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COMMUNITY GARDENS IN POST-SOCIALIST HUNGARY: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

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Abstract

Interest of scholars in community gardens has skyrocketed recently. However, little is known about how community gardens are adopted in post-socialist countries and what modifications took place. The present article aims to identify spatial differences and management practices of gardens organized in Hungary from a critical geography perspective. The paper presents the findings of a nationwide research based on online research and interviewing including 44 community gardens. Results show that in contrast to the gardens in the USA, these located in Hungary are organized on the peripheries (of cities) and local governments play a significant role in organizing and managing them.

Key words

urban agriculture • top-down development • urban renewal • Hungary

Introduction

In recent years interest in urban agriculture – including community gardens – in Hungary has increased significantly, and particularly among political decision-makers. Although community gardens have a short history in Hungary and are one of the newest elements of the urban fabric, the number of garden projects has soared since their first appearance in 2011 which strongly influenced the city landscape. Politicians, activists and gardeners celebrated the return of food production to urban areas, their contribution to greening, sustainability,

food security and social cohesion. We believe, their spread is partly a result of their incorporation to neoliberal urban strategies. As one of the key figures of Hungarian community garden movement stated: “*After they won the local elections (the elected mayors of districts of Budapest in 2010 October) (...) I told them we should start community gardens. Everyone was really positive, they replied soon from a high level, usually the chief architect or the head of the green department.*” (Int. 01, 2CC)¹.

¹ Interview quotations are completed with information on the gardens. It is explained in details in the methodology section.

The notable interest of local governments in the idea of community gardening reflects the changed attitudes of authorities. In 2010 a new political regime emerged, with neoliberal economic goals and strong presence in and sometimes authoritarian control over economy, society and public space (Udvarhelyi, 2014).

The positive interpretation of community gardens is dominant in daily and scientific discourses. However, urban agriculture – including community gardens – is a conflicting area (Egerer & Fairbairn, 2018) and has received critical comments from scholars. Critical researches emphasized the role of urban agriculture in neoliberal urban policies (Quastel, 2009; Classens, 2015) by outsourcing public space maintenance (Knigge, 2009; Rosol, 2010), or greenwashing development projects (Tornaghi, 2014; Kumnig, 2017), advancing gentrification (Smith & DeFillips, 1999; Voicu & Been, 2006) and increasing social exclusion or oppression (Pudup, 2008; Eizenberg & Fenster, 2015). As McClintock (2014) emphasized, urban agriculture is both radical and neoliberal by nature and *serves different, sometimes contradictory functions for different actors and institutions* (McClintock, 2014: 15). Therefore, urban agriculture and community gardens include both characteristics.

To understand deeper the nature of community gardens, the paper focuses on two aspects. First, it replies to Guitart, Pickering, and Byrne, (2012) call for community garden research in various socio-political settings to reduce imbalances within the literature. The literature mostly focuses on gardens in disadvantaged neighborhoods in North American settings, while the research made on the ones located in Europe is limited, especially considering the post-socialist countries (Borčić, Cvitanović, & Lukić, 2016; Spilková, 2017; Trendov, 2018). Second, the paper intends to explore what modifications took place in the community gardens as a result of their adaptation in a different socio-spatial and political context. Therefore, we present the findings of a nation-wide research

in Hungary. Hungary as a post-socialist, Central European country possesses characteristics that might provide new insights and understanding of community gardens and unveil specificities of local processes that shape them. Therefore, the article addresses the following research questions: (1) How and why community gardens in Hungary differ from the North American ones? We decided to compare Hungarian community gardens to the North American because of two reasons; First, Hungary provides a largely different socio-spatial setting for community garden research. Second, community gardens projects are soaring in the country, but little is known about their effects. While garden organizers in Hungary intend to reach the same social, economic or environmental outcomes as the ones in North America, we assume that it cannot be achieved without significant modification of the outcomes, as a result of different socio-spatial setting and political culture. Our second research question intends to explore (2) what is the role of the local governments in forming the community garden movement? We argue that local governments play a key role in organizing community gardens in Hungary and this leads to the modification of their functions.

The paper starts with a review of the community gardening literature, including the historical background to position Hungarian gardens. Moreover, it explains how the perception of community gardening changed in scientific literature over time. The paper continues with the presentation of research context and methods. At the end, empirical data is critically analyzed and main results are discussed.

Theoretical background: The evolution of community gardening – a historical approach

Community gardens have been well researched and widely explored in North America. The literature might be divided into two parts. The first interpretation sees them as an urban grassroots movement (Reynolds,

2008), rooted in counter planning culture (Certomá & Notteboom, 2017) and considers them as expressions of citizens who disagree with local and global political trends and stand out for environmental and social justice (Schmelzkopf, 2002; Reynolds, 2014). This discourse labels gardens with *civil activism* and *informality*. The second interpretation is more critical and understands gardens as a part of neoliberal urban strategies (Rosol, 2012; Tornaghi, 2014), serving the existing power relations and means to greenwash or legitimize unequal and unjust urban processes. However, McClintock (2014) argues that gardens are both grassroots and neoliberal depending on the context. To understand the dichotomy that defines the perception of gardens, a historical overview will be done to demonstrate the changing nature of gardens and their interpretations.

Scholars agree that community gardens originated in North America and appeared simultaneously in the United States of America and Canada (Bassett, 1981; Cosgrove, 1998; Lawson, 2005; Eizenberg, 2013). Although McKay (2011) argues that community gardens may not be so closely linked with North America, the authors of this paper also agree with the dominant interpretation. However, we emphasize that the first community gardens were largely inspired by European allotments. Due to better documentation, in the review we will follow the case of the USA.

The first community gardens were organized in 1893 as a response to an economic

crisis, when the mayor of Detroit allocated vacant lots to the poor. Community gardens shared many similarities with different types of urban agriculture initiatives, especially with European allotments this time; however, their temporality, the logic of community organizing, and the size of the cultivated land differentiated them. The role of local governments remained significant in the development of gardens during their early history, and gardens were organized top-down by public authorities during the times of economic and social crisis (Lawson, 2005) till the 1970s. Bassett (1981) captured the linkage between crisis and the presence of urban gardens and differentiated seven eras (Fig. 1). He also noted that the number of gardens increases and declines parallel to crisis.

The recession of the 1970s had significant impact on the North American cities which opened a new phase of community gardens. The crisis resulted in complex challenges. Deindustrialization, degradation of urban environment, unemployment, social polarization and conflicts between citizens and state emerged. However, urban and social decay were not new phenomena, as from the 1950s American cities faced with urban crisis (Sugrue, 2014) and struggled with poverty, ghettoization, suburbanization, slumming and urban vacant lots, and the deterioration of urban public spaces (Jacobs, 1961; Schneider, 2008; Boustan, 2010). In this context, urban gardening was renewed by citizens on expropriated neglected spaces, to challenge crisis and



Figure 1. The community garden eras and their core values

Source: Based on Bassett’s (1981) work, completed with grassroots gardens and neoliberal gardens.

renew neighborhoods. Grassroots guerrilla gardens and later formal community gardens were organized. Political activism was rare, although in some cases it was linked to the Black Nationalist movement (White, 2011). From this period, gardens no longer resembled the European allotments, as the creation of the gardens, the logic of community organizing, the community nature, and the size of the gardens differed.

But why urban gardening became a good practice to address crisis? Scholars has recently proved that community gardens have positive environmental, social and economic effects. Gardening contributes to family savings and food security (Castro & Harman, 2011; Corrigan, 2011; Milbourne, 2012). It strengthens communities, increases social capital (Kingsley & Townstead, 2006; Augustina & Beilin, 2011) and helps the inclusion of different ethnic groups (Harris, Minniss, & Somerset, 2014) which helps individuals to share the burden of economic difficulties. Gardens are accessible for all and support more than just distribution of social services (Knigge, 2009). Besides, gardening helps individuals to maintain their health (Armstrong, 2000; Alaimo, Packnet, Miles, & Kruger, 2008; Pudup, 2008). Therefore, gardens are useful tools to challenge crisis.

However, in those cities that shortly recovered from the crisis, local municipalities perceived community gardens as an unwanted activity. In New York hundreds of garden plots were handed over to investors. The external pressure turned gardeners into activists who developed social organizations. Through the mobilizing capacity and knowledge, gardeners opened discourses about urban development. They articulated the right to the city (Stæheli, Mitchell, & Gibson, 2002; Harvey, 2012). The core values became cooperation and solidarity, opposite of capitalism, individualism and competition (Eizenberg, 2012). Gardeners formed coalitions to stop state power and save gardens from destruction (Schmeltzkopf, 2002). As Ernwein (2017, 252) pointed out *gardening was no more a question of flowers and vegetables* but started

to mean right to the city and opposition to neoliberal politics.

Community gardens had a clear geographical distribution into the 1970s. But due to the development of global networks, gardens dissolved in the globe during the 1980s and the 1990s. This resulted in the arrival of first community gardens in Europe (Milbourne, 2012) and Australia (Thorton, 2017); nevertheless, their number was increasing only from the late 1990s. The spatial evolution indicates that gardens became permanent elements of cities with various socio-spatial and political contexts. This indicates that the key drivers of their appearance are independent from economic crisis and their proliferation is the consequence of other reasons.

We argue, their geographical spread is partly the result of their acceptance as a city development tool (Rosol, 2012; Ernwein, 2017). However, radical bottom-up gardens are still present. The increase of local governments interest in community gardening resulted in the creation of city-scaled programs (Domene & Saurí, 2007; Scheromm, 2015). The monetary and technical support for gardens was welcomed by many activists. However, as Rosol (2012) showed in case of Berlin, this meant a shift from social movements towards gardening as a form of voluntarism. She explains that the local government organized gardens to engage citizens in public space maintenance and outsourced governmental tasks. Therefore, gardening was incorporated into neoliberal policies (Rosol, 2012). According to scholars (Pudup, 2008; Drake, 2014) this transformed the values associated with gardening and as a result grassroots nature disappears and community and social goals fades.

Furthermore, growth oriented municipal policies have discovered community gardens to foster capital accumulation (Perkins, 2010; Ernwein, 2017). Gardens are attractive green spaces organized on vacant lots. Urban vacant lots are hot spots of illegal activities in many cities and are overgrown with vegetation. As they turn into gardens, the local aesthetic quality increases and illegal

activities decrease (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001; Snelgrove, Michael, Waliczek, & Zajicek, 2004; Gorham, Waliczek, Snelgrove, & Zajicek, 2009). These effects contribute to the repossession of public place and improve the neighborhood image. Better image and safe public spaces articulate the livability of the district (Gehl, 2010) and increase property prices (Voicu & Been, 2008). Therefore, gardens are often utilized by developers to intensify gentrification or promote sustainability of projects (Dooling, 2009; Quastel, 2009; Markham, 2014; Kumnig 2017). As the entrepreneurial city evolved in the 1990s (Harvey, 1989), community gardens became important elements in the redevelopment of urban spaces.

The temporal approach to the evolution of community gardens provides an important lesson. Historically, community gardens were linked to North America, and firstly appeared as top-down responses to crisis. But in the 1970s, citizens became initiators, and new values and ideas were added to gardening, which dominated discourses for several decades. However, the adaptation of community gardens to entrepreneurial urbanism resulted in the appearance of top-down governed gardens linked to urban redevelopment projects. In addition, the geographical spread of gardens supported the emergence of new forms of gardens. We conclude that the neo-liberalization of community gardens is a key phenomenon brought by the 2000s.

Context and methods

Context of the Hungarian urban development

To better understand the differences of community gardens in Hungary and North America, it is important to overview the development of Hungarian urban context. Later, we will try to confirm that the socio-spatial context of a country has significant effect on the adaptation of community gardens.

The development of Hungarian cities is determined by the socialist past. Cities had different spatial pattern and socio-economic

structure (Kovács & Herfert, 2012) than the ones in West, because of central-planning, collective ownership and the lack of land rent (Sýkora, 2009). Although the socialist state aimed to ensure homogeneity, its planning practices resulted in increased spatial differentiation of cities (Musil, 1980; Gentile, Tamaru, & Van Kempen, 2012). Modernist planning ideas were key tools in reaching spatial equality. Numerous socialist high-rise neighborhoods emerged as green field investments on the peripheries (Van Kempen, Dekker, Hall, & Tosics, 2005) and the deconcentration of cities became dominant. However, the socialist cities remained compact in comparison to the North American ones (Sýkora, 2009).

The development of large housing estates (LHE) was a result of forced urbanization. Cities were favored by planning and the resettlement of rural population increased demand for housing. LHE districts functioned as suburban villages with primary housing function, experienced a lack of recreational and cultural services and low quality of green areas. This resulted in the disintegration of society (Szelényi, 1983). Bottom up initiatives for diversifying the functions of public space could not appear because of strong state control. But later, the state started gardening programs to improve self-sufficiency and intensify citizen interactions.

After the demise of socialism, the socio, economic and political condition of Hungary transformed the drivers of city development. The role of local governments became significant in planning again. CBDs and the inner city became places of rehabilitation projects. The transition zone was hit by deindustrialization, plots and buildings turned vacant. LHE neighborhoods experienced physical downgrading and social challenges (Kovács & Herfert, 2012). Low-quality green areas of LHE districts were improved in aesthetics and functions, but the densification and development of new services meant a constant pressure (Šuška & Stasíková, 2013; Kristiánová, 2016). Suburbanization (Kok & Kovács, 1999) and gentrification emerged. Rehabilitation

projects often resulted in conflicts over public space (Nagy, 2005; Boros, Fabula, Horváth, & Kovács, 2016; Fabula, Boros, Kovács, Horváth, & Pál, 2017). Overall, the transition triggered the fragmentation of urban fabric with similar characteristics to postmodern urbanization (Dear & Flusty, 1998).

To sum up, a new capitalist city emerged with remnants of the socialist. The transition left many problems unsolved. The massive number of LHE neighborhoods, the inadequate quality of social and environmental services, the weak social ties of residents and the raised number of urban brown fields and vacant lots created a situation similar to the one in the USA in which gardens were used to address challenges. This is confirmed by scholars who identified that community gardens organized in post-socialist settings were created usually on brown fields or vacant lots, on the purpose of community building and social inclusion (Spilková, 2017; Trendov, 2018). Moreover, the reallocation of responsibility and planning to local governments hands fostered the engagement of authorities in the creation of community gardens.

Research design and methods

The article aims to answer how and why community gardens in Hungary differ from the North American ones and to discover what is the role of local governments in forming community gardens. To answer these questions, we draw upon the results of a nationwide research.

A definition of community gardens was created. A clear reference point was needed to compare gardens in North America and Hungary. Additionally, we have experienced the proliferation of gardening initiatives that label themselves as community gardens (*közösségi kert* in Hungarian); however, by layout, functions and goals they clearly cannot be called them. The definition enabled us to exclude communal work gardens, or community supported agriculture projects and other garden initiatives (for example

exhibition gardens). We have reviewed the literature, but it also lacks a clear definition (Guitart et al., 2012). Therefore, we explored numerous urban gardening policies – altogether 22 from various geographical locations – which we combined with the ones from the literature (for example Beilin & Hunter, 2011) to create a functional definition. We understand community gardens as *an urban initiative in which a piece of land, publicly or privately owned, is used by a group of individuals to grow vegetables and fruits for their own needs, and to build community*. The definition misses some key characteristics, such as grassroots nature, open access or community building because in the identified definitions they were not always present. A generated word cloud (Fig. 2) presents the primary components of the examined literature and garden policy definitions.

Then, an online research was executed to explore gardens across Hungary. The research focused on cities with population above 10 thousand and 142 cities were examined (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2016). The population limit has been added because we consider community gardens as urban phenomena. Although the term urban is subjective, in Hungary cities with population above 10 thousand are functional cities. The research was carried out in Google search engine in Hungarian. The combination of community garden, and the name of the city were used as keywords. The research was conducted in spring 2017. In 16 Hungarian cities 44 community gardens were discovered (Fig. 3). The method has some limitations, but we expected the online presence of gardens. First, gardeners aspire to popularize their activity among citizens through social media, since community gardening is a new activity in Hungary. Second, we expected local governments to participate in their popularization of community gardens online. This was later confirmed: *“Look, the governments have their own TV channel, printed and online papers (...) (and) the gardens are always there.”* (Int. 01, 2CC). We also believed that

government clerks), and altogether 18 interviews were completed till the end of August 2017. In some cases, the interviewees were responsible for the organizing of several, sometimes five or six gardens. With this method, we have covered 37 gardens from 10 different cities. The rest of the identified gardens organizers did not wish to participate in the research. Therefore, interview results are relevant only to the 37 gardens. To eliminate the selective nature of our online research, we asked organizers to tell us about gardens that they know, but no additional gardens were identified. Interviews were made by phone or at the garden sites, and in one case on video chat. The length of the conversations varied between 20-25 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview outline. Transcription was made in Hungarian and quotes translated into English.

To discover Hungarian specificities, we examined their governance approaches. We followed the classification of Fox-Kämper, Wesener, Münderlein, Sondermann, McWilliam, and Kirk (2018) developed for community gardens. (1) *Top-down gardens*: Planned, organized and managed by professionals. (2) *Top-down gardens with community help*: Gardens planned, organized, and managed by professionals with the involvement of the gardeners but they have limited power. (3) *Bottom-up gardens with professional help*: Gardeners organize and manage the gardens with paid professionals, usually in the planning and organizing phase. (4) *Bottom-up gardens with informal help*: Gardens organized and run by gardeners, but they receive informal, unpaid help. (5) *Bottom-up gardens*: Managed exclusively by garden communities. (6) *Bottom-up gardens with political or administrative support*: Planned, organized and managed by gardeners, but they receive financial or management support, or land access from local governments. Due to the specifics of the Hungarian context, an additional category has been created. (7) *Bottom up gardens that become top-down*: The efforts to have a garden come from local citizens, but the local government excludes the

community from decision making in the planning, organizing and management stages.

To provide information on the community gardens when citing interviewees, we indicated the number of interviewees, garden type and settlement type. Numbers start from one. We differentiated five garden types (explained in *Overview of the Hungarian community gardens*), here we indicate them with numbers from 1 to 5, where: 1 = *Local government managed gardens*; 2 = *Government sponsored NGO gardens*; 3 = *Private sponsored NGO gardens*; 4 = *Grassroots gardens* and 5 = *Government sponsored grassroots gardens*. Settlement types are the following: mid-size cities (MC) with population from 30,000 to 100,000; large cities (LC) with population from a 100,000 to 1 million; and capital city (CC), Budapest.

Results and discussion

Overview of the community gardens

The first community garden in Hungary was opened in 2011 in Budapest. In the following years, numerous gardens were organized in the capital and in regional centers as well. Their spatial distribution strongly correlates with the population of cities; gardens are mostly present in the bigger cities which partly may be a consequence of our definition.

The lack of inner city vacant lots, and the high number of low quality green spaces in large housing estate areas transferred gardens to the periphery of Hungarian cities (Fig. 4). We observed that a dominant proportion of gardens are in, or near LHEs (forty out of forty-four). This pattern is the result of the historical development of Hungarian cities, which have a low number of unused plots. Although the socialist period left vacant lots in the transition zone, local governments privatized most of these lands soon after the transition. Therefore, most of the accessible lands are in the peripheries, particularly in LHE areas. The low quality of green areas further stimulated the creation of gardens. *"The area which we chose is actually a fallow. It would be extreme to say that it is a park,*



Figure 4. The Kelen Kert community garden in of the high-rise neighborhoods of Budapest

because there is no tree and not a single bench. An empty area, with some grass.” (Int. 13, 5LC). The observed spatial distribution is the opposite of the North American, inner city gardens are rare in Hungary.

The ownership of accessible lands greatly defined the actors involved in the development of gardens. Green spaces in LHE areas are owned by local governments, thus they appear as key actors. This reflected on the governance types of the gardens as well (Tab. 1), and most of the explored gardens have top-down or top-down with community help governance approach. Only six cases were found which resembles to grassroots, and in three cases authors did not have enough data to decide about the type.

After the classification, we merged them together to foster easier understanding and highlight the dominance of local governments (Tab. 2). The thirty-five dominantly top-down gardens (1st, 2nd, and 7th category) we divided into two garden types: *local government managed gardens* ($N = 13$) and gardens managed by civil organizations ($N = 22$). In the former case gardens are supervised by local governments and no NGO’s involved. In the latter case, seventeen gardens from twenty-two are *government sponsored NGO*

gardens. In these cases, the local authorities serve as patrons and ensure land access, the physical creation and the maintenance costs but the gardens are managed by NGO’s. The other five gardens are operated independently from governments and are *private sponsored NGO gardens*; the funds are assured by the organizer NGO, who receives financial support and land from the private sector. In these cases, the support of the gardens is embedded into the corporate social responsibility activity of the companies. “It is

Table 1. The governance approaches of community gardens according to the classification of Fox-Kämper et. al. (2018) with our addition

Cat-egory	No. of cases	Decision maker
1	10	Local government / NGO / other
2	22	Local government / NGO / other
3	1	Gardeners
4	2	Gardeners
5	1	Gardeners
6	2	Gardeners
7	3	Local government
n.d.a	3	-

important for them (the corporations) to be responsible for the communities (...) and with their corporate social responsibility activity (...) they join to a greater aim that looks forward.” (Int. 06, 3CC).

Table 2. Community gardens types in Hungary according to managing agencies and governance approaches

Garden types	No. of cases
Local government managed gardens	13
Government sponsored NGO gardens	17
Private sponsored NGO gardens	5
Grassroots gardens	3
Government sponsored grassroots garden	3

The six grassroots gardens (3d, 4th, 5th and 6th category) we divided into two groups. First, *grassroots gardens* ($N = 3$); these gardens are organized bottom-up, decision making in the organizing, planning and managing phases are democratic, land is owned by the community or used through informal agreement. Second, *government sponsored grassroots gardens* ($N = 3$); these gardens are organized bottom up, decision making is democratic, land is government owned, but it has no influence on the garden's operation. This last one reflects the paternalist manner that keeps existing after the demise of socialism, as individuals seek for the help of local authorities. Despite the fact that the number of the examined grassroots gardens is not representative, it is an existing feature of the community garden movement and their low number reflects a post socialist specificity. Results suggest that the examined gardens are tightly linked to local governments, grassroots gardens are rare, and the governance types are dominantly top-down.

The results examined by settlement type show an interesting pattern. In the capital, the dominant proportion of gardens are local government managed or governments sponsored NGO garden. Private sponsored NGO gardens are only present in the capital city.

In large cities, the role of local governments is even more striking, private sponsored NGO or pure grassroots gardens are not present, and the specific local government sponsored grassroots appears only in these settlements. While in medium-sized cities, grassroots gardens are more common. The latter might be explained by cheaper land access.

Regarding the motivations, Hungarian gardens are organized with the purpose of community building. This means that organizers realized the inherent social problems of cities, particularly the lack of cohesion in LHE neighborhoods. As a government official stated: *“We began with that the society of large housing estates is isolated (...) and we created gardens to bind the community together and support them to get to know each other.”* (Int. 02, 1CC). Therefore, gardens address social disintegration which is most striking in large housing estate areas, but it is an important goal in inner city gardens as well.

The location of the gardens defined the user groups. It resembles the typical of high-rise apartments with strong presence of the elderly and young families. *“There are young families with small children and there is the elderly. What makes them similar is that they moved in (to the housing estates) from detached houses in smaller cities and villages.”* (Int. 05, 1MC). While in inner city gardens (Fig. 5) the picture is more mosaic. *“There is a lot of young people, young families with children (...) but we can't state that it's only for the young intelligentsia, there are cooks, customer service assistants, firemen, teachers, photographers and theatre directors.”* (Int. 06, 2CC). This quote does not reflect in English the latent content in Hungarian, so we need to add an explanation. According to the interviewee, gardeners' group is socially diverse in terms of income and age as well.

The driver of organizing community gardens in Hungary is to address crisis as in the USA. However, we believe that gardens are not responses to the economic struggles and are not the direct result of the economic crash of 2008. Although the first garden was opened soon after that. We argue that



Figure 5. The Leonardo Kert (closed shortly after research) in a gentrifying inner city neighborhood of Budapest

gardens are responses to the social disintegration and alienation of the society and urban citizens and aim to increase social cohesion and build communities. The situation is opposite in the North American gardens where the priority is food provision and other benefits. The importance of community aspects over other benefits was documented in other post-socialist countries as well (Spilková, 2017; Trendov 2018). Garden organizers did not have the means to effectively address the social crisis of Hungarian cities, particularly in LHE areas until community gardens, as a know-hows arrived to Hungary. The transfer of community gardening as best practices is a result of a renewed interest in crisis management in Europe (da Silva, 2014; Partalidou & Anthopoulos, 2015).

We suggest that as local governments noticed that community gardens have a strong and positive influence on building communities, they incorporated community gardening into their urban development strategies. Therefore, local authorities became initiators of the community garden movement. In the next section, we explore their role in the community garden movement and argue

that it is linked to the adaptation of the idea of entrepreneurial city and neoliberalism.

To conclude, this section provided an overview of the examined gardens. In contrast to North American gardens, community gardens in Hungary are dominantly organized on the peripheries of cities, in LHE neighborhoods. This is the result of the post-socialist development of Hungarian cities. Gardens are organized in government owned lands, therefore, we experienced a dominant role of local governments and in case of 33 out of 41 gardens local governments are involved directly or indirectly. This is clearly the opposite of the North American case, where grassroots gardens or NGO sponsored gardens are dominant. The primary purpose of organizing community gardens is community building, while in North America the priority is food provision.

Role of local authorities in managing the community gardening movement

To understand the role of local governments, we raised the following questions: what the strong presence of governments tell

us about the examined Hungarian gardens? Who benefits from them and what are these benefits? In this section, we examine the role of local governments through critical lenses.

Results show evidence that community gardens are used to outsource public space maintenance tasks. This is in parallel with the findings of the literature. In the Hungarian case it is even more extraordinary because in a few cases the governments provided plots that are barely usable and not maintained, and gardeners were supposed to clear them.

"We firstly got a plot from the local government which was not cultivable. It was full of reed. (...) We did not have energy to clear that so we resigned and rather searched for a new plot for half a year." (Int. 07, 5MC).

In other cases, gardens sites were just simply unused. *"These are unused areas without any function, which did not improve the quality of the neighborhood (...) and we made them to be cultivable."* (Int. 05, 1MC). It is observed that local governments provide the least desirable plots for garden organizers and those areas that are less likely to have a future function. As an interviewee put: *"(these are) wastelands, they can't build there anything (...) and cannot be utilized because of some reasons."* (Int. 01, 2CC).

Government managed community gardens have limited autonomy because of their top-down governance. Gardens are created according to a standard plan. Local government designates the future site of the garden and presents the possible arrangements of the plots and design to the interested citizens in a forum. Citizens have the possibility to express their opinions and ideas; however, the plans are not made by them. "In other cases, government officials ensured that *smaller needs can be added to the plans.*" (Int. 03, 1CC), but complete redrawing is not possible. The inclusion of gardeners in decision making and participation is very limited. In a long-term perspective, limited participation in decision making alienates gardeners from the garden. Consequently, these gardens fail to become places of autonomy.

The research suggests that community gardens control behaviors and actions in public space. A government official mentioned that gardens contribute to the regulation of activities of unwanted social groups, mostly the homeless and the youth on public space.

"We presented the advantages (of community gardens) on a forum to convince locals (...) we said that no fruit, no vegetables nor flowers were stolen in the gardens, besides the homeless stop using these areas, they rather avoid the gardens. In addition, the local youth rambling in the neighborhood do not appear there either (...) what we also experienced and was interesting that crime rates decreased around the gardens." (Int. 02, 1CC).

We argue that the primary goal of these gardens was not the displacement of certain groups from public space, but local governments are aware of this effect and might see it as a benefit. Gardens increase safety, limit the visibility and activity of unwanted behaviors and social groups. The regulation of public space is enforced directly by the gardeners and indirectly by the values that they produce.

"We have created a community space next to the garden with benches, where half of the residents of the prefabricated houses spend their evenings. And they (unspecified groups) do not destroy it because there are the gardeners and if they see someone is behaving stupid then they rebuke them." (Int. 01, 2CC).

Gardens foster middle class values which affects public space behavior. Gardeners organize events to collect rubbish in their vicinity or to plant flowers. On the one hand, this increases the aesthetic value of the neighborhood. On the other, it has its effects on the mind set of residents and shows them new values. *"We have a garden, where the community organized a collect your rubbish event in their vicinity. They promoted that everyone is responsible for his living area, and they convinced others to plant flowers (...)"* (Int. 6, 2CC). The promotion of values associated with the middle class is a soft, indirect

way of gardens to influence public space activities and behaviors. They might affect against littering and promote citizens' participation of public space renewal.

Gardens are used to legitimize the power of local governments. Garden openings and events obtain significant media attention. These are good opportunities for local representatives to show up as supporters of a noble initiative. Sometimes gardens become even the subject of a party's politics. In one case, a council member from an opposition party offered his budget to the creation of a bottom-up garden. *"I am not saying that he gave it because of voters, but it clearly demonstrates that this garden was created by this guy and maybe it could have an effect on unsure voters."* (Int.13, 6LC). In another case, gardeners were asked to support the elected mayor in a political event. *"Local governments see gardeners as a group that can be mobilized. There was an event, where it was important for the mayor that many people would show up, then he asked gardeners to come, and they went."* (Int. 01, 2CC). However, it is unsure whether the representation of local politicians in the gardens have any effect on their popularity or not.

We also experienced weak community ties which might be the consequence of strong government presence. The disappearance of grassroots nature weakens the basis for community building. Gardens are created by local governments and gardeners have limited voice in decision making. Thus, in the organizing, creation and maintenance stages gardeners do not participate in negotiation and decision making, which would teach them community action and bind them together. Therefore, gardeners are not creators but merely users of their gardens. As users, their motivation of joining is simple, mostly to cultivate food, not building community. The motivation for gardening because of a specific purpose, such as a better neighborhood, a better community, to inform others about alternative discourses, to show a good example and to foster change is weakly present. Friendships might forge, people get

to know each other, but ties are weak and only present in the garden sites. Community aims are replaced by individual aims. Thus, the Hungarian community gardens cannot reach the objective that they aimed to, community building.

Conclusion

The paper intended to discover differences between North American and Hungarian community gardens. We contrasted the examined Hungarian gardens to those North American ones that are the same as the original grassroots from the 1970s and afterwards. First, the examined gardens are predominantly located in large housing estate neighborhoods, while inner city gardens are rare due to the lack of vacant lots. Thus, the spatial distribution of gardens is the opposite. In addition, the spatial distribution of the examined gardens follows a hierarchy; Budapest has the highest number of garden initiatives, but gardens are present in cities in the agglomeration, regional centers and sub-centers as well.

Second, local governments play a crucial role in the development of the examined Hungarian gardens. This is partly the consequence of land access. According to our garden classification, *local government managed* ($N = 13$), *government sponsored NGO* ($N = 17$) and *government sponsored grassroots gardens* ($N = 3$) comprise roughly the four-fifths of all community gardens. Results showed a low number of pure *grassroots* ($N = 3$) and *private sponsored NGO gardens* ($N = 5$). The shortage of grassroots gardens might be the result of not having a representative research but we rather believe it is the reflection of weak civil society and low mobilizing capacity of individuals observed.

Third, community gardens address social alienation and disintegration in LHE areas. Community building is an important goal of gardens in North America, although we observed it as the primary aim of gardens, while production of food is secondary. Unfortunately, in the case of government initiated

gardens, we experienced that gardens are comprised of atomized individuals who intent on cultivation. Addressing alienation and weak cohesion might be an important motivation factor for organizing gardens in other post-socialist cities as well. It is worth noting that the social problems of LHEs might be similar in North America as well.

The second research question aimed to explore the role of local governments in the Hungarian community garden movement. First, the paper argues that the community gardens in Hungary are not crisis driven, as many North American gardens, but by urban development policies adopted in the post-socialist period. Authors observed the outsourcing of public space maintenance tasks through community gardens, which is parallel to the findings of Rosol (2010). In a few cases, it is even more extreme since local governments tried to convince gardeners to clear the not maintained areas. Although during the crisis of 1970s in North America clearing of unused, not maintained plots was the main way to get land access, in Hungary, gardeners were simply seen as volunteers who could do the hard task.

Second, government managed gardens are not autonomic spaces. The involvement of gardeners in decision making is limited and have little influence on the future direction of the project. Although local governments try to emphasize the independent nature of garden sites visioning them as places beyond regulations, it was not documented. In addition, the vicinity of gardens is controlled. Gardens promote middle class values, accepted uses of public space, and local government managed gardens foster the visions of local governments about public space. Governments are aware of the positive impact of gardens on safety and might consider them as tools to keep away unwanted groups and activities, such as the homeless and public drinking. In this sense, community gardens contribute to the improvement of their surroundings and are city rehabilitation tools but their impact is controversial and foster exclusion from public space.

Third, community gardens legitimize the operation of local governments. They provide opportunity for representatives to show up as supporters of a noble initiative. In addition, gardeners are mobilized to participate in political events. This demonstrates the vulnerability and dependence of community gardens on their patrons. The refusal of supporting power is possible, but for the success of the garden gardeners need to cooperate in many cases. The presence of mayors and representatives in garden openings might be a symbolic event in which roles and positions are showed to the gardeners.

In conclusion, the examined community gardens clearly differ from the ones in North America. The layout, structure and functions are the same, but their content and effects are different. Gardens aim to reach noble goals, such as community building, but the outcome depends on local factors. In Hungary the presence of local governments is evident. As a result, community gardens lose their ideological backgrounds, which placed them in the literature for quite long as a grassroots initiatives and counter Bplaces of neoliberalism. However, garden initiatives stop being something more than just sites for urban agriculture and their original values fade away. Additionally, gardens are utilized by local government and adopted to urban strategies, as a result often contribute to the control of public space and legitimize the power of local governments. In a long-term, we expect further increase of gardens initiatives because of their benefits to local governments. As one of the interviewees put *"Many mayors told me that it was my best investment so far (to organize a community garden)."* (Int. 01, 2CC). Nevertheless, we hope that citizens will find the way to start their bottom-up projects and garden types will diversify and balance out.

Editors' note:

Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the authors', on the basis of their own research.

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