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Contested urban green spaces in the compact city: The (re-)negotiation of urban gardening in Swiss cities

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ABSTRACT

Since the intensification of the search for sustainable urban planning, the ideal of the compact and green city characterized by high density, mixed land use and attractive green infrastructure, has become a desirable urban form at global scale. Urban greening, including urban gardening, has experienced a resurgence of interest. Within the frame of the compact city, the meanings, forms and functions of urban gardening have been re-evaluated for their contribution to urban sustainability, turning those spaces into a contested subject of negotiation. This qualitative study, conducted in the Swiss cities of Basle, Berne, Geneva and Zurich, investigates how the meanings of urban gardening are discursively (re)produced in political negotiation processes and how different rationalities of space produce a hegemonic order, constructing urban gardening sites as contested spaces. The findings demonstrate that urban growth strategies within the frame of the compact city, aiming at an efficient and resource-saving (re)organization of urban space, are discursively rationalizing current transformation processes. While so-called traditional forms of urban gardening are closed down, displaced to locations with less significance for urban development plans, or transformed in spatial and functional terms, new forms of urban gardening commensurate with the current ideals of urban landscapes and are emerging in the inner-city areas.

1. Introduction

Since the publication of the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report *Our Common Future,* local authorities in developed countries have increasingly embraced concepts enabling sustainable urban development. The compact city ideal has been widely advocated as key to creating livable and sustainable cities and, thus, has become a desirable urban form at global scale (Jim, 2004; Lang, 2014; Zimmermann, 2001). Green spaces in the compact city are recognized as valuable for maintaining or facilitating high quality densification of urban settlements, and the practice of greening cities, especially the upgrading of dense urban areas with greenery, has become a widespread approach within the urban sustainability agenda. Thus, urban green spaces are undergoing a re-evaluation of their contribution to urban sustainability in terms of their meaning and role within the urban tissue, re-conceptualizing their form and function in congruence with the principles of the compact city ideal. They are characterized by multifunctional land-use, providing a range of benefits, adaptive and flexible forms, and high accessibility for urbanites (Pincetl & Gearin, 2005).

Within this frame, urban allotment gardens have experienced a resurgence of interest and are increasingly the object of urban sustainability policies. It is claimed that urban gardening creates social, ecological and economic benefits for the city and its residents, strongly contributing to the development and maintenance of quality of life in the city (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006; Lang, 2014; Lossau & Winter, 2011; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; Turner, 2011). However, urban green spaces, including urban allotment gardens, compete with other uses of urban space, such as housing or business, and are often perceived as a land reserve for housing constructions and other urban development projects (Eizenberg, Tappert, Thomas, & Zilans, 2016; Jim, 2004). Thus, densifying urban areas may also be related to a loss of green space or a declining per capita green space provision (Haaland & Konijnendijk van den Bosch, 2015). In order to be able to provide sufficient and high-quality green space to urban residents, local authorities are increasingly in search of new, adaptive and flexible forms of urban gardening, characterized by high accessibility and hybrid functions (Klöti, Tappert, & Drilling, 2016). This has several implications for existing urban allotment garden spaces and newly created urban gardening infrastructure. While newer urban gardening practices fitting the desirable compact landscape in terms of form and function

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and, thus, feeding into the sustainable urban development agenda, are increasingly recognized and promoted by local authorities, traditional forms such as urban allotment gardens have been problematized as seemingly incompatible with the requirements of green space provision in the compact city.

2. The compact city and its hegemonic character

2.1. Compactness meets sustainability

Over recent decades the concept of urban sustainable development has become a meta-narrative shaping present ideas of what constitutes the 'good city' and desirable urban planning policy (Drilling, 2013). "It has shifted from being a variable to being the parameter of the debate, almost certain to be integrated into any future scenario of development" (Campbell, 1996:301). As such, the successful meta-narrative of the sustainable city "not only describes but prescribe[s], organizing meaning and action across different discursive modes and their institutional and social contexts" (Brand, 2007:624).

Urban sustainability may be described as a vision of ecologically, economically and socially responsible urban planning, a holistic vision or a triangular model that enables sustainable urban development through the reconciliation of the different (ecological, economic and social) interests in a city (Campbell, 1996). It is observable across cities that urban sustainability is neither a singular concept nor a unified or coherent approach. It rather constitutes a contested concept that is first and foremost ideological and shaped by the policy environment in which it is operating (Zimmerman, 2001).

In the search for sustainable urban development, there has been a growing concern about the development of urban form, especially urban sprawl which is characterized by urban settlements with low density, suburbanization, spatially segregated land uses and extensive commercial strip development (Dieleman & Wegener, 2004). In the course of the 1990s critics stated that urban sprawl "ate up open space, was racially and economically homogeneous, socially deadening, poorly designed, automobile dependent and environmentally destructive" (Hagerman, 2007:288). Since then, the use of the term 'urban sprawl' has become pejorative and it has turned into an inherently negative signifier (Kirby, 2013). More importantly, urban sprawl became a foil for sustainable urban development. Even though the idea of the compact city predates the debate on sustainable urban development, there has been growing support from local governments for compact city theories and policies embodying an ideal response to urban sustainability challenges (Scheurer, 2007). The compact city approach is marked by high density, mixed land use, pedestrian-oriented habitation, the utilization of development reserves for construction projects and the structural transformation of former industrial areas or fallow land into service or residential areas of high quality, enabling the "creation of both resource efficient systems and good, engaging design for attractive cities with good quality of life" (Haaland & Konijnendijk van den Bosch, 2015:760).

However, critical studies of urban sustainability have suggested that the correlation between compact settlements and urban sustainability is not as clear as previously assumed, and a number of claimed advantages have not yet been empirically proven (Chen, Jia, & Lau, 2008). It has been shown that higher density may also lead to traffic congestion, local air pollution, increased energy demand, overcrowding linked to poor health, increased poverty and crime, and the bad neighbor effect, as well as the loss of urban green or open space to development projects (Burton, 2002; Jenks, Burton, & Williams, 1996; Rudlin & Falk, 1999; Tony, 1996).

The concept of density plays an important role in the controversy on what is the ideal urban form to enable sustainable urban development. In this paper, density is understood as a conceptual idea of thinking the city. As such, it constitutes a contested concept that is continually negotiated and (re)defined by different actors, interests, norms and values (Hirschberg et al., 2012).

2.2. The role of urban green space in the compact city

Within the broader urban sustainability debate, there has been a growing concern or awareness about the interdependence of human (settlements) and nature, shaped by an increasing sensibility towards nature as a resource contributing to the livability of cities. This rather functional understanding of nature creates an understanding of urban green space as a resource for post-industrial ways of working and living (Petrow, 2012). At the same time, it implies a shift from nature as compensation for the ills of the city, to nature as an integral part of the city, attempting to overcome the manifest duality between humans and nature (Talen & Brody, 2005).

This so-called 'green turn' (Tornaghi, 2014:560) in the urban development debate has produced a resurgence of interest in greening cities and urban green spaces. While perceived functions and meanings of urban green space have changed over time, and while its meanings are not fixed or fully established but rather multiple and contextual, over recent decades urban green space has been increasingly recognized for its ecological, social and economic importance (Horwood, 2011). Green space is considered to form a fundamental part of urban sustainable development, based on the argument that it contributes to the urban ecosystem (through air purification, water and climate regulation, carbon storage, biodiversity, habitat for wildlife), provides benefits to urban residents (recreation, social interaction, community building, health benefits, subjective wellbeing, aesthetics) and produces economic value by increasing the quality of landscapes (its location, scenic setting, livability, recreational value, image, level of identification, and cultural heritage).

Simultaneously, postmodern lifestyles, marked by a diversification of leisure and recreational behavior (jogging, cycling, skating, etc.) and changing attitudes to nature, have generated new demands and, consequently, reshaped urban green space. Even though realized to different extents in compact cities, greening strategies have become an idealized vision of universal appeal (e.g. Singapore as 'city in a garden'). According to Jim (2004:311) "a city with high-quality and generous green spaces epitomizes good planning and management, a healthy environment for humans, vegetation and wildlife populations, and bestows pride on its citizenry and government".

The resurgence of interest in urban gardening is representative of these shifted meanings and functions of green space within the sustainability agenda and its predominating paradigm of urban densification (Nikolaidou, Klöti, Tappert, & Drilling, 2016). It is argued that urban gardening promotes social inclusion, community cohesion and collective empowerment. By providing spaces for food production, it solves problems related to food quality and affordability, and also increases biodiversity and improves micro-climatic conditions in urban areas (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006; Lang, 2014; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; Turner, 2011). With its combination of social and environmental aspects, urban gardening has been increasingly recognized as a productive and socially inclusive use of urban green spaces. Thus, it is not only perceived as contributing to the ecosystem, but also to the amelioration of urban living conditions and the development of urban livability in resonance with sustainability goals. Additionally, urban gardening spaces may generate economic value by enhancing the quality of the urban landscape and the attractiveness of the city within the context of increasing city competition (Lossau & Winter, 2011). Through the adoption of spatial planning strategies and green space design that aim to optimize the green space configuration within a city (creation of green networks, development of green space database for planning processes), the integration of adequate green space in the compact city may be enabled (Jim, 2004).

Nevertheless, densifying urban settlements as a principle for sustainable urban growth has exerted pressure on urban green spaces. The increasing competition between global cities has led to a commodification of urban space and to an optimization of land for economic benefit, producing an understanding of urban green space (including

urban gardening sites – for an extended discussion on urban allotment gardens becoming contested spaces in European cities see Bell et al., 2016) as a valuable resource for housing construction and other urban development projects (Eizenberg et al., 2016; Harvey, 1989). According to Haaland and Konijnendijk van den Bosch (2015), a loss of green space in densifying urban areas, mainly in Asian and Australian cities, and to a lesser extent in European and Northern American cities, is observable. Even in Western European cities, which have seen an overall increase of urban green spaces in the last decade, there is evidence for a low per capita green space in compact cities (ibid.). Thus, urban green space in the compact city competes with other land uses, and the re-evaluation of its maintenance and/or development through the lens of the urban landscape envisioned by the compact city, turns urban gardening sites into contested space in the context of urban green infrastructure.

Urban planning approaches often aim to address and reconcile the different needs and demands of all stakeholders in the city in an integrated and balanced manner. Therefore, they play a crucial role in the negotiation of contested space (Allmendinger, 2009; Nikolaidou et al., 2016). However, their apparent neutrality veils imbalanced power relations between the different stakeholders and their interests and, consequently, entails certain dilemmas.

3. Contested spaces in the compact city: discourses and discursive practices

The concept of contested spaces applied within this research project is based on a discourse theoretical understanding. Within this frame urban allotment gardens and newer forms of urban gardening, their functions, forms and ascribed meanings, are not merely understood as an ontological entity or given, but as a space that emerges out of historically situated discursive practices (Glasze & Mattissek, 2009). According to Foucault (2010), discourses occur as structured and structuring discursive practices. They are institutionalized and regulated articulations that evolve in a particular historical context and are (re) produced, manifested and transformed through discursive practices. Discourses are in a constant state of flux constituting objective knowledge, norms and ways of perceiving and understanding the world involving inconsistencies and fractures along lines of conflict, and, thereby, producing particular conceptualizations of truth emerging out of historically contingent power/knowledge constellations. In discourse theory, power and knowledge are intrinsically interlinked – "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (Foucault, 1977:27). Knowledge is understood as a means to enforce, perpetuate, contest or transform existing structures of power and domination. "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991:207). In their continuous attempt to become hegemonic, those 'regimes of truth' become reified, so that they are assumed as given and slip from critical assessment.

Within this theoretical frame, discursive and non-discursive/materialized practices are conceptualized dialectically. Space is not rendered only as a materialization of discursive practices, but space itself becomes constitutive for the (re)production of discursive practices that produce specific spatial orders within the rationalities of hegemonic power-knowledge constellations. Those spatial orders are continuously contested; they are never definitively fixed, but are constituted through discursive practices and bound in a particular historical context. According to Glasze (2009), as spaces are not a given but emerging out of historically situated discursive practices, space is always politic. Spaces "may be constructed in different ways by different people, through power struggles and conflicts of interest" (Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 1998:53). The problematization and contestation of space, and particular urban forms such as urban allotment gardens, in the political sphere can then be interpreted as a fought over spatialized power emerging out of hegemonic power-knowledge regimes unfolding particular materialized practices and spatial orders. Different urban visions, linked to particular conceptualizations of spatial structures and forms and different interests, compete for hegemony over policies (re)shaping the spatial order, and consequently the urban form (Richardson & Jensen, 2003).

Thus, meanings ascribed to urban allotment gardens and other forms of urban gardening, as well as their functions, forms and location within the urban fabric, are permanently discursively (re)produced, reified and contested, also involving inconsistencies, fractures and along lines of conflict. Different actors, interests, norms and values continually negotiate and shape these particular urban spaces. Urban policy and planning is understood as part of the discursive field – constituting a contested concept itself – (re)producing, challenging or transforming dominant discursive orders and, thereby, structuring ideas and concepts about the ideal city and its green spaces. Thus, urban politics and planning are constitutive of negotiations on urban space and the (re)production of meanings ascribed to urban gardening. This article aims to deconstruct these reified meanings of urban allotment gardens and newer forms of urban gardening in Swiss cities by analyzing negotiation processes in urban planning and policy-making.

4. Research questions and method

This article is based on findings from the qualitative research project 'Future Scenarios of Allotment Gardens in the context of increasing urban densification and urban open space policies' conducted in the Swiss cities of Basle, Berne, Geneva and Zurich from February 2014 to July 2016, which analysed changed meanings and present planning practices related to allotment gardens and newer forms of urban gardening in Swiss cities, currently shaped by the planning paradigm of the sustainable and compact city. The cities of Basle, Berne, Geneva and Zurich were chosen due to their long tradition of urban allotment gardens and the recent emergence of other forms of urban gardening. Further, these four cities are considered to constitute the future metropolitan areas in Switzerland and are marked by sustainable urban growth strategies and the densification of urban areas (Federal Office for Spatial Development, 2004).

The study is framed by a discourse-theoretical approach addressing questions concerning the politics of knowledge and the discursive (re)production of *truth* as an empirical (material) process. While discursive and non-discursive practices are conceptually understood in a dialectical manner, the paper focuses on discursive practices in political negotiation processes. This theoretical frame enables the analysis of meaning construction within discourses (re)produced, contested and negotiated in the political sphere, and how these meanings become stabilized and reified. Therefore, this article poses the following questions: 1) How are the meanings of urban gardening (re)produced in political negotiation processes in Switzerland? 2) What discursive practices construct urban gardening spaces as contested spaces? The focus of the article lies on the common patterns of discursive practices among the selected cities rather than on the differences, in order to show how dominant power-knowledge formations challenge and problematize urban allotment gardens in Swiss cities.

A constructivist-hermeneutic approach was adopted for data collection and analysis and the controlled strategy of theoretical sampling was used to develop the data corpus. For a first exploration of the discursive field the approach of 'pure description' (Foucault, 2010) was applied. This does not entail a simple summary of contents, but entails their dissection, sorting, commenting, contrasting and aggregation in terms of patterns, similarities and dissimilarities. The different discursive levels (politics,

	Basle	Berne	Geneva	Zurich
Parliamentary session protocols	27	15	18	24
Administrative concepts	9	7	5	6
Urban development plans	15	0	5	3
Administrative reports	15	3	1	5

Fig. 1. Final sample Basle, Berne, Geneva, Zurich for the years 2000–2014; N = 158.

public administration, media, science, art and culture, civil society organizations and initiatives) were searched for relevant data by means of an online search using a list of terms, including 'allotment garden' and other terms associated with new forms of urban gardening (as well as synonyms), in order to develop familiarity with the field. The final sample consisted of a total of 158 documents from politics and public administration (verbatim protocols of parliament sessions, administrative concepts, plans and reports) for the period from 2000 to 2014 retrieved from the online data bases of the cantonal and city councils Basle, Berne, Geneva and Zurich (see Fig. 1).

The data was analyzed following abductive logic, requiring an iterative-cyclic approach between theoretically driven empirics and empirically generated theory (Charmaz, 2006). A thematic analysis was undertaken in two stages, with the first dealing with the management of the data and identifying recurring themes and ideas that emerged in the data and were used to create a code list, which was then employed to label, sort and synthesize the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The codes were then systematically applied to the whole data set with some passages of the material being multi-coded. The qualitative software program Atlas.ti was used to assist in the organization and management of the data. The outcome of this stage was a set of fragmented and decontextualized data, allowing each category to be focused on, with particular attention paid to similarities and differences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In the second phase, emerging patterns were detected and meanings were assigned, in order to systematically interpret the data set and to move from descriptive to explanatory accounts. This involved comparing themes and concepts across the data set, examining similarities and differences such as quantity, location and typologies of urban gardening, mechanisms of governance or urban green space strategies. Key dimensions were identified and written down in memos. The analytical process involved going backwards and forwards between the data and emerging explanations in order to ensure that the analysis was grounded in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The paper aims to provide an understanding of how urban gardening is negotiated at political level and, therefore, highlights common patterns and meanings rather than looking at the regional differences between the cities chosen for this research project.

5. Contested meanings of urban gardening in Swiss cities

5.1. Sustainability and densification: strategies for balanced urban growth

In 1992 Switzerland signed the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development following a holistic and reciprocal understanding of economic, social and environmental processes which need to be balanced in terms of their conflicting objectives and interests. Since then, different measures have been implemented and the aim of sustainable development has been enshrined in the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation (Art. 2 Aims, Section 4 Environment and Spatial Planning, Art. 73 Sustainable Development). While the Federal Office for Spatial Development in Switzerland serves as coordination platform for sustainable development and is responsible for spatial planning, and traffic and transport issues, due to the federalist structure of the country, the cantons, cities and municipalities play a key role in implementation (Federal Office for Spatial Development, 2012).

Within the debate on sustainable development in Switzerland, space-related processes have been recognized as highly important and, according to the guide for Sustainable Development in Switzerland (2012:27), spatial planning "must ensure the proper spatial framework conditions for business, efficient infrastructures, economical land use and the protection of natural habitats". This should be enabled through the planning concept of the compact city (in Switzerland called 'inward urban development'), which is marked by densifying urban settlements, the conversion of brownfields and railway station areas, and the requalification of traffic-affected open spaces (Reutlinger, 2015). It aims at avoiding urban sprawl, the further expansion of urban settlements into peri-urban areas and environmental degradation. It is claimed that a high population density, mixed land-use, infrastructural compactness, provision of public transport, and nearby availability of recreation space help the development of sustainable urban areas by reducing land consumption and motorized private transport, and are thus less harmful to the environment (Schemmel, 2015).

While in Swiss media and politics, urban sprawl has become the threatening scenario that needs to be fought against, the compact city embodies the well-structured, densified and clearly contoured European city providing solutions to present sustainability challenges. However, there has been criticism that measures only focus on spatial densification, leaving aside the social context and individual demands—the increase of the average age, professional careers marked by flexibility and mobility, changes in family structures and gender roles, migration, and a plurality of lifestyles have changed patterns of cohabitation and living, leading to diversified demands on living and increasing per capita land consumption. Thus, it might be too shortsighted to exclusively target spatial densification in order to enable sustainable urban development (Reutlinger, 2015).

Since 2000, Swiss cities have been marked by the reversal trend of reurbanization, which is mainly explained by economic growth, international migration flows and the residential behavior of certain population groups (Rérat, 2012). The present imbalance of the high number of workplaces in urban areas and the relatively low number of housing opportunities (Basle, Berne, Geneva and Zurich have an accommodation vacancy rate below 0.5%; Swiss Cities Association, 2015) has been problematized in the political debate (Ecoplan, 2012). It is argued as a cause of environmental degradation due to commuter traffic and, in consequence, reducing the livability of cities. Further, the imbalance creates a loss of potential tax revenues. Current urban development strategies in Swiss cities (Geneva: Municipal Director Plan 2020, Berne: Strategy Berne 2020, Revised Urban Development Concept STEK 95, Basle: Sustainability, Legislature Targets 2013–2017, Zurich: Strategy, Zurich 2025/2035, Spatial Development Strategy) address these challenges by adhering to a balanced-growth approach, marked by a logic of resource saving and efficiency and aiming to reconcile the economic and ecological (and to a lesser degree social) interests of the city. Over the last decade, construction activities in Swiss cities have strongly intensified and the ideal of the compact city is currently reshaping the urban landscape (Nikolaidou et al., 2016).

5.2. The implementation of urban visions and changing urban gardening practices

Urban allotment gardens in Switzerland emerged in the context of industrialization in order to support household incomes through subsistence agriculture, specifically targeting poorer populations in the urban areas. The regenerative, compensatory and socio-communicative functions of allotment gardens were assumed to improve the living conditions of socio-economically disadvantaged people (Gallati & Schiller, 2011). Since then, forms, functions and the role of urban allotment gardens within the urban fabric have been continuously reshaped by envisioned urban landscapes, spatial planning approaches and societal transformation processes. Nowadays, urban allotment gardens in Switzerland (called *family* or *leisure gardens*) are still used for the purpose of gardening and food production, but mainly serve as recreational space fostering social integration and identification with the local community (Frauenfelder & Delay, 2011). They are characterized as follows: a) plots of 200–400 m^2, b) located on public land, c) allocated for a small annual fee (CHF 220–CHF 450 per year), d) under a renewable lease contract, e) for individual use within a fenced area, f) most of the areas have permanent installations (individual garden house, community building), g) used for recreation, food production, keeping of animals, h) no permission for overnight stay. Although urban allotment gardens were initially created for poorer populations and mainly used by Swiss nationals until the 1960s, the population has diversified since then in terms of profession, age, and national background. While Swiss nationals from 50 years old and upwards dominate among allotment garden users, immigrants from southern countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and former Yugoslavia have led to a multicultural composition of users representing current socio-cultural changes in Swiss cities. Despite this diversification, the majority of allotment garden users are still from the working class or people with lower incomes (Frauenfelder & Delay, 2011).

Over the last decade, urban growth, the promotion of a more compact urbanization and a diversification of the needs and demands of urban residents for urban green space have exerted pressure on urban allotment gardens, and their role and function within the urban fabric has been contested in political debates. Prior to the year 2000, urban allotment gardens were not discussed in parliamentary session for about 40 years (since the last period of urban renewal and growth in Swiss cities). Over the last 15 years, urban allotment gardens have been addressed continuously in parliamentary debates, always within the context of urban development projects and spatial transformations. Simultaneously, a resurgence of interest in different urban gardening practices by urban residents and local municipalities can be observed, new forms of urban gardening in Swiss cities have emerged (in the German part called *urban gardening, Gemeinschaftsgarten, Generationengarten, Interkultureller Garten, Küchengarten, mobile Gärten, Siedlungsgarten*; in the French part called *jardins potagers, plantages*, or *potagers urbains,* see Fig. 2 for an example of new forms of urban gardening). They are characterized as follows: a) small plots in urban areas, b) located on public or private land (vacant space, brownfields, future construction sites, existing green/open spaces, existing but structurally changed allotment garden sites, front yards under grass, parks etc.), c) highly accessible to the public, d) multifunctional land-use (integrating other uses of space such as cultural, educational or social practices), e) allocated without rent or for a small fee, f) used by the surrounding neighborhood, g) temporary in nature (especially if located on brownfields and future construction sites), h) involving co-operation between public and civic actors.

The compact city approach in Switzerland follows the concept of qualitative densification of urban settlements, which means that urban density is increased while green spaces are integrated into the urban landscape (Geneva: Municipal Director Plan 2020, Berne: Strategy Bern 2020, Revised Urban Development Concept STEK 95, Basle: Sustainability Strategy, Legislature Targets 2013–2017, Zurich: Strategy, Zurich 2025/2035, Spatial Development Strategy). The adaptability and flexibility of newer forms of urban gardening (small-scale design, the lack of permanent installations and their temporary nature), as well as their multiple functions and high accessibility, seemingly feed into this planning practice of greening dense urban cores and the envisioned compact urban landscape. Over the last 5 years new forms of urban gardening, often under the label ‘edible city’, ‘urban gardening’ or ‘urban agriculture’, have emerged in parliamentary debates (Basle: motion ‘urban agriculture’ 12.5201.01; cantonal parliament session 19/01/2011; Berne: postulate ‘edible city’ 2013.SR.000049, city council session 08/05/2014; Geneva: motion ‘Des potagers urbains (plantages) pour faire fleurir les fruits et légumes, mais aussi le lien social’ M-1029, city council session 04/02/2014; Zurich: postulate ‘edible city’ 2012/455, city council session 15/12/2012; motion ‘Areal Dunkelhölzli’ 2013/184, city council session 22/05/2013). They are represented as a means of addressing pressing sustainability challenges (contribution to biodiversity, related ecosystems, food provision, local capacity building, social inclusiveness and economic use of urban space) and are strongly promoted by local authorities (Nikolaidou et al., 2016). In contrast, urban allotment gardens are discursively constructed as incompatible with the requirements posed by hegemonic urban visions, and their form, functions and utilizations are continuously problematized:

> “To shut down the allotment gardens does not yet mean that the currently existing green belt is going to vanish. Unfortunately, it is in the area of Muttachstrasse in particular that allotment gardens are often used as a barbecue area, and that surprisingly big garden houses are built rather than [allotment gardens] being used for gardening. This would not be disturbing on the outskirts of the city. But in the midst of housing areas and transport infrastructure, allotment gardens on public land and leased at low prices, should not be covered with garden houses and terraces. In this case, genuine

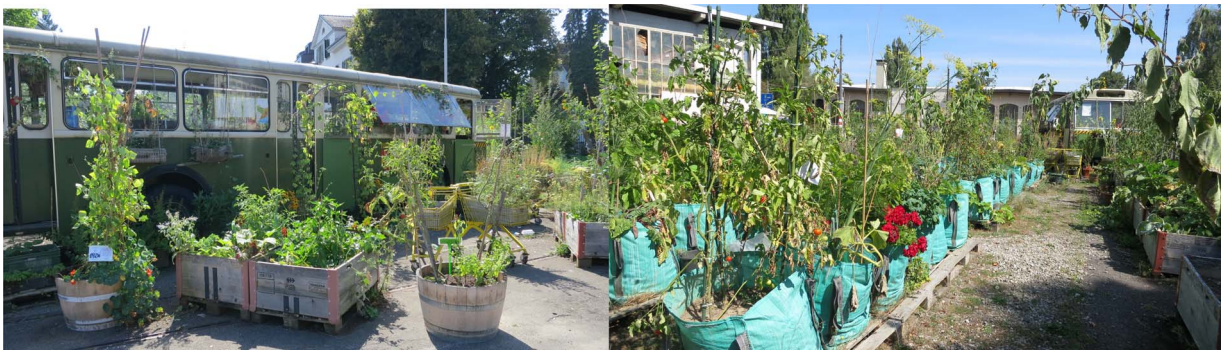

Fig. 2. Temporary urban gardening project Berne, Tramdepot Burgernziel 2013 – n.a., redevelopment site.
Source: Simone Tappert.

> housing space serving many people would be preferable, rather than fenced green areas only being accessed and used by a few people and during a limited period of time each year."
>
> (Berne city council session, 17/3/2011, closing UAG Muttachstrasse)

This quotation refers to a debate on the Holligen urban development project in the city of Berne. An allotment garden area was partly closed down in order to make space for the creation of new housing and a public park within the well-located neighborhood of Holligen.

At a political level, urban allotment gardens are seen as rather unsustainable due to their large-scale design, their limited accessibility, their permanent installations such as garden houses (sealed surfaces), and their mono-functional usage as a *hobby* for a small part of the urban population (individual use of large-scale plots in fenced areas). Within the political debate this is reinforced by the representation of urban allotment gardeners as using pesticides and not being sensitive or willing to adopt sustainable gardening practices and, thereby, causing environmental degradation. Thus, in current political debates on urban development different meanings are ascribed to urban allotment gardens and to newer forms of urban gardening shaped by dominant rationalities inherent to the envisioned urban landscape of the sustainable urban city.

5.3. Urban green space as a resource for a hegemonic ideal

Densifying urban areas according to the principles of the compact city, which has become a synonym for sustainable urban development, is assumed to produce optimal land utilization. Urban space is understood as a resource that needs to be used and reorganized in an efficient and resource-saving manner. In this process of spatial reorganization, urban allotment gardens are understood as a potential resource for housing construction, the development of public infrastructure (i.e. motorway, public school, sports stadium), commercial and industrial areas. The continuous problematization at the political level of an imbalance between workplaces and housing opportunities in Swiss cities causing environmental degradation and loss of potential tax revenues, as well as reinforcing the undesirable process of suburbanization, makes the intensification of housing construction within the urban area a necessity, a given, rather than a subject of negotiation. This is reinforced by demographic and economic future forecasts supporting the claim for the need for an urban growth strategy. The understanding of densifying urban settlements as a holistic approach to tackling the above-mentioned challenges justifies the closing down of urban allotment gardens in the inner-city area. Thus, urban allotment gardens are not universally problematized. Whether an urban allotment garden becomes contested or not depends on its location, the existing infrastructure and (public) transport connections, and its integration into a specific neighborhood. This means that in particular urban allotment gardens that are located in well-developed inner-city areas become contested and are often closed down or relocated to the outskirts of the city. Referring to the principles of the compact city as the ideal urban planning strategy produces meanings of urban allotment gardens in those areas as a resource to achieve the overall urban development goals:

> "Traffic calming in neighborhoods has been a major concern for the city council. Traffic calming is part of the urban mobility strategy, as is the promotion of the city of short distances. It is families and elderly people in particular that rely on recreational areas within walking distance of the place of residence. […] Allotment gardens cannot be understood as public open spaces and recreational areas as they are not accessible to the wider public and only serve the tenants. Allotment gardens cannot replace public recreational space. And undesirable traffic is not only created because of allotment gardens being very distant [from the place of residence], but because of recreational areas being located far away. If the city council is forced to choose, the creation of local recreational areas will be favored at the expense of allotment gardens."
>
> (Interpellation 2006/0005, response by Zurich City Council 15/3/2006, closing down of the Aussersihl-Hard urban allotment garden area due to a redevelopment project).

Urban allotment gardens are spoken of as a *land reserve*, *scope for action* for further development projects, or *temporary usage/maintenance* of urban land. They are converted (irrespective of whether the urban allotment gardens remain in the zoning plan or not), if the conversion of the area is used for development projects in the public interest (housing, road, public school, sports stadium, etc.; see Fig. 3 for an example of an urban allotment garden converted into a public park and a public school building which is expected to be built from 2017 onwards) and legitimized by the larger frame of sustainable urban growth

Fig. 3. A former urban allotment garden area in Zurich converted into a public park (Pfingstweid Park).
Source: Grün Stadt Zürich/SchnitzelCopter.

(i.e. the housing construction and the creation of living space in well-developed areas prevents or reduces outward-migration to the suburbs and, thereby, decreases the commuter traffic and related environmental pollution caused by motorized private transport). Within the political debate, meanings produced and ascribed to these urban locations appear as prediscursively existing and, thereby, rationalize a specific utilization of the contested space. As a result, any alternative use of the space (such as the maintenance of the urban allotment garden) becomes marginalized and appears illegitimate.

5.4. A public good or "an individual interest"

Urban green space on public land is understood to be a public good and it is the responsibility of the local municipality to supply an adequate quantity and quality of green spaces for all urban residents. The present reorganization of urban space through densifying urban settlements and simultaneously maintaining and integrating existing green spaces into the urban landscape (qualitative densification of urban areas) in order to guarantee the supply of green space, creates an utilization pressure on urban allotment gardens in urban areas under development due to the increasing undersupply of green space in those areas. The undersupply as a result of densification processes is not questioned, but rather accepted as a natural and necessary consequence of present spatial reorganization processes.

Urban allotment gardens are on public land and, thus, are categorized as a public good. However, the increasing undersupply of green space in densified urban settlements and the need to address this challenge turns urban allotment gardens located in developing areas into a contested space. Within the political debate on urban development processes the ecological and social functions of these gardens are not made relevant, and urban allotment gardens are rather framed within a dualistic understanding of public and private space:

> "We want to narrow the role of allotment gardens a little bit. They do not have the same function as sports fields or neighborhood designs that are publicly accessible. They are only for usage by their owners. The rest of the population does not gain anything from them."
> (Berne city council session, 15/8/2002, Weissenstein redevelopment project)

They become discursively constructed as private spaces, understood as an *individual interest* for a small segment of the population, rather than contributing to the common welfare. Even though in many of the parliamentary debates, the social function and the value of urban allotment gardens is recognized, it is not made decisively relevant in further decision-making processes. Reified meanings of urban allotment gardens as just a *hobby* for a small number of people devalue these urban green spaces as they seem not to meet the criteria of urban green space understood as a public good. This construction of urban allotment gardens questions their legitimation in increasingly densified urban areas and reifies their contestation as a given and rational consequence. This results in the transformation of urban allotment gardens. They are either closed down and converted into a public park (see Fig. 3), or undergo a transformation in terms of design, function and utilization: plots are rescaled and re-designed in order to be used as collectively used plots, and accessibility is increased by building public pathways, playgrounds and meeting places (see Figs. 4 and 5 for examples of transformation).

5.5. "Lettuce grows equally well everywhere"—the reconciliation of interests as urban planning strategy

In order to enable sustainable urban development, current urban planning approaches aim to reconcile the needs and demands of the different stakeholders in the city, with the intention of achieving a balance of interests if conflicts of objectives occur. This consensus-oriented and integrated urban planning approach takes the increasing land-use competition and the utilization pressure on particular spaces, such as urban allotment gardens, as a given. While different causes (spatial densification, resource-consuming lifestyles or increasing per capita land consumption) are not questioned at a political level, the increasing utilization pressure on urban allotment gardens is understood as being a natural consequence of present spatial reorganization processes within cities.

The so-called balancing of interests in urban development processes can only be achieved by a compensatory land-use regime that constructs urban allotment garden spaces as a land-use practice that can be employed at any location within the city. This turns urban gardening sites into a mobile and flexible resource that can be relocated to any other urban area. In consequence, the closing and the conversion of urban allotment garden areas is often linked to the provision of replacement plots for urban allotment gardeners at other already existing allotment garden areas, or (in exceptional cases) the creation of a new area at a different location. This compensatory land-use regime makes the reconciliation of different needs and demands possible. However, firstly, the extent of the replacement plots is always linked to the demand posed by the allotment gardeners affected by the conversion of a particular allotment garden area and, secondly, the relocation of the gardening site often leads to a diminished demand by the gardeners as the provision of the replacement area is not bound to the criterion of proximity to the place of residence or to the prior urban allotment garden area. The replacement plots and areas are often at locations that are difficult to access (poor transportation connections, on the outskirts of the city) and, additionally, older gardeners especially (the majority of urban allotment gardeners are elderly people) are less willing to create a new garden plot due to limited resources. Thereby, the consensus-oriented urban planning approach of reconciling different interests within the city and the related compensatory land-use regime results in a decreased demand for urban allotment gardens and, in turn, justifies the further numerical cutback of urban allotment gardens in the city.

6. Conclusion

Local governments have embraced the compact city as the desirable urban form that facilitates sustainable urban development. It aims to create an urban landscape that tackles pressing sustainability challenges through the reorganization of urban space in an efficient and resource-saving manner in order to produce optimal land utilization. The research shows that the normative construction of the compact city and its envisioned urban landscape constitutes a hegemonic spatial order that turns urban allotment gardens into contested space in Swiss cities. While urban gardening is recognized as an integral part of Swiss cities, and newer forms of urban gardening currently emerging within the urban fabric are promoted and supported by local authorities due to their positive functions feeding into the overall sustainability agenda, as well as their flexible and adaptive forms, the so-called traditional form of urban gardening – the urban allotment garden – has become a problematized and contested object.

Framing discursive and non-discursive/materialized practices dialectically makes visible how the idealized urban vision of the compact city produces hegemonic spatial practices that are currently reorganizing urban allotment gardens, and how the idealized urban vision of the compact city produces, rationalizes and reifies the present transformation of urban allotment gardens. Urban landscape and design projects are a constitutive part of this 'regime of truth'. It is structured by and restructures those hegemonic rationalities through spatial practices and, as such, plays a pivotal role in the reorganization of urban green spaces. Dominant norms and conceptualizations and the appropriated urban form question the legitimacy of gardening sites by problematizing their form, functions and utilizations. In the political debate they are constructed as a land reserve and as offering scope for

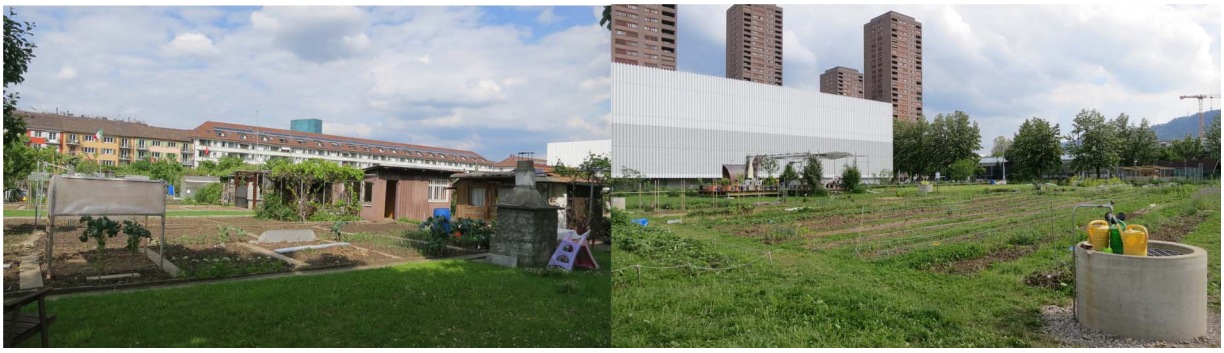

Fig. 4. Hard Zurich urban allotment garden area (left) with individual plots of 250m^2 and garden shed; half of the urban allotment garden area was converted into the Quartiergarten Hard community garden (right) with shared plots and two community areas.
Source: Simone Tappert.

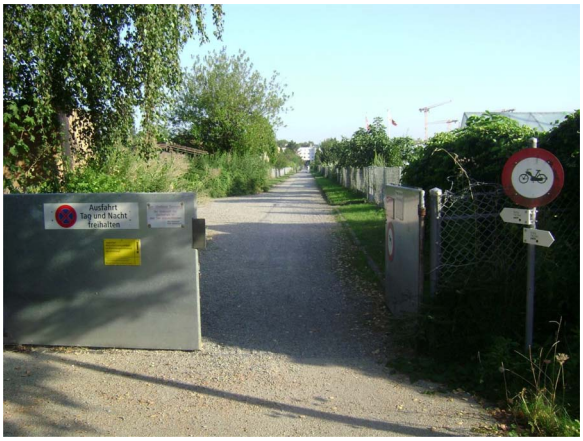

Fig. 5. Urban allotment garden area in Basle (Milchsuppe), which was previously closed to non-gardeners (locked door). The area is now connected with the green space network and its infrastructure (playground, restaurant) is accessible to the public.
Source: Tanja Klöti.

action to achieve the overall urban development goals operating under the meta-narrative of sustainable urban growth. Further, urban allotment gardens are constructed as unsustainable and, therefore, incompatible with the criteria posed by the hegemonic urban vision. Conceptualizations of urban allotment gardens as private spaces, or as a hobby for a few people, that are allocated on public land and provided by the state, reinforce their contestation, as they are constructed as being in conflict with the criteria of urban green space categorized as a public good.

The relocation of converted urban allotment gardens is linked to a consensus-oriented planning approach aiming at reconciling the different needs in the city. While this compensatory land-use regime appears to be a neutral planning approach that, in addition, is sensitive to sustainability issues, it produces a marginalization of particular urban forms and spatial practices, such as the urban allotment garden, and, thereby, also triggers socio-spatial marginalization by displacing urban allotment gardens and their users to the outskirts of the city. Thus, the contestation of those urban spaces in the political sphere can also be understood as a fought over spatialized power, which shapes not only urban policy and planning but also rationality itself, by defining what kind of urban development and urban landscape is acceptable and appropriate and what knowledge is considered valid in the negotiation process (Westerink, Lagendijkb, Dühr, Van der Jagta & Kempenaara, 2013). As the hegemonic urban vision of the compact city as the response to present sustainability challenges has become a powerful 'truth' that has been inscribed into the urban landscape, the reorganization of urban space and the current transformation processes undergone by urban allotment gardens have been constructed as a rational consequence producing benefits that are universally enjoyed by all urban residents. However, making the city more compact is not necessarily the 'best' urban planning approach to enable sustainable urban growth that aims to combine and reconcile the different needs and interests in the city concurrently and with equal value. For other approaches, urban allotment gardens may constitute a socially desirable provision to involve particular groups of urban residents in the use of public urban green space and, thereby, to foster livability in the city (Dooling, 2009; Kirby, 2013; Ward Thompson, 2002).

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