The Power of the Garden: Social Gardening in the United Kingdom (Article in English)

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Gardens, as both private and public spaces, are a major resource for leisure in the United Kingdom and a way of life for many British citizens. The growth of garden charity openings with the emergence of the National Garden Scheme in the 20th century has created a relatively new tourist attraction from a wide range of domestic gardens that have become accessible. These now offer more information and garden ideas than historic gardens. This paper uses qualitative studies to present owners' perceptions of their garden and gardening as an activity in itself. This approach reveals different connections between the garden and the owner and garden-openings can therefore be understood in a variety of ways and play a different role for each owner.

Key words: domestic garden, The National Garden Scheme, garden opening, garden owner, qualitative research, social gardening

"Gardens have special meaning. They are powerful settings for human life" (Francis, Hester, 1990). Further recommendations include; spaces are major resources for leisure in the UK (Fox, 2007) and a way of life for many British citizens (Evans, 2001). Anyone can have a garden if they have sufficient space and adequate budget (Francis, Hester, 1990): an ordinary everyday space becomes a status symbol (Bhatti, Church, 2000) and a structure with spatial and material composition (Roberts, 1996a). Ordinary gardens, modest in scale (Roberts, 1996b) with unsophisticated design (Francis, Hester, 1990) are accepted by many sociologists as cultural objects which present a wide range of meanings about us (Hoyles, 1991), and these can be explored from a variety of theoretical and conceptual directions (Bhatti, Church, 2004). Garden space is seen as a forum for family and friends to interact, and also as a good point of social contact with neighbours 'over the wall' (Bhatti, Church, 2004), and finally, gardens and gardening, the activity that usually derives from owning a garden (Francis, Hester, 1990), highlights our relationship with the natural world.

A history of gardens and gardening as a form of leisure occupation in United Kingdom

For hundreds of years, members of the aristocracy and gentry held estates on the edges of London for hunting, temporary courts and as retreats from London's affairs (MODA, 2007). Small estates of villas likely began development during the second half of the 17th century. These were surrounded by gardens and became a middle-class symbol of status and wealth (Whitehand, Carr, 2001). Many of the wealthiest members of the middle class departed cramped and unhealthy inner-city areas (Constantine, 1981) to settle on the urban fringe (MODA, 2007). To establish links with society, they began to emulate the upper-class traditions of creating gardens which had originally been intended for ostentatious display of wealth and good taste (Constantine, 1981). Gardens were planted in 'formal Victorian suburban tradition' seen as moral space and pedagogical devices for children (Davidoff, Hall, 1994). Much of the work in the garden was done by the owners to ameliorate any sense that leisure time could be misconstrued as idleness (Taylor, 2008).

Encouraged by the moral imperatives in middle-class gardens, the landowners were motivated to attach gardens to houses on the expanding urban fringe and also to cottages in the modern villages (Constantine, 1981). Whitehand and Carr (2001) reported that a garden attached to the house became a model for British working class housing, and the 'villa with associated garden' had descended far down the social hierarchy. The average size of the back garden was around forty feet by one hundred and twenty feet which, collectively, means that there was approximately half a million acres of new garden available for design and ornamentation during this period (12 by 40 m; 220,000 ha; Roberts, 1996b), and the working class were encouraged to take up gardening as a pursuit (Constantine, 1981). Development and improvement in the national housing stock by 1939 opened up opportunities for increased suburban living (Whitehand, Carr, 2001) and new housing estates were built on the urban fringe. Roberts (1996b) recorded that the suburbanites themselves represented a new social group; relatively young and now able to model and interact with their environment.

Evenson (1979) suggested that Britain had a relatively higher proportion of dwellings with private gardens in the 1970's than other European nations, and this escalated in the 1990's to 20.2 million private gardens (MINTEL, 1999). This source (MINTEL, 2003) also records that almost every second adult in the country regularly participates in gardening activities. Although gardening is recognised as an activity for all social and economic classes (Roberts, 1996a) MINTEL's (1999) data suggests that the degree of involvement varies significantly between lowerincome groups (40 %) and higher income groups (60 %), and participation in gardening is also strongly influenced by age; with 61 % of 60 – 69 year olds more occupied in this pursuit.

Garden opening

Gardens have been always recognised as an important part of social life (Hyams, 1971). Landowners took pride in the presentation of their houses and gardens, and landscaping became a major preoccupation on many estates towards the end of the 18th century (Hyams, 1971). The origins of working-class participation in visiting country houses and gardens can be traced back to the early-Victorian period, and Mandler (1997) records that this was also the first age of mass visits and the evident management of visitor activities. The following factors stimulated demand for garden visiting: transport improvement and cheaper fares; increased leisure time and disposable income; the desire to escape urban life and the increasing interest in rural environments. A small number of gardens and historic houses charged an entry fee to control visitor numbers, and some estates placed a strict entry limit on the number of admission tickets available each day. For some landowners, rising popularity proved a key to more profitable openings and development of more innovative ways of managing estate visitors; including publishing an opening schedule and using entry fees to pay professional guides.

Higher tax levels and two world wars in the early 20th century led to ruination of many fine properties (Mandler, 1997) and the cost of maintaining house and garden could no longer be met through income. Many houses and their gardens were neglected or abandoned, while ownership of others was transferred to conservation organisations such as the National Trust, to be kept in perpetuity for future generations (Connell, 2005).

The number of gardens open to the public in 1927 increased because of introduction of both the National Garden Scheme (NGS) and the Gardeners' Sunday Scheme. Owners of fine gardens were invited to open them on one day for charity towards the Queen's Nursing Institute funding (QNI). Three hundred and forty nine gardens took part in the first opening. These included Sandringham Gardens in Norfolk, Chatsworth in Derbyshire, Carborne Manor in Dorset and Hatfield House in Herefordshire. This event was so well supported that the QNI committee decided to continue this scheme (NGS, 2012).

The English middle class expanded in the 1970's and generated a section of society with high levels of education and cultural capital and this is often reflected in their leisure trends (Connell, 2004a). People travelled further and visited gardens seeking inspirations and ideas. In 1982, the English Tourist Board reported that more than 2,000 gardens were open, and the NGS also opened around 1,440 gardens in 1980. This expanded to 3,800 in 2012; mostly comprising small private gardens (NGS, 2012).

Bhatti and Church (2004) revealed that gardens meant 'sensual and embodied experiences with nature' for many owners; with gardens seen as therapeutic space and a part of the home-making process, thus creating a sense of home.

Multiple studies have shown that garden-visiting is a popular leisure activity for many people in England and that this tendency is increasing (Gallagher, 1983; Connell, 2004a, b, 2005; Fox, 2007, and Lipovská, 2013). These studies traditionally emphasised grand gardens - often those formally designed and much larger - while smaller domestic gardens not designed for public openings were neglected (Fox, 2007). The first research that highlighted the significance of this NGS garden phenomenon was by Connell (2005) who found NGS gardens a fruitful research area. A subsequent tourist management-oriented study by Fox (2007) then sought to understand participation in garden visiting from a number of perspectives, especially because of the unprecedented number of visitors to NGS gardens.

Social Gardening in the United Kingdom

The NGS is charitable trust founded in 1927. Since then, it has assisted in the creation of a new type of garden to visit based on historical antecedents but different in term of social stratification and space – that of the private residents (Connell, 2005). The NGS public garden openings are coordinated to raise money for charity, and assistance is offered to garden owners through the marketing of the gardens. This is provided by *The Yellow Book* gardens guide and a yellow sign marking the open garden.

Research Project

Garden owners were selected randomly from the NGS Yellow Book and its web page for research, and verification depended on the garden's accessibility by public transport (Čakovská, 2017). It was important that the garden was privately owned, that it was a basic part of the house and land and was not commercially designed as a public attraction. Gardens were visited from May to August 2012. Many NGS garden openings were rescheduled or cancelled (NGS, 2012) because of the unusually wet 2012 spring and summer but I was able to interview 34 owners of small private gardens. These were mainly group openings in villages or suburbs in Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, the West Midlands and Worcestershire.

A face-to-face structured interview was considered the most appropriate research technique; with garden owners informed in advance by email. All the garden owners I approached agreed to be interviewed, and interviews were conducted before the garden was open to the public. The face-to-face interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, using a mix of 25 closed and open-ended questions. Responses were written down during the conversation, with additional notes on the interview setting and any problems encountered. The obtained data was subjected to the process of constant comparison,

Tab. 1. Explanation of Social Gardening

| Charity support reasons | Request reason | Social reasons | Community rea- sons | Nostalgic reasons | Age resistance reasons |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| Garden owner decide to open the garden to raise money for their charity(ies) | Garden owners are invited by National Garden Scheme organisers to open their gardens for a variety of reasons. | Garden owners enjoy socialising in the garden with other people/neighbours | Gardens are seen as places to knit the community together and improve social connection in the village/town | Gardening and opening the garden to the public originates in very personal reasons that highlight the importance of a garden or gardening. | Gardening became a form of physical exercise, opening new possibilities to resist the image of an inactive and senile body |
| Charity reasons | | Social reasons | | Personal reasons | |
| SOCIAL GARDENING | | | | | |

and a code was assigned to each garden owner to ensure participation anonymity and confidentiality. A code example is; GO50–59 denotes a garden owner in the 50 – 59 age group (Čakovská, 2017).

Social gardening

The garden owners lived in five counties and were in the following demographics; 20 % of interviewees were between 50 and 59, 64.2 % were over 60, 61.8 % were retired and the rest were employed. While this age ratio is best explained as the period of independent, full and active life which encourages people in gardening activity (Bhatti, 2006), the survey revealed that most of the owners started gardening when they were in their 40's.

The length of time the gardens were listed by the NGS varied from a few days to fifty years, and they were open for visit from a few hours on one day to throughout the entire year. The gardens visited are classed as semi-detached and cottage gardens. The differences in aesthetics were apparent and the gardens varied greatly in design. However, as Hoyles (1991) noted, despite the differing traditions in English gardening, most open gardens are typical in their contrast between Victorian formal gardens and vernacular cottage gardens. Even though the NGS (2012) states that "the size of the garden is not critical, and many are typical back gardens", gardens still must meet specified criteria and the owners respect these criteria and spend a considerable time ensuring their gardens meet the needs of visitors. For instance, gardener GO50–59 stated: "I visited gardens with my mum, and after about 20 years I thought maybe my garden was good enough to share, this was in about 2006/7."

The motivations set out in previous Čakovská (2017) research are divided into six categories and then grouped to create the three main UK gardening motivations; charitable, social and personal reasons (Tab. 1).

All motivations, however, come under the blanket term 'social gardening'.

1) Charity reasons

In many cases, charity support was the main motivation to open the garden. Respondents find the NGSsupported charities trustworthy and, as GO50-59 stated: "The Charities that the NGS support are great and not controversial." In some cases, charity support was influenced by personal experience, and the garden opening was regarded as repayment for charity aid given to their relatives or friends. GO40-49 explained: "To open for NGS was for me obvious because they support the Marie Curie Cancer Care, which helped my sister when she was ill". Owner GO50-59 then added: "I know several people who have had cancer and who have benefitted from them. We are lucky to live where we do and be healthy and we like to give something back."

This possibility of supporting charities, local groups and organisations was repeated in a number of responses. Many owners also support

charities not supported by the NGS, such as the St. Bernard Charity, the Hardy Plant Society, Air Ambulance Charity or local clubs, hospices, village halls and municipalities. For instance, GO50–59 raised money "for the local church," and GO60+ stated: "I wanted to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society as my father died from Alzheimer disease." This charity was not on the original NGS charity list but the trust voted for an additional donation, and the Alzheimer's Society was made the 2012 annual guest charity.

A request from NGS local organisers or friends was mentioned in a number of responses. GO50–59 expressed "I was invited and encouraged to do so [open the garden] by the NGS organisers".

Respondents were requested by NGS local organisers to open their garden for many reasons and in many different ways. For example, GO60+ was asked "to do so by County Organisers to fill the August gap." and GO30-39 "found an advertisement in local newspapers" encouraging new garden owners in the town to participate. These answers indicate that, in addition to charity support, the NGS was trying to develop a year-round scheme covering most parts of England. Many other owners partook in the scheme because of their unusual garden or friends' recommendations. For example, GO60+ was asked "because of the beautiful and unusual garden," and GO40-49 was "recommended to NGS by her friend."

This idea of opening gardens to the public was spread not just by the

county/local NGS organisers but also by the act of garden opening itself. Gardeners were motivated to show pride in their allotments by visiting other gardens and understanding the wider aims of this scheme; GO60+ commented: "I saw other gardens and it encouraged me." GO18-29 described a similar experience: "We had a friend visit who was with the NGS and she said our opening was a <must> and asked the county organiser to visit." Enhancing the village reputation and neighbours' encouragement also had an inevitable role in spreading the word. Here, GO60+ admitted that "people may even buy houses in certain villages in order to open their gardens" and GO50-59 told how the neighbours motivated her to participate: "When we moved here our neighbour was opening his garden. My husband has been enthusiastic and interested in gardening so he wanted to open the garden too."

Hence, visiting gardens spreads not just the idea but it also inspires original garden design and layout.

2) Social reasons

In addition to charity support, social reasons are very important in deciding to open gardens to the public. Most owners stated that they like to socialise. Here, GO50–59 stated that garden opening means "meeting people with different background" and GO50–59 added: "We can spend a day with our friends, neighbours and the other gardeners". Supplying benches and chairs helps to keep garden visitors longer; to talk and to share advice and experiences.

Sharing skills was one of the main social reasons for many young owners joining the scheme. GO18–29 stated: "To share the garden with others means to invite other 'plants-people' to see the garden and get advice." For that one day, an ordinary garden becomes the big attraction for both the locals and tourists (Fig. 1).

There are also strong social reasons within the family unit. Almost all surveyed gardens were maintained by at least two family members, and garden opening then became a fam-



Fig. 1. Tourists in a private garden (High Street, Pershore, May 2012). Photo: Barbora Čakovská

ily event where family spend a happy afternoon together. GO60+ described this relationship as: "A husband and wife partnership in maintaining gardens" and GO60+ added that every family member was involved and had a role in the garden opening: "My 93 year old mum cuts edges of lawn, daughter mans the gate, granddaughter helps with the teas and husband pays the bills and gives the orders".

Almost all garden owners emphasised that many locals and neighbours visited and that the garden became a happy meeting place. One GO60+, explained: "Garden opening is seen as a great time to meet with your new neighbours and to get to know each other", and another GO60+ met her new neighbours in her garden: "A new family moved in about two months ago and came to the Sunday and the Wednesday openings - they were introduced to everyone else in the lane".

Social reasons for garden opening were often specifically given, where the opening is a local event, uniting the community and improving village social connection. GO60+ described this: "It gets [garden opening] local people together, sharing a common

interest and an interest in making their area attractive". Community feeling was also described by GO50–59: "It gives a great sense of community – businesses advertise, local church provides parking and delicatessen provides crocks! [cups and plates]. People meet up and enjoy a cup of tea and chat". Volunteers help to spread this idea to attract more people who want to be part of this group and help the village raise money, not just for charities but also for local clubs and organisations. As GO60+ stated: "All [the] village is incorporated in this process"

While gardens fulfil this local function, they also provide a social point for visitors where people with different backgrounds gather. GO50–59 stated: "We have here an eclectic mix of people who would not normally be put together". The community aim to attract tourists was expressed by one of the owners, GOF60+: "Open gardens bring people into village, and they use the shops and pubs and may come back to spend more time in this area".

In many villages, neighbours' small gardens are partnered to create a group-opening-event and this then fulfils one of the NGS conditions –



Fig. 2. 'The Tree' which commemorates the birth of the owners' granddaughter; signed with the name and date of birth of the owner ("Krellingen", Steeple Aston, May 2012). Photo: Barbora Čakovská

'the provision of 45 minutes of interest for visitors'. GO18 – 29 explained the advantages of being part of a group opening: "We are one of two gardens. Both of our gardens peak at a similar time, so we open at this time. It makes sense for us to open with another garden as we are rather isolated, and people are more likely to make the journey if two gardens are on offer."

Group garden-opening affects entire villages, where older residents especially participate by serving tea and cakes in a refreshment area and help orient people on site. Owner GO60+stated: "We use the one large garden in our group to serve teas and cakes. The cakes are all donated by the group members, friends, neighbours and family. Friends and people from the village volunteer to serve cakes and take the money".

3) Personal reasons

Memories and emotional ties are intrinsically connected with garden creation (Francis, Hester, 1990). Some owners emphasised the importance of garden opening after their spouse

'passed away'. This reason to open the garden to the wider public originates from very personal reasons and highlights a further important aspect of both garden and gardening. The garden thus becomes a powerful symbol of memory and loss; a 'living reminder of the partner' (Hockey et al., 2001; Hallam, Hockey, 2001). One GO60+ explained his reason to open the garden as a wish of his wife: "My wife (she died) she always wanted to open the garden, so I decided to make her dream come true by opening the garden". The garden initiated a new start in life and the possibility to re-create the surrounding environment. GO60+ described how she has been dealing with her partner's death with garden opening: "It brought me into a new circle of friends, but I also try to find a way of living after a 56 year marriage, now being free to do what I want." One of the elderly owners, GO60+, has a similar reason: "Garden opening got me a project in my new existence as a widow, and I met a new group of friends which has been good."

Garden opening also maintains traditions started by family members. GO40–49 described her garden opening as "continuing in tradition that my mother-in-law started many years ago." The garden is a perfect setting to maintain personal ties to relatives. A wonderful example of garden celebration is witnessed by owners planting a special tree when their grand daughter was born (Fig. 2).

Further, the physical changes experienced as people get older encourage physical activity. This not only preserves physical health and prolongs life, but also provides enjoyment on an everyday basis (Bhatti, 2006). Many elderly owners stated that gardening became a form of physical exercise, opening new possibilities to resist the image of an inactive and senile body. For example, GO50 - 59, explained: "After serious illness I wanted to «Seize the day» a bit more." Ageing can also reduce the possibility of socialising; so garden opening can be a social day where the elderly meet new people. GO60+ stated: "[Garden opening] brings new people into my retired life." Advancing age, however, can also limit activity. Ageing garden owners sometimes think about closing their garden because they cannot longer maintain it. GO60+ explained, "I feel too old to keep the garden in good shape."

In addition to the important charity, social and personal reasons for garden opening, my survey identified the following motivations for pursuing this interest;

- Pride: for some respondents, pride in garden maintenance was the main reason for continued participation. To keep the garden tidy or to be forced by an opening deadline was a main motivation and benefit. Owner, GO50– 59, stated: "Garden opening is the deadline to get the garden ready";
- Sharing: to be a part of the community and to share the responsibility is also a principle in garden maintenance. GO60+ explained:
 "Being part of the group also ensures that I keep my garden in good shape

- knowing that several hundred people will see it on certain date does concentrate the mind!";
- Creativity: the way the garden looks is an important source of self-expression and reflection. Bhatti (2006) defines this as a source of pride, a way to show that the creative mind is still alive. Many garden owners agreed that they like showing their gardens and hearing compliments. As GO60+ stated: "I like to show people what I have done," and GO50–59 added: "I like to share my skills and to hear compliments."
- Business Acumen: neat, tidy and well-designed gardens also provide new possibilities in exiting activities and business. For GO50-59, garden opening is "networking for [her] design business." And GO50-59 has found promoting her business through the garden really helpful: "We are in the middle of nowhere and have an art gallery and run art courses. We do not expect to sell anything at the garden openings, but the NGS increases the number of people who know about us. The NGS has a very positive reputation and it is good to be associated with that". There is also occasional discounted membership in the National Trust and this proves a great incentive to open gardens. GO60+ admitted: "Free National Trust membership, and in those days half price seed was attractive."

Research Results

Owing to its scale and national prominence, the NGS was used as the basis for this exploratory research focused on smaller domestic private gardens in suburban and village settings; principally where 'clusters' of gardens open simultaneously. Although such gardens are, by definition, owner-designed and therefore of little or no economic value to the designer, they reveal unusual elements and further spread garden openings. The NGS has strongly influenced the expansion of the number of private gardens open

to the public and garden opening has become a traditional way of raising money for many charities. This manner of charity support has been promoted across the UK, trying to cover all counties and spread the idea to every village. Owners can nominate their gardens, be recommended by friends or they are directly asked by the local NGS county organisers: owners therefore regard this as appreciation of their hard work, offering them participation in a special group with generous aims and thus they become a living example of a working charity scheme.

Although the significance of charity openings, often with personal and local interests, is undoubtedly a manifestation of the success of the NGS (Connell, 2005), there are many other reasons why the owners decided to share their gardens with the public. Francis and Hester (1990) stated: "we use our gardens to communicate to others, to show the public world how we feel about ourselves and the larger world that surrounds us. Through our gardens, we reveal to ourselves and others (...) our personality, aesthetics, environmental values...".

This work established that social reasons are vital in garden opening. On this level, gardens are seen as a social space where owners can socialise (Clayton, 2007), and their opening appreciably increases village socialisation. A shared interest in gardens makes this process easy, and socialisation during openings is clearly apparent in owners' participation in garden activities through offering refreshments and their welcoming communication with visitors. In many cases, benches and chairs are located in garden areas to provide refuge for visitors to rest and also to keep them longer in the garden. Thus, open gardens facilitate social interaction among neighbours and they also unite the family when members are involved in the process and relatives journey from afar to join in the celebrations.

From a wider perspective, research results provide evidence that garden openings not only "form a communi-

ty" but also create a stronger sense of the local community. Eder (1996) emphasises that local community relationships shape our attitude towards the garden. Garden events then unite people who not only share the same interest but also those who can help in organisation and are skilled in other ways. These expressly include garden design, aesthetics and cartography; not just the social aspects of providing refreshments, baking cakes and welcoming guests. Garden opening is therefore an organism where everyone has their own special place and performs accordingly. The community reasons are very strong for older people, but equally so for new residents who want to connect with their new surrounds and become a contributing part of the existing social life.

Bhatti (2006) further states that the need to carry on gardening is an obvious resistance to an ageing body. Opening and maintaining gardens is seen as renewed issue of life in older people, and it helps them secure a place in society after retirement. Age, however, can be a motivating or a limiting factor and owners can stop maintaining or opening their garden when the feel they "have had enough". There is also the visible and inevitable role of 'the event' in itself. For Crompton (1979), garden opening is a very special and festive event; similar to other leisure activities which offer the opportunity to escape from the daily routine and provide an opportunity to indulge in something new and different. Meeting new people through this pursuit helps elderly people socialise in garden openings and obtain personal enjoyment.

Hockey et al. (2001) further states that a garden can become a powerful symbol of memory and loss: a 'living' reminder of a partner. Opening a private garden therefore also originates in personal reasons. Elderly owners can find it hard to cope with losses, and opening a garden helps them express their feelings and find greater love of life.

Although a limited and relatively small sample was available for this

study, the results provide a clear picture of owners' perceptions of the garden, the benefits accrued from this activity and the role of the garden in everyday life. The research confirms that participation in garden opening differs according to both a person's status and the perception of opening gardens. Finally, in addition to the important aspects of charity support and social and personal reasons, garden opening provides social cohesion, community benefits, age resistance, pride in property maintenance, business success and a memorial to lost partners.

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While this work has established many of the reasons for the great interest in gardening and garden opening, it raises open questions for future research. The position of garden owners in the community and the overall community attitude to garden opening require examination. Most garden owners in this study were in their 50's, and a survey of the attitude of younger people to NGS and other garden schemes may explain both the age profile of garden owners and the future success of garden opening. Most gardens also open as group openings with influence on the entire village and although all surveyed owners state that local people like this idea and support it, participant observation would be useful in clarifying interactions between garden owners and non-participating locals. Further interesting research may focus on local ethnicity and their age and relationship with owners who open their garden.

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Zhrnutie

Čakovská, B.: Sila záhrady: sociálne záhradníctvo vo Veľkej Británii

Záhrady ako súkromné aj verejné priestory sú hlavným zdrojom voľného času vo Veľkej Británii a ovplyvňujú spôsob života mnohých britských občanov. S narastajúcimi akciami, zameranými na otváranie súkromných záhrad, ktoré vznikli pod záštitou National Garden Scheme začiatkom 20. storočia, sa vytvoril priestor na novú turistickú atrakciu a z obyčajných domácich záhrad sa stali inšpiratívne priestory ponúkajúce v porovnaní s historickými záhradami viac nápadov a inšpirácií. Použitím kvalitatívnych metód práca prezentuje vnímanie vlastníctva záhrad a záhradníctva ako aktivity súvisiacej s vlastníctvom záhrady. Tento postup si kladie za cieľ odhaliť vzťahy medzi záhradou a majiteľom a odhaliť dôvody sprístupnenia súkromnej záhrady verejnosti.

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