

"SOCIAL CAPITAL IN ALLOTMENT GARDEN ESTATES IN VIENNA"

Self-initiated project

Funded by „Club of Vienna“ www.clubofvienna.org

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In Cooperation with ‚Zentralverband der Kleingärtner‘ and ‚Landesverband Wien‘

Duration: May 2014 to January 2015

Vienna has a tradition of allotment garden estates for almost 100 years. Today there are 26.831 allotment gardens in the city of Vienna, organised in 247 local estates in 13 district associations. Allotment garden estates are traditionally characterised by a high sense of community. A common interest for farming fruits and vegetables (subsistence economy), for garden design (flower garden), but also for crafts and home-building has shaped and fostered sustainable neighbourhood ties. Is this kind of social capital still relevant in times of electronic communication and social media relationships? In how far can we still speak of community in the case of allotment garden estates? Which informal ‘communities of interest’ can be observed in allotment estates? How close are the relationships between gardeners and how important is anonymity today?

What does a private garden within an allotment garden estate mean to people in these days? Is it predominantly a kitchen garden, an ornamental garden, or is it space for recreation and relaxation in privacy? Does the new ecological movement in terms of “urban greening” have the potential to nurture an intentional community of gardeners? Or has the legal re-dedication in favour of “permanent residency” already replaced the original function of garden estates? How will allotment garden estates be managed in the future? Will professional facility management supersede the voluntary commitment of gardeners for their community?

This ethnographic study has been conceived in the tradition of cultural sociology and investigates the historical development and present-day social life of gardeners in selected allotment estates in the city of Vienna. Its aim is to contribute to enhancing the sense of community in society.

The appropriate methodology for this project is found in “Action Research” (Reason P. & Bradbury H.: The Sage Handbook of Action Research – Participatory Inquiry and Practice. Sage Publications, Los Angeles; 2008).

The theoretical background can be found in the sociology of Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim and in the theory of ‘urban sociology’ according to Simmel, Bourdieu, and Lefebvre.

The cooperation currently includes two allotment garden estates in Vienna:

- KGV „Blumenfreunde“ in the 21st district.
- KGV „Zukunft auf der Schmelz“ in the 15th district.

An extension of the project to other allotment garden estates is conceivable.