

Intercultural Gardens, Germany

Stiftung Interkultur - Intercultural Foundation

Background:

The Intercultural Garden Association started in Göttingen in 1995 (more on this below) as a project led by immigrants that wanted to cultivate land for growing food. After this successful story, *Stiftung Interkultur*, Intercultural Foundation, was created in 2003 based on the long-standing cooperation between the Munich research association and the network of intercultural gardens started in Göttingen.

“In Germany, intercultural gardens have been causing a stir since the mid-1990s. These social spaces, new in the German project landscape, not only serve urban recreational purposes and supply organic fruit and vegetables but quite deliberately pursue a further aim: intercultural communication and integration on the basis of a resource-oriented approach. It was not by chance that the intercultural garden movement in Germany had its beginnings in an immigrant centre. In 1995 Bosnian refugees found themselves stranded in Göttingen, awaiting the end of the war in their home country, women unaccustomed to idleness who missed their big vegetable gardens. Together with the Ethiopian agrarian engineer Shimeles, they went in search of suitable land to cultivate even in exile. This was the start of a success story (Müller 2002; Shimeles 2002). The “Intercultural Gardens Network” coordinated by the Stiftung Interkultur (Intercultural Foundation) has now assembled more than 60 such garden projects in Germany alone, and about the same number are being developed.” (Müller, 2007, p.2)

Intercultural Gardens has established links with a wide range of organisations and institutions such as: Local Agenda 21, Network for the integration of immigrants and with local partners that had been trying to get access to land for cultivation.

1. Practice:

“Stiftung Interkultur wants to contribute to changing the conception of integration. The essence of this lies in recognising the value of the impulses, generated by the migrants themselves, concerning the development of a society and to actively mediate these. They include, apart from the practical skills, diverse social and cultural competences, as well as knowledge, which is updated and readjusted during the integration process (culture of hospitality, intercultural education, contributions to peace and a civil society). Intercultural gardens are fertile ground for cultivating these competences and knowledge structures. This is why Stiftung Interkultur acts as a federal coordination- and service centre to promote and

support the networking, as well as the mutual knowledge exchange between the various garden projects.”

The activities organized are:

- Fundraising for intercultural gardens
- Advising and guidance to the development and financing of new projects
- Networking of intercultural gardens with each other and with other research and development associations
- Accompanied research, documentation and evaluation of the projects and the process of their dissemination
- Association and enhancement of different discourses concerning integration (for example the debate on/about immigration, research of intercultural relationships and lifestyles of migrants) as well as active participation in politically relevant debates and public funding policy.

These are some of examples of intercultural garden projects in Germany:

Berlin-Friedrichshain, Berlin-Köpenick, Berlin-Kreuzberg, Berlin-Schöneberg, Bonn, Dessau, Dresden, Göttingen, Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg, Leipzig, Munich-Neuhausen, Munich-Neuperlach.

2. Type of Urban Agriculture practiced:

It can be said that the main goal of Intercultural Gardens is to fulfil the dimension of social inclusion of a vulnerable group: immigrants. However, the gardens are also important because they contribute to the food requirements of the people who work there, therefore reaching an economic dimension. More importantly it contributes to a more dignified life in exile. In the words of Ms. Abid, a 46-year-old founding member of the project:

“At home, everything was organic, everything was fresh. Here, unfortunately, it isn’t. Here there is a lot of poison in the food. In Baghdad, there are markets everywhere, and everything is brought in fresh every morning. The chickens are still alive on the market. Here, organic food is very expensive. I can’t afford it. When my parents bought bread, they first chose the kind of wheat, and if the bread didn’t taste good, we took the bread back and it was exchanged. Some Germans think we were poor, but we were not poor. Here we are poor. We cannot afford decent food.” (In Müller, 2001, p.3)

By reclaiming the access to fresh organic food that is also culturally appropriate, immigrants stop being at the receiving end of the benefits culture and become active members that create links of solidarity and cooperation with other immigrants and with members of the host country. A very important aspect of Intercultural Gardens is the level of organisation behind it. This is where it's true potential lies.

3. Summary of your experience; Current challenges that you are facing; What are future perspectives or solutions?

The idea behind intercultural gardens is expanding rapidly to other European countries. Not only a European Network has been created, but also they have been approached by the London Sustainable Development Commission as one of eight international projects to study in order to document urban policy in this city. The British Black Environmental Network and the Community gardens network in the United States have also agreed to work in collaboration with Intercultural Gardens.

4. UA and the urban food crisis:

The first aim of Intercultural Gardens is social inclusion and though it is clear that the produce from the gardens clearly complement the food requirements of participants and other community members, it is difficult to know to what extent this contributes to the overall food security of the cities where the gardens are.

This clearly represents a knowledge gap and an opportunity for increasing food production.

5. Contact information:

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