

## **Abstract**

**THESIS:** Urban Gardening South of the Tracks in Middletown, USA: An Embedded Qualitative GIS Approach

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While the globalized restructuring of manufacturing economies has marked many cities in the Midwest as places in decline, urban residents continue to mold the changing landscape to meet their needs and desires. Gardening is one socio-spatial practice that has expanded within the spaces left behind by a shrinking population and vacated industrial, commercial and residential properties. But not enough researchers have grappled with the social and political aspects of gardening. Gardens in general, and vegetable gardens in particular, sit at the nexus of a range of human constructs: urban land use, aesthetics, property law, social and class structure, economy and food. More specifically, little has been written on the distinguished history of urban gardening in Muncie, especially within the context of the “Middletown Studies” sociological tradition. Qualitative GIS represents an emerging mixed methods approach to geographic inquiry and a promising venue for an embedded exploration of gardening. Engaging with several “channels” of data collection, including participant observation, I use such an approach to combine fieldwork, spatial analysis, ethnographic inquiry, and an archival survey into an examination of how urban gardening in Muncie relates to broader economic forces. I ask

what roles does gardening play in the physical landscape and social sphere of the south side of Muncie.

Keywords: urban gardening, qualitative GIS, Middletown Studies, community gardening, scale, place