



UGAIN

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

Garden:

**Garten der Hoffnung- bustan-ul-amal
(Garden of Hope)**



Internet links

✓ <http://www.garten-der-hoffnung.net/>

1. Introduction

The „Garden of Hope“ is an intercultural garden, which was founded in 2015. Local residents and refugees, who came in 2015 to Germany, initiated the garden. The garden provides a green space, a playground for kids, places to rest and beds with flowers, herbs and vegetables. The garden belongs to the temporary accommodation (container buildings) where refugees are hosted. The garden is located in Berlin-Koepenick, a district known as a social hotspot. The garden is cultivated according to ecological principles, and anyone who wishes to participate is welcome.



"You need to involve the people, have an honest interest, an open mind and patience. Patience with the weather, the produce and the people. The success is we are still alive, it is not a top down approach, where I am the teacher and you are the student. Everyone contributes."

Manager

"Go for it, it is an opportunity to learn! Go help, be a part of it and have fun."

Gardener

2. Garden data



 **Location - coordinates:** Alfred-Randt-Str. 19, 12559 Berlin, Germany

Garden description: The garden belongs to three buildings where temporary homes for refugees are located. The district is in a socially deprived neighborhood consisting of high-rise buildings. The garden area is quite small, it less than 100 m² and consists of a concrete area with 12 raised beds, which is used by the 400 inhabitants of the temporary home. Two middle age women, a professional gardener and a journalist, manage every Friday an active garden group of 3 - 30 people. In the commonly owned raised beds, vegetables, such as potatoes, tomatoes, and herbs that are common in Arab culture are grown. Besides raised beds the garden includes a shed to store tools and equipment, a pavilion to rest, a playground for children and benches to rest. From the beginning, the garden received a lot of public attention. On the one hand, many volunteers and donors supported the project. On the other hand, members of right-wing parties protested and besieged the garden. Over time, support and attention decreased, and people are now peacefully co-existing. One difficulty that the garden is facing is that the accommodation is temporary. All beds and facilities are transportable as the accommodation is supposed to close in 2019. The establishment of the garden was realized through financial means provided by the city of Berlin. It was an investment of approximately 8.000 - 10.000 Euros. In addition, there is an annual maintenance costs of 4.000 - 5.000 Euros. At present, individuals and organisations support the garden through resource and financial donations.

3. Social integration and empowerment of migrants



Details of the initiative: The garden's aim is to facilitate encounter, to establish dialogue and an open-minded community. The garden did not follow a specific integrated concept when it began and the managers did not receive any training regarding intercultural issues. However, their personal backgrounds, for instance intercultural marriage and an open and curious mind-set allowed establishing a garden appreciated by the local community, and its active gardeners. The members of the garden meet every Friday, and all members are considered equal. There are no hierarchies in the garden. Even though the garden is open to all members of the temporary housing facility, the active garden group consists predominantly of men and children. Besides the horticultural components of the garden, the garden serves as a form of therapy, as a place for recreation and dialogue. The dialogue takes place informally during the work, but also in a more formal manner in a weekly neighbourhood café, where local residents visit the garden and the temporary housing facilities.

The garden managers consider two forms of activities as important to establish a community. These are horticultural activities such as establishing and arranging the raised beds as well as conversational activities such as the neighborhood café. The managers indicated that they view their activities as a rather creative process, which is not so strictly organised. Yet, they emphasise that within the group, people organise more intuitively according to their skills and interest, while the managers organise the materials for the activities.

As one of the managers is a professional gardener, she uses her professional network to acquire resources and raw materials, shrubs, trees, seedlings, container, soil and fertiliser, while the other manager, a journalist by profession, gathers financial donations, is writing applications and is filling forms to receive financial support. Both types of skillsets are necessary for the garden activities. The managers further explain that any activity should include time for conversation, reflection and communal meals, as the intentions of these activities are community-building. As necessary competences they point out an open mind, patience, crafting and certain horticultural skills. They agree that these competences do not need to be embodied in one person, as skills are distributed in the group. People learn from each other and develop over time.

The garden is seeking cooperation with other intercultural gardening groups in Berlin to facilitate further exchange. However, any attempts have not yet been successful. A regular exchange takes place among members of the garden and a retirement home. In addition, school classes or other visitor groups join the garden and help on construction, decoration and refurbishment activities.

Chances / Opportunities: The garden provides several learning opportunities: horticultural knowledge, constructing, language and intercultural exchange. Gardeners and garden managers explicitly stress that within the garden project, each person in the group is a learner and a teacher, as each person has a unique background, skills and experience that they bring into the project. Particular children and teenagers who are part of the group were quick learners of the German language and active teachers with respect to vegetable cultivation. In their home countries the children and young people have accompanied their parents who lived in the countryside, either being professional agriculturists or spare time growers.

The acknowledgement of diversity is an important aspect for the garden members. Closeness, diversity, conversation and trust are essential for all group members, and the grounds of friendship and social interaction, which are considered as the most important benefits. In addition, the garden is seen as a place for recreation and therapy, as well as an escape from the circumstances (tight conditions, little privacy) in the temporary home.



Threats/Challenges: Besides all positive experiences and benefits, the garden group had faced some challenges, for instance being accepted by the local community. The group faced resistance from right-wing parties in the beginning of the garden project, however, the support of the neighborhood and demonstrations lead to acceptance of the project. Within the garden group, there are not many interpersonal tensions or conflicts about horticultural practices or equity, as all produce is commonly owned. Minor problems such as produce being taken over night - is seen with a twinkling eye.

Interpersonal problems are solved in the group through conversation. Conversation takes place in German, English and the Arabic language. Members of the group act as translators. Conversations take place in person and not necessarily online, as not all members of the group are familiar with mobile messengers such as 'whats app', social media platforms or computers.

General considerations: One aspect pointed out by the organiser of the gardens is that external individuals and groups frequently visit the garden. This is appreciated in order to receive attention and support for the project, as well as to facilitate exchange. However, the visitors are not coming regularly and therefore it is challenging to establish meaningful relationships and trust. Stability and regularity are seen as important contributors to social empowerment. In terms of success factors, the garden managers believe the following factors created their success; a bottom up approach built the group. They perceive a top down approach as hindering to commitment, motivation and learning of the group members. The garden still exists and was never demolished or attacked even though there were problems with right-wing parties. Trust, friendship, acceptance and patience are important personal skills, which are developed and fostered, in the garden project.

With respect to lessons that can be learned from this garden and that are useful for gardening projects in development, the gardening managers emphasise patience and an open mind. They further indicate that each gardening project is unique, because people and their dynamics are unique. Each project is unique as it is, once people start assuming one size fits all, it is an approach to failure.

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