

Title: A comparison between rural and urban permaculture projects

Introduction: I have visited four rural permaculture projects so far, and only one urban project. The Concrete Garden has therefore been my main project of comparison. Nonetheless, I know of many other community gardens, in France and in the UK, that are using - although not always consciously - permaculture ethics and principles in their projects. In the aims, strength and weaknesses sections of this comparative table, I have therefore sometimes based my appreciation on other projects I had in mind that were not explicitly mentioned by the urban growing community workers I interviewed at CG, as well as the existing literature on the subject.

The point of this comparative table is not to assess if one sort of project is better than the other, but rather to point out that they are intrinsically different in nature and aims, and obey different logic – as well as to summarize my findings so far. I would also argue that, looking at the weaknesses of both sort of projects, there seems to be common ground in resolving the possible problematics by looking at the question of land/public space – and how to reclaim it. My article is looking at that particular issue (with a focus on urban examples).

Finally, a lot of the criticism expressed here are based on three premises that may or may not be accepted by all: (a) that the ultimate aim of permaculture (different from individuals’ permaculture projects) is the establishment of an ecological society (b) the establishment of an ecological society is not possible within the neo-liberal paradigm we now live in (c) therefore, permaculture should try to stay outside of this neo-liberal paradigm and/or fight it

I haven’t visited Tombreck farm yet, and may add more information then – if you think something is missing, please let me know.

	Rural projects	Urban projects
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *White, middle-class, educated couples or individuals *Wwoofers (international) *Participants in workshops *PDC students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *White, middle-class, educated ‘urban growing community workers’ *Volunteers ‘community gardener’ from the local area *PDC students *Charities
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Self-funded (from previous jobs or from another income) *Holiday let *Grants from different organisations *Vegbox (1) *Nursery (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Funded by different organisations such as Climate Challenge Fund
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Self-sufficiency (to some extent) *Live a more sustainable and interesting life for themselves and their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Increase people’s knowledge on how to grow healthy organic food and how food is produced *Empower people from the local community with a sense

	<p>family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Live on the land, outside of the city *Experiment and explore *Connect with nature *Apply permaculture ethics to their daily life *Have a 'lifestyle business', an income that is based on their values and principles *Teach people permaculture by welcoming wwoofers, hosting events, workshops, PDC, or in schools, and actively participate to that knowledge by being a 'model', a pioneer of permaculture <p>*Through farming: provide organic food to the community, enhance a sense of shared identity based on the food we eat locally Participate to the local economy Create an alternative to industrial farming Potentially show the way to other farms from the area</p>	<p>of agency on their environment, and by giving them, through horizontal teaching (popular education), a set of skills and knowledge, from seeding and planting to working together and being able to use the permaculture semantics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Use 'stalled space', neglected areas of the city to a good effect *Give people from marginalised/deprived backgrounds a safe space to socialise, experiment and be together, as well as a sense of identity *Revalorise a sense of work outside the neo-liberalist system based on autonomous cooperation and collaboration from individuals from heterogeneous backgrounds *Promote permaculture ethics and principles through PDC opened to some of the volunteers *Promote ecologically friendly behaviours and ways of gardening – limit the carbon footprint of the community
<p>Place of permaculture</p>	<p>Central; applied to their daily lives and their occupations Peripheral; seen as a tool for farming rather than a philosophy</p>	<p>Peripheral; permaculture's principles are inherent in this kind of project and naturally apply to most of it. It is a tool of empowerment for members of the community to use, but not necessarily an obligation or a philosophy of life.</p>
<p>Nature of the project</p>	<p>Personal: the permaculture project comes from individuals' desire to use permaculture in their lives and the project is centred around their own life</p>	<p>Communal: the project usually comes from an organisation and it is aimed at the total autonomy in the future of the local community over their gardens without interferences. Community gardeners and workers have limited sessions</p>

	Comes from the desire to break away from a previous life/job	of work in the garden.
Strength of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *total freedom to explore and experiment on the land as it does not usually depend on external funding * on a personal level, its actors have a degree of control over their lives higher than they previously had *permaculture is lived as a philosophy potentially impacting every aspect of life on a personal level and can therefore be a stronger model for others *it can help repopulate the area, foster a sense of community, re-dynamise it through new forms of tourism and new businesses *depending on the size of the land, it can be experienced at a much higher scale than what is possible in a city and therefore produce more *a potential stronger environmental impact if used at a larger scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *ability to access more funds thanks to a renewed interest in urban agriculture and community gardens; and therefore to provide incomes to community workers and bigger sources of investment for the project *a wider and more diverse outreach that enables a deep form of togetherness and has a transformative capacity for people from various background ('integrate, not segregate') * the interconnected nature of the city enables different groups and organisation to work together and organise events easily * creates social harmony and offers a model of organisation for cities, in which most of us now live, by challenging notions of work, education, hierarchy * more adaptable, can be created in any unused land quite easily
Potential weaknesses of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Living in rural areas limits the natural local community and therefore the impact it can have *It therefore relies on a more international (or national) community of interests from -/+ similar backgrounds, which can hinder people's reflection on their own privileges and socio-economic problematics *Projects like this rely on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * relies only on external funding *degree of connectedness to nature is limited *Concrete Garden is based on 'stalled space', meaning it could potentially have to close if a more profitable project is chosen * big debate on whether this kind of projects actually helps to reinforce neo-liberal private development agenda by regenerating derelict sites which prepares places for

	<p>the ability to be in a position to purchase land and are therefore limited in spreading amongst the population, if they are not accompanied by a strong land reform</p> <p>*By focusing on individual's changes and the notion of 'responsibility for your own action', it can foster a sense that individuals' behaviours carry more weight than structural systems of oppression and power dynamics</p> <p>*The land and the funding are very much limited and even if it stabilises after a while, it requires a lot of investment at first (mentally, physically and financially)</p> <p>*the difficult financial nature of such a project forces a lot of people to re-enter, voluntarily or not, a capitalist and neo-liberal paradigm</p> <p>*Still very much based on an individualistic perception and on ownership of the land</p>	<p>gentrification</p> <p>*the support from neo-liberal governments to these social and ecological initiatives where people actively 'care for themselves' may be a way for them to reduce their responsibility of providing welfare services</p> <p>*if we agree with that, then community gardens could be seen as 'breaches' allowed by the capitalist system to exist because they actually foster it. Hence the support of personalities such as Boris Johnson to the Transition Movement</p>
--	---	---

Conclusions: *Rural permaculture projects and urban permaculture projects (here widened to a more general notion of community gardens using, consciously or not, permaculture ethics) differ widely in aims, funding, organisation, and in the place given to permaculture itself.

*They use different strategies to attain their ideal of an ecological society – if we agree that it is the common goal of permaculturists: in the case of rural projects, it is mostly based on the notion of individual pioneers and models 'taking responsibility for their own actions' and inspiring other like-minded individuals to do the same by using permaculture principles. The growing involvement of rural schools (through Children in Permaculture for example) changes that status-quo by integrating a new public and a new model of education. There is also a focus by the Permaculture Association on how to make these projects successful businesses ('green' or 'sustainable' entrepreneurship, still within the capitalist paradigm) rather than on how to end this system based on profit and competition

In the case of urban projects, the focus is on community building, on reclaiming the neglected part of the city and on asserting a strong identity, especially from marginalised groups often also 'neglected' by the city. Therefore, food production and

environmental issues are directly perceived as correlated to socio-economical problems. Once again, there is a notion of responsabilization by individual members of this community which can foster a neo-liberal ideology and reduce the investment of the state in its citizens' well-being.

* However, the newly acquired sense of agency and identity fostered by such initiatives, as well as the skills and knowledge gained by members of the community; and the individual models provided by rural projects, have the real potential to be threats to the current system if they become tool of political and radical empowerment.

* Forms of anarchism for instance also calls for responsabilization – but as an autonomous community, and not as individuals. Reclaiming the city, and reclaiming the land in the countryside, should be a right that we, as people living there, have.