



Social aspects are most often mentioned as a motivation for participating in the garden. (Photo: Stephanie Degenhardt / City of Oslo)

Monitoring people's motivations to participate in an urban neighbourhood and community garden

Participation in Linderud neighbourhood and community garden in Oslo is mostly motivated by social aspects and by the desire to grow organic food.

Public health science has clearly documented that participation in voluntary work and social inclusion can contribute to increased quality of life. In 2020, two master's students at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) investigated the significance of Linderud neighbourhood and community garden for the health and quality of life of its users. They gained insight into various motivating factors that the participants themselves defined as significant for their involvement in the garden. Based on this,

we conducted a similar survey in 2021 to find out if there were any changes in motivations and future wishes.

THE SPLOT-METHOD

We used the dialogue-based method "splot" to examine different motivations for use of and future wishes for the neighbourhood and community garden. Splot stands for Space, Person, Learning, Observation and Tracks. The method was developed



Pumpkins grown without use of pesticides, to be harvested 'straight from the ground'. (Photo: Pia C. Kristiansen)

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, we wrote fieldnotes to record our observations. In connection with a market day and a bonfire event in September and October 2021 the participants were first asked about their positive associations with the garden, and then asked to express their dreams for the future of the garden. In total, 18 users of the garden participated, of which eight were under 18 years of age and ten were over 18 years. Only one participant had taken part in the survey in 2020.

MOTIVATIONS FOR USING THE GARDEN

The first step in analysing the plots involved a count of the number of times various themes were mentioned. To provide a more complete picture, all the words used were grouped into six main categories. These categories were, listed from most to least frequent: social aspects, gardening, activities, aesthetics, feelings and neighbourhood.

“Social aspects” motivated most people to come to Linderud neighbourhood and community garden. The participants mentioned that the garden was a great opportunity to connect with people and be part of a community. It was described as positive that the people were of different ages and had different international backgrounds.

Words categorized as related to “Gardening” and “Aesthetics” were also frequently mentioned. Many considered it important that the vegetables were free from pesticides and came straight from the ground. Some participants said that it felt nice to take a break from the computer and get closer to nature. Learning about planting and gardening from others was also emphasized. For some users, the colours and smells of the garden evoked memories of their homeland, which relates to “Aesthetics” and “Feelings”.

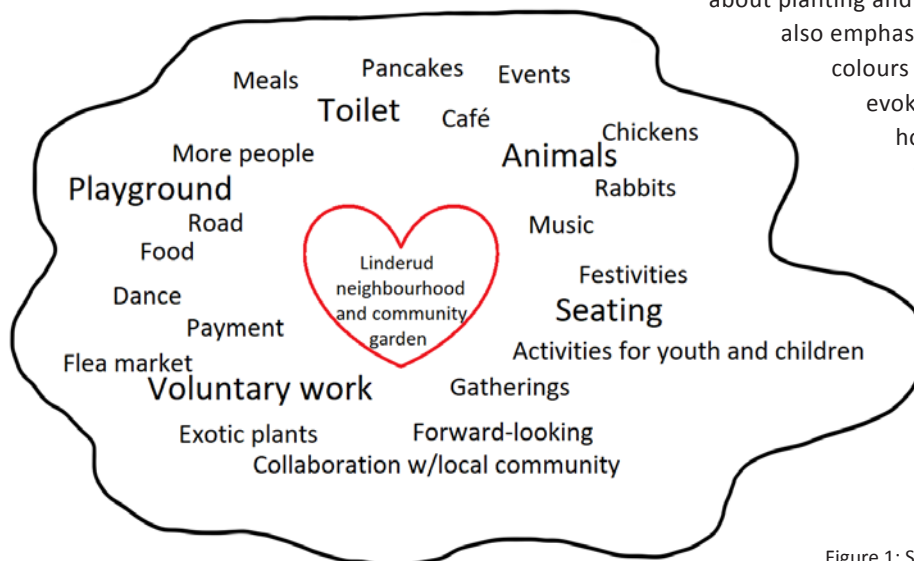


Figure 1: Plot-illustration of future wishes

FUTURE WISHES

Many wishes for the garden were articulated. One third of the participants wished there was a proper toilet at the garden. Another desire was for a playground for children close to the garden. Animals like chickens and rabbits were mentioned. This is a new factor that was not mentioned in 2020. Some users wished for more social events, for example events where they could prepare and eat meals together, using vegetables from the garden. There was also a desire for more and better information about the events in the garden.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 2020 AND 2021

We have not found any major changes compared to the 2020 survey, but there were some small differences. For example, in 2020, the design of the area and its historical significance were mentioned as important, but these were not mentioned in 2021. In 2021, home-grown vegetables and climate positivity seemed to be considered more important than in 2020.

The 2020 season was characterized by the start-up of the garden and preparation of the field. By 2021, the site was more established, more fully cultivated and there were more events, possibly attracting more people from further afield. This may be why there seemed to be a slightly greater focus on activities in 2021, and somewhat less focus on the neighbourhood compared to 2020.

The infection control measures to stop the corona-pandemic may have influenced people's reflections on and use of the garden in both years. Lots of Norwegians have participated in school and work activities to a large degree on digital platforms. This may raise the importance of natural surroundings and a better social network. The desire for toilets may be because the members were spending more time in



Flowers contribute to aesthetic quality. They can also evoke memories that trigger positive feelings. (Photo: Benedicte S. Nilssen)

the garden. In the summer of 2021, there were few who left Norway for holidays, so maybe the garden was visited more throughout the summer.

MEMBER-CHECK OF FINDINGS

At an evaluation meeting for garden members in November, we used an on-site online survey to check whether meeting participants agreed with our findings. None of our plot-participants attended this meeting. We first presented our findings and then asked, "To what extent do our findings correspond with your thoughts about Linderud neighbourhood and community garden". Ten of the 17 respondents

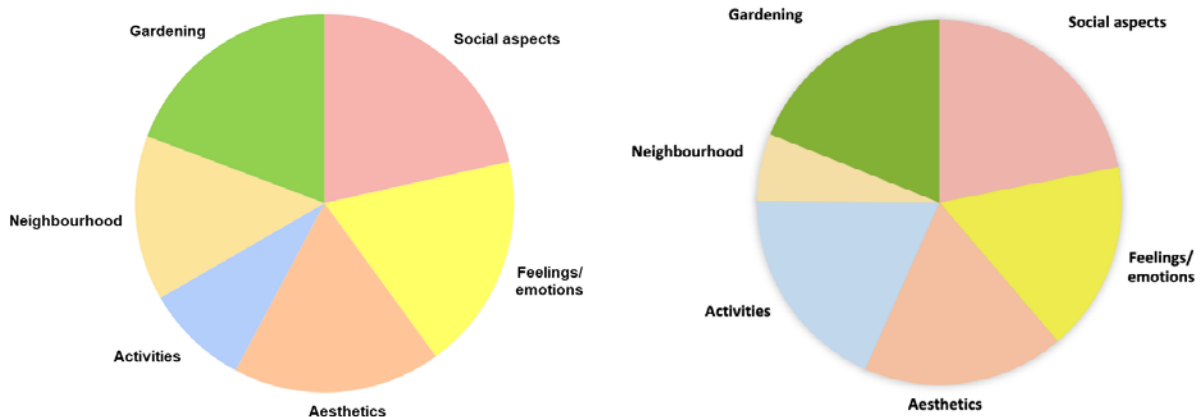


Figure 2: Main categories of motivations in 2020 (left, from Valle et al. 2021) and 2021 (right).



Figure 3: Member-check: On a scale from one to five, "My participation in the garden has led to ...". Numbers show the average for the 17 members.

agreed to a large extent, seven agreed to some degree, and no one answered 'to a small degree' or 'not at all'. The member-check indicates that our findings are valid.

We also asked the meeting participants to rate how far they agree with a set of statements about their personal experiences with the garden (Figure 3), where 1 indicates agreement to a small extent and 5 to a large extent. Contact with nature and an increased feeling of mastery were rated highest. Financial gain was rated lowest. It should be noted that garden members pay for their share in the garden.

MONITORING EFFECTS OVER TIME

With regards 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 our experiences, we recommend an annual questionnaire survey, in addition to plots or focus group interviews to monitor user motivation and perspectives from year to year. The results of the splot-analysis indicate that

social aspects, activities and gardening are particularly important aspects affecting the impact of the Linderud neighbourhood and community garden.

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