

A Visual Exploration of Allotments as Spaces of 'Spectacle': A comparative analysis of allotment gardens within The Greater Dublin Area and the City of Aarhus in Denmark

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International Visual Sociology Association Annual Conference, Goldsmiths College, London, July 2013

Allotments & Food Production

Local/ alternative food movements include community supported agriculture, urban agriculture, farmer's markets, organic agriculture etc

Allotments differ from these other examples in that they do not involve the production of food for profit only for personal consumption.

Allotments: A Brief History

European allotments emerged out of industrialisation and urbanisation

Contemporary revival, due to:

economic downturns, environmental & health issues and a desire for alternative types of leisure spaces...

Ireland: allotments returned since 2008

Denmark: allotments date back to 1930s & 40s but have regained popularity in past decade, esp among younger generation

Allotments: A Working Typology

General definitions identify an allotment as a private gardening area within a larger collection of such gardens
Different allotment landscapes exist in Ireland and Denmark due to:

Structure of lease

Time in existence

Each type of allotment area has a different 'feel' and look depending on these factors

Method

1) Visual ethnographies in allotment sites in the Greater Dublin Area between 2009 and 2012 and in Aarhus in 2011

2) Researcher as *flâneur*

The *flâneur* strolls '...without any clear purpose, but with an openness, an availability to whatever may come the way of the stroller' (Slater, 1998, p. 2)

3) Reflexive use of images

Photographs represent something of what the plot-holders visualise in regards to their plot; as well as the plot at a particular moment in time

Case Studies

Greater Dublin Area:

North East Central Farmer's Hill Community Garden

Fingal Allotments

Weaver Sq Community Garden

Aarhus city:

Aabrinken (Riverbank)

Moselund (Bog Grove)

Oldhøjen (Ancient Hill)

North East Central Farmer's Hill
Community Garden (NEC)



Fingal Allotments



Weaver Square Community Garden



Aarhus Allotments



Allotments as Creative Spaces: Aesthetics and Personalisation

Urban allotments are landscapes that allow for creativity

Allotments are personalised and inscribed with a personal aesthetic and with markers of identity

These plots become not only personalised but privatised places.

However, allotment areas are also communal

Aesthetics within individual gardens are on display to other plot-holders and the general public







The 'Spectacle' of Food Production in Allotment Gardens

Almost every garden contains an area for food production, some more so than others

Can we consider contemporary allotments 'spectacles' of food?

Debord (1967): spectacle as a public, image saturated and visually laden event, produced by commercial interests

Food in allotments is not produced for profit

But food produce is laid out and grown in ways that are designed to a particular style and with a particular imagery in mind

Allotments make visible aspects of food production that are otherwise left hidden

It draws on local traditions and heritage as well as the plot-holder's own personal aesthetics and cultural taste



Visualising Food Production



Spectacle of Food and Personal Taste



Conclusions

Allotments are a form of lived public space

They offer an opportunity for creativity and self-expression

This includes the way food plots are imagined, planned, planted, tended and maintained

Growing vegetables in an allotment is a way of creating a visual display of self expression, which signifies the norms, values and identities held by the individual gardener

They are 'personalised spectacles'