
Learning for Sustainable Agriculture: Urban Gardening in Berlin

Project

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The last years have shown a boom of urban gardening initiatives in Berlin. Among the core motivations of many gardeners has been the wish to actively experience and contribute to sustainable agriculture. Within the European FP7 research project "SOLINSA – Support and Learning of Innovation for Sustainable Agriculture" the Ecologic Institute conducted a case study about urban gardening initiatives in Berlin, in particular the "Allmende Kontor" located at the former Tempelhof airport. The study analysed the role that sustainability plays among other motivations in these initiatives, identifies success factors and barriers and eventually draws conclusions about the transferability of experiences to other regions.

In the last decade Berlin has become a hot spot and the international "capital" of urban gardening: In 2002 there were some eight urban gardens in Germany and none in Berlin, while 11 years later (as of August 2013) there were more than 100 urban gardens in Berlin. This number doesn't even include traditional allotment gardens, school gardens, children farms etc.

The reasons why people get involved in urban gardening initiatives are manifold. However, urban gardens do share a simple principle in that they provide people without a professional agricultural background the opportunity to undertake gardening and small scale agriculture experiences. Their small size and mix of various actors result in a profoundly different exchange of knowledge and skills, bringing about different patterns than within other agricultural and gardening networks.

It is for this reason that urban gardening was selected as a case study within the European FP7 research project "SOLINSA – Support and Learning of Innovation for Sustainable Agriculture". SOLINSA aims to identify barriers and success factors to the development of so called "Learning and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture" (LINSNA). Within the project different innovative and successful networks are explored.

The study focused on the following aspects:

1. First, it shed a light on how urban gardening motivates community involvement with specific

reference to the development of Berlin's urban gardening movement. It also clarified the role of sustainability in these efforts and motivations.

2. Second, it looked for the success factors as well as barriers faced; with a particular focus on the role of governance structures, knowledge sharing and decision making processes.
3. Based on these observations first conclusions about the transferability of experiences to other regions and necessary preconditions were provided.

The analysis related to urban gardening in Berlin, but highlights one of the bigger initiatives in the city, the "Allmende Kontor" on the former airport Berlin-Tempelhof, that has a particular emphasis on sustainability and a strong network to other urban gardens.

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European Commission, Directorate-General Research & Innovation (DG Research & Innovation), International

Partner

University of Gloucestershire (UoG), United Kingdom

Team

Stephanie Wunder
Elena Hofmann

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