

Transnational at Home: Intercultural Gardens and the Social Sustainability of Cities in Innsbruck, Austria

Transnacional en Casa: Huertos interculturales y la sostenibilidad de las ciudades en Innsbruck, Austria

Markus Schermer*

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Summary

The impact of social stability and cohesion on the sustainability of cities gains importance as changing relations between societal groups of different cultural background increasingly shape life in urban environments due to global migration. Urban gardening initiatives and intercultural gardens are receiving growing public attention, especially within Germany and Austria, as a means of migrant integration. The paper uses the intercultural community garden in the Austrian city of Innsbruck as a case to illustrate these processes. The empirical material is based on interviews, besides observations during a public garden visit and newspaper clippings.

The paper describes changing patterns from classical emigration over work migration to *transmigration* and living in *transnational social spaces*. Intercultural gardens are conceptualized as specific forms of transnational spaces, which localize them and at the same time open them to *multi-ethnic* spaces. As intercultural gardens are organized as communal spaces, they provide new social networks for persons from different provenance and encourage various learning processes. Thus they impact on two key dimensions of the social sustainability of cities, social cohesion and the stability of communities, and allow new ways of interaction between different cultures beyond assimilation and integration.

Key words

Intercultural gardens, transnational space, transmigration, social sustainability, social capital

Resumen

El impacto de la estabilidad y la cohesión social para la sostenibilidad de las ciudades gana importancia, ya que las cambiantes relaciones entre grupos sociales de diferente origen cultural influyen cada vez más sobre la vida urbana debido a procesos de migración global. Iniciativas de huertos urbanos y huertos interculturales reciben cada vez más atención pública como medio de integración de los migrantes, sobre todo en Alemania y Austria. En este artículo se utiliza el huerto comunitario intercultural en la ciudad austriaca de Innsbruck como un caso para ilustrar estos procesos. El material empírico se basa en entrevistas, aparte de observaciones realizadas durante una visita pública al huerto y artículos de prensa.

El artículo describe los cambios de patrones de migración desde la emigración clásica sobre la migración laboral hacia la transmigración y vivir en *espacios sociales transnacionales*. Los huertos interculturales están conceptualizados como formas específicas de espacios transnacionales, lo que los *localiza* y al mismo tiempo los abre como *espacios multiétnicos*. Debido a que los huertos interculturales están organizados como espacios comunales, proporcionan nuevos enlaces sociales para personas de diferentes orígenes y promueven diversos procesos de aprendizaje. Así impactan en dos dimensiones claves de la sostenibilidad social urbana, que son la cohesión social y la estabilidad de las comunidades; y favorecen nuevas formas de interacción entre diferentes culturas más allá de la asimilación y la integración.

Palabras clave

Jardines interculturales, espacio transnacional, transmigration, sostenibilidad social, capital social

* Markus Schermer is associated professor with a main research focus on rural sociology and agro-food studies. E-mail: markus.schermer@uibk.ac.at.

1. Introduction

In September 2011 I participated in a guided tour through an intercultural community garden in Innsbruck, Austria. We moved through the garden and the mostly female gardeners described their plots and the significance of the garden activity for them.

The first woman was from Bosnia, in charge of the communal bed for beans. The beans were kept separate as the climbing variety had different requirements to other crops. The woman in charge explained that the beans and especially the particular variety of beans she was growing had a special connection to her personal history. As a child back home in Bosnia during Ramadan fasting time she and her friends had used to sit every late afternoon on a hill at the edge of the village watching the sun going down. Although as children they were exempted from obeying fasting rules, they waited impatiently for the lights to be put on in the mosque, indicating the breaking of the fasting. Then they ran down to their grandmother's house, where they received a delicious dish made out of this particular variety of beans.

The next stop was at the collective bed of the Latin American community. The woman who explained their activities was of Spanish origin, but married to a Colombian. She told us that the main crop grown in this bed was maize and that a number of discourses usually develop around it when the group gathers for their gardening activities. They then discuss not only the cultural relevance of maize in different Latin American countries, but also about genetic modification of maize, the role of Monsanto in the exploitation of genetic resources etc. The Spanish woman then continued to present her own patch, next to the collective bed. She told us that she is trying year after year to grow her favorite variety of tomatoes from home, but so far without much success. However she does not give up and is planning to try again the coming year.

Further on again another Bosnian woman explained the different crops she grows, relating each of them to family recipes how to cook or preserve them best. Finally the Turkish owner of a private tomato bed proudly announced that this year she had already harvested 26 kilograms from the small plot.

The different ways how these women presented their plots may serve as a first indication of the variety of approaches towards garden activities and food in general, which can be found among the participants of intercultural gardens. This sparked my interest in the relevance of gardening and the garden as a cultural space for the participants of intercultural garden initiatives. This seems to be an aspect so far largely neglected by research as a literature review on research about community gardens in the USA (Francis, 2009) concludes. The review specifically recommends studies on the contribution of community gardens to sustainable development of cities as an area for new research.

Two local politicians were in our small group during the garden visit. One was a member of the regional parliament from the green party, the other a member of the city council from the ruling conservative party, conveying greetings from the mayor. The presence of two politicians at such an informal event underpins the interest and importance given to the integrative effects of intercultural gardens by official institutions.

Thus the aim of this contribution is to explore the relevance of the garden for individual participants as well as for city administrations in

the concept of social sustainability. To examine these connections I will employ two theoretical approaches, the notion of *transnational spaces* and the concept of *social sustainability of cities*. I will show how intercultural community gardens combine these two concepts and thus open up new avenues to engage in an intercultural dialogue beyond the usual frame of integration and assimilation.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section provides a background of the historical development of intercultural gardens in general and a brief description of the garden in Innsbruck, which serves as an illustrative case study. This is followed by a brief account of the various waves of migration to Austria. The account is framed by theoretical reflections on the changing patterns of migration from classical emigration over work migration during the era of the *Wirtschaftswunder* (German for “economic miracle”) to current forms of *transmigration* and living in *transnational social spaces*. I will then explain how intercultural gardens localize transnational social spaces which usually stretch over long distances and connect nations and even continents. At the same time, the transnational space, often remaining within a single ethnic sphere, is opened up and becomes multiethnic and multicultural. This creation of *localized* and simultaneously *multicultural* transnational spaces, I will argue, is a crucial factor for the social sustainability of cities.

The next section elaborates the concept of social sustainability of cities further. Sustainability can neither be reduced to environmental issues, nor to material flows, but needs to include social stability and cohesion. These factors are influenced greatly by changing relations between societal groups of different cultural backgrounds due to global migration. Thus social sustainability has emerged as a theme in its own right (Dempsey *et al.*, 2011). I will focus on two key dimensions of social sustainability, *social cohesion* and the *stability of communities*, and underpin the theoretical reflections again with examples from the intercultural community garden of Innsbruck. Finally, the concluding section discusses the potential of intercultural gardens to provide new interactions between different cultures beyond the traditional models of assimilation and integration.

The empirical material on the intercultural community garden in Innsbruck is derived from various sources. Beside my own participant observation during the garden visit and discussions with a member of the core group, the illustrative examples used in the paper build mainly on the qualitative content analysis of five narrative interviews.¹ Furthermore, I analyzed a number of internet sites and articles in newspapers, which were published on the case.

2. The concept of intercultural gardens

The notion of community gardens has a long tradition in the history of urban growth and industrialization in the form of allotment gardens. For instance Flavell (2003) reports that as early as 1780 in the town of Sheffield 1500-1800 allotments had been available for rent to workers. Recently, the topic of community gardening has gained a renewed attention in connection to urban farming. While allotment gardens were and are highly individualized, often with fences around each plots, community gardens have an explicit element of community building in their goals (Moulin-Doos, 2013).

¹ I am indebted to Monika Fischer and Elisabeth Walch for the verbatim transcripts of interviews which they conducted in the frame of their unpublished Bachelor theses on motivations for participation and communication structure in the intercultural community garden of Innsbruck.

Essentially, community gardens can be understood as social movements (Rosol, 2010; Walter, 2012) from two different perspectives. One is related to food justice and lack of access to an affordable and healthy diet (see for instance Corrigan, 2011; Metcalf and Widener, 2011) as a result of the prevailing corporate food system (Kelly, 2012). This lack of access is commonly referred to as “food deserts” (Cummins & McIntyre, 2002). From a different perspective some urban sociologists (Rosol, 2006; Müller, 2011) claim that community gardens create new relations with the city, reclaiming public space and exerting post-modern practices of production and consumption.

In the USA, Canada and Australia community gardens are often used by specific ethnic and migrant groups (Armstrong, 2000). Recent studies (Augustina and Beilin, 2012) on intercultural aspects of community gardens mention that often intra-cultural association is fostered instead of cross-cultural association due to language barriers. Seto (2009) mentions that research tends to focus on gardens which are ethnically homogenous, even in areas where the surrounding neighborhood is demographically diverse. In contrast to other community gardens where inter-ethnicity casually happens, the concept of intercultural community gardens aims explicitly at the social inclusion of persons from a variety of ethnical and cultural backgrounds (Müller, 2002).

The phenomenon of intercultural gardens seems to be particularly strong in Germany and Austria. The German Network of Intercultural Gardens (*Netzwerk Interkulturelle Gärten*) lists currently 145 gardens in 16 regional states of Germany, while 83 more are currently (April 2013) planned.² Within Austria there are about 40 community gardens organized within a network called *Gartenpolylog*.³ Out of them 13 are explicitly labelled “intercultural gardens” or can be included under this heading according to their description.

The first intercultural gardens emerged in Germany during the Yugoslavian war.

In 1995 Bosnian refugees found themselves stranded in Göttingen, awaiting the end of the war in their home country, women unaccustomed to idleness who missed their big vegetable gardens. Together with the Ethiopian agrarian engineer Shimeles, they went in search of suitable land to cultivate even in exile. This was the start of a success story (Müller, 2007).

Two different forms can be distinguished. There are gardens at asylum centers where participants are refugees from different countries (about 5 of the intercultural gardens in Austria) and gardens in cities which provide spaces of integration for people from all over the world including local residents (about 8 of the intercultural gardens in Austria). Gardens at asylum centers are important for refugees in a situation where they are not allowed to work. They have a great potential to maintain their self-esteem. However, sometimes they do not provide much scope for the integration of migrants into the host society, especially if only refugees are participating in garden activities. The interaction between local and migrant populations, which is one central goal of the second category, opens up a number of additional potential impacts for sustainable urban development. Therefore in this paper I will concentrate on the second category only, for which the intercultural community garden in Innsbruck serves as an example.

² <http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/gaerten-im-ueberblick> (accessed 10.5.2013)

³ <http://gartenpolylog.org/de> (accessed 10.5.2013)

3. The intercultural community garden in Innsbruck, Austria

The intercultural community garden in Innsbruck is situated in the south of the city on a plot which legally belongs to an abbey of the Premonstratensian clergy. The idea emerged in 2008, when the catholic diocese together with refugee support organizations had organized a workshop about intercultural gardens. A small working group was established and elaborated a project proposal which was submitted for funding to the Austrian Development Cooperation, the local town council and the regional government. Finally, a plot of about 2600 m² was assigned to the group. The city council provided access to water, and various institutions for adult education were instrumental in the further development of organizational structures. In 2012 the initiative was turned into a registered association, which provides a more formalized organizational structure.

According to their information leaflet and internet website⁴ the intercultural community garden aims to provide a meeting space for people of different origin, culture, lifestyle and age. The rules for participation, established through grassroots' democratic decisions, try to safeguard the balance among the members regarding their ethnic, religious and national origins as well as their lifestyle and age. Despite this definition of the objectives, the term "intercultural" seems to be interpreted mainly as "inter-ethnic" in the context of intercultural gardens. For example, the initiative established rules to prevent the dominance of certain ethnic groups in the overall composition of participants. A limit of maximum 20% was established and at the moment no more Austrian or Turkish applicants are admitted, to prevent overrepresentation of these nationalities. According to Moulin-Doors (2013) such regulations are common practice in most intercultural gardens. Currently the members originate from 25 different countries with a gender relation of about two-third women and one-third men. Besides participants of Austrian and Turkish background, most nationalities are represented by 3-4 persons. Second generation migrants, often identifying themselves with the country of origin despite of possessing an Austrian passport, are counted according to their ethnic heritage.

In 2013 the group consisted of about 60 active gardeners with and without migrant background. Besides Austrian residents the garden assembles work migrants, foreign students, refugees and other participants who left their home countries out of personal reasons (e.g. being married to an Austrian). The social, economic, religious, political and educational background varies greatly. Most of the Latin American members for instance have an academic education, while especially elderly Turkish women often only have minimal schooling and little proficiency in speaking German.

The intercultural garden allocates plots to individuals and families as well as to groups and for communal purposes. In 2012 the participants cultivated 19 individual plots, 7 collective plots and 8 communal plots. Individual plots are given mainly to families. One interviewed member argued that individual plots are too big for single persons and may cater for the requirement of an entire family. Collective plots are managed for instance by regional groups, like the Latin American group, by religious groups (like the "Bosnian Islamic Religious and Cultural Association") or by "Women from all Countries" —an educational and cultural initiative for female migrants. Communal beds for herbs, flow-

4 <http://garteninnsbruck.blog.at/> (accessed 10/5/2013)

ers and berries are free for individual needs while a central raised bed for vegetables is used to cater for communal feasts. Cultivation according to the principles of organic agriculture is mandatory for all plots.

The plots are distributed in a meeting at the beginning of the gardening season. There is a waiting list as there are more applications than the group can cater for. Each year 3-5 families or single members drop out and their plots can be allocated to new applicants. Besides a nominal membership fee of €5 per year, an annual fee of €20 is collected for individual plots and €50 for collective plots which are usually bigger. The fees are used to cover the running costs, for example for water or the mobile toilet. The group is able to keep the amount rather symbolic, as they receive financial contributions from various donors.

The garden provides also space for recreation, collective activities and a playground for children. Various religious and cultural feasts, according to the origin of the gardeners, are frequently celebrated together thus encouraging intercultural communication and learning. Monthly gatherings are held in the garden during the growing season, but the core group organizes several meetings on different topics even during winter time to foster the community spirit.

The motivation to participate varies between ethnic groups and personal situations. While the gardening activity is basically central to all, some combine this interest either with the intercultural dimension and focus on global learning process or with the community aspect of social inclusion. Among migrant participants, the aspect of self-provisioning

Figure 1. Intercultural community garden in Innsbruck. Source: Interkultureller Gemeinschaftsgarten Wilten-Innsbruck.



or growing varieties that are not available on the market is very important. For instance, a Moroccan family cultivates a specific variety of peppermint needed for their traditional tea, while Mexicans grow certain chili varieties or *tomatillos* to prepare sauces and so on. For others, most notably for some Turkish women, the aim is to maximize their yield for self-provisioning of vegetables. However, for many the yield is not the main interest but rather the process of gardening and meeting other people. Especially Austrian participants are more often working rather on collective and communal plots than on private ones and seem to have less interest in gardening for subsistence purposes.

4. Changing faces of migration: From emigration to transmigration

Currently, the share of non-national population living in Austria is about 11.5%. When including “first generation migrants”, meaning persons holding an Austrian passport but with a “migrant background”, the figure increases to 18.9%. Amongst non-Austrian residents the biggest group comes from former Yugoslavia (42.4%) followed by migrants from Germany (23.0%) and Turkey (19.1%) (Balazszi *et al.*, 2012).

The patterns of migration have changed over time. Traditional migration research distinguished three ideal types, regardless of the motives and whether migration has been voluntary or forced upon: emigration/immigration, migration/re-migration and Diaspora migration (Pries, 2003). The classic type of migration is the *emigration/immigration* to a “new world”. The migration waves to the USA in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century fall into this category. These migrants lose their ties to the region of origin quickly and there is a high potential for integration/assimilation into the recipient society.

Traditionally, Austria has been rather a country of emigration than immigration. However, especially from the 1960s onward, when economic growth accelerated, work migration increased. The first wave from 1963 to 1974 was characterized by an influx of young men mainly from Yugoslavia and Turkey. They usually only worked in Austria for a couple of years, as they were awarded work permits for a limited time only, and returned afterwards to their home countries. This rotational behavior was termed “guest workers”. In 1971 the proportion of foreign workers among the total work force was 6.1%, however only 2.8% among the total population (Bauer, 2008). This indicates that the majority of migrants at that time were men (more than 60%) without their families accompanying them. This was the typical pattern of *migration/re-migration*. After the first oil crisis and the resulting economic crisis during the 1970s, the policy of Austrian immigration authorities changed and permits for new immigrants were reduced. At the same time, it was made easier for those already in Austria to stay longer and to bring their families. Consequently, the proportion of female migrants increased from 39.4% in 1971 to 44.4% in 1981. The percentage of children increased even more from 14.8% to 22.5% (Bauer, 2008).

The breakdown of the socialist countries and the fall of the “Iron Curtain” in 1989 resulted in a sharp increase of migrants of almost 80% within 4 years. Now more and more refugees and asylum seekers immigrated. Especially the war in Yugoslavia after 1991 resulted in a high influx of refugees. Thus, the total number of immigrants almost doubled between 1989 and 1993, reaching 9.1% of the total work force (Bauer,

2008). About two-third of the 90.000 refugees from former Yugoslavia immigrated permanently to Austria.

Recent statistical data suggest that the integration of migrants into the Austrian society differs according to their country of origin (Balaszti *et al.*, 2012). Migrants from former Yugoslavia adapted quite fast to the Austrian society and their cultural ties to the society of origin have weakened over time. Even when they maintain some cultural difference to the Austrian culture, at the same time they become more and more alienated from their culture of origin. According to Balaszti *et al.* (2012) 92% of respondents from former Yugoslavia feel at home in Austria, but only 78% of respondents from Turkey. Similarly three-quarters of former Yugoslavians regard themselves as belonging to Austria in contrast to only 44% of migrants from Turkey.

The more often tradition-minded migrants from Turkey frequently originate from rural areas in central Anatolia. They often cultivate their traditions to underline their culture of origin and sometimes observe traditional attitudes and religious norms even more strictly than people in many parts of Turkey. Therefore, migrants from former Yugoslavia could be rather called *immigrants*, while many of the Turkish migrants would belong to a *Diaspora* in the above mentioned classic typology. Originally, the term 'Diaspora' refers to religious groups which were forced to leave their homeland. According to Faist (2010) more recent interpretations of the term include three general characteristics: dispersal, the social orientation to an (often imagined) homeland and maintaining cultural distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* other groups. Social tensions between them and the population of the host country, who demands assimilation, are frequent.

According to Pries (2003) these three ideal types cannot cover the current social reality any more. In recent decades a new type of migratory behavior, *transmigration*, is emerging. In 2011 about 130.000 persons migrated to Austria, almost half of them from other EU-countries (one quarter of the total from Central & Eastern European countries like Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic), asylum seekers were about 11%, almost equal with the immigration of family members coming from non EU-countries. At the same time 95.000 persons left Austria again (Balaszti *et al.*, 2012). This high mobility is typical for a situation of transmigration. Transnational migrants or transmigrants are "immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1995, p. 48). For transmigrants migration is neither a single event, nor a unidirectional movement, like for emigrants, but a recurrent stage.

One of the distinct features of the concept is that transnational social spaces are not temporary stages on the way to integration/assimilation or returning to the country of origin but part of permanent life trajectories (Pries, 2003). Transmigrants can be conceptualized as pluri-local, if not in their physical reality, then at least in their state of mind. Their social space becomes transnational and is not bound to fixed and precisely defined borders of a nation-state, like in the case of emigrants or migrants/re-migrants. Usually their *transnational social spaces* are connected to new forms of communication, which allow an at least virtual presence in both societies. Transmigrants remain connected to their families abroad for example via e-mail and Skype.

Transnational social spaces allow two different interpretations. Pries

(2003) presupposes that the transnational space is not a mosaic of 'homes' kept coherent by a set of common differential denominators or ethnic ascriptions, like in the case of the 'Diaspora', but consists of multiple, partly opposing social constructs with elements of identification and social structure of both spaces and the corresponding cultures. Transmigrants become part of two worlds, they maintain ties to the culture where they come from and develop new relations in the culture where they come to. In contrast to this conception Faist (2006) understands transnational social spaces as stretching over different nationalities, while the relations remain largely within one ethnic group. This understanding includes members of Diaspora communities and could be applied to ethnic entrepreneurs in the USA (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) or even for instance to Beninese second hand car importers who travel regularly between Cotonou and Brussels. Rosenfeld (2012) defines them as transmigrant, but restricted to the economic sphere. In this paper I will try to show that intercultural community gardens have a potential to break up the negative effects of transnational spaces in Diasporas into new relationships that comply with the inclusive conception of Pries.

5. The intercultural garden as a localized multi-ethnic transnational space

The distinct feature of intercultural gardens is that they *localize* the transnational social spaces and do not only bridge the gap between the various localities, but also between past and their present. Moreover, the intercultural gardens offer overlapping transnational spaces which lead to *multi-ethnic* spaces. Ultimately, the thematic issue of food provisioning generates a link between these different features.

Food is more than the calories it contains. In the sense of Marcel Mauss (1990 [1924]) food can be perceived "a total social phenomenon". Or, as Warren Belasco phrased it: "food is important. In fact, nothing is more basic" (Belasco, 2006, p. vii). As we have seen in the introductory account of the public garden visit, this applies to a high degree to intercultural gardeners. The choice of seeds is not informed primarily by the needs of subsistence. The gardeners grow varieties which have a strong personal relevance, like for instance the beans in the case of the Bosnian muslim woman, who relates them to a safe place in her childhood memories, to her grandmother (family) and her religious heritage. By planting and caring for these beans she can reconnect to her personal history, her culture, her heritage and her country. On the other hand, she has to acquire knowledge about the local conditions of climate, soil, temperature and rainfall in Innsbruck in order to be successful. Gardening provides a feeling for seasons and integrates into the natural rhythms of the new environment. In this way not only seeds, but the entire person is literally transplanted and re-rooted (Müller, 2002).

A further example of re-rooting by growing seeds from a distant home in a new locality can be observed in the case of the Spanish lady who, even more metaphorically, tries again and again to grow a certain variety, even if she has had no success in consecutive years. In her case the significance of the activity for her subsistence has almost vanished and the psychological relevance for taking roots in a strange soil has taken over. Thus the garden as a specific locality provides a space



Figure 2. Muslim woman in the Intercultural community garden, Innsbruck. Source: Interkultureller Gemeinschaftsgarten Wilten-Innsbruck.

where transnational elements are rooted and where transmigrants can feel at home. The intercultural garden provides a locality where different stages of their personal history and important features for their self-sustenance, like food, from different national spaces amalgamate. Empirical studies in other parts of the world underpin this. “Food as a major transmitter of cultural capital” (Flora *et al.*, 2011, p.130) is confirmed for Latino immigrants in the Midwest of the USA as well as in inter-ethnic community gardens in Melbourne/Australia, where Augustina and Beilin (2012, p. 447) conclude that “community gardens provide a space to make the unfamiliar familiar; re-creating the sense of belonging for migrants, either by transplanting the gardening practices from their country of origin, or by creating a connection to the new community”.

Moreover, the work in the garden can have a therapeutic effect relieving different traumas for those migrants who left their homes due to political unrest. While this is a specifically important feature for intercultural gardens at asylum centres, garden work may relieve personal crises in general, regardless for residents or migrants. This is underpinned by a quote of one member of the intercultural garden in Innsbruck, who mentioned in a newspaper interview, that garden work had helped her to overcome the psychological pressure after her divorce (Al-Kattib, 2011). Such effects of gardening on psychological well-being are well documented in a number of studies, listed for instance by Armstrong (2000).

Besides the contribution of gardening to the general well-being, as confirmed during the interviews, especially the Austrian participants referred to the personal enrichment derived from cultural encounters. The option for different groups to meet with a common goal regardless of their ethnic, religious, cultural and social background adds a further aspect to the localization of transnational spaces in intercultural gardens. Intercultural gardens are an arena of contact and for social learning between different cultural and ethnic groups. The processes of sharing experiences and learning are manifold. As the guided tour through the garden exemplifies, the discussions may circle around issues of political economy and ecology (as in the case of the Latin American group) or much more tangible concerns and knowledge sharing such as vegetable preservation techniques or cooking recipes.

Of course the cultural encounters are not always without friction. The interviews revealed a number of potential and actual conflicts amongst the gardeners. Some occurred due to language problems, others due to differences in educational levels, again others due to different cultural perceptions. The aim of mixing a big variety of cultural backgrounds, age groups and lifestyles increases not only the potential for social learning, but at the same time also the potential for conflict. For instance, the claim for a big plot seems to be different according to the various ethnic groups. Some interviewed members mentioned that especially elderly women with an Islamic, Turkish or Arab cultural background seem to have a stronger orientation towards production

Figure 3. Learning in the intercultural community garden, Innsbruck. Source: Interkultureller Gemeinschaftsgarten Wilten-Innsbruck.



and request bigger plots or gradually extend their plots at the expense of others. Maybe this group is economically weaker and therefore more dependent on the productivity of their plot, maybe the women raise their status within their community by being “good gardeners”. However, the informants indicated that they had no real explanation yet. Turkish men, on the other hand, only involve themselves into digging and turning the soil in the beginning of the season, afterwards they use the garden rather for meeting friends and playing cards. One interviewee mentioned the fact that they even refuse to participate in communal garden work upon invitation as a potential source of conflict between Austrian and Turkish members. During the establishment phase of the garden the core group had anticipated such potential conflicts and even invited an external expert for a workshop on conflict management.

Although cultural differences may sometimes induce tensions between neighboring gardeners, all interviewed members confirmed that the open atmosphere and the high emotional value assigned to the common good of the garden so far overruled the discrepancies. This is reported in various other studies on intercultural gardens. Moulin-Doos (2013) refers to the creation of mutual respect in intercultural gardens which provide common spaces beyond existing and persisting differences. Kelly (2012) reports similar experiences for a community garden project in Toronto. Also there tensions did not result in the dissolution of the activities, but were perceived as an integral part of community building. Thus the provision of multicultural overlapping transnational spaces, if properly guided, may provide a valuable learning ground to improve the mutual understanding and tolerance between different cultural groups. This is a precondition for achieving social sustainability in today’s multiethnic urban environments.

6. Migration and the social sustainability of cities

The global migration movements cumulate in cities; within Austria the share of migrants is highest in the national capital Vienna with 33% migrant population, followed by Salzburg (30% migrants), Wels (28%) and Innsbruck (25%). However, it needs to be noted that the high percentage of migrants in some cities, especially in Salzburg and Innsbruck, is attributed to an influx of German nationals who are generally not considered “migrants” (Woidich, 2007). In any case migration is a predominantly urban phenomenon and cities become more and more focal points of processes of social inclusion and exclusion (Müller, 2009). While in former times cities were attractive in the hope for a better life, free from the political and social restrictions of rural life, today the growing economic and social polarization is felt especially in urban contexts and there is a tendency that cities change from places of integration to places of exclusion (Siebel, 2010). This has of course repercussions on the social sustainability of cities.

Although originally part of the concept of sustainability, the social aspect has been largely neglected in a focus on bio-physical environmental issues (Valance *et al.*, 2011; Murphy, 2012). This rather eco-centric approach needs to be replaced by an anthropocentric approach which “focuses on human relationships, marking what is commonly referred to as social sustainability” (Manzi *et al.*, 2010 p. 3). However, the concept of urban social sustainability is still quite vague (Murphy,

2012). Dempsey *et al.* (2011) provide in their literature review on the social dimension of sustainable development a long list of physical and non-physical factors. Building on Barmley & Power (2009) the authors identify two dimensions, *social equity* and the *sustainability of community* as underlying key concepts for social interaction and local environmental quality. This comprises what Chiu (2003) calls a *people-oriented* interpretation of social sustainability in contrast to *development*—or *environment-oriented* approaches—. In the following, I will restrict myself to this people-oriented perspective and look specifically at the connection to (trans)migration processes.

Social equity is based on social justice and inclusion. It relates to “aspects of everyday life to which residents and users need equitable access... [these] include education and training, decent housing, public services, (social) infrastructure, green space, culture and recreation” (Dempsey *et al.*, 2011, p. 293). Within an urban context, social equity means the absence of “exclusionary” or discriminatory practices, that hinder individuals from participating economically, socially and politically in society (Pierson, 2002; Ratcliffe, 2000). Thus, social exclusion or inclusion is more than just a question of social discrimination or relative poverty. It includes the possibilities of being heard, finding recognition, having chances to social status improvement and being accepted members of society (Bude, 2008).

Our society generally demands that migrants adapt to local situations by means of assimilation if they want to be accepted. This attitude originates from the traditional perception of migration as an irreversible act of emigration/immigration. The sequence of assimilation as postulated by Taft (1953) distinguishes seven stages: (1) cultural learning, (2) developing a positive attitude towards the host society, (3) developing a negative attitude towards the country of origin, (4) economic accommodation, (5) social acceptance by the host society, (6) identification with the host society, and (7) adoption of the norms and values of the host society.

However, this sequence does not fit to the social reality of migration today. In contrast, today’s transnational migrants frequently do not remain permanently in the country where they migrate for work. Moreover, they often do not even select consciously the country where they end up; it is merely a choice by chance where they know someone already and thus have connections to access a labour market. If the working or living environment does not provide much contact with the local population, it is not easy to develop a positive attitude. Some migrants live in a status of asylum seekers without the possibility to work, preventing cultural learning and economic accommodation etc. The situations of migrating persons are very diverse and do not always lead ultimately to identification with the host country and the adoption of cultural values of the host society.

The very notion of integration (let alone of assimilation) has become a problematic term. There is an ongoing debate in general society on how to deal with multi-ethnicity in our daily life. Multi-ethnicity implies not only relations between migrants and local population, but also between migrants from different cultural backgrounds, an additional factor for social sustainability. Therefore, according to Amelina (2010), the terms assimilation and integration should be substituted by the term *inclusion*. This would prevent to fix an “entire” person or an “entire” collective group to a national container space. Inclusion moreover denotes a temporary arrangement and not a fixed state (Amelina,

2010). Pries (2003) understands the social inclusion of migrants as an open process without predetermined results. This includes different ways how migrants involve themselves in the economic, cultural, political and social set ups on different spatial levels (local, national and transnational) in both, the region of origin and the region of arrival (if these terms are still justified, given that people migrate forth and back). A complex process of interaction, but also reflection on oneself and the other, is the result.

The second key dimension of social sustainability is the *sustainability of communities*, which Dempsey *et al.* (2011) associate with collective “social capital” and “social cohesion”, encompassing social networks, norms of reciprocity and features of social organization (Coleman, 1988). Following Woolcock (1998), we may distinguish three forms of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking social capital. *Bonding social capital* generally refers to horizontal, face-to-face relationships occurring in homogenous groups (like a family or neighborhood) where members share identities, histories and viewpoints. Obviously, this type of social capital is very important for migrants. They often depend initially on the assistance of fellow countrymen to establish themselves in a foreign country and often relate to the positive and negative experiences their compatriots have already made. While this is essential for a first orientation in a new environment, it may also lead to “negative social capital” (Portes, 1998). Portes, who studied ethnic entrepreneurs in the USA, identified “four negative consequences of social capital: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms” (Portes, 1998, p. 15). Such processes can be especially observed in Diaspora migrant communities, if the group becomes too much self-centered and other dimensions of social capital are missing.

Bridging social capital links members of more distant groups (either horizontally or vertically) and allows the mobilization of external resources. Relations to other groups or individuals with other cultural backgrounds are crucial for a critical reflection on one’s own prejudices or the collective prejudices of one’s ethnic group. The confrontation with other approaches and perspectives enriches the personal development. The simultaneous presence of bonding social capital, necessary for emotional embedding and of bridging social capital, raising the individual autonomy, seems to be a crucial precondition for personal development and ultimately for the establishment of social sustainable multi-ethnic communities (Rush, 2010). The third category, *linking capital*, refers to linkages across levels of institutions, which allow access to power holders. This again is vital to reduce power asymmetries between the different ethnic and social groups in their relation to government and state institutions.

According to Constock *et al.* (2010) gardening may have positive effects on the social cohesion of communities. Their quantitative study, conducted in Denver, Colorado in the USA, suggested that besides length of residency and collective efficacy the participation in community gardening correlates with neighborhood attachment. Bartolomei *et al.* (2003, p. 57) recommended that public housing authorities “actively pursue development of community gardens in public housing estates as an important contribution to community and personal renewal and empowerment”. Their and other studies (Müller, 2007; Augustina and Beilin, 2011) mention the effect of sharing food and exchanging seeds and recipes on community building. Beckie and Bogdan (2010,

p. 83) quote a senior immigrant gardener who concludes that “there is nothing better than food to build community”. These positive effects may be understood in connection to the formation of social capital.

7. The contribution of intercultural gardens to social inclusion and the sustainability of communities

Migrant women originating from remote rural areas are among the most marginalized social groups in modern urban life. Rural descent, migratory background and female gender constitute major intersectional categories of marginalization. Gardening is essentially a rural practice that is very often exerted by women. During the era of modernization urban societies frequently regarded agriculture and gardening as backward and something from the past. Moreover, women in agriculture stood for subsistence production and reproductive activities which were also look down on as being backward.

In recent years, however, a new attitude towards growing one’s own food can be observed. A new trend towards practices of “do it yourself” is emerging (Renting *et al.*, 2012), which may lead to a reversal of such negative appreciations. Gardening has become a potential to enhance the *social equity* for usually marginalized social groups in the sense of being an accepted member of society (Bude, 2008). In the industrialized world the present generation (and to a large extent even the one before) has no practical experience in gardening or agriculture. Now at once knowledge related to agricultural and gardening practices is again highly appreciated. Women, people of lower educational status and persons of rural origin are no longer looked down upon by well-educated city folk. This reverses the traditional gradient of power and raises the status of those who know how to grow.

While people originating from a rural background were often ashamed of their heritage, the revived interest in gardening, and more specifically in organic gardening which builds on tacit plant knowledge and traditional skills, may raise their self-consciousness. The pride of the women when presenting their plots at the intercultural garden tour in Innsbruck was very telling in this respect. When the intercultural garden group organized a course on seed multiplication, selection and preservation, elderly Turkish women, who hardly speak any German, acted as teachers together with educated gardening experts. In such practical workshops the language proficiency comes second to technical knowledge. For instance compost making was taught by members of the core group in the form of an entertaining drama. Communication through demonstration enables an active participation for people who usually keep silent in plenary meetings. The participants can be teachers and pupils at the same time; everybody is in a similar situation which encourages openness, solidarity and mutual assistance. Experiences from many cultural backgrounds are equally shared, which allows valuing the background of the other.

Nevertheless, language proficiency is still essential for social inclusion into the general society of the host country. This barrier has been mentioned in various other studies on community gardens (Kelly, 2012; Augustina and Beilin, 2012). A limited command of German excludes members from the participation in the core group and in plenary sessions as one interviewed member observed. Therefore the core group tries to integrate language courses into the garden’s activities. One of



Figure 4. Scene of the intercultural community garden in Innsbruck. Source: Interkultureller Gemeinschaftsgarten Wilten-Innsbruck.

the Austrian members, who is experienced in teaching German to migrants, started already to give lessons in the garden.

The intercultural garden provides a new set of possibilities for interaction to people with different backgrounds who are in a similar situation. This may help to open up strong restrictive bonds which often prevail within one ethnic group. Among the participants of the intercultural garden in Innsbruck women from Turkey seem to be affected most often by the forms of “negative social capital” described above. Often in traditional settings the social space of women is confined to their homes and they are prevented to establish social relations beyond this space. The interviews confirmed that the garden is culturally perceived as a women’s sphere by Turkish men and thus women are allowed and even encouraged to participate. Their plots were generally recommended by the interviewees as being the best. As mentioned above, the Turkish gardeners were even employed as teachers in the seed multiplication workshop.

The participation in the garden therefore raises their status and increases their degree of personal freedom. In one interview the daughter of a Turkish gardener related that the participation in the garden has greatly increased the ability of her mother to express herself, despite her limited command of the German language. Now she feels confident to visit offices and hospitals without assistance. Furthermore, the garden has helped her to increase the number of personal relations with other people. However, the same interviewee conceded that

her father is usually accompanying her mother on the garden visits and that the new contacts remain largely within the Turkish community. Even if the garden is perceived a female sphere, participation in communal and collective activities seems to be restricted to productive activities and feasts. For instance, interviewed members mentioned that Turkish women are not mowing the communal lawn, supposedly this is not part of their traditional gendered division of labor. The same applies to participation in planning meetings etc.

In its contribution to a *sustainable community* the intercultural garden in Innsbruck potentially adds to all three forms of social capital on a collective level. As already mentioned the group organizes a number of social events all year round. These included for instance in 2011 a summer feast and a harvest thanksgiving feast, an interreligious celebration, a workshop on seed multiplication, a visit to a herb producer, language courses in the garden and numerous guided garden tours for visiting groups. Group meetings of the organizing team and the garden group took place regularly. Global learning was the main focus of many activities.

The collective internal activities like group meetings, feasts and workshops foster group identities and build up bonding social capital. A close relationship among the gardeners from different nations was mentioned often during the interviews. One interview partner called it a “family” and specified the relationship as being “like brothers and sisters”. This complies with the empirical evidence in other intercultural gardens (Tabrosky, 2008; Müller, 2007) where the emergence of family-like structures is reported. Another interviewed member mentioned that it has become usual, that if somebody travels to her home country for some weeks during summer time, somebody else takes over the watering and tending of her plot. In another interview a vivid seed exchange of plant varieties between the different nationalities was mentioned.

Some feasts foster internal group cohesion and others provide links to the general society. While the harvest thanksgiving feast is kept more internal, friends and the interested public are invited for the summer feast. On this occasion participants bring their traditional ethnic food specialties and share them with others, which increases the mutual understanding. The guided tours through the garden and open days create bridging social capital to other societal groups. During the last cropping seasons the opportunity to visit the garden was well received and especially schools frequently made use of this opportunity. In this respect the presence of the intercultural garden enhances not only the understanding between different cultures within the group, but also beyond in general society.

Finally, linking social capital is provided by the good relations maintained to various institutions. The group is organized within the network organization *Gartenpolylog* and core members attend conferences and workshops with other intercultural garden projects throughout Austria. In autumn 2012 they even hosted their national conference in Innsbruck. A picture calendar published by the initiative for 2012 lists as supporting partners the Austrian Development Cooperation, the regional government and the Premonstratensian abbey. My interview partner from the core group claims that their good connections to local and regional political institutions are crucial for the long term success. The presence of local and regional politicians at the occasion of the garden visit, as mentioned in the introductory section of this paper,

underpins the strong interest from the side of the institutions. Public institutions clearly started to recognize intercultural gardens as an integration measure. Even the London Sustainable Development Commission studied the intercultural gardens of Göttingen as one of eight international best practice projects (London Sustainable Development Commission, 2007; Müller, 2007).

The example of the intercultural community garden in Innsbruck highlights the potential contributions of intercultural gardens to the social sustainability of cities in general. For an extension of such endeavors some structural key success factors might be derived from the Innsbruck experience. First, the initiative has been established in a bottom-up process, but is well integrated into existing structures. There seems to be a balance between top-down and bottom-up activities, which allows creating a sense of ownership that will hopefully be fostered by the formalization into an association. Second, the initiative has put in place regulations to prevent the dominance of certain groups and to allow maximum social variation of participants. This creates an atmosphere of urban cosmopolitanism in a rural garden environment. It provides a platform for social learning, but it is at the same time very demanding in respect of dealing with inevitable conflicts due to cultural differences. Third, the regulations for use of resources allow involvement on individual, collective or communal level to cater for the different requirements of the participants. Depending on their motive for participation some can stress production while others favour the community building and cultural interaction.

8. Key aspects: the localization and multi-ethnization of individual transnational spaces

As demonstrated, the intercultural gardens may provide social inclusion for persons with migrant background and at the same time support the interaction of different cultures to increase the social sustainability of the community. The key elements to provide these benefits lie in the *localization* and *multi-ethnization* of individual transnational spaces. Intercultural gardens add important new features to this conceptualization of transnational spaces, because they localize their function through the material and emotional presence of elements of both cultures, which is mediated by soil, seeds and the resulting food produce. Moreover, they provide an arena which does not belong to a certain culture alone. They are truly transnational and transcultural localities with effects on an individual as well as on a collective level. Intercultural gardens seem to have in this respect some decisive advantages over other arenas of integration and social inclusion, like cultural centres or tea-rooms. Their decisive advantage lies in dealing with the basic issue of food provisioning.

The practical work allows to embed features of the region of origin, most obviously seeds and plants, but also the traditions and cultural aspects associated with them, into the “soil” or environment of the host country. This leads to a profound (in the literal sense) engagement and involvement into both realities. The exchange of food and seeds, as well as the collective sharing of food at feasts is a universal deeply rooted cultural practice to create and foster bonds among individuals and social groups. Gardening implies a physical activity, which allows reversing the traditional marginalization of female and rural persons.

The knowledge required in the garden relates rather to skills based on practical experience than to academic education. The increase of self-confidence appears to be a precondition to value others on equal grounds. This enables a dialogue and may open doors which are usually closed for members of Diaspora migrant groups.

Furthermore, the gardens establish an arena of intercultural exchange on an equal basis, not only between migrants and locals but also between migrants of different cultural and social backgrounds. They additionally provide a place for social learning, understanding and conflict management. Last but not least, as the intercultural gardens are communal spaces which open their doors for feasts and visits, this potential is not confined to members only, but available for the general public.

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