



Participants working in the Prinzessinnengarten community garden at the New St. Jacobi Cemetery in Berlin-Neukölln. © Nomadisch Grün / Prinzessinnengarten

Can Action Days in a community garden contribute to social integration and cohesion?

The Prinzessinnengarten community garden uses Cultural and Culinary Action Days to invite diverse participants to come together to grow food, learn about sustainable urban agriculture and participate in other cultural and culinary activities. The desire to shape one's own environment is a major motivation for participating, along with a thirst for knowledge and social exchange.

The Prinzessinnengarten is a community garden at the New St. Jacobi Cemetery in Berlin-Neukölln, which invites people to garden with others and experience nature. Children, youth and adults from the neighborhood, and all other interested people can participate in the design of the garden and gain experience in the local, organic cultivation of useful plants.

The main goal of the community garden is to provide educational and participatory opportunities. Activities

include sowing, planting, harvesting seeds, processing and preserving vegetables, learning about keeping bees or building a worm composting system, and learning about and contributing to collaborative urban habitat design. By trying things out together and sharing experiences and knowledge, participants rediscover old cultural techniques and acquire new knowledge about biodiversity, urban ecology, climate adaptation, recycling, and sustainable urban living.



Planting of mint for tea production as an Action Day activity at the community garden. © Nomadisch Grün / Prinzessinnengarten

The City of Berlin hosts a Living Lab in the EU Innovation Action 'Edible Cities Network'. Coordinated by the NGO Nomadisch Grün / Prinzessinnengarten, the Living Lab has been implemented through co-creation with public and private institutions, enterprises and individuals. The Living Lab includes a variety of urban food gardening initiatives, referred to as Edible City Solutions. As part of the Innovation Action, economic, social and environmental impacts of Edible City Solutions are assessed.

CULTURAL AND CULINARY ACTION DAYS

The Action Days are designed to bring together ideas and suggestions for engaging the intercultural neighborhood of Neukölln in a practical, flexible and easily accessible way. They take place monthly on Saturdays from April to October. On an Action Day, several activities can take place simultaneously, such as gardening and crafting, or other cultural and culinary activities. The city district of Neukölln is a diverse neighborhood, with people of different cultural and social backgrounds. Approaching already established groups and associations in the neighborhood and

developing joint activities seems to be a good way to emphasize that the garden is a place where everyone is welcome.

ACTIVITIES: GARDENING, CULTURAL AND CULINARY EVENTS

The activities can be divided into three main categories: gardening, cultural and culinary activities. Gardening takes place in raised beds in the community garden, in a vegetable field and in a greenhouse. Action Days have proven a useful format to mobilize many hands for certain tasks. These gardening activities are integrated into a parallel program of cultural and culinary activities, such as musical and artistic performances, preparing vegetables and herbs from the garden, or harvesting mint plants to make tea. In order to have a stronger impact on the neighborhood, activities can also take place outside the garden, e.g. in the nearby streets.

MONITORING: QUESTIONNAIRES AND INDICATORS

To assess the effects of the Action Days, the team managing the garden carry out monitoring. Monitoring involves collecting data in a standardized way at multiple points in time. Good monitoring data can

provide feedback about what works well, what is not so good, and the factors that affect people’s participation. This information can help in the design of even better Action Days in the future. Monitoring must be manageable and practical. In particular, if good and relatively complete data are to be obtained, monitoring needs to be (1) unobtrusive and expeditious, and (2) easily done by people with different abilities. To meet these requirements, a short, written questionnaire was used to gather data from all participants at the Action Days.

Several indicators were chosen for the monitoring. In order to capture the “reach” of the Action Days, the team asked whether the participants were residents of the neighborhood. The questionnaire deliberately did not define a geographical area, so that the answers would reflect the participants’ own perspective of “neighborhood”.

In addition, the motivation of the participants was recorded. Here, different options could be selected: (1) Knowledge building (“I want to learn something (new) / deepen my knowledge”), (2) Action for the environment (“I want to become active and help shape my environment”), 3) Social exchange (“I want to exchange ideas with other people / get to know new people”) and (4) Other (free text input).

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AND OUTREACH

Action Day activities and participation were documented for the first time in 2021. There were seven Action Days, and a total of 168 questionnaires were completed. The Covid-19 pandemic probably led to a lower

level of participation than would have occurred in a non-pandemic situation.

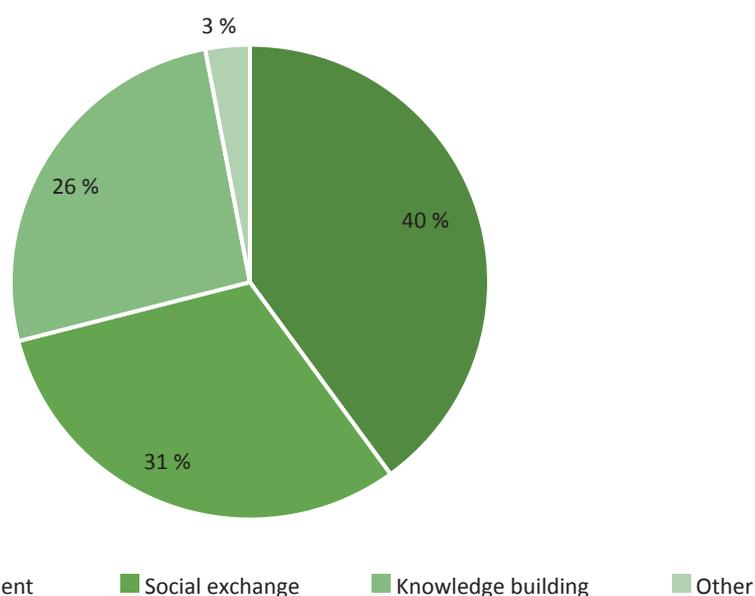
Of the 168 documented participants, just over half answered that they were resident in the neighborhood. The activities thus attract both residents of the neighborhood and people who do not live in the immediate area.

MOTIVATIONS TO PARTICIPATE

The predominant motivation to participate in the Action Days was ‘Action for the environment’. The second strongest motivation was ‘Social exchange’, closely followed by ‘Knowledge building’. In addition, five ‘Other’ reasons were given: “Interest in climate protection”, “Because I love the Prinzessinnengarten and always enjoy spending time here”, “I love being in nature”, “Nothing beats the bread we make here”, “Tradition: baking group has existed for 10 years”.

The questionnaire answers indicate that the desire for opportunities to shape one’s own environment plays a major motivating role, which also entails the experience of self-efficacy. This can also have a positive influence on social cohesion and can be seen as a contribution to democracy building: Participants experience the possibility of positively influencing their own environment and have their ideas heard and valued, and possibly implemented.

Knowledge building and social exchange are also strong motivators that move participants to engage in activities. The community garden with its Action Days



Motivations to participate in Action Days (total 168 questionnaires).



Harvesting zucchini on an Action Day at the community garden. © Nomadisch Grün / Prinzessinnengarten

opens a space where people come together to experience participation, exchange and learning. This makes it clear that all of these factors are important components in ensuring the success of the Action Days for a diversity of participants.

As part of the social fabric in the neighborhood, the community garden thus contributes to integration, mutual acceptance and commitment. We expect that increased documentation and recognition of how urban gardening can influence social development will lead to such green spaces gaining in importance and becoming indispensable for the cities of the future.



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