



**URBAN
ALLOTMENT
GARDENS**

COST Action TU1201

Urban Allotment Gardens in European Cities
Future, Challenges and Lessons Learned

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URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS



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Abbreviations:

AG Allotment Garden

CG Core Group

COST European Cooperation in Science and Technology

MC Management Committee

STSM Short-term Scientific Mission

WG Working Group

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URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS



THE MEANING OF URBAN GARDENING IN RELATION TO LOCAL PECULIARITIES

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Introduction

The presentation offered an overview on the process and results of the Short Term Scientific Mission handled in 2015 in Malmo and in Riga. The aim of the research was to investigate the role of urban gardening in revitalization of residential areas in both cities. In the case of Malmo research focused on community gardening impact on health and well-being of people living in residential neighborhoods of Seved and Annelund. As Riga is rich with allotment garden areas, in the case of Riga it was decided to focus on the role of allotment garden in people's everyday life. This study was also focused on the role of community garden as a place that promotes social engagement, and on possibility of allotment garden to adjust such function.

Despite the fact that Riga with 641007 inhabitants and the area of 304 km² is almost twice as big as Malmo with 317930 inhabitants and the total area of 158,4 km², similarities in climate conditions and similar location of community and allotment garden within the neighbourhood made it possible to compare the role of urban gardening for residents of residential areas in both cities (Central Statistical Database, 2015; Stadtskontoret, 2015).

Methods

In order to find out which role does the urban gardening play in people's everyday life it was decided to use participatory approach as an empirical research method that involves researcher in the knowledge-production process (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). In the case of Malmo it was decided to join the community garden group to take part in everyday activities, and to make observations also from a community gardener's point of view. In the case of Riga it was decided to visit allotment gardens several times to meet more gardeners and to interview them. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were used, choosing semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data, and surveys to get the statistical data. Qualitative and quantitative methods interact in social research practices and are both considered to be a useful tool (Kvale, 1996).

Findings

Research in Malmo showed that community garden is relatively new trend there (Eriksson, 2013). In total there are three community gardens. The first community garden project was initiated in 1997 in Slottsträdgården (Malmö stad, 2015). However, being located in the city center and having a function partly of a botanical garden and garden exhibition place it doesn't now fit into the definition of neighbourhood community garden. That is why it was decided to focus on two community gardens located in neighbourhoods of Seved and Annelund.

Results of literature studies and statistical data analysis as well as observations showed that inhabitants of both analyzed neighbourhoods have different social, economical and cultural backgrounds. However, the building environment in



URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS



Seved and Annelund differs. So differ also the visual appearance of community gardens: “transparent” community garden plot with a low fence, a community garden with small personal plots and a vertical garden structure in Seved, and community garden with high fence and hidden entrance doors in Enskifteshagen (Annelund).

In order to have the data comparable with the findings from Malmo, in the case of Riga it was decided to focus on the smallest allotment garden located inside the neighbourhood called Mežaparks. The chosen neighbourhood is characterized as green, clean and prestigious residential area with welcoming outdoor environment. The garden consists of approximately 50 plots and is managed by “Mežaparks Development Community” (Central Office of Northern District, 2015). The garden area has a high fence and all entrance doors are closed, as every garden member has his own key. According to the interview data such solution helps to prevent theft and vandalism in the garden.



Discussion and conclusion

Results of the research in Malmo showed that community (neighbourhood) gardens are perceived by their users to have a positive impact on human health and well-being, to give possibility to be physically active and to promote social engagement. In turn, in both cases (neighbourhoods of Seved and Annelund) possibility to get additional fresh food supply didn't play the most important role, as the amount of vegetables grown in the garden is not very big. According to survey and semi-structured interview data the majority of community garden members are residents of Seved or Annelund (two neighbourhoods where gardens are located). This fact proved that community gardens have a positive impact on neighbourhood strengthening.



Observations', surveys' and interviews' results also proved the importance of community garden as a place for integration. In case of community garden in Seved, community garden members have different cultural background (in general representing 7 different countries). In the case of community garden Annelund majority of gardeners are native Swedes, however according to the interview data everyone is welcome to join the community regardless age, gender and ethnicity.

Comparative case studies of Seved and Annelund community gardens showed how the differences between the arrangement of community gardens can affect the way gardens are used, promoting both welcoming environment for work and relaxation, or vice versa creating an unused space for spending free time. In the case of Seved garden, low fencing and lack of shrubs promoted creation of “transparent” space, which is one of possible reasons for recreational space to be unused. In the case of Annelund, garden has about 1.5 m high metal net fence, and

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URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS



COMMUNITY GARDEN SEVED



GREEN WALL SEVED



SCHOOL CHILDREN HAVING THEIR FIRST JOB EXPERIENCE WORKING FOR NGO IN SEVED

the entrance door hidden in tangled vegetation. Such organization of community garden gives the feeling of the area being private. However, when spending time inside the garden it provides the feeling of privacy in a good sense. This makes gardeners feel more free while working, but especially while having a rest, sitting around the table and drinking coffee. These facts prove that organization of space is of importance when providing place for recreation.

In turn, the answers from gardeners in Riga showed that possibility to get fresh vegetables, grown using only natural fertilizers is of importance. However, many gardeners pointed out, that growing own vegetables is not always cost-effective.

Results of the interviews in Riga showed that majority of respondents are not interested in having a space for common recreation in the allotment garden area. This fact shows that allotment garden users are not interested in social engagement while spending time in the garden.

Comparative analysis of the outdoor quality in the neighborhoods, from which gardeners come, show that Mežaparks is characterized as more prestigious, cleaner and safer neighborhood, with welcoming outdoor environment, while the outdoor environment of other analyzed neighborhoods is characterized by poor condition of roads, paths and courtyards. Allotment gardens in Mežaparks are easy accessible and provide clean and nice place for both active and passive recreation. Results of this research show that for some people, having an allotment plot means having an access to a clean and welcoming outdoor environment in close proximity to their home.

Comparative analysis showed, that both community and allotment garden have a positive impact on human health and well-being, and promote physical activity. However, community gardening, following its general idea is focused on social engagement. Allotment garden do not provide a direct opportunity for people to communicate. Furthermore, the majority of allotment garden users are not interested in spending time with their fellow gardeners. That's why, when solving problems of social segregation and to promote cross-cultural and intergenerational dialogue, it is recommended to develop a community garden's pilot project.

Photos courtesy of Alisa Korolova



URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS

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