



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

August 2020
Oikos d.o.o.
Mojca Hrabar
mojca.hrabar@oikos.si

Establishment of equipped community gardens in the Municipality of Medvode

Ljubljana Urban Region

Key words: community garden, physical activity, local food supply, public health, vulnerable groups, household consumption, access to healthy food

1. Introduction

In the municipality of Medvode, a small town located in Ljubljana Urban Region just northwest of Ljubljana, a new approach to community gardening was implemented by renting out not only the bare garden plots, but ones equipped with a shed and with other relevant infrastructure such as a users' parking area. This approach has been already practiced in other countries before. However, it is novel for Slovenia where community gardening is otherwise very popular and has a long tradition. As a result, the project is setting an example for other municipalities.

The project was implemented on the edges of the town of Medvode where the urban area and its functions meet the countryside. The new community garden is set up among the fields farmed by local farmers from nearby villages. It therefore brings together, even if just physically, urban gardeners and local farmers. The project is a good example how a local public authority can use its real estate to support local inhabitants to take up a new hobby as well as cultivate their own food, at the same time supporting vulnerable groups and encourage socializing among diverse groups of people (e.g. by age, ethnically). Its relevance lies in the support of active, healthy and sociable lifestyles in local community with minimum investment and operation costs.



2. Project Intention / Background information

The Municipality of Medvode is a small municipality with 16.500 inhabitants living in 31 settlements that borders the City of Ljubljana. The main town of Medvode is located at the confluence of rivers Sava and Sora and at the crossroads of several main roads, including the road towards Austria. As part of its activities for improving social cohesion, the Municipality of Medvode has decided to strengthen its support for community gardening. Across Slovenia, community gardening has already a long tradition, likely originating in the socialist planning during Yugoslav period where community gardens were designated and made available for inhabitants of apartment complexes.

The Municipality of Medvode is no exception, with well-established community gardens south of the town centre. In this way, people can locally grow their own food – perhaps healthier, but more sustainable in terms of transportation impact, be physically active outdoors and possibly save some money as well as reduce environmental impacts of their food shopping. In critical times during socialism, gardening was the source of food diversity, too, and gardening remains very popular hobby. To this day most of the individual houses have at least a small vegetable garden patch besides (or integrated into) the landscaped exterior, and most of the towns provide community gardens.

There were two reasons for starting the project in the municipality of Medvode: First, the supply of community gardens is smaller than the demand and second, some of the existing community gardens at another location, near a major transport junction in Preska, will be abandoned because the municipality is selling off part of its real estate there. As a result, the municipality decided to set up a new location in the north of the town and equip them with sheds for storage.

The project was funded through LEADER with the support of LAG “Za mesto in vas “, which means “For the Town and the Village”, and with funding from EARDF as well as from the Municipality of Medvode. The coordinator of the project was and remains the Municipality of Medvode which plans to further expand the approach to other locations around the town. Even before the project started, the demand outstripped the number of garden plots available. The success of this project shows how to proceed the establishment of community gardens and how to improve the scheme beyond just renting a land plot.

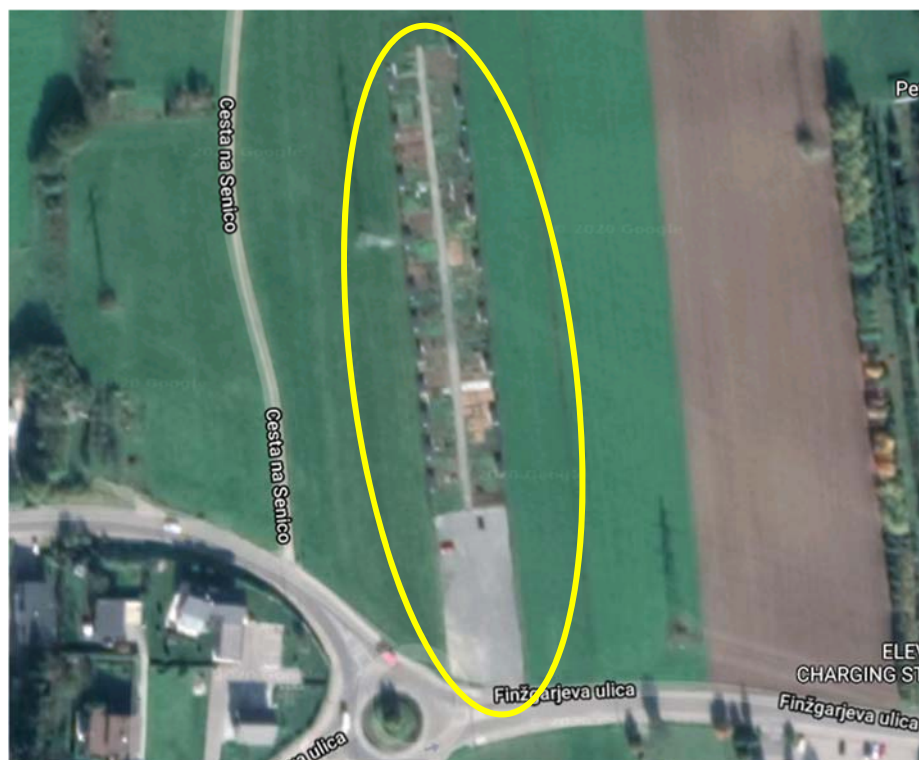
In Slovenia, houses usually have their own vegetable gardens. The main target group of the projects are however people without an own garden, in most cases people living in apartments. As the garden plots are relatively far from the main apartment block areas, accessibility for vulnerable groups was one of the main concerns. Therefore, the installation of sheds played an important role, which had several objectives. The main objective was to make it easier for the renters to walk or cycle to their gardens, not needing to haul their tools and equipment as it is stored safely in the shed. Another objective was to support the enjoyment of outdoor activities, active leisure time as well as socializing and connecting to

others, no matter what generation or social background. Moreover, installation of sheds gives the area certain structure and prevents makeshift structures that would not fit with the surrounding. The municipality provides some useful information via the LAG, but does not provide the renters with further equipment, tools, fertilizers and similar.

3. Main Description

In the first step taken in 2018, the Municipality of Medvode allocated a suitable land parcel at an area called Svetje that is owned by the municipality for gardening and divided it into 40 garden plots, each measuring between 50 and 80 m². The garden plots were then put up for rent by advertising them on the municipal website. Applications could be submitted electronically and all the garden plots were quite quickly rented out on a first-come-first-serve basis. This rule is kept in place as some turnover of renters is expected in the next years despite the fact that the renting agreement lasts for 5 years. The municipality charges a small rent that is used to pay for the investment and maintenance of the equipment and infrastructure. A small road was arranged between the gardens to ensure enough space for load and unload. A large parking area at the beginning of the gardens was built to allow for good accessibility by car. In the second step, the garden plots were equipped with small garden sheds that are of the same size and design. They can be used for storage of equipment, seeds and products.

Graph 1: Aerial view of community gardens at Svetje, Municipality of Medvode



Source: Google Maps

All of the garden plots were rented out to the local applicant and turned out to be a success. In spring 2020, two years after the start, the gardens are well maintained and thriving. The main obstacle was to find a suitable area of agricultural land owned by the municipality that could be used for community gardens and outfitted for the users (parking lot, sheds etc.). A land parcel on the north side of the town, typically shaped in a long stretch, proved to be suitable. It is easily accessible by car or bicycle via a recently refurbished road. Access on foot is a bit less favourable as it is uphill from the town centre, however it is just across the road of some other public facilities such as the Community Health Centre, a school and a kindergarten.

The implementation of the project required only limited cross-sectoral interactions, bringing together the Municipality Council experts on asset management, public procurement and agriculture. The coordination was relatively easy as there was strong motivation for the project. The fact that the municipality owns the land made the technical aspects of implementation (preparation of documentation, permitting) easier. However, it is expected that gradually social and public health services will be more involved as the municipality and renters organize occasional lectures and presentations on gardening practices, sustainable food production and organic farming. The renters have to respect the gardening rules set out by the Municipality specifically for the community gardens, with additional provisions for the use of specific infrastructure (sheds, parking area). In the neighbouring Municipality of Ljubljana, there have been also private initiatives where local farmers divided one of their fields into allotments and started renting them out, however, in these cases there is no coordination among renters and no additional infrastructure (e.g. shed, parking) is provided. However, this can be viewed as the answer to very high demand in Ljubljana as the most urban and densely populated municipality.

The project adjusted the examples from other countries to the local need and local potential. Its added value is the gardening community that has been gradually created. At the moment it is too early to comment on it, but it appears it is already one of the strongly positive aspects of the project. The project has a strong added value in the sense of creating connections and socializing outdoors by a productive activity that has a positive impact on public health, particularly of the inhabitants of apartment blocks and low-income families. Recent anecdotal evidence from across Slovenia shows that the gardening communities are likely more resilient in the light of the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and impending financial implications for personal budget. It is likely that this is valid also for the community formed in this new community garden in Medvode.

4. References

European Commission (2010) Europe 2020: A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

Application for Svetje community gardens, <https://www.medvode.si/podatkiobrazca/5124>

Urban gardening–LAG “For the Town and the Village”, <https://www.medvode.si/post/144954>