



# UGAIN

Urban **G**Ardens for the social  
**I**Ntegration of migrants

**Garden:**

**Garten der Begegnung**



## Internet links

- ✓ [www.gartenderbegegnung.com](http://www.gartenderbegegnung.com)
- ✓ [www.facebook.com/gartenderbegegnung](https://www.facebook.com/gartenderbegegnung)

## 1. Introduction

The 'Garden of Encounter' was founded in 2014 out of refugee empowerment activities in Traiskirchen, Lower Austria next to Austria's largest first reception centre for asylum-seekers. The garden's focus is to create a setting where inclusion can happen through various projects with the main goal to empower refugees so they can discover their abilities and get support to make those abilities visible through projects on an economic basis. Because most official job and soft skill training activities in Austria only start when refugees get their residence permit, this projects tries to show ways other communities can start activities at an earlier stage. Besides gardening the group also sell vegetables locals and planted 150 fruit trees through a sponsorship model. They also started a sewing and a wood workshop and organise regular events like an oriental breakfast and started an atelier for refugees to work on their products and give them an opportunity to make them visible and to sell them.



*"We tell people in the beginning that they are not employees in this project. It is our project! We do it hand in hand and we take our hands and say: This is our project."*

*"For migrants its very important to learn how to work in the new country, how you talk to customers, how to write an email, how to make a bill - small things, but for refugees those are really big things."*

*"Having big ears (good listening skills) for the needs and talents of the migrants is very important"*

*"Many times the failure is to know from the beginning how integration works."*

*"Ideas for projects are like the seeds of a plant, many do not germinate. It's about to see what society needs at that specific moment – only those ideas can really grow"*

## 2. Garden data

**Location - coordinates:** Akademiestrasse / Ecke Einödweg, Traiskirchen

**Garden description:** The garden is situated on a field that belongs to the municipality right next to the first reception centre for asylum-seekers in Austria. They have a contract for permanent use with the municipality who gave the land for free. It has 10.000 m<sup>2</sup> and is divided in three areas (vegetable production, livestock farming and an area for social encounter.) The vegetables are produced together, mainly in rows with an irrigation system. To enable people to meet and work together there is a modified trailer that works as an outdoor kitchen, tables and benches (one with an solar device to charge your mobile phones in the garden) berry shrubs and 150 fruit trees that are part of a sponsorship project (locals finance half of the fruit tree and the care costs for the first years and the local government pays the other half). In addition they renovated an old house for the 'Global Talents' activities and run a small booth to sell their vegetables. The sewing and woodworking workshop takes place in a hall close by. The project has a paid coordination team. One of them is a former refugee from Syria. The gardeners group are approximately 40 gardeners, and around 20 -30 are refugees or migrants who get a small compensation for their work. In the first year they started without a budget and they bought seeds and plants on their own and began the project on their own. In the second year the municipality gave financial support. The annual budget is now around 90.000€, with most of it going towards staff costs. The local government supports the project with 38.000€/year, the rest is financed by assignments and donations.



### 3. Social integration and empowerment of migrants



**Details of the initiative:** In winter 2013-14 there was a need to help the migrants from the overflowing asylum centre. Volunteers started lots of activities in a hall where they did creative things like sewing, painting, sports etc. At that time Nikolai Ritter, the initiator of the garden, had the idea to extend those activities to gardening. Without detailed plans he contacted the mayor (who turned out to be a major help and a source of support in this project). Some days later he was offered the land next to the asylum centre. Nikolai felt the need for projects which were inclusive. In contrast to integration projects, inclusion is a two way process where also locals have to be open and learn from each other. Without this, integration cannot happen. According to him inclusion is also seen as developing assistance for locals to get ready for globalisation. Knowledge in this field are, for example, in taking care and having respect for the elderly people. Getting to know the African humour and that friendship is more important than punctuality. Gardening is seen as more economically important in other cultures. The support from the municipality is seen as an important factor in understanding projects from the civil society. In this project they received real support with land, financial support and personnel - The recommendation is to seek cooperation with the municipality. Their aim is to grow together with all levels of society in an evolutionary kind of process and not against them in a revolutionary one.

**Chances / Opportunities:** As described above most official integration tools start when people get their residence permit. This happens (sometimes) after the elapse of years of legally ordered apathy. One of the aims of this project is to show other communities how this important work can happen straight from the beginning of the arrival of migrants. The project is seen as an introduction to the working world. Even though asylum seekers in Austria are generally not allowed to do paid jobs, there are opportunities for financial recognition on different kind of small jobs they do in the garden. The deal is that if the asylum seekers come to work 3 days per week they can get 110€ / month compensation. Even if this is not a big amount of money, it is seen as one of the key-factors of success in this project. Because the municipality does not come up with the whole amount of money that is needed, the garden has to look for external assignments and donations, which brings people real potential jobs where services and products are provided. These include small sewing jobs, building fences, tables and benches for the community spaces, selling vegetables and regularly organising events like the oriental breakfast. For legal reasons those activities are held using money from donations. Beside the asylum seekers who are involved in the project, a former asylum seeker from Syria is employed with 5 staff in the management team. Due to his language skills and background he is an important interface in the project.

The Syrian project manager told us that it takes time to get to know the society and that every society has its own mentality. According to him integration doesn't only need time, it also requires personal contacts. The garden opens up the opportunity to not only meet locals but to work together. For the project manager it was very important to understand what and how you can do things here. In the garden he could really learn the language with all its different dialects and locals could correct him if he said things wrong. He could learn how to work in this country, how to talk with customers. It turned out that every culture is different regarding punctuality, security and cleanliness on the building site. This knowledge seems small but according to migrants these are important for future living and working in

the new homeland.

**Threats/Challenges:** Potential challenges can be seen in gender issues. It might be challenging to be open to get to know the family structures from other cultures. Women seem to fade in the background and might be seen as unliberated. It often needs other approaches to open those projects for women. The challenge is seen in understanding these issues and that things are completely different for these women.

**General considerations:** General considerations can be seen in the importance of having a good vision of the project but staying very open and flexible to understand what is important for the refugees right now. If there are family problems or troubles with the asylum procedure then planting strawberries might not be the first thing to do. People should also not be pushed in any work. The project's aim is to look behind the facade, discover talents and potentials and then try to bring those to life and help participants to work independently. Those individual talents are seen as the main source of energy for self-empowerment. According to their experiences migrants not have this vision, but with good listening skills and the help of translation those can be discovered. The situation needs personal trust between the project manager and the migrants and it is very important to support their motivations and step back with the previous integration strategies.

**Knowledge/Attitudes/Skills/Training:** According to the interviewee you don't need special training to start the type of project. On the contrary, it just needs a real interest from the people and their history and willingness to learn from each other. The advice is just to start. Some things must be considered like electricity, water, the organisational form, money and the membership but one should overthink initiative. Civil projects don't work with a master plan. The most important thing is to start.

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## Project Website

[www.ugain.online](http://www.ugain.online)



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