

**NO STRAIGHT LINES:
Local Leadership and the Path from
Government to Governance in Small Cities**
Edited by Terry Kading

ISBN 978-1-55238-945-4

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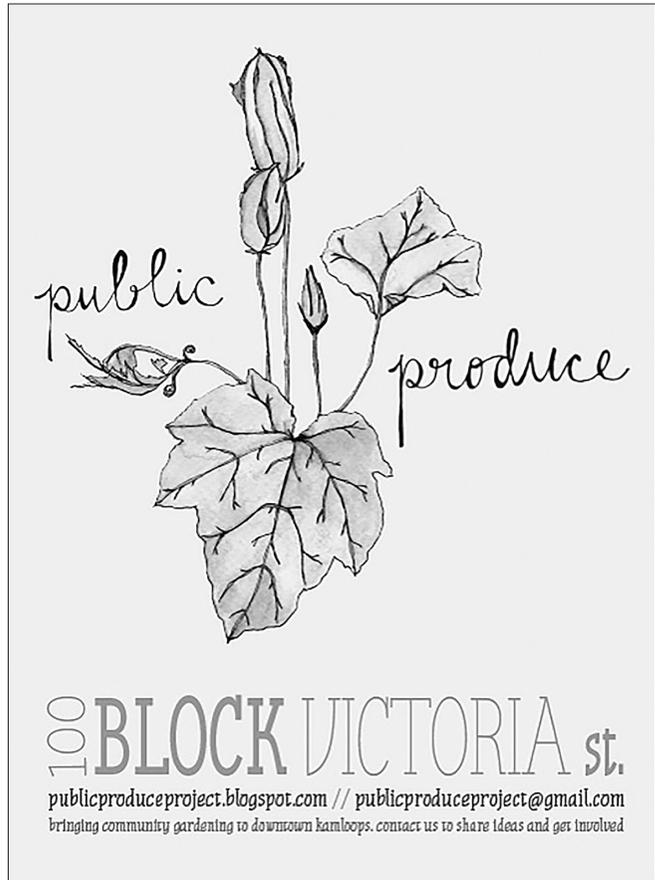
The Kamloops Public Produce Project: A Story of Place, Partnerships, and Proximity in an Edible Garden Setting

Robin Reid and Kendra Besanger

Introduction

In this chapter we describe a grassroots-initiated urban agriculture project introduced in Kamloops, British Columbia, in 2011. As one of the first urban agriculture projects of its kind in Canada, the “Public Produce Project” interrupted the prescribed logic of a downtown urban space by creating an innovative response to issues of sustainability and food production at the local level. It was Kamloops’ first fully public garden project, and it transformed a derelict urban lot into a fertile garden oasis. Its public success demonstrated the capacity of the community to produce free food in an urban setting, and it prompted residents and the municipal government to rethink the potential of edibles in urban spaces. The garden lasted two full growing seasons in its initial location and was moved to an alternative location after those two years. It also catalyzed the creation of a permanent, municipally funded public produce garden in the city’s McDonald Park in 2012, a development that offers a cautionary note about

FIGURE
4.1. “Public
Produce,”
drawing and
digital design by
E. Hope, 2011.
Poster courtesy of
Bonnie Klohn.



the potential gains from vertical linkages (as per Dale and Newman; see Introduction), particularly in a small city where financial limitations may open avenues for powerful global corporations to manipulate local spaces to their own advantage.

While acknowledging that one garden in a small city cannot address the multiple dynamics of food production at the global or local levels, the Public Produce Project successfully demonstrated that edible gardens and urban agriculture initiatives are able to challenge our perception of where food production can take place and to prompt conversations about the potential for municipalities to grow food in urban settings. If we imagine

cities as “strategic terrains,” as Duxbury (2014) suggests, we can conceptualize localized, creative, and innovative projects within cities as strategic, local responses to global conditions (1). Kamloops’ first public produce garden became a “strategic terrain” for initiating conversations about innovative urban agriculture initiatives in the city and, consequently, about the larger, globalized food system. Its physical location in the downtown core, combined with its open access concept, meant that people from all walks of life could access the garden and participate in these conversations. Open access and participation are important aspects of building equality and improving quality of life in cities in general. As the author of *Public Produce*, Darrin Nordahl (2009), points out, “the best place[s] to realize the environmental, economic, and equitable benefits of a more local system of agriculture may not be in some rural or exurban location, but in and among the places we pass by daily on our way to work, home, school, commerce, and recreation” (8). The physical location of the Public Produce Project was exactly this: half a block from City Hall, adjacent to a well-travelled sidewalk, on a main street. It sat across the street from a locally owned restaurant that prides itself in serving local food. It shared a wall with the Kamloops Immigrant Services office, a community organization that “deliver[s] programs and activities designed to facilitate immigrants, visible minorities, first-generation Canadians and their families in becoming full and equal members of Canadian society.” A locally owned café, a volunteer-run thrift store, and the city’s main Royal Bank branch were the garden’s other nearby neighbours. It is significant to note that the garden was located on a route that employees from City Hall, the BC Lottery Corporation (BCLC), and the Cornerstone, a large office building containing approximately 20 businesses, walked every day to get coffee or go for lunch. This means that dozens of people passed by the garden on a daily basis for two full growing seasons.

To assist in our discussion of the Kamloops Public Produce Project and to frame the concepts of *leadership*, *learning*, and *collaboration* as fundamental concepts in building *equality of quality of life* in a small city, we draw on a range of authors offering theoretical and practical insights into transforming urban spaces and ultimately changing our relationships with each other and our cities. Charles Montgomery (2013) reminds us that the power to change the way we live, work, and play in

our urban spaces often is in our own hands and, fundamentally, rests in thoughtful, playful design. The Kamloops Public Produce Project exemplified the potential for playful, welcoming design to engage residents and influence policy by leading through example. Within the context of empowerment and the re-visioning of urban spaces, we also recognize the work of Duxbury (2014), which draws attention to the importance of localized, collaborative social processes and networks as being significant to building sustainable cities. We draw on the work of Dale and Newman (2010) to explore the role of government and the network structure that supports bridging, bonding, and vertical forms of social capital. Through a Community Capitals Framework (CCF), Emery and Flora (2006) illustrate how increases in social capital can create a spiraling-up process that mutually reinforces other community capitals—a necessary condition of sustainable community development. If the flow of assets increases across community capitals (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built), then the assets gained in one capital are likely to increase assets in another capital, resulting in an upward spiral (2006). Consequently, the “best entry point to spiraling up is social capital” (23), as it draws on connections among people and organizations and provides the social “glue” to make things happen (21).

In the context of the garden, the interaction among the natural, cultural, human, social, political, and financial capitals stimulated an increase in assets across all of these community capitals. The location of the garden (natural), the initial startup grant (financial), and the abilities and skills people used to build the garden site and access further resources (human) resulted in an increased flow of assets across the capitals. Social capital is perhaps the most important in mobilizing resources, bringing people and organizations together, and creating an integrated strategy to make things happen. In the context of a grassroots approach, the increase in social capital also builds political capital as people find their own voice and through alternative actions contribute to the well-being of the community. Emery and Flora (2006) suggest the entry point for community change begins with critical investments in social capital. Additionally, Lon Dubinsky (2006) provides a foundation for exploring the theoretical implications of the geographical and social proximity of people, organizations, and neighbourhoods. Dubinsky suggests, “Proximities within a

city equally give meaning, shape, and effect to cultural production and participation” (96). Dubinsky expands on this, explaining that “proximity in its many forms is a key factor in the cultural life of the small city. It has symbolic significance and determines to some degree the location and flow of social and cultural capital” (97). The concept of *proximity* is useful in understanding the impact and influence of the Public Produce Project because it helps to frame the garden project through the factors of *access*, *public interaction*, and *political visibility*. *Proximity* also works to connect the physical garden space with discourses of place, community collaboration, and leadership.

In addition to framing the Public Produce Project through the concept of proximity, we suggest that the project successfully transformed a space into a place. As such, we draw from social geographers and place theorists such as Doreen Massey, Yi-Fu Tuan (1974), and Lucy Lippard (1997), who, among many others, suggest that spaces become places when people spend time in them, care for them, tell stories about them, and, connect with them. Doreen Massey’s work (1994) provides a vocabulary to discuss the “need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global” (264). Massey’s seminal text *Space, Place, and Gender* laid the groundwork for an understanding of space as socially constructed. In an interview from 2013, Massey reminds us that spatial relations are material but never void of social interactions or exchanges; in fact, social relations themselves produce geographies (Warburton, 2013). Tuan (1974) considers the ways in which people interact with and form attachments to space, suggesting that “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). Lippard (2013) points out that it is easier to identify a place than it is to create one and, most importantly, that understanding a place requires spending time in that place to understand its social complexities and details: “It’s hard to make a place. It’s easier to recognize a place, but that means you have to learn to read it, see what it’s used for, who goes there and why, where, when” (3).

We framed our study of the Public Produce Project as a space transformed into a place through citizen-led engagement, and we narrowed our focus to the intersection of geographical space and place theory

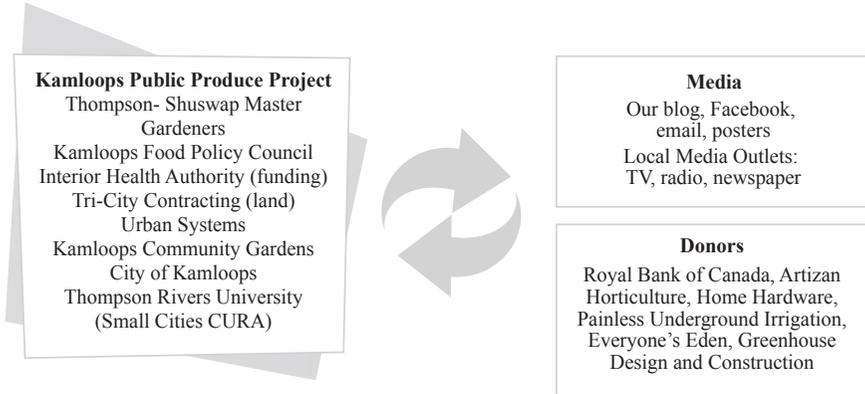
and the discourse of alternative food politics (Harris 2010; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs 2007; Massey 2007; Amin 2002). How we construct our social and political relationships with place is of considerable significance to how alternative food initiatives are perceived in the context of urban spaces.

Our Approach

As researchers, our own proximity to the project was integral to our research approach. We were both involved as participants in the Kamloops Public Produce Project from its outset. In 2011, we participated in the project's conceptualization and construction, and the planting and maintenance of the garden. We also contributed to the *Strategic Plan (2012)* and the *Public Produce Start-up Guide (2012)*. In addition, we contributed to several municipal and community grant proposals between 2012 and 2013. While we were not the primary grant holders, we did contribute to the grant applications. Grassroots-level initiatives often lack the kind of research that is so critical to the success and longevity of citizen-led projects. As researchers, we were able to use our research results to highlight the value of community-university research partnerships through letters of support for KFPC's grant applications, progress reports, and presentations to City Council. In the capacity of participant observers, we were able to witness, document, and participate in the complex issues of leadership, networking, community collaboration, and funding—all the realities that need to be considered when reflecting on what it means to *act locally*.

The Kamloops Public Produce Project has been an ideal project to engage with, not only as an object of academic inquiry but also as a place of lived experience and praxis: “lived experience is central [. . .] to the subject of place” (Lippard 1997, 5). Thus, the purpose of this chapter is not to engage in an objective case study of the garden or to draw broad generalizations about gardens or garden projects. Instead, we use this chapter as an opportunity to provide a critical, pragmatic discussion about the complexities of the Public Produce Project, with the hopes of illuminating what it means to work collaboratively to transform a space into a public place, with a desired outcome of improving both quality of place and equality of quality of life.

Formal Network Linkages



Informal Network Linkages



FIGURE 4.2. Public Produce Project Network by Robin Reid and Kendra Besanger. Design by Moneca Jantzen, Daily Designz.

The Story of the Garden

Early Spring

In January 2011, a building was razed at the east end of Victoria Street, the main street in downtown Kamloops. In the wake of the demolition, a space taking up half a city block was left vacant.

Curious about the newly vacant space, a few Kamloops residents who had previously connected through a local not-for-profit agency called the Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC)¹ met to discuss ideas for the future of the site. At the time, the group members imagined a garden oasis in the middle of downtown: a space filled with benches, raised garden beds, and edible plants. A few weeks later, the residents set up a meeting with Casey VanDongen, the person they thought was the sole owner of the land, and the group pitched the idea of installing a temporary, edible demonstration garden on his site. During that meeting, the group learned that the space actually consisted of three lots, not one. At that point, VanDongen was unable to develop anything on the site because his lots were split in two by the second owner.² VanDongen expressed an interest in purchasing the middle lot, so he could own the entire space, but had been unable to do so up until that point. So, when the group proposed setting up a temporary garden, he offered up one of his two lots: the narrow lot, adjacent to the Cornerstone Building, on the west end of the space (see Figure 4.3).

After gaining permission to use the lot, the group needed to secure funding in order to move the project ahead. One of the group members, a co-chair of the Kamloops Food Policy Council and, by profession, a dietitian with the regional health authority, Interior Health, alerted the group to a grant opportunity with Interior Health. In March 2011, the group successfully applied for \$4,500 in funding through Interior Health's Community Food Action Initiative Grant. The funding provided the group with essential resources to go forward and leverage other sources of funding, both in cash and in kind. The process of writing the grant also helped the group establish the primary objectives of the garden as well as a project timeline.

<i>SOUTH</i>	<i>SOUTH</i>	<i>SOUTH</i>	<i>SOUTH</i>
Lot A Vacant	Lot B Vacant	Lot C Vacant (owned by VanDongen)	Cornerstone Building
(owned by VanDongen)	Owner/developer began erecting a building in 2013	Site of produce garden	Kamloops Immigrant Society Office and 20+ other businesses
<i>NORTH</i>	<i>NORTH</i>	<i>NORTH</i>	<i>NORTH</i>

FIGURE 4.3. Division of Vacant Space on Victoria Street in Kamloops.

The group stated that the garden would do the following:

- Act as a demonstration project for public produce
- Increase awareness about local food security and healthy food
- Act as a tool to educate residents about growing edibles
- Encourage the creation of municipal policy that would support urban agricultural initiatives on public and private land

The group partnered with two local Kamloops organizations to submit the grant to Interior Health: the already nationally successful Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC) and the well-established Thompson-Shuswap Master Gardeners Association. The application was successful, which was a fundamental to the success of the project. *Without the \$4,500 in funding, it would not have been possible for the group to leverage the human and financial resources necessary to build the garden.* The grant money funded the levelling of the lot and the purchasing of the wood and soil for the raised beds. But, perhaps more importantly, it also allowed critical

communications and community outreach work to be done. The group was tasked with asking for community and business support for a project that the community had never seen before. Knowing this would be one of the biggest challenges, the group hired a local artist very early on to create a poster and a visual identity for the project. From there, they had the capacity to go out into the community and explain the project's purpose and ask for support.

In addition to the grant funding, the connections and proximity of the group to the local community made outreach possible. The core working group of the Public Produce Project came to consist of the co-chair of KFPC (also a dietitian at the Interior Health Authority); the Kamloops Community Gardens coordinator (also a landscape designer by trade); the president of the Thompson-Shuswap Master Gardeners Association; an assistant professor at Thompson Rivers University (TRU); students in Visual Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies programs at TRU; a resident who had grown up in Kamloops and had been attending KFPC meetings for a few months, prior to the initiation of the project, and became the project's coordinator; and, more peripherally, other members of the KFPC.

The individuals who formed the Public Produce Project working group had relevant and diverse strengths, insights, and skill sets, as well as important local connections and networks to contribute to the project. They differed in background, age, and experience; some had never gardened, while others had made careers of it. Each group member also had specific ties to the local business community that made in-kind donations possible. For example, the irrigation was installed by a local company who provided in-kind labour and supplies in exchange for having their name on the welcome sign. The actual construction and daily maintenance of the garden relied heavily on the collaborative efforts of volunteers, community organizations, and local networks. These varied types of networks are what Dale and Newman (2010) pronounce as crucial to "accessing more diverse kinds of capital, particularly social linking ties" (8). Collaborative strategies are fundamental to Emery and Flora's (2006) "spiraling up process," whereby the flow of assets increases across community capitals (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built), resulting in a mutually reinforcing increase in all assets. The group members' previous investments and connections to their

local community meant they could effectively utilize and mobilize their networks and resources to the benefit of the garden.

In addition to the materials and expert labour donated by local companies, contributions from local not-for-profit organizations were essential to the garden's progress and success. The combined and collective labour, time, and resources of the group and all of the community contributors successfully leveraged an astounding \$35,000 from the initial \$4,500 grant. A "Day of Caring" was organized through the United Way. Through this initiative, Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) employees spent a day in the garden moving soil into the raised beds. On that same day, a smaller not-for-profit organization called Garden Gate also provided labour and donated seedlings. Garden Gate is a local horticulture project and training centre that promotes healthy eating and active living for persons with mental health challenges. Students from the nearby Stuart Wood Elementary School helped with the planting of the garden, which also engaged them in conversations about edible gardening and food security, and brought a younger generation from the community into the garden. In one day, three otherwise unrelated groups spent time in the space together, contributing to a local place-making initiative that would not have been possible without their participation. One way to understand the strength built through these community partnerships is through Dubinsky's (2005) notion of "culture of participation; a type of social capital stretching across sectors, age groups and neighbourhoods" (81).

The garden also engaged university students and professors. Students from TRU were given an opportunity to apply innovative and creative methods to engage with the space. For example, one student in the Visual Arts program at TRU documented the development of the garden through a series of photographs. Another Visual Arts student constructed a biodegradable mural on the back wall of the Cornerstone building, directly adjacent to the garden. Additionally, a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies student at TRU used qualitative research methods to investigate public responses to the garden. These three students came into contact with the garden through Community University Research Alliance (CURA). In essence, the garden provided an ideal space for work study projects and research collaborations with community partners. All of these engagements built community awareness and connections, while simultaneously

sharing knowledge and resources fundamental to community collaborations (Garrett-Petts 2005).

Early Summer

At the beginning of May 2011, the garden beds had been built, soil had been delivered, but edibles had not been planted yet.³ Residents were starting to hear about the project, but many were still unaware. The KFPC hosted a two-day public produce event, consisting of a local stakeholders' workshop and a public talk given by Darrin Nordahl, author of *Public Produce* (2009). Nordahl is a landscape architect and community planner who has used public produce policies and practices to transform the urban landscape of Davenport, Iowa. The KFPC hosted Nordahl at Thompson Rivers University for a public presentation about the potential of public produce to transform cities. Additionally, a stakeholders' workshop called "Designing Healthy Cities" was hosted by the City of Kamloops and facilitated by Nordahl and two employees from Urban Systems, a local urban design firm. The goals of the workshop were to:

- inform key stakeholders of the progressive, community-minded initiatives taking place in urban settings—specifically to discuss development, design, and policy as they relate to the production of local food.
- begin creating a strategy that would move Kamloops forward in both policy and practice.

The workshop attracted approximately 45 people and successfully created a space for discussing practical ways through which we might collectively address urban food production initiatives. Workshop attendees (stakeholders) included private business owners, municipal staff, Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD) staff, Interior Health Authority (IHA) staff, members of not-for-profit / community organizations, School District 73 staff, developers, and city councillors. Duxbury (2014) has highlighted the importance of "collaborative social processes, diverse knowledge and perspectives, and citizen participation" (1) as being significant to city planning and citizen responses to issues of sustainability at the global and

local levels, and the workshop exemplified the power of citizen participation and perspectives. The goals of the workshop and the initiation of the garden on Victoria Street were complementary because they empowered people to imagine alternatives to traditional urban landscaping. Nordahl's concept of *public produce* invites people to consider municipal land as ideal for growing food. He argues that municipalities have land, staff, irrigation, and all of the resources required to maintain parks and gardens; thus edibles can be grown assuming a redirection of resources. As a result of this collective visioning process and the citizen participation, the City of Kamloops gathered key citizen input for future public produce initiatives in Kamloops.

A few weeks after the workshop, the garden was planted by way of the "Big Public Plant-In." City councillors, business owners, community organizations, students, and friends and family of the core public produce group participated by planting seedlings that had been donated by community organizations. Local master gardeners led the plant-in and incorporated important educational gardening tips throughout the day. For Charles Montgomery (2013), the pursuit of urban happiness relies on strong positive relationships that build community across private and public spaces. Thus, the "Big Public Plant-In" exemplified the kind of space and event where such relationships are formed, and the garden site, thereafter, became a nexus for these kinds of relationships.

Summer

Throughout the summer, the garden thrived. It was well utilized and very well respected. Beans disappeared quickly, squash blossoms were harvested, tomatoes ripened beautifully and then vanished, and the space became a tiny, fertile oasis in the middle of the city's downtown core. "Lunch and Learn" workshops were held in the garden; edibles were donated to downtown businesses (to extend the garden's reach along Victoria Street); and information about the garden was distributed during public events and street carnivals.

By mid-August, the garden was in full bloom and the team organized a grand opening—another chance for site-specific community engagement. Citizens, community organizations, the mayor, downtown business



FIGURE 4.4. Educational signs in the garden. Photo by Bonnie Klohn, 2011.



FIGURE 4.5. Onsite photo—Kamloops Public Produce Project. Photo by Bonnie Klohn, 2011.

owners, and the media were invited to share a midday potluck feast to celebrate the grand opening and marvel at the success of this tiny, temporary, and delicious garden. The grand opening, aptly named the “Gala in the Garden,” brought even more publicity to the Public Produce Project. Through the workshops, volunteer sessions, and celebrations, the garden came to exemplify the power that vibrant public spaces hold, and the persuasive political potential they can create when successful.

Putting the Garden into Context: Community Collaboration

How we collaborate, and with whom, is important to the overall success of any project that relies on community support. Dubinsky (2006) acknowledges that collaboration, through multiple organizational structures, relies on a lexicon of “strategic alliances, shared resources, co-productions, co-sponsorships, and cross-sectoral partnerships.” He also suggests that these collaborations “govern, if not determine, the organization of many activities, including cultural production and participation” (99). In the beginning, the Public Produce Project was faced with three large challenges: raising adequate funds for the project; putting forth a new, unusual, and untested idea in the community; and acquiring credibility as a new community initiative. In order to meet these challenges, the Kamloops Public Produce Project—as a new, unknown group—needed to partner with an organization that had already established itself in the community. As mentioned, this partnership was beneficial during the grant-writing process and helped them to secure adequate funds for the project, but it was also beneficial to the project’s continued success in the community. The KFPC, being a well-established, grassroots organization, had already experienced significant success in the community. When the Public Produce Project reached out to the community for support and in order to grow awareness of the garden project, they were able to reference the KFPC, which already had name recognition throughout the community. The Public Produce Project’s connection to the KFPC was also particularly helpful in dealing with the municipality. The KFPC had been working with the City of Kamloops for many years, so the fact that the Public Produce Project operated beneath the umbrella of the KFPC added to the

validity of the project. It also made connecting with the right city staff much easier. Establishing connections with decision makers and authority figures such as government helps build “vertical ties” and enhances the network structure described by Dale and Newman (2010). They argue that “the network structure that is necessary for sustainable community development is one that is open, diverse, and involves social capital ties at the bridging and vertical levels” (9).

The Public Produce Project’s connection to the KFPC also made connecting with volunteers much easier and, not surprisingly, these volunteers became an essential part of getting the idea of the garden out into the community. Not only could these volunteers tend to the garden on a daily basis, they were able to connect with local businesses in the downtown and spread the word. Through the “Adopt an Edible” initiative, the volunteers provided one small planter full of edible plants to each of the businesses to place outside their storefronts. The planter pots served to initiate a discussion with customers about the garden initiative down the street. Eleven businesses participated in the initiative and maintained their edibles throughout the growing season. A few of the businesses continued to grow edibles in pots the next year. Although Adopt an Edible did not last as a community-driven initiative, several downtown restaurants continued to grow herbs on their patio, even after the Public Produce Project was moved to its second location (on the North Shore of the city). In April 2013 the garden was moved to Elm Street on the North Shore. Through a partnership with a private landowner and a community organization called ASK Wellness, the garden found a new home. The actual location of the garden is described by the garden coordinator as an “in between site,” one that is between a shopping area and a main street on the North Shore that sees more vehicle traffic than pedestrians. In the first season the garden was well received by residents in the area, as indicated by one resident who described it as “a miracle in her neighbourhood.” She also recalled two seniors from the nearby Renaissance seniors low-income apartment building walking by and stopping to share their stories of their own gardens they had tended before moving into assisted living (see Chapter 7: Conclusion for more insights into the South Shore and North Shore landscapes, and the new public produce leadership).

The motivation for establishing collaborative networks in the context of the garden were closely aligned with what Dubinsky (2006) identifies as an *organic* collaboration—and *self-interested* collaboration. While the Public Produce Project’s initial collaboration with the KFPC happened organically, through various serendipitous meetings and conversations and brainstorming between community members, the formal partnership was created knowing that the KFPC would provide legitimacy and mentorship for a young project, still in the early stages of conceptualization. This purposeful alignment is what Dubinsky (2006) refers to as *self-interest*, collaboration whereby “one or more parties will be specifically self-interested from the outset—on the lookout, as it were, for possible partnerships and alliances” (100). Dubinsky (2005) has pointed out that long-standing pools of social and cultural capital are instrumental in providing a continuity of engagement and participation in cultural activities in Kamloops, and the same can be said for the success of the Public Produce Project. According to Dubinsky, social capital in Kamloops is built on leadership and citizen participation, social ties, alliances, and other supportive voluntary activities (82). The Public Produce Project is an enactment of the culture of participation to which Dubinsky refers. The goal from the outset was to demonstrate, through practice, the capacity that community groups and municipalities have to make their cities more food-secure. The outcomes that were achieved by the end of the 2011 summer growing season well surpassed the initial expectations set out by the group, and good news arrived in 2012 when the project was granted access to the lot for a second year in a row.

Putting the Garden into Context: The Transformative Power of Engaging Spaces

One of the goals for *equality of quality of life* set forth by Montgomery is the notion that cities “should enable us to build and strengthen the bonds between friends, families and strangers that give life meaning, bonds that represent the city’s greatest achievement and opportunity” (43). In support of this goal, Montgomery (2013) draws from a number of examples around the world where people have taken slices of urban land and transformed them into spaces that are interactive and engaging. The 120 x

15-foot parcel of land the garden project occupied was a long and narrow shape, and we hypothesize that the size and shape of this garden played an important role in encouraging interaction among strangers. The narrow width brought people into close proximity, which encouraged conversation and engagement. Montgomery (2013) proposes that “with the right triangulation, even the ugliest of places can be infused with the warmth that turns strangers into familiars by giving us enough reason to slow down” (167). Architect William Lim (2002) shares this perspective when he suggests that “the unexpected can sometimes be realized in the transformation of cracks and gaps from dead zones to extraordinary vibrant sites” (2). Perhaps the garden was a “hinge between an ordered and disordered space” that encouraged people to slow down and take a look (Jones 2007, 72); or perhaps it was the aesthetic and welcoming design that came forward and punctuated the neglected awkward spaces. Drawing on Dutch architect Jan Gel’s studies of street edges, Montgomery has focused on the emotional responses people have to antisocial spaces versus spaces of conviviality. In his own study in New York, Montgomery found people were more likely to feel despondent and walk quickly through urban spaces of blank walls, sharp edges, uniform facades, or those fallen into disrepair. On the other hand, people are more likely to walk more slowly and pause in urban spaces that contain varied forms and functions, openings, and inviting features (Montgomery 2013, 161).

The Public Produce Project garden was a peculiar space in that it interrupted the normal flow of the downtown core. Its presence was unexpected and surprising. Additionally, its public, non-gated design also challenged pre-established notions of gated community gardens. Unlike most community gardens, public produce gardens are not gated, and individually leased plots do not exist. The food belongs to no one specifically and is accessible to everyone. Furthermore, anyone can contribute to the space through watering, weeding, and general maintenance; and no one is restricted from entering the space. In a public park, you can enjoy the space freely but you cannot pick the flowers or plant something in the garden beds. In community gardens, you most often have a key, a designated lock, and a sense that whatever you plant will be yours to eat when it is ready. In a public produce garden, there are no guarantees that what you planted will be there when you want it. At the same time, you can take

anything you want and contribute however you please. The space itself invites public engagement and challenges the sense of ownership that so frequently dictates public behaviour in urban spaces.

The potential benefits of public produce are many, but it is also important that the language used to describe the garden does not create a perception of inclusion and exclusion. For example, when the Victoria Street garden was first relocated to Elm Street in 2013, the term “poverty reduction garden” was being used. The KFPC engaged in a discussion about the implications of this terminology, and it was decided that any reference to poverty reduction was inappropriate. One garden that subsists on such a small amount of funding cannot take on the burden of such a task as poverty reduction. Such language also reinforces the perception that public produce and urban agriculture initiatives are for the poor. The signage used for the entrance of the garden is equally important in ensuring the public perception is consistent with the notion of free, accessible food for everyone. The signage used at the entrance of the Victoria Street garden, “Kamloops Public Produce Project,” was moved to the entrance of the garden on Elm Street to maintain consistency in the messaging and encourage access and participation in the garden from all members of the community.

Putting the Garden into Context: What Does *Public* Mean, Anyway?

The *public* garden concept was not immediately clear to people. Some were confused as to the purpose of the garden: Was it public or private? Who was the produce intended for? According to Reid, Besanger, and Klohn (2013), “The concept of *public* produce is new to most people, the concept of *free* is foreign to many and the concept of *communal* is not something that our society practices very often” (219). Comments collected from people visiting the garden and through a comment/suggestion box at the entrance to the garden indicated that many appreciated the garden but had not taken any food because they wanted to leave the produce for those in need. The assumption that public produce gardens are only for times of necessity or for those in need may belong to a history of people coming together in the production, harvest, and preservation of food during

times of economic hardship, such as the Victory gardens during World War II. In her book *City Farmer*, Johnson (2011) acknowledges that public food gardens (in North America) are often assumed to be for those in the lower socio-economic classes for which the need to grow food reflects an individual's circumstances and reduced status (Reid, Besanger, and Klohn 2013).

In addition to the perception that the garden was created for “those in need,” numerous comments from the public expressed surprise that the ungated garden had not been vandalized. Through interviews and informal conversations with the general public passing through the garden, there was a general concern that the garden would eventually be vandalized—because of the downtown location and the fact that it was not gated. One patron stated, “People will ruin it. What’s the point? Everything gets vandalized anyway.” Another patron voiced a concern that was heard frequently: “people will contaminate it,” and hence they would “never eat from the garden.” Before the project commenced, a city councillor suggested that people might “inject the tomatoes with heroin.” These assumptions are particularly noteworthy in that they speak to a perception that places without supervision or gates will be vandalized. The garden was never vandalized or contaminated, and garbage was never found in the produce planters, which suggests that a certain respect was given to the plants. In its two-year existence in the downtown core, the garden was never mistreated. On the contrary, the garden promoted community interaction and respect. Business owners nearby suggested that the garden improved that part of the street and even made the area more inviting for patrons.

Interesting questions emerged from interviews with the Public Produce Project coordinators regarding the social construction of place. For example, do we know whether the space was respected because it was public or because it was a garden? Would the treatment of the garden change if the garden were to be situated in a different place in the city? Do we respond differently to community-generated spaces than we do to public parks? Does bottom-up, participatory design elicit a different kind of respect or engagement than top-down design supported by corporate sponsorships? The intent of the garden was to create a place where everyone would feel welcome and could enjoy both as a place of reprieve and as

a source of healthy food. The diversity of people who used the garden for various purposes is worth noting—business people, pedestrians, homeless people, students, city staff, commuters, and patrons of the downtown all spent time in the garden. Each visitor to the garden had their own personal stories to tell.

A woman visiting Kamloops Immigrant Services⁴ was thrilled to see Asian greens such as mizuna and kohlrabi in the garden, since she had not encountered these vegetables in Canada (Reid, Besanger, and Klohn 2013). The brightly coloured garden bench provided a peaceful place for a young business owner to take a break and think about her grandmother who had recently passed away. Around this same bench, cigarette butts and empty bottles were found by a volunteer during a scheduled early morning watering. Interestingly, this small amount of garbage was placed directly under the bench, not in the garden beds themselves. We hypothesized that people had spent some evening time in the garden, enjoying one another's company and a few drinks. The garden transformed an awkward and unusable space into an open access community space: a place of refuge and conviviality that challenged public perceptions of how we engage with urban spaces.

Putting the Garden into Context: Place, Proximity, and Politics

By now, the problematic characteristics inherent in the conventional food system have been well documented, including the physical and psychological disconnection that occurs when our food comes from places we don't know and is distributed through complex systems we don't recognize (Tracey 2011). Within alternative food networks (AFN), some activists view food systems embedded in the "local" as the counter to the unsustainable structure of the "global" domination of the conventional food system (Harris 2010). However, employing a defensive perspective of localism in response to globalism is criticized by number of authors as reactionary and regressive (Hinrichs 2007; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). According to Harris:

The message from critical commentaries of AFN activism, and indeed from critical human geography, is that in order to explore the politics of such place-based activism, concepts like “place” and “the local” cannot be taken as ontologically given: they must be recognized as social constructions (366).

With respect to the literature, Harris is in agreement with a number of authors (Agnew 2005; Creswell 2004; Massey 1999; Hinrichs 2007) who point out “that space and place are defined with reference to each other; and that the terms are co-constitutive” (359). Within this perspective of space and place as relational, the global and local nexuses inform each other as opposed to being binary opponents. For Harris, this assertion of place as open, collaborative, and constituted through social relations is viewed as vital to maintaining the possibility of generating political change from “grassroots” organizations (359).

In the case of the Public Produce Project, the garden was a grassroots pilot project intended to engage the community in new approaches to food security issues and urban agriculture. Although the City of Kamloops’ Sustainable Kamloops Plan (2010) acknowledged the potential for edible landscaping practices and food security, and urban agriculture was becoming part of the public lexicon, it takes time for city administrators, elected officials, and urban planning departments to embrace the ideology of edible landscapes at the municipal level. For example, during the early months of developing the public produce garden, a group of anonymous food activists engaged in “guerrilla”-style planting of edibles in planter boxes in the public square outside of the main public library and Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD) administrative building. The location of the square and administrative offices is five blocks east of the public produce garden, at the opposite end of Victoria Street. Although members of the public voiced their support for the “guerrilla” edibles by writing letters to the editors of local newspapers, the produce was eventually uprooted by the TNRD administration, who was not very happy about the surreptitiously planted vegetables. The TNRD “had a liability concern and had intended to planters for floral beautification of the square” (Youds 2011, June 17). The response from the TNRD reveals how traditional decorative landscaping in public spaces is the common default. The Public Produce

Project group offered to adopt the uprooted vegetables and replanted them in the public produce garden.

Due to the proximity of the garden near City Hall and the downtown business centre, city administrators, staff, councillors, and the general public were able to watch the progress of the garden during their daily commute. Prior to the Public Produce Project, edible landscaping initiatives in Kamloops were, for the most part, visually and spatially minimal.⁵ Hence, the location of the garden was instrumental in demonstrating to the municipal government that it is feasible to use urban spaces to grow food, and simultaneously beautify the downtown urban landscape. The Public Produce Project is an excellent example of the way in which citizen engagement on a local level changed the municipality's approach to food policy. Edible landscaping, public fruit trees in parks, and public produce have entered the lexicon of Kamloops city planners. In fact, the city received a large grant for street improvement along the south shore of the Thompson River—the Lorne Street Improvement Project. At a KFPC meeting in May 2012, it was explained that the city's success in attaining the grant was due to the edible landscaping initiatives that were written into the application. The Lorne Street Improvement project, now complete, further demonstrates how urban agriculture and municipal planning can transform the way that Kamloops will look and taste in the future.

The municipality made great strides in demonstrating its willingness to grow public produce on municipal lands. Not only did the city place public produce into its budget, they set into action a municipally run public produce garden that was constructed 2012. On June 7, 2012, the City of Kamloops issued a press release announcing the brand new “Kamloops Showcase Community Garden” at McDonald Park, which was a formal partnership of the City of Kamloops and Interior Community Services (ICS). The McDonald Park showcase garden was Kamloops' first municipal-led and maintained public produce garden. It was planted in McDonald Park near a residential area and not far from the primary business district. The garden was fenced but not locked, and it was a combination of community garden plots (assigned plots) and public produce areas (not assigned and available to anyone). However, the municipality's configuration of social capital as it relates to bridging and mobilization of resources may be quite different from the grassroots approach used at the

Victoria Street garden. For example, to attain funding for this garden, the city applied for a grant with Scotts Canada. This funding was meant to initiate a “Showcase” community garden and a municipally funded and organized public produce garden. The application was successful and the showcase garden received a \$5,000 injection of cash from Scotts Canada’s “Gro1000 initiative” and another \$5,000 in Scotts Canada products. The grant from Scotts Canada provoked important and challenging questions in terms of community collaboration and leadership at the municipal level. The benefits of the project were that Kamloops was only one of two cities in Canada selected to receive this grant. One could argue that the community benefits of a demonstration garden and a community garden in the park outweigh any of the associated negative perceptions of the partnership with Scotts Canada. Others question the city’s choice of partners in developing the showcase community garden and demonstration gardens.

Because community gardens in Kamloops are organic by regulation, the Community Gardens Coordinator could not utilize any of the Scotts products. She chose to receive bark mulch, which was immediately buried under the gazebo, so that the mulch would not touch any of the plants. The Public Produce Project’s initiative works within the same, deliberate politics of organic growing practices and supports sustainable, local economies when it is able to. Scotts Canada is the sole distributor of Monsanto’s herbicide Roundup, and this fact alone does not jive with the political position of the Kamloops Food Policy Council. The city’s acceptance of a very small injection of cash was troubling to members of the KFPC because it demonstrated how corporate donations can often derail the focus and purpose of local public spaces as sites of community collaboration and engagement. For a \$5,000 cash donation (and \$5,000 product donation, all of which remained unused) in a \$70,000 garden site, Scotts was able to leverage their investment into a marketing opportunity for their gardening products. Brightly coloured T-shirts with Scotts logos were worn by children, City of Kamloops staff, and Communities in Bloom members involved in the opening of the showcase garden. The grand opening of this Scotts garden resembled the garden section of a big box store and, through both aesthetic and tone, emphasized the business partnership rather than the years of community efforts related to food security. As Dale and Newman point out, local networks are composed of social ties, and the structure

of those ties influences access to power and resources. Consequently, different sources of power offer different options as to how space is defined and used. The events that took place in the creation of the Victoria Street and Elm Street gardens were part of a grassroots initiative that helped to cultivate an ethos within the space. The experience at McDonald Park was very different. What questions can be asked about leadership and design of public spaces under the influence of corporate sponsorship? The increasing reliance on private funding to subsidize public services and spaces is a challenge that is too large to tackle in this chapter but is certainly ever present in conversations about community-engaged projects, food security, and grassroots politics, generally speaking.

While collaboration with community partners is paramount to the success of public produce initiatives, the role of volunteers on an ongoing basis is significant to grassroots initiatives trying to sustain pools of social capital in the long term. For example, as the summer progressed at the Victoria Street site and Elm Street relocation, there were fewer volunteers in the garden. While we do not have any concrete explanations for the decreased participation, we did note that while community partners are paramount to building social capital, the success of the public produce garden and gardening tasks rely on the continued support of volunteers. Without regular volunteers, responsibilities increase for the public produce coordinator, in particular. Responsibility also falls on other members of the group, who may have given extra time to the project on top of their designated roles. An observation regarding volunteers, offered by the public produce coordinator for 2013, was that people did not feel comfortable volunteering if they were not associated with the garden through a non-profit group or some other form of formal association with the garden. Drawing specifically from organizations that already have a strong base of volunteers is a consideration for future grassroots initiatives.

Conclusion and Reflection

Looking at the Public Produce Project through Dubinsky's lens of proximity has enabled us to draw important links between our approach to food security and public produce initiatives, as well as to the partnerships and community collaborations that are created along the way. If we are to

rethink city design and our way of being in urban spaces, citizen participation and dialogue that encourages diverse knowledge and perspectives is central to city planning (Duxbury 2014). As Giesecking et al. (2014) have pointed out, “cities are malleable, pliable and constantly changing and as such the experience we have of urban spaces is always a negotiation between various powers and influences” (221). We see from Emery and Flora (2006) the significance of cultural capital in driving the flow of other capitals in an upward spiral. However, the quality of the interactions between social capital and local leaders (political capital and vertical ties) plays a critical role in maintaining an upward spiral—particularly in the case of projects such as the public produce garden, positioned to challenge public and political perceptions of access, equality, and food security in urban public spaces.

Montgomery’s notions (2013) of what makes a city happy and healthy have helped us frame the Public Produce Project as something that belongs to a larger cultural shift in urban place making. Contributing to this discussion, a number of authors have suggested that a relational perspective of place allows for “a non-territorial way of viewing place politics in an age of global connectivity” (Amin 2002, 397). As DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have pointed out, “an inclusive and reflexive politics in place would understand local food systems not as local ‘resistance’ against a global capitalist ‘logic’ but as a mutually constitutive, imperfect, political process in which the local and the global make each other on an everyday basis” (369). As researchers, although we often are engaged in traditional academic discourse within our respective disciplines, this project has provided us with an opportunity to write a narrative from an interdisciplinary position that is both pragmatic and personal. It also has given us the opportunity to reflect on the process of initiating, creating, and documenting the public produce initiatives that have been created in Kamloops. Through the research and writing process, we have encountered questions that should be taken up in future research. These questions include a focus on the lack of funding, the limited role of volunteers in community-engaged projects, and the corporatization of community spaces, which raise further questions about where funding should come from and what the future of “public spaces” might look like. Through our shared experiences in and reflections on the garden, we have

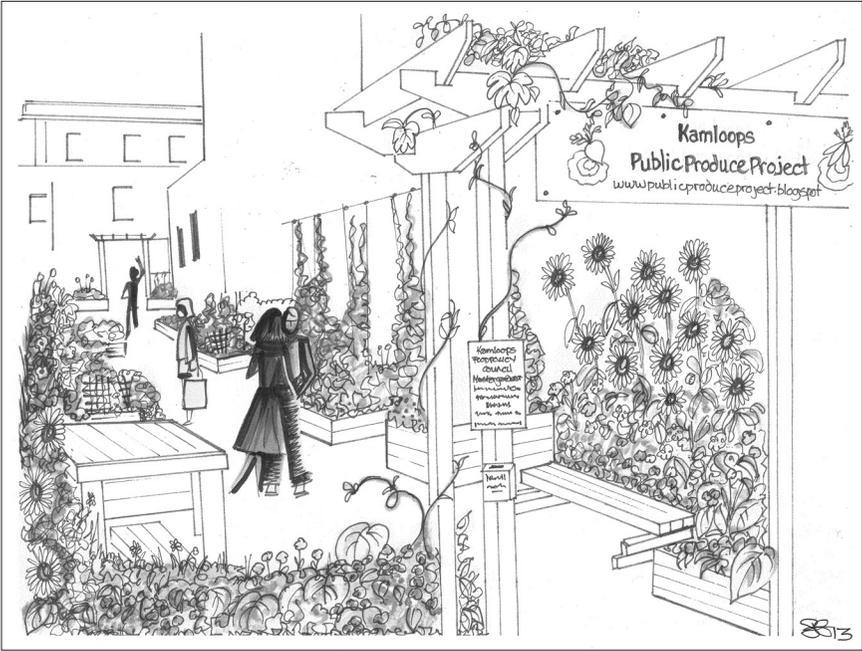


FIGURE 4.6. Kamloops Public Produce Project. Artistic rendition of the Public Produce Project by Shelaigh Garson, 2013. Courtesy of Shelaigh Garson.

come to appreciate how public produce gardens can be instrumental in situating people in place and creating opportunities for community and political engagement in urban agricultural initiatives.

As Montgomery has suggested, the happy city is one that moves beyond meeting the basic needs of food, shelter, and security. It also builds conviviality, recognizes the city's natural systems, and creates individual and collective benefits across public and private spaces. The Public Produce Project, which truly extended beyond the physical garden, demonstrated the potential of urban sites to become beautiful, inviting spaces of collaboration. By creating a place of engagement, reprieve, and inclusivity, public produce gardens have the potential to demonstrate the viability of local food production, and actively invite people to participate in the kind of complex local civic engagement that belongs to the “think global, act local” phenomenon. As we have illustrated, “acting locally”

is complicated, challenging, full of imperfections, and requires a lot of work (as per Shucksmith; Montgomery—see Introduction to this volume). This kind of local work and critique needs to come to the forefront of our thinking and practice when we consider what exactly we mean when we say *act local*. As researchers at a small university in a small city, the local particularities of where we live, study, and work become apparent, particularly when working with community partners in reimagining our urban spaces. Collaborative initiatives such as the Public Produce Project enable multiple perspectives of place and heighten our understanding of *equality of quality of life* issues in Kamloops (see Chapter 7: Conclusion on perpetuation of Public Produce idea on the North Shore).

NOTES

- 1 The Kamloops Food Policy Council is a group that has been bringing food and food security-related organizations and individuals together to network for over 20 years. The group meets monthly, over potluck dinner, to exchange updates, events, and opportunities.
- 2 The space is made up of three lots owned by two different owners. It faces north and runs along the south side of Victoria Street. The garden was built in the narrow lot on the west side of the lot (adjacent to the Cornerstone building). This lot is owned by Casey VanDongen, of TriCity Developments. The lot immediately to the east of the narrow lot is owned by a different resident and the lot on the furthest east end is also owned by VanDongen. The narrow lot, upon which the garden was built, measured approximately 4.6 metres (15 feet) wide and 36.5 metres (120 feet) long.
- 3 Given the climate in Kamloops, best practices for planting edibles suggest plants should go in the ground toward the end of May.
- 4 At that time, Kamloops Immigrant Services was the neighbour to the west of the garden.
- 5 In 2010, the City of Kamloops and the Kamloops Downtown Business Association held a competition in which downtown business owners planted the large flower planters along Victoria Street. Many of these planters contained edibles, but the edible nature of these planters was not made highly public. In 2011, a month before the Public Produce Project's "public plant-in," the same planters were planted with edibles.

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