



MODULE 1:

Starting, developing and sustaining an intercultural garden as a social integration project

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Introducing community and intercultural gardens

Description of the module

Overview: The module illustrates tasks and steps to set up and sustain an intercultural garden as a social integration project.

This module puts a special focus on the following:

- How to start an intercultural garden
- How to involve participants
- How to sustain the project

Learning objectives of the module

Knowledge:

- How to carry out and coordinate tasks when developing an intercultural garden structures and organisation, leadership, and budgeting.
- How to outline important organisational challenges and how to find solutions.

Skills:

- Operating a complex organisation in an multi-cultural environment.
- Acquiring soft skills such as teamwork, communication and delegation.

Approaches:

- Combining urban gardening with social integration.
- Improving understanding of the new country's society, values and culture.
- Creating common ground for interaction between migrants and the local community.



Intercultural gardens bring together people from all section of society, local people, migrants and refugees. They are mostly incorporated in social projects. These gardens are an opportunity to foster social integration of migrants and refugees and empower them in the new countries. They provide a safe environment where people can interact with each other. The number of urban gardens is steadily increasing across Europe.

- Intercultural gardens offer environmental, horticultural, practical and informal **learning opportunities**.
- They are spaces for **networking, social activism** and active citizenship.
- Enhanced diets through **local food** production and **therapeutic benefits** through contact to nature are acknowledged benefits of intercultural community gardens.
- Given the right policy framework and financial support, intercultural gardens can provide potential for **employment and training opportunities**.

→ [Have a look on the summary report \(link\)](#)

1. Confirm your idea

Detail your intercultural garden concept and include:

- Focal points, basic alignment and target group(s)
- Engage with your community
- Identify potential stakeholders and, potential multipliers
- Find and define an area for the garden
- Plan the first steps to set up the garden
- Think about challenges and solutions

Detail your intercultural garden concept

- Intercultural gardens can have a variety of different shapes, structures and possibilities. **There is no blueprint.**
- [See the multitude of different garden concepts in the Best Practices list \(link\)](#)
- To get new ideas for your space get in contact with existing (intercultural) garden projects, make a field visit and ask questions.
- Think about what is transferable (e.g., information about the legal framework, important contacts).
- Afterwards, think about:
 - Including local conditions and possibilities during project planning.
 - Involving potential gardeners and garden users as early as possible.
 - Considering common interests and leave space and time for development.
 - Planning required material, useful networks, procurement, staff etc.

Note: Planning is an ongoing process!

Inform the direct periphery/ neighbourhood

Intercultural gardens are “neighbourhood-projects”

- It is advisable to inform the neighbours and institutions early on as well as initiatives in the neighbourhood of your idea to set up an intercultural garden.

- Intercultural gardens are most effective as social integration projects if **neighbours, schools, kindergartens and other institutions** nearby know about it and can actively take part in the garden development.

→ [Best practice example with children events \(link\)](#)

- Organise an **information event**. Ask people about their ideas and who would like to be part of the garden project. Distribute information (e.g., publish an article in the local paper.)

→ [Best practice example organising an information event \(link\)](#)



Identify potential stakeholders and, potential multipliers

Building a trustworthy and helpful network

- Most intercultural gardens are created through the **cooperation of different people** and groups.
- [Chances of cooperation](#)
- Carefully **analyse the environment** of the project: Which institutions, clubs, politicians, administration, companies are in the area? Who might be helpful and could advance your project? Who might have knowledge, resources or contacts to be a partner? Who might have concerns about your plans?
- Make contact with **organisations working with migrants**. Speak as soon as

possible to people who can inform their networks of the planned garden project. Invite them to develop the project together.

→ **An example of a successful approach: the “Begegnungscafé”**



Find and define an area for the garden

Find a suitable area as a starting point for the garden

- The space should be close to where most of the gardeners/participants are living **and hopefully walkable**.
- Plants need soil (direct cultivation in the soil or raised beds, depending on the ground), sunlight and water.
- You will **need sufficient space** for beds, garden-tools, compost, a meeting and celebration-area, and other infrastructure such as toilets and a playground area for children.
- Depending on your ideas, you might need premises for workshops, consulting, cooking, etc...

How to obtain a suitable place for the intercultural garden?

- Consider, who owns or uses suitable plots:

Examples: the municipality, local churches, housing cooperatives, socio-cultural institutions, multigenerational houses, neighbourhood centres or environmental education centres, youth-clubs, allotment clubs, farmers or even individuals.

- If you have no place in mind, start your search by contacting the municipality.
- If you have an area in mind, research the owner(s) by consulting the land registry and contact them.
- Once you're in touch, it can be useful to bring with you the ideas of the project with pictures and experiences from other cities and places.



Plan the steps to set up the intercultural garden

You should by now be a group already - make a plan on how to involve more people: both gardeners and supporters. Planning should be done together with all interested parties. Required planning steps:

- Collect requests and needs of everybody in the group: What should be in the garden? Are there features that many want? What might cause conflict?
- **Places to share wishes** Blend these ideas together:
 - Get hold of the ground plan of the plot or draw yourself one
 - Record what is already there and what is not changeable
 - Check out the water situation. Is there already an installation or well on the site? Can you harvest rainwater? Who is on the borders?
 - Analyse the soil condition: Is it impenetrable? Can you grow right into the ground (contamination)?
- Consult with the plot owner(s)

Think about challenges and solutions



- Direct neighbours might feel disturbed by increasing noise and “new people”.
- Consider if there may be informal users of the area including people with dogs, teens or children who meet here or play ball, people who use trails as shortcuts, etc..
- To avoid conflicts with the informal users, it is advisable to visit “your plot” at different times and talk with the residents (including the local children and youths) to find out who is using it. Inform people about your plans, invite the previous users to be part of the garden.
- Set up a signpost with basic information as soon as possible and do not forget to add a contact E-Mail and an invitation to join in the garden.

2. Get your participants involved

- Find participants (migrants/neighbours/gardeners and garden users).
 - How to get in contact?
 - How to explain the intercultural garden to e.g. migrants?
 - Access to the garden
- Develop an organisational structure and responsibilities that fit the available human resources.
- Discuss and define basic rules for garden use and internal collaboration.
- Think about challenges and solutions.



Photo from Cornelia Suhan

Find participants

How to get in contact with potential participants (gardeners and garden users)?

- Organise an information event for neighbours.
- **See also here**
- Circulate a list, where interested people can sign up.
- Use the local newspaper or other local media to make your project public.
- Try to invite as broad a group as possible to this event and if necessary do run it again.
- If you have a plot already, invite people there.
- Have regular open meetings and publish the dates. Create possibilities so that people can contact you.
- Inform relevant institutions and initiatives in the area about the project and ask them to spread the word.





How to get in contact with migrants?

- Get in touch as early as possible with migration and refugee associations, churches, organisations and potential partners who engage with and work with people with a migration history.
- Foster personal contact and trust. Volunteers, asylum counsellors and social workers in refugee-work have experiences and can build up confidence.

- Ask them to organise an information-event or to come to the plot together with migrants and refugees.

→ [An example of a successful approach: the "Neighbourhood café"](#)

How to explain the intercultural garden to e.g. migrants?

- Think of language problems; work with simple models, drawings and photos. It might be difficult to explain the sense and value of an intercultural garden.
- Consider that the interest in gardening is not necessarily the focus for the migrants. Gardens can offer much more as places for meeting and learning. For example: celebrating parties, having picnics, cooking and dining together, crafting, workshops, German language courses, creative activities with and for children or simply access to nature, meeting other people and recreation.

→ [A variety of great examples can be found here \(link\)](#)

- Invite migrants to parties, picnics, workshops or just to gardening or „enjoying the garden“.

→ [Just organise a "Community picnic" \(link\)](#)

- If an intercultural garden project is still being planned or is supposed to be developed together with migrants, visit existing (intercultural) garden projects nearby with them to present and further develop the idea.

→ [Maybe there's a best practice example near you? \(link\)](#)

Access to the garden

- If an intercultural garden is on the grounds of a refugee accommodation it is not easy for others in the nearby community to participate. It depends on who is in charge. Offer special times or give the community a special access permit.
- [An example of an integrated garden in a refugee home](#)
- Ask the social workers or other supporting initiatives and try to establish an easy access for the gardeners of the neighbourhood.
 - Keep in mind that the refugees are living here and respect their right to privacy.
 - Intercultural gardens are not always very close to refugee accommodations. If the garden is not within walking distance, there should be a place to pick people up together. Go to the accommodation and walk together to the garden. Consider that not all people can ride bikes, so think of public transport or minibuses.

Develop an organisational structure

- All intercultural gardens are different and all are set up individually.
 - They need good communication.
- [See also training module 3: language challenges](#)
- It is advisable to visualise all the tasks involved (write down / visualise in teams) and to think about the responsibilities.
 - Working groups can be created for specific topics or responsibilities
 - Make important decisions in a plenary session.
 - It is important that the coordination is not in the hands of a single person, so that if this person leaves, the project is not at risk.

Define basic rules for garden use and collaboration

- There are good experiences where rules are jointly developed within the garden-group to ensure good interaction in the garden e. g., care of the beds/plots, communal areas, use of water, taking care of waste products, handling of garden

tools, allowance of open fire/barbecues

- Discuss if you want to set rules for a shared language (usually that of the host country).
- Communication rules (“what to do, how to do, how to make decisions”) are important points on the project agenda.
- The rules should not be fixed and rigid from the beginning but adaptable as the project develops.

→ **Principles of cooperation in action**

- New gardeners who join should have the opportunity to get involved in the reflection, changes and innovations of the garden.
 - Clear agreements and information in the intercultural gardens which don't have individual plots on the “state of gardening” is important, e.g.: when/where/what is done and what is still to be done.
 - Some intercultural gardens use social media to describe tasks, events, and advances – **but no virtual tool can replace personal contact!**
 - Avoid too many rules and restrictions: It is difficult to understand the regulations and their application in different situations. Too many unclear rules can lead to themigrants not daring to do anything themselves.



Think about the challenges and the solutions

- Not all people involved in the intercultural garden may have E-mail or smartphones; not everybody likes to use social media!
- „Telephone partners“ can pass on information to those who do not have E-mail addresses or internet access.
- Make the most important information and policies visible in the garden in an accessible place (information boards, garden-books).
- People come only once or twice: Try to welcome all new faces. Show them around,

answer questions, ask them what they want to do. Motivate them to take action by themselves.

Motivate them to come back!



3. Keep everyday business running



- Plan so you have the necessary resources and materials.
- Raise money and find materials.
- Staffing and voluntary work.
- Establish regular meetings with gardeners and garden users.
- Get visible and set up communication channels (“spread the word”).
 - Internal communication:
 - Communication with migrants in the group.
 - Communication channels and media.
 - Hosting diverse activities.

Plan the necessary resources and materials

- Analyse plot conditions; consider together with the group of potential gardeners which resources are needed.
- [See also here \(link\)](#)
- Plan modular and start with basics (e.g. beds position, soil and substrates, seeds and plants, water, tools). **“Think low-tech”**
- Create a list of materials and talk about what is really needed and what is more “nice to have”.
- Think about things possibly which can be procured second hand and materials that can be continued to use, repaired, or upcycled; shared or borrowed.
- [Upcycling practices](#)
- Incorporate people who can give materials or services.
- Draw up a budget plan of the necessary investment and operating costs.
- [You can find further information here](#)



Raise money and find materials

- Ask the local garden centre, nearby DIY-stores or communal green space administration to sponsor material (substrate, plants, wood, stones), tools and services (e.g., transports).
- You own funds can be generated with regular small contributions by the gardeners: e.g., “coffee and cake” events, small fees for workshops or similar activities.
- For major investments check foundations and competitions and clarify if your organisation can legally accept financial donations.
- Think about ways of crowdfunding.
- [You can find further information here](#)

Staffing and voluntary work

- Intercultural gardens as social integration projects can best develop their potentials when there are people who have the time and know-how to coordinate and develop the project. **Tasks are varied and depending on the plans, it can be difficult to do everything on a voluntary basis.** Tasks are waiting to be made aware of, understood and distributed. But not all can and want to contribute to the same extent, and not everyone has confidence in their abilities. Distribute tasks: project coordination; invitation to meetings; mediation; PR & information;

promoting; lobbying; networking and initiator of cooperation; fund raising; garden expertise; activity planning for social integration beyond gardening.

- Communicate internally and externally, deal constructively with conflict situations.
- [Link module 5](#)
- In intercultural gardens personal contact and trust are important. Working with migrants requires understandable information and support as well as constant encouragement and assistance of the migrants.
- In some countries it can be difficult to raise funds for paid staff for the coordination: find part-time workers or free-lancers.
- Coordinators and teams on a voluntary basis should think about how much time they can “invest” in the project and adjust plans and goals.
- Find more people, who can and like to be part of the organisational board. Ask gardeners, other garden users and co-operation partners if they can take on specific tasks.
- Offer internships and get connected with schools, universities and other educational institutions.
- Work together with volunteer agencies and relevant platforms.

Establish regular meetings with garden users



- Regular meetings are an opportunity for the gardeners and the group to meet, get information, ask questions, discuss, decide and plan the tasks and practical work to be done. Start or end with food as an additional incentive to take part in these meetings.
- Organise regular „garden days“ once a week or twice a month as user meetings.

→ [Example of ‘Open Garden Days’](#)

- In gardens where migrants run their

own plots, it is important that the people they know or people who welcome (new) migrants are there at fixed times so that they do not feel lost.

Keep in mind: appointments and agreements are not always adhered to, times are understood and lived differently in different cultures.

Get visible and set up communication channels

- Use visible, current signs, banners or weatherproof posters. Place them at public places nearby (district libraries, churches, neighbourhood initiatives) and ask them to stock flyers.
- Set up a project website with a newsletter and a project-contact-E-Mail address and – according to your target groups – use social media and keep it updated. Pay attention to photos. Make sure that you follow the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Maintain contacts with the press right from the start. Inform district bulletins, local daily newspaper editors, and church newspapers.
- Ask for all media contacts or links or recordings - regardless of whether it is radio, television, online or print media. You can use these materials and links for public relations and for grant applications.

Internal Communication

[Communication with migrants in the group](#)

- Invite migrants explicitly to garden meetings and plenary sessions. Be careful: some people may be overwhelmed or deterred from being involved in grassroots discussion and decision-making processes.

→ [Detailed information on communication can be found in Training module 3](#)

[Communication channels](#)

- Execute direct communication in small group conversations directly in the garden.
- Use bulletin boards where the most important information is easily understandable **in the country language or multilingual languages**. Translation apps on smartphones can be helpful.



- Agree in the group on a joint social messenger app and how to keep in contact with people who won't use it.

Host diverse activities to get people actively involved in the intercultural garden



- In order to establish the intercultural garden as a place for all, the community open up and think of activities beyond gardening. **Social integration needs exchange and meeting-possibilities at a face to face level.**
- Quick ideas for activities. Show movies, host concerts, readings, workshops and open discussions; activities for children; offer uninvolved neighbours a day to use

the garden for recreation and barbecues; create regular cooking-days, where the gardeners can cook delicacies of their home countries; invite beekeepers to install some hives; invite language schools and other relevant initiatives that may be of interest to migrants and refugees;... **There are no limits to the range of options!!!**

→ [Good examples can be found here](#)

4. Develop and sustain your successful project

- Durable garden planning.
- Budgeting and continuous funding.
- Encourage new groups to be part of the garden and to get involved in tasks together.
- Build up new cooperation and networks.



Photo from Cornelia Suhan



Durable garden planning

- Intercultural gardens are participatory-projects. Discuss and decide together how the gardeners and the group would like to use the garden and how the garden should develop further. Think of questions such as: Who will take care of the garden during vacation time? What happens with the harvest?
- Is there a garden technique the group likes to follow? e.g.: permaculture,



intercropping.

→ **Permaculture gardening**

- Use the winter-season to re-evaluate the garden-infrastructure when it is less busy. e.g.: Is all equipment in order? Are paths between the beds wide enough? Do you need to Increase/decrease number of beds? Is group communication running satisfactorily? Are activities or events well attended?

Budgeting and continuous funding

- Create annual budget plans. Upcoming investment and running costs; upcoming cost for specific activities; costs of garden coordination; personnel costs.
- Include all eventualities in the group to avoid unforeseen expenses.
- Ask experienced cooperation-partners, in other garden-projects, politicians or other organisations for tips on where to apply for funding.
- Search the internet : there are newsletters and funding-databases; look for suitable foundations, relevant announcements and awards.
- Formally adhere strictly to the specifications in the funding process; however, do not hesitate to contact the authorities or sponsors directly by telephone.

Encourage new groups to be part of the garden and to get involved in coordinative tasks

- Intercultural gardens are community gardens! Encourage neighbourhood groups, schools, kindergartens, senior facilities, family-groups to use the garden and be part of it.
- **Organise workshops for schoolchildren**
- Visitors or interested parties can have a garden bed sponsored or can use the garden for meetings, courses or celebrations.
- **Use own activities for external presentation (e.g. choral singing)**
- Enable local community colleges, language schools or health centres to organise regular activities



Build up new cooperation and networks

Networks and cooperation are essential, in order to

- Make the intercultural garden even better known and to attract more gardeners, garden users and supporters.
- Learn, where you can get, share or lend material.
- Get to know if you could use rooms of others during the winter or for meetings, cooking-events or other activities.
- Be informed and take actively part in neighbourhood/community-issues.
- Be part of the supporter-circle for refugees and migrants; activate support if needed.

Analyse which kind of networks are already existing and decide where you want and can be part. Think of your time-resources and the benefits you and your project will get out of it!

Assessment of competence

Questions for self-reflection

- What are the reasons why my intercultural garden should exist and what topics and groups of people do we want to deal with in the garden?
- Which interest groups are affected by the operation of the intercultural garden and are there competing goals of these groups?
- Which volunteers, associations or other stakeholders can actively support the management and organisation of the intercultural garden?
- What additional skills does the garden management or organisation team need to develop in order to maintain the intercultural garden in a sustainable way?

Short knowledge test for garden managers Did you understand the training module?

1. With which of the following statements do you agree?

- Intercultural gardens are “neighbourhood-projects”
- In intercultural gardens virtual communication system can replace personal contact.
- Social integration needs exchange and meeting-possibilities face to face.

2. In a multicultural environment, there is greater diversity of learning, experience and cultures.

- True
- False

3. Staffing is often a challenge in intercultural community gardens. What strategies can be applied to improve the personnel situation?

- Assigning volunteers in double shifts
- Work together with volunteer agencies and relevant platforms
- Offer internships and get connected with schools, universities and other educational institutions.

4. Networks and cooperation are essential for intercultural gardens in order to assign the most inconvenient tasks to externals.

- True
- False

References & Further links

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