MULTISOURCE

Research on the impact of applying a gender-sensitive approach on social equity and food sovereignty in urban gardens

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nature-based solutions, may they be aimed at water treatment or food security in urban settings, are interventions inspired by nature to provide benefits for natural ecosystems and the people that depend on them. Literature review however exposed that when considering, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating such solutions in countries of the Global North, human well-being, social equity and gender equality are not sufficiently considered. The work described in this deliverable aims at providing evidence that gender mainstreaming into one of the nature-based solutions, namely urban gardening, not only contributes to social equity, but also to food sovereignty in urban settings.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

ModULar Tools for Integrating enhanced natural treatment Solutions in Urban water CyclEs (MULTISOURCE) is an EU funded project striving at facilitating the systematic, city-wide planning of nature-based solutions (NBS) for urban water treatment, storage, and reuse. An important consideration in the project is ensuring social inclusion and equality, including a gender-sensitive perspective.

As part of the project, a literature review was carried to gain better insight on the intersection between gender, NBS and water treatment. More specifically, one of the foci of the research was to provide evidence, based on already existing research, developed tools and implemented good practices, that addressing gender in NBS for water treatment not only contributes to water use efficiency and environmental sustainability, but also promotes gender equality. In doing so, the aim was also to identify key approaches and tools that would allow for partners to not only apply a gender-sensitive approach when engaging with all relevant stakeholders, but also to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into all of their activities.

The research however exposed a gap when it comes to the intersection between gender, NBS and water treatment, especially present in countries of the Global North. It confirmed that the predominant majority of existing analysis focuses on countries of the Global South, whereas in countries of the Global North gender no longer seems to play a role in ecosystem services. Investigation and interviews with experts that followed the literature review revealed the existence of relevant projects and analysis focusing on related subjects, emerging especially over the past few years, such as governance of NBS in the city from the perspective of justice and equity[1] and green and blue infrastructure in cities in relation to improved contributions to human well-being and equity[2], while some projects even suggested frameworks for inclusive and gender just NBS in cities[3]. While this indicates a positive trend in mainstreaming gender and social justice into NBS, further exploration, including providing evidence of the impact of such endeavours or lack thereof on the final outcome, is much needed.

It is with this aim that the exploration of the extent of gender sensitive approaches in urban gardening was carried out in three locations in Catalonia, Spain, namely in Manresa, Sant Feliu de Llobregat and in Girona. This investigation, which took place in cooperation with the University of Girona and Arran de Terra, an ecofeminist

[1] Sekulova, F., Anguelovski, I., Kiss, B., Kotsila, P., Baro, F., Voytenko Palgan, Y., Connolly, J (2023). The governance of nature-based solutions in the city at the intersection of justice and equity. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349198609_The_governance_of_nature-based_solutions_in_the_city_at_the_intersection_of_justice_and_equity

[2] Andersson, E., Langemeyer, J., Borgström, S., McPhearson, T., Haase, D., Kronenberg, J., Barton, D.N., Davis, M., Naumann, S, Röschel, L., Baró, F. Enabling Green and Blue Infrastructure to Improve Contributions to Human Well-Being and Equity in Urban Systems, *BioScience*, Volume 69, Issue 7, July 2019, Pages 566–574, https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biz058

[3] Delbaere B., Pereira Barboza E., Van Rafelghem E., Potter K., McCabe E., McBeth Á., Utkarsh S., Rudd K., Fernandez de OssoFuentes MJ., Duarte A., Gäckle J., and Keune H.(2024). The development of aGender, Inclusionand Diversity Frameworkfor inclusive Nature-based Solutions in cities. Research Directions:One Health.2, e1, 1–7.https://doi.org/10.1017/one.2023.14

cooperation, was not initially planned as part of the MULTISOURCE project but was undertaken in the attempt to provide evidence that gender mainstreaming can have a positive impact on NBS. Urban gardens are considered an NBS, which are intrinsically related to water management, although not water treatment specifically, they are an interesting case study for the relation between social and environmental dimensions of NBS. The objective of the research was to explore to what extent adopting a gender perspective can contribute to social equity and food sovereignty in urban gardening. To understand the relation between a gender-sensitive response and social justice in urban gardens, the following research questions were investigated:

1) Does the urban garden initiative recognise that different socio-cultural groups have unequal experiences and rights?
2) Have the voices of women, men and non-binary persons been equally represented, included and respected in all stages of the urban garden project (preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation)?
3) Does the urban garden initiative equally divide benefits and costs between women, men and non-binary persons?
4) Does the urban garden initiative provide well-being, biodiversity and economic benefits for all participants at the same level?

2.0 GENERAL CONCEPTS

2.1 Nature-based solution

In 2016, members of the International Union for Conservation on Nature (IUCN) adopted a resolution[4], in which NBS are defined as "actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits."

For interventions to be defined as NBS, they must have clearly defined goals, partners, beneficiaries, and management systems. In addition to achieving benefits for the ecosystem, their primary objective must go beyond that to obtain additional benefits. Solutions that solely benefit the environment or society cannot be considered as NBS, and it is essential that actions create synergies and ensure a fair distribution of benefits and costs.

2.2 Urban gardens

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), urban and peri-urban agriculture »can be defined as practices that yield food and other outputs through agricultural production and related processes, taking place on land and other spaces within cities and surrounding regions.[5]«

[4] IUCN (2016). WCC-2016-Res-069. https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/wcc_2016_res_069_en.pdf
[5] FAO. Urban and peri-urban agriculture. https://www.fao.org/urban-peri-urban-agriculture/en

Urban gardens (UG) can take many forms, but the two following types feature in this research:

- Community gardens, which are located on public or private land, and are cultivated by a group of people, usually volunteers. There are different variations of community gardens, such as plot gardens, where individuals are solely responsible for their plot, or collective gardens that are run by a number of individuals together, who then share the harvest equally[6].

- Social gardens, which can function in a similar manner as community gardens, but in accordance with the involved examples in Catalonia their first and utmost goal is to strengthen social cohesion. Growing food is a co-benefit, which can by the beneficiaries nevertheless be seen as the primary goal and not as the tool for achieving the end goal.

In addition to the two types of UG addressed in this paper, other types of UG can include rooftop gardens, vertical edible green infrastructure, vacant land, containers on balconies, and marine or freshwater systems[7].

Academic knowledge on the contributions and co-benefits of UG is still fragmented. Artmann and Sartison[8] however argue that food supply that comes through urban agriculture can be considered as a NBS. NBS by definition promote innovative solutions to address societal challenges, in this case food risks and unsustainable urbanisation, and in the process provide numerous co-benefits by contributing to biodiversity, climate change prevention and adaptation, urban regeneration, land management, public health, social cohesion and economic growth.

2.3 Gender

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality *gender* is defined as "social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and to the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as to the relations between women and those between men"[9]. Unlike the biological sex, which we are attributed at birth in line with different biological and physiological characteristics, gender is a socially constructed category, which is changeable with context and time. It prescribes qualities, expectations and behaviours that are valued and allowed in men and women at a specific time and place. As a consequence, men and women have different power, possibilities and opportunities in the society. The gender-sensitive approach is one that acknowledges the existence of gender roles and norms,

[6] Study.com. Community Garden Definition, Benefits ' Importance. https://study.com/learn/lesson/community-garden-benefits-purpose-what-is-a-community-garden.html

[7] Artmann, M. And Sartison, K. The Role of Urban Agriculture as a Nature-Based Solution: A Review for Developing a Systemic Assessment Framework. Sustainability 2018, Vol. 10, Issue 6. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/6/1937

[8] Ibid

[9] EIGE. What is gender. https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1141

and power inequalities, addresses them and integrates them in the actions to try and reduce gender inequalities.

2.4 Social Equity

Power inequalities do not exist only between men and women and other genders. Based on personal circumstances, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic situation, (dis)ability or religion, individuals have varying levels of power in the society, which impacts their possibilities and opportunities. Social equity is achieved when systemic inequalities are taken into account to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their personal circumstances, have access to the same opportunities and outcomes.

3.0 GENDER, SOCIAL EQUITY AND URBAN GARDENS

3.1 Urban gardens in the research

Representatives of the University of Girona and Arran de Terra conducted 11 interviews in 6 different urban gardens in Catalonia, Spain, in August and September 2023, in Girona, Sant Feliu de Llobregat and Manresa. Following are the profiles of the UG, which describe their modus operandi and type of UG, as well as the number of beneficiaries involved, disaggregated by gender.

1. Horts de Santa Eugenia, Girona

The gardens of Santa Eugènia de Girona[10] are considered one of the most important 'green lungs' of the city, the largest urban gardening project in terms of size. At the end of 2007, Girona City Council started a project to transfer municipal allotments to citizens interested in using them as a recreational garden, for rent. Currently there are a total of 400-500 plots, distributed throughout the vegetable gardens. In 2022, the municipality received substantial NextGeneration funding[11] for the revitalisation of this area. At the time of the interview it was not possible to retrieve data on gender ballance but the majority of the people working in the area are migrants and elderly people. The interview was conducted with a female municipality worker.

2. Menja't Sant Narcis, Girona

The Menja't Sant Narcís[12] (MSN) (Eat Sant Narcís in English) project, an urban gardening project initiated by the Economic Promotion Division of the Girona City Council in 2018. Despite being initiated by the municipality, the project is currently led by local, grassroots movements, with only occasional institutional support from the municipality and involvement of university members. While mainly relying on participatory dynamics, challenges persist in integrating migrant communities into

[10] https://web.girona.cat/ccivics/projectes/menjatsantnarcis
[11] https://web.girona.cat/sostur
[12] https://web.girona.cat/ccivics/projectes/menjatsantnarcis

decision-making processes[13]. At the time of the interview there were 15 persons cultivating the UG, out of them 10 women. The interview was conducted with a 2 female and 1 male beneficiaries of the UG.

3. Horts Transformadors, Old Town, Girona

The urban garden in an Barri Vell (Old Town) square is a neighbourhood initiative to address the square's degradation (drug use, insecurity, etc). Initially, the interviewee reached out to many neighbours in the area, but commitment was low. The core group consists of the interviewee and three men. At the time of the interview there were 4 persons cultivating the UG, out of them 3 women. The interview was conducted with 1 female beneficiary and the initiator of the UG.

4. Sant Feliu de Llobregat

The garden in Sant Feliu de Llobergat is a municipal garden with two different kinds of users. Part of the UG is a community garden, while part of it is social in nature, yet the main goal of the UG is food production. A local non-governmental organisation (NGO) Tarpuna is contracted by the municipality that assist with agro-ecological tasks and facilitation. The garden functions in a very top-down approach, whereas the municipality is the main decision-maker. At the time of the interview there were 25 persons cultivating the UG, out of them 13 women. 16 were Catalan, 7 Moroccan, 1 Cuban and 1 Peruvian. The interview was conducted with 2 female beneficiaries, 1 male representative from Tarpuna and 1 representative of the municipality.

5. Casa de la culla, Manresa

The Casa de la culla is an UG that again has two kinds of purposes, on one hand agroecological and food sovereignty, and on the other hand a social purpose. The social component is very important, as the garden is meant as a meeting place for different persons in the neighbourhood, who are supported to create a common space. Unfortunately this goal has not yet been entirely achieved. From the agricultural point of view gardens did not exist on the location prior to the imitative, which led to the creation of organic gardens. The municipality is not involved directly in the initiative, which is supported by a local foundation (Parc de la Séquia [14]). A technical team is responsible for the selection of the beneficiaries, diversity is an important factor in selecting them. A person is contracted to support with maintenance and agro-ecological facilitation tasks. The interview was conducted with 1 female beneficiary.

6. Hort d'en Jaume, Manresa

Hort d'en Jaume is a community UG in a private property, which is self-managed. It is a private initiative that is being implemented on a private land, which used to be cultivated by a man that passed away. After his death, his wife offered the land to the

[13] Edwards, E., Popartan, L. A., Nilstad Pettersen, I., ed. Urban Natures. Living the More-than-Human City. https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/EdwardsUrban

[14] https://www.parcdelasequia.cat/en/portada/

neighbours who then continued to take care of the UG. Organic food production in urban settings is the main purpose of the UG. At the time of the interview 8 women and 6 men were involved in th UG. At the time of the interview, 24 persons were involved in the UG, out of which 13 were women. 7 of them (5 women, 2 men) migrated to Manresa from Morocco, 2 from Peru. The interview was conducted with 1 female gardener.

7. Project to create an urban garden in the Vistalalegre neighbourhood, Girona

The project is in its initial phase, with plans to integrate it with a local school and high school due to challenges and lack of consensus on setting up the gardens in the neighbourhood plaza. The choice for this interview was related to the interest in exploring to what extent gender is integrated – if it is – in project design.

3.2 Gender in urban gardens

In order to allow for analysis and comparison between the adopted levels of gender sensitivity in the various UG and their impact on social equity, guiding questions were coordinated to be used during the interviews. They focused on two aspects, namely on the modus operandi of the UGs and the levels of autonomy of their beneficiaries, and the extent and methods of including the gender and diversity perspectives in the UG design and functioning (Annex I). Following are the summaries of the interviews that include the main mentioned aspects.

1. Horts de Santa Eugenia

The interviewed municipality worker described the UG as a communal one, where gardeners work and make decisions about their individual plots, without there being any formal decision-making process. More men than women participate in gardening, and it is more common for migrant women to be involved in UG than those born in Catalonia. At the same time, the interviewee stated that the women involved often align with leftist ideologies, ecological transition, and feminism, especially the younger ones. When compared to more traditional forms of agriculture, UG are seen as having more community orientation compared to the traditional ones, which focus more on the actual farming and thus tend to a larger extent to reproduce gendered roles. Security issues, such as vandalism and poor lighting, are present in the Santa Eugenia UG. The interviewed social worker noted that women might feel unsafe in poorly lit or less travelled areas, she also shared a personal experience of feeling insecure.

2. Menja't Sant Narcis

The three interviewed beneficiaries, 2 women and 1 man, stated that a variety of people participate in gardening, yet the majority are retirees due to their more flexible schedules. There is no specific mechanism that would account for gender balance in the UG, although women tend to be the majority, participation is fluid and based on the interest and availability of each individual. The interviewees agreed that both men and women actively participate in the UG and that both genders are similarly committed to tasks and responsibilities. Despite them describing the UG as a non-

discriminatory and safe space, and denying any gendered divisions in terms of technical knowledge or skills, or more physical tasks, even commending the involvement of female carpenters, they nevertheless mentioned some gendered role divisions. Certain activities, such as garden care, tend to be associated with women. One of the beneficiaries said that women represent the majority at workshops and various activities in the UG, with an emphasis on creating safe and respectful spaces, while the other two highlighted that women contribute to social sensitivity and foster the construction of a stronger community. Women are thus more likely than men to focus on social aspects and neighbourliness. They mentioned that some tasks, such as building, are generally associated with male roles, yet that the beneficiaries are actively challenging gender stereotypes related to physical strength.

3. Horts Transformadors, Old Town, Girona

There is no specific mechanism in place regarding participation in this UG, which is open to anyone that has interest in taking part. Both interviewees stated that both men and women are involved in the UG, the majority being over 40 years old, even though traditionally more men participate. One of the interviewees stated that she would like to see more experienced women participating in the UG, while the other went further and said that there have been remarks implying that women lack experience and knowledge in agriculture. The latter also stated that young women leaders could be facing double discrimination, due to being female and young. Despite the first interviewee stating that there were no gender specific roles, the second one spoke about the attitude towards male and female leaderships, speculating that a woman with architectural training (deemed as relevant), might gain respect and credibility more easily than a woman without specific training. While both women mentioned work-life balance, the older interviewee, a grandmother, viewed her inclusion and work at the UG as rewarding, the younger one stated that the mothers, who represented the majority of project leaders, faced challenges of balancing project leadership with family responsibilities and work.

4. Sant Feliu de Llobregat

The UG was initially planned as a place to promote social cohesion and to support those facing a poor socio-economic situation. With time the communal part was added, not just to promote cohesion, but also to ensure full participation in the UG. Besides Tarpuna that facilitates and supports all activities, there are 2 more organisations involved in the social part of the UG, working with women at risk of exclusion, including migrant women, and with people with disabilities. The aim of the UG is to be included as a mental therapy prescription. While gender mainstreaming is contained in the guidelines for the UG, it is in reality not implemented. From the side of the municipality, there is an assumption that because Trapuna is involved, a gender-sensitive approach is automatically undertaken. The planning of the UG was undertaken mainly by the Municipality. One of the interviewees stated that among older users there are more male beneficiaries, the same goes for African migrants, while in the case of Latin American migrants, the majority are women, which is also the case with younger persons. The values of coexistence and multiculturalism are of utmost importance in the gardens. A female beneficiary recommended that it would

be beneficial if more women were involved in the UG. Another female beneficiary stated that prior to becoming an official user, she came to join the UG as a volunteer, but left as she felt not respected as a woman.

5. Casa de la culla, Manresa

Casa de la culla has been an UG sine the 1980s, but its modus operandi has changed over time. Over the past years it has become a meeting space for different persons in the neighbourhood with a strong social cohesion aim. The interviewee, who provides technical support, stated that unfortunately they have not been as successful as they had wished for and that they hope to increase diversity and peaceful coexistence. The existing levels of diversity, as well as competition for resources (especially water) already are causing conflicts among the beneficiaries, which are being addressed at assemblies by the technical staff, but they do wish for the initiative to be more self-organised and autonomous. When admitting new beneficiaries the criteria of age and origin, and the personals status of the candidate are taken into account, but not in a systematic manner. Gender has not been among the criteria and it is not an issue they are systematically addressing, as their main focus is racism, but the interviewee believed that it could be added as an intersectional dimension.

6. Hort d'en Jaume, Manresa

Being a self-managed community UG, Hort d'en Jaume does not have a formal structure with formal rules. A female beneficiary said that new persons join the UG through word of the mouth, which means there is not much diversity. She said that women are the ones to propose new approaches to regenerate the UG and think about benefits for the whole area, while the male beneficiaries are the ones mainly working on their individual plots. She was of the opinion that internal management needs to be improved in order to raise the quality of the UG. Some of the beneficiaries have the desire to work on gender issues, women were interested in creating a women-only space that would serve as a self-empowerment tool, but it was not a sentiment shared by all beneficiaries.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is possible to conclude from the interviews that the approach of running the UG differs in the case of community and social gardens. The latter have as their goal social cohesion and also choose their beneficiaries in line with some criteria that aim at achieving diversity, such as age, migration status or disability. The former, on the other hand, tend to have as their primary goal food production. As such, they do not have any specific criteria for selecting their beneficiaries, who usually join on a first come, first served principle, and must have enough time to devote to gardening. As a consequence, it is not unusual to find retirees working in the UG. Despite the fact that food production is the primary goal of the communal UG, the interviewees nevertheless stated that in the UG there are differences from traditional farming, wherein UG tend to exhibit a stronger community orientation.

Only one of the UG, the one in Sant Feliu de Llobregat, has formal guidelines for ensuring a gender-sensitive approach, yet both the facilitator from Tarpuna and the representative from the municipality stated that they are not implemented in reality. A few plots in the UG are used as a space to work with women at risk of discrimination, specifically migrant women, some of which are so-called irregular migrants and some do not speak Catalan or Spanish and thus have difficulties accessing the labour market. The UG thus has a positive impact on the lives of that specific group and also generates a shared space for various users.

None of the other UG has a specific gender-oriented formal strategy. In the community gardens, which are self-managed, female leadership emerges as a distinctive element. Women assume roles as promoters and leaders of initiatives, while men to a larger extent tend to work individually on their plots. In the social UG this does not occur, as there are external persons that carry out the roles that the women in the communal UG partially assume, but their responsibilities go beyond that to support the beneficiaries from the technical point of view, but also to promote social cohesion.

The majority of those interviewed in both types of UG recognise the importance of involving people of different ages, genders and origins to be collaborators and generate a sense of community. Even though the majority also spoke about the lack of discrimination and equal participation in all tasks in their UG, the existence of gendered roles is nevertheless present across the UG. Roles linked to certain functions traditionally associated with women are mentioned, such as garden care or the social aspects and neighbourliness of the UG. On the other hand, some tasks, such as building, are more often associated with men, as are leadership roles. In case of leadership positions, women who have additional competencies might be considered as more appropriate for the function. When it comes to men, on the other hand, additional competencies are not necessary. As traditional farming is usually perceived as a men's task, the notion that women cannot be good gardeners is also present.

Work-life balance was also highlighted in the interviews, but from different points of views. In a context where traditional gender expectations often assign women responsibility for household chores and family care, participation in gardens is presented as an opportunity to balance multiple roles and responsibilities. For the younger mothers, however, active participation, especially since women tend to also assume leadership roles, gardening represented another task they had to balance.

The fact that many of the beneficiaries are retirees with more traditional ideas about gender equality and gendered roles probably contributes to the presence of the above-mentioned sexist overtones in coexistence within UG. Despite this, in the majority of the UG community and equity are encouraged. Women, especially the younger, are the ones that show the most support to concepts of social cohesion and ecological transition.

Whereas in one social UG there were some comments suggesting discriminatory approaches towards women, traditional gendered roles seem to be more present in communal UG. In UG like Santa Eugenia, which are a large set of allotments for individuals, which are not focused on creating a sense of community, even more

challenges and resistance are noted, among them insecurity, harassment and lack of participation in collective tasks.

Due to the lack of formal or even informal gender sensitive approaches or guidelines it is difficult to ascertain that adopting a gender perspective in UG impacts social equity and even less so food sovereignty. However, it is possible to state that in the UG that recognise that different socio-cultural groups have unequal experiences and rights, there were significantly less mentions of gendered roles that seemed to emerge in all of the communal UG. This implies that cases in which a lens, recognising uneven distribution of power in the society, is systematically applied to the functioning and activities of the UG, albeit not specifically for gender, has a positive impact on equity. When this does not occur, existing gender stereotypes are reproduced.

Even though the aim of the research was to provide evidence that gender mainstreaming is beneficial not only to the functioning of NBS, but also for social equity, it unfortunately reproduced the conclusions from the literature review on the intersection of gender, NBS and water treatment, namely that gender is not perceived to be playing a role in ecosystem services. This only reinforces the need for more research about the nexus between existing gender inequalities in the Global North and NBS, in order to at least avoid replicating them, but preferentially to reduce discrimination and increase social cohesion.

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Annex I

Guiding questions

Inclusiveness and participation in urban garden

- Who proposed it (top-down, bottom-up)?
- Who participated in its design and creation? What are the objectives of the project?
- What are the criteria for participating? How is the admission process?
- Who decided which benefits are most important for the involved community, was there a need to negotiate and/or look for synergies between the potential benefits? If yes, in what way did this process happen?
- How has the garden been adjusted to the local context (not only environmental, but also the population involved, such as their age, socio-economic status, gender, culture, religion etc)?
- Has local expertise and knowledge from beneficiaries of the garden initiatives been included in the above processes?
- What was the gender mix in all of the above steps?
- Do all beneficiaries enjoy and can they exercise the same amounts of power in all of the above steps?

Gender and diversity perspectives

- Has a gender analysis ever been carried out regarding any aspect of the urban garden initiative? Is data collected gender disaggregated?
- When planning the project and analysing the future impacts and benefits, has this analysis been carried out as if the beneficiaries are a homogeneous group or have the beneficiaries been divided into diverse groups and addresses as such?
- In monitoring and evaluation of the actual impacts and benefits, have the beneficiaries been disaggregated into groups by gender?
- Have any steps/measures/actions been taken to promote gender parity in the process and if yes, which ones?
- It is important to use an intersectional approach in order to study other types of inequalities in the society.