

National Report

Community Gardens and Climate Change in Hungary

A review of Community Gardens' activities in climate change adaptation, environmental education and their potentials for future climate strategies.

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1. Introduction

1.1. History and development of community gardens and community garden organisations

1.1.1. Community Gardening in Hungary

Like in many other European countries, Hungarian society first encountered the concept of community gardens (CG) in the early 2000s. Initially, community gardening was typically carried out by small communities of private individuals - groups of friends in privately owned gardens, members of condominium communities - or kindergartens and schools had initiatives for common garden cultivation. Whenever we think about the introduction of an initiative in a country with a different socio-cultural background, geopolitical characteristics and a democratic social outlook that has developed organically, we have to take into account that in Hungary there is a great deal of resistance and suspicion towards activities based on community cooperation and solidarity.

At present, there are 82 active community gardens in Hungary¹. Most of it are operating in the Capital.

The types of the community gardens in Hungary in terms of their organisation:

- top-to-down initiatives:

- Municipalities organizing gardens providing plots for gardening and making gardener-recruitment process themselves or in cooperation with a professional organization (NGO) in the field.
- An NGO or individuals initiate establishment of a garden. Negotiating with the plot owner (Private owner (mostly multinational or real-estate development companies), municipalities) and then start to recruit the members of the gardening community.

- Bottom-up initiatives: an existing gardening community managing the process from finding the appropriate plot through negotiation with the land-owner to managing the operation of the CG.

Since “group of people” is not recognized by the Hungarian civil legal system as a legal entity, gardening communities must be organized in the frame of a civil legal body e.g. association, foundation etc. esp.: in case of applying for a project call or accept (financial) support.

¹ Resource: <http://kozossegitertek.hu/kertek/>. Free, up-to-date community gardens mapping of Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre's Community Gardening Project is the only initiative in Hungary that provides information about the ever existed/existing community gardens in Hungary.

1.1.2. Community Garden Organizations in Hungary

Presently, there is no any organization (association, federation etc.) or network that regionally or nationally takes up the role of coordination, networking, service providing or other functions in order to support the cooperation of the gardens, dissemination of their values and promoting them towards the public and the decision makers.

Not taken up this role, the Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre (KÉK) has been engaged in the naturalization and distribution of community gardens in Hungary since 2010 and it has facilitated the initiative to become a self-organizing movement by creating sample gardens. Our foundation has taken part in the creation of several community and school gardens in the capital and in the country, and currently it is running five community gardens.

The Foundation has worked out for the movement, which has become mostly self-organized by today, the methodology, legal background and models adaptable to the Hungarian environment. It also supported the development of the cause with education, consultancy and creation of a knowledge base. Our foundation has contributed in setting up many community- and school gardens as professional partner and operating four community gardens in Budapest.

The aim of the programme's first phase (2010-2012) was to realise the concept of community gardens in Hungary, and to broadly distribute and raise awareness of the initiative. We recruited our future gardeners and the followers of our movement through communication channels and free programmes.

As a next step, it was indispensable to plan and create in every way exemplary gardens.

Seeing the examples overseas and in other European cities (London, Berlin, etc.) we put faith in that the realisation of these gardens would result in a wide social movement. In September 2011, the "Lecsós Kert"² community garden started in the Millenaris Park as part of an awareness raising community programme and in March 2012, after the winter frosts, the plots were distributed.

Since then a lot of communities have created their own gardens following in our footsteps.

KÉK, as a professional partner, has taken part in the creation of several community and school gardens in the capital and in the country, and currently it is running four community gardens.

² <http://kozossegekertek.hu/garden/lecsos-kert/>. The first community garden in Budapest opened its gates in 2011. Closed by now.

The Leonardo Garden with the support of Futureal Holding BV (a retail and office real estate developer), the “Kerthatár”³ and the “Csárdás”⁴CG with the help of the Hungarian Telekom, and “Kisdiófa”⁵ CG with the cooperation of the local municipality of Erzsébetváros (7st district of Budapest) are expecting city residents who wish to engage in a gardening community programme. At the end of 2016 the IBIS CG and IBIS Healing garden⁶, opened in the beautiful park of Citysouth IBIS Budapest Hotel, was a true rarity, which was a community initiative, one of its kind.

Our gardens provide gardening opportunities for almost 800 city residents, and in addition, they serve other actions as well: the garden works as a meeting point, a cultural-communal space, and an innovative platform to test and distribute different liveable and sustainable urban tools, solutions.

Apart from the gardeners working on the plots of our community gardens, every year thousands of people attend the informative, cultural and community developing programmes organized within the project. The long-term aim of the project is to contribute to the distribution of eco-conscious forms of city usage, and to make concepts relevant to urban sustainability easily comprehensible.

1.2. Perception in society

“Community gardeners are still seen as a bit of oddballs to the average city dwellers. There is a need for outward-looking awareness-raising campaigns to make people know and understand community gardens/gardeners.” (participant of focus group conversation.)

Community gardening is still a blank spot for the wider public, policy and decision makers etc. There is not and has not been ever a national or even regional (green) programme that has addressed community gardens in a meaningful way and there is no centralised or regional/local financial resource system operating.

In climate strategies CG-s are still revealed in narrow and rather misunderstood context e.g. only as part of public (green) place development, than a well-known, recognized tool for community climate adaptation and mitigation⁷. *“We still do not reach the pendulum threshold.”* (CG organizer and climate activist’s remark at the questionnaire).

³ <http://kozossegi kertek.hu/garden/kerthatar-kozossegi-kert/>. The biggest community garden in Budapest with it 2600 m² and 100 plots. Operated between 2015 and 2019. Downloaded: 31/07/2022

⁴ <http://kozossegi kertek.hu/garden/csardas-kert/>. Realized with the support of Hungarian Telekom Nyrt. and the organization and professional guidance of the Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre, is located in Csárda Street, Újbuda (11th District of Budapest). More than half of the almost 600 m² area is used for gardening. In addition to 24 open field plots and 3 raised bed plots of 7 m² each, 131 m² are available for collective plant cultivation. Downloaded: 31/07/2022

⁵ <http://kozossegi kertek.hu/garden/kisdiofa-kert/>. In the so-called “Party-district” this garden is a pearl. The most popular garden among ours. Downloaded: 31/07/2022

⁶ <http://kozossegi kertek.hu/garden/ibis-kozossegi-kert/>, <http://kozossegi kertek.hu/garden/ibis-healing-garden/>. Unique initiative: community gardens in an operating hotel’s garden. Downloaded: 31/07/2022

⁷ See in Climate Strategy and Action plan - City of Budaörs. <https://www.budaors.hu/index.php?module=news&action=show&nid=191872> Downloaded: 31/07/2022.

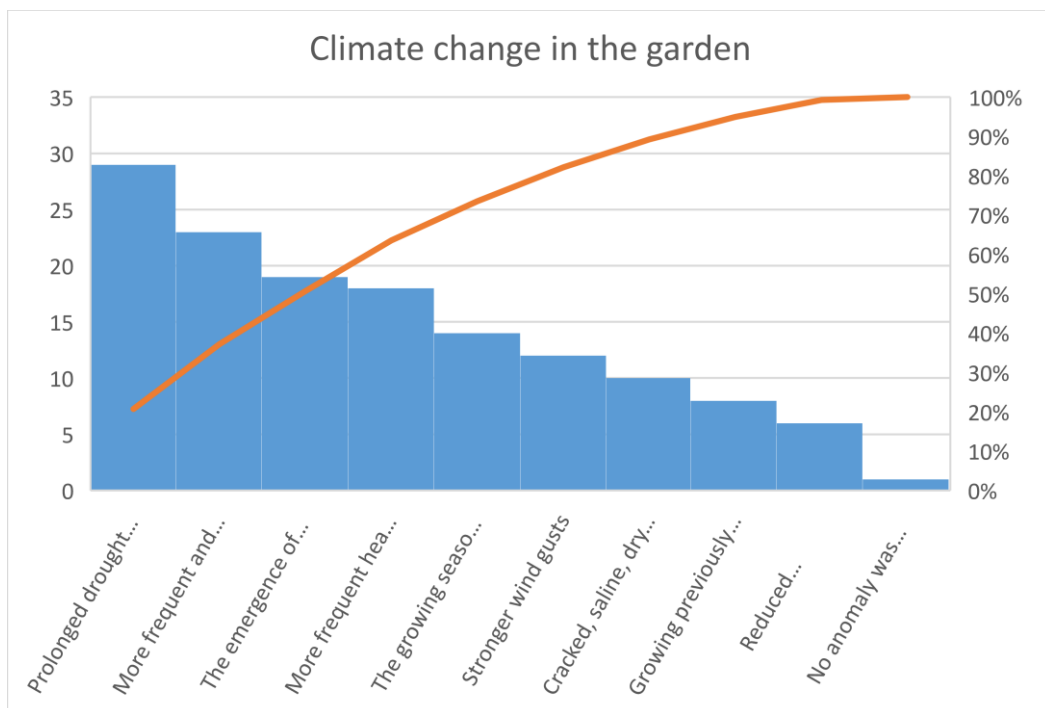
1.3. Climate Change in Hungary

The general approach to the global ecological crisis in Hungary lacks systems thinking and complexity. Since 2010 the national environmental issues such as waste and water management, environmental protection, soil conservation etc. have lost dramatically their importance. For 12 years there is no ministerial level coordination and regulation in that field: decentralized, different type of authorities operating in the relevant areas. The political pressure and governmental influence are extreme on these institutions. Politically-driven economic interests override and negate professional opinions that are important for long-term nature and climate protection. Despite the existing climate act and other relevant regulations, plans and strategies etc. in force, in reality climate change adaptation and mitigation still not taken as seriously as it should be. Presently our country is mostly at the state of creative greenwashing.

2. Current Situation in Hungary

2.1. Adaptation to Climate change

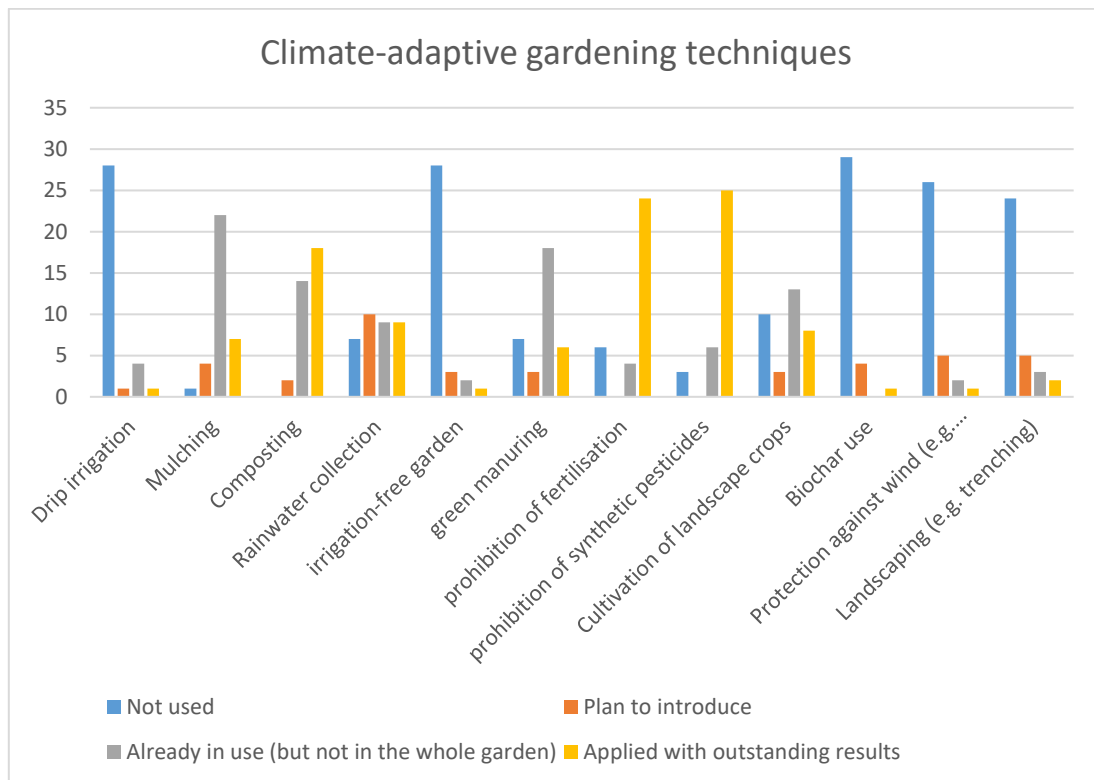
The responses to our online questionnaire on the climate adaptability of community gardens and garden communities, including the attitudes of community gardeners towards global climate change, confirmed many of our previous assumptions and experiences.



1. diagram: What changes are you experiencing in the garden that can be clearly linked to climate change? (You can tick more than one answer.)

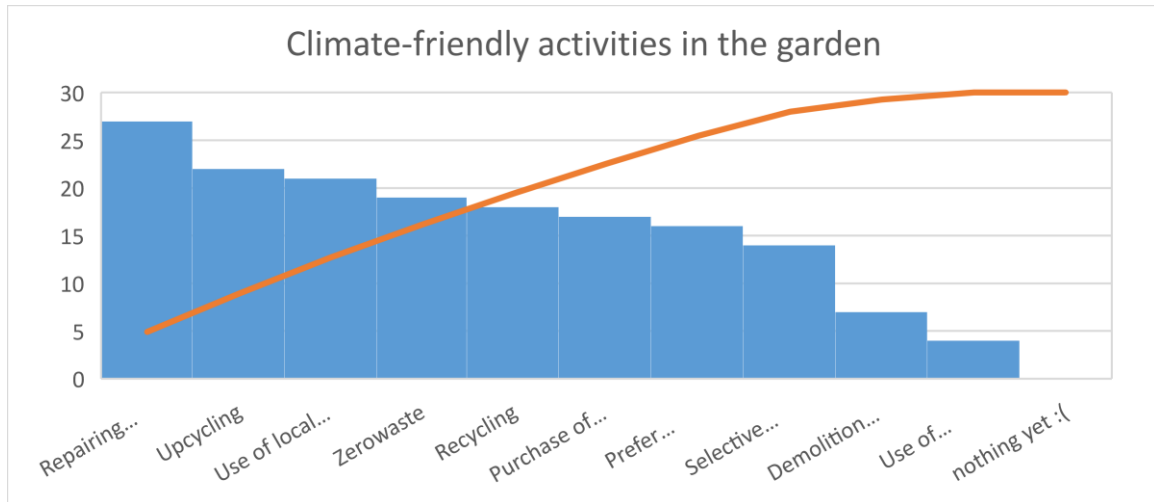
Prolonged drought periods, more frequent heavy rainfalls, flash floods and unpredictable spring frosts are the most detected anomalies in community gardens. Community gardeners are clearly blaming global climate change for the emergence of new plant pests and the ineffectiveness of previous pest management techniques (1. diagram).

However, community gardeners are not cut out to sit idly by and watch what climate change is doing to their crops. There are many gardening methods, ecological watering and soil-saving technics can be used in that critical situation. Most of these are effective tools in their own right, but their combined use in a systemic, holistic approach (e.g. permaculture-horticulture) can provide a long-term solution (2. diagram). During the survey period, there were occasions when respondents had not previously used some of the solutions and techniques mentioned in the survey, but this has changed by now. In the survey, we also gave opportunity to the respondents to mention other methods and tools used in their community gardens, in addition to the ones we have mentioned.



2. diagram: Which climate-adaptive gardening techniques are you currently using and which do you plan to use in the future?

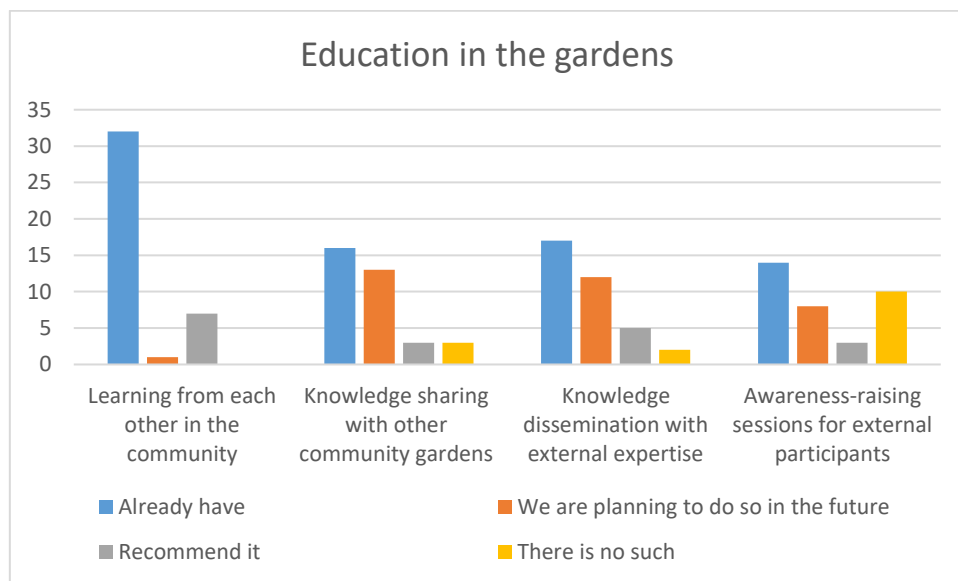
It became evident to us that the community gardeners we interviewed are more sensitive than the average to the unusual functioning of the natural environment, but at the same time they do not necessarily recognise the connection between their gardening or other gardening activities and their climate adaptability (3. diagram).



3. diagram: Do you do any climate-friendly activities in/around the garden?

2.2. Environmental education

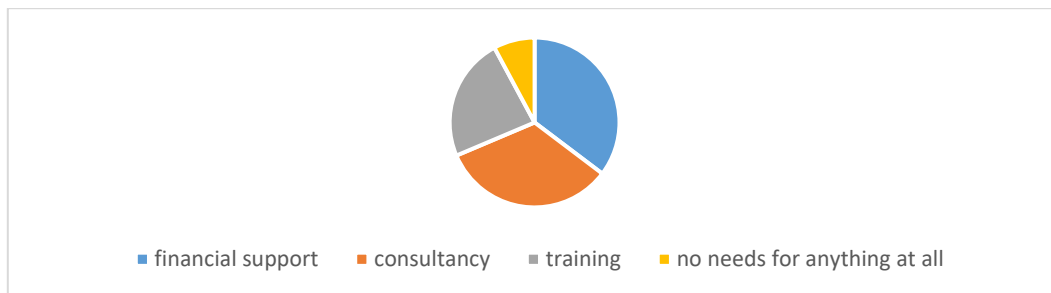
Both the questionnaire survey and the focus group discussion has enforced the assumption that community gardens (thanks to the garden community itself and the gardeners) currently play a crucial role in environmental education.



4. diagram: What educational/knowledge-sharing/awareness-raising activities related to climate adaptation are taking place in your garden and what activities do you plan to organise in the future? What activities have you experienced and would you recommend to other gardens?

The most common form of knowledge-sharing is intra-garden knowledge-transfer between community gardeners. (4. diagram) *“Our gardeners come to the garden in their spare time. They may share their experiences with each other, but it's hard to get them to be active outside the garden.”* (Focus group participant.) Although nearly half of the community gardens that responded to the questionnaire organise environmental education and awareness-raising programmes for schools and kindergartens, but few of them can be considered regular. *“We are always keen on organising awareness-raising programmes for community gardens, but due to a lack of funding we are less and*

less able to do so free of charge." (Focus group participant). For the question whether their garden is planning further activities on environmental education/climate education, 20 from 34 respondents have answered "yes".



5. diagram: What support would you need to implement the planned programmes?

Respondents have considered the availability of the necessary financial resources, the possibility to call on appropriate expertise and the possibility to participate in targeted training equally important to implement the planned activities.

2.3. Cooperation with NGOs and decision makers

27 of the 34 of the questionnaire-respondents have declared existing connection between the relevant gardens and the local municipalities. The result that declares relationships between the gardens and local governments might be distorted by the fact that most of the community gardens that responded to the questionnaire are located in municipal areas or were established by the municipality. The picture has become more nuanced after analyzation of the non-structured questionnaire responses in this field. The focus group conversation and the roundtable discussion also have pointed out some weak points of the cooperation with local decision makers. It seems that if the community garden has some personal connection to the local government (e.g. the organiser or gardener of the very CG is also a councillor or other official representative of the municipality), the community garden may have more stable and can get more support.

Many gardens have permanent, active connection, especially with local and regional NGOs. Community gardens provide space for e.g.: shopping communities as points of sale, but also cooperate as partners in various e.g.: EU-funded projects and provide platforms to various researches. (6. diagram)



6. diagram: Do you cooperate with any professional or other institutions, companies etc.?

3. Future Strategies

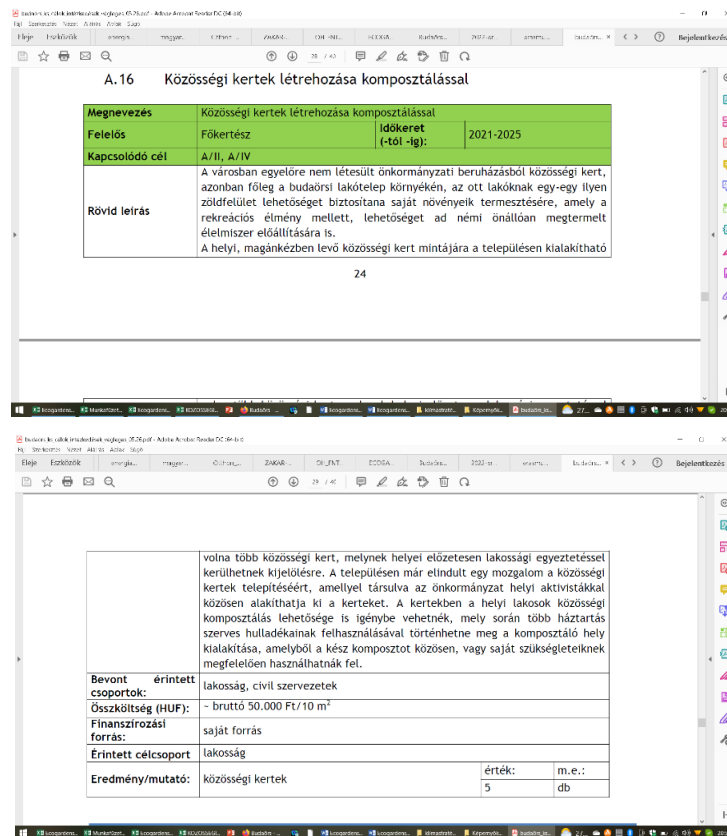
3.1. Theories in force

Less than 1 month after the municipal elections, on 5th of November, 2019, the Municipality of Budapest announced climate emergency.

Majority of the district municipalities in the Capital and some other cities in Hungary has followed the Municipality of Budapest, started to elaborate of their climate strategy and other relevant documents. Some of the lucky ones had the chance to apply for a relevant call for application to implement development and conceptualization of Climate strategies and sustainable energy plans (KEHOP 2.1.2⁸).

Our online- and field research in connection with local climate strategies has pointed out that the documents contain references - at different levels of abstraction - to the relevance of community gardens, their impact on the local community and their achievements in mitigation as urban green spaces. (7. figure)

⁸ KEHOP 2.1.2. "Developing local climate strategies and programmes for raising awareness of climate change"- EU co-funded project. <https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/kehop-121-helyi-klmastratgik-kidolgozsa-valamint-a-klmatudatossgot-erst-szemlletformls-1> . Downloaded: 31.07.2022.



7. figure: Instalment from Budaörs City Municipality's Climate Strategy and Action Plan in connection with community gardens

New head of the Budapest Municipality Gardening Ltd. declared his programme on 16th of January, 2020 in which he had emphasized the importance of harmonization of community gardens are operating in every level in the Capital and promised to establish 10 more CG with the support of the Municipality. He has highlighted that the best practices of the existing community gardens could be a strong basis of dissemination and number of the CG's must be raised esp. in those parts of the Capital where there are currently no such properties at all.

3.2. The realities

Despite the ambitious statements in connection with the relevance of the community gardens in the battle against the harmful effects of climate change in the urban environment till now even the operational harmonization of the existing CG-s has not started.

“The use of community gardens in itself helps to adapt to climate change, as all locally grown vegetables, fruits and herbs are consumed locally without transport, so their ecological footprint is significantly smaller than that of food transported from far away. In addition to the food produced,

the awareness-raising effect of community gardens can multiply the benefits of climate change adaptation.” (Round table participants).

In those local decision-makers who have already established or are operating community gardens, there is a clear openness towards CG-s. On the other hand, they have no real ideas of what other roles gardens and their gardening community could play in increasing the climate adaptability of the local community or neighbourhoods. Even of climate strategy experts have a general, theoretical approach towards CG-s not considering the hidden potential of its divers nature.

“The creation of a new community garden is a regular feature of the District Environment Fund's Annual Action Plan. Now, this effort is not only focused on public areas owned by the district municipality, but we have also started discussions with the Municipality of Budapest on which areas owned by the capital city can be used for the creation of additional community gardens.” (from Local municipality representative’s interview). There are many examples that show that without community development, community gardens created by municipalities will not generate garden community. These gardens rather provide possibility (space) for isolated individual gardening than create community garden. There are also examples of local authorities “imposing” themselves on the community garden, preventing the community from forming on its own.

Municipality of Budapest - the only municipal actor that seemed to prove its commitment and conceptuality of the climate crisis management at least in its communication - was addressed at the very beginning of our analytical work-phase in the project. It took weeks to get answer for our invitation for the round table participation from the relevant division. Finally, neither a competent staff member of the division was sent to the meeting, nor did they answer the interview questions sent after the round table discussion.

4. Conclusion

According to our former experiences enforced by the results of the analytical work in this phase of the project the bottom-up CG initiatives and community gardens coordinated by civil associations or NGO-s are much more follow the original and effective way lead by the philosophy of community gardening.

As there are no meaningful efforts to tackle the climate crisis at national level, and most of the action plans for the operational implementation of local climate strategies do not include meaningful activities to increase the climate adaptation potential of the population, grassroots (bottom-up) initiatives based on community gardens are even more important.

Enabling gardening communities to disseminate knowledge about climate change, we can increase the potential of climate adaptation in small communities and neighbourhoods.

In parallel with this best practices from different countries including alternative solutions and adaptation methodology could be presented to the policy and decision makers.

5. List of references

5.1. Regulation and strategies

- Collection of climate related national strategies in force in Hungary:
<https://www.enhat.mekh.hu/strategiak> (31.07.2022.)
- Climate act in force in force: [2020. évi XLIV. törvény a Klímavédelemről](#) (31.07.2022.)
- Climate strategy, sustainable energy and climate action plan of
 - Budapest Municipality.
<https://budapest.hu/Lapok/Hivatal/Kornyezetvedelem.aspx> (31.07.2022.)
 - Budapest, 7st Districts Municipality.
<https://www.erzsebetvaros.hu/page/klimavedelmi-akcioteru>
(31.07.2022.)
 - Municipality of City of Budaörs
<https://www.budaors.hu/?module=news&action=show&nid=191872>
(31.07.2022.)

5.2. Articles and analyses

- News and analyses about the insufficiency of the Hungarian Climate Act.
https://hvg.hu/zhvg/20210919_Az_Alkotmanybirosaghoz_fordult_az_ellenzek_az_elegtelen_klimatorveny_miatt. Date of download: 31.07.2022.
https://hvg.hu/zhvg/20200602_zold_megujulas_energia_klimatorveny_fosszilis
- Critical analyses of the sustainable energy and climate action plan of Budapest Municipality
<https://www.greenpeace.org/hungary/cikkek/8004/a-greenpeace-velemenye-a-budapest-fenntarthato-energia-es-klima-akcioterve-cimu-dokumentum-egyezetteti-valtozatarol/>
Date of download: 31.07.2022.
- About community gardens:
<https://xforest.hu/kozossegi-kert/>
<https://www.zoldpolc.hu/kozossegi-kertek-budapest-333>
<http://www.urbact.hu/node/582>
<https://www.levego.hu/kapcsolodo-anyagok/kozossegi-kertek/>
Date of download: 31.07.2022.

6. Annex

6.1. Methodology

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Period of data collection	22/04/22 - 30/04/22
Number of gardens, that have participated	83
Number of gardeners represented (total)	cca 1200
Ways of reaching respondents	Via e- mail: email has been sent to all garden addresses registered on KÉK's community garden map on our website: http://kozossegikertek.hu/kertek/
Response quote (to how many did you send out, how many did you get back)	34 of 120

FOCUS GROUP

Date	31/05/2022
Number of participants	6
Field of expertise of the participants	- community garden organization - organizations providing educational programmes for community gardens in the field of climate change adaptation and mitigation
Relation between participants	Some of the participants have met or even worked together before but all of them came from different gardens/organizations.
Online or place	online via zoom
How did you choose participants?	Using our professional network experts with the related experiences (organization of community gardens and educational programs provided to

	community gardens in the field of climate adaptation and mitigation.
How easy or difficult was it to get them?	Theoretically everybody was interested in the issue and in connection to participation in the conversation, but finding a date that was suitable was not easy.

ROUND TABLE

Date	14/06/22
Number of participants	7
Background of participants (politicians, administrative body, national/regional/local,...)	<p>The participants of the roundtable discussion were selected to represent the following disciplines, types of organisations and responsibilities (minimum 1 person /each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - active political life (green politician from one of the opposition party) - professional organisations involved in the preparation of local and regional climate strategies (ENERGIACLUB Climate Policy Institute, HUMUSZ Association) - local and metropolitan government (The Municipality of Budapest, Budapest 7st District Municipality) - NGOs with national competence in ongoing programmes (curricula development for school students, program development for kindergartens) in climate change adaptation and mitigations. (Alapértékek Nonprofit Kft., Iskolakertekért Alapítvány)
Relation between participants	Most of them have not even know each other.

Online or place	"Kisdiófa" Community Garden, Budapest
How did you choose participants?	The participants were selected to represent all the relevant sectors/fields/organizations stb. (actual political life, local municipalities and city municipality, experts in climate strategy making, organization that have national level programs in climate change adaptation and mitigation).
How easy or difficult was it to get them?	It was much easier to attract the interest of NGO's than of representatives of decision makers. The relevant heads of municipalities seemed cooperative when contacted, but did not provide real assistance. There is no Ministry of Environment in Hungary. The current government's activities on climate change are limited to meeting (theoretically, on paper) the legislative requirements for relevant EU policy, but no effective, substantive interventions are being made. It was impossible to invite a participant representing governmental environmental policy.

6.2. Additional Activities

In addition to the tools described in section 6.1 and the online- research and consultation conducted of national, regional and local climate change adaptation, mitigation strategies and city development strategies the following interview questions were sent to the relevant departments of local authorities.

1. Purpose of the request
<p>In the current phase of the project, we are working on a situation analysis on community gardens in the country. We are looking for answers to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any links in existing municipal (city district) climate strategies to establish meaningful cooperation between community gardens and local decision makers? - Are there local projects/programmes/applications to support community gardens?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there measures that also involve community gardens and are linked to climate strategies at different levels? - How could community gardens be part of climate change adaptation strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change? - What is a realistic vision for community gardens in the context of future climate strategies? For example: promoting community gardens (garden communities), making gardens formal and informal centres for awareness-raising, education, etc.
2. Topics and questions
2.1 From the aspect of Implementation of regional/local climate strategies
2.1.1. Do you see, and if so, what opportunities for community gardens in terms of communicating the content of environmental/climate strategies of different levels, facilitating the implementation of planned interventions, etc.?
2.1. 2. What do you think would be needed to make community gardens part of climate change adaptation strategies (in terms of green infrastructure that exists and can be developed in gardens, and in terms of awareness raising/education)?
2.1.3. What challenges and difficulties do you see in this area?
2.2. From the perspective of policy makers/local decision makers
2.2.1. Do you see and if so what (untapped) potential in community gardens?
2.2.2. Does your municipality already have experience with community gardens and if so, what kind of experience (garden establishment, maintenance, programme organisation, relationship with the garden community, etc.)?
2.2.3 Does your municipality use community gardens for its own events (meetings, workshops, (citizens') forums, etc.)?
2.2.4. What would be needed to enable the municipality to 'use' community gardens in climate adaptation work?
(Ad 2.2.1.-2.2.3. If there are no community gardens in the municipality/district, please describe your own ideas on the possible role of community gardens and the cooperation of the municipality with them)