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# INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS FOR ADULT EDUCATION

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# INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS FOR ADULT EDUCATION

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**Abstract**

*This paper describes and analyzes the social relations that emerged from an ongoing adult education internship/community-based garden project in Montreal. I employ institutional ethnography to explore and uncover how adult education internships in community gardens and gardening programming can work to produce disproportionate outcomes for adult learners, community workers, and community members. I trace my own and others' experiential knowledge of attempting to use gardens for social, environmental, and educational reasons into texts and policies that shape garden and adult education possibilities in community-based contexts. In the process of creating, funding, enacting, and evaluating adult education internships in community organizations, I elucidate specific institutional contrivances (e.g., funding, policy, work processes, discourse) that are presently structuring and defining who experiences access to gardens, gardening and its ostensible health and well-being benefits, and adult education.*

**Résumé**

*Cet article décrit et analyse les relations sociales émergeant d'un stage en éducation des adultes/projet de jardin communautaire à Montréal toujours en cours. Je mobilise l'ethnographie institutionnelle pour explorer et découvrir en quoi les stages en éducation des adultes dans les jardins communautaires peuvent contribuer aux résultats disproportionnés des personnes apprenantes adultes, des personnes qui travaillent avec la communauté et des membres de la communauté. Je trace mes propres connaissances expérientielles, et celles des autres, tirées de tentatives d'utiliser les jardins à des fins sociales, environnementales et pédagogiques pour les intégrer aux textes et politiques qui façonnent les possibilités pour l'éducation des adultes et les jardins en contexte communautaire. En examinant le processus de créer, financer, mettre en œuvre et évaluer les stages en éducation des adultes au sein d'organismes communautaires, je jette la lumière sur les dispositifs institutionnels précis (p. ex. financement, politiques, procédures de travail, discours) qui structurent et définissent actuellement l'accès accordé aux jardins, au jardinage et aux bienfaits présumés pour la santé et le bienêtre, ainsi qu'à l'éducation des adultes.*

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**Keywords**

*Community gardens, adult education, institutional ethnography, neo-liberalism*

**Mots-clés**

*jardins communautaires, éducation des adultes, ethnographie institutionnelle, néolibéralisme*

In this paper I analyze the social relations that emerged from an informal adult education internship/community-based garden project in Montreal. Guided by institutional ethnography (IE) (Smith, 1999, 2005), I investigated different ways gardens are being textually and politically used to advance global sustainability goals, to enable adult education and employability training, to support local food security programs, and to contribute to neighbourhood "greening" and "revitalization." I traced my own and others' experiential knowledge into the vast political and institutional terrain of relevant texts and policies that coordinate our educational and gardening efforts, paying attention to the cumbersome bureaucratic work that enables the physical labour often associated with gardening. Through this tracing, I extended sociological interpretations of policy and governance issues in relation to neo-liberal funding schemes that enable adult education and gardening in community contexts while constraining the overall social and environmental justice potential of these kinds of projects.

The article is based on years of fieldwork that I conducted as part of a broader inquiry on the social and environmental relations that emerged from school and community gardening in Montreal. My findings were grouped into four main themes that shape garden possibilities: funding, labour, land, and history. For the purpose of this paper, I discuss funding and labour through my ongoing community-based research with the Griffin House, a Montreal organization whose mandate is to support people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and barriers to education/employment. In collaboration with front-line community workers, we established an adult education/employment program called Gardening for Food Security, in which the garden served as the central site for project activities (popular education and food production). I used photography, voice memos, field notes, informal conversations, and interviews to document issues and institutional contrivances that shaped my gardening work and the gardening work of community workers. In attending reflexively to my ongoing observations and reflections about gardening and garden work for social and environmental justice, I began to see how gardens are implicated in enduring social relations—relations I could effectively navigate to create gardens in the community for different purposes (i.e., an adult education internship), but which concurrently prevented community workers (and by extension community members) from doing the same things. While the social relations that emerge from my embodied experience as "engaged/activist scholar" differ significantly from the social relations of those who are experiencing homelessness, tracing these relations from my position of privilege helped community workers socially organize and shape future gardening opportunities for others. Proceeding from people's actual experiences (including my own) working to organize gardening opportunities for social, educational, and environmental purposes, this project contests dominant discourse encircling community

gardens while also attempting to complicate ideas about how gardens in educational and community contexts are beneficial to all.

In this article, I begin by reviewing relevant literature and dominant discourse on community gardening and draw connections to research in adult education. Next, I describe how IE helped me uncover the social relations of community gardening for different purposes (adult education, employment, food security, etc.). I then describe and interrogate the work activities required to create gardens and adult education opportunities from two different standpoints: my own and the perspective of Jan, a front-line community worker. Smith (1990) implored institutional ethnographers to employ her concept of standpoint as both a method and a theory. She proposed that, as researchers, we embody a standpoint that arises from our own experiences and from which we might interrogate our research problematic (Devault, 2006). My research emerged from my standpoint as a gardener, participant, adult educator, supporter and mediator of garden initiatives, which provided insider knowledge on the labour required to create, deliver, evaluate, and make gardens work in different contexts. Here, I ethnographically trace my own work processes of creating gardens and garden teams, highlighting the social relations of different funding schemes that supported the creation of gardens and the adult education internship. I also rely on Smith's (1990) description of standpoint as a method to describe relations of ruling from the experiential knowledge of people. To do so, I introduce excerpts of an interview with one front-line community worker, Jan, that illuminate the immense amount of labour required to keep people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and barriers to education/employment hooked up to gardening/adult education internships. In IE, one person's account is not meant to illuminate everyone else's experiences; rather, it is there to show us something about how these experiences are socially organized. Following Smith (2005), I have included Jan's interview to help figure out what social relations are organizing how we have both come to know and experience "gardening work" in remarkably similar ways, irrespective of our divergent social positions. Taken together, I demonstrate how informal adult education in community gardening happens in Montreal by critically engaging with funding (to create gardens, garden teams, and adult education programming) and labour (physical, emotional, and administrative to sustain gardens in an urban environment). I intentionally highlight ruling relations that obscure how the social, educational, and environmental benefits purportedly inherent in community gardening are not equally accessible.

## Literature Review: Why Gardens for Adult Education?

There are many contested and contradictory definitions of adult education practices and pedagogies in both Quebec and Canada (Brigham et al., 2021; Groen & Kawalilak, 2013). Adult education as an intervention for the sole purpose of human capital (or employability) has a complex and longstanding relationship to exclusion, class struggle, language, and literacy, especially in Quebec, where adult education is most available to those who already possess formal education credentials, such as a university degree (Levesque et al., 2009). While conventionally and problematically understood to occur in universities and workplaces, adult education exists in more inclusive and accessible forms where learning unfolds among peers in informal settings (Dahl, 2021). Despite the importance of community-based adult education, particularly for reaching people historically excluded

from higher education, its place in society is very contentious, particularly in Quebec, where much of the discourse is shaped by French language preservation (Solar & Thériault, 2013) and *francisation* programs for immigrants. My research is situated in community-based adult education and in literature on the social organization of knowledge (Carpenter, 2017, 2021; Nichols, 2014, 2019). It adds to adult education scholarship encircling homelessness and food insecurity (Clover & Craig, 2009; Clover, 2013), and intersects with other research on adult environmental education (Groen, 2021), food studies (Sumner, 2013, 2016), and community gardening (Walter, 2013).

In his literature review, Walter (2013) argued that community gardens are important sites for informal adult education, yet he stated that they remain significantly under-researched. When I am asked "why gardens?" or what my interest is in promoting and exploring equitable access to gardens for informal adult education, I tend to respond with the governing narratives or scholarly tropes associated with environmental education and community gardens. A brief overview of the literature and dominant discourse encircling community gardens can be distilled into the following themes and scholarly tropes: (1) gardens promote ecological, community, and nutritional literacies, and an understanding of food sourcing (where our food comes from) (Hirschi, 2017); (2) gardens and gardening provide engaging experiential learning opportunities for adult and community learners (Walter, 2013); (3) through gardening, people can connect with nature and begin to understand human dependency on the natural world; and (4) exposure to nature through gardens can improve ADHD symptoms, depression, stress, and emotional well-being while encouraging physical activity, which helps with obesity, type 2 diabetes, asthma, pain reduction, and vitamin D deficiency (McCurdy et al., 2010). Despite these ostensible benefits, conducting research on and in a garden is often shaped by obstacles (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2010).

In contrast to studies on community gardening and adult environmental education that seek to explain or reduce particular variables and behaviours into categories for the purpose of analysis, I subscribe to Smith (1990), who urged researchers to undermine dominant discourse emerging from one's research problematic (see below). These research areas and practices that are unchallenged or taken for granted will reproduce and perpetuate dominant discourses (i.e., that gardens provide inherent educational, social, environmental, and health and well-being benefits) rather than critically investigating how particular rationalities actively coordinate thought and action across time and space, diminishing attentiveness to other ways of knowing the field. Instead, my research is concerned with how we (urban gardeners, adult educators, community workers, and activists) have come to know what we know—and how this knowledge inflects and is shaped by social relations; the natural world; institutional, economic, and policy processes; and so forth.

Particular to this community-based research, creating gardens and garden teams through a paid adult education internship required me and others to participate in funding schemes that undercut the ethical, environmental, and social ethos of my work. Furthermore, this required significant administrative attention and auditing that then constrained not only the social and environmental potential of the gardens, but also the educational opportunities available to program participants, some of whom were encountering barriers to employment and/or education and experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. Moreover, when community workers, garden team members, and I created gardens on land that was both public land (municipally permitted community garden plots) and private land (the front yard of a church, a university campus, and so on), we were hooked into many

organizational processes that significantly limited the environmental justice outcomes (like food security) often associated with gardens. Lastly, by contributing to increased gardening, greening, and urban beautification in rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods, we contributed in small ways to increasing land values by fitting in with the area's new presentation in a process described as *green gentrification* (Dooling, 2009).

## Gardening as Problematic

As my gardening work evolved to include more than the physical act of gardening, I began to notice that what I described as "gardening" or "gardening work" or "a garden project" often required that I navigate textual processes not associated with gardening. Along with actual gardening, I found myself writing grant applications, enrolling young adults in post-secondary education programs to ensure their eligibility for employment/adult education opportunities, meeting with potential community partners, and filling out government forms on everything from finances to personal demographic information. In Dorothy Smith's *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), she positioned researchers as experts in their own lives and showed that a person can usefully identify a rupture, a research problematic, or a point of entry to the research in experience rather than theory. One does not have to, for example, anchor one's research to a concept like "gardening for adult education or food security." In this sense, the research I describe began in my body as I endeavoured to create community gardens for social (employment, food security), environmental (sustainability), and educational (a paid adult education internship) purposes.

I did not immediately see the problematic in my everyday work. I took the work for granted as simply how gardens are made and also took for granted how easy it was to access land, as permissions were already established for myself and others. I eventually began to focus on documenting the processes of getting a garden and making use of it for different purposes. I also started paying attention to the ways in which people (adult educators/students, community workers) were speaking about gardens—noting that we often spoke of the inherent and unquestioned benefits of gardening for social, environmental, and educational purposes, but paid less (or no) attention to how much administrative labour was needed to fund and create gardens and garden teams, to how the presumed benefits of gardens were distributed, nor to how gardens might also serve ruling interests (e.g., as tools for urban renewal, revitalization, and "neighbourhood transformation"). As I continued to explore my own and others' experiences in the organizing relations of garden work, I began to note contradictions between how gardens were talked about (e.g., specific to food sourcing/production/security, environmental sustainability, and educational potential) and their actual use in organizations and neighbourhoods. In reviewing my ethnographic data, I could see abstracted forms of social relations (e.g., gardening for food security not actually addressing food security) organizing my labour and my overall ethos about gardening in different urban contexts.

## Method of Inquiry: Institutional Ethnography

Described as a method of inquiry and not a methodology, IE is a sociology that resists producing and using knowledge in ways that perpetuate the objectification of people's lives and experiences as instances of a theory or concept (Nichols, 2014). Research begins

with people's experiential knowledge, then traces their knowledge into the policies, laws, books, media, and digital technologies they interact with and that coordinate the ordinary movements of their days and nights. In this sense, analysis seeks to reveal large-scale forms of social coordination within which people's individual lives and experiences are unfolding (Mykhalovskiy et al., 2004). Smith (2005) invited researchers to resist conventional approaches of theoretical abstraction and explore "how people are putting our world together daily in the local places of our everyday lives and yet somehow constructing a dynamic complex of relations that coordinates our doings trans-locally" (p. 2). In IE, the research explores social organization, not people.

Similar to other IEs, much of my data and analysis are based on interviews and informal conversations with community workers. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the organizations and the front-line community workers. Subscribing to IE interviewing techniques, I asked participants to describe a typical workday to determine how community workers are engaging with texts and textually mediated relations in their everyday. For institutional ethnographers, the concept of "work" is used expansively and generously to encompass any "action by an actual person that takes time, energy and intention" (Nichols et al., 2018, p. 118). Specifically, to get a sense of the social, environmental, and textual relations related to gardening, I asked participants to describe their typical workday when garden experiences were scheduled, as conversations with educators/community workers alike had suggested that incorporating gardening included more cumbersome institutional and bureaucratic engagement and accountability than a typical workday. Conducting interviews that explicitly explored texts and people's work allowed me to identify disjunctures between everyday life and administrative accounts of it.

To uncover the organizing relations of community gardens, in my analysis I considered my transcripts as important texts for further questions (Devault & McCoy, 2004). Subscribing to Smith (Smith & Griffith, 2016), I would ask, "How is it that these people are saying what they're saying?" I began coding and organizing my findings into distinct and aggregate categories corresponding to social, environmental, institutional, and political-economic factors that I was observing and that influenced people's access to gardening opportunities. As I grew confident in my codes, I embarked on textual analysis, where I traced people's experiences into texts and textual mechanisms that organize their work lives. Adhering to IE analysis, the research goal of my study was to empirically connect, delineate, and explicate tensions entrenched in people's work, including my own, and not to theorize them. The objective of my textual analysis was twofold. First, to get a sense of the invisible social relations not explicitly addressed or expressed through people's experiences, but shaping their everyday; and second, to bring into view how institutional texts influence work processes that are ingrained in and through people's actions (Smith, 2006).

## Building Gardens and Garden Teams

In the next two sections, I describe building gardens and fostering garden teams at the Griffin House through different government-funded employment programs. I first explicate my own experiences (as a gardener/researcher/educator) creating the Gardening for Food Security project using a Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) grant. I then compare my experiences with the efforts of Jan, a front-line community worker with whom I collaborated. By describing and interrogating the social relations of gardens from our two standpoints (as

suggested by Smith, 1990), I make visible the challenges of relying on government funding while highlighting important considerations related to gardens as a site for adult education, employment, and other purposes. I also draw attention to what Smith (1999) called ruling relations. That is, the "forms that we know as bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization, and media. They include the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural, that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate the multiple sites of ruling" (p. 6).

To create gardens and an adult education internship, I had to write multiple grant applications, participate uncritically in positive discourse encircling community gardening, and align my narrative with the federal government's "local priorities" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018a). In downtown Montreal, the local priorities included:

> Environment; Organizations that provide programs and services to women, youth, persons with disabilities, seniors, disadvantaged families, refugees, immigrants and Indigenous peoples; Homelessness and poverty: Nonprofit organizations and public sector; and Social Services: Nonprofit organizations and public sector. (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018b)

After writing the grant and before receiving the funding, I had to collect and submit lengthy personal and demographic forms about each team member, including details on race, minority status, gender, sexuality, and other information; research, write about, and account for workplace health and safety; create mentorship plans for each team member; coordinate weekly work schedules; ensure that the community organization was adequately supported and the gardens were being watered; and report on the finances and successful completion of the employment program before receiving the funding/full reimbursement. Getting the auditing and accounting right was thus a significant preoccupation throughout the entire project. Through the CSJ program, eligible participants would be compensated for 35 hours per week at minimum wage for eight weeks, and we deliberately recruited people who were experiencing barriers to education and employment. While the funding allowed me to create a garden team and partner with the Griffin House on gardening and educational programming, it came with many stipulations and constraints.

For some of the garden team members, the CSJ opportunity represented their first foray into gardening and employment. Ensuring team members were present each day in the morning to support morning meal service at the Griffin House and to water the garden was a challenge. According to the grant's regulations, participants were not permitted to miss any work during an employment contract (CSJ, 2024). For me personally, it was not an issue when a team member missed a day of work or showed up late. However, along with the textual constraints of the grant agreement, there are natural and environmental constraints imposed by gardening. Given our food production objectives, gardens needed to be watered regularly and in the morning to optimize water absorption. One summer, a team member was absent for over two weeks for personal and medical reasons. As a result, I had to rework the schedule to ensure that gardens were getting watered at the right time of the day and that the Griffin House had adequate support during mealtimes.

Reorganizing the schedule also meant that other garden team members, Griffin House staff, and/or I had to take on additional labour. In addition, Service Canada noticed that one of the garden team members did not complete his hours. They informed me that in order

to receive the final installment of the funding, I had to explain why a team member "broke the contract of employment." Thankfully, after I filled out an additional accountability statement form and exchanged several emails with civil servants, Service Canada accepted my rationale for why the team member missed work and they disbursed the remaining funds, minus the hours missed by the team member.

This experience revealed a conflict between the stated program objectives of the CSJ program—to "provide quality work experiences for youth; respond to national and local priorities to improve access to the labour market for youth who face unique barriers; and, provide opportunities for youth to develop and improve their skills" (CSJ, 2024, p. 3)—and the actual lives of young people who experience employment barriers. In conversation with a Service Canada government employee, I requested that the team member make up the missed time at a later date or on a part-time basis, but my request was refused. The rigidity of the regulations of a CSJ grant—i.e., the contract had to be completed by August 31—assumed a stability in young people's lives that it was not always possible for them to maintain throughout the entire program. For many people, social and material instability meant the employment contract could not unfold exactly as dictated by the CSJ agreement. While there was some flexibility within the program, any unforeseen change to the project required additional administrative work, leading to less time for mentorship, and less labour support for the Griffin House given that the young person was not allowed to make up the missed work outside the terms of the stated agreement.

Taking on the supervisory and reporting work meant I was not gardening nor mentoring team members in ways that actually supported people "to develop and improve their skills" or "provide quality work experiences" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018a). Importantly, not all team members wanted gardening or educational mentorship: they just needed work and participated in the internship for payment. One way I tried to acknowledge young people's varied passions was to ensure that each team member devoted a portion of their working hours to educational projects, events, or initiatives that were important to them, even if it was not gardening. Helping the garden team identify their passions took the shape of popular education. Often the events, initiatives, and ideas that team members were interested in pursuing were not connected to gardens but supported the needs of the Griffin House (described in the next paragraph). At other times, the team proposed initiatives that had little to do with either the Griffin House or gardens, and I encouraged them to pursue these as well. I viewed connecting the interests of team members to the Gardening for Food Security project as one of my growing responsibilities to ensure that people felt valued beyond the monetary compensation and mentorship plans submitted to Service Canada.

Across the different internships, garden team members' projects included a garden song, four academic articles, artistic renderings, a workshop on misconceptions about Black masculinity in Canada, and several non-hierarchical workshops on various topics. Outside of gardening and individual projects, the garden team worked on daily tasks for the Griffin House that were pressing and helpful. For instance, some days the team would support daily tasks like meal service, driving to Montreal's largest food bank (Moisson Montréal), and house cleanup. The team also performed other work that the full-time staff had identified as needed, including longer-term projects such as the construction and maintenance of a new and updated bilingual (English and French) website that included information about the organization's front-line services, a more efficient system for receiving donations, and a functioning volunteer recruitment portal.

Although I started this project hoping to provide gardening, paid employment, and mentorship in a supportive and non-hierarchal way, participating in the CSJ program shifted the balance of my work. As the project unfolded, I had seamlessly become accountable to the administration and finances of Griffin House and to the Canadian government through the CSJ agreement. I often found myself playing the role of a project manager and was inadvertently looped into hierarchal relations. I was asking for accountability (weekly timesheets) and auditing the gardening team's work in relation to the daily, weekly, and monthly needs of the organization, the mentorship plans, and the reporting requirements of the CSJ program. My relationships with team members shifted from being a friend/mentor to also being their supervisor, as I had to ensure that people were physically present in the garden and at the Griffin House. My comprehensive plan for mentoring soon became less important than submitting information to the government in a timely fashion and achieving the project's textual outcomes (ensuring that the organization had a food production garden and human resource support). It also became increasingly clear that none of this would work without my own unpaid labour.

Recognizing that this project was located under rampant global capitalism, it was not realistic or sustainable for me or others to work these additional unpaid hours each week because we also had to attend to the material conditions of our own lives. Although the CSJ grant enabled me to offer employment and mentorship opportunities to people who needed jobs, it changed how I related to them and altered the organization of my days so that I was increasingly engaged in supervision and reporting work. These circumstances reflect normalized relations of dependence between non-profit organizations and the state (Griffith & Smith, 2014). Like other institutional ethnographers (Carpenter, 2017; Nichols, 2014), in my research I uncovered how auditing and accountability through governing texts implemented an extra-local set of "local priorities," as determined by the Canadian government, that hooked me and others into a series of social relations that obscured both the intention of our collective gardening work and the objectives of the CSJ program. Dependence on government funding is a consequence of decades of neo-liberal austerity measures (Harvey, 2006). Governments no longer actually provide services directly; rather, they rely on a range of grantees and contractually obligated entities to do this service work for them (Griffith & Smith, 2014). With governments divesting from social services, organizations like the Griffin House are forced to rely on any support that is available—but as this account shows, doing so changes the nature of one's work. Understanding gardening as a product of textually mediated coordination raises important questions about the social relations that shape gardening and adult education experiences in community-based organizations. Returning to Smith's (2002) insights, the intention of highlighting the coordination between gardening and funding schemes might provide the basis for organizational change that aims to separate them from one another.

The CSJ program underestimates the labour required from non-profit organizations that are responsible for managing and accounting for the program's funding and deliverables. The program fails to acknowledge the important labour of people who take on managerial tasks (often in addition to their already busy work lives) to ensure that communities, organizations, and people are able to receive important and timely supports that eventually function to textually address the needs of a particular voting district. Based on my experience, the administrative and bureaucratic labour of managing a CSJ employment program limits the degree to which organizations are able to fulfill the "mentorship" program objectives.

The CSJ employment program, while helpful in a short-term sense (i.e., paying people who might be experiencing the pressures of poverty to provide human resource support for organizations), further serves to normalize the Canadian government's neo-liberal ideology. By depending on individuals and community organizations to address complex social and environmental justice issues, the state places the onus and responsibility for social change on individuals. This helps obscure systemic inequalities while limiting actual government intervention, all while promoting capitalist (free-market) solutions (Harvey, 2006).

**Community Gardening for Employment**

In this section, I juxtapose my experience socially organizing a gardening employment program (Gardening for Food Security) with the efforts of Jan (a community worker from the Griffin House) to do the same thing. I describe how Jan works with a similar government-mediated employment program to provide gardening and education opportunities to Griffin House guests who experience homelessness, food insecurity, and barriers to employment, and I point out striking differences and similarities between her work and my own. In order for Griffin House guests to successfully complete garden employment programs and experience garden benefits, Jan has to help them navigate other institutional relations (e.g., transportation and health care). To provide people with employment opportunities, she relies on a provincial program in Quebec called PAAS Action (PAAS stands for Programme d'aide et d'accompagnement social—in English, Social Assistance and Support Program), offered by Emploi Québec, which is designed to support people in financial hardship as they try to re-enter the workforce and integrate into society (Emploi Québec, 2014). Similar to the CSJ program, PAAS Action has particular inclusion and completion regulations that organize participants' weekly working hours, their employment objectives, and the duration of their contracts, and requires final evaluations that must be submitted to the government in a timely fashion.

To successfully complete PAAS Action, program participants are required to sign a contract with Emploi Québec that includes:

> The identification of the program and the partnering organization; the duration and intensity of the participation (maximum 12 months); the objectives set by the agent (1 to 2 objectives); *Emploi-Québec's* commitment regarding payments of support allowance and additional costs, if applicable; the person's commitment to their obligations; details of the additional costs allocated (transport costs, child-care costs, other one-off costs); the terms of payment of the support allowance; the modalities concerning the administrative review; and the consent of the participant to the exchange of personal information with the organization. (Emploi Québec, 2014, p. 8)

After setting objectives and signing the contract, the participant (or gardener in our case) needs to maintain eligibility by working 20 hours per week, communicating with the organization for the duration of the employment (usually 12 months), and submitting a program evaluation at the completion of the contract. As indicated in the excerpt above, beyond compensation for working 20 hours a week, PAAS Action also provides financial support for "transport, child-care, and other one-off costs." Despite these supports for

participants, Jan describes PAAS Action as "very difficult," elaborating that "if you [program participant] miss more than five or six times, you can't do it anymore and then you have to wait a few more years before you're allowed to try again."

Struck by how this process resembled the CSJ program in its adherence to strict attendance policies, I looked more closely at the PAAS Action project and learned there are several ways for someone to be considered ineligible or penalized for "false declarations […] or participation that's less than 20 hours per week" (Emploi Québec, 2014, p. 13). Furthermore, like the CSJ grant, every alteration to the contract's duration, intensity, or objectives requires communication with the managing government department.

To keep people connected to gardens through the PAAS Action employability program, Jan focuses her efforts on communicating with Emploi Québec to maintain the participant's eligibility:

> So that's a rigidity of working with the government […] you have to give names and social insurance numbers, and be very, very specific […] very often when you do a program with Emploi Québec and you don't succeed—the person, for whatever reason, it doesn't work out, they're too disorganized, they can't do it. The person will not be allowed to do another one. They will have to wait. So it might have been that this program was not the program for them, but there's another program and another organization that is better suited, but they can't access that program because they've technically failed. And so we're going to penalize you and for the next three or four years, we're not going to allow you to do another program. So it's unfair.

In her efforts to keep people eligible for a range of employment programs, Jan prefers using funding from private donors because it allows her to work without the kind of labour-intensive bureaucratic accountability I describe above:

> When you're working with private foundations and you're funded privately, it gives you a lot more leeway as to how you intervene with people, and what you choose to intervene with. We don't have to give names, we don't have to say that so-and-so participated in this program, period. We talk about it globally in our final reports. Like, "we had, throughout the year, 30 or 40 people who participated in this program for X amount of time."

Private funding requires Jan to undertake fewer administrative tasks (i.e., a broad final report) than those associated with PAAS Action or other government-mediated employment programs. Private funding involves significantly less surveillance of the Griffin House guests and affords Jan more time and flexibility to work one-on-one with guests to ensure that the material conditions of the work are designed to meet their needs.

Just as I attempted to creatively subvert some of the more stringent regulations of the CSJ employment program to better support the actual aims of the program (inclusion, mentorship, asking participants to work on projects that are important to them, and so on), Jan has also developed tactics to better navigate and structure the successful completion of employment programs for a variety of individuals. While PAAS Action and other government employability programs can work for a range of people, these programs are

based on the assumption that participants have stable housing and a functioning body that can travel safely around the city. Because Jan and the Griffin House work with people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and multiple barriers to employment, Jan often lines up important institutional supports that will enable the successful completion of an employability program before she enrols a guest. For example, she may find that person temporary and/or stable housing, she may connect them with a social worker or "intervenant," and she may negotiate access to preventative and/or diagnostic medical/psychological examinations.

As Smith (1999) noted, in modern capitalistic societies, bureaucratic processes across public-facing institutions like "municipal affairs, education, and healthcare" (p. 32) are often linked. A person may have to be evaluated psychologically so that they can access a particular supportive housing program. Access to housing will also support a person to participate fully in an employability program and receive compensation for working with the garden team. Jan explains these linkages in the account below:

> So basically, we wanted the gardener to have an evaluation by a neuropsychologist […] You need the neuropsychologist to make a formal diagnosis that this person does not have the mental capacity to make decisions in terms of his own housing—about where he's going to live, if he needs to be in supervised housing, can he do shopping, can he nourish himself? So he needs to see a neuropsychologist but there is no neuropsychologist for him to see. So you'll call one place and I'll say, "So I need a referral." We'll go to the doctor and will say, "Okay, doctor, this person needs to see a neuropsychologist, can you please write a reference?" Which he does. But there is no neuropsychologist. So you thought you heard about a neuropsychologist in the North End of the city, so you're calling the Guichet d'Accès [Quebec's health care phoneline] and you say, "Hey, I've got the referral for any doctor. Is doctor so-and-so here? I heard that this guy …" "No, he left; he's not working here anymore." "Okay, well can you refer me to another?" Or there might be a neuropsychologist but that person only deals in brain injuries and he will only see people who have brain trauma. So you have all of these things that happen with people that you want to help, you see them sliding through the cracks […] There's nowhere to send them. There's no organization that's going to take them because there's so many issues there. One social service deals with mental health, one place deals with drug addiction, one person deals with intellectual disabilities, but as soon as everything sort of overlaps, nobody can deal with it. That's a lot of our clients here. There's just no access to the services that they need. It is hard enough for me or you to find a family doctor.

Specific to the Quebec health care system, Jan's last point about finding a family doctor is an important one that helps to highlight the series of complex and interrelated social relations that work in synergy and make it challenging for vulnerable people to access important services like health care, housing, and employment. For the average citizen of Quebec, the wait time from registering for a family doctor to actually seeing the family doctor is 500 days (Derfel, 2019). Tracing some of the unseen obstacles to

government-organized employability programs brings into view the challenges people like Jan and I experience in our efforts to provide the range of possible supports needed for someone who is experiencing barriers to employment.

**Getting Work and Getting to Work: Criminalization, Employment, and Gardening**

Beyond the barriers Jan and I encountered to ensure people had what they needed to stay connected to the garden team through government-funded programs, there are also personal barriers that people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity face that are not accounted for in private and publicly funded employability programs. Jan explained to me some of the barriers she has encountered in trying to hook people up to work as part of the garden team:

> I think sometimes they're scared to try something new. They'll say "I can't even grow a plant," and I'll be like "Me neither! I have a whole line of dead plants in my house that I keep watering, hoping." They'll be intimidated, sometimes it will be that they don't want to fail. Very often it's that they don't want to commit to something. They don't want to commit to something, because it goes back to their lifestyle and the fact that they're just trying to get through the day, and if they walked to one end of the city for whatever, because they had to sleep at a shelter that's […] in the East. They're not going to walk all the way back.

The long-term impacts of local community organizations having less government funding means that very few organizations have the capacity to help everyone needing support. While there are a few organizations in Montreal that offer a myriad of essential supports at one location (i.e., employment programming, on-site health care, food support, shelter, etc.), spots are limited, and those wishing to access services in these organizations need to have the correct documentation and arrive early in the day to obtain this access.

Moreover, for people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, accessing key services at these supporting organizations often requires involvement in that same organization's programs for employability, psychosocial support, urban support, and so on (Kerman et al., 2022), and these programs fill up very fast given their limited availability. Returning to Jan's point, more typically a front-line community organization in one end of town will provide housing support while another organization in a completely different part of Montreal will serve meals, have a food bank, and may offer employment programming. Due to the few supports and limited capacity of most organizations, some people experiencing homelessness need to move to one area of the city to access food, then to another area for employment, and then to another neighbourhood if they choose to visit an emergency shelter.

Jan describes the daily travel of one of the Griffin House guests who sought shelter in one area of the city, but was enrolled in the Griffin House day and employment programming. After the interview, I calculated the travel distance between the landmarks and organizations. The distance Jan mentioned was over 10 kilometres one way. Someone who is employed in the Griffin House garden yet seeks access to a shelter in the other end of the city would need to spend over four hours walking between sites. While public transit is an option, and the PAAS Action program will reimburse expenses for "transportation

costs" (Emploi Québec, 2014, p. 8), such as tickets for the bus and metro, it is not the safest or most comfortable option. Many people experiencing homelessness, especially women, women of colour, and Indigenous women, decide not to take public transit as they are often not let on buses, or are hassled or assaulted by police or Montreal's Transit Society (Société de transport de Montréal) security officers (field note, June 26, 2019). People's experiences of travel and transportation can serve as barriers to participation in employment programs.

To further complicate transportation, Jan's quote underscores a key point about gardening: it is a long-term commitment. For the past several years, the garden at the Griffin House survived and thrived because several people involved have a long-term commitment to the garden, with many paid for their direct labour in the garden. Even with the established partnership and paid positions, however, there were often days when team members could not attend work because cars broke down or they missed the bus or they had spent too much time in the sun that week. Gardening is physical work. For people who also need to devote time, effort, and intent (expansively understood as work in IE) to moving around the city to access essential services and are not sure where they will be sleeping and how much rest they will get, garden work may not be the most ideal form of employment or education, despite the ostensible benefits. Throughout my research I came to consider how the celebratory discourse of gardening for well-being and food security undercuts the extensive physical and emotional labour (and exhaustion) that one can experience when gardening.

For Smith (1987), discourse is related to the production of knowledge; any time people speak, write, or represent, they are making a proposition about the world through discourse. In the ongoing production of knowledge through discourse, the conditions for practice (being in the world) are created and people start to think and act in a particular way because of their participation in particular discursive formations. For example, in community gardening, dominant discourse and research highlights the innumerable positive benefits of gardening (e.g., sustainability, community-building, food security, health and well-being benefits, etc.) without acknowledging that these initiatives occur on stolen land in settler colonial states under rampant global capitalism that treats land and water as regulated and for-profit commodities. Therefore, discussions of gardens often exclude the exploration and history of systemic racism, colonialism, poverty, expropriation, and land dispossession that has allowed gardens to be in one location and not others, and to serve some purposes and not others. Nor does most garden-based and adult environmental education research explore the social and ecological impacts of creating gardens in urban environments, particularly impacts related to access to gardens in gentrifying neighbourhoods, (over-) production, and maintenance. Most research in Montreal's unique urban context also does not explore if gardens actually achieve their stated objectives of food security and well-being for all. As such, people working in and with gardens tend to continue to frame it as a way of stimulating the innumerable positive benefits of gardening related to education, the environment, health, and well-being. In sum, the purported benefits of gardening for education, well-being, and food security might ring hollow for people without employment, stable housing, food security, and other essential supports.

## Closing Discussion

Smith (2005) reminded us that the capacity for collective action is not located in discourse, institutional processes, or government policies, but among people. Here, I revisit IE's analytic research commitment of starting with people and their experiential knowledge (Smith, 2006), and apply my own slant by returning to people, especially the key actors of this project, whose work and commitments allowed gardens and our partnerships to flourish. To conclude and reflect on the degree to which urban gardens can support social, educational, and environmental justice, I return to my interview with Jan to help respond to the questions I ask myself on a daily basis: Why gardens? Why garden?

> Me: So why would we garden? Why would you think that this initiative is worthwhile when so many of the issues that you're dealing with on a day-to-day basis have no relation to the garden. It's not like you need a garden to deal with these issues …
>
> Jan: Because a garden is…[pause] One thing I realized when I started to garden, is that it's very, very, calming. You have a task, you are there, you're in nature, you are touching the earth, you are with a flower, you're with seeds and you're creating life in a very, very—it's just you and whatever it is that you're doing. And if you're planting vegetables […] it becomes sort of your baby. And you feel proud about that, and feel good about that […] When you have someone who sleeps on the sidewalk, to be able to have them come into a space and say, "You're gonna grow a flower today. You're gonna take this little seedling," and then you take people who have never done anything like this before and you had them plant the seedlings. […] How proud he was, that we then took these little seedlings in these tiny little pots and we transferred them into the ground, into the garden, which is something he had never done before. It's that pride that you have when you are responsible for creating something, not just for yourself, but for the entire House. It was nice for the guys to be able to take their meals on their tray and sit in the garden, and have their lunch or their dinner. It's a beautiful feeling and it's nice to sit out there. A lot of the time they would just sit out there in the garden.

Despite the issues that Jan and I encountered when trying to hook people up to gardens for different purposes, Jan continues to see the garden as an important feature of the organization, and a means for living a life with dignity. Despite my own increasingly critical orientation to gardens, I recognize the importance of cultivated inclusive and beautiful spaces like the one we built together at Griffin House. Yet I remain ever skeptical that our garden collaboration has fundamentally altered the landscape of opportunities for education, recreation, employment, food security, and punishments for those involved in the project and for those in Montreal more broadly.

While the garden collaboration with the Griffin House produced an immense amount of food that was harvested on a weekly/bi-weekly basis from late June to early November, it did little to address food insecurity at the organization and in Montreal more broadly. For instance, even when the garden was thriving and producing pounds of harvest each week, the Griffin House never reduced its food order to Moisson Montréal. The Gardening for

Food Security project did, however, modestly support the Griffin House's food bank and an occasional (once-a-week) meal service. Many people dedicated physical and emotional labour to the ongoing harvests and should be applauded for their efforts. None of the Griffin House guests I worked with ever described the kale or chard as tasty; however, many people described the pleasurable and *visual* experience of being in the garden. They would describe the sensation, the scents and colours of the garden, and how they felt when sitting in the garden (field note, July 27, 2018). On the other hand, building garden teams and getting connected to gardening education/employment programs presented a litany of difficulties for both participants and organizers that perhaps diminished the gardening's transformative or political potential.

For both Jan and me, getting people connected to gardens for employment and education involved a significant amount of administrative labour that was eclipsed by the program reporting schemes. Without diminishing the importance of providing educational/employment opportunities and offering human resource support to an underfunded yet crucial front-line community organization, the textual structure and rigid regulations of employment programs can often work to exclude and restrict the same people those programs are designed to help. While the collaboration between the Griffin House and our garden team did little to impact food security, the labour provided to the organization did help temporarily relieve some of the pressures experienced daily by Griffin House staff.

Reflecting on my efforts to connect the work of growing food to environmental justice issues inherent in capitalism, I cannot claim gardening helped to alleviate the concerns of food-insecure people in any quantifiable way. When working with people experiencing food insecurity, homelessness, and barriers to employment, my findings also challenge scholarship that suggests gardening contributes to well-being for all, highlighting the myriad ways this general claim is complicated by particular bodies and experiences. Important to this paper and my analysis was to divulge the extensive forms of social coordination within which people's distinct lives and experiences are occurring. I began my research problematic in my own embodied experience, attempting to produce garden experiences in collaboration with community workers and community members. Rather than seeking a justification for my behaviour and the behaviour of community workers as we work to organize garden experiences, I explored the conceptual, institutional, and discursive practices associated with garden work. By starting with the personal and linking to the political, this paper has mapped garden tensions and shared struggles to show researchers, community workers, and community members "what they are up against (politically) and where they might want to apply pressure" (Devault, 2006, p. 295).

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