



Urban gardening is productive in many different respects. Photo: Agnes Lyche Melvær / Museums in Akershus

Urban gardening contributes to health and quality of life

Participating in a neighbourhood and community garden has positive social and emotional impacts, as well as the satisfaction derived from growing food. Adults and teenagers participating in gardening activities at Linderud farm in Oslo report positive experiences most commonly related to social networks, growing food, feelings/emotions and aesthetics.

Urban gardening is gaining increasing popularity across Europe. Like other kinds of green spaces in towns and cities, areas where crops are grown provide numerous environmental benefits. For example, the earth can soak up water – a valuable service to help prevent flooding where other surfaces are sealed by roads and buildings. And garden areas can provide havens for wildlife, such as birds and insects.

Yet areas where crops are grown may also provide social benefits, perhaps to a greater degree than many other types of green spaces. Neighbourhood and community gardens attract the same group of people into a relatively small space on a regular basis. Although these people may have very different lives outside the garden, when they come to this space, they all share a common interest: growing food. Is this their main motivation? We set

out to explore what it is that people value about the Linderud neighbourhood and community garden in Oslo. We wanted to know what kinds of social interactions take place, what encourages (or hinders) interactions, and what measures people thought might improve this green space in the city.

Linderud neighbourhood and community garden in Oslo is a Living Lab in the EU Innovation Action ‘Edible Cities Network’. Coordinated by the city administration’s Agency for Urban Environment, the Living Lab has been implemented through co-creation with public and private institutions, enterprises and individuals. The Living Lab includes different Edible City Solutions, namely a variety of urban food gardening initiatives: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), business-oriented test beds for market gardens and social entrepreneurs, a wild flower meadow from locally sourced wild plants, an educational garden for the local gardening school, and a social garden for interested neighbours. As part of the Innovation Action, economic, social and environmental impacts of Edible City Solutions are assessed.

THE SPLOT METHOD

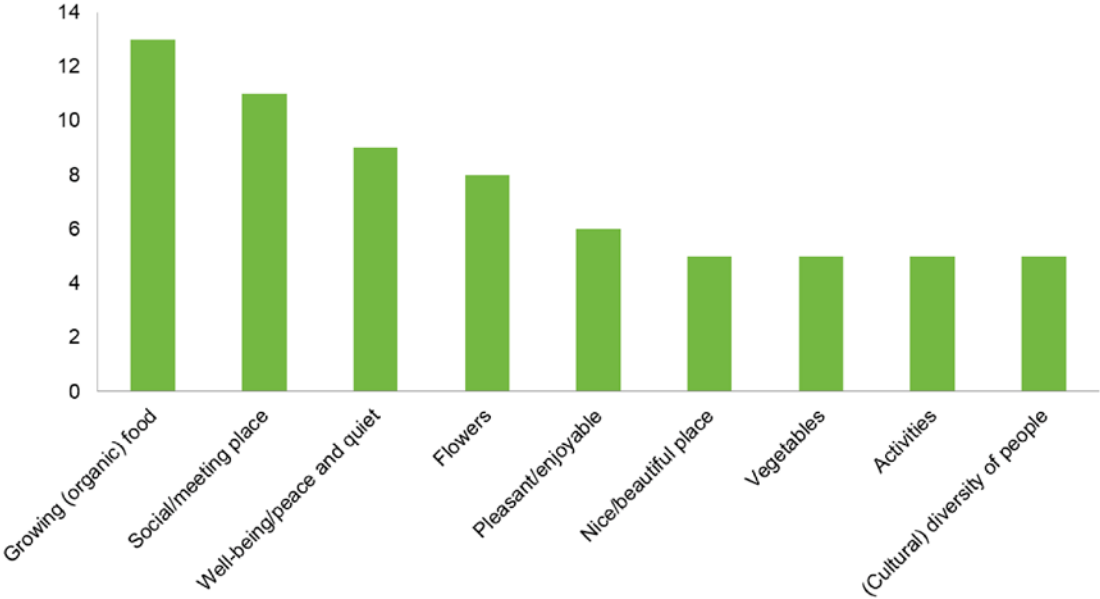
The method we used has the catchy name “SPLOT”, which stands for Space, Person, Learning, Observation and Tracks, developed by anthropologist Aina Landsverk Hagen at OsloMet. It is a highly visual method that encourages participants to express their thoughts and feelings through drawing and writing. In addition to the documentation, or splot, an important

part of the process is the observation of the participants and their interactions with each other and with the space around them. Finally, the researcher and participants walk together around the space in question. The participants use their usual tracks and show the spaces that they have spoken of when drawing the splot. This allows the researcher to observe and experience the space for themselves, enhancing learning and insights. At Linderud, a total of 18 participants were asked first about their positive associations with the garden, and then asked to make a new splot expressing their dreams for the future of the garden. The study was conducted in connection with an open day (10 participants) and a volunteer work day (8 participants) in September and October 2020.

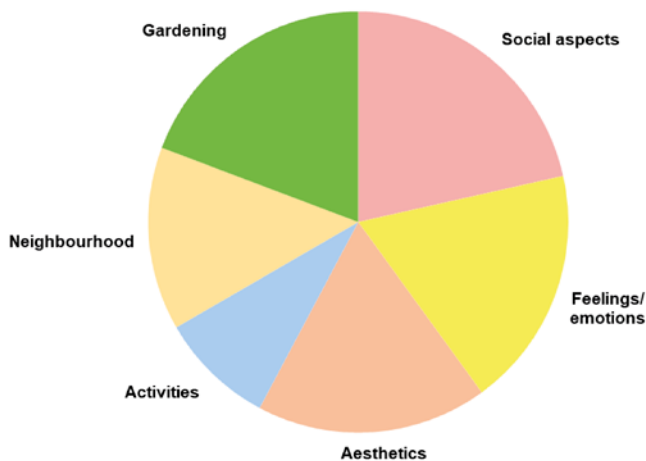
THEMES OF ASSOCIATION

The first step in analysing the splots involved a count of the number of times various themes were mentioned. The most common theme was growing (organic) food, closely followed by social/meeting place. Also, well-being/peace and quiet was mentioned by more than half of the participants.

To provide a more complete picture, all of the words used were grouped into a few main categories. These were gardening, social aspects, feelings/emotions, aesthetics, neighbourhood and activities. Again, gardening and social aspects were the most common keywords, followed by feelings/emotions and aesthetics.



Positive associations mentioned most commonly.



Positive associations mentioned according to categories.

DIFFERING POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS AMONG ADULTS AND YOUTH

The sample comprised 13 adults, four teenagers and one child. The adults were CSA shareholders, board members, employees or entrepreneurs in the garden, while the youth had worked for money in the garden for some time during the summer months, but also volunteered. Growing (organic) food and social/meeting place were among the five most frequently mentioned positive associations in both groups. Adults more frequently mentioned produce (vegetables and flowers) and pleasure, whereas quiet, kind gardening companions and aesthetics were more important among the youth.

SOCIAL NETWORK

Social aspects were mentioned as important by respondents from both groups, for example, as a place to make new friends, a sense of community and social inclusiveness. Particularly for the youth, the garden is a place without the usual distinctions

among groups from school, thus enabling them to extend their individual social network. Adults stressed the possibility for strengthening relations among neighbours, even motivating some to cross a nearby highway to reach the garden and thus meet people from the other side.

PRODUCE AND GROWING

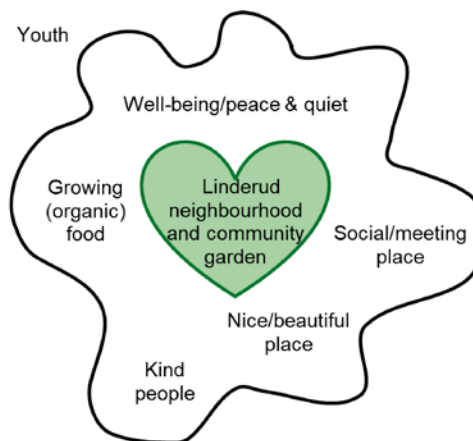
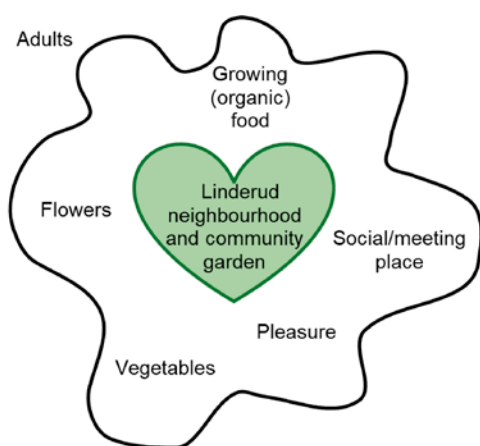
The gardening and productive aspect was also important for both groups. However, the adults focused more on its organic nature and sustainability than the teenagers. Other positive aspects of gardening that were mentioned were its character as a joint voluntary activity, learning aspects, and creativity. Particularly teenagers mentioned a stress-reducing aspect as well.



Social aspects are highest valued by all participants. Photo: Agnes Lyche Melvær / Museums in Akershus

FEELINGS/EMOTIONS AND AESTHETICS

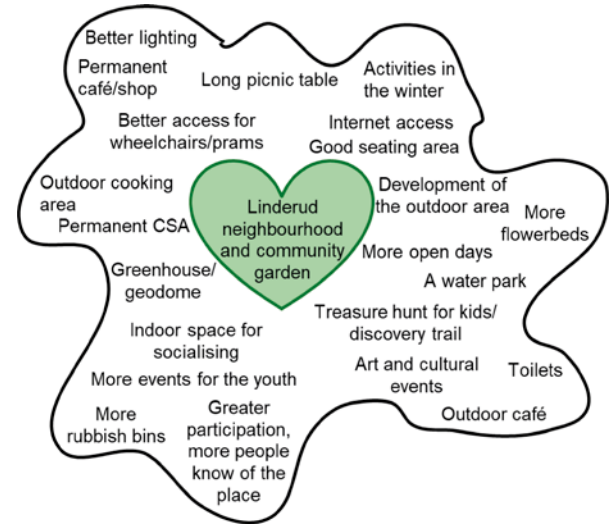
Several participants mentioned quiet or peace. The beauty of flowers and other aspects within the garden seem to contribute to this. Several teenagers reported reduced stress levels when coming to the garden, especially after school.



Summary plots of positive associations mentioned most commonly among adults and youth.



Flowers create beauty and contribute to a feeling of quiet and peace.
Photo: Stephanie Degenhardt / Agency for Urban Environment, City of Oslo



Summary plot of desires for the future development of the gardening project.

MULTIPLE DREAMS

A total of 23 desires for the future development of the gardening project were collected. The most frequently mentioned ideas were an indoor permanent shop or café with a room for common social activities, and a greenhouse/geodome. Both of these would contribute to an extended garden season for many, as well as being social meeting places. Adults were particularly interested in a room for gathering.

MONITORING EFFECTS OVER TIME

With regard to future political strategies on urban development, it is considered important that social as well as economic and environmental benefits of urban gardening projects are documented and

monitored over time. Based on the results of the SPLOT-analysis, we suggest Participation, Feeling part of your community, and Local food consumption as three highly relevant indicators for assessing the impact of the Edible City Solutions in the Linderud neighbourhood and community garden.

REFERENCE

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