



UGAIN

Urban **G**Ardens for the social
INtegration of migrants

Garden:

**Interkultureller Gemeinschaftsgarten
Wilten - Innsbruck**



Internet links

✓ <https://www.facebook.com/InterkulturellerGarten.ibk>

1. Introduction

Interkultureller Gemeinschaftsgarten Wilten was the first community garden in Innsbruck. It was created as a place where all people feel good - independent from their social, economic, cultural background. The gardeners follow ecological principles. In 2018 the garden had 90 members with two thirds of them female, and one third male. Of these members 75% of them are migrants, mainly people aged between 30 and 45. The garden is used by people from 25 different nations. The biggest group with a migrant profile is Turkish, others are from Syria, Afghanistan and Iran. At the moment the garden is organised by one paid coordinator and two board members.



"I have seen other community gardens and even if they wanted to be intercultural, it did not work out well. I think, it worked in our garden because we enforced it from the beginning and it was always a topic. If you want to be intercultural you have to look for and it is not that easy to find."

Board member

"Visit other gardens and be interested!"

Gardener

2. Garden data



 **Location - coordinates:** Fritz-Konzertstraße/Pastorstraße 6020 Innsbruck

Garden description: The garden is situated between the local train station, a residential house, a parking lot and two streets in a somewhat hidden place in the quite traditional district of Wilten. The garden area covers 2600 m². The garden contains of 25 individual growing beds, 7 growing beds for groups like associations or groups of friends and some common growing beds for flowers, berries and herbs. The individual and group growing beds are mainly used for vegetables and herbs. Beside the growing beds the garden provides one trailer for tools and materials, one trailer for socialising, 2 water taps, a big free area for playing and socialising and an area especially equipped for children. The garden site belongs to the abbey and is let to the garden group on a precarious land title called "Bittleihe". The garden group gets the plot for free but the contract can be quit every year. The garden was founded by Tiroler Bildungsforum, the university and some local initiatives. The main difficulty for this group was to find a plot of land.

In the beginning the garden was funded by EU funds and a national integration fund. These funds were mainly granted for a paid half-time position to organise the foundation of the garden (18.000€ for 18 months) and to carry out activities and events for intercultural understanding (16.000€ for 18 months). The main infrastructure required were the construction of a well and the fence. Nowadays the garden is financed through membership fees and public funding for the coordination of the group. The budget is about 5000€ per year.

3. Social integration and empowerment of migrants



The garden was founded to create a space of encounter, to create an intercultural community, to create dialogue among different cultures and different perspectives and to learn to interact with people from different backgrounds. In the creation of the garden, Tiroler Bildungsforum, the university of Innsbruck, students from the college for social work focused on the involvement of migrants in the garden. The college students did research about migrants and migrant organisations in the area and got in contact with different organisations to invite as many migrants as possible. The grant for the first two years was dedicated to work with people who had come to Austria less than three years ago. To assure the intercultural character of the garden the group has decided that no ethnic group of gardeners should exceed 20% of all gardeners.

The garden cooperated with an intercultural women association who did some of their German classes in the garden and had a group growing bed of their own. A Bosnian culture association also had a growing bed. The geographical institute offered tours through the surroundings and the dinner club and the language café carried out their activities in the garden, thereby enriching the intercultural garden life. In the beginning training on management and how to deal with intercultural groups as well

as how to manage conflicts were held for all group members.

The main opportunities are to learn from each other, to understand yourself in different roles as someone who learns and as someone who is an expert and teaches. Learning German and having a place to speak German is another benefit of being part of the garden. The possibility for friendships and networking, becoming part of professional networks of other gardeners helps migrants with their professional integration.

The experience of diversity is a benefit for all gardeners independent of their backgrounds.

Especially for traumatised migrants the garden is also a refuge and a place where they get strengthened and find peace. Mutual support in difficult situations is another important benefit.

After the first two years the garden became an independent association and no longer had a paid coordinator. After some time, more conflicts among gardeners occurred and the garden group decided that a new coordinator could help to solve the problems. With a grant from the city and the county they managed to employ a coordinator for a few hours per week. This first coordinator was mainly skilled in project management and experienced in work with migrants and intercultural relationships. She supported social interaction and the inclusion of different groups, improved communication and organised a number of activities. This helped the garden to run smoothly again.



Differences in how to discuss, how to deal with problems are not necessarily related to nationality but also to personal experiences. Being ready to understand each other is seen as a key attitude to solve and reduce conflicts.

To deal with different language levels and different communication habits the garden group uses several strategies such as:

- translation of important information in different languages
- translators for meetings
- using different communication channels such as, messenger, e-mail, letters and text messages

To use simple language is seen as important but not always easy to implement.

Declining engagement and motivation are also a problem as in many groups. Joint actions make it easier to communicate and to learn from each other and at the same time create community. Another

key to community building are garden feasts and eating together.

It is important to constantly invite gardeners and people from outside to activities and not to expect that people will come by themselves. Clear structures and clearly described tasks help gardeners to engage.

From the interviewers' perspective the main success factors and of the initiative are:

- A strong focus on intercultural encounter and integration and involvement from the beginning.
- A broad range of ways to cooperate.
- Seeking professional support in the beginning and when needed. E.g; training for the whole group on how to deal with intercultural diversity and conflicts.

The grants at the one side gave the opportunity to organise a lot of activities for migrant support. On the other hand, the resources could not be used to foster less tangible, less obvious qualities of the garden.

As a lot of training and activities to create cohesion and awareness of intercultural relationships took place in the first years of the project, gardeners who joined later could not benefit to the same extent as those who were there from the beginning.

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