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Session: Gender and feminist geographies: Developments, directions and tensions

Theme: Embracing Diversity – Expanding Geographies

Community gardens as spatial praxis: alternatives for women's empowerment (PhD proposal)

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Abstract

Since concerns about food security and more sustainable alternatives for food supply have increased in the past decade, urban and peri-urban agriculture (UA) became a topic of interest bringing together civil society, governments and researchers to discuss options for food raising and distribution in metropolitan areas. Despite revealing a transdisciplinary inclination, most part of the researches still adopt a technological and utilitarian perspective that values innovation on urban planning and techniques for cropping, harvesting and livestock production.

In recent years, some authors proposed another approach to the topic: instead of only focusing in the food growing implications of UA, they opted from an ontological one that envisions it as a strategy to change socio-economical, community, environmental and urban paradigms (Surel, 1998). Following this critical perspective, Tornaghi (2014) suggested four approaches for a future research agenda in the area: (a) explore cultural and political meanings of UA, including gendered approach; (b) expose socio-environmental injustice and exclusionary dynamics; (c) propose alternative models for a critical envisioning of post-capitalism, de-growth inspired urban living; and (d) repoliticise the role of UA in the urban structure.

Following this critical agenda, this paper aims, firstly, to make a literature review of the tangible and intangible benefits of UA, focusing on community gardens. Gradually, the paper guides the discussion to a gendered approach to the topic. The second goal of the paper is to identify potentials of women's empowerment through UA based on previous research findings. Empowerment here is understood as a process that can overlap and occur in a non-linear way, which can be related to tangible outcomes, as well as a process of *conscientização* (critical consciousness) of oppressive structures (Freire, 1970).

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