Chapter 8
Guerrilla Gardeners, Urban Agriculture, Food and the Future

Abstract In this summary chapter, we revisit the key messages and tease out some themes for further research. Whilst the book covers a variety of themes, we highlight those we see as most important: ranging from why groups may pursue guerrilla gardening to the darker side of the activity. In doing so, we emphasise where we feel the core outputs of this book sit and how it could add value to debates around guerrilla gardening activity. This summary chapter first reviews the case studies, before using them as a springboard for wider debates around guerrilla urban agriculture. The chapter also includes a reflection on our methodological approach, which we argue that it can be replicated to gather more data around guerrilla gardening practices, enabling researchers to be integrated with the activity, yet provide an objective view of the action and its impact. Finally, we reflect on the wider relevance of this text in the context of urban agriculture and call for more research on this topic.

This book has journeyed with several guerrilla gardening groups which practiced two forms of urban agriculture (UA). The groups differed significantly in terms of the crops cultivated, the type of unregulated approach adopted and the spaces in which the UA was performed. The first few chapters set the scene, with an overview of UA and then an exploration of informal activities. We then proceeded to delve further into case studies collated during a piece of ethnographic-informed research, before probing their practices in latter chapters. In doing so, we hoped to present a unique perspective on the activity: something of a halfway house between Reynolds's text and McKay's overview.

Reflecting on the Case Studies

As we have mentioned previously, this book focuses quite explicitly on the case studies. The reasoning behind this is to engage with the activities of some guerrilla gardeners on the ground, providing the reader with a flavour of the action and an idea of the spectrum of groups/individuals involved in the activity. In this first section, we will summarise the key messages from these case studies and then reflect more on guerrilla practice as a whole.

Revolting Against Authority

Perhaps the first significant issue arising during the research was the role played by perception and its impact on groups adopting a guerrilla gardening approach. In several cases we have discussed, previous interactions with authority resulted in the groups deliberately adopting this guerrilla route to propel the idea and practice of UA. The groups portrayed in this book perceived the authority, and in particular the planning system, to be a negative entity which should be avoided. In particular, Chap. 5 demonstrates the guerrillas' views toward adopting a legal route and their many reasons for pursuing unregulated UA.

In the case of F Troop, members argued that working with officials would render them liable to be incorporated into the often neoliberal agendas of authorities. This clash correlates with the narratives provided by Holland (2004), Milbourne (2010, 2011), Pudup (2008) and others, all of which demonstrate the reluctance, in many cases, of gardening activists to engage with authorities pursuing these agendas. The research also demonstrates how group members were wary of new political concepts, such as the Big Society, which they felt would jeopardise the activity if a legal route was adopted.

In the context of the WG, members felt that current politics within the local authority would see the site transformed: with those in power taking the lead and deciding on how the community garden should go forward. They were less reluctant to engage with authority, but used guerrilla gardening as a mechanism through which to hasten progress and make change immediately. Finally, with the solo guerrilla gardener, it appeared that her attempts to take the official route, and constant encounters with barriers, pushed her to adopt guerrilla gardening.

It must be noted again that perception of authority, and current political rhetoric, plays only one part in both of the groups' reasons for adopting guerrilla gardening. To a large extent the pursuit of the 'thrill' element drives F Troop's action: this opportunity to disobey and retaliate is a pull for some guerrilla gardeners (Crane et al. 2012; Reynolds 2008). The need for this thrill again aligns F Troop with other urban practices which disobey authority and use the environment for pleasure (Adams and Hardman 2014): skateboarders, graffiti artists and free runners are very similar to these guerrilla gardeners in this sense. Inevitably, this quest for a 'naughty activity' is unlikely to be viewed favourably by any legitimate authorities and this presents a major challenge if guerrilla groups, like F Troop, were ever to legitimise.

This research suggests, in support of McKay (2011), that there is a divide between those who pursue Reynolds's philosophy of guerrilla gardening and those who are located outside this more militarised form of the activity. It will be more difficult to interact with the former, who may only be willing to embrace authority if directly approached or if their project grows to a significant level (Reynolds 2008). On the other hand, the less radical guerrilla projects, such as the WG's community garden or the solo guerrilla, would gladly engage with the wider authority if funds and attractive propositions were to be offered, and such offers would probably need to allow the group to retain some direct control over the space.

Inevitably, more research is required into this area to examine whether such a significant divide between guerrilla gardeners exists elsewhere: are there more 'unconscious' guerrillas, for example, or troops pursuing the activity primarily for thrills? A wider body of knowledge would enable a clearer picture of why guerrilla gardeners adopt this form of action, instead of working alongside authorities in order to obtain permission for creating and managing the sites with the support of other organisations. Future research may wish to adopt a similar approach to ours, or that of Crane et al. (2012) and Zanetti (2007), which enables researchers to engage with guerrilla gardeners on an intimate level. In doing so, they may be able to delve a little deeper and realise, like ourselves, that guerrilla gardening is perhaps more widespread and varied than initially perceived.

Contradicting Opinion: Avoiding the 'Guerrilla Trap'

Fundamentally, this research challenges the prevailing notion that guerrilla gardening should be encouraged or viewed in a purely positive light. Prominent, well-cited, guerrilla gardening literature, such as that by Flores (2006), Hou (2010), McKay (2011), Reynolds (2008) and Tracey (2007), fails to give sufficient weight to identifying and exploring the negative aspects of the act. Moreover, these texts are frequently used by other authors in an attempt to reinforce the idea that guerrilla gardening is a possible avenue for introducing crops into the city fabric (see, e.g., Astyk and Newton 2009; Elliot 2010; Lewis 2012; Pudup 2008; Winnie 2010 and others). Our detailed case studies suggest the significant limitations that can be encountered.

The evidence revealed, predominantly in Chap. 6, demonstrates the need to step back and assess the nature and extent of the impacts of guerrilla gardening on the nearby environment. A lens, the 'local trap', was used to ensure that the research adopted a critical perspective on the guerrilla gardeners' actions. In a similar manner to Purcell's (2006) formulation of the local trap, a 'guerrilla trap' appeared here: the unquestioning promotion of the activity by academics and nonacademics. Arguably, the interventions of both groups depicted in this research improve the visual/aesthetic aspect of the spaces in which they are situated. However, in both instances, the guerrillas have colonised land without prior notification and transformed it according to their own values. Whilst F Troop introduces unsustainable vegetation into a harsh environment, the WG transforms a patch of grass once used by the local children. Worryingly this practice of transforming land without consultation is not limited to these two groups: there are many examples when guerrilla gardeners have changed land – sometimes drastically – under the cover of darkness (Crane et al. 2012; Johnson 2011; McKay 2011; Reynolds 2008; Zanetti 2007). In a similar manner to the groups featured in this book, these modifications have occurred without either community or authority knowledge.

Understandably, this research only provides a snapshot into the operations of guerrilla gardeners, mainly due to limitations on its duration and scope

(cf. Seale 2004). Yet it highlights the potential harm, both to the environment and surrounding community, which guerrillas can unknowingly (or knowingly) inflict. Fundamentally, this work challenges the often heroic persona of this grass-roots movement and brings to the surface some dangers of unregulated UA. This research is crucial here, since some claim that the activity is growing, with the movement expanding rapidly across the world, primarily due to the popularity of social networks (Bennett and Moss 2010; Harutyunyan et al. 2009; Reynolds 2008). If this claim is accurate, then perhaps more unsustainable and intrusive practices could be happening not just under the noses of authority but also the communities which surround these informal sites.

Guerrilla gardeners are often viewed as positive enablers who transform space, for the better, without authority involvement (Johnson 2011; Lewis 2012; Tracey 2007, 2011). Taking this further, Metcalf and Widener (2011) argue that guerrilla gardening should be encouraged to transform neglected spaces; this could bring the benefit of increasing the quality of life and property prices by beautifying landscapes and impacting on the communities through UA. It becomes evident that this idea of the heroic figure of a guerrilla continues today, with recent authors still insisting – seemingly without much understanding of the issue – that these rebellious volunteers should be encouraged to transform more land. In each case, the guerrilla gardener is portrayed as a heroic grass-roots volunteer taking action into their own hands.

The observations undertaken during this research also challenge this perception that guerrilla gardeners are of a particular breed; agreeing with Reynolds's comments regarding the diverse nature of the act. Yet this study takes the idea a step further, by arguing that the WG, a collection of residents who tend the community garden, can be considered to be guerrilla gardeners. At first sight, the WG does not appear to conform to the rebellious nature of guerrilla gardeners. This leap in characterising a guerrilla gardener correlates well with McKay (2011), who stated that a guerrilla can be anyone of any age and background. Furthermore, McKay feels that there are guerrilla gardeners who lean towards the *guerrilla* aspect and those who lean more towards the *gardening* activity. This research provides an example of these two forms of guerrilla gardening: F Troop pursuing the act for thrills and the WG opting to create the community garden in this manner due to its ambition to plant crops. Whilst only a small portion of F Troop has this desire for UA, the WG comprises individuals who wish to spend more time in the garden alongside the vegetables and fruit: increasing their access to free, fresh produce. Inevitably, the divisions between guerrillas are considerably more complex than McKay states, with crossovers and multifaceted objectives emerging.

In this book, we suggest that there is a guerrilla trap and that future research should adopt a stance which provides a more holistic, honest recording and review of this unregulated action. It has already been stated that many authors tend to call for encouragement of grass-roots actions, from Bennett and Moss (2010) who call for this shift in order to move away from the damaged modern agricultural system to more recently Crane et al. (2012) who provide a somewhat one-sided perspective of the activity. In a similar manner to Purcell's local trap, the acceptance of a

guerrilla trap would help researchers to become more aware of the occasionally negative actions performed by guerrilla gardeners. In the context of this research, Purcell's ideas have promoted more conceptualisation of unregulated UA and have revealed this negative, somewhat hidden, side of guerrilla gardeners.

It must be noted that we are not arguing that all guerrilla gardeners damage land. Far from it, we just urge researchers to be mindful, when interacting with these groups, that objectivity is key. In the context of UA, guerrilla gardeners often transform neglected spaces into wonderful havens for produce, decorative plants and wildlife. This is reinforced by the likes of Milbourne (2011) and IET (2011), who demonstrate the positive impact guerrilla activity can have in our villages, towns and cities.

Key Points from the Case Studies

This research looks beyond the 'iron curtain' which cloaks the actions of those involved in unpermitted UA. It demonstrates the lengths to which individuals, and groups, will pursue the UA concept, avoiding authority in the process. This study not only adds to debates surrounding food in the city but provides empirical evidence on what could be termed 'rebellious' groups operating with the urban environment, producing spaces which are inherently 'out of place' (Creswell 1996; Pudup 2008). This exploration adds to the evolving knowledge base of submerged activities occurring within the urban and therefore provides more information on such secretive acts (Douglas 2011; Melucci 1996).

The extended observation during this research demonstrates that, as with certain instances of legitimate food projects, these unregulated sites can sometimes limit access and essentially privatise public space. This was particularly apparent with the WG, whose members created an allotment space and used the term 'community garden' to cloak their real intentions. Produce from this site was primarily used by the WG, whilst leftovers were sent forward for the community lunch: but first and foremost the site was an allotment space, intended for private cultivation and consumption. Public land owned by the local authority, intended for the community, was transformed from an accessible space to a restricted space. To an extent, there are similarities with the activities of the solo guerrilla gardener, who experienced hostility from her neighbour due to a lack of communication and his perception that she was privatising public land.

In the context of F Troop, this group's site was adorned with vegetables and flowers. The observations highlighted the nature of the group, in terms of discussing activities in small collectives and excluding any interested parties from understanding what was happening with the site. The pursuit of UA was predominantly a personal objective of the leader of the troop who, due to the lack of communication with the nearby populace, did not realise the related ambitions of the pub landlady, who wished to cultivate produce near the pub, in raised beds, to supplement the food served in her establishment. Subsequently, the observation approach revealed details

of the two guerrilla groups which, arguably, would have remained undetected if other research techniques were used (cf. Barker 2008; Haviland et al. 2010; Malinowski 1978). These observation-related revelations range from the general practice of the guerrilla groups (staged approach to UA) to the more complex account of their blunt view of authority: Cameron's 'Big Society' was a particularly problematic subject with F Troop, for instance.

The Methodological Approach: An Adaptable Set of Techniques

The wider relevance of this research is not isolated to the topics investigated, such as guerrilla gardening and UA, but the approach underpinning the data collection demonstrates a strategy which can be replicated in a variety of studies. We explored an unusual ordering of techniques in order to draw out as much informa-tion as possible from a complex and ever-evolving setting: providing a set pattern for the collection and a detailed analysis of the ethical implications of research intending to interact with what were, implicitly or explicitly, illegal activities. The latter is important here, as many studies – especially ethnographic – show little regard for the researcher's position when interacting with potentially illegal groups (see, for instance, Crane 2011; Crane et al. 2012; Patrick 1973; Whyte 1955; Zanetti 2007).

In the context of the themes touched upon throughout this book, the observation technique employed could be utilised in other research which focuses on UA and local food systems. To date, there are few studies which explore UA projects through ethnography (see, for instance, Milbourne 2011; Tomkins 2012); there are even fewer which observe urban illegal food growers (Crane et al. 2012; Zanetti 2007). What we uncovered about the guerrilla gardeners was only achieved through employing this prolonged observation of the groups. Arguably, some of the points discovered via this technique may be apparent in other UA schemes, even those which work with authority: issues of access and the misuse of space are bound to appear in legitimate urban food projects. Primarily, we highlight the need to con-sider observation for UA research. We call for more researchers to provide detailed notes on urban food projects, instead of the general practice of quick, sometimes one-off, visits which do not provide the whole story about these projects (Tomkins 2012).

UA and the Public: Perceptions of Urban Food Growing

In its most fundamental form, we attempted to make this a pioneering study into informal UA within the UK context. Whilst there is an ever-growing body of evi-dence on food in the city, relatively little research has been conducted outside North America and other UA 'hotspots' (see, for instance, Cobb 2011; Gorgolewski et al. 2011). This study has provided a review of two significantly different forms of UA: the radical (F Troop) and the everyday (WG and the solo guerrilla).

In terms of the urban food growing specifically, this research reveals the hesitancy, from locals, relating to more radical forms of UA: primarily F Troop's displays alongside the dual carriageway. Yet it also demonstrates an acceptance of more everyday forms of urban grow spaces, in this instance the WG community garden, which was generally positively received by the surrounding residents due to its less radical features. These points correlate well with literature concerning how the populace perceive these spaces: more radical forms are treated with caution, whilst spaces which the everyday person can relate to are usually viewed in a more approachable manner (Gorgolewski et al. 2011; Viljoen et al. 2005; Wiskerke and Viljoen 2012).

Whilst other countries, such as Canada and the USA, have embraced more radical forms of UA (Toronto Food Policy Council 1999; Johnson 2011; Komisar et al. 2009), the thoughts conveyed by the local communities in this study suggest that community gardens and other less drastic forms of UA would be more acceptable in the UK context. However, these comments only provide a glimpse into how the public might react to UA projects; it was not the intention of this book to provide a comprehensive analysis of the acceptance, or rejection, of UA systems. Nevertheless, the two communities' views of the unregulated projects demonstrate the need for UA to form part of the everyday urban experience, perhaps especially in less affluent communities, such as those featured in this study.

It is also relevant to realise that current European, national and local policy also favours the more 'everyday' forms of UA. Vejre (2012) noted that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) does not take the UA concept into account, seeing agriculture as very much a rural activity. In order for future policy to change, it may have to do so gradually, with more everyday schemes adopted first (Vejre 2012). This is echoed by Wiskerke and Viljoen (2012) who feel that less radical forms of UA will be embraced first, with perhaps the relevant authorities, and communities, accepting more innovative forms as time progresses. The various food policies featured in Chap. 2 reinforce these views, with each holding community gardens, and farms, high on their list of projects to be encouraged in the city context (DEFRA 2010; FAO 2009; London Food 2006; Marsden 2010). Temporary developments are also promoted through these strategies, with authorities encouraged to seize on the opportunity to use stalled spaces (Greenspace Scotland 2010; Scott et al. 2013).

Future Research: Observing Guerrillas in the Wild

The use of observation techniques to explore the hidden world of guerrilla UA results in the identification of more questions than answers. Fundamentally, this work suggests that guerrilla gardening can be harmful, both to the environment and surrounding community of their sites. It also suggests that some guerrilla gardeners will continue to avoid obtaining planning permission for their UA action and instead pursue the unregulated route until they decline – in some cases altering environments significantly. With this in mind and considering the movement is felt to be rapidly growing (Flores 2006; Hou 2010; McKay 2011; Reynolds 2008; Tracey 2007), more research is required to reveal the nature of the guerrilla projects. Furthermore, it

seems advisable to us that such research should adopt an approach which would allow a significant and dispassionate analysis of the guerrilla gardeners' actions and motivations, as opposed to most research to date, which seems to have largely focused on the guerrilla perspective, through the use of interviews and questionnaires.

We also suggest that guerrilla gardening is more 'hidden' than initially thought, with some groups, such as F Troop, using other social networking sites and avoiding Reynolds's forum. The inclusion of organisations such as the WG also suggests that there are unconscious guerrilla gardeners operating on everyday sites without permission. Inevitably, this shift from a central forum, and the realisation that some guerrilla gardeners operate outside the network, creates a dilemma for any future research: merely contacting these groups via Reynolds's forum is no longer sufficient. Instead, more comprehensive networking, both verbally and remotely, is necessary to gain admission to guerrilla gardeners. An open-minded approach is required when attempting to liaise with guerrilla groups for research purposes: it could be, for example, that one is operating much closer to home than initially thought, as this research demonstrated was the case with the WG.

There are many different angles for future research projects, particularly if one takes forward some of the new issues we have identified here: from testing the soil at unregulated guerrilla sites and evaluating the edibility of the produce to further investigating the roles of the guerrilla gardeners (e.g., in terms of geographies of gender) or focussing specifically on the deprived communities in which they act (see, for instance, Milbourne's (2011) work and associated papers on gardening in less affluent communities). Perhaps the most notable potential focus for any further research, and intentionally omitted from our own work, is the absence of an authority voice: whilst a range of documents and third-party views were considered, local authorities themselves were not consulted. Chapter 5 highlighted why this was deliberately the case. In other contexts, with different guerrilla gardeners less connected with the local authority, it may be possible to liaise with these practitioners. A strategy would need to be employed which would not reveal the precise location of a guerrilla gardening site, yet be sufficiently detailed to allow an idea about the development and to identify, and explore the impact of, appropriate regulations within that specific locale.

Evidently, in each case researchers should carefully adopt an ethical approach which will protect the guerrillas, themselves and their institutions. This is a priority since exposure, or incorrect research practice, could have serious implications for those involved. One must remember that interacting with guerrilla gardeners, on a meaningful level, will require large sacrifices and long amounts of time in the field: embedding one's self with the troop to fully understand their actions.

The Wider Relevance of This Book

Whilst we have focused upon two case studies for much of this text, with the occasional appearance of a third in the form of the solo guerrilla gardener, we now wish to reflect on how this builds on the wider field of UA research. The foregoing

sections hint at the wider relevance of this work, from the methodological approach to the idea that some forms of UA are less tolerable to members of the public. Yet we wish to conclude this book by moving away from the case studies and reviewing guerrilla UA more broadly.

On a much wider level, we believe that this study shows the determination of some, even in the Global North, to pursue UA, despite the lack of support through official channels. This echoes elements of the literature exploring the UA scene in the Global South, which mentioned how many are practising the activity without permission; of particular note were the African case studies, which showed how many were pursuing the unregulated path to produce crops for survival (see Chipungu et al. 2014; Lynch et al. 2013 and others). One could wonder, if we take Reynolds's (2008) wide view of guerrilla gardening, whether these actors in Africa could be guerrillas too. Whilst there is little reflection on guerrilla gardeners who practise UA in the Global North, there is even less in the Global South context: from South America to Africa and beyond, academic material is severely lacking. Apart from the odd mention of the practice being seen as unregulated, there is a significant need for more studies to uncover the exact impact of these actions, especially since unregulated UA practices are so widespread on the African continent.

Reverting back to the Global North, we demonstrate how UA is still viewed as somewhat alien by local authorities and other key actors, with those wishing to pursue the activity also unclear as to which channels they should pursue to gain permissions. The perception of planners, who are usually viewed as gatekeepers to land, is fuzzy from those we liaised with during this study. On numerous occasions, those wishing to practise UA did not understand the role of a planner and appeared to blame them for their lack of enabling. Politics, previous experiences and other issues were also viewed as reasons why some did not pursue a more official route for their UA activities. There is also confusion with regard to land owners generally, with those wishing to pursue UA lacking awareness about who to speak with and how to approach organisations or individuals.

In terms of general UA, the text also highlights the hesitancy of some members of society to adopt the practice. In this case, since the practice is still emerging in the UK, the public are not all ready for agriculture to appear in the city context: the idea of growing vegetables in the heart of a 'concrete jungle' is not viewed as appropriate by some. These thoughts were mainly raised during the interviews with those who surrounded F Troop's guerrilla site, with pub patrons showing disgust at the very idea of planting vegetables in such an area. Whilst this is obviously a radical example, evidence from the likes of Incredible Edible Todmorden (IET) and other schemes demonstrate how some are perplexed with the idea of UA.

Yet our study also shows how some are extremely passionate about the very idea of UA. This passion pushes these individuals to adopt a practice which is not officially backed nor endorsed by authority. In turn, this suggests that there is equally a collection of fervent individuals who wish to pursue UA; this is reinforced if one realises the sharp rise in bodies established to start such projects across the UK, from the Soil Association's 'Food Cities' programme to the national Big Dig events and the many local groups which have now sprung up; UA is on the increase

(Hardman and Larkham 2014). Most cities now operate some form of food-growing scheme in the city, often encouraged by movements in other countries, such as North America and beyond.

However, we do suggest that community gardens and allotments are more approachable than more revolutionary forms of UA. Whilst our exploration has predominantly focussed on guerrilla gardening, the text has also inadvertently investigated different forms of UA; responses from communities around the community garden, which was protected via a fence, demonstrated how they felt more relaxing about eating the food grown in this space. Contrary to this, views from those near to the more radical sites, such as the vegetables grown within the heart of a city centre, shows how they were less relaxed about consuming produce from this space. Whilst this study did not set out to gather perceptions about different UA practices, through the approach taken one can gain a glimpse into how the public may react to more radical versions of the activity.

Overall, this text has provided a glimpse behind those who practice guerrilla gardening: focussing explicitly on those who cultivate land and pursue the idea of UA. More research is certainly needed on the themes covered in this book to provide more details on the fascinating lives of these groups and individuals. Planners, sociologists and a whole host of other disciplines need to pay more attention to this under-researched activity, which is flourishing. There is also a need for local authorities to research those who engage in this activity, with the potential of somehow enticing guerrillas to move over to the more formal side, attracting an army of volunteers who are willing to make cities and towns more beautiful and productive.

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