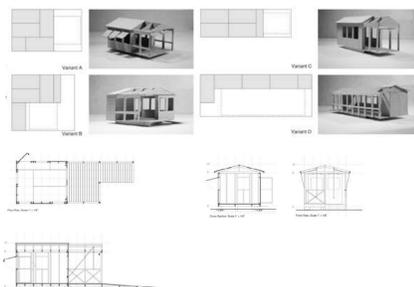




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Participatory planned, self-built structures in New York City's community gardens



In European and North American cities the use of shared garden spaces for the construction of self-built structures, food production and other, more leisurely activities has varied over the years, depending on the general global economic situation and on the economic situation of the individual gardeners. However, the construction and use of self-built structures in shared urban gardens has primarily derived out of the will of urban low-income residents to improve their quality of life, which was previously characterized by a lack of access to open spaces and adequate housing, as well as to public urban open spaces for socializing and cultural expression. The existence of shared urban gardens as well as the self-built structures has been confronted by the changing positions of local governments: During economic boom times municipalities rejected the shared urban gardens as informal, collective landscape lacking visual unity that were privatizing public land and either enacted regulatory measures to control this land use or right away demolished self-built structures and entire gardens. During times of global economic crisis though shared urban gardens were tolerated by local government as welcomed voluntary welfare relief efforts by residents. Despite this back-and-forth in the municipal position, due to the organizational efforts and the commitment of resident groups to their participatory planned shared urban garden with self-built structures, this land use form exists until in cities of Europe and North America until today.

In my presentation I will focus on the role of self-built structures in shared urban gardens as an expression of the residents' endurance as well as their cultural or sub-cultural background and as a link to the informal self-built housing in other parts of the world. In this context I will analyze the development of self-built structures in community gardens in low-income neighborhoods in New York City since the 1970s and especially in the last 15 years under the influence of the municipal community gardens program GreenThumb as well as the Mayor's office. This research is based on my long-term research on community gardens in New York City, my doctoral dissertation at the University of Arts in Berlin, published in 2015, and on my work as an architect with community groups on participatively planned projects in shared urban gardens since 2007. My book on Participatory Design and Self Built Structures will be published with Springer in early 2018.

Dr. Carolin Mees is a registered architect and writer living in New York City. She was the Project and Design Coordinator for the Mayor Office's Obesity Task Force's Gardens for Healthy Community's initiative from 2012 to 2014 and architectural consultant for GreenThumb, New York City's community garden program, from 2007 until 2014. With her office mees architecture she has since 2007 designed community-based urban gardening and public open space projects. She currently teaches at Parsons The New School for Design.