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**Abstract**

*Emergence of concepts like sustainable development act as a trigger to awake a global consciousness : national and local public actor started to think about how to apply a sustainable way to live in city, to build potential sustainable/ green cities. A big change after a century of liberal development for city, essentially with concrete. Citizens actors, confronted to a certain urban miasma, tend to develop actions to build by themselves another way to live in the city, and to plan the city. This article focus on how these actors bring back nature in the center of the city of Lyon. We identify two collective gardening forms which have social, economic, landscape impact on their district. We analyse how these initiatives emerge, what values and representations they carry on, and what interest they can represent for the development of sustainable cities.*

*Key-words : sustainable city, urban planning, sustainable development, nature, urban garden*

**Introduction**

It's today commonly admitted that our societies are in a global crisis. We saw in 2008 that economy can be very fragile, that social cohesion is in decline and individualism became a strong priority (Ehrenberg, 2000; Morin, 2010). But we experience an environmental crisis too, which question our ways to live, our production model and our existence in the long terms.

Today, more than 50% of the mondial population live in cities, as they concentrate the cultural, economic and politic power of each territory. The 20th century has been marked by a neoliberal urban development to respond to a fast growth population (Peck & Tickell, 2002) with a focus made on the development of consuming places (Parham, 2015). This urban organization is today contested: few citizens and political actors put back nature and environmental topics in the center of cities. We also discover nature's benefits on health, mind and spirit (Pudup, 2008),

on biodiversity and to fight against pollution and warming in cities (Clergeau, 2012; Roszak, 2001), and so on the necessity to preserve nature (Bailly, 2013).

In this article, we would like to focus on the way that actors, citizens, residents, in this global and national context, try to bring back nature in city, and particularly on the collective gardening. Our problematic focus on how citizens actively participate in the construction of sustainable cities, by planning and managing these gardens. We use the expression “nature in city”, a term that can be contested, as nature cannot be associated with urban (Dubost et Lizet, 2003), because those green spaces are, by definition, created and managed by humans. If this is true for urban parks, this is quite more complicated for collective gardens, because most of them are wilderness, vacants lots (Demailly, 2014b), where nature emerged through the concrete.

We will describe in the first part, the history of urban collective gardening and our territory of research, Lyon, and the two different collective gardening identified. Secondly, we will describe the informal and formal appropriation of these vacants lots and the representation of gardeners. Thirdly, we analyse the way that they impact their neighbourhood and district.

## **Nature in city and sustainable city : the urban gardening practices**

### ***Emergence of nature in city : a rediscovery of nature's benefits***

The different international and national politics for 30 years converge towards a protection of environment and a return of the nature in cities. Even if the concept is questionable (Buclet, 2011), the traduction of sustainable development for cities, with Aalborg Chart in 1994, has highlighted their role in the transition to come. This integration of the sustainable development problematic on urban agenda is going to modify, slowly, the organization and aspect of cities.

At the same time, residents of cities start to be attracted by nature : a nature domesticated by man, which emerges in cities with the urban garden and parks in the 19th century. In psychology, researchers notice that nature have benefits on the human functioning (Roszak, 2001), while natural sciences inform on the way this nature can counter the pollution's effect in city and to reduce the ecological print (Clergeau, 2015). We discover the qualities, beauty and benefits of nature and so the necessity to preserve it (Bailly, 2013), and to bring it back in city, after a suffer metropolisation, imposed by a neoliberal vision of urban planning (Peck et Tickell, 2002). The work of Charles Lewis on the potential of transformation of bodies, of spirits and urban by nature is a first and stated the urban nature as necessary and positive (Lewis, 1996; Pudup, 2008).

Those different analysis can explain the second development of different forms of nature in cities, with this time, a focus on collective gardens and collective vegetable gardens.

### ***What's a sustainable city ?***

The concept of sustainable city is deeply linked with sustainable development, and has been discussed since 1992, and the conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, and the adoption of Agenda 21 in different cities. The Habitat Agenda in 1996 and the World Urban Forum in 2002 reinforced the concept, by defining the pillars of a sustainable city : social development (food and nutrition, green housing...), economic development (green productive growth, decent employment...), environmental management (soil management, waste and recycling...) and urban governance (reduction of inequities, strengthening of civil political rights).

A sustainable city is a way to develop cities to live with resources and biocapacity of one and only one planet (Rees et al, 2009) and to assure access of services and goods essentials for a decent living. It is a society project, and a politic project, in terms of education, formation, economy, and urban development (Charlot Valdieu et al., 2009). More generally, a sustainable city can be seen as a new culture (Lipovac & Boutonné, 2014) : new ways to live in the city, to move into the city and to consume. A project opposed to the today's vision commonly accepted by the cities: where inequalities are strong, with pollution, noise, cars, high buildings and domination of concrete. In other words, a world where the citizens have lost their rights on the space (Lefebvre, 1968), and where consuming is a priority (Parham, 2015). This concept of sustainable city is a way to develop spaces of production and socialization, in order to enable a potential change (Berkes & Folke, 1994; Lipovac & Boutonné, 2014).

The sustainable city is also an opportunity for an urban planner to take an integrated approach to urban planning, industrial transformation, transport changing, improved infrastructure, social cohesion and to reduce pollution. Those benefits are set for the long terms. To summarize, some cities are strongly engaged in sustainable development, and show what kind of actions can be made, like Singapore or Stockholm, for example, with the development of nature in the city within urban and public park, an Eco-friendly transportation regulations, and a water management.

In this paper, we will show that collective gardens are a way to build a sustainable city, and can be part of public policies to build the cities of future - and an economic way. Furthermore, the goals of these citizens' initiatives, their values, are close to the definition of sustainable cities, and their discourses are opposed to the way cities are built and managed today.

### ***Community Gardens : a brief history of collective gardening***

Urban community gardening finds its origins in the 19th century, in the United States. In 1890, country suffers from a social, environmental and economic crisis. Few municipalities react by setting up cultivation projects in vacant-lot and school gardens, to provide food support to the poorest, immigrants and newly residents arrived in city (Lawson, 2005). These first urban gardens are often known as Labour Gardens (Moore, 2006), and will be replicated in other American cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Chicago (Hynes, 1996; Warner, 1987). Different economic crisis of the 20th century – after World War I, the 30s, after the World War II - will be occasion for municipalities to develop again these forms of

gardening, to supply the most touched populations by these events: school gardens and war gardens are successively developed. Gardening indeed became an act of patriotism between the two World War (Bentley, 1998) with « Sow Seeds for Victory » and other considerations such as « Every garden a Munitions plan » (Basset, 1991, Hynes, 1996, Warner, 1987). These projects tend to be stopped once crises are over, as municipalities sell the land to private owners, in order to develop economic activities.

Economic crises of the 1970s will modify urban landscape of a lot of American cities, such as New York. Several factories, residencies and stores are closed, and the property of these lands came back to the city: which can't manage these lands without funds. Some groups of residents in poor districts such as Bronx or Lower East Side decided to take care of these vacant lands by transforming them into gardens, open to all. The aim is to develop nature and to fight against abandoned space, where criminality grew. The group Guerilla Gardening was the first to occupy vacant, with their « seeds bomb »<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, the first collective garden was opened in 1974. It will be assisted by the municipality and the Operation Green Thumb emerges in 1976 to support all collective gardens creations<sup>2</sup>. This institutional support will contribute to the development of community gardens in New York City and others like San Francisco, Chicago, until the 1990s.

The first stop at this movement will come from New York and the arrival of R. Giuliani's administration, and a neoliberal vision of urban planning. The plots of community gardens are seen as worthless, and are sold to private investors, to build parking and commercial center. The municipality shut down more than a hundred community gardens for these urban projects (Schmelzkopf, 2002). After a contesting period (Schmelzkopf, 1995), community gardens continued to grow in big cities in America and spread to Canada, England and France.

These community gardens are collective places where there's a convergence of multiple individuals to grow food, i.e the plots are shared and can be cultivated by each participant. These gardens have multiple goals like propose a place where residents of a district can interact, exchange, and learn to cultivate, produce food for the most deprived population in the district, be a place of integration for all where all inequalities are nullified, be a place of celebration too.

### ***Collective gardens in Lyon***

In France, collective gardens are strongly influenced by community gardens, and family gardens. These gardens have emerged in 1952 and were directly inspired by working gardens<sup>3</sup> (Guyon, 2008) : they are defined by the rural code and has to be managed by the association. These gardens offer individual lots, for urban families, to discover the benefits of gardening

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<sup>1</sup> Bomb of different flowers seeds which they could throw upside the fences protecting vacant. The rain can dissolve the container and nourish the seeds after.

<sup>2</sup> With loan of the lands for one symbolic dollars.

<sup>3</sup> Gardens born at the end of 19th century in France, created by Abbé Lemire, to offer a complement of revenue for the poor, occupy them and educate them too.

and agriculture. We identify two forms of collective gardening in Lyon : Shared gardens and Street gardens.

Shared gardens arrived in the middle of 1990s in France, with the national forum in Lille in 1997 and the creation of a national network: Jardin dans tout ses États. The first garden of Lyon emerge in 1998 in Villeurbanne. There's today more than 50 shared Gardens in the city. The plots are collective and shared: every gardener can cultivate what he wants, what he knows or what he wants to learn. The food produced is - in the majority of shared gardens - secondary and not sufficient to nourish every resident implicated: it's often cooked for some events and celebrations on the garden. The shared gardens were firstly created according to a bottom-up perspective: residents who seen a vacant green space built-up an association to formulate a demand of occupation to the municipality<sup>4</sup>. If their project is accepted, a temporary and renewable agreement for occupation is signed with the municipality, for one or three years. Some work can be done to install a fence, trays if necessary and to standardise the space. Some obligations are related to the convention : non-use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, promote biodiversity and avoid waste of energy for example.

The street gardens (Scribes, 2009) are small gardens planned by residents within the street. We distinguish three types of street gardens: bottom tree gardens, window boxes gardens and micro gardens.

The **bottom-tree gardens** are little spaces around urban trees that can be converted by residents, to plant flowers. Here there is no need of intervention from municipality, because the soil is already prepared.

The **Windowbox gardens** are out of soil. They are in a large or small tray that are accessible to everyone : they contain a large quantity of soil to plant flowers but also aromatics. Some associations like Incredible Edible<sup>5</sup>, or Habitants Main Verte in Oullins<sup>6</sup> build and install those trays. The installation is the occasion to create an event with some volunteers, some residents and other associative, where everyone participates. For the association and the participants, the installation is the occasion to garden, learn from the other and is a social moment. After that, everyone in the district can water and take care of the plants. We can find Street gardens at Croix-Rousse, Blandan Parc in the 7th district, Oullins, etc.

The **Micro gardens**<sup>7</sup> can be wild herbs emerging from the concrete, flower plants on little green space, flowers on the space between an habitation and the pavement. The residents choose to cultivate their street and to take care of flowers during the year.

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<sup>4</sup> But more and more shared gardens are now created by municipalities, in new neighborhood. In these cases, municipalities find a group of residents to cultivate the space, in a more top-bottom perspective.

<sup>5</sup> This association born in 2008, in the United Kingdom, in the city of Trolden, which got today an international visibility. This association has a priority : produce food for free and for all, and bring back nature in cities.

<sup>6</sup> Territory of Conurbation Grand Lyon

<sup>7</sup> In Lyon, the micro gardens emerged with Bernard Marret, a resident who also was in the Green Space direction, and who wanted to greenify his neighbourhood. He build up a group of

These street gardens are supported by the Green Space Direction of the city of Lyon : residents can contact the municipality once they have a project and they are a group, and see what's possible to do and plan on their street. If the project is accepted, in the case of micro gardens, a specialized enterprise intervene to dig the holes in the pavement. For windowboxes, the city can intervene to move the trays. These street gardens have two particularities : they emerge quite rapidly, compared to shared gardens, and they are accessible to everyone to water, manage, or degrade. We use the term collective garden to design those installations because they demand a group of residents - their management ask for a certain coordination within the group -, and the spaces are cultivated, with flowers, aromatics, like a garden.

### *Literature Review*

American literature is particularly rich on collective gardens, and on community gardens, as a way to instigate nature in city (Irvine, Johnson, & Peters, 1999). S. Moore (2006) explains the history of community gardening in the United States, showing the way that they are linked to different social and economic crisis in the 20th century (Moore, 2006). E. Eizenberg is interested in the commons (Eizenberg, 2012) produced by the New York City community gardens, and in the different conceptions of space, according to the theory of Henri Lefebvre. J. Welsh and R. MacRae highlight the born of a « food citizenship » (Welsh & MacRae, 1998) and of different communities of citizens based on food produced, in Toronto. R. Ghose and M. Pettygrove (2014) extend those theories to think about those collective urban gardens as spaces of citizenship : where the residents can structure, model their urban environment (Amstrong, 2000 ; Baker, 2004), and where they can contest the public policies and reclaim their « right to the city » (Lefebvre, 1968; Schmelzkopf, 2002; Staeheli, Mitchell, & Gibson, 2002). Participation which is not necessarily an empowerment for those residents (Staeheli, 2008).

In France, shared gardens are – for now - only emerging in social sciences, and notably in geography and sociology. The work of C. Den Hartigh shows the functioning, the history and the experiments of these gardens in France (Den Hartigh, 2013). S. Baudry analysis these places like a space of socialization, of protest and civil disobedience (Baudry, 2012). Shared gardens of Bordeaux has been decrypted for their affiliations with a sustainable neighbourhood, and for the participation of residents to a sustainable way to live (D'Andrea & Tozzi, 2014). Community gardens in Paris has been approached for the social demand of nature and like closed places open only to a certain highly qualified population (Bourdeau-Lepage & Vidal, 2012). If we consider the terms collective gardens instead of shared gardens, there is more research considering nature in city.

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residents, ready to garden and convert concrete in green space. With the Green Space direction, he established a way to garden in micro space, by digging a hole – via a specialized enterprise – in the pavement. Since then, the municipality experimented these micro gardens, with two start event, in 2005 and 2010 : « Gardening my city », « Gardening my neighbourhood ».

Collective gardens have been studied for their potential empowerment for a population (Boulianne, 2001), for the risks with the pollution of soil in cities (Baudelet, Halgrand, & Weill, 2007), for the sociability created by these spaces (Mestdagh, 2016a) and their uncertainty about their future (Mestdagh, 2016b). Finally, we can highlight the work of K.E. Demailly on the governance of vacant lots, showing how and by whom these unoccupied spaces are produced, and on the participation of citizens in those gardens, which can be a lever to participate actively in the construction of the neighbourhood and the city (Demailly, 2014a).

This literature, for now, miss the reasons of the participation of the collective gardeners and fail to explain why they want to actively maintain a green space in public. The street gardens are also totally absent from the literature. This form of collective gardening doesn't attract research in sociology and geography, like the community or shared gardens.

## ***Methodology***

### *Research context*

The empirical study is based on shared and street gardens localized in Lyon<sup>8</sup>. This city presents several interesting features for our study. Firstly, Lyon is crossed by two rivers, Rhone and Saone, which allowed the development of blue and green lines of nature. The city – and the conurbation<sup>9</sup> - is strongly engaged in an energetic transition, particularly to fight its image: indeed Lyon is often associated with an urban vision, district where industries and habitations were mixed (Saunier, 1994).

Secondly, the territory of Lyon propose at least 12 000 hectares of green space and count 14 parks, with 200 km of nature paths. These parks were the first to adopt a Charter for nature in 2000. The nature development in city is ruled by the Tree Charter, which summarizes the vision, principle and recommendation for a common landscape dynamic between the actors of the territory. The municipalities are engaged in a sustainable management of the green space since 2000, with alternative methods to the phyto-sanitary product: introduction of predatory insects, vegetalization with different kinds of plants, or salvage of rain water. Since 2017, the conurbation has adopted the « 0 phyto » plan, consisting in an interdiction to use – for citizens and city's technicians - fertilizer product in public space. This plan is linked to a visual communication campaign consisting in showing the beauty of wild nature in city, like herbs growing in the pavement, for example. The headline is : « when vegetation came back, life is good ». This to raise awareness of citizens but also technicians of city (public roads), that wild nature isn't a danger in the street, and can be accepted, beautiful and have different benefits.

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<sup>8</sup> and two cities, part of the conurbation: Venissieux and Oullins.

<sup>9</sup> Urban conurbation of Lyon has been created 31 December 1966, by a state decree. Situated on the confluence of the Rhone and Saone, it count 59 municipalities, 1,3 million residents, 80% of the population on the Rhone department.



Thirdly, the conurbation Grand Lyon support shared gardens by leasing them a land, and by fundings dedicated to their functioning<sup>10</sup>, if gardeners formulate a demand. The land is free and an agreement is signed between the municipality and the association in charge of the shared garden. This agreement have some obligation like: no « hut », no noise and nuisance by night and taking care and clean the plots. From an economic point of view, leasing these lands is a cost for municipalities: they are in the center, on places, some are very well situated. Some private actor, investor, want to buy these lands. So keeping it for shared gardens relied on a good will of certain political actor. In some gardens, an organizer is funded by the city to open all week and animate the garden. It concerns 3 gardens in Lyon for now. The organizer allow the garden to be open for visitors, students and kids from school. The organizer animates some school classes for kids from schools in the district, around the nature, the soil, etc. The Conurbation also funds Passe-Jardins, an association created in 1998 to support shared gardens in the region. The association has some salaries and volunteers. It delivers a label Shared gardens with a chart, formations for gardeners and information. It's a support for new shared gardens which provide help on how to manage a group of people, how to cultivate without pesticide, how to adopt permaculture, how to organize an eco-responsible event. Some employees of Passe-Jardins can come on a new garden to ensure formation for all volunteers, for example. Passe-Jardins also organize events, twice a year, to gather all the volunteers and actors of the region's shared gardens. De facto, Passe-Jardins acts either like a structure which can organize and help the shared gardens on the territory and like a network, where gardeners and new garden's organizer can meet other people, find advices and resources.

The street gardens are also supported by the municipalities: the Green Space Direction gather the demands of residents and organize the layout for the micro garden. The goal is to mobilize residents to develop this kind of initiative. Two streets, in the 3rd district has been vegetalized and are now maintained by its residents. The person in charge gathers the demands, gives seeds twice a year to gardeners and organize events. Those events is the occasion to meet the gardeners, and give them advices on how to grow plants, which organic fertilizer to use, on how to recognize the plants, how to maintain them in a good shape, etc. These kind of events finish with a shared meal with all the gardeners.

### *Research design*

We decided to use a purely qualitative approach, to better understand the logic, the experience lived by the gardeners when they are in the garden. We use an ethnographic approach with semi-directive interviews, observations and field notes, and an immersion in each garden (Gumperz, 1989 ; Mehan, 1978 ; Spradley, 2016)(Gumperz, 1989; Mehan, 1978; Spradley, 2016)(Mehan, 1978; Spradley, 2016) and an approach of case-study on multiple gardens (Merriam, 1988 ; Yin, 1984)(Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984). Using a qualitative study allowed to seek new theoretical insights with the richness of the data and material collected (Cuervo-Cazurra, Andersson, Brannen, Nielsen, & Reuber, 2016). Besides, qualitative methods are much more suited to how and why questions (Yin, 2014)

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<sup>10</sup> Often less than 1000 euros / year.

than quantitative methods. A qualitative approach allowed the depth and breadth necessary to truly understand the experience and the practice of each gardener. It provides more details on past, decisions, behaviors and representations. We selected shared gardens that emerged from citizens, according to the data shared by the person in charge of the shared gardens at the municipality. For this text, we choose to base our observations on all visited shared gardens<sup>11</sup>. For the street gardens, we focused on two neighborhoods: Guillotière, a popular district where there is a strong associative movement and a low income rate, and Montchat, a more recent district, with a high income rate, with more individual houses. Both presents a high number of street gardens, and strong collective of residents taking care of it.

The interview guide for gardeners covers five main themes: the garden / project historical, the functioning of the garden and the collective, the relation to city and public actors, the relation between gardeners, the impacts of the gardens and the perception of the city. These dimensions were derived from the literature. Like Mead (1965) and Blumer (Blumer, 1986), we suppose that we can understand the behavior of the participant only with the signification that they attribute to their actions.

We realized 36 interviews with participants of different citizen initiatives and gardeners, 3 with elected people and actors in charge of public green space on the territory. Those interviews are inseparable of multiple observation on shared gardens, to see the interaction on the gardens between gardeners, events with public and how gardeners occupy the space. The analysis of these qualitative content was made through the Atlas TI software. We extracted verbatim to restore the density of the data collected.

### **Dig in collective gardens: relation with city, representations and impacts**

The conurbation Grand Lyon, with a strong green politics and the good will of certain political actor, is a favourable soil for the citizens collective gardens. But how gardeners act with the city ? What are their representations and the impacts of their practices in terms of sustainable city ? All these analyses to bring some reflexion on how cities can implement collective gardens in their politics, better supporting them and developing them.

#### ***Act with or without the city ?***

If collective gardening is supported by the conurbation Grand Lyon and municipalities, the relations between gardeners and institutions can sometimes be problematic. Indeed, the official agreement between association and municipality is conducted for either one or three years, and can be reconducted or stopped on municipalities' will. The example of New York City - and other cities in the United States - showed that the life of these gardens are very dependent on political context, the good will of public actors and the economic context of the city. Municipalities can decide to sell the lands to private investor one year, and so on forced the shared garden to close. One public actor reminds that these gardens are supposed to be ephemeral.

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<sup>11</sup> We visited 22 shared gardens on Lyon for the purpose of this research.

First, the shared gardens have to be nourishing, a garden is, by definition nourishing, and these shared gardens have to remember that it's not their land. Of course, they organize it, very well, but municipalities can stop an agreement, or refuse an agreement. Those gardens are, normally, ephemeral. (Elected, Conurbation Grand Lyon, December 2015).

In other words, these gardens may be seen by institutions like a solution to organize a vacant, neglected space, restore it and make it shine for future use. For the residents and gardeners, that's a negative point because they always have an uncertainty: they don't know if next year, their garden will be there, *i.e* if the agreement will be renewed.

Right from the start, the conurbation, which owns the land, specifies that this garden will be temporary. The project of gardens is a way to occupy the land, to contribute to the landscape and the life of the neighbourhood, during a time when the land is unused. The long term's project is to renovate all the neighbourhood. So our gardens can be stopped next year, but it will be moved, we don't know where yet. (Véronique, Shared Garden of Saulaie, november 2017).

This ephemeral aspect of the shared gardens can be a problem because gardeners invest their (free)time, their energy to organize and to restore a place. So they develop affection, emotional attachment towards the garden (Blanc, 2012) and towards their group. Breaking this attachment is a risk to break the will of these residents to invest themselves in other gardens. This may be a cause of leaving, of disengagement from residents: because they don't know if the gardens will be permanent, durable. The street gardens are also subject to attachment from residents, despite the fact that flowers can be cut, destroyed, or that the hole can be filled back by the municipality's technician : "It's kind of my little garden in the street, so i'm very attached to it. I manage it every two days in summer". (Mathilde, Micro-garden Monchat, december 2017).

### *Experiencing a formal integration "top bottom"*

The thematic of urban collective gardening start to be taken in account by institutions: a few gardens on the territory were started on municipalities' will. For example, the garden Graines de Lait take place in a new urban neighbourhood, in the seventh district. The city and the backer of the neighbourhood planned to keep two plots for a shared gardens before the construction. When the buildings were finished and delivered, the municipality ask to residents if they were interested to create an association to build a shared gardens on those plots. Some residents answer positively to the invitation and create the association and the shared garden Graines de Lait. The two plots form a land of 380m<sup>2</sup> and the association count twenty participants, including eight really active. The plots contain a space for plantation, a space for experimentation and some bees totem. It's closed by a half-high barrier, and open when they are one or more gardeners present. The garden is active on Saturday morning, Sunday and some evening in the weeks. It's interesting to note that despite the agreement, gardeners have some freedom on how manage the garden.

Residents and other passersby, look at the garden, and find it beautiful, they come to discuss with us. Some are not very happy, because the garden appears to be a little wild, a little messy. It's my, our vision of the gardening and the nature. This presentation of nature attract people, in a good way and a bad way. Some really are scared of wild nature, because of what it represents for them. (Alexia, Shared Garden Graines de Lait, march 2016).

Today, the number of residents who participate in the gardens is too short: the president of the association will leave and nobody wants her place. This garden is at high risk of having no gardeners in the future. This because of the turn-over - ancient residents leaving, newcomers. Municipalities have to find a way to concern more gardeners on these types of garden: by promoting the social gardening, maybe find a way to reward it, or by hiring organizers to maintain the garden open. This solution seems to be particularly efficient for the Shared garden Ilot d'Amaranthe, in the seventh district: this garden keep more than a hundred total adherents, for less than 15 active participants.

### *Informal practices of the gardeners*

Some residents don't want to wait during the - too long for them - procedure, which sometimes conduct to a refusal from the municipality. That is the start of the garden Les Pendarts, an informal shared garden which stayed in conflict with authorities. Created in the spring of 2014, the association La Ruche de Croix Rousse wanted to « *give the possibility to residents to invest a central space of the neighbourhood and to develop a new space of sociability, creation and social development* » (Website, La Ruche de Croix-Rousse). The place spotted by the residents was a vacant lot with wilderness of 1700m<sup>2</sup>, situated on the top of Croix-Rousse, with an ancient villa on it.

The association formulated a demand for a formal agreement to the municipality. At the beginning of 2015, bored to wait for so long, the association decided to invest the space by cleaning the vacant plot and the villa, convert the green space into a garden, install a composter. The association rapidly count 118 members, essentially residents of the neighbourhood. The shared garden open illegally in spring of 2015 : in addition to gardening, the association propose activity like Yoga, creation of furniture, learning class, etc. The garden Les Pendarts is not only a shared garden, it's a « space where we can meet other people, discuss, laugh, dance, sing, share and invent » (Participant, Garden Les Pendarts). But the association never obtained the agreement. The reason is that this spot was supposed to be sold to a private investor to build a parking : which was finally not doable because of the instability of soil. On 17 April 2015, the municipality forbid the resident to continue their activities on the plot, and install a fence to block access to the garden. On the first of may, the association cut a part of the fence to continue to occupy the garden. This illegal occupation will continue until September 2015 : policemen started to guard the fence and definitely blocked the access of the garden for the participant. This experience shows the difficulties for the city to accept that residents take care, occupy a public place, particularly for security reasons.

They (volunteers of the association of Garden Les Pendarts) didn't want to be associated with the collectivity. They wanted to be an alternative space on Croix-Rousse, non taken in obligations and juridical constraints. But they wanted a support from the conurbation, to keep the land. But we cannot let them, it was too late because they were already in conflict with the collectivity. Also, the land has real problems of insecurities : they were holes in the ground, it was too dangerous for the kids. From a legal point of view, we cannot let them appropriate the land. (Vice-President of sustainable development, Conurbation Grand Lyon, november 2015).

These "land hacking" as the gardeners said are quite rare in the case of shared gardens. However, it can take another form : some gardeners like to invest other vacant lot, next to the gardens. They plant vegetables only, and let it appear as a wild and still vacant lot, to not alert the municipality. These informal appropriations can be followed by an official demand. In the case of the street gardens, gardeners often go beyond their micro gardens, to plant flowers in other places. That's the case of this resident, who installed two trays in front of her house, without the city consense, and plants flowers in the street below her, to hide a non-esthetic building.

Yes I can plant sometimes without the Green Direction consense. The two trays, for example. It's in front of my house, I don't see why I should make procedures for that. With my neighbors, we also plant flowers where it's not really...planned. We do this because it's no effort, it demands nothing, and it does no harm. (Lucie, Micro-garden Monchat, november 2017).

### ***Why do they act ? Reasons of gardeners to invest public space***

In order to understand the practices of collective gardening, we tried to identify the reasons to gardening given by the residents. What are the ideas which led these actors to become gardeners in group ? An analysis of those reasons is a good way to better understand the gardeners and propose some pertinent way to concern them for the city.

First reason which emerges from the interviews is the lack of green space in the city. For these actors, the concrete is everywhere in Lyon, and too few are contested by nature. It's the results of a long period of neoliberalism urban planning (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Pudup, 2008). Concrete is grey, and associated to the pollution, car, publicity, sadness and to the moroseness of the city. In others word, their representation of what the urban has to be is different of what it is actually. These gardeners want to bring green and nature to contest the concrete and the grey : for them, the green is full of meanings like joy, regeneration, vitality, etc. The green is supposed to bring back happiness in the neighbourhood and to transform the city in a sustainable one. With their gardening's practices, residents wants to put green and nature in their neighbourhood, to transform it, to make it more liveable and sociable. For some, it's a fight against the concrete, for others, it's a way to keep nature in their lives. This will to bring back nature in the city also lies on an environmental esthetic (Blanc, 2012): those residents gardeners want to make their street beautiful, to highlight the beauty of the urban environment. They want to show that green

and grey are compatible and can be a source of a better urban habitability (N. Blanc, 2014). For some residents, nature in city can be a form of art and become an esthetic experience, an autonomous form to live everyday life opposed to the policial injunction (N. Blanc, 2012).

*It's global, on all Lyon : we lack of nature everywhere in the city...we no more wanted parking lot, so we put there some vegetalized wheel, filled with flowers and herbs, this to counter cars, progressively. We want more nature, so all these actions are a way to show more nature in city, and to show what nature can produce in terms of image, landscape. (Louise, Guerilla Gardening, february 2016).*

Second reason, the residents want to work with the soil, to learn how to plant and different techniques of gardening. For two reasons, to renew a relationship and an emotional link with earth (Charbonnier, Latour, & Morizot, 2017). And to go further than a relation object/ subject with the soil, they develop a relation of compassion, they care about the soil and the nature (Blanc, 2014). They want to protect it, and to redevelop biodiversity in city, by attracting bees with insect totem for example, and with flowers in streets. Some gardeners really care about how vegetation can emerge and survive in this hostile environment. They recognize nature as a grand Other (Blanc, 2014) that they contemplate and admire: these gardeners are aware that environment is damaged, and that they have to act, even at their level, to protect it, for them and for the future generation. Gardening here becomes a sensitive experience which highlights an ordinary creativity for the residents (Blanc, 2012).

That's why it's a little messy, and people don't understand this. But I like a lot the wild nature, flowers, a lot of things are edible, wild flowers which grow in the gardens without our permission. Keeping this is diversity. We also have insect totems, for wild bees on the lots : if we want to attract them, we need flowers, natural, wild plants, not only vegetable garden. And if we want that our vegetable garden work well, we need wild plants next to it. Indeed it's in the charter, we maintain our garden, but in an ecological way. (Alexia, Shared garden Graines de Lait, March 2016).

Some gardeners mention the possibility of taking care of the soil, and taking care of its own person in this way: with a reciprocity of benefits.

This is a huge connexion, it develops the sight, the sense of smell, the creativity. It's a space where you are conscious of the nature.(...) You take from nature but you also have to give. The garden is a possibility to think about yourself, but also about the world, and its rhythm. The gardens offer a possibility to heal the soil. (Rachel, shared garden sur Cours, november 2017).

Third reasons, these participants in collective gardens in Lyon highlight the possibility of doing things by themselves. Following the logic of the today's famous credo, Do it yourself, these gardeners want to cultivate, to produce their own food, to discover the hard work to grow a salad or a tomato. They want to come back to what they call "reality", and to discover how things work outside of a supermarket. Their representations and ideas are close to the makers

(Anderson, 2012): taking back the process of producing something, of doing something concrete, tangible. It's a step back to promote handcrafts instead of a generalization and massification of production and rest on three motivations : autonomy, creativity, responsibility. This movement is part of a new way to perceive work and society, and is very critical, opposed to consuming society (Lallement, 2015). By producing themselves even a little bit of food or simply aromatics, those residents take part in this movement and make a criticism on how we consume food today, without thinking about how it's produced, what it demands, how it can be a danger, etc.

The idea is to make people think about the way things grow, and where it's produced. There is not only a supermarket which gives vegetables, these kinds of things. We want people to think about ecological practices : no pesticides, no chemical products, the compost bin too, there is an awareness. The peeling is not just a waste, we can make it useful instead of putting it in the trash. (Nathalie, shared garden Le Doua Vert, January 2016).

To make compost, you have to wait 12 months, its force you to think about your life, the rhythm of the nature and the rhythm of yours. (Rachel, shared garden sur Cours, november 2017).

The fourth reason appeared in all the documents of presentation for the shared and street gardens, of institutions and associations : the social aspect. Indeed, these gardens are always presented as spaces where people can meet, exchange, be friends with other families of the neighbourhood. It can « favourite social aspect » (City of Lyon for the shared Garden), and « be a space of meetings, exchange, to encourage the relationship and neighbourhood live » (Association Brin d'Guill). Indeed, these streets and shared gardens have the hard missions to fix the social fabric with the practice of gardening. There is the representation that those gardens can be a socio-urban village organization (N. Blanc, 1996): a mix between the urban population and the village population – often see as more social, welcoming, etc. This social aspect also emerged from our interviews, with a particular accent on new retired people, and newcomer in the city. The shared garden is a way to meet other people of the neighbourhood, and to extend a social network.

I joined the garden as soon as I was retired. For me, it's a way to meet people of my neighbourhood: I have met my neighbours in the garden, but I have never met them before, during 8 years here. (...) It's the occasion to meet new people, who share interest in nature, gardening. (Sarah, Shared garden Confluence, november 2017).

All those reasons identified in the literature and interviews allow us to better understand the motivations of gardeners. They associate their practices to different values, social, environmental: values that are important to know in order to concern residents, to make them participate in the urban planning.

### ***Impact and potential of these Citizens' initiatives of collective gardening***

Those collective gardens invest public space with diverse activities - not only gardening - and participate *de facto*, more or less, to the urban planning and development. We distinguish here four impacts of the gardens on the territory : landscape, social, education and well-being.

### *The Nature as a contribution to urban landscape*

The goal of these different gardens is to impact the city/ district for the landscape. Gardeners want to greenify the city and fight against the concrete, improving city's and neighbourhood's landscape. The idea is that nature makes the city more beautiful and attractive and these touches of greens contribute changing the landscape. The gardens Grattons les Pentes, located on Croix-Rousse hills offer a view on the Saone and the basilica Fourviere. Situated away from the road, in a calm neighbourhood, many gardeners, participants and visitors come just to admire the view and enjoy the calm. Other gardens, situated in a more urbanized district, like the shared garden of Confluence, also contribute to build a special landscape: mixing new buildings and "wild"<sup>12</sup> nature.

Yeah, it contributes to create a different atmosphere in the neighbourhood, which already is a little green, but mostly mineral. The gardens really contribute to the landscape, we look at it, we have the Saone, and the hills behind, it's just beautiful. (Emilie, Shared garden of Confluence, November 2017).

Here, these gardens offer a rural environment (Dubost, 1984) in the city. It creates a new harmony and contribute to the development of a green thread (C. Calenge, 2003). According to C. Calenge, « not a single urban project can forget the landscape level » (2003) : every urban planning, including citizens ones, take in account this problematic of the landscape. Indeed, every urban planning has a consequence on the urban landscape : and contribute to change it. Here, residents want to give meaning to city, by bringing back nature in their district. For gardeners, an artistic nature can be a way to enlighten landscape. That is why Guerilla Gardening decorate walls with their vegetal tags :

It's a form of urban art, urban appropriation, like another. We sometimes said street land art : because street art is the graph, land art is art with natural elements. So it's streets land art. That's how we point out our actions... The vegetal tag is a way to enhance the wall, the district, the city. (Guerilla Gardening, April 2016).

According to gardeners, nature can also be an art and improve the landscape. The shared garden La Réserve, next to Gerland in the seventh district is also focused on the nature as art, with a space reserved for artistic figures, to highlight the landscape. This way, nature allows a better « habitability » (N. Blanc, 2014) of the city for the residents, enriching the view and the neighbourhood. Those gardens are space where residents « escape the city » (Chiesura, 2004),

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<sup>12</sup> Following meaning given by gardeners: wild as a non organized space.



as well as the public park : the green, the tree, plants, sometimes the calm bring a particular atmosphere on the garden, which is radically different than the city.

The garden is a pocket of nature, of greenery inside the neighbourhood, mostly urbanized. When we work, when we are in the garden, we sometimes forgot that we are in Lyon. (Matthieu, Shared Garden Le Secret, november 2017).

### *Nature for Well-being*

This integration of nature in city, and the contribution to landscape, is also a potential factor for well-being (Bailly, 2013). Indeed, nature in city can bring fresh air, water purification, wind and noise filtering, microclimate stabilization (Chiesura, 2004) : an alley full of trees can for example have effect on the temperature in summer, with a reducing of 2 degrees Celsius or more (Clergeau, 2012). But nature can also reduce stress (Ulrich, 1981) and provide a sense of peacefulness and tranquillity (Kaplan, 1983). By bringing some nature in very urbanized neighbourhoods, those collective gardens act for the dwellers well-being, and others. Furthermore, parks and nature have a significant impact on stress-reduction and mental health (Hartig, Mitchell, de Vries, & Frumkin, 2014). This well-being is human and also non-human: gardeners bring some tools like Totem insects, to attract insects and encourage biodiversity. The territory become a laboratory for biodiversity (N. Consales, 2000).

### *Nature as a way to bring social link*

Nature can also encourage the use of outdoor spaces, increasing interactions with neighbours and potential social integration (Coley, Sullivan, & E. Kuo, 1997). On Saturday and Sunday, shared gardens and micro gardens attract people, passersby, who come on the gardens, ask questions and interact with them. On certain shared gardens, children of surrounding buildings come on the garden to play, to touch plants, and some of them to try gardening. These gardens appear as places of non-consumption, free, which are more and more uncommon in cities (Parham, 2015). There are also spaces of meetings and leisure : it replaces leisure linked to consumption and promote green/ nature activities. It can indeed construct social ties (E. Kuo, Bacaicoa, & Sullivan, 1998). Gardening on a shared garden allow to meet other people : for some gardeners, the place is a way to occupy themselves and to fit in a group of people of their neighbourhood.

We do not participate in the association to produce, we are here for the conviviality, producing is not the goal. Personally, I came to the garden with my wife as so as I was in retirement(...) This winter, some of the woman of the gardens gathered to knit. Some go to the movie theater together. The network on the garden brings to interpersonal relation, going further than the only garden. (Matthieu, Shared Garden Le Secret, november 2017).

On micro garden too, the managing of these micro-spaces allows to meet the neighbour and to interact more frequently with them. To discuss the managing, about the seeds for next seasons, for the next opening of micro gardens, for example.

When we organize the distribution of seeds for next season, we want to gather participants, maybe plan a shared meal too, or a buffet. I strongly support the fact that this distribution has to be in the neighbourhood, in one of the gardeners' houses: it's often mine by the way. Other structures like the MJC asked to organize the distribution but it's too impersonal, in my opinion, we would miss the social link of these moments. (Lucie, Manager of a MIF Neighbourhood, november 2017).

Furthermore, the gardens become an important place of the district, as other structures. The gardeners organize different events, like shared meals, discovery of nature and agriculture, and participate to other grand events like the Lyon "Fête des Lumières". It also become a place where associations and schools can act, and organize workshops.

We also make meal together, when we have potatoes, we make a salad and come to eat it together. We organize some petanque tournament, same when we have honey, we taste it together with a meal. We distribute the honey to all volunteers. We try to organize some little events too : concert, choral. On 8 December, we came to highlight the garden with some candle. There were many passing by, and we were 20 gardeners. It was cool. (Jacqueline, Shared Garden Grattons les Pentes, december 2015).

### *Nature, Education and Learning*

Shared gardens are also a place where learning is important, and where associations, schools and other groups organize workshops, classes and other events around the urban nature, sustainable development and ecological practices. For example, in Oullins, on the shared gardens of Saulaie, kids from a school of the neighbourhood come once a month to garden, with an organizer – funded by the municipality. It's the occasion for kids to discover the soil, the plants, vegetables and to learn how the nature function in general. They came back at the end of the year to collect some vegetable that they planted earlier.

Here is the tray reserved for the kids of the schools. They come to the garden, but in winter it's the professional gardener of the city and the volunteer of the shared garden who go to classes to explain compost and gardening. In other seasons, the kids come and gardens: flowers for their mothers for example, tomatoes, and this year they have made potatoes. (Véronique, Shared garden La Saulaie, november 2017).

This proximity between schools and shared gardens is common in Lyon. Schools see in the shared gardens a way to educate kids and to teach them the cycle of nature. Associations specialized on the study of insects, biodiversity, compost and others also come for some workshops. Other associations are as well interested to use the gardens : in the neighbourhood

of Confluence for example, it's an association which taking care of retired people and bring them once a week on the shared gardens.

This is also a place where gardeners exchange a lot on their practices of gardening. The chart of these gardens requires ecological gardening: gardeners have to learn new practices and exchange with others is the best way to learn quickly. Some gardeners are amateurs, some are confirmed, some just has a little experience, but they learn with the others and by practising.

Personally, I had no experience, no knowledge of gardening at the start. But the others, and some semi-professional gardeners, taught me, progressively. Not always the same, but we learned gardening, and we take pleasure to garden, thanks to others. (Sarah, Shared garden of Confluence, november 2017).

Finally, micro gardens and shared gardens appeared as places rejuvenating the city. The shared gardens become central in their neighbourhood, even if they don't bring enough people and a lot of residents are still totally indifferent. The micro garden allows residents to meet their neighbours, and contribute to transforming the neighbourhood and streets with nature. Those places also allow self-improvement (Pudup, 2008) and well-being (Colding & Barthel, 2013). They can be seen as cultural ecosystemic services (Clergeau, 2012), indirects (Rankovic, Pacteau et Abbadie, 2012), offering different benefits for residents and others (Bally, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

This text focused on collective gardens as a way to bring back nature into city, and participate in the construction of a sustainable city. Indeed, Lyon is a very urbanized city, with a growing concernment for nature, from politics actors and citizens. Those actors have the same goals: greenify the city and make it more liveable.

So what is the point for the city to adopt these collective gardens ? First, it's an economical way to transform the city. The micro gardens and the shared gardens are a non-expensive form to develop nature in city. Citizens manage and maintain these green spaces for free, with social and psychological benefits. An organizer can be required for certain neighbourhood, to maintain engagement from residents. Secondly, these initiatives can transform a neighbourhood, making it more liveable and lively, more attractive to residents and future residents. Thirdly, it's a way to concern residents, on environmental problematic and on urban planning: therefore, it can be a good link to participative democracy.

For citizens, the participation in these gardens also has its good points: it's a way to recreate a link with the soil and the nature, to develop his well-being, etc. Those gardens bring two types of resilience : resilience for residents, who resist to concrete, to consumerism, to the rhythm of the life in the city. It's also resilience from the nature, because those gardens brings diversity and biodiversity in city (Colding & Barthel, 2013).

So, are these shared gardens a first answer to build a sustainable city ? More or less. By offering space of leisure and non-consumption, of nature and biodiversity, they offer a first step towards the definition of the sustainable city. But it's necessary to keep in mind that these collective gardens are managed by graduated and highly graduated people essentially - on Lyon. Plus, the shared gardens are still closed, and should be open to respect the principle of equity of a sustainable city (Bourdeau-Lepage & Vidal, 2012).

Cities can support these green initiatives with programs like Green Thumb in New York City in the 70s and associations like Passe Jardins for Lyon. Build parking lot, commercial zones or gardens inside public parks or non used spaces, these choices from political actors will make cities of tomorrow.

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