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Urban gardening: elements, social, cultural and recreational aspects

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ABSTRACT

Urban gardening, as a social innovation, is considered to have become popular in recent years in the USA and some Western European countries. Derelict, abandoned and usually neglected areas are being used to create gardens and vegetable gardens in large cities.

One can see this trend in Lithuania too. Vegetable gardens of a similar purpose have been created in Vilnius, Kaunas, Mažeikiai and certain other Lithuanian towns. It's worth mentioning, that the phenomenon of urban gardening most probably could be developed successfully in Lithuania, because the tradition of maintaining gardens in the suburbs of large cities is still very much alive. Such family-run gardens were very popular and also very useful in the last decades of the 20th century, as fruits and vegetables were grown there to cater for family needs. On the other hand, this is also a new type of recreation for the younger generation.

One of the relatively new forms of such activities is gardening in an urban space, where people can find common values, share their skills and support each other. Urban gardening seems to bring people together naturally, so, in addition to the social issues aspect, people are able to solve environmental problems together.

Community vegetable gardens usually have many different functions, depending on their location and type. The main idea here is to encourage neighbourly cooperation and to cultivate a sense of community spirit among people of different generations, but it is also a very good opportunity to become familiar with different types of plants and the methods of their cultivation, with fruits and vegetables for a healthy lifestyle, and with the possibilities of making use of derelict areas. Food production in the urban environment is no longer the main issue, today this has become a more symbolic and an educational movement, which can easily become an alternative way of supplying the persons involved with a certain amount of fresh food if required.

Growing your own vegetables and strolling round your garden after a busy working day is not only a pleasure, but also a form of recreation, useful as a therapy for those tired of the hustle and bustle of city life or for people with sedentary jobs.

Introduction

The main significance of urban gardening is not only aesthetic or architectural, but also social, recreational and psychological, when a person relaxes growing plants in his living space, engages in conversation with congenial people and at the same time knows he is faithful to his ideals of ecology, sustainable development, and improving the living environment. Typical features of urban gardening are: growing both ornamental and edible plants in an area of a city with limited space; the recreational nature of gardening, when satisfaction is derived from the gardening process itself or because of the pleasing results; social functions of gardening (bringing together people sharing the same ideas); linking the ideas of gardening with those of ecology and sustainable development.

Elements of urban gardening

Gardening is a relatively new phenomenon. There were almost no specially created gardens until the 15th century, although wild fruit and berries were known and widely used by people for a very long time. Garden plants were already cultivated in Ancient Egypt 3000 – 1000 years BC, but at that time gardens had a more ornamental, and less economical function. “*Philosophers*” and “*Gymnasium*” gardens were popular in Ancient Greece, with the prominent garden of Theophrastus (371 c. – 287 c. BC) mentioned as one of the first botanical plant collections. In Medieval times (from the 16th century) gardens with a regular design were usually created near palaces and monasteries, but the plant assortment there was rather poor. There was a predominance of grapes, medicinal plants and herbs.

England and France were among the first countries where private gardens were created during the Renaissance, and later the tradition of palaces and manor houses with gardens became common place.

In Lithuania gardening traditions are quite old – we can consider the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the beginning of gardening here. In the 15th century the Grand Duke Vytautas used to receive ornamental plants and fruiters as gifts from other European countries. At the same time the practice of cultivating “useful” plants, like herbs and medicinal plants, reached Lithuanian monasteries. In the 16th century gardens near manor houses of the nobility became very popular as a result of the Renaissance. One can trace records about them in the Inventory Books from the 15 – 16th centuries, and issues of the legal regulation of gardening were already being discussed in The First Statute of Lithuania (1529).

The Botanical Garden of Vilnius University with the first collection of garden plants was created in 1781 by J. E. Gilibert. The famous Bernadine monastery garden existed in Vilnius until the uprising of 1863. And after that, as a sanction, the monastery was closed, and the city authorities used to rent this land to the town residents for vegetable cultivation.

In 1928 an interesting project for a garden – a town, based on the ideas of E. Howard, was designed in Jašiūnai near Vilnius (recently – Šalčininkai district). It comprised 160.5 hectares, consisted of 432 parcels of land for private houses, located on 20 streets. Public open spaces and green areas were also designed [Bielecki, 2010]. In Soviet times this place was handed over to local residents for “urban gardening”.

Interesting changes took place in the Kaunas Botanical Garden in Vytautas Magnus University during the Nazi occupation. Its authorities were given an order to expand the areas where medicinal plants were cultivated. In 1943 this area totalled 6 hectares in comparison with 1.5 hectares in 1942, and in 1944 it had to total 25 – 30 hectares. Raw materials made from medicinal plants were used to treat wounded German soldiers.

The concept of gardening in the city is not a new one. Today, urban gardening as a social innovation, is becoming more and more popular in the USA and countries of Western Europe (Fig. 1).

The term “urban gardening” is attributed different meanings: “Container Gardening” – growing plants in pots or containers, not in the ground. It is popular as greenery on balconies, roofs and terraces.

Fig. 1. A) Classical Medieval herb garden in the Old City of Budapest; B) 21st century vegetable garden in the center of Berlin



Fig. 2. Possibilities for the use of wild strawberry in the city spaces: A) A square next to London Central Library; B) Supporting wall in a private area



Fig. 2. Possibilities for the use of wild strawberry in the city spaces: C) A place under a fruiter in the garden)



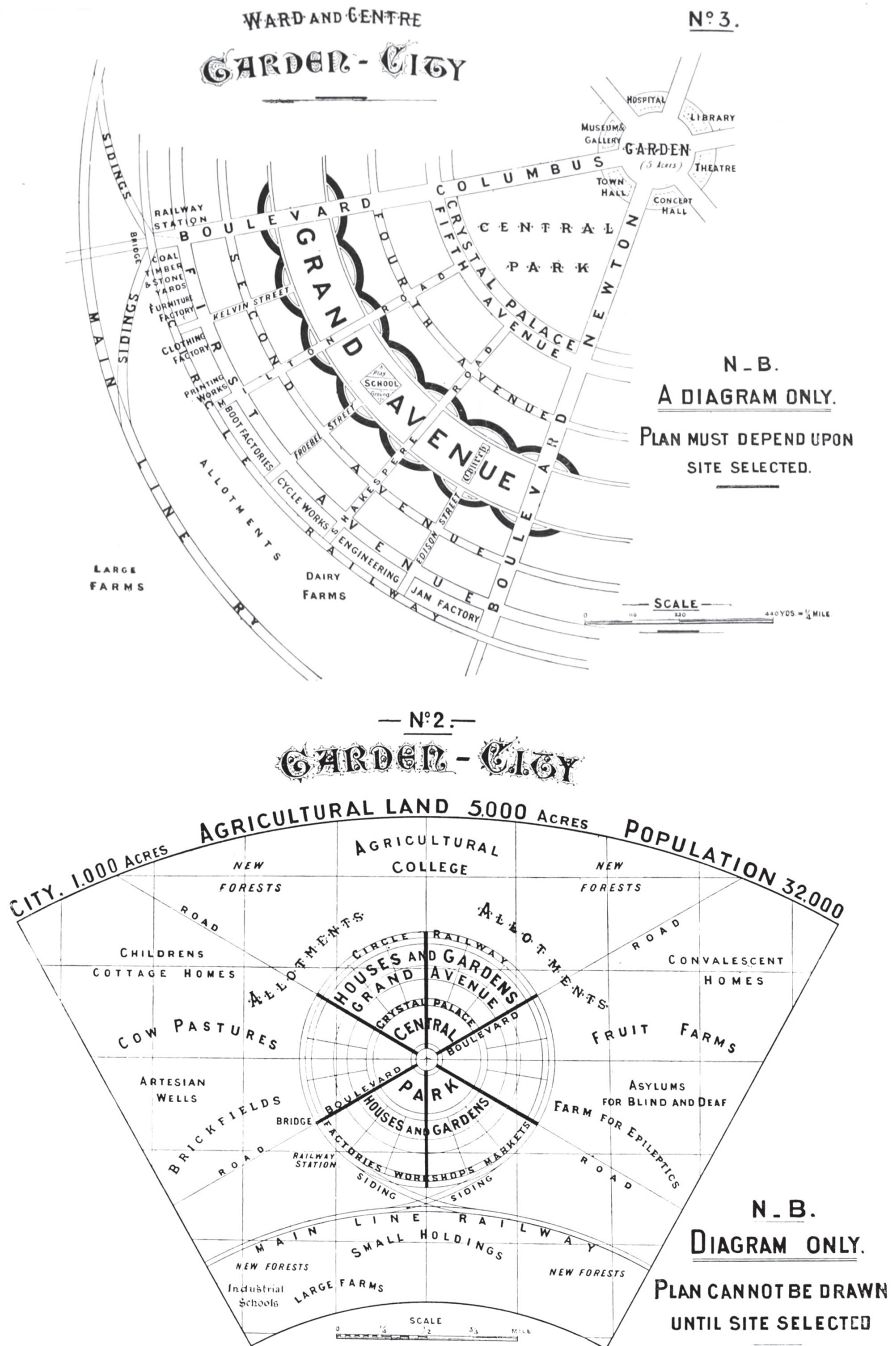
“Window box” – plants are planted in containers fitted onto window sills. This creates an illusion of domestic life among the plants in a green space when viewed from the inside of the building, and is an additional decoration to the exterior of the building.

“Urban Agriculture” is a term signifying production of food in a city environment. It includes a wide spectrum of activities, such as urban farming (keeping chickens for example), fishery in river and lake areas of the city, urban horticulture, keeping bees or even urban forestry, when vacant city spaces are planted with trees. The various forms of urban agriculture are very different, they depend on the level of economic and social development in the country [Bailkey, Nasr, 2000]. Quite often communities are supported by municipal institutions, and their green areas are incorporated into the city planning scheme, because they fit the idea of sustainable growth of the cities [Viljoen, 2005].

“Urban Horticulture” includes cultivation of dwarf and/or ornamental fruit trees in the city. Derelict, neglected, and usually abandoned areas are being used to create gardens and vegetable gardens in large cities. Usually the main aim here is to improve the conditions of the existing city environment [Tukey, 1983].

There is no doubt, that all the above mentioned terms are closely connected, and sometimes it’s rather difficult to decide which one should be used in a particular case. But it also

Fig. 3 A plan of a garden city and its fragment, <http://landscapeandurbanism.blogspot.com>



demonstrates the relevance of urban gardening, its wide possibilities and the need of city residents for an ecologically-friendly environment and healthy lifestyle.

One more interesting type of urban gardening is the so called "Guerilla Gardening", which has been spreading mainly in the US, Great Britain and Germany since the 1970's. Certain individuals and organized groups believe that the land is common property, and they even break the law, believing it's impossible to improve the Cityscape without it.

This type of urban gardening is becoming more popular, and this phenomenon can already be traced in Lithuania too.

Garden plants in city spaces and ornamental compositions also provide new opportunities for use of original architectural and functional solutions (Fig. 2).

Urban gardening could be developed both in private areas, public open spaces and suburbs, in particular emphasizing the shortest route of the foodstuffs from the garden to the table. Also it could be considered as a part of cultural heritage, helping to protect the traditions and to save historical objects in the city or a settlement.

Social and cultural aspects of urban gardening

Urban gardening is partly based on social and cultural nature. The positive influence of nature upon human development has been acknowledged and much esteemed since ancient times. Observing nature, noticing, discovering, exploring and contemplating it brings man closer to his ideal. That's why in the evenings the residents of Athens used to take their children to the fields to listen to the sound of the grasshoppers, the birdsong and the "voice" of the stream [Lamanauskas, 2005].

The history of urban planning has seen some attempts at creating Utopian cities. The idea of a garden in the city inspired English social reform activist Ebenezer Howard (1850 – 1928) to present his own project.

The author of the idea paid great attention to solving social problems. He proposed to create towns for 32 thousand residents believing they would be healthier, better educated and the towns less polluted because of growing industrialization. A garden city was conceived as being of circular shape, consisting of a few rings of low-rise dwelling houses with a "green belt" between them. The cities of Letchworth and Welwyn were built at the beginning of the 20th century according to E. Howard's model. The Garden City idea became recognized all over the world (Fig. 3).

In the years 1950 – 1960 American urban planners were looking for ways to use neglected and derelict buildings in the cities. Often planting was considered as the best way to improve the ecological situation. At the beginning these were movements on a local scale and were usually formed as a response to the growing impact of pollution and neglect of some city spaces [Hynes, Howe, 2004], but later they became quite popular.

This trend came to Western Europe from the USA. Garden spaces in the cities and outside them were turned into multifunctional public spaces (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 Artistic inspirations in the city garden spaces: A) Performance, Germany; B) Drawing lesson, Lithuania



Fig. 4 Artistic inspirations in the city garden spaces: C) Ballet, Scotland



In recent years these trends have also reached Lithuania. Their main principle is, that people who do not know each other work in one space, sharing the resources, information, contacts, so that an added value is created.

In foreign countries social movements, engaged in ecological and sustainable development ideas and aiming to improve the city, are being supported by governing bodies, responsible for the welfare of the residents [Bohn, Viljoen, 2011]. This is not yet noticeable in Lithuania, but even without the assistance of authorities one can feel the social influence of urban gardeners of various generations.

Community vegetable gardens usually have many different functions, depending on their location and type. The main idea here is to encourage neighbourly cooperation and to cultivate a sense of community among the different generations, but this is also a very good opportunity to acquire some knowledge about the plants and their cultivation, with fruits and vegetables for a healthy lifestyle, with the possibilities of making use of derelict areas. Food production in an urban environment is not the main issue now, today this is a more symbolic and educational movement, which can easily be turned into an alternative way of supplying the persons engaged in it with a certain amount of fresh food if needed. Psychologists in various countries distinguish the role of nature cognition, especially emphasizing its influence upon a child's psychological development.

Psychologist E. H. Erikson, a representative of the humanistic – psychoanalytic school of thought, highlights the cognition of nature as a main source in forming self-image and self-esteem of a pre-school child. A situation, where a child can explore nature and find something out for himself, evokes a feeling of independence, self-reliance, and at the same time he is a creator and discoverer, responsible for his actions [8].

J. Piaget's research proved, that when a child is in contact with nature "*...objects, that could be examined, changed, or used to create something, help a child to find out a lot of interesting things for himself. Knowledge, acquired this way, stays in the memory for a much longer time, than if it is simply received from other people*".

The better a human being gets to know nature, the closer his relations with nature become.

Today, we can only speculate about the prospects of urban gardening in Lithuania. We can presume, that it will become more and more popular, because the influence of West European culture is quite strong here, the ideas of ecology and community are accepted, the links with nature and agriculture are valued. In this case this movement can pass from local regional communities to large cities, and help their residents to promote an ecological lifestyle, taking the trouble to pay more attention to their environment.

Recreational aspects of urban gardening

Gardening in the town has a very old tradition. Even in Medieval centuries the richer residents of the towns, settled within the protective walls, and thus because of the shortage of space, tried to grow at least some small plants in the inner yards, on the windowsills or in

the balconies. Planting in the cities became very popular in the Renaissance period, when the chamber gardens of rich citizens were used for family recreation.

The fashion for ornamental gardens originated in Italy in the 15 – 16th centuries, and later it spread throughout Europe – similar gardens were planted in France (Paris), Germany (Augsburg, Frankfurt), Poland (Wrocław, Kraków), and also in Lithuania (Vilnius), where this tradition was brought by Queen Bona Sforza.

Nowadays, city parks are flourishing, and their main purpose is to meet the recreational needs of the citizens, especially those of the middle class.

After World War II the towns began to sprawl out into the suburbs, and at first this trend was noticed in the USA. Usually representational zones, blocks of flats together with old abandoned industrial buildings were left in the city centers, because new industrial enterprises were being established outside the cities. Quite often those vacant areas in the centers were planted with plants by groups of people for ideological reasons, with the aim of making their city pleasant, and following the principles of sustainable development [Hynes, Howe, 2004].

It's quite usual to spend free time in the park or out in the natural environment, but one can observe a tendency, that often there is a need to spend this time in a particular way, to learn something new, to have some active or educational purpose. One way of spending leisure time could be a trip to a suburban farm or a weekend spent in a nearby garden with organized educational programs. At the same time it is possible to relax, to learn how to plant and cultivate the plants, to learn about healthy food and how to prepare it.

The idea of gardening in the city developed differently in Lithuania due to different historical circumstances. In Soviet times mostly people, living in blocks of flats, were given a specific plot of land outside the city for gardening, but they were not allowed to live there. Only families who had a private house could engage in "urban gardening" of the same type, as is understood in the West, although the land still remained state property.

Today "urban gardening" could be developed rather successfully in Lithuania, because it remains culturally close to Lithuanian mentality and understanding the way of life. Also the traditional assumption that planting and cultivating plants is a process of recreation and a hobby is still quite strong.

That's why the spreading Western tradition of growing plants in the cities, is noticeable in Lithuania too. Apart from the common gardening in private areas near residential houses and decorating the windowsills and balconies with plants, community vegetable gardens are being created in Vilnius, Kaunas, Mažeikiai and other cities.

In analysing possible types of recreational activities in city gardens, we can state, that they are very diverse, and could be adapted to the modern lifestyle and pace of life. Urban gardening areas could be used not only for their primary purpose, as a means of food supply, but also for such activities as yoga, integration and recreation for disabled people or children with special needs. Not only are the abovementioned spaces being used to cure various diseases, physiotherapy and promoting a healthy lifestyle, but special new gardening schools are being established for that purpose with gardening as one of the forms of therapy.

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Współczesne ogrodnictwo i sadownictwo miejskie: elementy, aspekty społeczne, kulturowe oraz rekreacyjne

STRESZCZENIE

Według niepotwierdzonych opinii, sadownictwo miejskie miało początek w Stanach Zjednoczonych i w niektórych państwach Europy Zachodniej. W wielkich miastach ogrodnictwo oraz sadownictwo miejskie zajmuje zaniedbane i niewykorzystywane tereny. W Stanach Zjednoczonych około jedna piąta takich terenów znajduje się na dachach budynków publicznych lub prywatnych. Rodzina Prezydenta Obamy też urządziła taki ogród niedaleko Białego Domu.

Także na Litwie jest odczuwalna tendencja do tworzenia ogrodów. Powstają one w: Wilnie, Kownie, Możejkach i innych miastach. Przy ich urządzaniu wzrasta aktywność ludzi i powstaje nowy sposób rekreacji, który nie jest typowy dla środowiska miejskiego. Na Litwie nadal istnieje, pochodząca z czasów radzieckich, tradycja ogrodnictwa poza miastem, co stwarza możliwość udanego kontynuowania tej aktywności także i w miastach. Dla młodego pokolenia jest to nowa forma aktywności oraz pewien rodzaj rekreacji, powiązany z promowaniem zdrowej żywności, rozwinięciem zdolności komunikowania się, aktywnym wyczynkiem, a nawet rozwiązywaniem niektórych problemów wynikających z zachowania dzieci i nastolatków.

Idea sadownictwa w miastach jest związana z zastosowaniem innowacji społecznych i rozwojem technologii informacyjnych. Podstawową ideą takiej współpracy jest możliwość kontaktu i wymiany informacji między nieznanymi osobami.

Tworzenie grup społecznych może być oparte na różnych modelach: warsztaty twórcze, imprezy kulturalne, akcje społeczne oraz chroniące przyrodę. Jedną z najnowszych form aktywności jest sadownictwo na terenach zurbanizowanych. Taka aktywność bardzo łatwo jednoczy ludzi, dlatego może być wykorzystana do rozwiązania problemów nie tylko związanych z ochroną środowiska, ale również i problemów społecznych.

Ogrody społeczne w miastach pełnią różne funkcje w zależności od typu ogrodu i jego lokalizacji. Podstawą takiej działalności jest możliwość komunikacji pomiędzy sąsiadami, rozszerzenie kontaktów pomiędzy grupami ludzi w różnym wieku, poznanie gatunków roślin, w tym warzyw i owoców, zdrowy sposób życia oraz rewitalizacja zaniedbanych terenów. Osiąganie wysokich plonów we wspomnianych ogrodach nie jest głównym celem tej działalności. W znacznej mierze jest to bardziej działalność edukacyjna, która może też być wykorzystywana jako alternatywa forma produkowania świeżej żywności.

Możliwość aktywnego odpoczynku na własnej działce i uprawa własnych warzyw są nie tylko przyjemne, ale też mogą stać się jedną z form rekreacji w mieście. W niektórych przypadkach może być też wykorzystana jako terapia dla ludzi zmęczonych tempem życia oraz dla tych, którzy pracują w pozycji siedzącej.

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