* with its narrow aim based on productivity and efficiency. Civic agriculture is a food production system based on a local connectivity between consumer and producer, involving economic, ecological and social sustainability. It stresses an agricultural system that acts in harmony with nature, instead of trying to dominate it (Lyson 2005, 94-96). Civic agriculture, however, takes place in the rural or peri-urban area, and therefore responds to similar dynamics as urban agriculture, but represents a different solution.

The fourth phase of human-nature connection is manifested in bottom-up movements rebelling against the capitalist ideology of permanent growth, so Pink (2008) argues. Her research concerns the movement called 'Cittàslow'[15] which both represents a model for local governments, and a movement for citizens. It advocates a sensory approach:

"(…) for it is through the "education of the senses" that people achieve embodied sensorial appreciation of local produce (as opposed to mass-produced homogenised supermarket foods)." (Pink 2008, 98)

This education of the senses should be taken literally, for example through the presence of flower gardens for their smell and aesthetic value, something the urban gardens in Utrecht all possess, as well as the presence of beehives producing natural sounds and movements. When I visited a discussion evening about sustainable food, people advocated for tasting as a way to convince others about the richness of local food. This is a sound many people in the gardens in Utrecht gave, being convinced that a sensorial connection in the gardens will make people reappreciate the plants beyond nutritional value only. The food produced in the gardens is shared at events or with people who visit the gardens, but it is also sold to local restaurants and supermarkets. Besides the various possibilities of tasting, the gardens also provide the neighborhood with greenspace and tranquility through their spatial presence. The importance of these green spaces is pointed out by Van den Berg, Hartig and Staats (2007, 91-92) who mention the densely populated cities of Netherlands as an example of areas where the 'Green Urbanism approach' would benefit the quality of life. This approach aims at creating urban space that is sustainable and restorative both, which should be achieved through the inclusion of nature in the habitational environment.

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[15] Translation from Italian: Slow City.

Pink (2008, 101-102) argues that the education of the senses, rather than solely the mind, opens up the transmission of skills and knowledge from one generation to the other. According to her, this can be seen as an indirect form of activism against the global market controlled by the ideology of capital accumulation. In line with Pink's argument I state that although most (not all) people who practice urban gardening in Utrecht are not directly concerned with rebelling against global structures of capitalism, they do form a group of activist movement. Their longing for a sensory connection with nature is a countermovement to the global capitalist ideology of indifference towards quantitatively insignificant modes of life, and has its influence on ideological dynamics within society. It enhances a movement away from the submission of nature by humanity, towards a relationship of understanding and appreciation of both human and nature.

Bringing agriculture into urban space

Agricultural practice in urban gardens proposes a renewed socio-ecological interaction, contesting contemporary notions of human domination over nature. At the same time, by practicing this mode of agriculture within city-boundaries, the meaning of urban space is similarly contested. The influential socio-geographer David Harvey recognizes that the urban space, with its environment consisting of an infrastructure serving efficiency of production and transportation of commodities, is the spatial realization of the capitalist system based on accumulation (Harvey 1978, 115). He argues that the concentration of capitalist means of accumulation created an environment built for production and consumption, where roads, canals, houses and shops serve as components of this capitalist environment. To trace the meaning of urban space means to study the remnants of urban creation in previous eras. Urban space is full of symbols that explain its line of flight as process of becoming. Social movements and dynamics are visible in the transformation of urban space over time:

> *''The landscape of urban memory is not a personal or cognitive process alone but is achieved by movement through space that renews linkages between different parts of the urban field. In all these cases, actions claim or maintain boundaries around a space and assert commonalities that are continually challenged by broader processes.''* (Smart and Smart 2003, 272)

In other words, urban space is the embodiment of social processes, being the result of continuous human activity shaping and giving meaning to its existence. By constantly re-shaping the urban space, people give meaning to their surroundings and community-life within the boundaries of societal structures. The shaping of urban space becomes vivid in the history of the farmers from the Koningshof.

Robert, one of the initiators of the Koningshof, is the son of Jos, who was born as a farmer's-son on this piece of land. Jos was raised to be a farmer and until the end of the twentieth century farming was his occupation. He tells me many stories of how he would go to the farmer's auction together with his father to sell their weekly yield. Here, farmers from the Utrecht area gathered to sell their yield to the local people. Jos tells me that this farmer's market was located at the Jaarbeurs, next to the central station. I am surprised, because I only know the Jaarbeurs as the center for events, for its casino and cinema, in fact it is only two hundred meters away from my own house. Considering myself to live in the city's central area, it is hard to imagine a livestock auction further up the street. When thereafter I cycle past the Jaarbeurs, I notice a street sign saying ''Veemarktplein'' translated as 'livestock market square', in front of the theater they finished building recently.

This story of changing meaning of urban space reminds me of a TedTalk of Carolyn Steel[16] who explains that current cities are emancipated from any relation to nature at all. We can see the remnants of a previous connection in the street names in the city center, to which Steel adds that food used to be the center of city-life, but it has moved away from our visibility. Jos tells me a similar story: After a while the food auction was moved away from the city and eventually it was no longer profitable for him to go there, his farm became insignificant within the expanding food industry and he had to change his occupation.[17]

What this tracing of the meaning of urban space tells us is that the movement of food from farm to the market place used to be a significant factor of life in the city center of Utrecht. Nowadays, however, food distribution has moved out of the center and has become concentrated in supermarkets, increasing the efficiency of production and consumption serving capital accumulation. The place food used to have in the city center has become occupied by commercial distribution centers owned by multinationals from the global market, who sell their commodities all over the world. In their work on the process of urbanization from a perspective of globalization, Smart and Smart (2003, 263-264) see not only the expansion of urban areas, but also a transforming meaning of urban space. In line with previously mentioned authors Rosa (2003) and Lobel (2014), they see a time-space compression that modifies the everyday life in cities. Global identification increasingly replaces a connection to the local community (Smart and Smart 2003, 274). This transformation is vivid in the use of urban space in Utrecht, shifting from locally produced food sold at farmers markets in the city center, towards the distribution of non-food related products sold by global multinational corporations.

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[16] TedTalk at https://www.ted.com/talks/carolyn_steel_how_food_shapes_our_cities?language=nl#t-555981
[17] Field notes 25-3-17

Whilst, as noted in the previous paragraph, the contemporary human-nature relationship can be approached as a revitalization of appreciating a mutual dependency, at the same time there is a movement towards a mechanization of nature. Escobar (1995, 206-209), referring to several other authors, discusses the increased conjunction between organisms and machines created by the growing importance of machinic use and the 'capitalization' of life. The patenting of nanotechnologies discussed previously, is exemplary for how biotechnologies capitalize nature by expanding the possibility to create value from them into microbiological elements (Escobar 1995, 211). Nature, in this way, has become commodified and with nature also the human body. Although I recognize both movements, that of the capitalization of life and environmentalism, it is the latter as opposed to the former that forms the major axis of urban agriculture. Considering the capitalist veins that structure the urban space, it is remarkable to see agricultural practices occupy these urban areas. Since the absence of agricultural practices mark the urban space, and the process of out casting extensive modes of food distribution from the central urban areas in the past era, the appearance of agriculture in urban areas is a conflicting movement. It is representing the development of an alternative mode of life that opposes the limited approach of food as commodity, and explores the sensorial value of plants as part of the everyday life.

The first chapter of this thesis emphasized the societal dynamics that have led to the appearance of urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht. A longing for socio-ecological interaction, deceleration of everyday life, and sense of belonging to the community are the main incentives for the offspring of these urban gardens. Van den Berg, Hartig and Staats (2007) in their psychological analysis of restorative environments, come to a similar analysis of incentives for embedding nature in the urban space. They emphasize, amongst other things, the sense of moving away from the demands and routines of everyday life that nature provides people with (Van den Berg et. al. 2007, 84). The urban landscape consists, as stated before, of human selected elements and thus creates an environment that constantly reproduces social life. Combined with the earlier mentioned acceleration of the pace of life, the 'demands of everyday life' in the urban space are continually forced upon its receiver. Van den Berg et. al. (2007, 90) did research amongst Dutch citizens and concluded that green spaces enhance restoration due to stimulating activity, social inclusion and an aesthetic environment especially in the Netherlands due to its densely populated cities. The garden called the Wilgenhof is an example of the restorative value urban gardens have in Utrecht:

> In the neighborhood called 'Nieuw Engeland', located next to a railroad, people have started gardening together. In between the living area and the railroad there is a green strip of about forty meters wide, stretching along the length of the entire neighborhood. Part of this green strip is used by the people from the neighborhood who started a 'buurttuin' (translated as

'neighborhood-garden'). The garden already exists for over ten years and nowadays about thirty people visit at least weekly. I am welcomed openly and involved immediately in the gardening process. It does not take long for me to help planting trees and soon Annemieke starts walking me around and explaining how the garden works. After the joint coffee-break I have a conversation with Martine, the person I had contact with for visiting the garden. She is one of the coordinators of the organization around the garden.

V: What is the difference between an allotment garden and your garden?

M: We have always been a community-garden, emphasizing the common, the tranquility and the space. But also the roughness, we have places where nature and animals go their own way. (…) Permaculture was also part of this garden, we had the bees over there. And of course, there was a path through it, but it remained a very rough area with many flowers and raspberries.

Martine talks in the past, because about half a year ago their garden was halved in size due to the expansion of the railroad. So now they have to make their garden more efficiently organized to accommodate all participants. However, these changes don't disturb them, they rather emphasize the continuing community-feeling.

M: We have always had, and still have, many common spaces in the garden. For example, here we have the herbs, and potatoes, zucchini. We will keep sharing those crops.

Bert (passerby): That is the added value, we do it together. You can see that today, everybody does something for the shared pieces of land.

M: Most people here I have met in the garden, but now I also see them when I pick up my children from school for example.

The people from the garden organize 'samenwerkdagen' (translated as 'cooperation days') on a weekly basis where they together plant or harvest the shared parts of the garden. But besides enhancing community life amongst people in the neighborhood, it also has an important value to individual being.

V: What do you think is the function of a garden like the Wilgenhof?

M: Being. Not having to do anything but just being. It has a restorative effect in our pressuring lives and the crowded city. There you always have to be busy with something. So it just feels good, even if it is just ten minutes to get some lettuce, you can feel the difference. You get relaxed by just being, instead of having to think: 'What do I have to do?' or 'Let's do this real quick'. In the garden, it is 'wanting to' instead of 'having to'.

Her peaceful words are added with an example, showing the contrast of the garden's value of sharing as opposed to society's push for efficiency:

M: This [gardening] also makes you more conscious about how everything is coherent. For example, we could cover the berries with nets so the birds won't get at them, but then a bird will try anyway and might get stuck and die. We don't want that because we learn here that this bird also has its function, so we shouldn't get in its way too much. So what we did is have a place where the birds can eat their share, and another place where we have ours.

She continues to explain how, in line with most other gardens, they have bees and flowers to simulate nature's life cycle. Something through which the gardens create an inspirational environment.

M: If we create such a place in here, it's effects will flow through to your everyday life. That is why we try to do everything here in an as natural way possible, because the more natural you do these things, the more natural your life will be. Since I have started being aware of this, my entire life has become more natural. I have started to follow my own nature, looking for what fits me instead of trying to fit myself to some idea I need to fit in.[18]

The conversation with Martine is typical for how people experience the urban gardens in Utrecht. The tranquility and peace that people find here reflect their longing for qualitative interaction with people, nature and life in general. The urban life, full of its pressuring demands, lacks a space where people can escape societal pressure. Therefore people have created these gardens in which they act in a *state of being*, with no strings attached, creating an atmosphere of appreciation of the self and the community.

A confluence of human and nature

In her book, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins, Anna Tsing (2015) explores the appearance of alternatives to the capitalist mode of life centered around progress and accumulation. In the first chapter of this thesis, I have explored the societal dynamics in which the urban gardens find their roots, following the theory of social innovation responding to societal failure in creating the life conditions that people need. Based on the first chapter we can distinguish a lack of connection with the ecological environment, a lack of acceptance of and peace with a stable mode of being, and a lack of belonging to social and communal life. Above, I argued that

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[18] Recorded interview with Martine 1-4-17

the dominating capitalist ideology has made all elements of life to serve the purpose of (economic) growth, which in contemporary society equals progress. Progress, however, is in fact the notion of individual accumulation of capital in disguise, appearing as if serving all humans. However, ''progress has stopped making sense'' (Tsing 2015, 25) resulting in the appearance of alternatives like urban agriculture.

The current era is being called the Anthropocene, underlining the supposed domination of humanity over the planet. Humanity believes it can subject anything on the planet to serve its own purpose of progress. Philosopher Daniel Quinn explains this hierarchical approach of the human-nature relationship as humanity believing themselves to be the Gods controlling and ruling life (Quinn 1992). He explains that humanity has stepped out of what he calls the ''Law of the Community of Life'' which keeps balance within the ecological system. No longer does mankind have to fear vulnerability towards other beings on earth, since it now controls all elements of life. Similarly, Tsing names the condition of precarity which humanity aims to rule out of its own existence. However, both Quinn and Tsing state that ruling out this precarity, which is what keeps balance in life on earth, is what eventually destroys the possibility of human existence (Quinn 1992; Tsing 2015, 20). Humanity has come to believe that life serves us, rather than we serve life.

Domination over life however, has not lead to unilateral stories of success. The flipside of progress is expressed in society lacking to provide a connection to the ecological environment, a way of dealing with an acceleration of society, and a feeling of belonging to the community. As a form of adaptation to the conditions of life, people gather into what Tsing (2015, 22) calls 'world-making projects' that represent alternative modes of life. Urban agriculture initiatives are assemblages of people who want to practice life in an ecologically sound and collaborative way. They create world-making projects that assemble human and non-human, gardeners, pollinators, plants, animals, earth life, weather conditions and more. A woman gardening in Utrecht once explained that she never got the opportunity to eat the strawberries from her garden because birds kept being ahead of hear. I asked her why not put a net over it? But that was not what she intended to do at all: ''*If the birds ate my strawberries, then that is what they needed to do*''[19]. With an ideology of progress comes a fetishism of purpose. Every action needs to be in accordance to an intended future which has better prospects compared to the current existence. In the urban gardens that I have studied, however, there is no future purpose or notion of progress. In these gardens, people, plants, compost heaps, bees, insects and many other elements of life exist in a shared mode of *being*.

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[19] Informal conversation with informant 8-7-17

Social urban agriculture

The meaning of both *urban* and *agriculture* are above explained as oriented towards quantitative purposes serving the capitalist ideology of accumulation. The formation of dense-populated city-areas finds its roots in an ideology of efficiency and progress (Harvey 1978, 115), whilst agriculture, due to technological innovations has become subjected to the logic of capital (Rigi 2007, 56) and the food system nowadays is dominated by a notion of utilitarianism (Tsing 2015, 40). These realizations add to a broader notion of the economization of society. This process of economization of society affects all facets of life for both human and nature, and therefore I come to Foucault's concept of bio-power. Foucault (1978, 139-141) uses bio-power, an element inseparable from the rise of capitalism, which encompasses the power over biology, to explain how biological life is subverted to the will of the sovereign. The sovereign in a capitalist society aims to mechanize life and use the its bodies as machines for accumulation. I use Foucault's ideas to explain the upcoming of urban agriculture, because his conceptualization of this mechanization of life through the idea of sovereignty makes social activity like urban agriculture understandable as a movement of contestation. The machinic utilitarianism that dominates modernity's urban space and agricultural practices is the result of the sovereign power of capitalist actors. They attempt to optimize the capabilities of biological life by integrating it ''into systems of efficient and economic controls'' (Foucault 1978, 139). However, this quantification of biological life has its limits, indicated by a social movement towards valuing qualitive modes of life. The appreciation of, and search for life's qualitative rewards such as sensorial delight, social satisfaction and a downshift from the fast pace of everyday life, indicate a movement of distancing from the utilization of the body as a machine. Therefore, paradoxically, the urban space and agricultural practices do not only represent the capitalist mode of productivity, but also offer the potential for its alternatives. The urban space is an environment where community-life thrives and social innovation can take place (Davoudi and Stead 2002, 270). At the same time, agriculture has the potential to revitalize the connection between human and nature, moving away from the submission of nature into the creation of a mutual beneficial relationship (Holmgren 2012; Lyson 2005).

The activity of urban agriculture discussed in this thesis would therefore be best defined as *social urban agriculture*, in that both the urban and agriculture should be understood as social mediators rather than economic suppliers. It is not their potential for efficiency and productivity that is utilized in these initiatives, but rather their function as facilitating a interhuman and nature-human connection. Through the cultivation of plants, people learn about the basic elements of life that are practiced in the connection to nature and production of food as essential element of life. At the same time, this activity connects them to other people in the community and creates an area where not only food but also social capital can be harvested. Eventually, this movement represents a shift away from

an ideology of capital accumulation towards a shared notion of a social and environmental appreciation.

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Putting the concepts *urban* and *agriculture* together provokes a discussion about the meaning of both concepts, and their fusion as 'urban agriculture'. In the above chapter, I have aimed to describe what societal dynamics underlie the emergence of a social movement given this oxymoronic name. The use of 'social movement' in this sense is not to be understood as a group of people who assemble to discuss how they want to change society following different ideological causes. Rather, it is the movement of society that follows the people who shape it through their actions. The industrial revolution created a movement towards a system of productivity, commodification and accumulation that has come to be referred to as 'capitalism'. In a similar way, although I do not aim to compare the impact of urban agriculture with either the industrial revolution or capitalism, local gardening practices tell us what social dynamics are at play. Analyzing these dynamics enables us to see what trends constitute the current movement of society.

The movement urban agriculture reveals, is that of innovative ways of dealing with increasing global processes of urbanization and loss of human-nature connection. Urbanization is characterized by a time-space compression of the urban area which establishes itself in both individual time and common space being subjected to a logic of efficiency and productivity (Harvey 1978; Smart and Smart 2003). At the same time, agriculture, approached from a perspective of human-nature relationship and interaction, has become distanced from urban life. Where the rural area once served as food provider for local urban residents, this has now moved into a global food supply chain system. In other words, agriculture itself has become rationalized and commodified based on a notion of utilitarianism (Scrinis and Lyons 2007; Tsing 2015). By embedding a form of agriculture based on a sensorial connection between human and nature into the urban space, modernity's notions of both agriculture and the urban are contested. This contestation is what I propose to be the movement that urban agriculture contributes to, a movement that finds its roots in a sustainable human-nature and human-human interconnectivity. The following interlude will demonstrate how *social urban agriculture* is realized in the shape of an urban garden in Overvecht, Utrecht.

Interlude: Social urban agriculture in Overvecht

The neighborhood Overvecht, on the North end of the city of Utrecht, has a bad reputation. The general idea about the neighborhood is that people are poor and unhealthy, that there is a high rate of cultural diversity and much criminality. It is not an impression solely carried by outsiders, since many insiders follow similar stereotypes. But this image does not account for all the inhabitants of the area. The Voedseltuin Overvecht is a place where a different light is shed on the community life in this neighborhood.

7. The Voedseltuin Overvecht next to the playground and apartment building.

In the middle of Overvecht, there is a big city park called The Gagel. Surrounded by monotone concrete apartment buildings, it is experienced as a green oasis in a sea of grey. The park has been built on top of the ruins of old buildings that have been torn down. Nowadays, however, it is a park with much greenspace where people can walk, skate, cycle or sit. On the north end of the park there is a petting zoo and a playground. This is where the main activity of the park is at, especially on Wednesday afternoons when kids are out of school early. Here the Voedseltuin Overvecht[20] is located with two gardens, one within and another outside the fences of the petting zoo. It is near the end of

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[20] Translation from Dutch: Food garden Overvecht.

the winter season when I first visit the garden. Together with the garden coordinator, Mark, and two participants, Alieke and Ramon, we spend our Friday morning spading the garden. The cold (even some snowflakes fall) does not keep them from preparing the garden for the next season. During the morning, all three independently mention the image of deprivation that clouds over Overvecht. My presence as researcher and citizen from another neighborhood, triggers the necessity of giving an alternative point of view to the image they expect me to have about Overvecht. They acknowledge the neighborhood has some issues, but are frustrated by the one-sided view that is presented. According to them, Overvecht is a place of opportunities and has much to offer. The existence and persistence of the Voedseltuin is the embodiment of their proposition. On sunshiny days, people walk in with their children to see how things grow and help gardening. Every Thursday a group of physically handicapped people work in the garden which, according to their supervisor, is a trigger to get out into the community more often. People who walk by stop to have a chat and ask what is planted and others just work in the garden the entire day, chitchatting about all there is to talk about. The community of and around the Voedseltuin shares a positive and inclusive attitude. However, the garden is not unanimously met with positivity. Mark explains that many people are afraid of the garden. He continues to say that people fear the garden might become yet another initiative in Overvecht to fail and reproduce the negative image of the neighborhood, reaffirming their feeling of hopelessness. People fear such initiatives because it makes them vulnerable as an individual, but also as a community.

> There is a fence around the Voedseltuin. In urban places, much property is fenced to protect it from harm. The notion of 'fencing' is a response of security towards a feeling of vulnerability. During the second month of my presence as a researcher, a second garden is opened next to the first one. On a Monday evening, during an open session, a group of about ten people discusses the construction of the second Voedseltuin. What is special about this garden is that the piece of land is outside the fences of the petting zoo. But this also leads to some discussion.

> I learn from conversations with Mark, that the fence around the first garden is something that bothers him. In his opinion, it forms a barrier for people to enter the garden. To explain why the fence forms a barrier, he gives an example of a man I will here call Peter. Peter is an old guy who lives nearby the garden and goes in a mobility scooter. Mark explains that during summer he sees Peter often and makes a chat with him. However, Peter never wants to come into the garden, regardless of Mark asking him to do so. According to Mark he always has excuses why he shouldn't do it, although the garden is wheelchair friendly. Mark thinks the fence gives Peter a feeling of safety and he doesn't want to cross that border, otherwise he might get involved with things he doesn't want. The fence, in this way, has a double meaning

for Mark. It protects the garden, but it also opposes the purpose of the garden as social inclusive place.

When we start being concrete about the design of the garden, everybody seems to agree that there should be a fence around it to make it appear as something private, so that people will treat it with respect. The discussion about the fence continues, however, about what kind of fence is needed. Amongst the attendants, there is a representative of the

7. Second Voedseltuin, with sheep fence

neighborhood who lives in the apartments next to the garden. He is not a gardener himself, but wants to make sure the non-gardening people have a saying too. Sarcastically, he says that no fence will protect the garden from the vandalistic youth in the neighborhood, except for maybe a military cordon. His response makes me think about Mark's observation made earlier, that people fear failure of the garden. The representative's response does not come from unwillingness to have a garden in the park. Rather, this man wants to protect the people around him, and therewith himself, from disappointment. During the meeting, his negative view on the safety of the neighborhood runs into resistance with the gardeners. Yes, there is always the possibility of vandalism, but that is something they will adapt to, and not by barricading the area. Eventually they decide to have a ''sheep-fence'' for the first couple of years, until a hedge suffices as natural fence. It will have two gateways that face the inside of the park, as to attract people to walk into the garden. It has to be socially inclusive for all.

The initiators of the Voedseltuin Overvecht, Marianne and Ans, started with the idea of counteracting problems like poverty, loneliness, health issues, social exclusion, and unemployment in Overvecht. They chose to start a food garden because the cultivation of food empowers people by creating a notion of independence due to the knowledge and skill of growing food. Besides that, Ans explains that ''food connects'' because everybody needs it. Food enhances connectivity and community. Gardening, according to Ans, is a very easy-going way to get a diverse group of people to work together and get to know each other. It is a way to emphasize similarities as opposed to the many differences that are often named in the cultural diverse neighborhood that Overvecht is. Marianne adds that a garden like this creates a positive image in the neighborhood: ''It makes people proud to be part of it

and gives them a sense of belonging'', and Ans continues ''we want to create a place where people want to be part of''[21]. Thus, the aim of Marianne and Ans is to change the negative notion that people have about living in Overvecht, into feelings of pride about what people in Overvecht establish together. The two photos below (see picture 8 and 9) display the second Voedseltuin, which was established during my fieldwork period. The photos demonstrate how a fallow piece of land is turned into a functioning garden within a period of four months, ranging from March until July 2017. We can see here the aesthetic value it adds to the neighborhood, together with the pride people will take from being part of establishing such a functional area from scratch.

8. Fallow land of the second Voedseltuin on the 15th of March '17

9. Functioning garden of the second Voedseltuin on the 26th of July '17

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The second chapter covered two main arguments. Agricultural practices in the initiatives that are part of this research emphasize the human-nature relationship in a social way, disposing of the unilateral approach of plants and nature serving economic purposes. Furthermore, the urban space used by these initiatives is modified from a place built around consumerist efficiency into a place facilitating community-life and individual being. In Overvecht, what Hillier (2013, 17) calls *lacks* of society, are more present than in any other neighborhood in Utrecht. It is seen as a place where poor people live, being thought of as a problematic area. But it is exactly because of the image Overvecht represents that the Voedseltuin shows the power and potential of social innovation. In a place where people are afraid of personal and communal failure, the collaboration between inhabitants has led to the creation of an atmosphere of positivity and possibility. Here, people create possibilities for life in capitalist ruins. In what follows, the attempt of urban agriculture to appear as alternative will be discussed within the

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[21] Recorded interview with Marianne and Ans 19-5-17

political climate in which it must establish and maintain its existence. Here I will connect the practice of social urban agriculture applied to a global context of social movement to the reality of (local) governance.

Chapter 3 – Society in transition

''Aren't we that neoliberal, that we need to ask ourselves if we can change at all?''[22]

The second chapter discussed the meaning of 'urban agriculture' which concluded in a conceptualization of the initiatives that are part of this research as *social* urban agriculture initiatives. This nuance, adding 'social', gives urban agriculture an extra dimension within political systemic debates, in which the notion of sovereignty is central to the establishment and maintenance of these urban agriculture initiatives. The practice of agriculture in the urban space with a social rather than an economic purpose is contradicting the original purpose of both agricultural practice and urban space. The interlude on social urban agriculture demonstrated that these gardens use qualitative means of being and practicing without expectations, to serve social goals of connecting to nature, society and community. In what follows, the social innovative appearance of urban agriculture will be analyzed within contemporary societal structures that rely on mostly quantitative fundamental values. I will focus on the dual position of bureaucratic units that have to deal with bottom-up initiatives for social innovation whilst working in a system that functions on economic, and therewith possibly conflicting, principles. Policy-makers are positioned as gatekeepers of the bureaucratic system that regulates peoples' everyday life.

Whilst multiple gardens in Utrecht have been established, the recovering Dutch economy attracts contesters for the space these gardening initiatives occupy. In this chapter, I will focus on the position of the Utrecht municipality concerning urban agriculture initiatives. I will show that, on the one hand, governmental institutions practice a form of micropolitics in which they aspire to follow the local constituencies within their domain of policy. On the other hand, they are part of macropolitical structures in a global system of social, political and economic interconnectivity. Analyzing the negotiation around policy-making within this network of interconnectivity shows what structural impact bottom-up social movement has. The perseverance of the local governments' (financial) support and spatial allocation to urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht in a period of economic recovery enhances conflicting interests. Therefore, the following chapter will focus on the Utrecht municipality's position towards urban agriculture initiatives, and the interaction between top-down systems and bottom-up contestation in negotiating the potential for social initiatives like urban agriculture.

This chapter starts with arguing that social innovative practice thrives by governmental exceptions to neoliberal policy to support social initiatives in a capitalist system of competition. Following, I will zoom in to explain how the bureaucratic system of the local government works in

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[22] Informal conversation Ineke 29-4-17

practice, using the Utrecht municipality and their process of *turning* as an example of shifting paradigms in local policy-making in the Netherlands. Finally, such developments will be discussed within the discourse of processes of transition in policy-making, from a perspective of the dichotomy between both quantitative and qualitative values, and a top-down and bottom-up approach of policy implementation.

Exceptions to neoliberalism

As noted in the previous chapters, the rise of urban agriculture proposes an alternative to the quantification of life due to a capitalist ideology of economic efficiency and accumulation. The position of the government in the balancing of the capitalist ideology and its alternatives can be traced into the concept of neoliberalism. Ong (2007, 4) notes how neoliberalism is often understood as a force advocating the ideas of capitalism, but explains that in fact, neoliberalism is a way of governing rather than the spreading of ideological thoughts of a certain kind. Therefore, the conjunction with capitalism is unjust. Neoliberalism allows people to manage their own everyday life, the mode of life itself is left undefined. However, in Western society this neoliberal rationality gave space for an ideological domination based on the logic of capital. Harvey (2007, 33-35) explains how neoliberalism made place for the ruling class to increase their influence in the public domain, propagating the capitalist ideology of competition and constant growth. Hence, neoliberalism did not purposely establish capitalist domination, but it enabled the ruling class to seize ideological power. However, Harvey (2007, 35) argues, the government maintains a crucial position in legitimizing power with their ability to influence existing structures. This governmental ability is explained in another of Ong's works. She proposes two ways of neoliberal modes of governing, distinguishing between *neoliberalism as exception*, which means sovereign rule without regulation of the state, and *exceptions to neoliberalism*, being the state engaging in social protection (Ong 2006, 3-4). The 'self-managing' mode of neoliberalism as exception has given space for the logic of capital to become the contemporary dominating ideology. However, exception to neoliberalism is about excepting certain space or policy-making from the logic of capital that has come to dominate neoliberal rationality (Ong 2006, 4). In other words, when applying to the context of this research in Utrecht, under the governance of the Netherlands, neoliberal governing enhances capitalist development since the logic of capital is the contemporary dominant ideology. Therefore, to counteract this rule of capitalist logic, the government must make exceptions to their neoliberal policy to empower non-capitalist movements. In a society based on capital accumulation, social initiatives that built on other assumptions of value have little ground to stand on due to top-down systems that structure global and local governance. As Okongwu and Mencher (2000, 110) point

out, local policy cannot be separated from global actors to which not only political entities belong, but also organizations like the World Bank or multinational corporations like Monsanto. To move in a system where such powerful actors influence the systemic structures, an alliance between citizens and local policy-makers is necessary. Therefore, local actors who provide an alternative, are longing for and depend on governmental support to maintain their existence.

Social innovation in a bureaucratic system

The process of policy-making and implementation happens on various levels of governance. For this research, the analysis of local governance is most relevant. As the closest representation of governance the municipality is frequently accused of being 'bureaucratic'. Bureaucracy, within governmental institutions, is the implementation of policy into everyday reality. Bernstein and Mertz (2011, 6-7) point out that bureaucracy is often approached as a systemic maze that counteracts the agency of citizens. However, they refute this idea by stating that bureaucracy should be seen as a social enactment of policy, rather than a mechanical, lifeless entity. In line with this argument, Hoag (2011, 82) states that bureaucratic processes are enacted by the 'bureaucrats' who are the gatekeepers to the governmental system. These bureaucrats are in the position to interpret policies, which always need adjustment to local contexts. In that sense, the bureaucrats' interpretation creates room for collective agency, with their role being the translator of the demands of social actors onto policies and vice versa. The appearance of social innovative projects like urban agriculture initiatives are the public manifestation of these social demands. In line with both Hoag and Bernstein and Mertz, I would therefore say that bureaucrats are not only gatekeeper of the policy-system, but as political facilitators a crucial actor in social innovation. For this reason, the interaction between urban agriculture initiatives and the local municipality is analyzed as a significant element of the process of social innovation.

When having conversations with civil servants, experts or citizens, there was a general acknowledgement of a changing conduct of the local government concerning policy-making and implementation. Instead of *steering* citizens towards pre-established purposes, there is a national shift in the Netherlands towards *following* citizens' initiatives and innovation. The official terminology used for this shifting process is 'kantelen', which translates as *turning*. A civil servant explains to me how this works in practice:

> *If we for example look at Northwest Utrecht, an area of which we know people have a high average in health issues, something that goes together with a lower average income. As a municipality, we want to counteract this inequality and solve the health issues. One thing we know is that health*

issues in these areas many times come with high averages of smoking and drinking, so this would be a start to reduce the health issues. However, people that live there are reluctant to see the government come to their neighborhood telling them to stop smoking and drinking. Previous policy-making and implementation would aim directly at these measures against smoking and drinking. Our current approach however, is to engage in the neighborhood and see what health-related topics are present in the area. For example, in Northwest we noticed that sport is an important theme in many peoples' everyday lives. So, what we then try to do is see how we can get more people engaged with sports, by creating a network of sport-related people and organizations in the area to get connected and strengthen each other. In that way, we support people's initiative concerning sport, and indirectly health. We aren't going to interfere, but try to support these people and organizations so they feel backed by the government and have the means and space to evolve and involve the neighborhood. This is the new approach that is the result of the 'turning'-movement within the government.[23]

For the context of this research, it is important to understand the position of the Dutch government towards social innovation. Van den Berg (2013) did research to the shifting paradigm of the Dutch citizen-government interaction. Her analysis, starting in 2011, charts how Dutch policy used to be built around the concept of the welfare state, it has moved to what they call a 'participatiesamenleving', which translates into a 'society of participation'. By doing so, the government aims to create a society build intrinsic motivation rather than civic duty, as is demonstrated in the example of health issues above. However, Van den Berg points out that the communication of this new approach does not equal the implementation of it (Van den Berg 2013, 12-13). In line with the above made argument of the bureaucratic system being crucial in facilitating social innovation, Van den Berg (2013, 17) states that support of the governmental institutions is necessary for Dutch bottom-up projects to break through the power structures that occupy urban 'public' space.

In their book 'We Own The City', Miazzo and Kee (2014) use several case studies to describe the development of bottom-up urban planning. They describe contemporary urban space as 'institutionalized', being contested by a growing movement of citizens' participation in the organization of urban space. Moving away from the top-down ruling means shifting away from a top-down implementation of political ideology and a society of consumers, towards a society of co-decision makers and a collaborative mode of constructing society (Miazzo and Minkjan 2014, 2). Their extensive study on the interaction between bottom-up innovative urban practices and the local government show that ''(…) there is a moment when institutions employ unusual, progressive methods that help the local community to take (conceptual) ownership of the progress, and sometimes of the final

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[23] Recorded interview with Ineke 21-4-17

results'' (Miazzo 2014, 284). This analysis shows how social innovation thrives by an interpretation of policy applied to the local context. For it is through the co-operation of these political gatekeepers and the social innovators that existing structures in (urban) policy, or 'the system', are contested.

Transition in policy-making

Hacking (1991, 181) explains how statistics have become integrated into social sciences and created a 'bureaucratic machinery'. He continues to state that social laws to which we live in society have become subjected to statistics (Hacking 1991, 182), classifying social life and determining how people are expected to live following norms based on these statistics (Hacking 1991, 193-194). In line with Hacking I argue that statistics have quantified social life. This is what we see in the everyday life where qualitative actions and actors are being rated by a fetishist appreciation of numbers. Hacking (1991, 194) gives an example of the research on happiness in social sciences, which encompasses the measurement of criminality, prostitution and hygiene as determinants for rating happiness. Looking at similar measurements tells us that for example Overvecht in Utrecht is a poor neighborhood, with a high rate of criminality and low health conditions. However, this is in comparison to other Dutch neighborhoods and the means of numbers. According to Hacking, this is typical for the quantitative universe: ''deviation from the mean became the norm'' (Hacking 1991, 190). It therefore is not surprising that the Voedseltuin in Overvecht steps away from this categorization and quantification of life and creates an alternative feeling based on quality. Mark, the coordinator of the garden, explains to me: ''*The value of the Voedseltuin is not measurable in quantitative facts. I could write down the number of participants in the mailing-list or tell how much food we get off the land, but that does not explain the garden. The real story cannot be measured in numbers, it is the qualitative value that creates the garden's added value to peoples' lives''*[24].

The urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht, I argue, represent a movement towards an appreciation of quality over quantity. However, this movement occurs in a society occupied by a quantitative philosophy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the urban gardens are in a constant struggle to maintain themselves financially. There is no earning model that keeps the agriculture initiatives running in the urban space of financial competition and growth. To keep their initiative going they sell some of their yield or ask for a contribution by the participants, but they mostly rely on governments' and corporations' subsidies and funds, especially when initiating. Van den Berg's (2013, 17) research on the value of life in the urban space points out that in the Netherlands economic values are prioritized over social values. The result is an awkward position. Social urban gardens, which pursue

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[24] Informal conversation with Mark 31-3-17

no quantitative goals, have to prove their added value within a quantitative system. The line between added value and redundancy is thin in this situation. Hans, as initiator of both the Kasteeltuin and Food for Good, is occupied with getting his projects connected to the relevant people within the municipality. Having experience with different methods of approach, he tells me that he ''*only get things done at the municipality with stories*''[25]. He says that the civil servants, who I have previously mentioned to be the gatekeepers of the bureaucratic system, can either decide to stick their necks out for you, or tell you to look somewhere else to get things done. Qualitative stories, Hans argues, get people involved emotionally and makes them willing to put more effort in it than a set of numbers proving economic value. This observation shows the interaction taking place between the bureaucratic machinery and bureaucrats' implementation of policies. Hans also recognizes the process of *turning* which he calls a shift from ''*the systemic world to the living world*''[26]. The qualitative approach becomes visible in an interview I had with two civil servants who are involved with urban agriculture in Utrecht. In a conversation of about one and a half hour they solely mentioned qualitative stories from urban gardens. They explained the value of urban gardens in terms of social and qualitative benefits, rather than statistics or numbers. They used terms as 'zingeving' (translated as *a purpose in life*), 'ergens bijhoren' (translated as *belonging*) and 'afleiding van de dagelijkse sleur' (translated as *distraction from daily drag*). The idea of 'ontstressen' (translated as *deceleration*) is explained more detailed:

> ''*What we also saw was that many people [from urban agriculture initiatives] said it is a moment of peace for them, a moment of destressing. So you could say that it [gardening] works well for loneliness and mental wellbeing. Many people have many problems which they sometimes can't handle. What helps them is to 'be', work with plants, and clear their minds.*''[27]

At the same time, whilst there is appreciation for the qualitative stories from the field of urban agriculture, to justify the presence of urban agriculture initiatives there are attempts of trying to quantify their added value. For example, the Socio-economic Cost and Benefits Analysis quantifies the value of urban gardens in the Netherlands (Abma et. al. 2013). The fact that a quantitative analysis based on financial costs and benefits is necessary to justify social initiatives that only aim for qualitative goals, shows how thoroughly the philosophy of quantification and capital is embedded in the Dutch local and national government and policy. Hans explains that his efforts are mainly to try to move within or get around the 'system', in cooperation with civil servants who are willing to do the same. Here we recognize the image of a bureaucratic machinery counteracting citizens' agency. However, the effort put into the use of other, qualitative means, forms the basis for a process of structural

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[25] Recorded interview Hans 2-5-17
[26] Recorded interview Hans 2-5-17
[27] Recorded interview with Anne Marie and Katharina 6-2-17

transition. Rotmans, Kemp and van Asselt (2001, 16) use the term *transition* as the process of transformation of society's structures. When considering transition in social organization, they argue, it is a slow process that takes place on different scales they distinguish. According to them, the macroscale can be influenced by local practices and bottom-up pressure. They emphasize that transition accelerates if local behavior is supported by multiscale developments in policy-making (Rotmans et. al. 2001, 19-20). Still, as a response to the growing amounts of literature about such transitions, Shove and Walker (2007) demand caution for the alluring optimism that these studies represent. Responding to, among others, Rotmans and Kemp, they state literature tends to overestimate agency within the system, emphasizing the arbitrary line between spaces of agency and barriers of structure.

Often there is a line drawn between bottom-up and top-down actors. However, as in most social situations, this line is actually an area of blurriness where bottom-up and top-down overlap. During my fieldwork, this blurriness becomes apparent when I learn that one of the gardeners at the Koningshof also works for the Utrecht municipality. As I introduce her to my research topic, it becomes evident that her line of thought follows that of social innovative practices like urban agriculture initiatives. She invited me to the city hall for an interview and we had a conversation about many topics like neoliberalism, social innovation, top-down and bottom-up interaction and left- or right-wing politics. Being in conversation with her, I realized that she represents the images of top-down policy-making and bottom-up social innovation at the same time. She explained to me how the process of *turning* works in practice, how she works with projects that follow citizens' initiatives. At the same time, when we talked about urban agriculture specifically, she said: *''I think this [gardening] would be one of the first domains where you can feel that you can empower as a citizen within the world around you''*[28]. She continued saying *''when I was young I was missing a social connection with the people living around me (…), something I now realize was due to the culture of economism, where everything was about earning money''*. Analyzing her own words, she stated that *''this is only a temporary phase in the history of humanity, which currently shows its backlash''*. When comparing this conversation to the theoretical outline above, about neoliberal and capitalist ideologies operating in a governmental bureaucratic system that implements this philosophy in society through its policies, I can only think that this civil servant represents the exact opposite of these thoughts. She shows signs of contestation as a citizen against the structures of top-down systems that restrict agency, whilst at the same time she is the embodiment of these top-down structures within local politics.

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[28] Recorded interview with Ineke 21-4-17

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In the methodological note of this thesis, I distinguished the micro- and macropolitics that are at play in social innovation according to various authors (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010; Hillier 2013). Macropolitcs, I argued in line with these authors, concerns top-down movements of implementation and regulation. The macropolitical is often mentioned together with vague terminology like 'structures' and 'systems'. However, we should not see them as the monstrous mechanisms that are sometimes portrayed, but rather as our own administration of norms and values, interaction and interconnectivity. This chapter started with pointing out that neoliberalism as an approach to governing enhanced the ideology of capitalism to grow. The philosophy of subjecting life to capital has ever since been central to Western thought. The government, however, still has the position to call for *exceptions to neoliberalism* and facilitate alternatives to develop. With the Dutch government *turning* their mode of interpreting policy, choosing to facilitate citizens' initiative rather than implement their own projects, there is a fundamental movement within governing that makes place for social innovation to thrive. However, alternating such a mindset within the system of bureaucracy does not happen from one day to the other. Social innovation, being the innovative movement of micropolitics, interacts with capitalist macropolitics through the gatekeepers working at governmental positions. In the context of this research it is the civil servants working at the municipality of Utrecht who represent and conduct policy. Their position as gatekeepers explain social innovation as the collaboration between top-down and bottom-up movement in applying micropolitical actions within a system of macropolitical structures.

The three chapters in this thesis together show the micropolitical movement, the coming-into-being of macropolitics, and finally, in this chapter, the interaction between both. Together, they reveal societal dynamics resulting into micropolitical forms of agency, empowerment and the activity of shaping society through social interaction and practice. By indirect and often even unconscious actions, existing politics of capitalism are contested by alternative values of caring, being and belonging.

Conclusion

When I set out to do research among gardeners in urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht, I was pondering about the position the Anthropologist has towards both its research participants and the academic world. I decided that my research had to be written towards bridging societal and academic relevance. I therefore included the process of policy-making as one of three main aims of this research, to endorse myself as advocate anthropologist and make my analyses applicable beyond the academic world. This thesis has been built up to stay close to the field, devoting the first chapter and both interludes to ethnographic descriptions of urban gardening. Tsing (2015, 22) uses the concept of 'world-making projects' to explain that social reality is constantly made and remade through interactivity with our environment, posing alternatives to existing realities. Each world-making project has its own story, whilst at the same time they are all part of a rhizomatic structure of global interconnectedness. In the urban gardens people perform their own world-making project, contravening modern society's processes of rationalization, differentiation, individualization and instrumental domestication (Rosa 2003, 4-5). I followed a Deleuzean method of tracing lines of flight to explain the coming into being of these world-making projects as urban agriculture initiatives in Utrecht. I have traced the assemblage of lines that have appeared in the physical manifestation of urban gardens, by analyzing them as what Hillier (2013) and Mulgan et. al. (2007) have called *social innovation*. They are an act of agency to offer people what society lacks to provide. Including the position of the (local) government to such social innovation gives the opportunity for both the urban gardeners and the local policy-makers to get a better understanding of each other's activities, constraints and possibilities, enhancing future cooperation in Utrecht and else.

Revealing societal lacks

I analyzed the practice of urban gardening from the perspective that all practices are social (Shove et. al. 2012), and can therefore be traced into social meaning. In the urban gardens, I distinguished three underlying societal dynamics. The first presents itself as an increased distancing of humanity from nature. This trend is opposed by a growing interest in ecological knowledge which leads to the establishment of a renewed socio-ecological relationship. Second, an accelerated society has created excessive societal pressure, resulting in the need for people to find places of deceleration, in which they can escape social demands. The gardens are therefore experienced as oases of deceleration. The third meaning of gardening is traced into a loss of sense of self and community. By giving meaning to physical place, together with stimulating community life, the gardens create a sense of belonging to both place and people. These three dynamics and gardening practices constitute the fundamental characteristics of urban agriculture in Utrecht. However, the assumption that the gardeners are

constantly occupied with such underlying meaning to their activity in the garden is wrong. Rather, they are doing the exact opposite: Getting away from such an analytical perspective, by just aerating a compost heap, planting garlic or observing the activity of bees. Still, the values that are embodied in urban agriculture present a movement in society. These practices are the result of and countermovement to social developments following the industrial, technological and agricultural revolution, but also to ideologies of capitalism and an individualization of modern society.

Social innovative practice

Approaching urban agriculture as part of a social movement enables to see the local enactment of urban gardening in Utrecht within a macropolitical framework of structures that shape the contemporary society. The oxymoronic conceptualization as 'urban agriculture' reveals the underlying meaning of the overall practice of urban gardening. The *urban* space, characterized by an organization aiming for progress, is the physical manifestation of capitalism as dominating system in our everyday life (Harvey 1978, 115). Furthermore, *agriculture* reproduces a notion of domination over nature following a philosophy of utilitarianism, subjecting nature to be a human-serving mass-production system (Tsing 2015, 40). In other words, the ideology that urban agriculture conveys, opposes the meaning carried by both 'urban' and 'agriculture'. However, the urban space encourages community life (Davoudi and Stead 2002, 270) and agriculture is the enactment of a collaboration between human and nature (Lyson 2005, 94-96). Thus, a machinic utilitarian approach to both urban space and agriculture shows the capitalist ideology dominating everyday life in contemporary society. The confluence of both into *urban agriculture* epitomizes the social alternative contesting the logic of capital as axis of modern society. For this reason, I called for an understanding of this alternative as *social urban agriculture*, appreciating its fundamental value of life as a social, rather than economic process. It should be noted that we should not see urban agriculture as a large movement that actively refuses the capitalist ideology. Urban agriculture shows microscale movements in society towards a shift from assessing life through quantities, towards aiming for an appreciation of life's qualities. Therefore, I analyzed how this social innovative practice negotiates its position within the field of (local) politics.

Bottom-up and top-down processes

The continuous negotiation of how to order social life is manifested in governmental processes of policy-making and implementation which, in a democracy, represent the social values and demands of the citizens. Governance entails the construction and execution of policies, which is done through a bureaucratic system. Contrary to the popular understanding of bureaucracy as a lifeless machine, we should recognize it as a system operated by people who interpret and implement policies (Hoag 2011,

82). Understanding the bureaucratic system as something human enables us to see it as modifiable and susceptible for transformation through social innovative practice, which can aim to change societal structures through bottom-up processes of contestation (Hillier 2013, 170). Studying social innovative practice and local policy-making revealed that the separation between bottom-up and top-down is an area of blurriness which becomes evident in the enactment of local governance. Civil servants, through interpretation and implementation of policies, serve as gatekeepers to governmental systems. They are the communicating link between policies and citizens and the impact of social innovation shows itself in this process of communication. In Utrecht, governing is in a transition process called *turning,* which supports an approach following citizens' initiative rather than implementing top-down ideas. This shows the intention of empowering social innovative practice, whilst at the same time the government finds itself in awkward positions where conflicting ideals clash (Van den Berg 2013, 12-13). Often this concerns the social angle presented in social innovative process, against economic values that occupy top-down structures. Here I used Ong's (2006, 3-4) theory of *exceptions to neoliberalism* to argue for a position of the government as protector of economic powerless social initiatives as opposed to capitalist structures that dominate a neoliberal political system. It is in the awkward situation where top-down and bottom-up interrelations appear, that we can see to what extend alternative notions of appreciating qualitative value over quantitative results are finding its way into structures of governmental systems.

Discussion

The three chapters in this thesis each have their own narrative to the appearance of urban gardens. In *Gardening,* the practices enacted in the urban gardens show micro activities in Utrecht that concern basic practices like beekeeping, spading the field, and gardening together. This local narrative is added with a global approach given in *Urban agriculture*, relating these activities to macropolitics of capitalism, neoliberalism, and environmentalism. The confluence of both micro- and macroscale politics is analyzed in *Society in transition*, which brings local acts of agency together with global structures of power. Discussing urban agriculture as social movement, responding to societal dynamics within political structures poses a very theoretical insight. Therefore, the two interludes explain how the various topics that are part of this thesis, are inspired by the stories and experiences from the urban gardens. In these gardens, local activity shapes global movement, whilst at the same time global movement is influencing local activity. In other words *"(…) cultural processes of all "place" making and all "force" making are both local and global (…)''* (Tsing 2000, 352). The appearance of urban agriculture at this moment in space and time reveals what contemporary society lacks to provide its people, but also demonstrates how the existence of such shortcomings is remedied through human resilience

shaping society. Social innovation ensures a natural process of social development by guiding both academics and policy-makers. In that way, social innovation is the self-healing power of society. This research has set out to 'spade the field' of urban agriculture practices in Utrecht to reveal the underlying rhizomatic structure that made the appearance of these initiatives possible. By analyzing the social innovative appearance and approaching it from a critical stance towards both urban space, agriculture practice, political systems of governing and social contestation, this research aims to connect academics, policy-makers and social innovators to start a dialogue of how to further shape a society that follows the people who compose it. Therefore, more effort should be put in researching, applying and appreciating the innovative practice that we can find throughout everyday social activity.

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Appendix I: Map of initiatives

The map below shows the urban agriculture initiatives that are part of this research. The Voedseltuin Overvecht and the Koningshof were visited weekly. The Griftsteede, Pioniers, Bikkershof, Wilgenhof, Food for Good and Kasteeltuin Nijevelt were visited by appointment. In each garden, except for the Pioniers, I participated to get a notion of their specificities in practices. I also talked to people and occasionally had interviews. The Moestuin Maarschalkersweerd I visited without appointment to have an impression of its being, since I did use other research done on this urban farm.