

French National Report

Community Gardens and Climate Change in France

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1. Introduction

In France, community gardens are part of a century old tradition started at the end of the XIXth century with the family / workers garden. They had two objectives: to feed the poor families on one side, and from a religious point of view, to keep the blue collar men working in factories away from the bars and pubs. Another objective was also, for the employers, to keep the workers far from the unions.

Their number increased through the years and 380 000 family gardens were active in 1928, 70 000 being operated by railway workers on land granted by the railway companies. World War II contributed to their development, due to food restrictions, and 700 000 were active in 1947. The industrial development that followed until the oil crisis, the “thirty glorious years“, saw a huge drop down to 150 000. During this first phase of development of the collective gardens, they were mainly family and private plots.



Generally situated near built-up areas, factories or railroads, allotments were then essentially composed of vegetable plants. The law of October 31, 1941, partially modified by the law of May 7, 1946, gave them a legal status for the first time, by distinguishing between allotment gardens, industrial or rural gardens and family gardens, their common point being the prohibition of any commercial use of the products produced.

The law of July 26, 1952 merges these different types of gardens by using the term "allotment garden" and makes them benefit from tax exemptions for the first time.

In view of the important decrease in the number of allotment gardens since the post-war period, the law of November 10, 1976 tends to ensure their preservation by giving the SAFER and the local authorities the right to pre-empt the acquisition of land intended for them and to develop them, as well as by allowing the expropriated allotment garden associations to demand the provision of an equivalent piece of land.

The current concept of community gardens, (shared garden in French, "jardin partagé") was formally created in 1997 with the [Jardin dans Tous Ses Etats](#), a French network willing to develop the community gardens as they existed in United Kingdom and overall United States (New York) and Canada (Montreal).



During the international forums organized by Jardin dans Ses États in Lille, Nantes and Paris, American and Canadian speakers explained how these gardens work. In France, the first "community garden" was created in Lille in 1997 with the support of the Ajon association. Located in the Moulins district, the Jardin des (Re)trouvailles will soon celebrate its 25th anniversary. The regional correspondents of Jardin dans Tous Ses États have locally disseminated this model to the general public, associations and local authorities. They organized during almost 20 years trainings, workshops, developed tools for people willing to develop gardens.

The network declined in the 2010s but there is a growing movement of a few organizations working on its rebirth. As always the issue was the fact that there was not a renewal of people and volunteers willing to implement and develop the network. Some emerging opportunities, including at the European level thanks to the Gardeniser projects, are now motivating some old and some new stakeholders to go beyond the past difficulties.

Gardeniser projects were implemented in the 2010s by various organizations at the European level, the most important being Pistes-Solidaires (Pau, France), Social Farms & Gardens (Bristol, UK), Replay Network (Rome, Italie) and is now joined by many countries including Austria through Gartenpolylog. The objective of this project is to professionalize the figure of the community garden organiser (Gardeniser) through a 40 hours theoretical training, followed by an internship in at least one community garden, whether it is at the local or European level when there are funding opportunities.

After the internship, the interns must pass an online test on the platform [Gardeniser.eu](https://www.gardeniser.eu) to get a licence created according to the ECVET standards (European Credits for VET). There are currently 130 Gardenisers around the world and many are going to pass the test during the second half of 2022. Municipalities are now joining the movement and there is even a new project funded by EUROPAID, Generactor, applying the Gardeniser training in Latin American cities such as Baranquilla (Colombia), Tuxtla de Gutierrez (Mexico), Lima (Peru)... The platform includes a map of the licenced gardenisers and all the community gardens associated so far, but any garden can be added by anyone on the map.

The number of community gardens, pedagogical, therapeutical gardens is increasing with a strong support of various local authorities and municipal, whether it is for the general well being of the volunteers, users and local communities or for economical reason (it is less expensive for a city to let citizens manage a green land than to clean it and to pay someone to do it). The heat waves of the last few years are also contributing to increasing the need of green spaces to mitigate the temperature rises within the urban areas, community gardens being seen as green oasis. Globally, there is a trend in favor of community gardens, even if in some peri-urban areas they can have difficulties to be implemented. A lot of families do have houses and private gardens, while others prefer the family garden model in public spaces instead of the community garden one. A person contacted by phone said for example that she didn't want to be part of a community garden because there are people who take advantage of the work of others without contributing to the functioning of the garden. This preconceived idea can be an obstacle in some areas.

Right now, the national network is the focus of various organizations that are willing to organize workshops and trainings at the national and European levels. Globally, since the 1990s, we can see that the community gardens were usually promoted and developed by private citizens and nongovernmental organizations. Due to the increasing social responsibility financial incentives for enterprises, private companies are also supporting community gardens initiatives. There is also a reinforcement of the community gardens as pedagogical tool and resource for schools and the municipalities have very active roles.

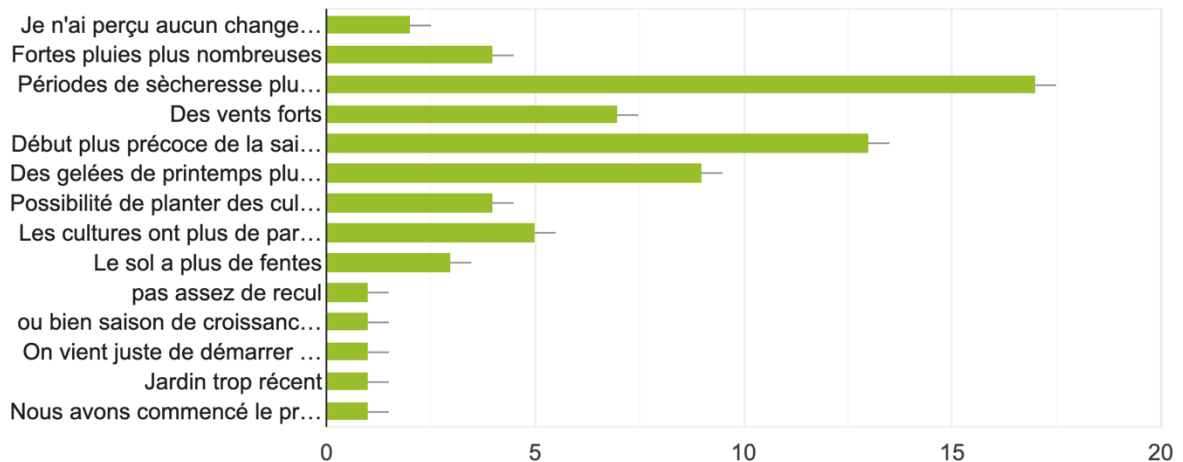
In the different exchanges and the online survey implemented during the first phase of the project, the following usual consequences are mentioned:

- Longer dry periods (65%)
- Earlier beginning of the production season (50%)
- More or unusual spring frosts (35%)
- Strong winds (27%)
- Crops do have more pests and diseases (19%)
- Possibility to plant crops that would not survive or bear fruit a few years ago (15%)

- More heavy rainfalls (15%)

Quels changements avez-vous perçus dans votre jardin communautaire en raison du changement climatique ?

26 réponses



Our exchanges with a biologist working at the CNRS (National Centre of Scientific Research) in Montpellier also mentioned an impact that gardens are more and more aware of: the low polonization. This phenomenon does not impact, surprisingly, only the city centre: the suburbs can have difficulties and there are gardeners obliged to pollinize, including simple plants such as courgettes.

2. Current Situation in the Respective Country

2.1. Adaptation to Climate change

Right now, community gardens have the potential to become strong actors in terms of climate change adaptation, but it depends on the actors, on the location of the gardens. Our online survey allowed us to reach gardens from all over France and the impacts can be very different: in the north of France, where it rains a lot, especially in Brittany, the impacts are limited while in the south, they are much more visible and we can see the

growing of plants or trees that were not so common a while. For example, if banana or palm trees are present since decades because there was a trend in Pau, they become more and more common, as are olive trees that are usually grown in the Mediterranean part of France.



A variety of techniques are currently used by the community gardens to mitigate the effect of climate change:

- Collecting rain water
- Oyas and pergolas
- Mulching
- Rotation of the plants grown
- Use of the broadfork ("grelinette") to remove soil in a superficial way
- Drop by drop
- Compost
- Green manure
- Prohibition of chemical products that could hurt and impact badly the soil

- Use of biochar
- Dry toilets
- Seed libraries
- Promoting low tech

Among the practices not yet implemented, it depends on the progress of the work already done by each garden. While a majority does compost activities, some of them didn't implement yet composting. The broad fork being a traditional tool in France, the organizations that don't use it yet are planning to do it. They are also considering the creation of ponds, to place animals able to eat slugs, etc. The use of roofs of pergolas is also a recurring topic, especially with the rising number of heat waves in France during the last years, and especially in Summer 2022.

One of the policies that could be implemented to prevent the low polinization, that weakens the production of a lot of vegetables, would be to generalize the creation of permanent green spaces, where the natural pollinizer would stay, could be attracted. The main issue is that usually people only think about the pollinizers during the spring and summer. And when they have initiatives to integrate beehives, they forget sometimes to take into account the native pollinizers, creating a competition between them, that threatens the local biodiversity.



2.2. Environmental education

The potential for environmental education of community gardens is something that gardeners are usually aware of, with 89,5% of the respondents of the questionnaire sent online giving a rate of 4 and 5 out of 5. The respondents as well as the participants to the focus agreed on the fact that the gardens are not only a space to promote sustainable practices when gardening, but also to create awareness about climate change for the general public.

This could be done through biking classes, to encourage people to use bikes, to present the consequences on the daily life of climate change, to use passive learning methods such as the use of information panels, to propose a bookshop / Library on the topic, to propose a climate mural, to propose diagnostics of ecoanxiety, to raise awareness of the way they consume...

Some of these activities are already being implemented:

- Biking classes
- Recovering unsold goods
- Permaculture
- Selling local products
- Information about the compost possibilities in the city, region...
- Eco-anxiety diagnostics (presenting it as something bad, a more positive approach will bring more solutions and hope than fear)

These informal activities that still promote awareness of climate change are quite new and we don't have yet a long-term impact available. But we can see that one of the effects of Covid-19 pandemic was an increase in numbers in people participating in community gardens. The main challenge is now to retain these volunteers and members, to avoid a "return to normal", which would make this increase a trend or fashion rather than a real change in the society.

Community gardens are also, according to the online survey, already active when it comes to organize explicitly educational activities, such as workshops for their volunteers and the local community, development of cooperation with schools or organizations promoting science among the citizens. The focus is not always on climate change but also on sustainable development in general, the two being obviously connected.

We can say that being nongovernmental organizations active in the non-formal field, the education activities are not the core of the activities implemented so far. As mentioned by one of the participants to the focus group, **the most important is for them to “lead by the example and communicate the results”**.

The challenges to organize explicitly and formal education activities can be very different according to the gardens, or their local context. The first one mentioned in our investigation is the lack of infrastructure and equipment (room, projectors, boards, etc.) and the absence of money to organize these workshops, whether it is in terms of equipment as mentioned or to pay experts to come. Another obstacle is the lack of knowledge of the local authorities in terms of climate change. The biologist working on community gardens and climate change that we met underlined the fact that there can be a deficit of knowledge in this topic in some areas as illustrated by the beehive example above in this report.



Despite these difficulties the different stakeholders suggest and propose solutions that could ease the process of organizing formal and explicit education activities such as:

- sharing material and pedagogical resources
- exchanges of expertise between the gardens
- common work between gardens to develop new content
- borrowing material / using spaces and infrastructures from the local authorities and their green services
- search of new fundings whether it is at the regional, national, or European level

2.3. Cooperations with NGOs and decision makers

Community gardens are already working on various activities with other NGOs and decision makers. Indeed, they usually organize workshops that require specific and technical knowledges. Composting is one of the topics in which these experts are active: there are various organizations in this field, and the people facilitating activities at the national level do generally have the status of “maître-composteur” (master composter), professional title created by the Ademe (Ecological transition agency).. To reach this goal, Ademe has created a 3-step professional reference system: first, a one-day training to become a composting site referent and thus be able to take care of a site on a voluntary basis. Then, there is a 2 or 3 days training to become a composting guide, which allows to become an ambassador of the waste policy of a community. Finally, there is a training of 11 days and a half to become a master composter. They usually have deals where the municipalities, for example, are sub-contracting organizations where they work. The main challenge to organize such workshops being the cost, the support of the cities is crucial, especially if they hire themselves such experts.

The municipalities are also very supportive of community gardens in general: various cities of different sizes like Pau, Montpellier, Paris, Lyon do accompany citizens who want to develop community gardens, helping them to create their project, to find a place, to create an association. They also provide materials and even plants: the last years, Montpellier offered 150 local and endemical plants, or plants adapted to the Mediterranean climate, to their 30 community gardens. There is therefore a real support possible.

3. Future Strategies

Community gardens are usually seen as very important in the context of climate strategies. The recent heatwaves confirmed this role, and they underlined how the gardens can be green lungs, and fresh spots, in the cities. The greener the city, the fresher it will be during the Summer. At the date of the writing of this report, France had almost 3 weeks of heat waves since June 2022 and the whole continental territory is now on drought alert. This is therefore very important for all the stakeholders involved.



Despite this, the focus group and the roundtable stated that the municipalities don't always have specific policies linking community gardens with climate change. Climate change is one of the topics as, for example, they recommend to and explain how not to waste water, but it is not a fight against climate change per se. Thus, the city of Montpellier asks to all gardens to sign a charter that includes some points related to climate change. But it is not its main topic and their strategies for the future don't include them as information and education centre.

This is one of the reasons that motivates the project. Concretely, all the activities already implemented and mentioned in this report can be the basis of the future strategies

regarding climate change and its awareness in community gardens. The most important point is usually from the point of the view of the gardens that they need to be exemplary. They want to lead by the example, not only by organizing workshops. But these workshops are necessary for example to promote soft mobilities, composting and they have a real potential: usually, the composting sites have more users than the volunteers in the gardens.



Another aspect to consider is the lack of long-term perspective. The community gardens movement is recent and sometimes the cities are accompanying the movement without trying to include it in a long-term perspective of climate change, even if it starts to change a little bit. The model from bottom to top such as the one in Pau or Montpellier is more and more common

The Gardeniser approach is also a model that is being applied to many countries in Europe (and now in the world) with a lot of new countries that were not in the initial group: Austria, Poland, Spain... Climate change is not yet in the training program but if we include the climate change practices with a clear and specific focus, the same way as permaculture is, it could be a very good opportunity to take advantage of the attractiveness of its European added value to promote these practices. The French

partner of Ecogardens, Pistes-Solidaires, is planning to propose to the Gardeniser consortium the results and the web app that we will develop.

4. Conclusion

Community gardens have a very important role in climate change education, as illustrated in this report. The first people concerned and touched by this role are obviously the users of the gardens. They must adapt their practices whether it is forced by the local rules already established or using their common sense when they face a drought situation like the one faced by France in 2022. The policy makers that were accompanying the creation of the gardens from a bottom-top approach need now to include them in their long-term policies due to their green lung / oasis effects.

Due to their proximity with the citizens, to the fact that they attract new visitors volunteers through their composting websites, social activities, workshops, they can have a fundamental role in the development of the policies of the cities. Some schools are already using the gardens as pedagogical resources. It is also another way to educate and inform the young and future citizens to the stakes and risks of climate change, of global warming, in their daily life and on the impact of the nature itself.

When it will come to create training material, this double aspect will need to be considered: the necessity to include children and teenagers on one side, the attractiveness to the local community in general. The material should therefore be addressed to these two audiences.

5. List of References

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6. Annex

6.1. Methodology

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Period of data collection	April-July 2022
Number of gardens, that have participated	26, from almost all parts of France
Number of gardeners represented (total)	26
Ways of reaching respondents	Via e-mail, social networks, phone
Response quote (to how many did you send out, how many did you get back)	More than 150 sent

FOCUS GROUP

Date	20/05/2022
Number of participants	10
Field of expertise of the participants	Community gardens and volunteers coming from Pau, Bayonne, Toulouse, Montpellier, Paris
Relation between participants	They met that week.
Online or place	In Assat, France
How did you choose participants?	Community gardens and volunteers that were participating that week in a training about animating community gardens.

How easy or difficult was it to get them?	They were easy to reach.
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ROUND TABLE

Date	July 2022
Number of participants	4
Background of participants (politicians, administrative body, national/regional/local,...)	1 researcher (biologist, Montpellier), 1 municipality technician (local), 1 trainer in composting (Montpellier), 1 person in charge of a community garden network in Lyon
Relation between participants	They didn't know each other
Online or place	Online
How did you choose participants?	we chose them according to their experience and expertise
How easy or difficult was it to get them?	Difficult, we had to split the meetings since it was not possible to have all at once.