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Citation: Hardman, Michael, Chipungu, Lovemore, Magidimisha, Hangwelani, Larkham, Peter, Scott, Alister and Armitage, Richard (2018) Guerrilla gardening and green activism: Rethinking the informal urban growing movement. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 170. pp. 6-14. ISSN 0169-2046

Published by: Elsevier

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2017.08.015>
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2017.08.015>>

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1 **Abstract**

2

3 Green activism and guerrilla gardening lie at the more informal end of the urban food
4 growing movement, but little is known about the extent of this practice or the future of such
5 unplanned activities. Accordingly, this paper firstly explores a range of informal Urban
6 Agriculture practices, illuminating the practice within Europe, North America, Africa and
7 other continents. The paper then proceeds to focus explicitly on Salford, UK, where guerrilla
8 gardening is being encouraged by the local authority. Using ethnographic and interview data,
9 we focus on the actors involved, their relationship with authority and the wider impact of
10 their activities; exploring their motives, aspirations, values and beliefs. The results reveal the
11 ability of the informal movement to regenerate ‘forgotten’ space and bring communities
12 together, and the ‘darker’ side of the activity, with actors sometimes restricting access to
13 colonised land. Ultimately, the paper reveals how this movement is expanding and that more
14 research is required to better understand the actions of those who pursue a more informal
15 approach to urban gardening and those who seek to regulate land use activity.

16

17

18 **1. Introduction**

19

20 With populations rising and cities expanding there is a nascent debate surrounding idea of
21 productive urban landscapes and their ability to tackle food chain disconnects (Wiskerke and
22 Viljoen, 2012). At the forefront of this debate is the practice of Urban Agriculture (UA)
23 which is on the rise across the globe (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; Noori and Benson,
24 2016); fundamentally, the concept revolves around the growing of food or rearing of
25 livestock in cities (Caputo, 2012). Arguments for UA vary, ranging from its potential to cut

26 food supply chains and relocate production closer to urban consumers, to the social
27 contributions of the concept such as its perceived ability to bring together communities
28 through allotments, communal gardens and other such spaces (Gorgolewski et al., 2011;
29 Wiskereke and Viljoen, 2012). The latter is often argued to be the core reason for the practice
30 in the Global North, with yield deemed minimal since spaces are relatively small and used
31 predominantly for recreational purposes (Wiltshire, 2012). Nevertheless, technologies such as
32 hydroponics and aquaponics are testing this argument and enabling vertical systems and high
33 yield even in the smallest of spaces (Hardman and Larkham, 2014). Meanwhile, in the Global
34 South, there is emerging discussion on the importance of UA and its ability to enable citizens
35 in deprived areas to survive through providing the urban poor with much needed access to
36 fresh produce (Chipungu et al., 2015).

37

38 Urban growing encompasses an array of practices and spaces, from traditional allotments to
39 community gardens and larger spaces such as urban farms and rooftop developments. Yet to
40 date many of these spaces are poorly defined and explored (Caputo, 2012). If we take the
41 example of an urban farm, it becomes clear how this larger form of UA not only lacks
42 coverage in both academic and non-academic literature, but also a distinct definition, with
43 Hanson et al.'s (2012: 5) attempt perhaps closest: 'an urban farm is an intentional effort by an
44 individual or a community to grow its capacity for self-sufficiency and well-being through
45 the cultivation of plants/animals'. Indeed, the very notion of UA is contested, with questions
46 surrounding whether the term focuses purely on food growing activities or constitutes any
47 form of agricultural activity within the city context (Lohrberg et al., 2015).

48



49

50 Figure 1: The world's largest rooftop urban farm in Brooklyn, New York City, USA

51 (Hardman, 2015)

52

53 In terms of exemplars of UA practice, figure 1 depicts a large-scale form of the activity, in
54 this case Brooklyn Grange Rooftop Farm in New York City, USA. The figure highlights the
55 potential for UA and how the practice can involve projects which employ gardeners and
56 operate as a business, with the project shown in the figure growing some 50,000lbs of
57 vegetables each year (Brooklyn Grange Rooftop Farm, n.d.). This large-scale form of activity
58 is growing, with companies such as Gotham Greens (2016) starting new UA projects across
59 North America and employing more people within the sector. Within the UK there is a rise in
60 this large-scale form of the practice, with aqua farms, hydroponic, rooftop and conventional
61 urban farms appearing more and more (see for instance Sustainable Food Cities, 2017).

62

63 Proponents of UA often cite Detroit (USA) and Havana (Cuba) as exemplars in which the
64 practice has made significant impacts in cities: regenerating space, feeding residents in
65 deprived areas and helping to create more sustainable economies (Giorda, 2012; Ioannou et

66 al., 2016). In both these spaces, UA has been successful and contributes significantly to both
67 economies. This has in turn enabled residents of the two cities to have better access to food
68 and obtain new skills which could help with future employment opportunities. There are
69 other exemplars, such as New York City's urban farms and community gardens (McKay,
70 2011) alongside high-tech projects in Singapore (see One World, 2012).

71

72 Within academia, an recent argument surrounds the potential for UA to create a more socially
73 'just' food system (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011). Whilst the link between food justice and UA
74 has a solid research base in North America, there is little exploration elsewhere, particularly
75 in the European and UK contexts (Tornaghi, 2014). There is also emerging research which
76 focuses on the multiple environmental benefits derived through UA, particularly its
77 contribution to regulating and provisioning ecosystem services (UKNEAFO, 2014). However
78 this has led to calls for more research around the risk associated with such practices,
79 particularly in relation to the contaminated land upon which many of the projects are
80 constructed (Chipungu et al., 2015). Yet, whilst there is a blossoming research base on the
81 formal element of UA, there is scant regard for researching the more informal approaches
82 (Zanetti, 2007).

83

84 Indeed, evidence demonstrates how many successful UA projects began through an informal
85 approach and legitimised to seize on funding and opportunities to grow their action (Hardman
86 and Larkham, 2014). Guerrilla gardening is a broad term which is associated with actors
87 occupying space for the growing of vegetables or plants without permission (McKay, 2011).
88 Guerrilla gardening is a global movement and is apparent in every country, from Africa to
89 China, the USA and UK, students, businessmen, the elderly and others are regularly
90 practising the activity (Reynolds, 2008). The perception that guerrilla gardening is merely

91 small-scale is incorrect, with the global Incredible Edible movement and many more formal
92 projects owing their success to the informal practice (Scott et al., 2013). This paper explores
93 informal UA and provides an insight into practices around the globe, drawing on a range of
94 case studies before focussing on a local authority in the UK which is actively encouraging
95 citizens to adopt a more informal route.

96

97

98 **2. Pursuing an Informal Agenda**

99

100 'Guerrilla gardening has seen increased practice and popular media coverage over
101 the last 5 years, but has yet to receive much attention from the academic sphere.

102 This is likely due to guerrilla gardenings' conceptual fuzziness – its relational and
103 contextual nature makes collapsing it to a specific definition difficult'

104 (Crane et al., 2013: 76)

105

106 In a similar manner to the wider practice of UA, the idea of an informal approach is ill-
107 defined and elusive. When raised, the informal movement is often linked to the idea of
108 guerrilla gardening, a broad term which encompasses any form of growing activity conducted
109 without the permission of the land owner (McKay, 2011; Reynolds, 2008). In academic
110 literature the two are used alongside one another uncritically, often without a clear definition
111 of either practice. Guerrilla gardening is a militaristic term and is often stigmatised as an
112 activity of younger radicals with a deep political agenda (see for instance McKay, 2011).
113 Furthermore, there is often a perception that those practising guerrilla gardening are adopting
114 an illegal rather than merely an informal approach (Adams et al., 2013; Hung, 2017).

115

116 With the lack of arrests and no documented prosecutions, guerrilla gardening is more
117 appropriately conceptualised as an informal act as opposed to an illegal act (Adams et al.,
118 2015; Reynolds, 2008). Although no guerrillas have been arrested, there are several instances
119 relating to threats to detain, such as Richard Reynold; his encounter with London's
120 Metropolitan Police whilst gardening in the British capital (YouTube, 2008). Under UK law,
121 guerrilla gardening would not constitute criminal damage and thus the Police Officer in
122 question was incorrect in this video (Hardman, 2013). Perhaps the most unlawful action of a
123 typical guerrilla gardener is their avoidance of obtaining planning permission or dealing with
124 the bureaucracy of local authorities through avoiding risk assessments, insurance and other
125 such paperwork usually required to establish a formal site (Zanetti, 2007). Ironically, one
126 could argue that the idea of participatory planning may give these actors a voice and enable
127 some avoidance of the informal occupation of land. This concept involves involving the
128 community and interested parties in planning processes, with tools such as neighbourhood
129 planning proving population within the UK context (see for instance the DCLG, 2012).

130

131 The motivations for employing a guerrilla gardening approach vary; from actors who are
132 confused about how to obtain permission for a legitimate community garden or similar space
133 through the planning system, to others who pursue it for a 'thrill' where challenging authority
134 becomes the core motivation (Adams and Hardman, 2014). A review of the literature shows
135 that a lack of knowledge regarding the regulatory planning environment is a core reason for
136 those adopting a more informal approach (Adams et al., 2013; Crane et al., 2013; Tracey,
137 2007; Reynolds, 2008). For instance, in the UK Scott et al. (2013) argue that the planning
138 system is often perceived to be disabling with regard to innovative activities such as UA and,
139 in this case, has pushed some to adopt different tactics to enable such activities to occur.
140 However, the authors identify a number of 'hooks' (opportunities) in existing UK policy in

141 which planners can act as enablers but warn that such uptake is reliant on their ‘willingness to
142 engage widely in a new constructive dialogue and way of working that crosses the planning
143 and environment divide’ (Scott et al., 2013: 44). In this sense they are discussing the
144 Ecosystem Approach and Ecosystem Service concepts which offer an opportunity for UA to
145 be increased in cities.

146

147 With regards to obtaining planning permission, a considerable amount of UK-based UA
148 advisory bodies stipulate that groups and individuals must seek guidance on whether they
149 require such consent before creating spaces for food cultivation, regardless of whether it is
150 eventually required (Community Land Advisory Service, 2012; Federation of City Farms and
151 Community Gardens, 2009; PlanLoCal, 2012). In this case, planners are the individuals who
152 can either support, or restrict, UA practices (Neegard et al., 2012; Shackelton 2012). It is here
153 that the risk-adverse planning system can frustrate locally-based initiatives even though
154 suitable planning tools are available to enable such activities to occur (White and Natelson,
155 2012). For example Scott (2001) found that often the micropolitics and personalities of
156 individual planning officers played a key role in whether a particular development was
157 supported. Furthermore, the Welsh Rural Observatory (2012: 17) critique restrictive planning
158 practice in parts of the UK where ‘planning was identified as a major barrier to the formation
159 of new community growing sites and activities’. This problem reflects a lack of mutual
160 understanding of the nature of the activity and the complexities of planning law (Scott et al.,
161 2013).

162

163 “Established growing projects and groups also reported problems in negotiating
164 the planning system. It was suggested that there were difficulties on both sides,
165 with many communities and groups often lacking the necessary expertise and

166 experience in dealing with the planning system, and planners uncertain about how
167 to deal with applications for community growing activities”

168 (Welsh Rural Observatory, 2012: 17)

169

170 A considerable number of sites analysed in this Welsh Rural Observatory report were of an
171 urban origin and a core issue identified was the lack of contact with the planning system.

172 Such a barrier resonates well with the guerrilla gardening literature which identifies similar
173 issues, resulting in many actors adopting the informal approach as a last resort in an attempt

174 to enable the activity to take place (see for example Reynolds, 2008). Similar arguments can

175 be found in the international context, with studies in Africa, North America and beyond

176 revealing issues with their respective planning systems (see for instance Chipungu et al.,

177 2015; Crane et al., 2013). For instance, in many African countries planning policy often

178 restricts UA and thus actors resort to guerrilla gardening on a mass scale (Chipungu et al.,

179 2015); this results in vegetables being grown in often contaminated land and often across

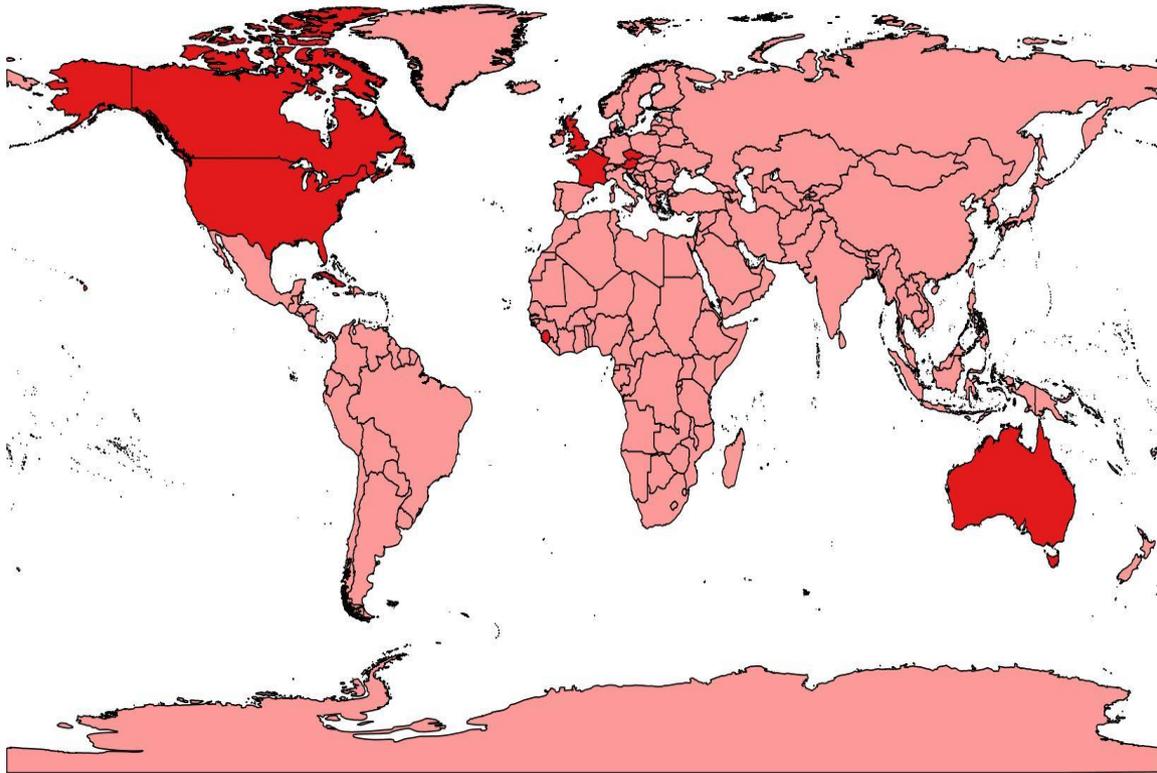
180 private property.

181

182

183 **3. Exploring Practice**

184



185

186 Figure 2: A GIS analysis of the location of published academic studies prior to 2016 on
187 guerrilla gardening, the majority of which are in the Global North (Armitage and Hardman,
188 2016)

189

190 This paper now proceeds to provide a worldwide overview of different approaches across the
191 globe and examples of informal UA on the ground. To date, few studies interact closely with
192 the informal or ‘guerrilla’ movement (see figure 2 and Crane et al., 2013; Zanetti, 2007). As
193 figure 2 demonstrates, the majority of these studies focus on the practice within the Global
194 North, predominantly in North America (see for example, Hardman, 2009, 2013; Harrison,
195 2010; Zanetti, 2007). Furthermore, the authors observing the guerrilla gardening practices are
196 often informal gardeners themselves, which arguably argues creates an issue around
197 objectivity.

198

199 One of the few to explore guerrilla gardening up close is that by Crane et al. (2013) who
200 focussed on how guerrilla groups formed and practised within Kingston, Ontario. Their
201 findings revealed the spectrum of actors involved and how the activity had a positive impact
202 on the surrounding environment; beautifying neglected space and bringing production into
203 the heart of the city. In particular, they highlight the positive aspects of adopting such an
204 approach ‘actions like guerrilla gardening encourage and promote open expression and
205 agency provide powerful opportunities to reclaim city space as a lived project’ (Crane et al.,
206 2013: 85). They conclude by arguing that more encouragement is required for such self-
207 expression which will enable more citizens to become involved and reclaim neglected spaces
208 within our cities.

209

210 Whilst there is a burgeoning literature base, there is still a distinct lack of a critical lens
211 placed on guerrilla gardening in both academic and non-academic literature. From Reynolds
212 (2008) to Crane et al. (2013), McKay (2011) and beyond, the explorations so far are largely
213 positive. We have previously conducted a series of studies on guerrilla gardeners,
214 predominantly in the West Midlands region of the UK, analysing their practices and the
215 impact of their activities on the surrounding area; our core aim to critically analyse the
216 practices of the groups involved. Our findings highlighted a diversity of individuals involved
217 in the informal movement; from teachers to planners, students and the elderly. The data also
218 revealed the darker side to the action, with actors colonising land not only without the
219 permission of the local authority, but also the communities which surrounded the spaces
220 (Hardman and Larkham, 2014). This resulted in some locals becoming disgruntled with the
221 action and angry with the lack of consultation and local authority enforcement. In one case,
222 guerrilla gardeners would colonise the land and plant vegetables but would not maintain the

223 space on a regular basis. Ironically, this soon led to the informal intervention adversely
224 impacting on the aesthetics of the space, with a severe lack of maintenance resulting in the
225 vegetation dying (see Hardman and Larkham, 2014).

226

227 However, there are also examples that show the positive impact and multiple benefits of
228 those cultivating land without permission. For example Caldmore Guerrillas, who operate in
229 Walsall, UK, was formed by a Polish migrant who wanted to connect with the community
230 and help to regenerate leftover space in Walsall. Through guerrilla gardening she was able to
231 bring together the fragmented community and create a community garden in the heart of a
232 deprived area. The activity soon flourished and, like so many successful cases, soon
233 transitioned into a permitted form of gardening which was able to grow further and obtain
234 local funding.

235

236 Whilst many of these studies focus on English-speaking countries, there is an array of
237 evidence to show how the informal movement is just as rife in other areas of the globe (Crane
238 et al., 2012; Hung, 2017; Wiskerke and Viljoen, 2012). As previously mentioned, Cuba is an
239 exemplar of guerrilla gardening on a large scale given that much of the activity is informal
240 and without the consent of the appropriate authority. There is evidence for guerrilla gardening
241 in Pakistan (Cityfarmer, 2013), China (guerrillagardening.org, n.d.), Hong Kong (Hung,
242 2017) and many other non-English speaking countries (see guerrillagardening.org for a list
243 and links for each country). Within these contexts the subversive nature of the activity results
244 in connections relying on face-to-face contact rather than through social media, possibly due
245 to the lack of widespread access to such technology and tools in parts of the Global South.

246

247

248 **3.1 Guerrilla Gardening in South Africa and the UK**

249 In order to provide a flavour of the diverse nature of guerrilla activity we now draw on our
250 recent in South Africa and the UK to show practice on the ground; providing a snapshot of
251 contrasting work in the Global South and North. With the former, we provide a brief
252 overview of action and then with the latter add some empirical material from a case study in
253 Salford, UK. In terms of the South Africa, we begin by focussing on Umlazi, which is the
254 second largest township (after Soweto) in Durban, South Africa. Development of the Umlazi
255 township began in 1961 and by 1965 it was opened for occupation (Minnaar, 2001).

256

257 The Umlazi township inherited the aftermaths of the apartheid government characterised with
258 spatial and economic isolation. Due to its sheer size, the typical problems of severe housing
259 shortage, major informal settlements, and high levels of unemployment were magnified. The
260 area is not only an economic heartland of Durban, but also an environmental hotspot
261 characterised by heavy industrial and large-scale residential development located in close
262 proximity in a topographically contained region. Hence the practice of UA in this area
263 represents a diversity of agricultural practices which have evolved from apartheid restrictions
264 to current mixed typologies consisting of communal and individual gardeners operating on
265 both subsistence and commercial levels. Though predominantly practised by women, it is
266 fulfilling nutritional and economic demands among the urban poor.

267



268

269 Figure 3: guerrilla gardening at a bus stop in Umlazi (Chipungu, 2016)

270

271 With regard to the informal movement, most of the UA practiced falls within this definition.

272 The practice of guerrilla gardening in the Umlazi area is a common phenomenon on road

273 verges, where municipal infrastructure (in the form of road signage and electricity power-

274 lines) compete for space with crops as shown in figure 3. On the other hand, open spaces,

275 meant to accommodate other social functions, have been overtaken by similar activities. In

276 this case, the residents are colonising any form of leftover space for UA activities, allowing

277 them to add to their diets and grow food within close proximity to their dwellings.

278

279 The extent of informal activity is also due to the lack of support for formal UA by authorities,

280 with significant barriers facing those those who wish to pursue more legitimate routes

281 (Chipungu et al., 2015). As Arku et al. (2012) note, there is a general lack of encouragement

282 and enabling around formal UA in African cities, with planners and other key gatekeepers

283 not realising the wider environmental and social benefits of the practice. Chipungu et al.

284 (2011) blame the historical development of many African cities which prevented the practice
285 developing in the heart of the urban centres. Due to the risk of the informal approach in
286 Africa, predominantly surrounding soil contamination, there have been calls for more funding
287 and support to encourage more legitimate projects to ensure that public health is not
288 endangered through the use of heavily-contaminated land for guerrilla gardening activities
289 (Chipungu et al., 2015; Haysom, 2007). Guerrilla gardening is not merely concentrated in
290 South Africa but spreads across the continent itself, with activity in the likes of Kenya,
291 Zimbabwe to the far reaches of Libya and other nations (Chipungu et al., 2015).

292

293 In terms of the Global North, and specifically the European context, there is a wide range of
294 informal guerrilla practices on the continental mainland, with activities in Spain, France,
295 Germany and elsewhere (see Bell et al., 2016); although this range is not reflected in
296 published academic material displayed in figure 2. An example from our own research can be
297 seen in Nitra, Slovakia, where guerrilla gardening has acted as a mechanism for reclaiming
298 unused land and starting a wider green movement. Close to the urban centre, in the year 2010
299 students colonised leftover patches of greenspace and began an informal allotment site. This
300 attracted others interested in the idea of UA before the students eventually applied for
301 permission to use the space legally. Retrospective permission was granted by the local
302 authority and now a successful project entitled 'Hyde Park' occupies the space, attracting
303 local residents and students alike to the area (Hyde Park, 2016).

304

305 Whether in the Global North or South, guerrilla gardening is an activity which has a profound
306 impact on the area in which it is practiced. Nevertheless, a connection between all these case
307 studies is often the lack of encouragement from authorities for this route; rather actors pursue
308 the authority once an informal project is established. As Reynolds (2008) argues, such

309 activity either eventually fails or legitimises in order to grow and seize on support. This is
310 particularly relevant in the South Africa case study in which guerrilla gardening was
311 practiced on a large-scale. We now, in contrast focus on an example of a local authority
312 embracing the informal movement and which is issuing a call for actors to help transform
313 neglected space on a large scale in the UK; drawing on empirical material, we add to the case
314 studies explored in this section. We then reflect on this approach before critiquing whether
315 informal UA should be encouraged on a wider scale.

316

317

318 **4. Embracing Informality: A Case Study of Salford, UK**

319

320 Salford, a city in the North West region of the UK, is one of the country's most deprived
321 areas (ONS, 2016). It is located in close proximity to Manchester and historically has offered
322 supporting services for its larger rival. In 2012 Salford City Council commissioned a master
323 plan for a large regeneration project in the heart of the city (see Pendleton Together, 2013).
324 The regeneration aimed to rejuvenate an area known as Pendleton through creating new
325 homes and employment opportunities for residents. The investment into this scheme stands at
326 around £650,000,000 and involves changing the urban fabric entirely: reducing brutalist
327 tower blocks, creating new jobs in the city and adding green infrastructure to the area
328 (Salford City Council, 2016).

329

330 Through the consultation process, planners and other key actors embraced the idea of UA and
331 embedded the concept within the masterplan. This included areas for new allotment sites,
332 temporary community gardens and the development of a large commercial urban farm.
333 Interestingly, the masterplan fits well with Viljoen's (2005) Continuous Productive Urban

334 Landscape (CPUL) concept, with the linking together of UA sites through green corridors
335 and other such tools. The urban farm acts as a hub for the regeneration, with the allotments,
336 community gardens, orchards and other UA connected to the space. Therefore there is a
337 conscious effort by the local authority to link together the spaces and create an inter-
338 connected network of UA across Salford. This also ties in well with key national UK policies
339 such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Natural Environment White
340 Paper (NEWP) which urge actors to maintain and improve the natural environment; the latter
341 also explicitly mentions the need to enhance green corridors, which aligns with the plan of a
342 CPUL network by Salford (DEFRA, 2011; DCLG, 2012).

343

344 In the Salford context, planners are championing a radical form of UA through the creation of
345 a commercial urban farm in the heart of the city's most deprived area. Salford is not alone in
346 the UK as there are similar examples including Brighton and Bristol which demonstrate how
347 planners are beginning to embrace the idea of UA (Wilson, 2014). In the Brighton example
348 planning guidance now exists for decision-makers to consider UA in new developments
349 within the city (see Brighton and Hove Council, 2011). There are also planned commercial
350 farms in other areas around the country, including in Oldham which was recently labelled the
351 UK's most deprived town (BBC News, 2016). However, unlike these other cities, Salford is
352 the first to actively encourage the informal movement in this landscape through using a
353 variety of marketing tools to call out to guerrilla gardeners to help regenerate land and enable
354 UA within the city. This adoption of guerrilla gardening is the first of its kind and thus
355 presents an interesting model to critically analyse.

356

357 Methodologically our research in this area focussed on mapping guerrilla activity before
358 conducting a series of unstructured and semi-structured interviews alongside

359 ethnographically-informed observation with three groups which operate in the city. Through
360 using a mixed methods approach we were able to gather an array of data, both subjective and
361 objective on the activities taking place. The primary aim here was to understand practice
362 from the key actors on the ground, both the guerrillas and local authority alike. The
363 ethnographic element involved attending digs and tours of previous sites by the guerrilla
364 gardeners. An interview was also conducted with the lead regeneration officer who was the
365 main actor behind the local authority's drive to encourage guerrilla gardening in the city. This
366 was in order to discover why the local authority was adopting such a proactive approach and
367 its ambitions for the activity. Through conversations and desktop research, three core groups
368 were found to be operating in the area:

369

- 370 • Incredible Edible Salford – started through guerrilla gardening in Eccles, a district
371 of Salford before legitimising their activities. Some 20 people are involved in this
372 group and range from retired individuals to horticultural experts and businessmen.
- 373 • The 'Guerrilla Gardener' – a lone gardener who colonises patches of land around
374 the area, mainly for beautification purposes.
- 375 • The 'Pendleton Guerrillas' – a semi-formal group which is being used by the
376 authority to attract others to the area. This mainly consists of local authority and
377 community volunteers with around 5 in total.

378

379 The informal movement in Salford is extremely diverse, with a wide range of ages involved
380 and individuals from different backgrounds. With Incredible Edible Salford and the
381 Pendleton Guerrillas, this mainly involved local residents from deprived backgrounds,
382 whereas the Guerrilla Gardener was a member of staff at the nearby University. There were a
383 variety of reasons for their activities; from greening the urban environment to raising

384 awareness around UA to the average Salfordian. The latter connected all three, who viewed
385 UA as a potential tool for those with poor diets to have better access to fresh produce. As the
386 leader of Incredible Edible Salford stated, ‘we were able to put that food out in the urban
387 setting to support people who may not have access to free fruit and vegetables, might not
388 even have the knowledge of what to grow, where to grow, what they can do with the food’.
389 This was reinforced by the solo ‘Guerrilla Gardener’ who felt that such activity was needed
390 in the locale alongside beautification, ‘there’s a real need to get people growing their own
391 fruit and vegetables in Salford’.

392

393 ‘Guerrilla gardening revives spaces - creating noise and getting people engaged. It
394 is fun, informal and a catalyst for bringing people together. There is an informal
395 movement in Salford. We’ve seen things just ‘pop-up’ in places!’

396 (Lead Project Officer, Salford City Council)

397

398 In terms of the third group explored, the Pendleton Guerrilla group was created through a
399 local authority officer responsible for the large regeneration project in the city. In this case,
400 he viewed guerrilla gardening as a mechanism for starting a grassroots movement in the city
401 which would enable residents to have a more intimate connection with the space. His vision
402 was to grow the movement and allow the community to take ownership of spaces; adopting
403 small patches of greenspace and larger ones within the regeneration area. A core reason for
404 this encouragement was his view that the space was overly-protected with large amounts of
405 fencing, CCTV and other negative features, ‘we want to create a friendlier place, remove the
406 fences and get people growing stuff’ (Lead Project Officer, Salford City Council).

407

408 He viewed guerrilla gardening as the perfect tool through which to push change from the
409 bottom up. The Pendleton Guerrillas was branded by the project officer who then pushed for
410 community members to take ownership of the brand; ironically this somewhat positions the
411 activity as top-down and as a hijacking of the guerrilla brand. During the interview, his
412 passion and enjoyment for the concept were evident ‘Ron Finley [a Los Angeles guerrilla
413 gardener] is great, we really need our own Ron in Salford’ (Lead Project Officer, Salford City
414 Council). His reference to Ron Finley here demonstrates his wider knowledge around the
415 practice. He also appeared to take inspiration from Africa, North America and other global
416 practices and wished to replicate the best of them within the Pendleton context: ‘I really
417 would like people to get involved – the more the merrier!’ (Lead Project Officer, Salford City
418 Council). This support goes beyond mere encouragement and involves the gifting of land to
419 guerrilla groups if they wish to use it. This actor now occupies a political position overseeing
420 a large area of the city and still actively encourages the practice. Through doing so he
421 influences local policy and attitudes towards guerrilla gardening.

422

423 With the Pendleton Guerrillas one could question whether this constitutes being part of the
424 informal movement as it appears to be encouraged (even initiated) by the local authority. It
425 must be noted that our observations nevertheless revealed that planning permission, risk
426 assessments and other such rigorous procedures were largely ignored. Rather the Pendleton
427 Guerrillas (in a similar manner to the wider guerrilla movement) adopted space without direct
428 consent and permission. Activities of this group included the creation of a ‘guerrilla orchard’
429 and a range of temporary sites across the city. Figure 4 shows one of the ‘meanwhile sites’
430 which used militaristic signage to raise awareness amongst the local community, attempting
431 to ensure that the activity was connected with the guerrilla group and not the wider authority.

432 Fundamentally, meanwhile sites are temporary spaces: often stalled development or leftover
433 land in which innovative activities can take place.

434



435

436 Figure 4: a meanwhile site complete with signage by the Pendleton Guerrillas (photograph
437 courtesy of Project Officer)

438

439 Observations were carried out on a variety of projects undertaken by the Pendleton
440 Guerrillas, with the most recent, a guerrilla orchard, being created in February 2016. This was
441 a large project which aimed to reclaim a site previously inaccessible to the community. In this
442 case the Pendleton Guerrilla group used trees donated by a local celebrity and planted 20
443 adjacent to the main road running through the city of Salford. Their aim was to ‘provide free
444 fruit to the community’ whilst simultaneously improving the aesthetics of the area (Pendleton
445 Guerrilla member). Through doing so they aimed to raise the profile of guerrilla gardening
446 and more formal types of UA in the city, encouraging other community members to join the
447 action. We conducted much of the observational element of the study in Salford and

448 witnessed a large turnout to this particular form of action, with an array of students, locals
449 and some authority members making an appearance.

450

451 In terms of other guerrilla practices, Incredible Edible Salford demonstrates the potential of
452 informal action to make a significant impact in a deprived area. The group formation shared
453 many characteristics with the Incredible Edible Todmorden group, using an informal
454 approach before proceeding to a more legitimate body which would enable it to access
455 funding. Through adopting a range of meanwhile sites, obtained through working with the
456 local planners and other key actors, they were able to grow their action and involve residents
457 across Salford. Eventually the group was able to purchase sites and have a permanent
458 physical and social footprint on the city's landscape, 'we have a farm now and sites across
459 Salford, working with the NHS, Age UK and others' (leader of Incredible Edible Salford).

460

461 Observational work with Incredible Edible Salford was more sporadic due to the varied
462 nature of their activities. Whilst out creating spaces for UA, either with permission or
463 without, it was clear the group had an intimate connection with the community. They often
464 used bizarre growing methods to attract attention, such as using leftover bottles to grow
465 vertically for instance or placing planters in very busy locations. This acted as a mechanism
466 to ignite conversation with passers-by who in turn became interested in their practices and
467 engaged with them about the concept of UA. In turn, this helped the Incredible Edible Salford
468 group to spread their message and encourage others to become involved in the wider
469 movement.

470

471 Whilst these two groups are quite vocal about their activities and easy to locate through social
472 media, the solo self-proclaimed Guerrilla Gardener demonstrates how there is often a

473 plethora of activity which is ongoing and difficult to track. The discovery of this informal
474 action in Salford was largely by accident, with the Guerrilla Gardener opting to take a much
475 more secretive approach: ‘I just get on with things and plant stuff here and there’ (Salford
476 Guerrilla Gardener). This correlates with earlier research which shows how many groups
477 prefer this approach and are not vocal about their work, rather they prefer to hide from the
478 media and cultivate space without the knowledge of others (Flore, 2006; Hardman and
479 Larkham, 2014). This solo guerrilla was encouraged by the local authority’s encouragement
480 of the activity and viewed it as a positive move, ‘I’d like to get involved and help, it makes
481 me feel less nervous about doing stuff’ (Salford Guerrilla Gardener).

482

483 This removal of persecution was exactly the reason the lead project officer wished to
484 encourage the informal movement in Salford: ‘we wanted to take away this idea that it wasn’t
485 allowed... we really want people to get involved in whichever way they want to’ (Lead
486 Project Officer, Salford City Council). Although this strategy may work with some
487 individuals, previous research has shown how the ‘naughty’ angle is a key driver for many
488 taking part in this movement (Hardman and Larkham, 2014). Many groups also use guerrilla
489 gardening as a tool to challenge authority and the right of the city, which again could be an
490 obstacle to embracing the underground movement. Through removing the thrill element – the
491 idea that you could be arrested for planting flowers or growing produce – the local authority
492 may be pushing away more ‘radical’ guerrilla gardeners.

493

494 Nevertheless, the authority’s stance in this context appears to have encouraged more residents
495 to be involved in the informal route. Discussions with those taking part in activities revealed
496 how many were happy with how easy it was to be involved with UA in the city and how the
497 bureaucracy was largely removed. Through pushing for a more informal approach, the local

498 authority has removed the barriers preventing the community becoming involved in the UA
499 movement and has ultimately impacted positively on the area. Many of the guerrilla
500 gardeners surveyed revealed how they intended to apply for permission to grow their
501 activities and, like so many other groups, seize on funding for their projects.

502

503

504 **5. Moving Forward: Should we Encourage Guerrilla Gardening?**

505

506 The Salford case study raises the notion of how best to address the rise in the informal
507 approach and whether encouragement or restriction is preferred. In this case the authority has
508 embraced and enabled a range of informal UA activities across the city. The result is that
509 more residents are engaging in informal activities within the area and feel empowered to help
510 revitalise space. This in turn has enabled the local authority to entice those practising
511 informal action onto a more legitimate path, through offering land to enable their action to
512 grow and have a wider impact on the city's inhabitants. However, one must question those
513 involved and whether the informal approach is inclusive; contrary to formal UA, which has
514 often involves a need to embrace communities and those wishing to use the space, the
515 informal route does not necessarily have this option and practice differs widely between
516 groups. As previous research has shown, there is a darker side to this action and a risk that a
517 small element of the wider community is making self-interested decisions without
518 consultation (Crane et al., 2013; Adams et al., 2015). This is even more important when one
519 considers the possibility of transient communities (e.g. students) changing space without the
520 permission or inclusion of the local residents.

521

522 The Salford example challenges many of the negative assumptions of local authorities and
523 planners on their risk aversion to radical concepts such as UA and the use of meanwhile sites
524 for innovative activities (Scott et al., 2009; Taylor, 2010; Tornaghi, 2012; White and
525 Natelson, 2012). A crucial element of this wider criticism is the disjointed approach to
526 approving projects; decisions are argued to be subjective and vary from authority to authority
527 and across scales (Scott, 2001; Adams et al 2013). Whilst one may understand the positives
528 of a UA project, others may view it in a different manner (Scott and Carter, 2012). This is
529 evident with the example of Incredible Edible Todmorden, which has been fortunate enough
530 to have a proactive local authority interested in the notion of UA (IET, 2011). Nevertheless,
531 Reed et al. (2010) demonstrate how key actors, such as planners, are generally risk adverse
532 and embedded within legislation which guides the practice. In the UK, the planning system's
533 reliance on legislation, particularly the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), which
534 characterises agricultural activity in a rigid manner, is argued by Adams et al. (2013) to be a
535 major obstacle for UA. Scott (2001) explains that projects which do not conform to the act
536 are deemed 'unsustainable' in most cases, but the decision to approve a space is solely in the
537 hands of the planning officer/councillor dealing with the case: decisions are highly
538 subjective.

539

540 Adding to this critique, Reynolds (2008: 33) is extremely negative towards planning practice,
541 explaining that 'planning rules and codes of conduct' create places without personality or
542 landscapes of order (Qvistrom 2007). Through adopting an informal route Reynolds (2008)
543 argues that this can add much needed character and diversity to the local urban landscape,
544 with actors not restricted to spatial norms and able to act outside of restrictions often imposed
545 on more formalised projects. Adding to this, Crane et al. (2013) argue that guerrilla gardening
546 is a practice which brings creativity and innovation to our urban landscapes. Their case study

547 in Canada demonstrates how guerrilla gardeners can interpret the cityscape differently and, in
548 this case, use large amounts of available space for their UA action.

549

550 The hardline anti-planning rhetoric presented above by Reynolds suggests that it will be more
551 difficult to work alongside more radicalised guerrilla gardeners. Indeed, many guerrillas were
552 angry with recent UK Government efforts to bring about a 'Big Society' agenda in which
553 volunteers would effectively replace/add value to frontline authority services; in this case, the
554 rebellious gardeners were worried that, if they adopted a formal approach, their action would
555 be aligned to this ideal. Such groups and individuals will be reluctant to work with authorities
556 who may wish to encourage the activity. McKay (2011) has a negative view of such rhetoric
557 and argues that Reynolds' philosophy is too militarised in parts and isolated from other
558 aspects of guerrilla gardening. A core critique by McKay (2011) revolves around the
559 numbering system devised by Reynolds: those who sign up to his site are given a tag, with
560 Reynolds adopting 001. In this case, McKay (2011) feels that Reynolds is a self-imposed
561 general of the movement.

562

563 Since our research demonstrates how many are pursuing the informal approach purely for
564 ease, through the idea that they do not understand the procedure for applying for formal
565 permission, there is a real opportunity here to seize upon this interest. A simple solution
566 could involve raising awareness of the procedures through providing more information,
567 perhaps targeting existing UA provision first before the general population. In doing so more
568 formalised UA projects could be encouraged and prevent individuals from pursuing the
569 informal route; using charters, policies and other mechanisms to support the practice. Another
570 solution here could see more authorities following Salford's lead through the embracement of

571 those practicing without permission. In a similar manner to Salford, some form of loose
572 control could be implemented which still allows actors some freedom with their efforts.

573

574 Indeed, the very notion of formalised guerrilla gardening is an oxymoron; many pursue the
575 activity predominantly due to its informal nature (McKay, 2011). As Reynolds (2008) shows,
576 guerrilla gardeners have a passion for taking back control and not fitting with authority
577 views. If planners and other key actors were to legitimise their action this could take away
578 crucial elements of the subversive practice. Taking away the informal nature of the activity
579 will render guerrilla gardening to merely transition to formal gardening, with many actors not
580 wishing to pursue the activity without the former element (Hardman and Larkham, 2014).

581 Some work is needed here to engage core guerrilla gardeners around this idea and how both
582 parties, the planners and informal actors, can work together to enable greener and more
583 productive cities.

584

585 Ultimately more research is required on the nature, extent, variety and success of practice and
586 to uncover the benefits derived from adopting an informal approach to UA. Along with more
587 work with officials – in particular planners – there is a need to delve further into practices
588 located in the Global South and to move away from the UK and USA which dominate the
589 literature base. Perhaps more urgently there is a need for a more thorough quantitative
590 exploration into the risk associated with both formal and informal UA practices, discovering
591 the levels of contaminants in community gardens, allotments and other such spaces. In
592 arguing for more research into these particular areas we hope more studies will add to the
593 emerging research base around informal UA and provide more of an insight into this
594 secretive world.

595

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