



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Geografiche e dell'Antichità

[Second Department name, if the supervisor doesn't belong to DiSSGeA]

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Local Development

Horti-Culture and Community Gardens: the Role of  
Libraries in Private and Public Projects

Supervisor: Prof. Giorgio Osti

Candidate: Maria Zamperetti

Registr. number: 2087917



*Unless someone like you  
cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better.  
It's not.*

The Lorax. Seuss Dr.

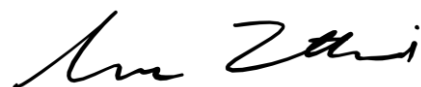
Il candidato dichiara che il presente lavoro è originale e non è già stato sottoposto, in tutto o in parte, per il conseguimento di un titolo accademico in altre Università italiane o straniere.

Il candidato dichiara altresì che tutti i materiali utilizzati durante la preparazione dell'elaborato sono stati indicati nel testo e nella sezione "Riferimenti bibliografici" e che le eventuali citazioni testuali sono individuabili attraverso l'esplicito richiamo alla pubblicazione originale.

The candidate declares that the present work is original and has not already been submitted, totally or in part, for the purposes of attaining an academic degree in other Italian or foreign universities.

The candidate also declares that all the materials used during the preparation of the thesis have been explicitly indicated in the text and in the section "Bibliographical references" and that any textual citations can be identified through an explicit reference to the original publication.

Student's signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Am Zani", is written over a horizontal line.



## Index

Abstract.....	1
Extended Summary .....	2
Preface .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Research Questions .....	6
1. Literature Review .....	7
1.1 A Definition of Community Gardens .....	7
1.2 A Brief Historical Analysis of Community Gardens.....	8
1.3 Benefits of Community Gardens .....	10
1.4 Barriers of Community Gardens.....	13
1.5 Public Libraries, Community Gardens and the Role of Culture .....	16
2. Theoretical Framework.....	19
2.1 Culture and the Social World .....	19
2.2 Socia Networks, Socialization and Participation.....	21
2.3 Networks, Institutions and Community Gardens .....	23
3. Research Design .....	26
4. Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions .....	31
5. Presentation of the Research Context and Case Studies .....	33
5.1 Urban Agriculture in the European Policy Framework.....	33
5.2 The Italian Context .....	34
5.3 Presentation of Case Studies .....	37
5.3.1 Rovigo – ‘Orti Urbani’ .....	38
5.3.2 Trento – ‘Orto Aperto’ .....	39
5.3.3 Terranuova Bracciolini – ‘Orto Diffuso’ .....	40
5.3.4 Perugia – Garden of ‘San Matteo degli Armeni’ .....	41
6. Results and Findings.....	43
6.1 Questionnaire.....	43

6.2 Semi-structured Interviews.....	47
7. Discussion.....	53
7.1 Growing Awareness: Gardens as Spaces of Accountability and Commitment.....	53
7.2 Harvesting Connections: Education and Sociability in Community Gardens.....	56
7.3 How Libraries and Gardens Can Grow Communities Together .....	61
Conclusions .....	65
Recommendations for future research.....	70
Bibliography .....	71
Webliography .....	81
Annexes .....	82
Annex A.....	82
Annex B.....	90
Annex C.....	98
Annex D.....	105

## **Abstract**

Community gardens have had different purposes throughout contemporary history, from subsistence tools to places of social struggle against social inequalities and injustice. This was done not only through horticultural practices but also through the promotion of meetings, seminars and events which often implied a cultural or educational objective. Nowadays, although many community gardens are born for less revolutionary reasons, they are still considered powerful spaces of empowerment and community building, while cultural events still play an important role within these projects. The culture promoted within and by community gardens is sometimes implicit or overshadowed in research, but it could contribute to social growth in different ways. These considerations lead us to the objective of this thesis, which is to investigate, first of all, the potential that community gardens, if combined with cultural initiatives, possess and then whether unexplored synergies that could improve the effectiveness and impact of community garden projects exist. Specifically, it will be investigated the role that public libraries could have in this context as agents on behalf of public administrations and the possible partnerships that could be established to further promote cultural growth within community gardens.

Gli orti comunitari hanno avuto scopi diversi nel corso della storia contemporanea, da strumenti di sussistenza a luoghi di lotta sociale contro le disuguaglianze e le ingiustizie. Ciò è avvenuto non solo attraverso pratiche orticole, ma anche attraverso la promozione di incontri, seminari ed eventi che spesso implicavano un obiettivo culturale o educativo. Oggi, sebbene molti orti comunitari siano nati per ragioni meno rivoluzionarie, sono ancora considerati potenti spazi di emancipazione e costruzione della comunità, mentre gli eventi culturali giocano ancora un ruolo importante all'interno di questi progetti. La cultura promossa all'interno e dagli orti comunitari è talvolta implicita o messa in ombra nella ricerca, ma potrebbe contribuire alla crescita sociale in diversi modi. Queste considerazioni ci portano all'obiettivo di questa tesi, che è quello di indagare, innanzitutto, il potenziale che gli orti comunitari, se combinati con iniziative culturali, possiedono e poi se esistono sinergie inesplorate che potrebbero migliorare l'efficacia e l'impatto dei progetti di orti comunitari. In particolare, si indagherà sul ruolo che le biblioteche pubbliche potrebbero avere in questo contesto come agenti per conto delle amministrazioni pubbliche e sulle possibili partnership che si potrebbero instaurare per promuovere ulteriormente la crescita culturale all'interno dei giardini comunitari.



## Extended Summary

Questa tesi mette in luce il ruolo della cultura negli orti comunitari, sotto due punti di vista: il primo si concentra sull'impatto che le attività ricreative, che vengono spesso affiancate alla semplice orticoltura, hanno dal punto di vista sociale e culturale, mentre il secondo prende in considerazione una specifica istituzione culturale, la biblioteca, e ne analizza il possibile rapporto che si può instaurare tra essa e l'orto comunitario. Dopo un'analisi storica, dei benefici ed ostacoli di questi progetti ed una riflessione sulle biblioteche come istituzioni culturali, la tesi si focalizza sulla sociologia culturale e sulla teoria dei *social networks*, esplorando concetti come *reciprocità* e relazioni tra gruppi ed istituzioni.

La ricerca, basata su un'analisi comparativa di quattro casi studio italiani, è stata condotta attraverso un questionario e delle interviste semi-strutturate, confrontando progetti con o senza attività culturali e collaborazioni con biblioteche. Quattro temi principali sono emersi: la consapevolezza ambientale, la coesione sociale, il ruolo dell'educazione ed il rapporto con le biblioteche. Le interviste evidenziano il ruolo della socializzazione e dell'educazione che vengono promosse all'interno degli orti, che impattano sulla percezione che i partecipanti hanno dei problemi ambientali e sociali. Tramite attività ricreative e educative, le persone riscoprono l'importanza di proteggere il legame con l'ambiente, acquisendo consapevolezza delle proprie azioni e del loro ruolo all'interno del sistema Terra. Inoltre, tramite la socializzazione che avviene spontaneamente all'interno di questi progetti, le persone riscoprono il loro ruolo di cittadini attivi e l'importanza della partecipazione alla definizione dello spazio urbano.

Le biblioteche si inseriscono come partner innovativi che condividono con gli orti la funzione di spazi di incontro e educazione, dove le persone ed i gruppi tessono rapporti tramite la condivisione di momenti conviviali ed informativi e, allo stesso tempo, si aprono all'educazione ambientale. Inoltre, data la loro posizione strategica, a metà tra la comunità e le istituzioni, le biblioteche possono provvedere a fornire supporto a lungo termine e aggiungere competenze al già ricco bagaglio di conoscenze degli orti, promuovendo un impatto culturale e educativo maggiore ed una gestione del progetto che mescola approcci top-down e bottom-up, sfruttando sia il supporto istituzionale che i benefici apportati dai metodi di gestione partecipativi.

In conclusione, sia le attività culturali che le collaborazioni con le biblioteche hanno impatti positivi sulla crescita culturale e sociale delle comunità e degli orti in cui vengono implementati, rendendo auspicabile l'implementazione di queste partnership in futuro, concentrando gli sforzi sulla cultura e l'educazione.

## **Preface**

The thesis presented below, titled '*Horti-Culture and Community Gardens: the Role of Libraries in Private and Public Projects*' was written at as a conclusion of the Master's degree course in Local Development, attended at the University of Padua.

The topics discussed in this thesis focus on community gardens' social and cultural impacts on both the direct participants and the broader community in which they are implemented. It specifically focuses on the Italian context, choice that was made given my personal interest in exploring the declinations of this phenomenon in my country of origin, not just because of emotional connection but also because of the lack of academic research on the specific context. The community garden has been chosen as the main object of my research because of my personal interest in environmental issues and the challenging task of increasing accountability within communities. In my opinion, this type of project is a sustainable and fairly accessible initiative that communities and municipalities can implement and which, at the same time, appear to have effects that go beyond individual organic or sustainable cultivation. At the same time, it is still afflicted with several governance and structural issues, that are rooted in the lack of interest in community and sustainable management of the common good that still pervades much of the population, including institutions. There is not much trust in small everyday actions, but many expectations towards a big and final solution that, unfortunately, seems distant and unrealistic. I believe in people as the main drivers for change, as they have always been throughout history, but I also admit that they need a small push every now and then to open their eyes and accept accountability and definitely commit themselves to a common cause, including myself. I consider community gardens as the right place to start this transition. The discussion is also expanded to include public libraries as partners in community garden projects. This specific theme is very intriguing to me because I have been involved as a volunteer in one of the projects of my local library, and I have come to believe that these institutions are critical for the cultural and social growth of our contemporary society. I consider them the missing link between communities and institutions, in the sense that they act as mediators between the two parties, while at the same time, possessing powerful tools and knowledge to pick up the role of active game changers when it comes to environmental and social awareness.

I believe myself to be somewhat unrealistic but there is no denying that environmental issues can no longer be ignored and that we, as human beings, are the ones responsible for the damage done and are the ones who must take responsibility and remedy. Community gardens appear as a simple and yet effective way to begin this journey, so they are worth studying.

## Introduction

The idea behind this thesis arose from a need recently expressed by the civic library of Valdagno to expand its Seed Library project. This initiative has been operational since 2018 and has led to a number of results over the years: the promotion of various horticulture, pruning and beekeeping courses, participation in the 'Bee Friendly Municipality' project (*'Comune amico delle api'*), the installation of a didactic apiary managed by the civic museum and library and the establishment of several partnerships with third sector associations active in the territory. Moreover, at the end of 2023, the Seed Library achieved a new goal by winning second place at the IFLA Green Library Award for 'Best Green Library projects', with Vancouver and Seul (IFLA, n.d.). This project is one of the city's flagships and with the municipal election that took place at the beginning of summer, the Seed Library is planning to present a new project to expand the already successful project with a community garden. This proposal sparked interest not only towards the role of culture within community gardens, but also to the possibility of involving new actors in these projects, like public libraries themselves.

In general, throughout modern and contemporary history, community gardens have had different purposes and meanings: from subsistence tools during times of war and famine to places representing environmental and food justice struggles (Panzini, 2021). Nowadays, social gardens present an array of different characteristics depending on the scope and the context in which they are born. They can also be implemented by different types of institutions and organizations, both public and private. On one hand, the main objectives of public projects have usually been the restoration of community bonds and/or environmental education (Arena & Sorbello, 2022). On the other hand, even though the focus has been similar, private initiatives were and are born mainly as a form of protest towards the administrative and political decisions of public administrations (Baudry, 2012).

An interesting characteristic of these projects is that most community garden initiatives incorporate cultivation into many forms of cultural and educational events, rather than just focusing on the basic task of cultivation (Ioannou et al., 2016). There could be a variety of reasons, ranging from the obvious desire to draw in more and more applicants, to the typical tendency shared by the majority of community garden initiatives: the production of a social and cultural impact. Within and between the plots of a garden a number of cross-cutting themes are addressed, from public health and food justice to environmental education, active community participation, empowerment, and social inclusion. The cultural nature of these topics and their relevance in contemporary urban contexts, makes community gardens places of cultural and

social interest, with the inherent capacity to change the mindsets and lifestyles of the population concerned.

For the reason above mentioned it appears necessary to investigate the role that culture and education play within these projects. In fact, the potential of combining horticulture with culture is not yet fully investigated and yet it is an integral part of community gardens. In general, academic literature on community gardens is still limited and the main body of literature focuses on the North American and Canadian regions, where there has been a strong development of the phenomenon and a significant growth of public interest on the topic. As for the Italian context, academic significance assigned to community gardens is still limited, even though this phenomenon is not recent or new (Arena & Sorbello, 2022). Therefore, to investigate this innovative bond between culture and community gardens could lead not only to a better understanding of the phenomenon in general, but also give new perspectives and solutions to these same projects that are sometimes narrowly bounded to become simple productive places if not effectively implemented from a cultural point of view.

Moreover, as mentioned above, this thesis will examine possible synergies that could be developed between public libraries and community garden projects. Indeed, public libraries have recently started to redefine their cultural role (D'Arpa et al., 2020; Scott, 2011; Skot-Hansen et al., 2013), moving away from the definition of simple book lending institutions to become hubs of social gathering and continuous education. This new role is often carried out by the development of gardening projects in collaboration with third sector associations or seed libraries, which allow libraries to go beyond their traditional competences. It is important to note that, for a number of Italian public initiatives, the integration of horticulture with cultural events appears not to be considered a priority, condition that might lead - if combined with other administrative related issues that will be discussed in the next sections - to a reduction in effectiveness and/or unsatisfactory results (Giardullo & Pozzato, 2024). The long-lasting impact that public libraries have had on the dissemination of culture and this contemporary evolution might be considered a solution to the shortcoming on the part of public administrations when it comes to community garden projects. Being this shift in competences a rather recent one, especially considering the Italian context, it allows for new questions to be posed and new paths to be investigated.

## Research Questions

Historically, the tendency to accompany horticulture with events of different kind (concerts, theatre performances, training courses, awareness-raising events, etc.) was not uncommon amongst community gardens, especially from the 1970s, when they started to become places of spontaneous aggregation for people with a common need to express disagreement with decisions taken by public administrations (Bell et al., 2016). The strong social drive of these movements transformed the gardens not only in symbolic places of public resistance, but also in spaces where people could share ideas, discuss and raise awareness. Nowadays, although the context has changed, in most cases cultural events continue to be promoted alongside cultivation activities, involving a variety of cultural agents not only from grassroots movement but from different spheres, including public institutions. This aspect is of crucial interest, since contemporary community gardens give rise to contemporary innovative governance arrangements, some of which present a mix of public-private partnerships. Positive effects seem to be associated with these types of collaborations, making them interesting topics of research, especially since impacts of these collaborations are yet to be investigated. In this thesis, the focus will be on a specific public cultural agent: public libraries. Moreover, another reason why it would be important to investigate this topic is that community gardens often find it difficult to remain active in the long term, for a series of commitment and management issues (Bonow & Normark, 2018; Castagnoli, 2019); innovative partnerships and cultural initiatives might assist with some of these issues. In fact, as stated by Lawson (2004) ‘collaborative partnerships are required’ in order ‘to balance the participatory, evolving nature of user-initiated spaces like community gardens with long term vision and structure of planning’ (p.171).

For this reason, this study aims to explore *how community gardens integrate the cultivation of culture with that of plants*. In line with this aim, the objectives of the proposed thesis are to assess how horticultural activities and other artistic and educational initiatives can influence cultural growth, and to observe which synergies at project level could help to bring the two worlds closer together. To reach these objectives, in the proposed research it is asked: *what are the potential cultural and social effects of community horticulture when combined with creative and educational initiatives? How public libraries can contribute to community garden projects when it comes to culture?* The assumption underlying this question is that culture, even though it is a core part of community gardens projects, is implicit, not recognized; this aspect, if properly managed, could improve the impact of these kind of projects.

## **1. Literature Review**

In this first section, a preliminary overview of the phenomenon of urban gardens will be carried out through a literary review, firstly by investigating the historical and contemporary development of community gardens, and secondly by analysing the benefits of these projects. Finally, new synergies with culture and cultural associations will be analysed to solve some limitations of current community garden projects, with a focus on the role of public libraries.

### **1.1 A Definition of Community Gardens**

If one were to follow a simple definition such as that given by Bonow and Normak (2018, p. 504), one could say that community gardens are ‘areas of land gardened collectively by a group of people’. This definition perfectly underlines the basic components of community gardens, namely people and shared land, but to fully comprehend the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, it would be helpful to add other notions to that definition.

In this study, community gardens will be assigned to that group of initiatives denominated Communal Urban Gardening (CUG), which refers to ‘all gardens with a non-profit structure, situated in an urban context, that are managed collectively, or at least are managing some common areas’ (Birky and Strom, 2013, as cited in Van Der Jagt et al., 2017, p. 265). These initiatives encourage the sharing of resources among gardeners such as water and tools, but, above all, knowledge (Židak & Osmanagić Bedenik, 2019), which allows for the development of new competences, a lifelong learning process and an overall stimulating context. Moreover, the community-based focus typical of community gardens, which allows the structure of the garden to be based on the characteristics and needs of the community, not only benefits the development of new individual relationships, but also fosters social sustainability in an ever-so individualistic society. Sharing a space where to meet and enjoy personal free time, allows people to open up to new experiences and encounters, which helps not only to reconstruct lost community bonds but also to develop new ones by ‘providing a space of integration for people from all over around the world’ (Schermer, 2014, p. 58). Moreover, as mentioned by Glover et al. (2005), these characteristics can be linked to an increase in active citizenship, democratic participation and sociability that perfectly fit with the strong social drive that has defined community gardens from the beginning. Indeed, it is important to underline that community gardens are part of the urban agriculture movement that is defined as ‘a global movement aimed at engaging people in collectively designing, organizing, realizing, and taking care of public farms and gardens in their own cities’ (Reynolds, 2008 as cited in Bonow & Normark, 2018, p. 504). This contemporary definition of

urban agriculture includes all those projects driven by a variety of factors including environmental awareness, the local food movement, and urban revitalization efforts that started to appear after the social and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. However, community gardens have been a constant presence throughout human history, so, to understand their contemporary and at time revolutionary role it is important to firstly investigate the different past forms that greening initiatives have taken, considering the long and rich history that these manifestations of human resilience possess.

## **1.2 A Brief Historical Analysis of Community Gardens**

The combination of urban spaces and horticultural production is a trait that unites different cultures and societies far apart in both space and time. The lack of conservation methods, which were created only through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, required the places of production and consumption of food to be close so as to control the perishability of products (Panzini, 2021) and only with the Industrial Revolution and the use of railways, agricultural production moved outside the cities. During that period, although reduced in number, urban gardens kept on existing, mainly as private gardens or plots of land that were assigned by the public administration to poor families who could not support themselves on factory wages. This is how the first modern community gardens were born: ‘*Jardin ouvrier* in France, *allotment garden* in England, *Kleingarten* or *Schrebergarten* in Germany’ (Panzini, 2021). However, during times of crisis, even the increased agricultural production brought by the industrial revolution proven to be insufficient to shield urban residents from severe famine, as demonstrated by the conflicts that ravaged Europe and the United States in the 20th century. To at least mitigate this issue, in the US, during World War I, federal agencies initiated campaigns to promote the so-called war gardens with slogans as “hoe for liberty” and the portrayal of gardening as a democratizing experience, while, during World War II, the same gardens took an even more patriotic turn by being renamed Victory gardens (Lawson, 2004). After the end of the conflict, community gardens disappeared just to come back as a response to unemployment and as a subsistence tool. For example, in Italy, between the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s, relief gardens were opened to meet the food needs of a peasant class that had moved from the South to the North of the nation in search of a better life (Alaimo, 2018).

Although urban horticultural practices have taken different forms throughout almost every phase of human history, there seems to be an underlying need that has often spurred their initial development: coping with a crisis. Indeed, the emergence of urban agriculture and the evolution of community gardens have not always been limited to food production - although it

was and still is a crucial part - but it also reflects broader social, economic, and environmental trends. In fact, as stated by Baudry (2012, p. 35):

Community greening has usually been a response to situations of crisis, offering an alternative to the governmental response to crisis [...]. In most cases, greening has been a reaction to the growing inequalities between powerful and the powerless during difficult times, and the inability of governments to temper these issues. [...] Local communities often act as substitutes for a government perceived as either indifferent or too distant to be able to identify local issues and solutions.

This is true especially for those gardens born after the 1990s, which take inspiration from community gardens born in America in the 1970s, urban agriculture movements in Latin America and the more recent Guerrilla Gardening action born in England (Ioannou et al., 2016, p. 62). All these initiatives were born from grassroot movements that represented the discontent of the population with some decision taken by the public administration and the demand for alternatives. The main topics were related to health issues, food access, environmental degradation, right to spaces of the city, mainstream management of public spaces and insufficient participation of people in decision-making (Ioannou et al., 2016).

In Italy the phenomenon appeared more recently than in other parts of Europe, with garden initiatives being promoted by environmentalist associations such as WWF and Legambiente and the first urban garden regulation published in Perugia in 1976. Typical of this context is the illegal appropriation of abandoned pieces of land to be transformed into community gardens (Arena & Sorbello, 2022; Bellia et al., 2014). Throughout the 80s and 90s the regulations and the number of initiatives started to increase, especially in Emilia-Romagna and near large industrial areas like Milan and Turin (Castagnoli, 2019). Nowadays, the scenario of community gardens is very diverse, with a preference for school and elderly gardens. Most of the contemporary initiatives, with their diverse facets, can be grouped under the category urban gardens, given the complexity of the issues and contexts that contemporary cities provide.

Indeed, considering that, nowadays, more than 50% of the world's population live in cities and that this percentage is expected to increase with the urban population (World Bank Group, 2023), the urban context can be considered a complex and multifaceted environment, where urban sprawl combines with different social issues. As stated by Baudry (2012), 'life in contemporary cities tends to exacerbate inequalities, or at least render them more visible by sheer virtue of density' (Baudry, 2012, p. 33). For example, health inequalities are an indicator of precarious security, sanitary and economic conditions in urban areas resulting from unequal access to goods and services, unfair housing prices and an unequitable way of life (Todd, 1996). If we add to this precariousness the global energetic and economic crisis and the increasingly evident climate change phenomenon, the situation only gets worse, especially when considering that cities are a key contributor to climate change and major sources of greenhouse gas



emissions. Estimates suggest that urban areas are responsible for 70% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with transport and buildings being among the largest contributors (IPCC, 2023). This contributes to raising temperatures, creating urban heat islands, namely the warmer temperatures that cities experience compared to rural areas.

Finally, isolation and alienation of certain sections of the urban population are other pressing issues for cities. For example, the urban environment might be difficult for elderly people to navigate, since it ‘limits the mobility [...], discourages social interaction, and increases the probability of isolation’ (Gusmano & Rodwin, 2010, p. 41). According to a report of the World Health Organization (2021), social isolation and loneliness among elderly are a widespread phenomenon, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It appears that between 20 and 34% of older people in China, Europe, Latin America, and the United States of America are lonely, situation that causes issues of both physical and mental nature (World Health Organization, 2021). Sadly, this condition is not limited to the elderly population. Even though there is no unanimously accepted answer, it appears that a relation between age and loneliness exists and it seems to fluctuate during the lifetime of individuals (Hawkley et al., 2022). In general, the crowded space of cities, the sometime excessive workload and the hectic pace of life makes socialisation difficult and limited to a few contexts, regardless of the age of the subjects.

### **1.3 Benefits of Community Gardens**

To resolve or at least mitigate this array of intricate and complicated issues is no simple task, but community gardens would seem to be a good starting point to approach these challenges. Several positive effects have been associated to CUG activities ranging from health, social, environmental, and educational benefits. All these topics find a space to be tackled in community gardens, not just as single and isolated issues but as a convoluted set that influence one another. For example, the involvement of the elderly in horticultural activities would seem to produce mixed results. The benefits impact both their physical and mental health, for example through the adoption of an active lifestyle that is sometimes neglected with the onset of old age and a new sense of usefulness and empowerment. This effects can shield this part of the population from forms of *ageism*, a mindset that associates old age with an inexorable decline in functions and capacities (Gasperi, 2020). Moreover, by combining empowerment and a healthy lifestyle for elderly people, it is possible to contribute to one of the goals of the World Health Organisation, *healthy aging*, which is defined as ‘a continuous process of optimizing opportunities to maintain and improve physical and mental health, independence, and quality of life throughout the life course’ (Pan American Health Organization, n.d.).

The physical and mental benefits connected to horticultural practices are not true only for the senior population, but they can apply to other categories as well. For example, horticultural therapy, theorized by Benjamin Rush between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century (Monroe, 2015), is still employed as a form of rehabilitation for patients with various psychophysical disorders (Di Nunzio, 2022). As stated by Zhou and Zeng (2023) in their literature review, the benefits of horticultural therapy range from reductions in physical stress, social anxiety and loneliness to improvements in self-esteem, well-being, emotion regulation and sense of belonging. Of course, as for the adoption of a more active lifestyle, these positive mental health effects are available to everyone who gets involved in a community garden, regardless of age, sex and cultural background.

Another benefit related to health available to the average person wishing to engage in community gardening is the improved access to fresh food, a right often denied to a large part of the population living in unstable economic conditions. Although the actual impact of food production within community gardens is not yet precisely documented (Shisanya & Hendriks, 2011), the underlying criticism to the food production system and the search for alternatives are crucial parts of some projects. Community gardens' contribution cannot be ignored: one can find virtuous examples of gardens that donate all their produce to third sector companies or charities, just like 'Agros in Hellinikon' - an emblematic case of guerrilla gardening developed in metropolitan Athens - or gardens who specifically assign plots to families based on their average income, which is the case of some public community gardens. It is also important to emphasise, in this context, the educational role of these initiatives that, by 'educating people about how food is produced, distributed, and consumed', can 'aid in redressing current inequities in that system' (Okvat & Zautra, 2011, p. 379).

As specified at the beginning of this section, health benefits are just a part of the advantages that community gardens bring to the table. It would be reductive, in fact, to analyse this phenomenon without describing the social assets to which CUG initiatives contributes to. First of all, being involved in a community gardens seems to help individuals to identify with the community, by providing moments of socialisation that foster a sense of belonging (Koroļova & Treija, 2018). In a context like contemporary society where community networks tend to dissolve in favour of individualistic tendencies, access to a neutral and leisure space of socialization like a garden can become a powerful tool to fight isolation and recreate neighbourhood bonds. Several researchers have been investigating this aspect, finding that the availability and proximity of greenspaces in general, not just gardens, positively correlate with an increase in social contact among neighbours (Sullivan et al., 2004), which leads to more socialising and a greater sense of safety (Kuo et al., 1998). Moreover, sharing and mutual aid

practices promote a sense of solidarity, reciprocity and trust among gardeners that helps create social capital and consequently mobilize resources (Glover, Parry, et al., 2005). These spaces of encounters and solidarity are especially important for those people belonging to minorities groups such as, migrants refugees and indigenous communities. Indeed, intercultural gardens emerged from the need of migrants to acquire a ‘new space of life in the country of residence’ (Moulin-Doos, 2014, p. 197), where to interact outside of the house and workplace and build social capital and a sense of belonging that, with their relocation, has been partially or completely lost. These *third places* (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982) are not just spaces of encounters and socialization, but they possess intrinsic power and meaning for those groups of people who have been eradicated from their homelands for various reasons. Topics such as decolonization and reconciliation (Datta, 2019) are dealt with through confrontation and the practice of respect which includes the recognition of migrants' and minority groups' need to own and/or use space (Moulin-Doos, 2014). Indeed, this re-appropriation of space by groups that were previously denied it, contributes to the development of a sustainable and resilient society where differences are valued and accepted rather than fought against. Equal agency is assigned to gardeners, aiming to improve *social equity*, justice and inclusion (Schermer, 2014). A virtuous example of this trend is the intercultural community garden in Innsbruck, Austria, where each gardener is free to cultivate whatever variety they want, and most of the time, plants with a strong emotional, cultural and familiar relationship are chosen (Schermer, 2014). Although many are far from their homeland, they can bring a piece of home to the garden, thus increasing their sense of familiarity with the foreign context. In this way, the garden is no longer just a productive place but becomes a place where diversity and respect come together, creating security and belonging. Through this process it is possible to promote a *people-oriented* interpretation of social sustainability (Chiu, 2003), where subjects are the core asset when it comes to environmental and social resilience.

Another set of benefits that community gardens provide, perhaps the most obvious, are those inherent to the environment. It is no mystery that the natural environment is degrading fast due to human action. According to the most recent climate change report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Calvin et al., 2023), human-caused climate change has already produced substantial damages, some of which are at this point irreversible, and the adverse impacts will continue to intensify if a drastic change in behaviours and priorities will not occur. In this context, even though the impact of urban gardening on this macro trends is not substantial, it can be a starting point to bring change in cities and especially about people's behaviours and mindsets. Indeed, CUG initiatives' contributions to mitigate climate change have been investigated in a limited amount of research, as stated by Tomatis et al. (2023) in

their literature review, but they can play a crucial role in improving soil quality, prevent soil erosion, promote pollination, mitigate the heat island effect in urban environments and minimize negative drainage of water (Koroļova & Treija, 2018).

Finally, the strong educational role of community gardens needs to be mentioned. Within the limits of the garden people can explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving and obtain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which nature works, principles which are at the root of environmental education (US EPA, 2012). The possibility to learn by doing is available to everyone, regardless of age, sex or cultural background. The potential of gardens as didactic tools has been investigated since the 19<sup>th</sup> century by several pedagogists such as Lucy R. Latter and Maria Montessori (Panzini, 2021). It has been proven that outdoor experiences can bring significant changes towards sustainable practice and pro-environmental behaviour (Prince, 2017). By experimenting and being in contact with nature, children, but also adults, can rediscover a connection with their surroundings, broadening the meaning of community to acknowledge the interdependence of humans with nature, the so called *Earth Community* as Berry (1988, p. 13) states:

Our relationship with the earth involves something more than pragmatic use, academic understanding, or aesthetic appreciation. A truly human intimacy with the earth and with the entire natural world is needed. Our children should be properly introduced to the world in which they live.

This co-learning process, available to everyone, not only improves the environmental knowledge of gardeners and users, but also increases their self-awareness as citizens and their use of urban space, in a generalised political awakening typical of post-modern societies (Certomà & Tornaghi, 2015). This revival assigns gardens with political meanings of urban activism, opposing the erasure of public places and the privatisation of leisure and recreation. The *right to the city* theorized by Lefebvre (1967), which reclaim the urban space as a co-creation of those who live in it and underlines the right of dwellers to their ability to shape the urban environment based on their needs, has been adopted by communities, associations but also innovative public institutions within urban planning processes, in order to create a more inclusive and representative space for all those who use and experience it.

#### **1.4 Barriers of Community Gardens**

All the above mentioned aspects that characterise community gardens create what was defined as *complex social value* (Fusco Girard, 1987, as cited in Bellia et al., 2014), meaning a set of valuations and assets that, in addition to the financial worth, identify the social significance of a public resource. Is this *complex social value* that has rekindled interest in community gardens in public administrations after a period of disinterest or even confrontation. However, despite the efforts that public administrations are making, in some cases the results

are poor and municipal tenders are left unanswered (Castagnoli, 2019). The enthusiasm that drives the narratives around community gardens sometimes obscures the less optimistic aspects of these projects.

Several reasons have been identified that could explain the lack of interest on the part of citizens, starting from land tenure (Rosol, 2005) that, being in most cases based on short licences of use and rotation schemes, underlines the temporariness of the personal use of the garden. In Italy, for example, garden concessions vary from 2 to 5 years depending on the city (Castagnoli, 2019). This context limits not only the rooting of customs and the establishment of a community-based structure (Pasquier, 2001) but also restrict the varieties that can be cultivated: in most Italian cases, in fact, the cultivation of fruit trees or generally high trees is prohibited due to the often obligated periodical hand-over of the plot, which has to happen as fast as possible and without added costs for the administration (Castagnoli, 2019). This stiffness of rules might drive away potential participants or reduce the motivation to participate.

Another barrier that might limit the affluence to the garden is the lack of long-term government support. Although nowadays community gardens receive more assistance from public administrations, as mentioned above, it seems that after the start-up phase, the contribution of PAs decreases or disappears altogether leaving the responsibility of managing the garden to volunteers for almost no cost (Giardullo & Pozzato, 2024). This tendency can be interpreted in two ways: as a turn towards the ‘enabling and activating state’ (Rosol, 2010) that allow for more freedom to be assigned to citizens, or as a typical neoliberal policy that aims to disengage the public administration both organisationally and economically from their own projects (Jessop, 2002) and put responsibility on the shoulders of citizens. However, from the perspective of governments, this deficiency can actually be explained by the systemic lack of staff that has been weakening the public administration and the impossible task to promptly respond to the gardeners’ necessities due to bureaucratic limitations (Giardullo & Pozzato, 2024). All these intricated and correlated issues erode the motivation of both administrations and gardeners that with time, might lose interest in engaging in an activity that should be relaxing but, in reality, gives them more responsibility and increase their stress. This was the example brought in the article of Bonow & Normark (2018) where they interviewed citizens and municipalities officers of Stockholm to understand the sustainability of community garden projects in the city. A facilitator with years of experience that contributed to several community gardens both as facilitator and project manager, stated that ‘he acknowledged and regretted the lack of support and management from the municipalities’ and that it was for people like him, ‘a kind of employed version of enthusiasts’, that several projects were kept alive (Bonow & Normark, 2018). At the same time, however, a top-down approach to the governance of

community gardens, although useful in the design phase, seems not to be the optimal choice, since some participants might feel alienated from the garden (Eizenberg, 2012) or the project might lose political support in the long-term (Howe & Wheeler, 1999). Enabling the community to be part of the development of the project and/or transitioning from a top-down to a bottom-up approach during implementation seems ‘to encourage positive social interaction and collaboration among gardeners’ (Fox-Kämper et al., 2018). This shift, however, should not mean an abandonment of gardeners by the public administration, but an overall support in case of necessity.

Therefore, an alternative approach is needed to restore both trust towards public administrations and motivation among gardeners, and in part it already seems to have been adopted. While attempts have been made over the years to categorise gardens as top-down or bottom-up initiatives (Casazza & Pianigiani, 2016), it seems that, as is often the case, reality lies somewhere in between. More and more, new innovative organizational approaches are emerging and public institutions are recognizing the role of partnerships to achieve successful community gardens (Seymoar et al., 2010) and, at the same time, the necessity to give citizens a certain amount of space for experimentation where they can coordinate among themselves. (Giardullo & Pozzato, 2024). Institutional support appears crucial for the development of community gardens but also the agency of people and associations to shape them as they see fit cannot be put aside, so the two dimensions need to be integrated. This mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches may be summarized as a specific type of governance of community gardens: bottom-up with political and/or administrator support (PAS) (Fox-Kämper et al., 2018). In their investigation on different governance structures in community gardens from Germany and New Zealand, Fox-Kämper et al. (2018) found that this type of approach was the most common one among their case studies, since public administrations can grant land-use permissions, financial or advisory support, donations of materials and plants, free water supply etc but, but people and associations involved are the ones who truly shape the project and maintain its appeal and activity. Moreover, also the study run by Van Der Jagt et al. (2017) on governance arrangements of CUGs and social resilience in 5 EU countries, found out that, although the role of municipalities is key to grant land and funding and thus promote longevity of the project, ‘partnership working was absolutely central to explain success in delivering social resilience’ (p. 271). In general, enabling citizens and various associations to be involved in decision making and management of the garden might have several positive effects: make up for lack of personnel from the part of public administrations, promotion of innovative democratic decisional processes, more varied and creative proposals, increased ownership of the project and motivation to participate.

Keeping interest and motivation of participants high is one of the most complicated aspects that characterise community garden projects. As stated above, this could be difficult when responsibilities are shifted onto the shoulders of participants, but also when it comes to long-term longevity of the project. For example, the commitment required to manage a garden is not obvious knowledge for everyone, nor are the diverse needs of plants. Lack of knowledge in these areas can lead to the initial enthusiasm waning and to the garden and its duties being abandoned over time (Bonow & Normark, 2018). This could be the case when community gardens become mere workplaces instead of socializing and entertaining spaces, as was stated by one of the interviewees in the article by Glover et al., (2005): ‘you really need to make it social to have yourself some fun because if you think it’s just dig that hole or water that thing then you’re going to get burnt out it’s not going to be fun’ (p.460). Sociability and leisure episodes are crucial to build both social capital within the garden (Glover, Parry, et al., 2005) and commitment. It is for this reason that a great number of community garden projects expand their proposals beyond the simple production activity, using horticulture to ‘cultivate something more’ (Cognetti & Conti, 2012). Mixed cultural initiatives, seminars, workshops and gardening courses but also communal and open spaces for the community also outside of the garden can become vehicles through which pursuing broader social objectives and community cohesion (Firth et al., 2011).

Not all project management institutions are equally interested in including cultural and educational activities within their projects. For example, community gardens promoted by public administrations only, seem to put little effort into advertising initiatives beyond the mere allocation of lots as stated by Giardullo & Pozzato (2024) in their article investigating the initiatives promoted by Veneto’s capital cities. Although the pedagogical role of this kind of environment is recognized in several documents on the activation of urban horticulture projects, only in rare cases public administrations promote educational activities for their gardeners (Giardullo & Pozzato, 2024). This lack of interest could be related more to an inability to offer this type of activity due to structural deficiencies, considering the above-mentioned limitations that public administrations face when creating a community garden.

### **1.5 Public Libraries, Community Gardens and the Role of Culture**

It is now accepted that learning is no longer necessarily linked to formal environments, but that it can happen also through informal activities and interactions (Ramsten & Säljö, 2012). For this reason, thanks to their educational role and the different cultural activities that can be promoted within them, community gardens are recognized as spaces of *social learning* (Krasny & Tidball, 2009), a ‘process of social change and social participation in communities of practice

(Reed et al., 2010 as cited in Rogge et al., 2020, p. 2). However, to really measure the educational potential of community gardens is complicated because it requires a thorough analysis of all the ways in which learning takes place within these spaces (Rogge et al., 2020), a difficult task considering all the different declinations these projects can take. In addition, the interest in new forms of governance and innovative collaborations (Fox-Kämper et al., 2018) adds to this intricate scenario, involving new stakeholders and actors. For example, library gardens are a new form of community gardens that are being established within public libraries' properties but the literature available on the connection between libraries and community gardens is still limited to 'practitioner-oriented library literature' (D'Arpa et al., 2020, p. 43). This phenomenon can be linked to the changing role of public libraries within the contemporary community (Scott, 2011).

In fact, with the introduction of the Internet and the possibility to access knowledge through phones, there was a risk that public libraries would lose their role as 'knowledge temples', but, in recent years, they have demonstrated to be able to adapt to social and cultural developments, sometimes better than other public institutions. Not only they have been dynamic actors in the *culture-led urban regeneration* trend, which emphasize the social and economic impact of culture when it comes to cities' attractiveness (Miles & Paddison, 2005), but they also have become inviting places both from an aesthetic point of view and because of the innovative array of services they provide, which go beyond the simple lending of books. Through *community vitalization* they boost local identity and cohesion, address social challenges, initiate local innovation, promote creativity and cooperation by re-conceptualizing their activities, question their traditional role and add new features (Skot-Hansen et al., 2013). Nowadays, libraries provide activities, facilities and experiences and are focal places where problems of different nature are addressed. For example, in the US and Canada, public libraries are often engaged in food justice and public health discussions. Their ability to disseminate health information in several formats and their role as crucial stakeholders within communities has led to the development of several food garden projects managed by the libraries themselves (D'Arpa et al., 2020). The involvement of public libraries in the management of community gardens is a rather new trend that has spread mainly in the abovementioned countries, but examples of this type of innovative partnership are starting to emerge also in Italy, as it will be shown in this thesis.

In general, it can be said that public libraries share several characteristics with community gardens: they are meeting places where both private and public uses of space are carried out, where people typically interact socially with both strangers and those they know, where similar but also different interests come together and influence each other and where



leisure time and work activities mix (Aabø & Audunson, 2012). Both public libraries and community gardens act as a *third places* for community members, becoming ‘an essential part of the twenty first century learning infrastructure’ (Watson, 2010). The educational role libraries play as cultural public institutions (Usherwood, 2002) is another characteristic that connects them to gardens. In fact, as mentioned in the sections above, the role that culture plays within gardens may be sometimes hidden but nonetheless pervasive. A mix of formal and informal learning methods like seminars, courses, workshops and a general share of knowledge can be made available in community gardens to allow anyone to access continuous learning (Datta, 2016). This lifelong learning process is a crucial asset for both gardens and libraries, considering that, in 2016, only 8.9% of the European population participated in activities for continuous learning but 24 million Europeans made use of public libraries non-formal learning opportunities (Lison & Reip, 2016). The importance of leisure initiatives within community gardens is crucial when it comes to commitment since it allows for people – gardeners and passersby – to find a space to socialize, enjoy themselves and forge new relationships spontaneously, increasing the emotional attachment to the garden and building community bonds which increase the longevity in the long-term (Glover, Parry, et al., 2005). By enabling local people to discover, nourish, adapt and co-create their own culture through leisure and cultural activities, it would be possible for CUG initiatives that, nowadays, are limited both in time and purposes, to achieve community buy-in and flourish (Van Der Jagt et al., 2017).

Articles analysing the impacts of potential collaboration between libraries and gardens are few and geographically limited, but they show promising results. For example, an investigation on agriculture-based community engagement in American rural libraries has found that public libraries involved in the development of community-based projects have impacts on several and overlapping domains, not only related to the garden per se but also to associated initiatives that were born after the establishment of the garden such as: farmers markets influencing the local economy, food awareness connected to education of the community and seed libraries and the preservation of biodiversity (Singh et al., 2022). The synergistic relationship between community gardens and libraries has yet to be explored in depth and this thesis hopes to at least scratch the surface of this topic.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Culture and the Social World**

Culture is an underlying characteristic of human nature. It is something pervasive that influences behaviours and mindsets of entire societies and that, at the same time is somewhat influenced by societies themselves. Different definitions of culture have been given throughout the years and the debate among sociologists, anthropologists, pedagogists, psychologists, human and social scientists is still open, especially considering the complexity and fragmentation that characterise contemporary societies (Baldwin et al., 2006). It is not possible to still refer to culture with an elitist and ethnocentric perspective typical of the humanities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where culture and society were considered separate entities, the first representing perfection as opposed to the second (Arnold, 1869). On the contrary, as perceived by social sciences such as sociology and anthropology, there might be a tight relation between culture and society, one that should only be empirically studied and not be dependent on subjective evaluation. From this perspective, sociologist Clifford Geertz (1973, p.89) defined culture as a “historically transmitted system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”. Although this definition is less ethnocentric it still falls back on the notion that culture is something systematic, with a rigid set of rules, a vision that scarcely explains the complex cultural scenario of contemporary society. For this reason, in recent years, a broader and more socially oriented cultural theory has spread, one in which culture is based on people’s social and cultural practices (Lysgård, 2013). For this reason, cultural analysis must investigate not only how culture create identities but also how it is produced, consumed and represented (du Gay et al., 1997 as cited in Lysgård, 2013). This vision imply that every cultural phenomenon is unique and context-related and needs to be analysed in all its aspects for its nature to be fully understood.

In the new cultural paradigm, a new role is assigned to people and their cultural agency. In fact, people’s behaviours are at times contradictory and incoherent, difficult to catalogue under a single cultural rule and, for this reason, sociologist Ann Swidler (2001, as cited in Griswold, 2004, p. 64) argues that ‘cultures resemble toolboxes rather than railroad switches in the sense that they contain logical foundations underlying various courses of action, which are referred to in different contexts, without these foundations being internally consistent’. Another perspective also comes from the field of psychology, where culture is perceived more as a process rather than a fixed set of characteristics, because people participate in more than one cultural group throughout their lives, thus not belonging to one single set of cultural meanings

but hopping between social groups with different perceptions. ‘The recognition of the holistic interconnectedness of many aspects of ways of life’ (Rogoff, 2016) allow to reconsider people’s role in the creation of culture, since they become not motionless subjects but active participants.

This cultural complexity requires for the adoption of methods that allow for an empirical analysis of cultural and social phenomena and of the interconnection that exists between them, and Wendy Griswold’s *cultural diamond* poses itself as a framework aimed at investigating precisely these two realms (Griswold, 2004). This heuristic tool identifies four main ‘actors’ that influence the creation of cultural phenomena - *cultural object*, *creator*, *receivers* and *social world* - and notes that there are bonds between them. The nature of those relationships is not specified because, as stated above, every cultural phenomenon is unique, and directions and extensions of the relations might change. It is up to the researcher to analyse the structure of these relationships and of the four actors representing the angles of the diamond, starting with the *cultural object*.

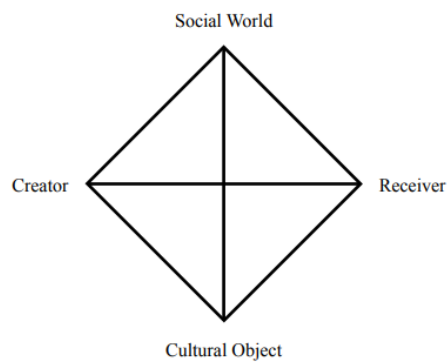


Figure 1: The Cultural Diamond (Griswold, 2004)

The concept of *cultural object* is defined as a ‘socially meaningful expression that is audible, visible or tangible or that can be articulated’ (p.26). These cultural forms are associated with symbols that by their nature can evoke different meanings, which can be ambiguous and therefore complex. Griswold then acknowledges the fact that, despite the differences in perspective, any definition of culture implicitly accepts that cultural objects are produced by human beings, implying the existence of another cultural actor: the *creator*. Creators are the first ones to articulate and communicate a thought, an idea, or create an object. However, this creation does not automatically become a cultural object, but to do so it must necessarily become public, meaning it must be received, heard and understood by a wider audience, the so-called *receivers*. Finally, Griswold underlines the fact that both *creators* and *receivers* are necessarily linked to a specific context, the *social world*, which is characterised by the economic, social, political and cultural needs of a specific point in time.

As any other cultural and social phenomenon, community gardens are influenced by the intricate set of relationships of which the cultural diamond only shows us the existence,

especially since sociability is a crucial aspect that underpins most leisure-oriented grassroots associations (Stebbins, 2002). The relationships established inside and outside this kind of projects might shape and develop hidden potential (Van Der Jagt et al., 2017), not only between gardeners but also between the garden as a community and external actors. The interaction between networks and institutions, as well as the analysis of these relationships are covered by the so-called *Theory of Social Network*, which will be covered in the following sections.

## 2.2 Social Networks, Socialization and Participation

The concept of culture as a collective creation was firstly introduced by Émile Durkheim in his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) in which he proposed an analysis of culture no longer as created by God, but as a product of the relationship between individuals. This theory gave rise to a new strand of cultural sociology, *symbolic interactionism*, which focuses on the ways in which individuals actively build norms and roles (Griswold, 2004). From this perspective, interactions between human beings are the basis for the creation of shared meanings while socialization becomes the tool through which culture is expressed and transmitted (Griswold, 2004). Actors and equivalent relationships that allow for meaningful cultural interactions are crucial to the development of a collective identity, and can be linked to the so-called *social networks*, defined by Ennis and West (2010) as:

a social structure which consists of two elements; these are generally known as actors (or nodes or points) and ties (sometimes referred to as links or relationships). An actor is most commonly an individual person, but it could be an organisation, a country, a community, or some other defined entity. A tie indicates a relationship between the actors.

Like cultural objects, social networks vary greatly depending on the context and can have different features that can be grouped in four different categories identified by Mitchell (1969) and Wellman (2019) and outlined by Hill (2002): structure, processes, functions and composition. The first category derives from the shape and geometrical properties of a network: for example, the size of networks may vary, from small ones, in which family relationships can be included, to very extended ones, such as a whole neighbourhood community (Ennis & West, 2010). In this category it is also included the concept of *connectedness*, representing the ‘number of links that occur between network members compared with the number that could potentially occur if everyone had contact with everyone else’ (Hill, 2002, p. 237). Dense or highly connected networks develop trust and common norms more easily, which influence the ability of people to benefit from the resources, or social capital, of the network (Portes, 1998). The production of social capital is a crucial sociological topic that also connects to community gardens: in the article of Glover et al. (2005) it is analysed how the relationships formed within community garden settings through leisure episodes allow members to access resources and develop strong ties, acting as a lubricant for the production of social capital. The second

category, processes, indicate the nature of interactions among network members, which is determined by: type of exchanges, degree of intimacy, frequency of contact, directedness, durability and intensity. Relationships can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, depending on the distribution of power within the actors. Deeply asymmetrical relationships are usually unstable and cause stress, so some kind of balance is desirable in order to produce bonds of trust and solidarity (Hill, 2002). In this context it is emphasized the role of *reciprocity*, meaning the mutual forms of transactions that aim to exchange benefits in order to obtain others (Molm, 2010). As stated by Molm in her article (2010), generalised and direct reciprocity promote positive feelings, the production of social capital and embeddedness in organizations. Once again, the quality and quantity of relationships and exchanges have positive effects on communities. The third category underlines the effects that networks can have based on different functions. Within a network, each person performs a specific function, but, at the same time, the whole network can provide wider social effects, both positive and negative, for example the socialization of children or the promotion of criminal activities (Hill, 2002). As demonstrated in previous sections, also community gardens can have wider effects not only on the gardeners themselves, but also on the larger community in which they are embedded. Finally, the composition category refers to the type of relationships that are usually found within networks, with kin relationships usually being the most common. However, the two main kinds of non-kin relationships appear to be based on proximity (neighbours) and affection (friends) (Hill, 2002). The development of friendly and reciprocal bonds is, once again, another crucial effect of effective sociability within community gardens (Glover, Parry, et al., 2005) which are based on solidarity and mutual aid.

The complexity and stratification that make up social networks can, therefore, have various effects, both positive and negative. Strong social networks can create trust, reduce transaction costs, help information circulation and reinforce group identity, but, at the same time, they might become rigid and exclusive compared to less tight structures (Granovetter, 1973). Also community gardens run the risk of becoming exclusive and isolated due to many factors like access control and the use of fences (Castagnoli, 2019). These tools, although used in good faith, could reduce the community effect of the garden, making it an exclusive place open to only specific groups. Therefore, also in this case, a certain balance is needed to protect and empower the whole network, in order to expand the potential of community gardens and protect them from isolating tendencies. It is for this reason that in the next section, social network theory will be complemented with an institutional approach, which aims to analyse the relationships institutions have with networks and the effects they might produce if embedded in them.

### 2.3 Networks, Institutions and Community Gardens

The link between networks and institutions – two ideas that are usually explored independently – was examined by Owen-Smith and Powell in their article *Networks and Institutions* (2008). They argue that these two concepts ‘mutually shape one another’ and that ‘over time, this co-evolutionary process creates, sustains and transforms social worlds’ (p. 594). They identify four core concepts that are used both in institutional and network analysis and that are all influenced in some way by both elements: *organizational fields*, *institutional logics*, *embeddedness* and *social capital*. For example, it can be said that people’s behaviours are ‘defined against a particular social and institutional backdrop’ (p. 601), since *logics* (rules characterizing a particular *field*) play a definite role in defining the limits of people’s actions, but, at the same time, the *embeddedness* of relations (non-contractual behaviours) also influences the success of the transaction by promoting the development of trust. In this context, institutions and networks influence each other, the first by setting the rules for actions and defining which connections will have effect, the second by demonstrating the significance of those relations that will determine the shape of structures. Finally, also social capital is influenced by both networks and institutions, since they ‘jointly determine when various sorts of capital can be invested, by whom, and with what expectations in return’ (p.616).

In their conclusion, Owen-Smith and Powell (2008) underline the importance of recognizing that the institutional characteristics of a network alter what is produced and the process of production. Therefore, when studying local actions, it is crucial to take into account logics, categories and relationships. The authors then assume that the joint pressures that networks and institutions have on social systems shape their features, providing a push towards evolution and change and that this will be particularly evident in situations where ‘roles and identities are ambiguous, logics and institutions are conflicting or multiple, and networks span diverse audiences’ (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008), all characteristics belonging to the context of community gardens.

Indeed, the forms that urban horticulture projects have taken and can take are varied in terms of both the scope and the actors involved. Born as social movements, contemporary community gardens began to spread as a cultural response to the instability of the 1960s and the inability of institutions to adapt and respond to new demands (Griswold, 2004). Public administrations often opposed and acted against these initiatives due to their open opposition to the dominant culture and their peaceful but incisive way of operating (Panzini, 2021). Only in recent decades, with the growing environmental awareness and the recognized benefits of community gardens, public administrations have started adopting a more open-minded behaviour towards these initiatives (Bell et al., 2016). However, although there has been

progress, a homogeneous regulation of urban gardens does not yet exist, but varies from municipality to municipality (Castagnoli, 2019), and also from the point of view of spatial planning, gardens do not yet have the same recognition as parks or other public places, but are considered more as temporary than continuous activities (Lawson, 2004). From a sociological point of view, this lack of support affects not only the longevity and effectiveness of projects but also the recognition of community gardens as cultural objects, since, according to Griswold's analysis (2004), PA's support is necessary in the modern era if social and cultural innovations are to be established. At the same time, their grassroots origins do not allow for a top-down type of control, leading sometimes to challenging planning arrangements (Lawson, 2004). Their nature of both private and public investment requires a different approach, simultaneously involving institutions and users (Lawson, 2004) and an innovative analysis of relations. In particular, the interaction between those institutions and networks participating in the garden is worth investigating, since the identity of community gardens, as above-mentioned, is still to be defined, especially from the point of view of institutions. As pointed out in the literature review, the presence of innovative partnerships could represent a source of innovation in the field, an aspect also mentioned in the theoretical analysis of Owen-Smith and Powell (2008), in which it is stated the necessity to give proper attention to relational and categorical sources of innovation in fields. In this thesis, the analysis between institutions and networks will involve public libraries in their role as institutional stakeholders in community garden projects, identifying them as tools to drive development in community gardens. Taking into consideration the different management and long-term issues mentioned above, community gardens need to find balance between their grassroots origins and future expectations, other than between participation and ownership. This could be possible to achieve through collaborative partnerships, as stated by Lawson (2004, p. 171):

Forming coalitions also brings everyone to the table, including gardeners, supporting organizations, and planning agencies, to form a stronger, more coherent voice for lobbying and encouraging public investment and commitment to community efforts. Just as the garden itself requires constant attention and nurture, so too does the concept of the community.

This potential interaction between public libraries as institutions and community gardens is expected to be examined using the frameworks discussed in this second chapter.

To conclude this chapter on research design, it would be appropriate to briefly distinguish between the concepts of organization and institution. Both these concepts have been studied by the sociology of organization, and the second is a declination of the first. In fact, while an organization represents a general group of people who come together to achieve a common goal and perform certain functions, and institution refers to a type of recognized organization created for an educational, religious, social or professional cause. Two typical

characteristics of institutions are objectivity, meaning that they are characterized by a series of accepted rules, and dynamism, which allows for these sets of rules to be continuously retracted and modified through social practices. Moreover, institutions are extrinsic and possess coercive power, meaning that the violation of those rules always generates a sanction: for example, not returning a book to the library could prevent borrowing other books for a certain period of time. One last characteristic of institutions is historicity, since its changes can be traced, and comparative analyses can be made.



### 3. Research Design

The research presented in this thesis was conducted between the months of May and September of 2024 on a sample of four case studies, all belonging to the Italian territory. The geographical focus of the study was chosen to fill a gap in the scholarly literature on Italian community gardening initiatives. In general, the overall objectives of this research are to investigate the role of cultural initiatives within community gardens and to identify possible synergies that could bring cultural and plant cultivation closer together. These aspects, which have not yet been investigated thoroughly in academic literature, are noteworthy because they foresee a development of the concept of community gardens, going beyond the simple definition of places of agricultural production. They also require new actors to be brought into the picture, expanding the opportunities for cultural blossoming alongside agricultural production. In this case, a specific type of cultural agency is considered: public libraries. The investigation on their role will be another focus of this study. Their participation in managing and organizing activities is assumed to be a crucial asset in community gardens.

To tackle these themes, a qualitative approach is chosen, since the focus is on observing and describing preferences, relationships and behaviours. Specifically, comparative analysis was chosen as the preferred methodology because, as stated by Collier (1993), ‘comparison is a fundamental tool of analysis. It sharpens our power of description and plays a central role in concept-formation by bringing into focus suggestive similarities and contrasts among cases’ (p.105). Even though this method presents some weaknesses that will be presented in the next section, it still offers a stronger basis for evaluating hypothesis and allows for systematic comparison (Collier, 1993). Moreover, this methodology often serves as a first step towards statistical analysis and contributes to choose among rival explanations without requiring excessive time and financial efforts (Lijphart, 1975, as cited in Collier, 1993), which is the case of this thesis. Therefore, given the reasons above and the fact building a statistical analysis on the topic at hand is outside the purview of this research, the comparative approach appears as the appropriate methodology. With this proposal it is hoped, to give a first initial overview of the relationship between gardens and culture and of the innovative partnerships between public libraries and community gardens, which could then be further investigated in future studies, maybe through a systematic statistical analysis. In order to further validate the choice of this method, it is made known that studies employing the comparative approach are easily found across community gardens literature. For example, in the article of Bonow & Normark (2018), cases of community gardens in Stockholm are analysed in order to investigate participation incentives and the role municipalities have in promoting and maintaining these kind of

initiatives. On the same note but with a larger geographical scope, the article of Van Der Jagt et al. (2017) investigates what governance arrangements influence the capacity of communal urban gardening (CUG) initiatives to deliver social resilience. The authors selected six case studies scattered across Europe and analysed the institutional context, the actors and partnerships involved, the resources, and the needs met through the implementation of the community gardens. One final example, this time including public libraries, is found in the research of D'Arpa et al. (2020) which investigate the relationship between food gardening and public librarianship, with a specific focus on community health. The case studies are selected through a sentinel surveillance system, which deliberately involves a limited amount of carefully selected reporting sites (World Health Organization, 2020). This decision was made based on the idea that, rather than using a large number of case studies, a community case study approach is required to comprehend the complicated nature of health. Sentinel communities are, in fact, providers of useful information on poorly understood public health related phenomena, which are inextricably linked to the context in which they emerge (D'Arpa et al., 2020). This requires a precise view of the studied phenomenon, one that can only be obtained if the context is analysed carefully and in detail. Also in the case of community gardens, context plays a crucial role and needs to be taken into account when analysing the phenomenon.

From a research point of view, community gardens have drawn attention from academics and urban planners alike; yet the amount of work done on the topic is still limited, with most of it concentrating on the advantages these initiatives offer, with few articles investigating weaknesses of these projects. Even though this last topic appears of crucial interest in order to gain a complete picture of the phenomenon of community garden, it has been excluded from this study, so as to focus on another aspect that characterise these types of initiatives: the different types of partnerships that are already put into practice and the ones that might have a potential positive impact on the long-term cultural production of community gardens. The shortage of research on the subject is also present in this instance, a situation that has turned out to be both an opportunity and a constraint. In fact, even though it was complicated to find previous studies to build the groundwork for the research, it allowed for more freedom in the definition of the path to follow for this study.

The selection of these cases began after the development of the literature review and a period of research conducted especially online and on academic articles. One issue encountered during this step has been the scarcity of online information about community gardens projects, which presented itself as out of date websites or complete absence of online information. To identify eligible projects, more fruitful than online research were direct and word-of-mouth interactions with actors who could have known about relevant projects. For example, librarians

of Valdagno civic library were already in contact with the two public libraries of Terranuova Bracciolini and Perugia, and they provided the contact information. These two projects in particular were chosen because, aside from showcasing collaborations with other libraries, they adopt similar strategies to Valdagno's when it comes to community involvement and library development, which seemed to be a plus considering the library's future plans to launch a community garden project.

It is important to remember that, as presented in the literature review, community gardens can take on different forms and also involve different groups of people, so it is necessary to give a definition of the concept. In this thesis, when talking about community gardens it is intended ‘organized initiatives whereby sections of land are used to produce food or flowers in an urban environment for the personal or collective benefit of their members who, by virtue of their participation, share certain resources such as space, tools and water’ (Glover, 2003, p.264). Each country has its own history of community gardens, but within Italy they initially developed as a tool to cope with food need of the migrating population between the 70s and 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while more recently they present themselves as forms of rehabilitation of abandoned spaces and are in general directed at different targets, ranging from children, to elderly people, with the aim to teach, provide a space for recreation and improve sociability (Arena & Sorbello, 2022). The need to improve the urban environment and reduce the phenomena of socio-economic marginalisation have allowed these projects to spread and to be promoted by public institutions as well. From a normative point of view, the management and regulation of these projects depends on city administrations, creating different frameworks and different ways of management within the same territory (Bellia et al., 2014). Although similarities can be identified, this context gives rise to several different declinations of community gardens, with different actors, scopes, targets and management arrangements. To represent this multifaceted scenario and be analysed in this thesis, four selected case studies belonging to different Italian regions:

<b>Name of the project</b>	<b>Region of origin</b>	<b>City</b>
Municipal community gardens of Rovigo	Veneto	Rovigo
‘Orto Aperto’	Trentino Alto-Adige	Trento
‘Orto Diffuso’	Toscana	Terranuova Bracciolini
Community gardens of ‘San Matteo degli Armeni’	Umbria	Perugia

*Table 1: Region and city of origin of the projects*

The four community gardens projects possess different characteristics regarding the type of promoting institution and the presence of a library partnership (Fig.2: Personal elaboration on Weber, 1922). To initially identify and organize the projects, it was adopted the concept of

Weber's *ideal type*, which is a conceptual category used in comparative analysis that acts as a heuristic tool to measure the average features of a given social phenomenon (Weber, 1922). It does not represent or exhaust the historical reality, but it is used as an example to which the real phenomenon needs to be correlated. The following framework was initially created to categorize the case studies in pure categories:

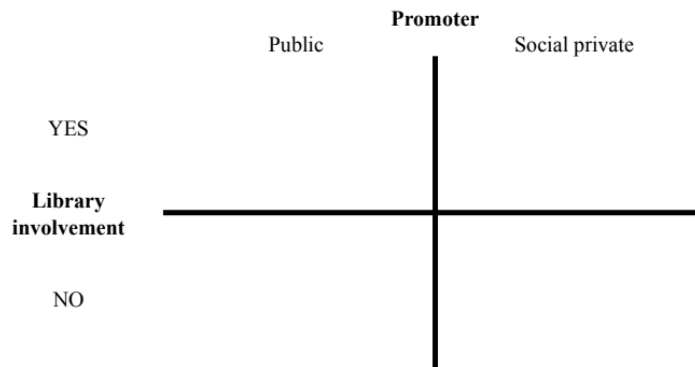


Figure 2: Personal elaboration on Weber, 1922.

However, the main criticism to the concept of *ideal types* is that, even though it is derived from observable reality, it does not conform to it because it resorts to alteration methods that select and accentuate certain elements. In this thesis, this concept is employed just as an initial as a method of schematisation that will inevitably be altered by the realities of the different case studies, which, as will be seen, can hardly fit solely into one of the four categories proposed above. In fact, all four cases have originated from different contexts and represent, in some way, different governance arrangements, ranging from private to public managements, but also, and in most cases, a mix of the two. On one hand, the first two cases - the urban gardens promoted by the municipality of Rovigo and the communitarian space of 'Orto Aperto' located in Trento - represent the lower part of the framework, with the first being mostly managed by public institutions and the second independently by the community. On the other hand, the last two projects - 'Orto Diffuso' managed with the collaboration of the public library of Terranuova Bracciolini and the community gardens of 'San Matteo degli Armeni' in Perugia that strictly collaborate with the adjacent library - even though they should symbolize the higher part of the scheme, present no clear distinction between the left and right part of the framework, both of them having a mix of public and private stakeholders engaged in the management part. These blurred arrangement distinctions will be explored further in the next sections, but they are useful indicators of how reality is usually more complex and multifaceted, therefore difficult to reduce to pure categories.

The data collection process followed an *inductive approach*, meaning that, after an extensive literature review, data were collected, codified and then connected to the theory. At the same time, it can be said that the nature of this study is iterative, meaning that the process

followed to produce this research consisted in continuous development, testing and improvement of each part of the process. This allowed a chance to review and improve the research design also depending on the outcomes of each phase. In general, the study is structured as a two steps process: firstly, a questionnaire was proposed to participants with the aim to collect general information about the case studies, such as the origin story of the projects, the financial and organizational arrangements, target groups etc. and, secondly, semi-structured online interviews were conducted where spokespersons of projects were asked to discuss a number of topics, especially regarding the relationship between culture and horticulture and the meanings they assign to this intrinsic bond. The interviews, while conducted in Italian, will be reported in English and all translations have been done by the author. The extended Italian transcripts of the interviews are available in the annex section of this thesis. In the case of the questionnaire the questions posed were the same for all the actors, but, due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, the discussion in each interview varied, even though it followed a generally determined path. This approach was chosen because the topic required to compare the chosen case studies and understand intrinsic and sometimes hidden meanings assigned to culture. To do so, it seemed appropriate, especially during the second phase of research, to allow interviewees to freely explore the topics of culture and horticulture without binding them to a series of pre-selected questions. Unfortunately, due to time and resource constraints, it was not possible to integrate in the research any fieldwork experience. It is hoped that future research will allow to further investigate the topic through in person meetings and field engagement.

Regarding the principles guiding this research I feel like it is important to underline that every actor involved in the study participated voluntarily after a thorough explanation of the process. They were informed on the objectives of the research and reassured that all the produced content is at the sole scope of academic research. No personal information about those involved in the projects have been disclosed and the results will be shared with everyone who decided to participate. To summarize, in this thesis it is hypothesised that community gardens can achieve greater social impacts if complemented with effective cultural initiatives and more so with complementary partnerships, specifically with public libraries. For example, it would be another way to expand libraries' services beyond simple lending of books, developing their role and becoming even more active players in the community, while for community gardens it would be an opportunity to impact on commitment and participation.

#### 4. Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions

As mentioned in the previous section, the two most relevant practical problems encountered were the scarcity of online information about community garden projects and the lack of time and resources to further investigate the topic. Apart from these limitations, for the sake of clarity and credibility of the research, it is worth emphasising the weaknesses of the method chosen for the analysis. The comparative method appeared as the most appropriate approach for this research, considering the various objectives and constraints presented above. However, certain limitations are associated with this method, starting from the risk of incurring in oversimplification, because social, political, and cultural phenomena are often the result of complex, interrelated causes and the comparative method often requires reducing complex entities to a set of comparable variables or features that can lead to ignoring the nuanced and context-specific factors that influence the phenomena being studied. Adding to this is the issue of the limited number of case studies involved in comparative analysis, the so-called *small N* issue, which is one of the main criticisms addressed to the method. However, as presented above, some social phenomena are better investigated if a restricted number of participants are involved, because a more precise and in-depth study can be conducted on the generating causes. This is true for community health, but, as presented in the article of D'Arpa et al. (2020), this method can be applied also to community gardens and their relations with libraries. Another author strengthening the justification for a *small N* approach is Giovanni Sartori (1970), who tackles the issue of limited generalizability. He states that on one hand the application of a concept to a large set of cases could lead to its 'stretching', meaning that larger the sample, the more difficult it would be to fit all cases within the concept itself, losing meaning and precision. On the other hand, he underlines the fact that those concepts that can be applied to a broad range of cases are usually so general that do not effectively underline the precise similarities and differences that characterize the cases involved. In Sartori's opinion, it would be better to accurately select the cases for their characteristics and not because they could be generalized. Great caution should be adopted when trying to generalize.

On this note, selection bias is noted as weak point of this method, since the choices of cases is usually subjective, preferring cases which are more likely to support their hypothesis, rather than those that provide a balanced view. In the specific case of this thesis, an attempt was made to avoid this problem by choosing cases that best represented the reality of community gardens as portrayed in the literature, meaning a variegated and context-specific scenario of multiple garden arrangements.

One final issue associated with the comparative method regards the tendency of this method to identify correlation between variables while struggling to establish clear causal relationships. Correlation is a statistical measure that describes the size and direction of a relationship between two or more variables, but it does not automatically mean indicate that the change in one variable is the cause of the change in the other. Causation, on the other hand, indicates precisely that one event is the result of the occurrence of another. However, one of the main goals of this method is ‘the systematic examination of covariation among cases for the purpose of causal analysis’(Collier, 1993, p. 105), and not correlative analysis. As stated by Skocpol & Somers (1980), a problem arises when scholars push each approach beyond the limits of its usefulness. As stated in the previous section, the aim of this thesis is to scratch the surface on the topic of culture, community gardens and libraries, and it is hoped that a more systematic and statistical analysis can be pursued in the future.

## 5. Presentation of the Research Context and Case Studies

### 5.1 Urban Agriculture in the European Policy Framework

The increasing popularity of urban agriculture has attracted interest of a variety of stakeholders, from local to national and international institutions, including United Nations and the European Union. As stated by Giardullo and Pozzato (2024) in their article, already with Agenda 2021 and again in Agenda 2030, public administrations were and are required to promote urban greening through inclusive and participatory initiatives (Agenda 21, Art. 28.1), in order to encourage a more sustainable consumption lifestyle in urban contexts (Agenda 2030, SDG 11 and 12) (p. 118). When it comes to the European Union, hints about urban agriculture can be found over the years in various debates of the European Commission, while the first funded research dates back to 2012 with ‘*Urban Agriculture Europe*’ *COST action*, a comprehensive, transdisciplinary study about the multifaceted declinations of the phenomenon across Europe (European Commission, n.d.). This study resulted in the creation of the ongoing *European Forum on Urban Agriculture* (EFUA), a four-year project funded by the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. The main objective of this forum is to unlock the potential of urban agriculture by improving effectiveness and efficiency of networks, knowledge, deployment of resources and policies (EFUA, n.d.). Other sources of information supporting urban agriculture related to the programming period 2014-2020 can be found in the ‘*European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and sustainability*’ (EIP-AGRI), a program launched in 2012 to contribute to ‘Europe 2020’ with the aim of fostering competitive and sustainable farming (EIP-AGRI, 2017). This program has now become part of EU CAP Network that connects organizations, administrations, researchers and practitioners and improves the dissemination of knowledge about agriculture and rural policy (EU CAP Network, n.d.).

Despite these initiatives and the progresses made in promoting sustainability, the European Union and related policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the European Green Deal, have largely overlooked the potential of urban agriculture. In fact, while recognizing the several benefits related to urban agriculture and its systematic challenges, little has been done at policy level to allow this sector to benefit from fundings and opportunities provided by the European Union. For example, despite the fact that urban agriculture meets most of the legal preconditions of being ‘agriculture’, it is largely marginalized in both CAP and rural development programmes because:

It appears that urban agriculture falls between different policy areas: ‘to some, it may not be sufficiently agricultural in nature to secure support under Pillar I of the Common Agricultural Policy (as typified by more conventional agriculture). To others, it is not considered sufficiently rural to



secure support under the above-mentioned rural development programmes. (McEldowney, 2017, p. 1)

To be clearer, Pillar I of the CAP focuses on the direct support of farmers, whose eligibility is based on the size of holdings, the minimum size being a hectare. This dimension requirement is very hardly met by any urban agriculture project, excluding this kind of initiatives a priori from the selection. At the same time, the rural focus of Pillar II of the CAP automatically prevents urban agriculture from benefiting from funding and support, because of its predominantly urban nature. In other words, the two main reasons excluding urban agriculture from the jurisdiction of the CAP are that it develops in urban and peri-urban contexts, rather than rural environments – which are the main focus of the CAP – and it is not of large scale enough to impact food markets (Curry et al., 2014).

Another complex aspect of urban agriculture when it comes to policy management is its multifaceted nature. Not only it involves a number of stakeholders and individuals from different fields, such as supporting organisations, advocacy groups, public institutions, volunteers and farmers, but it is also multifunctional and influential in various policy areas, including health, education, climate change, social inclusion and culture (McEldowney, 2017). Moreover, findings in previous studies demonstrate that a range of context specific factors, such as urban layout, attitudes and political climate, influence the development of urban agriculture initiatives, making it difficult to create supra-national policies that are flexible enough to adapt to the specific needs of all European nations and to assign responsibilities to the adequate decision levels (Curry et al., 2014). As stated by Curry et al. (2014), ‘there is a clear need for more local policies, set to provide greater detail to the principles of a European policy frame, but both adapted to local circumstances and integrated with other policy frameworks’ (p. 99). For these reasons, even though urban agriculture is prioritized in a number of European documents, policies still do not adequately implement it; rather, laws and regulations pertaining to its implementation differ significantly between nations as well as between municipalities (Bellia et al., 2014).

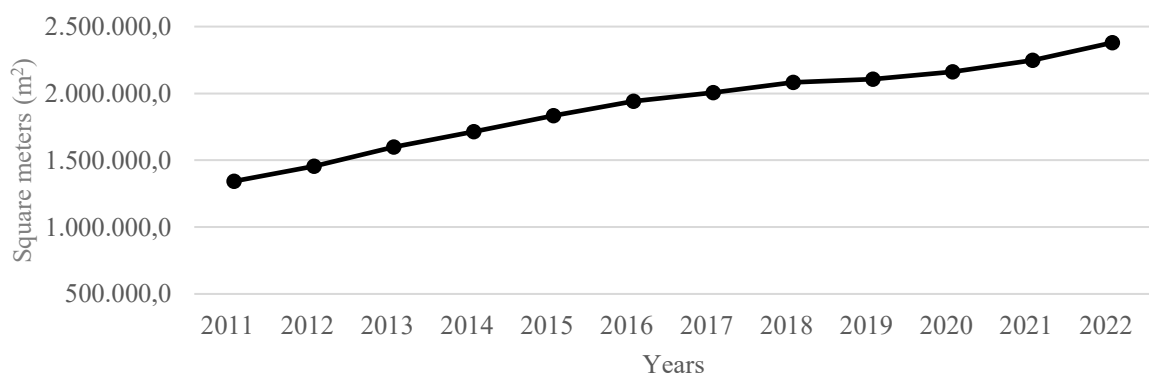
## **5.2 The Italian Context**

Some historical background on Italian urban horticulture has already been given in the first chapter of this thesis. However, in this section it is hoped to give a more precise picture of the context leading up to recent years.

While in the early stages community gardens originated from grassroots groups occupying abandoned land to demonstrate their dissent against public planning and the appropriation of land by large private construction companies (Arena & Sorbello, 2022; Bellia et al., 2014), nowadays the phenomenon has evolved and has adopted new declinations. In fact,

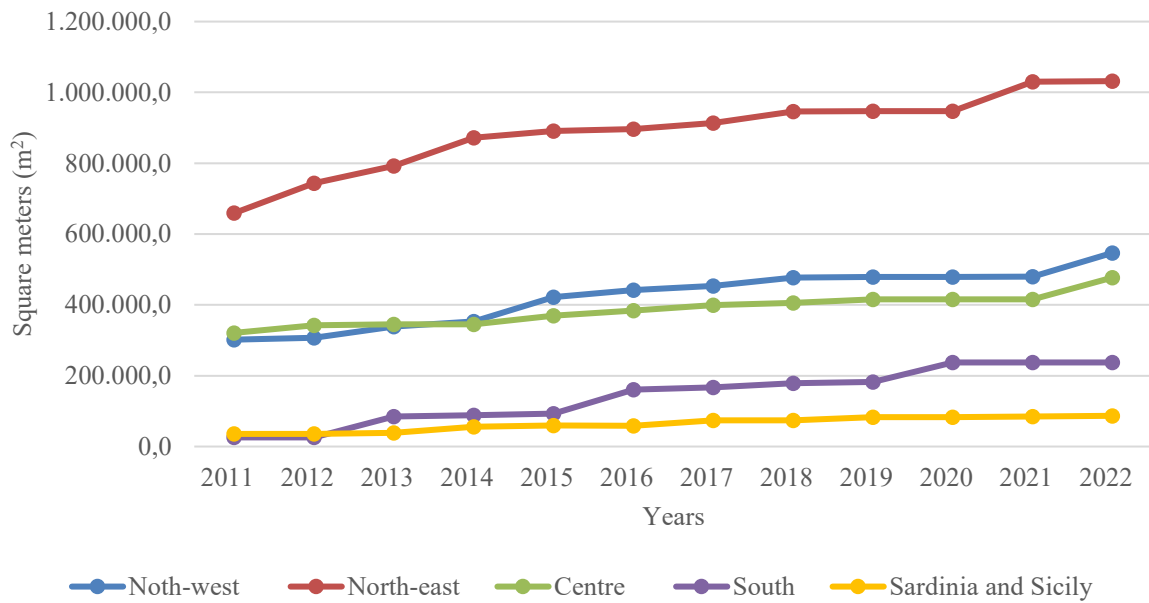
since the first urban garden regulation was published in Perugia in 1976, urban community gardens promoted by public administrations have surfaced throughout the peninsula and, nowadays, they are present especially in central and historical areas. Their public inspiration and interest towards environmental revitalisation differentiate them from previous war and post-war vegetables gardens, making them ecological citizenship gestures based on ‘innovative collaborative mode of planning, which integrates the work of both vernacular and professional planners’ (Certomà, 2016, p.117). Moreover, as explained by Certomà in her article investigating the relationship between urban gardening and planning (2016), these characteristics classify community gardens as acts of *informal planning*, a concept that differs from *urban informality* in that they do not categorically oppose official planners, but open a new channel of communication with them so that citizens can also participate. Even though this distinction is typical of most European community gardens, it is particularly true for the Italian context, where the transition from non-recognised initiatives to useful accepted greening tools is still happening. This process can be better understood if data from the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) regarding the presence of urban gardens on the Italian territory is taken into account.

ISTAT defines urban gardens as small plots of land owned by the municipality to be used for cultivation for domestic use, planting vegetable gardens and recreational gardening, allocated on loan to applicant citizens. In urban gardens cultivation is non-profit and provides produce for family consumption (ISTAT, 2022). This definition includes all those projects supported by public administrations and/or in which institutions are involved in some way. When comparing the number of square metres of urban green space occupied by urban gardens in the period between 2011 and 2022, a steady increase can be noted for the Italian territory, as shown in the following graph:



Graph 1: Square meters of Italian urban green space occupied by urban gardens from 2011 to 2022 (ISTAT, 2022)

This positive trend is also true when the different macro areas in which Italy is usually divided are considered and analysed.



Graph 2: Square meters of urban green space occupied by urban gardens in Italian macro areas from 2011 to 2022 (ISTAT, 2022)

By looking at the chart, it can be observed an overall increment in the extension of urban gardens within all macro areas. However, true differences can be found by looking at the specific growth of each area. Between 2011 and 2022 all areas have shown a growth ranging from around 50% to 150%, except for south Italy, presenting a growth exceeding 800%<sup>1</sup>. This positive picture of the Italian context shows how, over the years, urban horticulture practices have not only been accepted by institutions, but also recognised and encouraged. It is important to emphasise that if initiatives not included in this definition, perhaps those that have still not been recognised, were also taken into account, the number of square meters of urban gardens would probably be higher than the one reported above.

Regarding the regulations governing urban and community gardens, as specified above, they can change between regions but also between municipalities, since the responsibility to issue calls and create ranking lists to assign plots usually falls on to the latter. This specificity has both negative and positive consequences. On one hand it allows for projects to be as contextualised as possible, increasing the chances of municipalities to effectively meet the needs of the population, but on the other it creates a multitude of fragmented and non-homogeneous approaches that make it difficult to extract rules and methods that can lead to a uniform regulation of the phenomenon. At national level, the most recent regulation mentioning social and urban gardens is the legislative decree n.29 issued March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, titled ‘Disposizioni in materia di politiche in favore delle persone anziane’ (‘Provisions on policies

<sup>1</sup> This data reprocessing was carried out using the data at the following link: [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1.Z0920ENV.1.0/ENV\\_CITIES/DCCV\\_URBANENV\\_URBGRE/IT1.609\\_1\\_DF\\_DCCV\\_URBANENV\\_20.1.0](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1.Z0920ENV.1.0/ENV_CITIES/DCCV_URBANENV_URBGRE/IT1.609_1_DF_DCCV_URBANENV_20.1.0)

in favour of the elderly’). Within the national context, urban gardens are viewed as tools for social integration and active aging, as well as places that improve the psychophysical health of the older population (D.lgs. 29/2024). It is typical of the Italian setting to focus solely on the role of urban gardens as means of support for the elderly (Arena & Sorbello, 2022), while other types of gardens are not recognized by national law. Nonetheless, the various forms that urban gardens might take are more acknowledged at the local level. Third sector associations, NGOs and groups of citizens bound by common interests come together to create urban gardens that target the population as a whole, regardless of age. Objectives are diverse and range from reclaiming abandoned areas, promoting environmental education, boosting neighbourhood and environmental health, to rediscovering sociality and a sense of community. Rome is an excellent example of this multiplicity of actors and purposes that come together. As shown in the article of Certomà (2016), despite the lack of official regulations, a multitude of initiatives have emerged in the last decades, amounting to 150 in 2015 and more than 210 a year later.

However, thanks to the slow but steady regularisation of urban gardens by administrators, the recognition of their positive and multidimensional effects, and the growth of the phenomenon around Italy both in small and large cities, examples of collaboration of between public institutions, groups of active citizens and associations can be found (Arena & Sorbello, 2022). A specific type of collaboration is the one involving private groups and public libraries, which are becoming active in the context of urban gardens. In fact, as specified in the research of Trovato (2014), a public library can scarcely serve 20% of the population—students and young people included—if its only services are centred around encouraging reading. For this reason, libraries have been increasing the number of services provided, from data base access tools to spaces of collective learning and meeting, including community gardens. Unfortunately, specific data on these hybrid approaches could not be found, probably given their recent appearance. It is hoped that in the future, with the desired spread of this partnership, it will be possible to access accurate data. In the meantime, this thesis hopes to deepen this aspect by analysing a series of case studies chosen to represent the context presented above, which will be presented in the next section.

### **5.3 Presentation of Case Studies**

For the purpose of this research, four case studies were selected with different characteristics including public and private projects as well as specific cases of novel collaborations between public institutions and private entities, specifically public libraries.

### 5.3.1 Rovigo – ‘Orti Urbani’

The first initiative was launched in 2015 by the municipality of Rovigo with co-financing from the CaRiPaRo, a foundation of banking origin. The main objective was to recover, through the use of spaces for collective use, sustainable land management practices in urban areas in order to increase the involvement of the community. The project was born to relocate some spontaneous gardens that had sprung up along the unused green areas of the railway. In order to give the citizens a more proper and safer space, the municipality decided to move these gardens next to a new roundabout, place where they are still located. The garden is a fenced space composed of 38 individually delimited plots - one of which hosts a gazebo - of regular shape and approximate size of 50 m<sup>2</sup>, a water system and two storage wooden huts destined to the water pump and tools. The main target groups are elderly people (over 65), families, and associations, such as the WWF to which a plot for educational purposes is allocated. This educational role assigned to them appears not to be fulfilled at present, but the plot is nevertheless used for other purposes, such as the planting of specific plants. The calls assigning the plots are triennial, but, in 2021, due to lack of new applications, a waiver was made for current assignees, extending their assignment until 2025. At the beginning of 2015, a regulation defining the methods of lot allocation and management was also approved. It states that, from the organizational point of view, while maintenance costs are borne by the municipality, which asks gardeners to pay an annual fee of 46 euros, the actual management of the garden is assigned to an informally mandated coordinator and the assigned gardeners. They are in charge of managing their lots and the pathways around them, other than caring for the common areas, sometimes contributing with small sums to the purchase of tools. From the part of the municipality, no cultural initiatives or educational activities are organized, and it appears that neither the main the public library (Accademia dei Concordi) nor other minor ones are not involved. It is noted that, due to the recent municipal elections, it is not excluded that the project will be revived and revalued from a cultural point of view, thus showing an inevitable political dimension of urban gardens.

### 5.3.2 Trento – ‘Orto Aperto’



Figures 3: images of ‘Orto Aperto’. (a) Regular maintenance of the garden. (b) A recent community dinner.  
Source: Elisa Postai.

The second project, called ‘Orto Aperto’ was born in the municipality of Trento, specifically in the working-class neighbourhood called Clarina. It was officially founded in 2019, from a group of 8 friends that decided to participate to what is called a *collaboration agreement* (‘Patto di Collaborazione dei Beni Comuni’), meaning a municipal act by which one or more active citizens and a public entity define the terms of collaboration for the care of tangible and intangible common goods. The main peculiarity that distinguishes this type of agreement from others, is that it is informal, meaning that it involves subjects not necessarily linked to networks of associations. The main objectives of this agreement were: to regenerate an abandoned plot of land belonging to the municipality, to advertise the initiative throughout the neighbourhood, to promote socialization and to train two group members in order to propose informative events. Throughout the years, due to Covid-19 and changes in the organizational team, the project suffered setbacks and had the opportunity to start again only last year, in 2023. It now involves also the social cooperative ‘Progetto 92’ and other citizens, mostly young people who decided to participate. From a financial point of view, the budget available to the project is made up of a sum allocated by the municipality and donations that are collected during events, since participants are not asked to pay anything. The project is all volunteer based, with the exception of one cooperative worker, who is available for 2 hours per week. The main characteristics of this project are the collaborative drive and the openness to the community: the garden is collectively managed and is a safe space for those who wants to take care of or simply spending time in it. From an organizational point of view the community is also encouraged to participate. In fact, even though a main group composed of the 15 signatories exists with the aim of managing the project and the garden, their periodical meetings are open to everyone, as well as the activities to which everyone can contribute to. There is a strong social and cultural focus, with the main target being the entire community. The large space

assigned to the project is divided into two parts: the first is the community garden, while the second is a field that was left 'empty' so as to be used for the several initiatives like musical, literary and culinary events that 'Orto Aperto' promotes.

### 5.3.3 Terranuova Bracciolini – 'Orto Diffuso'



Figure 4: images of 'Orto Cultura', 'Le Fornaci' public library. (a) The garden. (b) An event taking place in the garden.  
Source: Lorenza Renzini.

Both this and the next selected case studies include the collaboration and active participation of public libraries.

The third project called 'Orto Diffuso', born in 2017 from the regional project 'Centomila Orti in Toscana', is articulated in different community gardens spread across the municipality of Terranuova Bracciolini in the province of Arezzo. One of the aims was to promote the creation of new gardens and regenerate the already existing ones, scattering them in five spaces with different target groups: one in a school, one in the public library 'Le Fornaci', one in a recreational space for people with disabilities, one in a communal space used by the Sikh community and one on a small plot in a peripheral neighbourhood. Another objective was to spread among all citizens the agricultural tradition that, with the urbanization of last century, has been forgotten. In the municipality of Terranuova Bracciolini, the project was and is still supported by the cultural associations 'Il Grano e le Rose' and 'Pandora' that are related to the Slow Food network, a strong reality in the area, so much so that the president of 'Il Grano e le Rose', who is Barbara Nappini, now has become the national president of Slow Food. From a financial point of view, as all the other projects, also this one survives on public and regional fundings, while there are no participation fees for citizens. As for the organization, the gardens were initially set-up by the cultural associations - which were also to carry out a constant long-term monitoring - but then they were to survive on their own thanks to the citizens' efforts and the personnel assigned to each garden. In this respect, some gardens have been more effective than others, which have instead struggled to survive in certain situations. The public library actively participates not only by housing one garden – which is more

symbolic than active - but also through a series of educational and recreational activities, such as seeds exchange, courses on biological cultivational methods and permaculture, children's laboratories and thematic bibliographies for children and adults. Although this project has a strong cultural value, periodic setbacks are reported probably due to a lack of education on communitarian care. However, the high participation rates in formative events held by the library are also noted.

#### 5.3.4 Perugia – Garden of 'San Matteo degli Armeni'



Figure 5: images of the garden in San Matteo degli Armeni. The garden in September of 2024 (a-b).  
Source: Gabriele de Veris

The fourth and last case study was initiated in 2015 after an agreement between the municipality of Perugia, the national association 'Italia Nostra' which aims at protecting and promoting Italian multifaceted heritage, and the non-profit neighbourhood association 'Vivi il Borgo'. The garden is situated within the monumental complex of 'San Matteo degli Armeni', which was founded by a community of Armenian monks around 1272 and now home to the public library. Until the 90s, the green area of the monumental complex was assigned to the neighbourhood families that cultivated it until the earthquake of '97, which forced them to leave, abandoning the area. It took three years, from 2012 to 2015, to recover the area and prepare it to become a vegetable garden. For example, it was planned how to bring water from the old well located within the complex to the garden. Nowadays, the 5000 m<sup>2</sup> green area used as a garden is formally divided in three plots: two are managed by individuals, while the third one, even though in the beginning it was supposed to be divided into smaller sections, has been set up as a collective garden. It is managed by a group of more or less thirty people, who have self-organised according to their skills, in order to meet the needs of the garden: for example, those who possess and are able to use tools like brush cutters or motor hoes make them available along with the necessary time. Moreover, Tuesday and Thursday afternoons are dedicated to group work, while during the rest of the week people can attend to the garden when they have



time. Finally, the gardeners are also supported by a contact person and an agronomist while the financial aspect of the project is managed by the municipality and the association 'Vivi il Borgo', to which the gardeners need to be subscribed for insurance purposes. The project adopts biological methods of cultivation and promotes meetings on pruning, planting, local tree species and urban gardens. These events are organized in collaboration with the public library that, other than providing support, also developed a seed library that has strong connections with the garden. Moreover, the project has expanded through partnerships with schools and a rose garden. During the inauguration of the community garden, at the end of 2015, the deputy mayor stated that the development of the project was possible thanks to a collective will and communitarian request (PerugiaToday, 2015) and still nowadays the garden is thriving. It is also noted the important network of collaborations and partnerships that the library has been developing with the territory: for example, there is a close relationship with the local university of agriculture, but also with neighbourhood associations and the twin city of Seattle. There is great commitment on the part of the library in promoting these partnerships, as well as organising events and developing their seed exchange project.

## 6. Results and Findings

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the main objective has been to understand *how community gardens integrate the cultivation of culture with that of plants*. To gain insights on this aspect, the investigation focused on two main questions, the first being: *what are the potential cultural and social effects of community horticulture when complemented with creative and educational initiatives?* The objective was to understand what meaning community gardens assign to horticultural activities and what potential all those other initiatives organised to integrate these projects possess. In this category are included musical, literary, theatrical, culinary and educational events that often complement horticultural projects. The underlying assumption is that culture plays a crucial role in community garden projects, in sense that, if properly developed, it might have relevant impacts on different aspects of community life, especially concerning social awareness and education. This focus on the larger cultural and social scenario led to the development of the second question, which is: *How can public libraries contribute to community garden projects when it comes to culture?* Since special attention has been paid to the presence of activities going beyond cultivation for self-consumption in order to enhance cultural impact, also possible wider connections that might be developed with cultural institutions have been investigated, especially those with public libraries, given their innovative evolution in recent years and their role as cultural agencies. For this reason, two of the selected projects directly involve public libraries as partners, an aspect that has been investigated during interviews.

To answer the presented research questions, a comparative analysis of four case studies has been conducted through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, adopting a qualitative approach. In this section, data collected through the questionnaires and the interviews will be presented.

### 6.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire proposed to the case studies was aimed at collecting primary information regarding the structure of the projects, including starting year, organizations and institutions involved, target groups, number of participants, participation fees, structure of the garden, organizational arrangements, and presence of cultural initiatives.

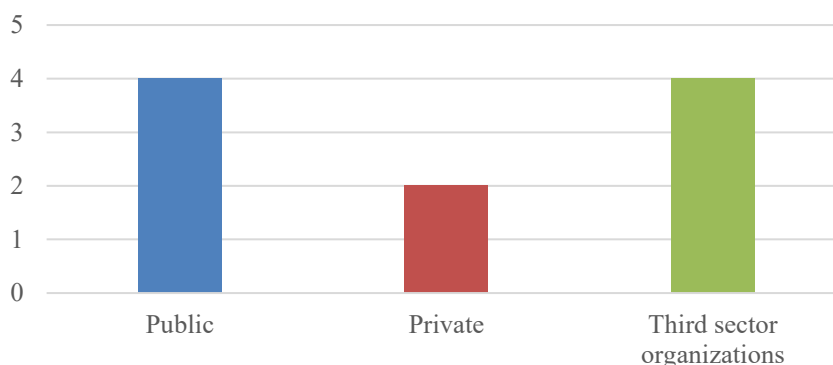
#### **Starting year**

With regard to the starting year, all four projects have been active for more than five years. The oldest garden is located inside San Matteo degli Armeni in Perugia and has been active since 2015. The second-oldest project is "Orti Urbani" in Rovigo, which was started in

2015. "Orto Diffuso" in Terranuova Bracciolini, which was started in 2018, is the next oldest project. Lastly, the most recent project incorporated in this research is "Orto Aperto" in Trento. Although it was officially reopened in 2022 following the Covid-19 epidemic, it has actually been operational since 2019 from a bureaucratic standpoint.

### Organizations and institutions involved

As shown in the graph below, all four case studies involve public institutions in their projects. However, the role and degree of involvement of institutions varies from case to case.

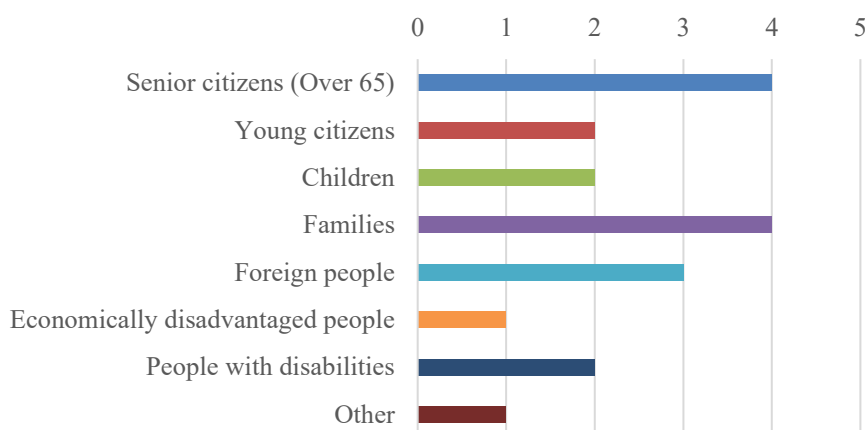


Graph 3: Organizations and institutions involved in case studies.

Based on the information provided in the questionnaire and explored in the interviews, only the project in Rovigo sees the municipality as direct manager of the project, while the other projects envisage collaborations with associations, citizens' groups or libraries for the maintenance and management of the garden. In general, the main support given by public administrations is logistical and financial. They provide the water supply in all four cases, the maintenance of public facilities when needed. It is also noteworthy that all four gardens are located on public land, whether lent through a *collaboration agreement* with citizens, as in the case of 'Orto Aperto', or corresponding to the public library garden, as in Perugia and Terranuova Bracciolini.

The involvement of third sector organizations is another crucial aspect of all case studies. As mentioned above, these groups actively participate in the projects as partners and are usually assigned the direct maintenance and management of the gardens. For example, in Terranuova Bracciolini, the gardens were set up and are currently monitored by 'Il Grano e le Rose' and 'Pandora', cultural promotion associations related to the Slow Food network. In Perugia, the garden of San Matteo degli Armeni is managed by the neighbourhood association 'Vivi il Borgo', while 'Orto Aperto' has developed a close mutual aid partnership with the social cooperative 'Progetto 92', which, among other things, provides them with plants for the garden. Finally, it is noted that, in Rovigo, the municipality assigned one plot of land within the garden to the WWF Association, in order for it to promote educational activities.

## Target groups



Graph 4: Target groups of the projects

As presented in the graph, the main target groups among the case studies are senior citizens and families. ‘Orto Aperto’, in Trento, declared to be open to everyone without any distinction, but they specified that participants are mostly young people, while they struggle to engage with the older population. Urban gardens in Rovigo, following the classic structure of the so-called ‘gardens for the elderly’ mainly focus on senior citizens and families. ‘Orto Diffuso’ having several gardens scattered around the territory, manages to involve different groups: older people, children, families, foreign people and people with disabilities. Finally, the garden located in San Matteo degli Armeni, similarly to Terranuova Bracciolini, targets seniors, families and foreigners, children and young people. The least targeted category are people with economic issues.

## Number of participants

Three out of four projects involve between 25 and 50 people, while in Trento the number of people directly participating in the garden is between 10 and 25. The public library of San Matteo degli Armeni declared that, throughout the years during which the project has been active, they managed to maintain the number of active participants always around 20 to 30 people.

## Participation fees

When it comes to participation fees, two out of four case studies, specifically ‘Orto Diffuso’ and ‘Orto Aperto’, do not require any fees to participate in the gardens. ‘Orto Diffuso’ is financed by the regional project ‘Centomila Orti in Toscana’, plus a small part funded by the municipality. Trento’s public administration also assign a small sum to ‘Orto Aperto’ every programming period, but the garden manages to sustain itself mainly through self-financing raised through organized events, since they report a continuous decrease in the monetary

support provided by the municipality. Instead, the other two case studies involved require participants some sort of fee to participate. For example, the garden in San Matteo degli Armeni instruct participants to pay the registration fee to the association 'Vivi il Borgo' for insurance purposes, while the urban gardens in Rovigo, since they are assigned by a public call, expect an annual fee of 46 euros by participants as a contribution to expenses. In general, from a financial point of view, public administrations are noted to contribute to all four projects with variable sums.

### **Structure and organization of the garden**

In this aspect, the four projects differ from each other in several ways. 'Orti Urbani' in Rovigo is the only garden that provides for a division into plots, of more or less 50 m<sup>2</sup>, that are then managed privately by an individual or a family. The garden is equipped with a water system, two wooden huts for the pump and tools, and its supervision is assigned to an informally mandated person, who acts as an intermediary between the municipality and the gardeners.

The garden located in San Matteo degli Armeni is also formally divided in plots but the majority of it is actually cultivated communally by a group of more or less thirty people who have self-organized with a mix of scheduled meetings and personal contributions in their free time, while water is collected from the ancient well, recovered at the beginning of the project and located inside the monumental complex. The direct management of the garden is assigned to the association 'Vivi il Borgo' to which participants, usually either residents of the neighbourhood or people connected to the library, are enrolled.

In Terranuova Bracciolini the structure changes depending on the location of the gardens. For example, the intercultural garden 'Orto Contaminato', located near a communal space used by the Sikh community, is managed collectively, the school garden is nurtured during the teaching period by the students and the school administration, while the library garden, called 'Orto Cultura', is kept alive by the library staff, not without any issues. As specified when introducing the case studies, this last garden is more of a symbolic space, since it is built in wooden boxes, and it is used as a meeting place for events. In general, the gardens are monitored and maintained by the associations 'Il Grano e le Rose' and 'Pandora' with the help, when available, of participants.

Finally, the garden in Trento's Clarina neighbourhood is split into two areas: one is a site for events and the other is a community-run garden. When it comes to the organizational arrangements, there is a group that periodically meets to manage and organize the garden and the events. This group is open to everyone who wishes to participate, in the extent and form they feel comfortable to. This is also valid for the garden, around which revolve people who

simply stops to help and participate. Also in this case, the water is supplied by the public administration, which recently also provided a storage hut.

### **Presence of cultural initiatives**

The only case study not including cultural and educational activities in their proposal is the one located in Rovigo. Some initiatives should be available through the WWF to which a lot is assigned, but at present no activity appear to be active.

In all other case studies, a multitude of events are organized. The two public libraries involved, 'Le Fornaci' in Terranuova Bracciolini and San Matteo degli Armeni in Perugia, are the main institutions entrusted with organizing activities mainly focused on environmental education. For example, both libraries have launched seeds exchange libraries and organize events related to the importance of seed preservation and recovery, permaculture, biological methods of cultivation and pruning. They both also organize meetings to get to know other similar realities and expand their network of connections. San Matteo degli Armeni also proposes festivals and film screenings. In general, both realities are active in organising various community animation and education activities.

Likewise, one of the main objectives of 'Orto Aperto' is to promote sociability and community building, both through the garden, but especially through community animation activities. Therefore, they organize various initiatives such as, concerts, yoga courses, children activities and book presentations. They recently organized a community dinner prepared with vegetables only produced by the garden. It is important to note that, they also participate and organize events also outside the garden, for example they will participate with a one-day activity to the Poplar, a musical festival organized in Trento, in collaboration with a library with which they established a positive cooperation.

## **6.2 Semi-structured Interviews**

After the questionnaire was administered, one spokesperson of each case study was asked to participate in an interview in order to deepen knowledge of both the projects and the research questions. The objective was to unveil the meanings and values assigned by promoters to community garden projects and especially to understand why the choice of including or excluding educational and creative activities was taken. Finally, some questions about the involvement and role of public libraries were asked in order to investigate the potential emerging role of this institution. Some recurring themes were identified throughout the interviews that can be linked to the research questions. In this next section, these topics will be introduced, while the analysis and relation with the research questions will be revealed in the next chapter.

## **Internal and External connections**

Building connections with other participants or other realities has been a recurrent topic mentioned by interviewees, when talking about effects and impacts of community garden projects. Internal connections refer to those relationships that could potentially form between participants and that, if considered in their entirety, could impact on the development of community ties. External connections, instead, include all those relationships that can be formed between similar or compatible realities within the wider scenario of the territory around the project.

The garden of San Matteo degli Armeni in Perugia and 'Orto Aperto' in Trento are the two projects that have been most vocal on this topic. For example, Elisa Postai, spokesperson of the second project, stated that the garden was born not so much to produce food, but, precisely, with the aim of building community, to provide people with a neutral space where to meet and spend their free time. When talking about her experience in organizing a recent communal dinner, she states:

This community dinner was a crazy job, but it was great because we all got together and then everyone had their part to play. For example, I like the aesthetic part more, so I took care of the set-up, while those who are good at cooking cooked, so I think it's nice that you create these, let's say these unions. I have met a lot of very nice people with whom I generally get along also outside the garden, so for me it's more about sharing and being together. (Full interview transcript available in Annex A)

At the same time, she emphasises the opportunity to build relationships also with other realities located in the region, citing the collaboration with the 'Due punti' workshop library and a possible future partnership with the vegetable gardens of Rovereto. Gabriele de Veris, professional librarian working in the public library of San Matteo degli Armeni, also mentions the importance of maintaining relationships with realities not just of the city of Perugia but also of the province. About this subject, he states that 'what gives value to a library are the relationships with the territory, people, associations, projects and so on' (Full interview transcript available in Annex B). Throughout the years, the library created a very wide network of relationships, ranging from the university of agriculture to Amnesty International and neighbourhood associations. They rely on the multiple initiatives they propose to increase the number of people frequenting the library and boost participation, that they managed to maintain throughout the years.

In contrast, Lorenza Renzini, head of the library service at the public library 'Le Fornaci', when talking about community engagement, focuses on the issues faced by the project 'Orto Diffuso'. She states that there was great difficulty in involving the citizens in this project, because of a civil conscience that was not yet 'ready':

I mean, there is a concept of ownership that should probably be unhinged. But it takes a lot, that's why the idea of curating a shared space is not easy. For example, there have been problems with this very thing. Because maybe one works in the garden more and then the other one picks the tomatoes. It's not easy. (Full interview transcript available in Annex C)

She appeared more optimistic when talking about the existing relationship with Slow Food. Other than being involved in the project since the beginning, the cultural association has always been a strong presence in the territory and the collaboration with the public library seems strong and durable. For example, the seed library will be hosted at the Slow Food stand during an important agricultural fair for the area, one of the so called 'Perdoni'. Renzini is optimistic that this will awaken attention to the seed project and gardens in general.

On another less positive note, in the urban gardens located in Rovigo it appears that the only active relationship established at the beginning of the project was with the WWF and, nowadays, it seems that this partnership has lost its original objective (Full interview transcript available in Annex D).

### **Environmental awareness**

The rediscovering of nature as a dimension unique to humans is another theme that has frequently come up in interviews. More than one spokesperson of the case studies believe that the community garden is a suitable location for people to go through this re-appropriation process, both for the well-being of humans and the Earth itself. For example, both Lorenza Renzini and Elisa Postai, when talking about their projects, underline the fact that both Terranuova Bracciolini and Trento have a very connected history with nature, the first because of its agricultural tradition and the second because of the close relationship with the surrounding mountains. At the same time, they recognize the loss of this connection in modern times and, in the case of 'Orto Diffuso', the not so easy process of re-appropriation:

Our territory is one that has been peasant until recently. In fact, it is still peasant. The parents of my generation, so, people from the 1930s and 1940s had a vegetable garden. So, there is a strong connection with the land, but one that is difficult to rediscover. And this, in my opinion, is an objective limitation for the success of this project. Maybe it would take another generation to go through before it works, that's it. It's a long process.

Both interviewees also mention the positive effects of working in contact with nature, especially regarding personal care:

There would be many things to say, because for example even cultivation as care is something that is talked about a lot now. I see it in my own small way. I have a large terrace at home, I have many plants, and I can see that when I am stressed, I like to take care of plants. (Lorenza Renzini, 'Orto Diffuso')

In my opinion, the simple manual part is also very nice. For example, mowing weeds, which is ultimately a mechanical action, takes a lot of stress out of you. (Elisa Postai, 'Orto Aperto')



When discussing about the reasons for engaging in horticultural activities, environmental awareness is one of the main points that have been brought up by Lorenza Renzini and Gabriele de Veris. The latter mentions the importance of participating in horticultural activities in order to continuously recall the goals of Agenda2030 so as to remind people the ‘collective value’ of taking care of the Earth that could lead to the ‘creation of a shared culture’. Lorenza Renzini, albeit in different words, takes up the same theme:

This reconnection with the earth can perhaps also serve to create a different civic consciousness. More centred on respect for the earth in general. Here then, a culture of respect in my opinion, at least. I firmly believe in this, but I think everyone involved in this project does.

The public library located in San Matteo degli Armeni appears to be very active with regard to environmental awareness. For example, through the collaboration with the university of agriculture, they host plant varieties in their garden that were in danger of being forgotten because they were no longer commercially exploited. Or, since 2020, they have been tending a small ginkgo biloba that is part of a project related to the propagation of trees descended from those that survived the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese term for these trees is *hibakujumoku*, which literally translates to ‘A-bombed tree’. They also often organize events corresponding to international environmental sensibilization days, like Earth Day. In conclusion, this reconnection is seen as potentially contributing to a broader civic consciousness centred on environmental responsibility, but it is also a gradual process that requires long time to be accepted. Engagement in community garden is noted as a channel through which this shift can begin.

### **Educational value**

The last recurring theme refers to the educational potential found in community gardens and, sometimes, in their relations with public libraries. Three out of four projects complement activities of the garden with other educational, cultural and entertainment initiatives, Rovigo being the only one not promoting these kinds of activities. For example, both public libraries involved in this study mention to have developed activities and collaborations with schools of their areas throughout the years. In Perugia, Gabriele de Veris notes that teachers and professors have been showing interest about the garden and the seed exchange because they would like to implement similar activities in the classroom. De Veris states:

In the morning, the presence of schools in the library has become very frequent [...]. This is a very good development because seeing the seed library, going around the garden, learning about plants are always very important educational activities for children living in a city.

A similar idea is expressed by Elisa Postai when talking about the activity they organized in order for children to learn seasonality of vegetables, called ‘PassapOrto’:

I think that we have to go back a bit. In general, right? I mean also ask yourself where do vegetables come from? I teach middle school, and I think it's crucial for kids to also go back a bit to this slightly more earthy dimension and not one where you get melon in any season.

The environmental education of children through their engagement in the garden has been a crucial point throughout the interviews. In this respect, Lorenza Renzini states that, in her opinion, the best way to implement the project of 'Orto Diffuso', which is currently struggling to produce valuable results, would be to focus completely on the school garden, the so called 'Orto di Classe'. One issue is that, while during the school period the garden is cared for by students, professors and school staff, during the summer it is abandoned because of holidays and because there is no external access open to those who would like to water it. If access could also be provided during the summer, it would be worthwhile, according to the head of library services, to keep it active and make the most of its educational value. She states that this would impact also a larger group of people because:

Through the child's garden you also reach the family. For example, the grandfather maybe can come to the school and explain how they grew maize, understand? That is, you can trigger a series of synergies. More connected, more natural and less forced.

Speaking instead of activities aimed at the rest of the population, while 'Orto Aperto' focuses more on, musical and entertainment activities, both public libraries involved in this study promotes also educational workshops. In Terranuova Bracciolini, the main topics proposed were sustainable and organic cultivation, permaculture, production of biological insecticides and fertilisers, extraction of seeds from plants. In Lorenza Renzini's opinion, these courses have been what has 'really worked' when looking at the results of the whole project. Similarly, in Perugia, thanks to a project to which the public library participated in collaboration with the university and an association called 'Sapere Ambiente', the 'School of Ecology' was born, with the aim of raising community awareness on various topics, as explained by Gabriele de Veris:

Meetings have been held depending also on the proposals that were made, which could be either on environmental communication or on well-being, on the relationship between people and plants, the aspect of nutrition.

This interest in educating the community about environmental and personal well-being also translated to a festival where films awarded the Green Drop World prize at the Venice Film Festival over the years were screened. This prize is awarded every year to the film that addresses the issue of sustainability in the most effective way. After a presentation given at the library, sometimes with people directly involved in the films, the screening was then done at the neighbourhood cinema. This festival, other than contributing to the library's objective of educating the community, also attracted new people to the library and, like all the activities

proposed, helped to raise awareness of the garden and all the projects in which the library is involved.

Finally, even though, as mentioned above, the urban garden in Rovigo do not complement cultivation with other cultural activities, it is noted that Umbertilla Bisco, spokesperson for the project, states that in the future it would be desirable to add a cultural proposal to the project, maybe with the help of the new administration:

It will be nice perhaps to try to find a more cultural key to the initiative this certainly. As a friend of mine says: 'projects walk on men's legs'. You always need motivated people to try to create something because if people don't have the time, as in my case, or don't have the culture or interest, it is clearly more difficult. I always say that everything that is born, is born because there are people who believe in it.

She also states that the original purpose of the garden was to develop a more comprehensive proposal and, she hopes that, in the future, this will be possible to achieve.

### **Role of public libraries**

Another final theme explored primarily with the spokesperson of the two public libraries involved, has been the reasons behind the involvement of institutions like public libraries in this kind of projects. Both emphasised the, in the words of Lorenza Renzini, 'strategic' role of this institution. Lorenza Renzini focuses on the concepts of tradition and memory that are preserved by the library, with a focus on the agricultural tradition of her territory:

I believe in the value of tradition, of the tradition that in any case must remain. The library is however the guardian of a memory and in this sense also of a physical, concrete, everyday memory, which is that of cultivating the land.

[Involving the library] was also a way to give a cultural connotation in the true sense of the term: of cultures, of learning about cultures and maintaining cultures. Also because it is a way to re-appropriate this tradition of cultivation in a more conscious way: the people who have returned to the land, are people who come from a past in which they were educated and in which there was a level of education higher than the one achievable for old farmers. And so perhaps the library can also play this role of educational support.

On the other hand, Gabriele de Veris underlines the importance of the library in building relationships with the community and the outside world:

The proper maintenance of a place, and by place I don't just mean the grass that has to be cut every so often otherwise it becomes a thicket, but also the space, the fixtures, the relationships between people, associations and the environment. Obviously having so many relationships and so many collaborations is one of the strengths of a library. Its true value is not the physical assets, which can be increased with difficulty, given the physical limitations of the walls, but the relationships that must be taken care of. The relationships with the territory, people, associations, projects and so on. This is what gives value to a library.

After presenting the main topics tackled during the interviews, in the next section a thorough analysis of these themes and their interrelations will be carried out in order to answer to the research questions leading this research.

## **7. Discussion**

As reported in the chapter above, four main topics were identified during interviews: networks development, environmental awareness, educational value and public library support. These themes can be used to trace an image of the relationships connecting community gardens, culture and public libraries.

Contemporary society is characterized by a pervasive complexity that influences every aspect of everyday life. Community gardens are no exception, considering their strong tendency to adapt to the specific context and transform themselves according to needs the community in which they are located. For example, the selected case studies of this research represent different governance arrangements, but rather than being pure categories, they locate somewhere in a spectrum. The involvement of groups of citizens and associations blurs the previously considered clear boundaries between public and private actions, increasing the complexity of the phenomenon. That is the reason why, in the research design, despite having established a framework, it was then challenging, in some cases impossible, to find cases that fell into some of the four categories. Moreover, the multitude of interrelated topics that are tackled within cultivated plots are other indicators pointing to this complexity: health, education, climate change, justice, freedom, housing, food security are just some of the most common ones. However, one main focus can be identified if all the above-mentioned topics are taken into consideration: the social dimension. As any cultural object (Griswold, 2004), also community gardens are created and assigned meanings by humans, who are themselves embedded in a broader social context that defines them and their needs, so it should not be surprising if even within a ‘simple’ community garden, we find a complex network of actors, relationships, themes and tools. Therefore, even within this research, topics that have been discussed separately are in truth interconnected, but these links are sometimes challenging to showcase. This section will reveal these connections and how they relate to the research questions.

### **7.1 Growing Awareness: Gardens as Spaces of Accountability and Commitment**

As presented in the literature review, one of the benefits associated with community gardens concerns the environment and its protection. There are several direct positive consequences connected with the establishment of green spaces, especially in cities and urban areas. From a practical point of view, the increasing presence of green areas has a mitigating effect on, for example, pollution and heat islands (Koroļova & Treija, 2018), other than promoting pollination and production of biological produce. Not to mention the psychophysical benefits reserved to humans when engaging with nature and plants: reduction of stress and

anxiety other than development of healthier nutrition habits and lifestyles (Di Nunzio, 2022; Zhou & Zeng, 2023). However, what emerged from the interviews has less to do with single benefits and more with the collective consequences that engaging with nature can bring to humans and the Earth alike. ‘A ‘return to the Earth’ has been mentioned in several interviews as a desirable outcome of engaging in community gardens, especially when the connection with the territorial natural identity seems to have been lost or forgotten. For example, both the projects in Terranuova Bracciolini and Trento mention to have had strong connections with nature in the past, the first because of the agricultural vocation of the territory and the second because of the proximity with the surrounding mountainous environment. Nowadays, these bonds seem to have been lost due to changes in lifestyles and working habits, but that does not mean that they have lost their usefulness or that they are not necessary. On the contrary, it seems that today more than ever it is necessary to rediscover this link with the Earth, for two reasons: firstly, to accept collective accountability when it comes to the damage that we, as human beings, have done to the natural environment and, secondly, to rediscover a broader sense of community, not just as human beings, but also as a species in the broader context of the Earth system. Just as mentioned by Thomas Berry in his book ‘The Dream of the Earth’ (1988) when talking about the *Earth Community*, it is necessary to rediscover an ‘intimacy’ with the entire natural world if we are to truly become equal parts in the system and not mere exploiters of resources. Community gardens seem to contribute to this process by providing spaces where people can commit themselves in caring for a piece of nature, some, such as the urban gardens in Rovigo, through individual allocations, and some through a collective effort without ownership. In both cases, the garden, trains the commitment of participants, a main feature when it comes to participation. In fact, Gabriele de Veris, when talking about the motivations that initially led to the creation of the garden in San Matteo degli Armeni states that:

The objectives were related to the participation of the neighbourhood in caring for the area, the educational dimension, the relationship with nature. [...] Because, obviously, taking care of an area, no matter how big or small, requires a commitment. Participation cannot be an extemporaneous thing, otherwise it risks becoming distorted or losing sight of the objective.

These concepts of commitment and participation need, again, to be considered in the broader scenario of public and environmental activism. Community gardens, as mentioned in the literature review, possess some kind of political power, in the sense that they add meaning to the gardeners’ agency when it comes to participation. In other words, the individual labour that everyone puts into the garden is not an end in itself, but it is ‘rooted in a common cause’ (Corcoran & Kettle, 2015, as cited in Certomà & Tornaghi, 2015, p. 6), it becomes charged with a collective meaning. For these reasons and since people transform the public space through ‘the often implicit alliances forged with non-human agents (such as plants and animals’

(Certomà, 2011), community gardens can be considered spaces of political and environmental change where people and nature together remodel the urban space and regain possession of it. Moreover, the voluntary nature of these initiatives promote the assimilation of civic virtues, such as active participation in public life, trust and reciprocity (Glover, Shinew, et al., 2005), which allows for the development of a ‘culture of respect’, as argued by Lorenza Renzini:

This reconnection with the earth can perhaps also serve to create a different civic consciousness. More centred on respect for the earth in general. Here then, a culture of respect in my opinion, at least.

In community gardens, this respect and dedication is not only aimed at other human participants, through act of generosity, but also and especially towards the natural environment itself, in all its components. It requires to rediscover what could be called ‘natural’ reciprocity, the original balance of giving and receiving that nature requires, where all parts equally participate in exchanges and receive benefits in return, but without demanding more than they need. If in the past this implicit rule was clearer in the minds of humans, with the advent of modernity, industrialization and contemporary overconsumption trends, its importance was put in the background just as the connection with the earth. To now recover this sense of responsibility is a complex process and requires much more commitment than the opposite action of forgetting, as it was underlined also during the interviews and reported above:

Our territory is one that has been peasant until recently. [...] The parents of my generation, so, people from the 1930s and 1940s had a vegetable garden. So, there is a strong connection with the land, but one that is difficult to rediscover. And this, in my opinion, is an objective limitation for the success of this project. Maybe it would take another generation to go through before it works, that's it. (Lorenza Renzini, ‘Orto Diffuso’)

This lack of identification and commitment is another reason why it is often complicated to involve people in horticultural activities and also why there is sometimes loss of interest in the long run towards community gardens projects. This issue has been mentioned also during this research, specifically by Elisa Postai, when she states that within the project of ‘Orto Aperto’ people are more likely to participate in the proposed events than in the maintenance and cultivation of the garden, because not everyone is aware of what a garden needs to thrive nor finds garden care even enjoyable. However, in Umbertilla Bisco’s opinion, spokesperson for the urban gardens in Rovigo, the number of people taking an interest in cultivation seems to be increasing. Rovigo seems to be an excellent example of this trend because the urban garden themselves were established after spontaneous gardens started to spring up alongside the railroad. Citizens living in the urban area started appropriating unused land, not because they needed it to sustain themselves, but because urban life did not allow or provide space for citizens to pursue this interest. The municipality, acknowledging this ‘un-expressed’ need, decided to provide a safer and more appropriate space for those citizens, creating the current

urban gardens. After a period characterized by lack of interest towards the project, according to Umbertilla Bisco nowadays the number of applications is increasing, as well as the demographics interested in this kind of initiative. If in the past, mainly retired elderly people applied to municipal calls, in recent times also young families join the waiting list to obtain a plot inside the gardens. Even in the case of ‘Orto Aperto’, young people seem to be the group most interested in these issues.

These processes of reappropriation of the earthly side of the human being and the acceptance of accountability are processes that require time and effort. For example, the project ‘Orto Diffuso’ in Terranuova Bracciolini, despite having a strong starting motivation, has lost some of its gardens due to loss of interest and abandonment from the citizens’ part. However, community gardens appear as both spaces where to start this journey of reconnection and where to keep training the personal and community commitment towards environmental restoration. As reported above, Lorenza Renzini, spokesperson for ‘Orto Diffuso’, despite the difficulties encountered throughout the years, firmly believes in the project, which is still ongoing. She focuses on the broader scenario of community education when she discusses about the need for this reappropriation in order to build a ‘civic consciousness, more centred on respect for the earth in general’.

For these reasons, although the presence of urban and community gardens does not seem to have major impacts on climate change, they remain valuable spaces where mindsets and beliefs are questioned, both from an individual and collective point of view. Sustainability and resilience can then be nurtured within community gardens through the development of a collective consciousness both as human beings and actors in the natural environment.

## **7.2 Harvesting Connections: Education and Sociability in Community Gardens**

Horticultural activities, such as planting flowers, growing vegetables and mowing the grass are just a small part of what is happening within a community garden. The processes discussed above are complex and take a lot of effort, which does not end with cultivation itself, but include also the convivial and informative sides of human nature. That is why it is important to consider also other aspects contributing to create the fertile context of community gardens and help explain the potential of these projects. For this purpose, two main defining characteristics will be taken into consideration in this section, both also mentioned during the interviews: the educational capacity and social impact of community gardens.

First of all, it is important to analyse the role that education plays within community gardens. Being outside of any academic environment, the garden itself can be considered an informal learning space, also because it provides people with the opportunity to directly

experience not only the mechanisms through which nature works but also to interact with them through a learn by doing process. Moreover, activities carried out in a garden are proven to increase have several effects such as increasing citizens' self-awareness (Certomà & Tornaghi, 2015) and allowing for the development of pro-environmental behaviours (Prince, 2017). This appears to be especially true if the other educational and leisure activities promoted by community gardens are taken into account. Except for Rovigo, in fact, the other three projects involved in this study complement gardens activities with other initiatives aimed at educating the community mainly on environmental issues, theme that perfectly fits the results presented in the previous section on environmental accountability and commitment. The garden in San Matteo degli Armeni, in collaboration with the public library is a great example when it comes to environmental initiatives, because of their constant commitment to promoting these issues. For example, when talking about the importance of remembering the Sustainable Development Goals through initiatives, Gabriele de Veris states:

Calling them out and declaring them is also a way of letting people know that taking care of the land, products, healthy eating, wellness, etc. are not things that belong only to the personal dimension, but have a collective value, so they go to affect precisely the creation of a shared culture.

He believes that educating those who are willing to support their activities will not only help the single person but also have a greater effect on the environment and the community at large. The development of a 'shared culture' starts when the commitment to learn and getting involved of participants is met with ad hoc activities that community gardens in collaboration with their partners develop. On a similar note, also Lorenza Renzini, underlines the importance of the cultural impact of community gardens initiatives by mentioning again the possibility of reconnecting with one's own identity, as human beings and citizens:

It is interesting for many reasons, both to reconnect it to our identity as Valdarnesi and Tuscan citizens and also for the future, to be more enlightened citizens.

This transformation can happen through different educational channels that are made available to all ages, from thematic shelves in the library to workshops and events. For example, San Matteo degli Armeni has presented an array of activities throughout the years, from adults and children workshops to the establishments of another garden dedicated to people who have pursued the collective good and a seed library. Even initiatives that at a glance do not seem to have any educational objective, such as the concerts and community dinners happening within 'Orto Aperto', can have a much wider impact than one would expect. This is because through leisure activities people develop new relationships which allow them to exchange perspectives, points of views and ideas, creating a fertile environment where informal learning is promoted, as confirmed also by (Glover et al., 2005) in their article investigating social capital mobilization in community garden. For this reason, within community gardens, every initiative



seems to be permeated by an educational purpose that, although it sometimes might not be clear or paramount, it might have a greater impact than expected. From the 'Talea Party' proposed by 'Orto Aperto' to the film festival promoted by the garden and the library of San Matteo degli Armeni and the workshops on permaculture and biological cultivation of 'Orto Diffuso', the community gardens become spaces where recreational and spontaneous education happens, with consequences that, with time, they may exceed the limits of the vegetable garden. As reported above, the benefits of this process do not only impact children, whose education can actively benefit from their engagement with nature, as also confirmed by various pedagogists, but also adults who, in this context, can benefit of a life-long learning process, through activities and, especially, socialization.

Socialization and sociability, in fact, are the other crucial aspect defining community gardens. As reported in the literature review, it seems that the moments of socialization happening in CUG initiatives have several positive impacts on participants: they lessen the tendency to isolate oneself by promoting neighbour contacts (Sullivan et al., 2004); they encourage behaviours that increases one's sense of safety (Kuo et al., 1998); they foster a sense of belonging and help people identify with a community (Koroļova & Treija, 2018). Moreover, from a more theoretical point of view, Griswold states that socialization has a critical role when it comes to cultural and social growth because through it people create, express and transmit shared meanings: in other words, it creates a channel through which culture can flow and spread (Griswold, 2004). Creating relationships through socialization is, therefore, a strong asset of CUG initiatives, especially in contemporary society where individualistic tendencies have weakened the concept of community. In some cases, this topic can become the main focus of a community garden project, like in the case of 'Orto Aperto' in Trento. Elisa Postai mentions several times how socialization and community have been the main concepts that inspired the opening and even the structure of their garden, leading them to split it in half: one half used for cultivation and the other half for activities. She underlines the special and original nature of the relationships she was able to establish through her participation in the garden:

The cultural part is very important, precisely because the idea is to create community through the garden. [...] Plus the nice thing is that even if you arrive alone, you end up talking about the garden and getting to know people, making a different kind of acquaintance than at a party or at work. It's more spontaneous. Sometimes I don't even know what people do for a living [...]. You create a bond unconnected to the usual context, because it's actually spontaneous, it's beautiful.

Providing a space for people to meet in a 'simple way', be it through a plain lawn or straightforward activities, is, in her opinion, answering to a need to gather together that is spontaneously reborn in people. Again, she also mentions other examples of how the community garden naturally attracts people, not only because of the possibility of cultivation, but simply because it provides a safe space:

Enrico, the guy from Valdarno, lives right across the street, so he discovered the garden by coming to an aperitif. Now he's one of the most active guys. Or there's a middle school boy who also lives in the building opposite and comes down every now and then, and he uses the vegetable garden as a sort of garden of his own.

Their role as neutral and leisure spaces, confirm the potential of community gardens has *third places*, spaces where people can meet outside work and home and rediscover community, solidarity and reciprocity ties. They provide 'opportunities for experiences and relationships that are otherwise unavailable' (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982, p. 270). This is true especially when it comes to minorities groups, as reported again in the literature review: the possibility of having a place to carry a bit of one's identity goes a long way when it comes to integration (Moulin-Doos, 2014). The creation of these kind of spaces requires a lot of effort and commitment from the different groups involved, but, in the end, it has the potential to create something effective and inclusive, as reported by Lorenza Renzini, when talking about one of the five gardens included in the larger project of 'Orto Diffuso': 'Orto Contaminato'. Although the process has not been without obstacles, this garden, located in a neighbourhood inhabited by a Sikh community, appears to have been the most successful of the five gardens that were activated, because it allowed people's identities to customise the space assigned to them. The spontaneous personalization of space can be considered another indicator of the development of a sense of belonging within a community garden, as it shows how people appropriate the space and enrich it with small parts of themselves, so as to identify with it. For example, while in the intercultural garden of Terranuova Bracciolini the Sikh community uses varieties which are typical of their homeland planting them alongside native Tuscan species, in 'Orto Aperto' this personalization takes place through creative work. Elisa Postai mentions two episodes on this very subject:

There is this Erasmus group who always come, and they are so cute. One of them made us a surprise: he made a wooden sign with the schedule of the vegetable garden. And they come to do Jam Sessions, to play in the vegetable garden.

I see the beautiful thing about our garden that sometimes you go, and you don't know what you will find. The other day I went in, I saw this little birdhouse, nobody knows who really made it. It is also nice to discover these acts of gratuity.

Therefore, the 'need for community' can be cultivated in the garden by personalizing it. The value of this kind of space is not based on personal ownership of land, but on the sense of belonging that arises when people take part in the collective effort of taking care of it together. The emotional value associated with this space derives from the shared moments and experiences that people collect when they get involved, maybe not in cultivation activities but in the general life of the garden, which is characterized by convivial moments, sharing and mutual aid. This relational context allows for the development of social networks inside and

outside the garden and the consequential mobilization of resources, as reported by Glover et al. (2005) in their article and confirmed by the interviews conducted. In fact, three out of four spokespersons underline the importance not only of internal relations but also external links that have been created through the community gardens. For example, 'Orto Aperto' has established relations with other akin realities that are interested in the community as much as they are, such as the 'Due Punti' workshop library, or the film laboratory 'Harpo Lab'. Moreover, they are now thinking about a possible collaboration with the community gardens located in Rovereto, with the hope to create a broader network. Similarly, the garden and the public library located in San Matteo degli Armeni, in Perugia, have developed a multitude of beneficial relationships with the territory and also with distant realities, such as the twin city of Seattle, that are contributing to strengthen the project. For example, the partnership with the university and specifically the agricultural department have created various opportunities to implement events and small projects, such as the 'School of Ecology', the donation of forgotten and *hibakujumoku* plants and the continuous support for garden cultivation through expert advice. These collaborations not only help the project thrive, but they also contribute to the environmental purpose of this initiative, finding a link with the previous section. Finally, Lorenza Renzini, head of library services in Terranuova Bracciolini and manager of the small garden 'Orto Cultura', sees networks and collaborations – for example the partnership with Slow Food – as drivers for the project, which is currently struggling to bloom. However, these collaborations and relations that are created within and between community gardens and other realities do not have a purely utilitarian purpose, on the contrary they seem to be based on symmetrical relations, similarities of visions and objectives, and direct and generalised reciprocity. This allows for the development of strong and positive ties that increase trust, reduce transaction cost and simplify the production and circulation of social capital. These effects can impact not only the single gardens, but the larger community in which they are embedded, allowing common visions and meanings to circulate more easily, creating a shared culture.

To conclude, both socialization and education play crucial roles in community garden projects: they promote social and environmental awareness by advocating for commitment and accountability; they boost the development of social capital and the circulation of tangible and intangible resources; and they stimulate the rediscovery of a sense of community and interest in participation. The development of a 'shared culture' based on these values is a desirable but complex process, which requires a collective effort that could involve not only community gardens but also other stakeholders who could contribute to this goal. In the research questions

of this thesis, public libraries are proposed as possible contributors to these projects and, in the last section presented, their actual and potential role within community gardens will be investigated.

### **7.3 How Libraries and Gardens Can Grow Communities Together**

As discussed above, community gardens possess a strong cultural component that manifest itself in various ways, for example through socialization, sensibilization activities and contacts with nature. If the *cultural diamond* (Griswold, 2004) is taken into account these projects can be considered *cultural objects*, because they are a ‘tangible expression of social meanings’, specifically of community, participation and commitment. Moreover, they are created by human institutions, associations and groups (*creators*) and they are then provided to the larger public to be received, heard and understood (*receivers*). Finally, they are born within a *social world* that shapes the community garden by providing the fertile context in which to exist while, at the same time, being itself changed by the cultural and social products produced by the community garden itself. All the actors involved in this equation are embedded in a dense network of relationships, bonds and ties of different nature that produce positive effects if properly managed. In this scenario, the partnership between public libraries and community gardens appears advantageous for various reasons that have emerged from this research.

First of all, as stated by Gabriele de Veris, the true power of public libraries resides in their ability to not only create but especially take care of relationships. As cultural institutions they are focal points for the community and for other stakeholders that are interested in cultural, social and environmental change. They act both as mediators between the territory and the administration and as representatives of communities, by adapting their proposals to the needs and the interests of people. In other words, public libraries are able to bring together different contexts, allowing for the creation and circulation of resources that were previously disconnected. But this is true also for community gardens, because of their nature of being spaces of meeting and exchange, which allows for the mobilization of people and resources. In fact, the relationship between these two actors could be considered a symbiotic one: both parts benefit from the relationship with each other. This is confirmed also in the theoretical framework, where institutions and networks are taken into account as dependent from each other rather than separate actors in the same context (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008). From a practical point of view, public libraries and community gardens allow each other to have an arena in which to promote their projects through activities and create new links with the community or other realities of the territory. This is confirmed also by Gabriele de Veris, when he mentions the fact that one weakness of the library in San Matteo degli Armeni is to be located

on a peripheral area of Perugia to which people go ‘because they took a wrong turn or because they have to go somewhere else [...]’. In this scenario, he underlines the importance of proposed activities, like the celebrations of the garden and library birthdays, to attract people and publicise not only the library and the garden themselves but also the projects that are being carried out.

Another crucial asset shared by public libraries and community gardens is their common vision towards environmental awareness. In fact, their collaborations are often perfectly coherent with their respective identities because they share the objective of community sensibilization towards environmental topics, which leads their collaboration to have a ‘strategic’ cultural value, as Lorenza Renzini stated:

[Involving the library] was also a way to give a cultural connotation in the true sense of the term: of cultures, of learning about cultures and maintaining cultures. Also because it is a way to re-appropriate this tradition of cultivation in a more conscious way: the people who have returned to the land, are people who come from a past in which they were educated and in which there was a level of education higher than the one achievable for old farmers. And so perhaps the library can also play this role of educational support.

The several initiatives organized by both public libraries involved in this study, San Matteo degli Armeni and Terranuova Bracciolini, in collaboration with their respective gardens, seem to point to the above mentioned ‘Return to the Earth’ because they focus on environmental sensibilization and the creation of a new perspective towards the human-nature relationship. A new culture of respect and accountability is promoted by mixing workshops on green practices, practical demonstrations of seed preservation, presentation of books and film that discusses environmental issues and general events in which the beauty and value of the Earth is celebrated. Moreover, the public library is also able to provide the resources to reach a more complex educational level, integrating the practical knowledge that can be experienced in the garden with the theoretical one that can be found in academic settings. This knowledge is not only made available but especially accessible to various categories of people, regardless of age and background. For examples, while libraries make their knowledge accessible through, books, digital materials, production of handouts and projections, community gardens provide the tools and the space where everyone interested can become involved. Acquiring ‘natural’ knowledge becomes easy and within reach, putting all users on the same level, giving everyone the same opportunities and thus, perhaps, making them a little more equal. All of these initiatives fall under the category of *environmental education*, which, hopefully, will contribute to the creation of new cultural practices based on respect and accountability, not just in the small space of a community garden, but also on the broader society.

The intrinsic sociability of those initiatives proposed by community gardens and public libraries and their focus on networks development might also contribute to the development of

the frequently mentioned sense of community, because through the garden and the library, people share a common space where they learn together and come in contact with others with similar interests. Relationships that go beyond the borders of the community garden can be born, as proven by Elisa Postai's personal experience:

I have met a lot of very nice people with whom I generally get along also outside the vegetable garden, so for me it is more sharing, more being together and maybe even learning something about horticulture.

The spontaneous relationships born within community gardens are characterized by reciprocity, trust and solidarity, feelings that underpin the process of community building and help people identifying with the values of the new group. Moreover, these sensations are enhanced by the presence of leisure and educational activities that, as presented also in the literature review, are crucial to increase emotional attachment to the group (Glover et al., 2005). Those who have fun together are more likely to develop long lasting relationships and, therefore, create a durable community based on trust and reciprocity. Community gardens and public libraries, in this sense, are confirmed, again, to be *third places*, because they provide spaces where leisure and work activities mix, where similar interests come together and where people go outside their personal spheres of work and home to meet with a new group of individuals to which they are not bound by contracts or kin relationships, but by common interests and the desire to share convivial and informational moments. The community garden itself provides these types of opportunities but, if combined also with the educational and social capacity of public libraries, it can boost the cultural potential of the initiative. A good example of this balance is found in the partnership between the community garden and the public library located in San Matteo degli Armeni in Perugia, because of the longevity of the project and the close link established between the two actors. The public library was opened in 2012, while the community garden in 2015, and since then they have managed to maintain a consistent number of people involved in the garden, always around twenty to thirty people every year. According to Gabriele de Veris, over half of those volunteers are neighbourhood residents, and the remaining individuals learned about the project through the library. Among them are some young people who completed their civic service at the library before becoming involved in the community gardens. The success of this project is also related to the large number and variety of activities that are offered by the library and that complement the community garden project from a cultural point of view and by the networks that the two realities share with each other. The result is enhanced impacts from both cultural and community perspectives.

One final aspect worth mentioning when discussing the potential positive effects of this partnership is connected to the management of these initiatives and the creation of 'new' public spaces. As mentioned in the literature review, due to their grassroots origins, community

gardens do not allow for a top-down management (Lawson, 2004), but, at the same time, they require institutional support to establish themselves as welcomed projects (Griswold, 2004). In addition to this, as also confirmed by the majority of case study involved in this research, partnerships involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders become crucial to guarantee the long-term longevity of this kind of projects (Van Der Jagt et al., 2017). Therefore, it appears that by combining the grassroots nature of community gardening and the institutional role of public libraries, this desirable mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches could be achieved. This could also contribute to the issue of gaps in project management: by increasing the number of people and competences involved, if a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities is done, more aspects could be covered and enhanced, avoiding indecision and delegation of responsibility. Finally, by allowing participants a range of agency and freedom in the management of a public space or project, not only contributes to people's right to shape the surroundings in which they live (Lefebvre, 1967), but contribute to increase ownership of the project and, therefore, commitment to it. These effects impact on the long-term longevity of community garden projects.

To conclude, if properly employed, public libraries could effectively complement community gardens by combining their respective educational, social and environmental potentials. If public libraries can be considered, as in the words of Lorenza Renzini, 'guardians of a traditional memory' which is both practical and theoretical, so too are community gardens. This knowledge can be employed to educate individuals about environmental issues and human-nature relations, an aspect in which both stakeholders are interest in. Finally, both public libraries and community gardens are places where people can meet to socialize and spend their free time, while learning and educating themselves. These similarities, if combined with the more practical advantages of mixing top-down and bottom-up governance approaches, allow for the partnership between community gardens and public libraries to unlock impacts that the individual parts could not otherwise activate individually.

## Conclusions

Community gardens are complex phenomena, strongly related to the context in which they are located and deeply rooted in the social fabric of the community they are born in. Although forms of community cultivation have always existed throughout human history, their contemporary configuration originated from the environmental protests that took place during the 1970s, which assigned them their strong social and environmental focus. In Italy the phenomenon appeared more recently than in other parts of the world, first characterised by illegal appropriations of land and then, after the emergence of preliminary regulations, by elderly and school gardens. Nowadays, community gardens can take on different compositions from an organizational and structural point of view, but they overall focus on the social and environmental dimensions. In fact, community gardens offer numerous benefits, both individual and collective. Psychophysically, engagement in community gardens is proven to reduce anxiety, stress and promote a more active and healthier lifestyle. This has led to the development of horticultural therapy, used for rehabilitating patients with psychophysical disorders and promoting healthy aging among the elderly. Additionally, community gardens play an important educational role, for both children and adults, raising awareness about food justice, environmental sustainability, healthy living, and democratic participation. This is also possible thanks to communal and socialising nature of these initiatives that, by providing a democratic and open space, they stimulate socialization and the rediscovery of a sense of community based on solidarity, reciprocity and trust among gardeners. This fertile context boosts the development of social capital and the circulation of tangible and intangible resources other than triggering forms of urban activism within communities. It appears clear that community gardens are not just spaces where vegetables, flowers and aromatic herbs can be cultivated for the personal benefit of gardeners, but they have an intrinsic tendency to ‘cultivate something more’.

However, community gardens projects face various issues that undermine their potential impact and, sometimes, prevent the development of the project beyond its preliminary phase. Lack of interest and inconsistent support from the part of public administrations risks preventing the recognition of community gardens as established projects and, therefore, limiting their long-term ability of remaining active. Governmental recognition has been proven to be a necessity for the effective development of community garden projects. On the other hand, also logistical issues like lack of funds, short land concessions and limited freedom on planted varieties risk deterring people from taking part in these projects. From the point of view of design and project management, it seems that exclusively bottom-up or top-down approaches



are detrimental to this type of projects, given the need to allow people to have freedoms in the management of this specific public space but always remaining within certain administrative regulations. To find this balance is a difficult process that, if not carried out properly, risks making the garden an isolated reality, open only to certain groups of people and less communitarian. Finally, another common issue found in community garden is lack of long-term commitment from the part of gardeners. Not everyone knows or realises what cultivating a vegetable garden entail, which leads to situations of neglect and abandonment in the long-term. To address these challenges, one possibility could be to implement these projects culturally, by combining agricultural activities with other recreational and cultural initiatives, or by seeking new collaborations. This thesis has focused precisely these topics: the cultural potential that leisure activities possess and the innovative partnership between community gardens and public libraries. The main aim has been to understand *how community gardens integrate the cultivation of culture with that of plants* by answering two research questions: *what are the potential cultural and social effects of community horticulture when combined with creative and educational initiatives? How public libraries can contribute to community garden projects when it comes to culture?* This goal has been pursued by conducting a comparative study of four case studies, using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, focusing mainly on concepts like culture, networks and institutions.

The results show that complementing community gardens activities with leisure initiatives has impacts on three main themes: social commitment, environmental consciousness and informal education. Activities such as community dinners, concerts and workshops not only offer leisure but also deepen participants' connection to nature and each other. By collaborating and sharing space and resources, people are able to develop values like equal participation, trust and reciprocity. A new community concept is formed based on sharing and caring for one's neighbour, developing what Lorenza Renzini, head of the library services in Terranuova Bracciolini, called a 'culture of respect', which is not only aimed at the human component, but also at the natural context. By engaging with taking care with a plot of land, the undervalued bond between humans and nature can be explored again, promoting a 'return to the Earth' and, in the long term, the development of pro-environmentalist behaviours. These values make community gardens not only civic, educational and social experiences but also political instruments. These initiatives empower communities by providing agency when it comes to taking care of a collective good like a garden. People are assigned direct decisional power over a public space, transforming them from superficial users to active and engaged agents of change of the spaces of their daily lives. The public space itself undergoes a transformation, from simple usable space to a democratic arena of change, where active citizens

become aware of their abilities and take action and responsibility for the collective, rather than public, good.

Thus, this fertile context allows people to delve deeper into concept like commitment and accountability, not just through a direct contact with nature but also through socialization and convivial moments, other crucial aspects of community gardens. This research has confirmed that neutral and leisure spaces like community gardens favour the development of relationships that are beneficial not only for the individuals involved, but also for the development of broader networks, as stated also by Elisa Postai, spokesperson for 'Orto Aperto' in Trento. Social capital and resources are also mobilized thanks to the opportunities favoured by engaging in a community garden. Acts of gratuity, synergies with like-minded people and sharing of convivial moments, make community gardens places for *social learning* where people can access relationships that would not be available otherwise. This becomes possible also thanks to the educational potential of community gardens. In fact, three out of four projects involved complement gardening activities with formational and leisure initiatives for various reasons: to attract potential future participants, to develop networks, to promote environmental learning and community building. The objective is, as stated by Gabriele de Veris, the creation of a 'shared culture' that will have benefits on the broader society and not only on the competences of single individuals. Learning is promoted through formal and informal channels: from actual workshop and courses on biological cultivation, permaculture and other related topics, to concerts, festivals, and convivial moments like the community dinner organized by 'Orto Aperto'. This continuous education contributes to the above-mentioned social and environmental education of participants, other than creating a space where people who share the same interests can meet and learn together.

In this context, where education, socialization and environmental consciousness mix, the role of public libraries has emerged as particularly significant. Libraries, which have traditionally been centres of knowledge dissemination, are increasingly evolving into creative and cultural hubs. In the case studies involving public libraries, these institutions go beyond simply providing books and educational materials: they provide crucial support for educational workshops, environmental awareness initiatives, and community-building activities. This partnership illustrates a unique symbiotic relation where libraries and gardens share several characteristics and complement each other: both libraries and gardens are open spaces where perspectives and ideas meet and influence each other; they foster the development of social networks and promote sociability; they share a common interest towards environmental awareness and education of communities. Moreover, they can both be considered *third places*, because they provide neutral, welcoming environment – different from home and workplaces -

where people can gather to socialize and come together. In addition to these similarities, the libraries' involvement brought an added layer of cultural depth to these initiatives. In Perugia, the library hosted events ranging from seed exchanges to environmental film festivals, all of which encouraged participants to think critically about sustainability and their role in the environment. This reflects a broader trend where libraries are shifting from passive spaces of consumption to active spaces of production and engagement. In Terranuova Bracciolini, the garden is used as a symbolic space where events are hosted, from book presentations to workshops on cultivation and pruning. By integrating their resources with community gardening efforts, libraries are contributing to the development of what might be called a "civic culture of sustainability". They pursue this objective by democratizing access to knowledge, as community gardens do, by making it free and accessible to everyone who would like to learn. They provide theoretical and practical knowledge, combining resources from different fields, such as universities, as in the case of Perugia, allowing participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of the broader environmental issues. This collaboration also enhances civic engagement of communities, contributing to a wider agenda of civic responsibility, for example by providing a platform for dialogue on broader social issues, like food security and urban development or, as in the case of Perugia, the promotion of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It would be interesting to further investigate the agronomic aspects of these gardens, which have not been sufficiently investigated in this thesis due to a greater focus on the cultural rather than the horticultural aspect both from the part of the respondents and the research itself, as well as the connection between public libraries engaged in community gardens and the development of seed libraries, assets present in both Perugia and Terranuova Bracciolini.

One final effect that the partnership between public libraries and community gardens can produce is on the more practical side of project design and management, specifically when it comes to participation and governance arrangements. This research further confirms that partnerships involving different stakeholders contribute to the long-term longevity of this kind of projects. By creating innovative collaborations such as the one with public libraries, community gardens can overcome the difficult top-down versus bottom-up discussion, by creating a desirable mix of both approaches. Moreover, this helps address project management gaps by involving more people and competences, allowing for a clearer definition of roles, enhancing overall effectiveness. Finally, by involving the community in a participatory design and management arrangement of the community garden, it becomes possible to foster a sense of ownership and commitment, which strengthens the long-term sustainability of community garden projects.

To conclude, the combination of practical gardening skills and civic discourse turns public libraries and community gardens into spaces where people not only learn but also take action. Through workshops, lectures, and community events, the two stakeholders help to cultivate a mindset of civic responsibility, where participants are encouraged to think of their local gardening activities as part of a larger global movement towards sustainability. This is also possible through hybrid and innovative management arrangements where a wider spectrum of stakeholders is involved, and where the community itself is empowered through participatory processes. Community gardens find in public libraries powerful partners that can assist them in enhancing the already promising potential that these initiatives show when it comes to impacts on communities' mindsets and perspectives. This research has demonstrated how individual activities, like reading and gardening, achieve and unlock new potential when made collective, allowing forces and drives to combine to create new directions that were previously unexplored. For this reason, it is hoped that the partnership between libraries and community gardens will be further developed and adopted as a model for future community-driven initiatives.

## **Recommendations for future research**

While this research has highlighted the positive impact of community gardens and the role of cultural institution like public libraries, there are several areas that would be interesting to further investigate. First of all, to contribute to the lack of research on this topic, further studies could investigate the long-term sustainability of community garden projects if complemented with innovative partnerships like this one. Moreover, other collaborations would be interesting to explore, maybe with other cultural institutions like museums and universities. In general, it would be beneficial for municipalities and public administrations to continue to explore partnerships between cultural institution and community projects, since variegated collaborations are being proved to be crucial for effective project implementation.

In addition to these topics, also furthering current understanding of causes enhancing or reducing long-term commitment appears of paramount importance, since one of the primary issues with community gardens appears to be precisely maintaining people's enthusiasm and engagement consistent over the long run. This would be useful for future project managers and community administrations.

To systematize the research, it would be desirable to also employ quantitative methods, in order to investigate correlations and causations that qualitative analysis alone cannot unveil. For example, exploring possible causation links between community gardens' longevity and implementation of cultural activities would further corroborate the findings presented in this thesis.

Finally, from an urban perspective, it would be intriguing to further explore the space dimension of community gardens. Community gardens sometimes run the risk of becoming closed, isolated spaces open only to certain categories of people. It would be interesting to explore new methods of inclusion that could reduce this possibility and help gardens regain a more communitarian nature. This could be done also by investigating how people reclaim urban space and how different groups personalize the urban space in which they live.

## Bibliography

- Aabø, S., & Audunson, R. (2012). Use of library space and the library as place. *Library & Information Science Research*, 34(2), 138–149.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2011.06.002>
- AgriResearch European Commission. (n.d.). *Urban Agriculture* [Fact Sheet]. European Commission.
- Alaimo, A. (2018). Orti urbani tra partecipazione e retorica. Il caso del Comun'Orto di Rovereto. *GEOTEMA*, 56, 11–17.
- Arena, G., & Sorbello, M. (2022). Gli orti urbani: Resilienza, socialità e sostenibilità. *Humanities*, 21, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13129/2240-7715/2022.1.1-22>
- Arnold, M. (1869). *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*. Smith, Elder and Company.
- Baldwin, J. R., Faulkner, S. L., & Hecht, M. L. (2006). A Moving Target: The Illusive Definition of Culture. In *Redefining culture: Perspectives across the disciplines* (pp. 3–26). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Baudry, S. (2012). Reclaiming Urban Space as Resistance: The Infrapolitics of Gardening. *Revue Française d Etudes Américaines*, 131, 32. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfea.131.0032>
- Bell, S., Fox-Kämper, R., Keshavarz, N., Benson, M., Caputo, S., Noori, S., & Voigt, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe* (1st ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315686608>
- Bellia, C., Granata, M. F., & Scavone, V. (2014). Aree dismesse ed orti urbani: Un 'valore sociale complesso' nelle città. *Agribusiness Landscape & Environment*, 17(2), 65–74.
- Berry, T. (1988). *The Dream of the Earth*. Sierra Club Books.
- Bonow, M., & Normark, M. (2018). Community gardening in Stockholm: Participation, driving forces and the role of the municipality. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 33(6), 503–517. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170517000734>

- Calvin, K., Dasgupta, D., Krinner, G., Mukherji, A., Thorne, P. W., Trisos, C., Romero, J., Aldunce, P., Barrett, K., Blanco, G., Cheung, W. W. L., Connors, S., Denton, F., Diongue-Niang, A., Dodman, D., Garschagen, M., Geden, O., Hayward, B., Jones, C., ... Péan, C. (2023). *IPCC, 2023: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland. (First). Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>*
- Casazza, C., & Pianigiani, S. (2016). Bottom-Up and Top Down Approaches for Urban Agriculture. *Civil Engineering and Urban Planning: An International Journal (CiVEJ)*, 3(2), 49–31. <https://doi.org/10.5121/civej.2016.3204>
- Castagnoli, D. (2019). La gestione collettiva degli orti urbani in Italia tra entusiasmo e criticità. *GEOTEMA*, 62, 88–96.
- Certomà, C. (2011). Critical urban gardening as a post-environmentalist practice. *Local Environment*, 16, 977–987. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2011.592181>
- Certomà, C. (2016). ‘A New Season for Planning’: Urban Gardening as Informal Planning in Rome. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 98(2), 109–126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geob.12094>
- Certomà, C., & Tornaghi, C. (2015). Political gardening. Transforming cities and political agency. *Local Environment*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2015.1053724>
- Chiu, R. L. H. (2003). Social sustainability, sustainable development and housing development: The experience of Hong Kong. In *Housing and Social Change: East-west perspectives* (pp. 221–239). Routledge.
- Cognetti, F., & Conti, S. (2012). Milano, coltivazione urbana e percorsi di vita in comune. Note da una ricerca in corso. *TERRITORIO*, 60, 33–38. <https://doi.org/10.3280/TR2012-060006>

- Collier, D. (1993). *The Comparative Method* (pp. 105–119).
- Curry, N., Reed, M., Keech, D., Maye, D., & Kirwan, J. (2014). Urban agriculture and the policies of the European Union: The need for renewal. *Spanish Journal of Rural Development*, 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.5261/2014.ESP1.08>
- D’Arpa, C., Lenstra, N., & Rubenstein, E. (2020). Growing food at and through the local library: An exploratory study of an emerging role. In *Roles and Responsibilities of Libraries in Increasing Consumer Health Literacy and Reducing Health Disparities* (Vol. 47, pp. 41–59). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Datta, R. (2016). Community garden: A bridging program between formal and informal learning. *Cogent Education*, 3(1), 1177154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1177154>
- Datta, R. (2019). Sustainability: Through cross-cultural community garden activities. *Local Environment*, 24(8), 762–776. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2019.1641073>
- Di Nunzio, M. (2022). *L’ortoterapia e il bilancio sociale nelle aziende del terzo settore*. [Sperimentale]. Università Politecnica delle Marche.
- Durkheim, É. (1912). *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. PUF.
- EFUA. (n.d.). *Presentation of the European Forum on Urban Agriculture* [Flyer]. EFUA.
- Eizenberg, E. (2012). The Changing Meaning of Community Space: Two Models of NGO Management of Community Gardens in New York City. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 36(1), 106–120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2011.01065.x>
- Ennis, G., & West, D. (2010). Exploring the Potential of Social Network Analysis in Asset-Based Community Development Practice and Research. *Australian Social Work*, 63, 404–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2010.508167>
- Firth, C., Maye, D., & Pearson, D. (2011). Developing “community” in community gardens. *Local Environment*, 16(6), 555–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2011.586025>



- Fox-Kämper, R., Wesener, A., Munderlein, D., Sondermann, M., McWilliam, W., & Kirk, N. (2018). Urban community gardens: An evaluation of governance approaches and related enablers and barriers at different development stages. *Landscape and Urban Planning, 170*, 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2017.06.023>
- Gasperi, E. (2020). Curare orti, costruire ponti tra generazioni e culture: Cenni sul contributo degli anziani attivi. *STUDIUM EDUCATIONIS - Rivista quadrimestrale per le professioni educative, 1*, 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.7346/SE-012020-10>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation Of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Giardullo, P., & Pozzato, C. (2024). Orti urbani tra sostenibilità e partecipazione: Un'esplorazione delle iniziative nei capoluoghi del Veneto. *SOCIOLOGIA URBANA E RURALE, 2024/133*. <https://doi.org/10.3280/SUR2024-133008>
- Glover, T. D. (2003). Community garden movement. In *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World: Vol. Vol. 1* (pp. 264–266). SAGE Publications.
- Glover, T. D., Parry, D. C., & Shinew, K. J. (2005). Building Relationships, Accessing Resources: Mobilizing Social Capital in Community Garden Contexts. *Journal of Leisure Research, 37*(4), 450–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2005.11950062>
- Glover, T. D., Shinew, K. J., & Parry, D. C. (2005). Association, Sociability, and Civic Culture: The Democratic Effect of Community Gardening. *Leisure Sciences, 27*(1), 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400590886060>
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(6), 1360–1380.
- Griswold, W. (2004). *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World* (II ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gusmano, M. K., & Rodwin, V. G. (2010). Urban Aging, Social Isolation, and Emergency Preparedness. *Global Ageing: Issues & Action 6, 2*, 40–41.

- Hawkley, L. C., Buecker, S., Kaiser, T., & Luhmann, M. (2022). Loneliness from young adulthood to old age: Explaining age differences in loneliness. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 46*(1), 39–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025420971048>
- Hill, M. (2002). Network Assessments and Diagrams: A Flexible Friend for Social Work Practice and Education. *Journal of Social Work, 2*(2), 233–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146801730200200207>
- Howe, J., & Wheeler, P. (1999). Urban food growing: The experience of two UK cities. *Sustainable Development, 7*(1), 13–24. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1719\(199902\)7:1<13::AID-SD100>3.0.CO;2-B](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1719(199902)7:1<13::AID-SD100>3.0.CO;2-B)
- Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change (Ippc). (2023). *Climate Change 2022 – Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844>
- Ioannou, B., Moràn, N., Sondermann, M., Certomà, C., Hardman, M., Notteboom, B., & Silvestri, G. (2016). Grassroots Gardening Movements—Towards Cooperative Forms of Green Urban Development? In *Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe*. Routledge.
- Jessop, B. (2002). Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Urban Governance: A State–Theoretical Perspective. *Antipode, 34*(3), 452–472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00250>
- Koroļova, A., & Treija, S. (2018). Urban Gardening as a Multifunctional Tool to Increase Social Sustainability in the City. *Architecture and Urban Planning, 14*(1), 91–95. <https://doi.org/10.2478/aup-2018-0012>
- Krasny, M., & Tidball, K. (2009). Community Gardens as Contexts for Science, Stewardship, and Civic Action Learning. *Cities and the Environment, 2*. <https://doi.org/10.15365/cate.2182009>

- Kuo, F. E., Sullivan, W. C., Coley, R. L., & Brunson, L. (1998). Fertile ground for community: Inner-city neighborhood common spaces. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(6), 823–851. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022294028903>
- Lawson, L. (2004). The Planner in the Garden: A Historical View into the Relationship between Planning and Community Gardens. *Journal of Planning History*, 3(2), 151–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513204264752>
- Lefebvre, H. (1967). *Le droit à la ville*. Economica/Anthropos.
- Lison, B., & Reip, N. (2016). *Research for CULT Committee—The New Role of Public Libraries in Local Communities*. European Union.
- McEldowney, J. (2017). *Urban Agriculture in Europe: Patterns, Challenges and Policies*. [In-depth Analysis]. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/413185>
- Miles, S., & Paddison, R. (2005). Introduction: The Rise and Rise of Culture-led Urban Regeneration. *Urban Studies*, 42(5–6), 833–839. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500107508>
- Mitchell, J. C. (1969). *Social Networks in Urban Situations: Analyses of Personal Relationships in Central African Towns*. Manchester University Press.
- Molm, L. D. (2010). The Structure of Reciprocity. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73(2), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272510369079>
- Monroe, L. (2015). Horticulture Therapy Improves the Body, Mind and Spirit. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 25(2), 33–40.
- Moulin-Doos, C. (2014). Intercultural Gardens: The Use of Space by Migrants and the Practice of Respect. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 36(2), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12027>
- Okvat, H. A., & Zautra, A. J. (2011). Community Gardening: A Parsimonious Path to Individual, Community, and Environmental Resilience. *American Journal of*

- Community Psychology*, 47(3–4), 374–387. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9404-z>
- Oldenburg, R., & Brissett, D. (1982). The third place. *Qualitative Sociology*, 5(4), 265–284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00986754>
- Owen-Smith, J., & Powell, W. W. (2008). Networks and Institutions. *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 596–623.
- Panzini, F. (2021). *Coltivare la città. Storia sociale degli orti urbani nel XX secolo*. DeriveApprodi srl.
- Pasquier, E. (2001). *Cultiver son jardin. Chronique des jardins de La Fournillère 1992-2000*. L'Harmanattan.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1>
- Prince, H. E. (2017). Outdoor experiences and sustainability. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 17(2), 161–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2016.1244645>
- Ramsten, A.-C., & Säljö, R. (2012). Communities, boundary practices and incentives for knowledge sharing?: A study of the deployment of a digital control system in a process industry as a learning activity. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 1(1), 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2012.04.001>
- Rogge, N., Theesfeld, I., & Strassner, C. (2020). The potential of social learning in community gardens and the impact of community heterogeneity. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 24, 100351. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100351>
- Rosol, M. (2005). Community gardens - A potential for stagnating and shrinking cities? Examples from Berlin. *Erde*, 136, 165–178.

- Rosol, M. (2010). Public Participation in Post-Fordist Urban Green Space Governance: The Case of Community Gardens in Berlin. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(3), 548–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00968.x>
- Sartori, G. (1970). Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics. *American Political Science Review*, 64(4), 1033–1053. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958356>
- Schermer, M. (2014). The role of intercultural gardens in the construction of a sustainable city. The example of Innsbruck in Austria. *Hábitat y Sociedad*, 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.12795/HabitatySociedad.2014.i7.04>
- Scott, R. (2011). The Role of Public Libraries in Community Building. *Public Library Quarterly*, 30(3), 191–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2011.599283>
- Seymoar, N.-K., Ballantyne, E., & Pearson, C. (2010). Empowering residents and improving governance in low income communities through urban greening. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, 8, 26–39. <https://doi.org/10.3763/ijas.2009.0467>
- Shisanya, S. O., & Hendriks, S. L. (2011). The contribution of community gardens to food security in the Maphephetheni uplands. *Development Southern Africa*, 28(4), 509–526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2011.605568>
- Singh, V., Mehra, B., & Sikes, E. S. (2022). Agriculture-based community engagement in rural libraries. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 54(3), 404–414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006211015788>
- Skocpol, T., & Somers, M. (1980). The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22(2), 174–197.
- Skot-Hansen, D., Hvenegaard Rasmussen, C., & Jochumsen, H. (2013). The role of public libraries in culture-led urban regeneration. *New Library World*, 114(1/2), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03074801311291929>
- Stebbins, R. (2002). *The Organizational Basis of Leisure Participation: A Motivational Exploration*.

- Sullivan, W., Kuo, M., & Depooter, S. (2004). The Fruit of Urban Nature: Vital Neighborhood Spaces. *Environment and Behavior*, 36, 678–700.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X04264945>
- Todd, A. (1996). Health inequalities in urban areas: A guide to the literature. *Environment and Urbanization*, 8(2).
- Tomatis, F., Egerer, M., Correa-Guimaraes, A., & Navas-Gracia, L. M. (2023). Urban Gardening in a Changing Climate: A Review of Effects, Responses and Adaptation Capacities for Cities. *Agriculture*, 13(2), Article 2.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture13020502>
- TROVATO, R. M. (2014). *BIC, Biblioteca Crescenzago tra innovazione e integrazione sociale* [Politecnico di Milano]. <https://www.politesi.polimi.it/handle/10589/101824>
- US EPA, O. (2012, December 13). *What is Environmental Education?*  
<https://www.epa.gov/education/what-environmental-education>
- Usherwood, B. (2002). Demonstrating impact through qualitative research. *Performance Measurement and Metrics*, 3(3), 117–122.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/14678040210453546>
- Van Der Jagt, A. P. N., Szaraz, L. R., Delshammar, T., Cvejić, R., Santos, A., Goodness, J., & Buijs, A. (2017). Cultivating nature-based solutions: The governance of communal urban gardens in the European Union. *Environmental Research*, 159, 264–275.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2017.08.013>
- Watson, L. (2010). The Future of the Library As a Place of Learning: A Personal Perspective. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 16(1), 45–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13614530903574637>
- Weber, M. (1922). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Mohr.
- Wellman, B. (2019). *Networks In The Global Village: Life In Contemporary Communities*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429498718>

World Health Organization. (2021). *Social isolation and loneliness among older people:*

*Advocacy brief.* World Health Organization.

Zhou, C., & Zeng, C. (2023). The Role of Horticultural Therapy in Promoting Physical and Mental Health. *Research in Health Science*, 8(3), p43.

<https://doi.org/10.22158/rhs.v8n3p43>

Židak, N., & Osmanagić Bedenik, N. (2019). Urban gardening—An integrative approach. *The Holistic Approach to Environment*, 9(2), 27–34. <https://doi.org/10.33765/thate.9.2.2>

## Webliography

- EIP-AGRI (2017, 22 May). *About EIP-AGRI*. European Commission. Retrieved August 26, 2024, from [https://ec-europa-eu.translate.google.com/eip/agriculture/en/about.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=it&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=it&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://ec-europa-eu.translate.google.com/eip/agriculture/en/about.html?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=it&_x_tr_hl=it&_x_tr_pto=sc)
- EU CAP Network (n.d.). *About the European CAP Network*. European Commission. Retrieved August 26, 2024, from [https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/about/eu-cap-network\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/about/eu-cap-network_en)
- IFLA (n.d.). *8th IFLA Green Library Award 2023 Results*. IFLA. Retrieved July 20, 2024, from <https://www.ifla.org/ifla-green-library-award-2023-winners-results/>.
- ISTAT (2022). *Verde urbano: tipologia di verde*. ISTAT. Retrieved August 27, 2024, from [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,Z0920ENV,1.0/ENV\\_CI\\_TIES/DCCV\\_URBANENV\\_URBGRE/IT1,609\\_1\\_DF\\_DCCV\\_URBANENV\\_20,1.0](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,Z0920ENV,1.0/ENV_CI_TIES/DCCV_URBANENV_URBGRE/IT1,609_1_DF_DCCV_URBANENV_20,1.0)
- Pan American Health Organization (n.d.). *Healthy Aging*. PAHO. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://www.paho.org/en/healthy-aging>.
- PerugiaToday (2015, November 19). *La città che cambia: ecco i nuovi orti urbani di Perugia a San Matteo degli Armeni*. PerugiaToday. Retrieved August 5, 2024 from <https://www.perugiatoday.it/politica/perugia-inaugurazione-orti-urbani-san-matteo-armeni-comune.html>
- US EPA (2012, December 13). *What is Environmental Education?*. US Environmental Protection agency. Retrieved July 16, 2024 from <https://www.epa.gov/education/whatenvironmental-education>
- World Bank Group (2023, April 3). *Urban Development Overview*. World Bank Group. Retrieved July 12, 2024 from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview#:~:text=Globally%2C%20over%2050%25%20of%20the,1.5%20times%20to%206%20billion.>
- World Health Organization (2020), *Immunization, vaccines and biologicals: Sentinel surveillance*. Retrieved August 9, 2024 from <https://www.who.int/teams/immunization-vaccines-and-biologicals>



## **Annexes**

### **Annex A**

#### **Transcript of the interview with Elisa Postai, spokesperson for 'Orto Aperto' in Trento**

##### **Elisa Postai**

Allora 'Orto Aperto' nasce dalla vittoria di un bando nel luglio 2019, un po' a caso in realtà, da un gruppo di 7 amici della Clarina che è rione di Trento. L'orto aperto è un patto comunale, quindi il terreno è del Comune di Trento che firma un patto con tutti i cittadini che vogliono aderire a questo patto. E il comune ci dà il terreno e noi ci impegniamo a portare avanti questo progetto che appunto è sia di orticoltura ma anche di comunità, anzi qua si chiama orto aperta appunto per quello nel senso di apertura verso appunto chiunque. Poi però c'è stato il COVID e quindi si è un po', diciamo, fermato, ma la volontà di portare avanti il progetto comunque rimaneva. Nel 2022 c'è stato proprio un anno di pausa perché questi ragazzi che gestivano il progetto, hanno cambiato città, cambiato lavoro e quindi è rimasto solo Francesco che appunto però ci teneva tanto a portare avanti questo progetto. Allora ha chiesto un po' di aiuti alla circoscrizione e al Comune di Trento e per fortuna grazie a loro, piano piano si è riusciti poi a coinvolgere alcune persone. Ad esempio, l'orto è vicino a un parco, in cui fanno un evento chiamato 'le stelle al parco Ranger' ed una tappa l'avevamo portata in orto per farlo un po' ripartire. Questo è stato possibile anche grazie al progetto 92 per cui lavora Francesco. È una cooperativa sociale che ha anche un vivaio che si chiama 'vivaio tutto verde' al quale noi ci appoggiamo. Ad esempio, le piante che noi abbiamo in orto, sono tutte piante che i ragazzi al vivaio non riescono a vendere perché magari brutti o che, e allora le danno noi all'orto. E in più venne appunto educatore e portano i ragazzi a fare attività in orto. Ad esempio, le panche le hanno create tutte loro. E poi piano piano l'anno scorso, tramite appunto i ragazzi giovani della nostra circoscrizione, si è creato questo gruppo che crede molto al progetto. Di firmatari più o meno siamo una ventina, poi ovviamente tutti lavorano, cioè comunque è un'attività che fai extra, è sempre un casino incastrarsi però siamo già contenti per com'è andato l'anno. E quindi l'anno scorso è ripartito tutto, anche abbastanza, perché il progetto stava un po' andando a morire, però era un peccato.

Siamo un gruppo molto di diversificato di persone, per lo più giovani in realtà. Anziani pochi, perché confiniamo con gli orti degli anziani e diciamo che loro vogliono il loro metro di terreno e non gliene frega niente di coltivarlo tutti assieme. Invece no, l'orto comunitario è diverso, cioè, è bello perché ti trovi tutti assieme e poi, essendo enorme e producendo molto verdura, tutti possono portarne a casa. La parte agricola è quella che ci riesce decisamente peggio, però vabbè.

## **Maria Zamperetti**

Ma la capacità di gestione dell'orto che hanno gli anziani è sconvolgente.

## **Elisa Postai**

Infatti, vedi il loro perfetto, mentre il nostro è una giungla. Vabbè comunque no, dicevo, la parte culturale è molto importante, appunto perché l'idea è proprio di creare comunità attraverso l'orto. Secondo me è molto bella anche la semplice parte manuale. Ad esempio, sfalciare erbacce, che alla fine è un'azione meccanica, ti sfoga un sacco. In più la cosa bella è che se anche arrivi da solo, alla fine parlando dell'orto conosci persone, facendo una conoscenza diversa rispetto a quella che puoi fare una festa o al lavoro. È più spontanea. Io a volte non so neanche che lavoro fanno le persone che magari vengono non abitualmente. Ti crei un legame slegato dal contesto solito, perché in realtà è spontaneo, è bello e appunto per questo è un terreno molto grande, è diviso a metà, metà è coltivato, l'altra metà è un prato adibito a tutte le attività che si vogliono fare per creare comunità. Quest'anno ne abbiamo fatte parecchie, dalle lezioni di Yoga, a tanti concertini che sono sempre molto belli. L'altro ieri abbiamo fatto una cena comunitaria e siamo stati contentissimi perché è stato un lavorone, perché per 80 persone abbiamo cucinato tutto con le cose dell'orto: abbiamo fatto la passata coi nostri pomodori e abbiamo fritto tutto il fritto possibile. Abbiamo fatto la torta al basilico, cioè ci siamo molto impegnati, però io ero molto agitata perché 80 sono tante. Però è andata molto bene, è stato bellissimo, veramente bello. E poi non ce l'aspettavamo in una settimana di finire le prenotazioni e avere una lista d'attesa di altrettante persone; quindi, ci ha fatto molto piacere. Fa riflettere, perché, secondo me, c'è proprio voglia di trovarsi in modo semplice, alla fine è un prato, cioè non è che c'è molto. Poi cos'altro abbiamo fatto? Attività per i bambini e adesso c'è un ragazzo che fa lezione di capoeira. E poi si è creato questo gruppo Erasmus che vengono sempre sono carissimi. Uno di loro ci ha fatto una sorpresa: ha creato il un cartello di legno con gli orari dell'orto. E loro vengono a fare Jam Sessions, a suonare nell'orto. Diciamo che poi la cosa bella è che è molto aperto a tutti, nel senso che, se uno vuole proporre attività ovviamente che si allineano con il nostro pensiero puoi farlo. C'è voglia di fare e la gente è contenta di avere uno spazio molto comodo perché è proprio in città.

## **Maria Zamperetti**

Ma quindi l'orto rimane sempre aperto?

## **Elisa Postai**

Allora sì, è sempre aperto. Però in realtà diciamo che ci troviamo due giorni a settimana, che sono ad esempio lunedì e il giovedì dalle 06:00 del pomeriggio, dove tutti insieme ci troviamo a coltivare e prendere raccolto. Poi è sempre aperto, però un po' limitato nel senso

perché sennò è un casino, cioè la gente va quando vuole. se uno ci chiede ‘posso andare la mattina?’ Sì, puoi andare. Però ecco che non si sparga troppo la voce.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Tutte le verdure che producete, a parte riusarle per le cene o per eventi, le distribuite a quelli che collaborano con l'orto, a chiunque le voglia, a prescindere che l'abbiano coltivate o no?

### **Elisa Postai**

A chiunque, cioè uno può anche venire a prendere i pomodori, però generalmente è sempre gente che viene a coltivare e poi si tiene la verdura. Abbiamo provato un periodo ad andare in strada a chiedere se volessero la verdura, ma non ha funzionato. Se hai bisogno di verdura puoi venire, ma di solito la gente viene proprio a coltivare e poi si prende la propria.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Ma allora, quindi il progetto è nato da appunto questo patto comunale? Nel patto comunale era scritto, cosa avreste dovuto fare con questo terreno? È stata una scelta vostra quella di creare un orto?

### **Elisa Postai**

Questo non so dirti perché l'ha fatto Francesco, e il suo sogno è sempre stato di avviare una fattoria didattica, sono allevatori di famiglia ed è educatore, quindi era sempre lì, diciamo. A lui piace da sempre, ha sempre voluto unire queste due cose. E poi comunque a Trento c'è un forte legame con la natura, in generale con la montagna. Inoltre, tra i ragazzi che l'hanno fondato, alcuni avevano proprio studiato, che si sono formate in quell'ambito e che quindi hanno proposto questo orto. Poi in realtà, da quel che ho capito, la città di Trento è contenta e vorrebbe che ce ne fossero altri di questi orti, quindi. Forse ad avere un orto così aperto siamo i primi, però ce ne sono magari gestiti da cooperative sociali.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Che valore associ alle attività di orticoltura? Perché ti sei interessata a questo progetto?

### **Elisa Postai**

A me più che la coltivazione, anche perché non è il mio forte, piace proprio il posto. Secondo me a Trento, ad esempio, manca un luogo dove trovarsi in modo spontaneo e tranquillo, cioè io ho bisogno un po' di conoscere persone e nell'orto ho sempre trovato persone positive in generale. È una cosa che fai di volontariato, cioè non lo fai per guadagnarci e quindi, ad esempio, sta cena comunitaria. È stato un lavoro assurdo, però è stato bellissimo perché ci siamo trovati tutti assieme e poi ognuno aveva la sua parte. Ad esempio, a me piace di più la parte estetica, quindi ho curato più l'allestimento, chi invece è bravo a cucinare cucinava; quindi, secondo me è bello che si creano queste, diciamo queste unioni. Ho

conosciuto tante persone molto belle con cui mi trovo in generale anche fuori dall'orto e quindi per me è più condivisione, cioè più stare bene insieme e magari anche appunto imparare a fare qualcosa di orticoltura. Quello succede. È tutto più naturale non lo so. E poi comunque l'orto dà soddisfazione perché è bello vedere anche il percorso: pianti, poi tiri su, mangi le tue cose, quello è molto bello. E credo che anche quello debba un po' tornare indietro. In generale, no? Cioè, anche chiedersi da dove vengono le verdure? Le stagioni, ad esempio, abbiamo fatto un'attività ai bambini, 'PassapOrto', per capire un po' la stagionalità delle verdure, quindi anche queste cose qua. Io credo che anche per i ragazzini non so, io insegno alle medie, per i ragazzini sia fondamentale tornare un po' anche questa dimensione un po' più terrena e non una in cui tu mi trovi il melone in qualsiasi stagione. Ci credo molto però personalmente, a parte appunto biologicamente, alla visione appunto, che è giusto tornare alla terra e tutto, ma per me è stato proprio la voglia di stare insieme.

**Maria Zamperetti**

No, è bello quello, quello è quello che vorrei fare io. Se dovessimo aprire davvero questo orto a Valdagno, però sarebbe molto bello, appunto.

**Elisa Postai**

Io vedo la cosa bella dell'orto nostro che, a volte vai e non sai cosa trovi. L'altro giorno sono entrato, ho visto questa casetta degli uccellini, nessuno sa chi l'abbia fatta veramente. Cioè, è bello anche scoprire queste cose di gratuità.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Da quel che ho capito il quartiere o comunque la città ha risposto bene al progetto.

**Elisa Postai**

Sì, ad esempio, Enrico, il ragazzo di Valdagno, lui abita proprio nel palazzo di fronte; quindi, ha scoperto l'orto venendo ad un aperitivo. Adesso è uno dei ragazzi più attivi. Oppure c'è un ragazzino delle medie che abita nel palazzo di fronte ed ogni tanto viene giù, e usa l'orto come una sorta di suo giardino.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Quegli orti per anziani sono gestiti sempre dal comune?

**Elisa Postai**

Sì, insieme ad un gruppo anziani chiamato 'la Casotta'. Poi per carità, ci prestano la corrente per i concerti, ma siamo lì ormai da anni, non è che più di tanto si interessino al progetto. Ma io preferisco così. Sono più a mio agio con gli studenti, i ragazzi delle medie.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Quindi avete deciso di aprire questo orto, ma con un altro obiettivo, non quello di coltivare e basta, giusto?

### **Elisa Postai**

È proprio un altro obiettivo, volutamente metà coltivato e metà no. Creare comunità era proprio l'intento primario. Ah, un'altra cosa bella è anche il legame con le altre realtà trentine. Ad esempio, tra poco c'è il festival musicale POPLAR a Trento, quattro giorni di musica e chiamano artisti importanti e tutto è molto bello. Noi andiamo in piazzetta sotto per il castello a fare il Talea Party e scambiamo le talee. Lo facciamo in collaborazione con la due punti libreria, che è una libreria di Trento con cui abbiamo già fatto attività. Oppure c'è ArcoLab, una realtà di cinema di Trento con cui abbiamo fatto il cinema all'aperto, dove noi facevamo gli aperitivi con le nostre verdure; quindi, è bello, secondo me, anche che si stanno creando tutti questi collegamenti con varie realtà. Si crea una rete proprio. Inoltre, adesso con Rovereto, che è un paese qua vicino dove ci sono tanti orti e in cui ci sono anche ragazzi nostri che bazzicano, si diceva che sarebbe bello fare qualcosa insieme, cioè non so come però anche fare una rete in generale, è bello anche quello, si crea proprio oltre l'orto un'altra rete.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Cavolo, sì, beh se riuscite siete veramente bravi! Portate il progetto allo step successivo. Sono proprio bravi.

### **Elisa Postai**

Facendo sempre semplicissime, cioè non è che è difficile da fare. Anche i concerti io ero preoccupati perché pensavo fossero un casino. In realtà la gente si propone per suonare, sono contenti, hanno un posto in città, si arrangiano e si portano le loro strumentazioni e noi portiamo le birrette, qualche stuzzichino se c'è, sennò pazienza, basta. Alla fine, la gente è contenta.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Il mio focus sarebbe sulle biblioteche e gli orti e ho sentito che voi avete collaborato con delle librerie, non biblioteche, ma comunque sempre aspetto culturale si parla. E come mai avete scelto loro?

### **Elisa Postai**

Perché io sono molto amica della libraia della due punti libreria. Una libreria bellissima perché è una libreria indipendente in San Martino e loro sono una libreria laboratorio; quindi, fanno sia libreria ma anche laboratorio. Ad esempio, secondo me Paola io l'ho conosciuta perché io con una mia amica facciamo cose di ricamo e ne ho fatto uno proprio lì, in via San Martino, organizzato insieme alla libreria due punti. Insomma, sono una realtà che crede molto nella Comunità, nel senso nelle dare occasioni per trovarsi. Hanno tantissime cose, tra cui questo party che fanno nella via davanti alla libreria. Sono venuti anche a presentare un libro da noi in orto e quindi siccome quest'anno ci è molto piaciuto il libro, allora in occasione del

Talea Party ci ha chiesto la libreria se volevamo andare lì. Anche noi abbiamo presentato un libro in San Martino, abbiamo parlato di questo libro che si chiamava 'Il meraviglioso mondo delle verdure' dove praticamente in ogni capitolo si spiegava la storia di una verdura diversa e quindi la gente poi chiedeva, ad esempio la storia del cavolo e quindi uno di noi raccontava la storia del Cavolo. Loro sono molto simili a noi come pensiero diciamo perché non sono una libreria normale, fanno tantissime attività per coinvolgere il quartiere, soprattutto quello di San Martino e quindi abbiamo detto facciamo, proviamo. A me piaceva anche l'idea di fare un Silent Party di lettura. Però vabbè non so. Poi sai boh, ci vuole anche tempo.

**Maria Zamperetti**

E avete mai pensato di collaborare con le biblioteche pubbliche?

**Elisa Postai**

Ma in realtà no, per il fatto che quest'anno allora noi comunque andiamo molto a non dico settimana in settimana abbastanza in base a chi c'è in base alle varie idee e quindi diciamo che quest'anno è stato già abbastanza intenso così. Poi penso che, quando si collabora col pubblico i tempi sono burocraticamente un po' più impegnativi, mentre chiami l'elisa della due punti e ti organizzi. Con le biblioteche sarebbe bello ma non ci abbiamo mai pensato. Abbiamo collaborato con la circoscrizione per fare questo laboratorio per bambini che facciamo sabato, in collaborazione con l'ufficio 'Parchi e Giardini'. Forse non abbiamo mai collaborato anche perché, se parliamo di libreria a noi piace pensare alla due punti, e oltretutto una libreria è completamente diversa da una biblioteca. Però potrebbe essere per un futuro, non è male. Io sono una grande fan della comunale, bellissima proprio anche come palazzo e tutto, ma siamo un po' distanti, quindi non so.

**Maria Zamperetti**

E invece per quanto riguarda le sfide della che avete nella gestione di questo orto?

**Elisa Postai**

Le erbacce. La più grande sfida è coinvolgere persone a togliere erbacce. Se per gli eventi c'è una partecipazione sempre al top, nella gestione orto no. Spesso ti trovi là in tre, l'orto è gigante, quindi, anche perché in estate la gente va in ferie, soprattutto agosto, giustamente. E quindi ecco, no, anche in generale noi nella gestione orto dobbiamo migliorare. Infatti, l'anno prossimo faremo una formazione, perché siamo veramente al limite. Le cose vengono su perché poi alla fine tutto si autoregola, però per miracolo. Abbiamo delle erbacce alte che soffocano le piante. Anche perché abbiamo un po' sbagliato all'inizio perché abbiamo concimato troppo e dato tanta acqua. Comunque, sicuramente coinvolge le persone a coltivare è molto più difficile che coinvolgere le persone ad ascoltare musica. È la sfida per l'anno prossimo, secondo me. Anche tra noi firmatari del Patto, se per gli eventi ci stiamo più o meno tutti, per la gestione

orto un po' meno. Già due volte a settimana per quell'orto lì è poco perché è enorme, e in più quelle due volte magari ti trovi in tre, è difficile stare dietro a tutto. Questa è la sfida, ma perché è molto grande; infatti, l'anno prossimo, secondo me, va fatto un ragionamento e renderlo magari un attimo più contenuto, più gestibile. Col fatto che è bellissimo e aperto, tutti fan quel che vogliono. Però ecco tipo non lo so, qualcuno ha piantato dei peperoni, abbiamo tantissimi peperoncini, tipico, cosa ce ne facciamo di tutti i peperoncini? Hai capito? È una cosa faticosa. Perché poi fa caldo, devi tirare su erbacce e ci sono le zanzare che ti mangiano.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Poi molte persone magari hanno questa idea dell'orto ideale e non pensano a tutta la fase in mezzo che è molto più impegnativa di quel che sembra.

### **Elisa Postai**

Anche perché in città, almeno a Trento, si è molto perso. Anche io in primis, non avendo mai avuto un orto, non sapevo cosa volesse dire. Può non piacere. È più facile andare agli eventi. E il fatto che già partecipino tanto agli eventi è molto positivo.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

E com'è il vostro rapporto con l'amministrazione pubblica? Positivo?

### **Elisa Postai**

Con noi è molto positiva, anche perché, secondo me, gli piace il progetto. Ad esempio, l'acqua la offre il comune, ci ha messo anche un impianto a goccia quest'anno. In più ci hanno messo la casetta per gli attrezzi, con i loro tempi un po' lenti perché non siamo la priorità, prima si gestiscono le loro cose e poi vengono a mettere la casetta degli attrezzi. Però ce l'hanno messa, anche bella. Poi di base ci lasciano fare quel che vogliamo. Se non è morto l'arte grazie alla circoscrizione del comune che ci ha creduto nel 2022. Poi dopo ci vogliono i cittadini, però comunque noi siamo contenti, anche perché sennò non sarebbe fattibile. Ad esempio, Domani vado all'ufficio parchi e giardini perché facciamo questa attività per i bambini e tutto il materiale lo offrono loro. In più mi hanno anche detto, se vedi qualcosa che può essere utile prendilo e portalo all'orto. Tutto sommato sì, secondo me, piace proprio il progetto. L'Assessora Giulia Casonato, che è l'assessora appunto ai parchi giardini, spinge molto perché gli piacerebbe che ci fossero altre realtà come la nostra, sparse per la città. Secondo me è per quello. Poi anche soldi, loro ci danno un minimo ma continuano a abbassare ogni anno che passa, però noi tramite questi eventi tiriamo su soldi tramite offerta libera, perché non si può fare in altro modo, però ce la facciamo. Anche perché ci servono, abbiamo comprato il decespugliatore ad esempio.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Che futuro vedi per il progetto?

### **Elisa Postai**

Sì, sì, noi siamo carichi. Io sono una che si illude molto nella vita. Noi ci crediamo molto. Perché adesso appunto abbiamo questo Patto che abbiamo appena rinnovato a inizio a gennaio per due anni, quindi per due anni abbiamo il terreno. Poi potrebbero benissimo togliercelo e farci parcheggi. Per ora ce l'hanno sempre rinnovato. Poi io sono positiva, ma anche perché appunto si stanno creando anche delle relazioni al di fuori dell'orto. È venuto un vecchietto che ha dei terreni con dei cavalli e ci ha chiesto se vogliamo aiutarlo a portare avanti anche quel progetto. Poi io non credo diventerà mai un lavoro, anche se c'è gente che ci spera, io sono un po' più terra terra su questo. È difficile. Tipo l'orto di Rovereto, 'Setap'. Loro sono nati un po' tipo noi, poi hanno vinto bandi, cose di questo tipo e adesso sono proprio un'azienda agricola; quindi, hanno persone che fanno servizio civile da loro però, secondo me, ha perso un po', cioè tutti dicono che rispetto tipo al comun orto che è più come il nostro, Setap è diventato un'azienda. Da noi Francesco ha questo sogno di aprire una fattoria didattica e non escludo che in un futuro magari questa esperienza venga spostata da un'altra parte e diventi appunto altro. A me piace il mio lavoro e vorrei andare avanti con quello, però c'è questa visione anche.



## **Annex B**

### **Transcript of the interview with Gabriele de Veris, spokesperson for the garden in San Matteo degli Armeni public library, in Perugia.**

#### **Maria Zamperetti**

Intanto le chiedo se può farmi un riassunto del progetto, A che punto è adesso? Com'è partito?

#### **Gabriele de Veris**

Dunque, il progetto, quello della biblioteca dei semi, è partito a settembre di due anni fa, ed è arrivato da una proposta di due cooperative. Una bottega del commercio equo e l'altra una cooperativa che dello stesso quartiere, Ponte San Giovanni, dove tra l'altro c'è un'altra biblioteca comunale. Queste due cooperative avevano iniziato a ragionare sul tema della biblioteca dei semi, e da lì, appunto, la proposta di portarlo anche qui. A quel punto abbiamo detto, vabbè, facciamo una cosa per tutte le biblioteche comunali o, meglio, per tutte quelle che in qualche modo possono gestire un progetto del genere, perché hanno uno spazio comunque fuori, davanti e così via. E allora è partito, tranne che per la biblioteca Augusta, la biblioteca storica, più grande che però non ha lo spazio utile. Le altre biblioteche l'hanno accolto, l'hanno sviluppato ognuno in maniera, diciamo, indipendente, ovviamente ci teniamo in contatto, abbiamo fatto degli incontri insieme. Ci sono delle biblioteche che hanno, diciamo, una serie di attività più costanti perché magari si è costituito, ad esempio appunto a Ponte San Giovanni, un gruppo di persone che si vede più o meno settimanalmente, ogni dieci giorni, ogni due settimane. Qui invece c'è la biblioteca dei semi, ma c'è fondamentalmente l'orto qui fuori che è nato nel novembre del 2015. È una realtà molto attiva che ha sempre mantenuto una presenza di tra le 20 e le 30 persone, con ovviamente il ricambio nel corso degli anni con l'inserimento di studenti, magari legati all'università per stranieri, all'università oppure con la partecipazione delle scuole e così via e quindi diciamo che affiancato all'attività dell'orto c'è l'attività della biblioteca dei semi. Poi abbiamo iniziato appunto a guardarci intorno, cioè a vedere tipo Valdarno, altre realtà che sono sviluppate più da tempo. Quindi diciamo, questo è il percorso fatto finora e adesso appunto con settembre ripartiamo anche con una serie di attività di incontri specifici, sempre più o meno collegate anche all'attività dell'orto, perché nell'orto gli incontri sono settimanali, diciamo il martedì e giovedì. Quindi c'è sempre una presenza nel lavoro collettivo, quindi quello c'è, c'è già e va avanti, ma in particolare poi vogliamo riprendere appunto questo tema dei semi anche perché soprattutto questa primavera è stato molto seguito dalle scuole. Infatti, la presenza delle scuole la mattina in biblioteca è diventata molto frequente e molto frequente sono le domande o in qualche modo l'interesse per cercare di sviluppare

un'attività analoga dentro una classe o nella scuola, ovviamente tenendo conto di tutte le problematiche che ci possono essere sulla gestione dei semi, la cura delle piante. Questo è un ottimo sviluppo perché comunque sia, vedere la biblioteca dei semi, girare nell'orto, conoscere le piante, insomma in una città è sempre un'attività educativa molto importante.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

La biblioteca come si è inserita in questo progetto?

### **Gabriele de Veris**

L'idea degli orti, degli orti urbani diciamo di nuova generazione, quindi non quelli che tra virgolette sono definiti gli orti dei pensionati, è nata, perlomeno a Perugia, un po' di anni fa. Appunto, intorno al 2012-2015, il comune aveva iniziato a cogliere questa proposta di Italia nostra, che era quella, appunto, di creare degli orti urbani, orti sociali, orti collettivi, come uno li vuole chiamare. Con indirizzo, appunto, più legato alla partecipazione del quartiere del territorio alla cura del territorio, la dimensione educativa, il rapporto con la natura, quindi tutta una serie di istanze, di attenzioni che hanno portato poi a individuare una serie di luoghi in giro per la città ed attivare una serie di convenzioni con le associazioni del territorio, quelle di quartiere e così via. Perché ovviamente avere cura di un'area per piccola che sia o grande che sia, richiede appunto un impegno, partecipare non può essere una cosa estemporanea, senno rischierebbe poi di snaturarsi o di perdere di vista quello che è l'obiettivo. E quindi all'epoca ci fu questo accordo con l'associazione di quartiere, il comune e la biblioteca. Noi abbiamo questo grande giardino qui fuori che ha una parte che è stata dedicata proprio ad orto o, meglio, è stata ridedicata. Noi siamo giovani, siamo nati nel 2012, ma la convenzione, l'idea dell'Orto urbano c'era da prima che aprisse la biblioteca, però non c'era la disponibilità dello spazio aperto. Un po' alla volta recuperato tutto, questi sono quasi 5000 m quadri di terreno. Tutto il complesso ha secoli di storia. San Matteo degli armeni si chiama così perché fu fondato da una comunità di monaci armeni intorno al 1272, quindi un po' di secoli fa. L'area verde ha cambiato tante volte destinazione e fino agli anni 80, 90 diciamo era diventata un'area affidata a chi abitava qui. Erano un gruppo di famiglie che abitava qui che purtroppo sono andati via via con il terremoto del '97 e così via. Successivamente, per un po' di anni il terreno è stato abbandonato e quindi quando abbiamo riaperto era diventato una giungla perché era cresciuto di tutto. Quindi tra il 2012 e il 2015, ci sono stati tre anni in cui sono state recuperate e ripulite le aree, è stata creata in piano la parte del dell'orto, dove non c'erano alberi e così via. Si è studiato ovviamente come portare l'acqua qui davanti. Dietro c'è un antico pozzo che risale appunto a secoli fa e da dove si attinge l'acqua per l'orto. Tutto questo lavoro è stato fondamentale per poi dare vita all'orto e permettergli di sopravvivere, di andare avanti, di avere l'acqua anche diciamo, nei momenti di siccità e così via. Legato a questo c'è stato anche per un certo periodo, appunto uno

sviluppo di questi orti urbani: infatti, tra il 2015 e oggi se ne sono aperti alcuni, se ne sono chiusi altri, eccetera. Adesso il nostro orto di riferimento è alla facoltà di agraria, al lato opposto del quartiere dove ci troviamo. Anche lì c'è una storia secolare, c'è l'orto medievale, però hanno creato anche degli orti urbani in quella zona e quindi c'è un rapporto con loro, creando un coinvolgimento diretto dell'Università. C'è una collaborazione tra i loro esperti e quelli che abbiamo già nell'orto per la risoluzione di problemi oppure dubbi sulla coltivazione delle specie di piante ed alberi. Ad esempio, sono stati donati degli alberi che fanno parte di specie tra virgolette antiche, non più sfruttate commercialmente, quindi spesso dimenticate, che però sono state conservate. E qui sono state ripiantate per cui vengono preservate piante da frutto che venivano utilizzate, magari un secolo lo fa, magari cinquant'anni fa, che poi per motivi meramente commerciali sono state lasciate perdere. Poi posso aggiungere che abbiamo questo piccolo ginko biloba che c'è stato donato, che fa parte di questo progetto legato alla diffusione degli alberi che discendono da quelli che sono sopravvissuti alle bombe atomiche ad Hiroshima e Nagasaki. Uno si chiama hibakujumoku come termine giapponese, e questo qui discende da un ginko che è sopravvissuto alla bomba atomica di Hiroshima e nel 2020, grazie anche appunto all'Università di Perugia, ci è stato donato e quindi ogni anno ad agosto ricordiamo questa tragedia e ci prendiamo cura di questo Ginko biloba che è piccolino (circa mezzo metro), però ci mette tre secoli, diciamo a crescere, quindi siamo fiduciosi.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

E la e la biblioteca in sé all'interno dell'orto che ruolo ha?

### **Gabriele de Veris**

Abbiamo una sezione di pubblicazioni che è dedicata proprio a questo. In più, diciamo, avevamo già, sempre tramite Convenzione, una parte della biblioteca di ARPA, dell'Agenzia regionale della protezione dell'ambiente, circa 2000 volumi legati ad emergenze ambientali, il territorio umbro e così via. Poi abbiamo aggiunto da parte nostra una sezione che ovviamente è in continua crescita, anche qui dedicata agli orti o temi analoghi; quindi, possono essere dagli orti urbani alle modalità di coltivazione degli orti, gli orti biologici, orti sinergici, gli orti di pace, insomma, tutto quello che ha come punto di riferimento gli orti. E anche dal punto di vista culturale e letterario, non solo dal punto di vista tecnico. E poi qualcosa anche dal punto di vista didattico educativo, perché poi il discorso degli orti dal punto di vista didattico è stato ripreso ad esempio anche da Maria Montessori che qui a Perugia è un personaggio ben conosciuto e spesso ricordato. Quindi anche questo aspetto didattico ed educativo, che è molto utile quando ci vengono richieste informazioni e partecipazione da parte degli insegnanti della scuola. Ogni tanto capita anche qualche visita da fuori. Ad esempio, qualche mese fa, è venuto un gruppo di studiosi giapponesi che si trovavano in Umbria per un convegno, in questo caso

sull'olivo. Però quando hanno saputo che c'era l'orto e c'era la biblioteca dei semi sono venuti qui. Ci fatto un sacco di domande, e dovrebbero ritornare tra noi o alla fine dell'anno o il prossimo anno, perché comunque gli interessa il progetto e questa connessione tra biblioteche e territorio, orti e così via.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Organizzate anche corsi o eventi?

**Gabriele de Veris**

Sì, sono stati organizzati, ovviamente grazie sia o all'università o appunto magari qualche associazione, dei corsi legati alla potatura, alla coltivazione degli ulivi, alla gestione magari delle sementi. Sono stati fatti anche degli incontri, spesso appunto in collaborazione con altre realtà del territorio, non solo di Perugia ma magari della provincia., per intenderci. E anche ovviamente presentazioni di libri. Poi come ultima cosa collegata a questo, c'è la partecipazione a un progetto che è nato 4, 5 anni fa: 'La scuola di ecologia'. È stata pensata insieme a questa associazione che si chiama 'Sapere ambiente' che organizza tantissime cose, in collaborazione ovviamente con l'università e così via. E nel corso degli anni sono stati fatti vari tipi di incontri a seconda anche delle proposte che venivano fatte, che potevano essere o sulla comunicazione ambientale oppure sul benessere, sul rapporto tra le persone e le piante, l'aspetto della dell'alimentazione. Apro parentesi. Sono stati fatti diversi incontri con il centro di promozione della salute dell'università, proprio tramite una iniziativa che si legava a cultura e benessere/biblioteche e benessere. Chiudo parentesi. È stata fatta anni fa anche una cosa interessante, cioè la rassegna dei film del Green Drop World, che è il premio che viene conferito al Festival di Venezia ad uno o più film a tema ambientale. Quindi quell'anno lì abbiamo proiettato praticamente tutti i film che avevano ricevuto il premio nel corso degli anni. In biblioteca veniva fatta una la presentazione del film, poi andavamo qui a 300 M, dove c'è il cinema del quartiere che proiettava nel cinema il film, quando era possibile anche con la partecipazione magari di qualche esperto, comunque di qualcuno legato al film stesso.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Come ha reagito la Comunità, il quartiere, insomma la città al progetto, visto che è un progetto che ormai va avanti da parecchi anni, avete visto dei cambiamenti, dei miglioramenti in fatto di partecipazione o comunque anche semplicemente modi di pensare o vedere questo tipo di progetti, visto che penso che l'orto sia gestito anche dalle persone del quartiere?

**Gabriele de Veris**

Nel gruppo che lavora all'orto ci sono circa 30 persone fisse, no? Poi possono esserci presenze temporanee, però più o meno se una trentina di persone che vengono quasi sempre. La maggior parte, più della metà, sono nel quartiere, mentre le altre sono legate alla vita della

biblioteca, ad esempio, dei ragazzi che hanno fatto il servizio civile o il tirocinio qui in biblioteca e si sono appassionati, trovando il modo di organizzarsi per venire a fare questo tipo di attività nell'orto. In generale direi che lo sviluppo c'è stato soprattutto nei primi 3 4 anni, perché c'è stato molto interesse perché, se per l'orto ci sono voluti almeno due anni di lavoro perché si vedesse un risultato, allo stesso tempo in quel periodo si sono fatte attività che hanno comunque portato le persone a venire qui; quindi, le attività legate alla Giornata della terra, dell'ambiente degli alberi. Erano delle feste dalla mattina alla sera che vedevano la presenza di varie persone o associazioni o esperti o iniziative legate, che ne so, anche ai prodotti locali e la gastronomia, o alla presentazione di altre attività ed esperienze sul territorio, dalla zona del Trasimeno, magari anche zone un po' più lontane. Negli ultimi anni c'è stato un po' un indebolimento da questo punto di vista. La prima cosa ovviamente è stato il Covid che per due anni ci ha impedito di fare buona parte di queste iniziative. In compenso non essendosi sviluppate attività così ricorrenti, è nato un appuntamento che è il compleanno dell'orto. Noi da quando siamo nati, quindi il 2 luglio del 2012, abbiamo iniziato a festeggiare il compleanno della biblioteca, quindi ogni anno non necessariamente due, ma intorno al 2 luglio facciamo una festa della biblioteca dal pomeriggio fino a mezzanotte, e nell'occasione c'è sempre ovviamente un'attività a un richiamo all'orto, insomma tutto quello che avviene in biblioteca, dentro e fuori. Sulla base di questo abbiamo detto, iniziamo a festeggiare il compleanno dell'orto e quindi, ad esempio, un po' di tempo fa è stata fatta una mostra fotografica che richiamava l'attività svolta nel corso dei mesi; quindi, erano foto stagionali di quello che avveniva nell'orto. Oppure è stato fatto il calendario, o l'anno scorso, se non sbaglio, è stato realizzato un libretto sulle ricette dell'orto; quindi, ogni persona che ha voluto ha contribuito con una ricetta collegata, alle zucche piuttosto che alle patate, ai pomodori e così via. E quindi questa è un'altra occasione, diciamo, di conoscenza, scambio con la città. Perché poi ovviamente non è limitato al quartiere, ma un po' a tutta la città.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

A livello un po' più diciamo concettuale, che valore associate alle attività di orticoltura e come mai sono state scelte effettivamente per un progetto del genere?

### **Gabriele de Veris**

La prima cosa potrei citare è il collegamento con l'Agenda 2030 quindi il richiamo, che forse dovremmo fare in modo più costante, ad una serie di obiettivi dell'Agenda 2030. Il fatto di richiamarli e di dichiararli è un modo anche per far conoscere le persone che avere cura della terra, dei prodotti, la sana alimentazione, il benessere, eccetera non sono cose che appartengono solo alla dimensione personale, ma hanno un valore collettivo, insomma, quindi vanno a incidere proprio sulla creazione di una cultura condivisa. Per quanto riguarda l'orto rispetto ad

altre attività, beh. Un altro elemento importante è 'Il Giardino dei Giusti', una parte dell'area verde che è dedicata a questo progetto che è nato qualche anno fa in Italia, a Milano e che si è ispirato al giardino dei giusti di Gerusalemme, che è nato con un'attenzione particolare, all'eccidio armeno, per cui siamo in parte presi in causa. Il 6 Marzo del 2016 abbiamo inaugurato questo giardino che prevede la dedica di uno spazio e di piante e di targhe, a persone che in qualche modo hanno perseguito il bene comune in vari ambiti, in vari modi. Per esempio, in ambito sportivo, per l'inclusione, in ambito politico, per la difesa dei diritti umani o la difesa dell'ambiente, la difesa della legalità. Per fortuna un'ampia casistica. E ogni anno, il 6 marzo, dedichiamo appunto uno o più piante a una o più persone. E ormai c'è un gruppo informale formato dall'assessore di turno, noi, Amnesty International (di cui abbiamo qui la biblioteca), l'associazione di quartiere e vari soggetti che partecipano propongono, avanzano delle candidature. Diciamo tra due e cinque persone vengono scelte e devono avere determinate caratteristiche condivise. E poi c'è questa cerimonia il 6 marzo, questa non cambia. L'orto ed il giardino dei giusti sono uno vicino all'altra. E poi c'è la parte del 'giardino della Compresenza', un giardino all'italiana del 1600, di cui ci sono ancora le tracce, e che è uno spazio per letture, spettacoli, e presentazioni. Questa è rimasta come area, diciamo più se vogliamo letteraria e più universale e informale, ecco. Si chiama così perché la compresenza è uno dei delle parole chiave di Aldo Capitini, di cui abbiamo la biblioteca, che si somma alla biblioteca dell'arpa, alla biblioteca di Amnesty che sono in Convenzione e la biblioteca del Comitato 8 Marzo, che è un'associazione che si occupava dei diritti delle donne, che, quando ha chiuso ce l'ha donata, ce l'ha affidata. Poi c'è la parte nostra, cioè i libri di narrativa, di poesia o sui temi che abbiamo detto, di saggistica e così via.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Parlando delle sfide invece che avete incontrato, incontrate nel gestire questo progetto, questa collaborazione, se ce ne sono.

### **Gabriele de Veris**

Beh, la prima sfida è la manutenzione, la corretta manutenzione di un luogo, e per luogo non intendo solo l'erba che va tagliata ogni tanto sennò diventa una selva, ma anche lo spazio, gli infissi, le relazioni tra le persone, le associazioni e l'ambiente. Ovviamente avere tante relazioni e tante collaborazioni è uno degli elementi di forza di una biblioteca. Il suo vero valore non è il patrimonio fisico che si può anche aumentare con difficoltà, dati i limiti fisici delle pareti, ma le relazioni di cui bisogna prendersi cura. Le relazioni col territorio, le persone, le associazioni, i progetti e così via. Questo è quello che dà il valore a una biblioteca. Ad esempio, una cosa che non ho detto è che proprio qui, dove c'è lo scaffale degli orti, c'è anche un ripiano dedicato alle Città gemelle, quelle che sono gemellate con Perugia. Questa è un'altra risorsa che

spesso viene un po' trascurata dalle biblioteche, che però di fatto permette di aprire una o più finestre sul mondo in maniera semplice, perché è un canale già aperto. Perugia, tra le altre città, è gemellata con Seattle che, al di là della dimensione tecnologica avveniristica, possiede una parte molto importante legata alle origini di Seattle, quindi la dimensione dei nativi, chi ci viveva prima che ci arrivassero gli occidentali. Sono molto attivi proprio nel preservare, nel tramandare le tradizioni e praticamente quasi ogni anno vengono a trovarci e ci portano o dei libri o degli oggetti e noi organizziamo con loro degli incontri in cui raccontano la vita com'era allora e come oggi. Anche per loro il discorso di recupero di spazi e di luoghi che sembravano definitivamente compromessi e che invece negli ultimi vent'anni sono riusciti a recuperare, è molto importante. Tante cose che possono ispirare, come ad esempio la tradizione del costruire le canoe, l'utilizzo del legname, il viaggio in canoa tra un villaggio e l'altro, il percorso fluviale e così via. E tutto questo è un tipo di agenda 2030 calato nella realtà di un territorio che sta molto lontano da noi però al tempo stesso è molto vicino proprio per questo gemellaggio.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Volevo chiedervi velocemente invece, qual è il ruolo dell'amministrazione pubblica. Se ha finanziato solo o se partecipa in altro modo?

### **Gabriele de Veris**

Allora dipende un po' dai periodi. Diciamo che da quando abbiamo aperto la collaborazione c'è sempre stata, che fosse la parte di gemellaggio o fosse la parte della cultura o fosse la parte dell'ambiente. A volte una non escludeva l'altra. Ad esempio, i primi anni, quando è nato il progetto degli orti, c'era l'allora assessore all'ambiente, che era anche vicesindaco, che era molto attento e insomma ci teneva. È lui che ha sollecitato e promosso la Convenzione con ARPA, tanto per fare un esempio. Nel corso del tempo diciamo c'è sempre stato un'interlocuzione. Adesso abbiamo una nuova amministrazione che inizia ad attivarsi adesso proprio in questo periodo quindi fine agosto, primi di settembre, vediamo come andrà. Penso bene, anche perché il primo incontro lo abbiamo avuto ad agosto, con il ricordo di Hiroshima e Nagasaki, a cui ha partecipato l'assessore all'ambiente, quindi è già un buon segno.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

E quindi siete contenti della collaborazione con l'amministrazione?

### **Gabriele de Veris**

Sì, sì, sì. Diciamo che non ci lamentiamo. Ecco. La nuova amministrazione sa benissimo chi siamo, cosa facciamo, cosa c'è, eccetera, e l'attuale assessore all'ambiente è uno di quelli che ha collaborato già in passato con gli orti; quindi, da quel punto di vista sono sicuro. Adesso si tratta di vedere come andranno avanti le cose eccetera. Sono ottimista, ripeto, I problemi ci sono perché come dicevo, la cosa importante è la manutenzione a volte. Ad esempio, a giugno

o luglio si era rotto un tubo di una fognatura. C'è voluto un po' per avere una squadra di tecnici che potesse venire, poi sono stati qui una settimana quindi. Però è un problema che si è risolto. Aggiungo una cosa: sicuramente la nostra è una delle biblioteche fortunate che ci sono in Italia, che stanno dentro un parco, hanno un giardino, hanno sicuramente un elemento, un elemento in più rispetto alle altre. Questo non, non lo discuto, eccetera. Il nostro punto debole, ma questo avviene in moltissime realtà italiane è che noi non siamo nel cuore ovviamente della città, non siamo di passaggio. Uno se viene qui ci viene o perché ha sbagliato strada, perché deve andare da un'altra parte o perché è convinto, cioè perché magari sa che c'è una manifestazione, un'iniziativa, eccetera. Anche se in linea d'aria siamo a 800 m dal centro di Perugia, però siamo fuori dalle mura, a 50 m dalle mura, dalle mura storiche. E quindi siamo in una, come per dire letterariamente, siamo nella terra di mezzo, cioè tra il centro storico e il quartiere che sta oltre la collina qua sopra. E quindi vuol dire che anche il discorso del 'Biblio-Compleanno', del fare tante attività serve a portare a far conoscere le persone quello che è la biblioteca. Arrivo subito. Anche perché noi qua fuori adesso, abbiamo un'insegna che è abbastanza piccola perché abbiamo dei vincoli paesaggistici. Quindi spesso la gente non ci vede. In effetti è vero, cioè, bisogna arrivarci proprio davanti.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Come vedete il futuro del progetto, se c'è qualcosa da implementare, se siete ottimisti.

### **Gabriele de Veris**

Sì. Cioè ottimista? Sì, diciamo. C'è sicuramente da sviluppare quello che abbiamo iniziato a fare con i semi, farlo in maniera più costante, vedere dopo aver prestato i semi, vedere se tornano. Ci sono arrivati però erano donazioni più che restituzioni. Poi contattare altre realtà e organizzare nuovi incontri, insomma far conoscere meglio quello che si fa. Insomma, non è che manchino le idee, le possibilità. Anzi, spesso, dal gruppo questo di ponte San Giovanni ci arrivano sollecitazioni a organizzare cose, attività. La cosa che non avevo detto ma che forse stava nella anche nella scheda: vicino all'orto, abbiamo anche questo angolo che è nato spontaneamente, il Roseto anche qui della compresenza, cioè, sono tutte rose che partendo da una rosa che era nata qualche anno fa, si è deciso di dedicare poi a persone che idealmente o fisicamente erano legate alla biblioteca. Quindi Capitini, ovviamente, il postino del quartiere che è morto qualche anno fa, era fisicamente legato alla biblioteca e così via. Nel corso dei. Quindi adesso c'è questo giardino che a seconda dei periodi è pieno di rose, un po' più spoglio. È una bella realtà.



## **Annex C**

### **Transcript of the interview with Lorenza Renzini, spokesperson for ‘Orto Diffuso’ in Terranuova Bracciolini.**

#### **Maria Zamperetti**

Marta Penzo, la direttrice della biblioteca di Valdagno, mi ha parlato del vostro progetto. È stata lei a parlarne per la prima volta e ha detto che è molto interessante e vi ha presi come spunto. Anche a Valdagno stiamo pensando, come biblioteca dei semi, di avviare un progetto di orti comunitari sociali. Per cui vi prenderemo come esempio. Volevo un po' capire come funziona un po' il vostro progetto che è partito nel 2018 se non sbaglio.

#### **Lorenza Renzini**

Sì, allora sì, è il progetto. Il contesto è quello di un progetto più ampio della Regione Toscana che è ‘100.000 orti in Toscana’, che proprio è volto al recupero della dell'antica tradizione tipica fra l'altro della nostra zona, ma credo anche della vostra, della coltivazione dell'orto familiare, non dell'orto come coltivazione estensiva ed intensiva. Quindi, dall'idea del mantenimento e del recupero delle tradizioni è nato questo progetto più ampio in cui erano coinvolte anche realtà legate proprio all'ambiente, all'agricoltura, a strutture della sostenibilità. La biblioteca ci è entrata in modo, come dire, periferico. Era un progetto portato avanti appunto da altri settori, non dal nostro della cultura. Poi era rimasto un pochino senza bambola e mamma, come si dice dalle nostre parti, e quindi poi alla fine è ricascato sulla biblioteca. Comunque, il progetto più ampio a livello regionale, che poi è stato declinato in finanziamenti. Per cui tutto quello prevede finanziamenti poi un po' sollecita le comunità a muoversi e a progettare. È declinato in tanti modi e in molti comuni: per esempio, nel vicino San Giovanni Valdarno, che è il nostro comune contiguo, anche se al di là dall'Arno, è stato declinato diversamente, per cui sono stati dati degli appezzamenti a singoli individui che li hanno coltivati. E quindi un terreno del comune che era incolto è diventato un terreno coltivato da singole persone. E poi fanno anche attività comuni: hanno un pozzo insieme, fanno attività anche ludiche e ricreative insieme. Invece, questo di Serenova in realtà nasce in un altro modo perché è portato avanti dalle associazioni ‘Il Grano e le Rose’ e ‘Pandora’, che promuovono la sostenibilità e sono molto legate anche a Slow Food che, nel nostro territorio è piuttosto forte, tanto che la Presidente dell'associazione ‘Il Grano e le Rose’, che è Barbara Nappini, ora diventa presidente nazionale di Slow Food. Quindi c'è un collegamento forte con questa realtà. Quindi da noi appunto, viene declinato in maniera un pochino diversa, cioè non vengono assegnati lotti ai singoli individui, ma nasce come progetto di comunità. Per cui il progetto appunto, è stato completamente gestito da queste due associazioni, sostenuto dal comune per

una piccola percentuale economica e per la maggior parte dal progetto regionale. Prevede l'individuazione di 5 micro-lotti che hanno delle vocazioni molto diverse. Il primo che nasce vicino al circolo delle bocce che viene frequentato però anche da un'associazione che gestisce una piccola comunità di ragazzi disabili, e quindi nasce come attività terapeutica. Poi c'è un altro appezzamento, in una frazione chiamata 'La Penna', dove ha sede una forte comunità indiana, che ha addirittura il tempio. Questo orto è quindi gestito insieme dagli indiani e anche dai cittadini che vivono lì intorno e si chiama 'Orto Contaminato' perché c'è una produzione di prodotti agricoli che si trovano poco e che sono tipici della cultura indiana. Poi c'è un lotto in un altro quartiere, dove vengono messi dei degli alberi da frutto e quindi diventa un piccolo boschetto del quartiere. E poi c'è quello della scuola, dove ci sono gli orti scalari perché vengono collocati tipo degli espositori a scaletta, dove lavorano i ragazzi che fanno i progetti per la scuola. E in ultimo c'è questo orto della biblioteca, 'l'orto cultura', che è un orto un po' simbolico perché viene fatto dentro dei cassoni nel piazzale della biblioteca. Inizialmente sono state piantate piante officinali e anche un po' di pomodori. Poi dopo piano piano abbiamo messo un piccolo melograno, poi una vite che però non ce l'ha fatta, e allora ci abbiamo messo piante più decorative. Insomma, diciamo è un orto un po' simbolico. Però la cosa interessante del coinvolgimento della biblioteca è che sono stati i fatti degli incontri: di formazione per la coltivazione sostenibile, per la coltivazione biologica, sulla permacultura, per produrre gli insetticidi e i concimi in modo naturale, per l'estrazione dei semi dalle piante. Insomma, tutta una serie di incontri che periodicamente si organizzano. Poi abbiamo allestito anche uno scaffale tematico di libri per cui valorizziamo anche la parte culturale, di documentazione. Per ultima è nata la biblioteca dei semi che dovrebbe essere un po' il completamento di tutto questo progetto. Questo diciamo è progetto ideale che però andando avanti nel tempo ha riscontrato diverse difficoltà perché poi la gente, le popolazioni cittadina, si è fatto fatica a coinvolgerla. Anche il progetto della biblioteca dei semi abbiamo fatto un po' di fatica a portarlo avanti, quindi insomma diciamo ci sono state diverse note critiche e quindi cercheremo nel futuro di valorizzarlo, di ripotenziarlo e di incrementarlo.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Capisci, era difficile coinvolgere la popolazione, anche noi qui a Valdagno con la biblioteca dei semi, è una delle parti più difficili, ovviamente.

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Non ti seguono! Quindi, c'è un problema di comunicazione da parte nostra. E poi c'è un altro problema che è legato proprio alla natura civile, diciamo. Il nostro territorio è un territorio che è stato contadino fino a poco tempo fa. Anzi, è ancora contadino. I nonni, ma nemmeno i nonni, i genitori della mia generazione; quindi, la gente degli anni 30 e 40 aveva l'orto. Quindi

c'è un collegamento forte con la terra ma che è difficile riscoprire. E questo, secondo me, è un limite oggettivo per la buona riuscita di questo progetto. Ecco. Forse ci voleva un'altra generazione di passaggio prima di farlo funzionare, ecco. Son processi lunghi

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Io adesso volevo concentrarmi un po' sulla biblioteca, perché appunto, sto cercando di indagare questa sinergia tra gli orti comunitari e le biblioteche, perché all'estero è una cosa che succede molto più spesso, soprattutto in Nord America. Ci sono molte biblioteche pubbliche che avviano loro stesse progetti di orti comunitari, e in quel contesto, appunto, sono abbastanza efficaci, vengono molto frequentate, eccetera. Allora sto cercando di indagare se una cosa del genere si potrebbe fare anche in Italia o comunque potenziare questa possibile collaborazione. E allora intanto volevo capire, la biblioteca come mai è stata scelta come luogo per mettere un orto? C'è qualche tipo di ideale valore che collega le due cose?

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Io credo il valore della tradizione, della tradizione che comunque deve rimanere. La biblioteca è comunque depositaria di una memoria e in questo senso anche di una memoria fisica, concreta, quotidiana, che è quella della coltivazione della terra. Penso un po' l'idea sia stata quella, sì.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

E quindi pensate che l'orticoltura possa spronare la crescita culturale e sociale?

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Sì. Anche per esempio, in vista di tanti cambiamenti che ci sono stati e ci saranno nella nostra società e nel nostro mondo. Questo riavvicinamento alla terra magari può servire anche per creare una coscienza civile diversa. Ecco, più centrata sul rispetto della terra in generale. Ecco quindi, una cultura di rispetto secondo me, perlomeno. Io ci credo fermamente in questa cosa, ma penso tutti, insomma, anche quelli, anche l'assessore. Ora per l'appunto è un po' cambiata la giunta rispetto a quella che aveva seguito il progetto e l'assessore non c'è più, ce n'è un altro. Ma insomma, sicuramente condivide la stessa opinione.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

E quindi poi volevo un po' capire anche il legame, diciamo, che c'è, tra la l'orticoltura e la cultura in sé. Perché voi avete detto che in questo progetto vengono integrate le attività di orticoltura con attività extra e volevo capire come mai si è sentita appunto la necessità di ampliare questo progetto oltre il semplice coltivare.

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Secondo me perché il coinvolgimento della biblioteca in questo senso è stato non solo simbolico ma anche strategico? No? Cioè, è stato un modo per dare una connotazione anche

culturale nel senso proprio vero del termine: di culture, dell'apprendimento di culture e del mantenimento di culture. Anche perché è un modo, appunto, per riappropriarsi di questa tradizione della coltivazione in modo più consapevole. Anche perché le persone che sono ritornate alla terra, son persone che vengono comunque da un passato in cui si sono formate e in cui c'è stato un'educazione, insomma di livello culturale più ampio del vecchio contadino di una volta. E quindi forse la biblioteca può anche rivestire questo ruolo di sostegno educativo. Insomma.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Visto che il vostro progetto è abbastanza lungo, volevo capire se avete visto dei cambiamenti nei modi di pensare o comunque semplicemente sulla frequentazione di questi orti, se c'è stato appunto qualche cambiamento visibile o che percepite?

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Allora Senti grandi cambiamenti, no? Purtroppo. Allora ci sono stati degli orti che non hanno proprio funzionato. Forse quello contaminato ha funzionato un po' di più. Perché comunque loro ci hanno lavorato tanto e però poi questo ha portato altri problemi perché magari ci sono stati dei vicini a cui non andava bene, e quindi non è che abbia avuto poi degli sviluppi ottimali. Quello della scuola ha un po' il problema delle vacanze estive che determinano questa chiusura importante. E poi diventa un problema annaffiare concretamente, insomma. E poi, diciamo che la cultura del volontariato che doveva in qualche modo essere sollecitata non è che sia venuta fuori tanto? Ecco, questo sì. Quindi ti dico, ci sono stati forse più limiti che successi da questo punto di vista. La cosa che effettivamente ha funzionato, secondo me sono stati gli incontri in biblioteca. Infatti, la gente continua a chiedere, quindi si rifaranno ora. Fra l'altro, una cosa bellina degli ultimi giorni e che si dovrebbe fare: abbiamo dalle nostre zone queste fiere annuali che vengono chiamati 'i perdoni', legati a una tradizione storica antica, insomma. E questo qui di Terranova è antichissimo perché è del 1400 e da allora tutti gli anni a settembre c'è questa fiera che nasce come fiera agricola al mercato che però poi si è sviluppata come sempre: banchini, chioschi eccetera eccetera. Si farà un piccolo stand, cioè Slow Food farà un piccolo stand e in uno di questi giorni ci sarà proprio la nostra biblioteca dei semi esposta. Quindi diciamo che dovrebbe anzi incrementare un po' di più la conoscenza di questo progetto.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

La biblioteca, essendo un'istituzione pubblica, comunque rientra in questa categoria del pubblico e volevo capire quale fosse il ruolo appunto dell'amministrazione all'interno del progetto, se ha solo finanziato o se partecipa in qualche altro modo.

### **Lorenza Renzini**

L'amministrazione dà un piccolo contributo economico e poi sostiene dal punto di vista amministrativo. I progetti che vengono avviati in collegamento con la Regione e poi, più concretamente, forniscono l'acqua per l'innaffiamento. Ecco, sostengono dal punto di vista logistico.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Ti faccio una domanda un po' controversa: l'amministrazione è stata abbastanza costante in questo aiuto logistico, oppure ha avuto magari qualche problema nel corso degli anni.

**Lorenza Renzini**

No, non è stata tanto lineare. Ora te considera che io in realtà dipendo dall'amministrazione, sono dipendente comunale. Però ecco, diciamo che poi concretamente sono io e basta l'unica dipendente comunale che segue in prima persona questo progetto, capito? Poi l'ufficio tecnico ha fatto tanta fatica, perché poi probabilmente non ha nemmeno condiviso completamente proprio dal punto di vista progettuale. Ecco. Quindi hanno fatto parecchia fatica a capirlo questo progetto, e sicché è stato sempre un po' sì, ci sono stati tanti alti e bassi. Ecco, sì, tanti, tanti sforzi da parte nostra per cercare di tirarli dentro, anche a volte per pagare la quota. Insomma, sì, non è stata costante per noi. Pur essendo un comune molto piccolo, abbiamo due sedi, quella dei ragazzi e quella dei grandi, per cui c'è il bisogno di tanto personale per tenere aperto e di dipendenti ci sono io e basta. E poi c'è una cooperativa con cui facciamo i bandi, e che gestisce la biblioteca insieme a me. Però insomma, siamo insieme. Cioè, io sono la responsabile, però sto anche in pubblico e seguo i progetti.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Questo rapporto con le istituzioni, benché sia difficile, lo consideri importante o comunque necessario per la buona riuscita di un del progetto?

**Lorenza Renzini**

Sì, certo. Non si può prescindere dal rapporto con le istituzioni. Poi, soprattutto nel nostro caso, perché nasce proprio come un'attività della Comunità, quindi come fai? Bisognerebbe forse lavorarci un po' meglio anche proprio a livello di programmazione, ecco quello sicuramente.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Tornando alla biblioteca, quali aspetti positivi trovi nella collaborazione con questo progetto?

**Lorenza Renzini**

Sì, secondo me sì, perché comunque apre un canale di promozione culturale in senso ampio, importante. Te l'ho detto, questo discorso dell'attenzione alla terra, al clima, cioè, sono

tutti fortemente legati? No, se stai attento alla coltivazione del semino, al mantenere il semino locale poi capisci anche tante altre cose. Quindi poi alla fine credo che, come dire, è come una cosa simbolica che poi assume quindi un valore educativo in senso ampio, ecco. Questo ha permesso anche di attivare tanti laboratori con la scuola, i bambini per esempio. No, non solo con le scuole e con le classi, ma anche laboratori pomeridiani. Quindi che ne so si legge la storia del semino e poi mi si fa vedere come si fa a togliere i semini da dai pomodori, ecco capito quindi insomma è bello secondo me. È interessante per tanti motivi, sia per ricollegarlo a quella che è la nostra identità di cittadini Valdarnesi e toscani. E sia anche per il futuro, ecco, per essere cittadini più illuminati per il futuro, quindi. Insomma, io ecco, ci credo. Sì, questa cosa.

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Guardo ci sta fuori, ma è di una tristezza senza fine ora. Poi dopo l'estate.... E proprio c'è un piazzale, capito? C'è un piazzale piastrellato e ci sono stati fatti dei cassoni di legno e dentro cassone ci si è piantato un po' di cose.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Ed è gestito quindi non dai cittadini ma dalla dall'associazione giusto?

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Eh sì, e da me che lo annaffio la mattina.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Comunque, pur essendoci state delle battute d'arresto per vari motivi, i momenti formativi in biblioteca sono stati apprezzati. Quindi io suppongo che tu sia positiva verso il futuro.

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Sì, perché sai, sono stati accettati perché poi alla fine vengono persone che hanno il loro orto e se lo gestiscono e quindi raccolgono informazioni utili per loro. Più che per coltivare nello spazio comune. Poi io voglio aggiungere una cosa, che è una critica a questo progetto, però insomma, te lo voglio dire uguale. L'orto comunitario è un po' per certi versi una contraddizione. Perché, secondo me, la persona che cura l'orto ha voglia di curare il suo orto. Cioè, c'è un fatto di proprietà che sì, probabilmente andrebbe scardinato. Però insomma, ci vuole tanto, ecco perché non è facile l'idea di curare uno spazio condiviso. Per esempio, ci sono stati dei problemi proprio relativi a questa cosa. Perché magari uno ci lavora di più e poi l'altro raccoglie i pomodori. Insomma, non è facile.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

E quindi come implementeresti tu questo progetto, se potessi? Idealmente o anche praticamente?

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Ma senti, forse la cosa ideale sarebbe lasciar perdere tutti gli altri e implementare quello della scuola, per privilegiare questa azione educativa. Secondo me potrebbe essere un'idea, magari mettendolo in una situazione per cui è accessibile anche dall'esterno, per cui l'estate si può andare a annaffiare. Però, ecco, insistere su questo valore educativo, proprio educativo? Sì, secondo me sì.

### **Maria Zamperetti**

Ma questo non renderebbe per questo fattore educativo specifico solo per i bambini, diciamo per gli studenti, insomma, e magari il resto della popolazione verrebbe un po' lasciata da parte?

### **Lorenza Renzini**

Sì, però sai, con l'orto del bambino tu arrivi comunque anche alla famiglia, tu arrivi e il nonno e magari può venire a scuola e spiegare come loro coltivavano il granoturco, capito? Cioè, si possono innescare una serie di sinergie. Più legate, più naturali e meno forzate. Però te la butto là. Comunque, di cose ce ne sarebbe tanti da dire, perché per esempio anche comunque la coltivazione come cura è una cosa di cui ora si parla tanto, ma è vero. Io lo vedo nel mio piccolo. Io a casa ho una terrazza grande, ho tante piante e proprio lo vedo che, quando sono stressata mi fa piacere stare dietro alle piante. Quindi ecco, questo aspetto, secondo me, potrebbe essere anche un altro punto da valorizzare.

## **Annex D**

### **Transcript of the interview with Umbertilla Bisco, spokesperson for the urban gardens in Rovigo.**

#### **Maria Zamperetti**

Può raccontarmi un po' come è nato il progetto?

#### **Umbertilla Bisco**

Allora il progetto è nato nel 2015. Allora premesso che io non c'ero, questa è già una premessa importante. Quindi le riporto quello che è stato rinvenuto all'interno dell'archivio dell'ente. Il progetto orti urbani ha avuto avvio nel 2015 grazie al cofinanziamento della Fondazione Cariparo, ed è un progetto esecutivo realizzato dal settore delle opere pubbliche. L'obiettivo del progetto è quello di recuperare, con l'utilizzo di spazi per un uso collettivo, pratiche di gestione sostenibili del terreno in ambito urbano, che sviluppi anche il coinvolgimento degli aderenti. Le sto leggendo proprio la relazione che è stata fatta. Poi cosa posso dire... Per fare questa cosa è stato realizzato un regolamento che è stato approvato sempre a maggio del 2015, con il quale poi sono state gestite le affidamenti e la conduzione degli orti che sono 37 più un orto che è adibito a gazebo. Di questi uno è stato assegnato al WWF che ha collaborato fin dalla realizzazione, anche con un compito didattico per i soggetti coinvolti: anziani, famiglie, scolaresche. Però io non so, le dico la verità, non so in che termini è stato fatto perché è passato del tempo e i concessionari che ci sono ora non sono neanche quelli di allora. Quindi diciamo che al tempo probabilmente il WWF è intervenuto per dare l'avvio al progetto probabilmente, però adesso, in questo momento il ruolo del WWF non è secondo me legato ai attuali assegnatari.

#### **Maria Zamperetti**

I lotti sono segnati tramite graduatoria?

#### **Umbertilla Bisco**

Diciamo che dopo il primo avvio del progetto nel 2015, quando è stato fatto proprio un bando e poi è stato fatto un'ulteriore perché sono bandi triennali. Quindi faccia conto che nel 2016/17 adesso non so quando sia aspetti che guardo che lì c'era scritto anche quello, un attimo solo. Allora "Il settore ha predisposto il regolamento, approvato il 29 maggio del 2015, per l'affidamento degli orti. Sono state individuate tre diverse categorie di soggetti in favore dei quali provvedere all'assegnazione e con tre avvisi pubblici, nel 2015 e nel 2019, si è provveduto alla conclusione dell'iter amministrativo." Quindi diciamo che l'ultimo bando è stato fatto nel 2019 ed è stato mantenuto fino al triennio del 2021. Quindi diciamo che c'è stato un primo bando che, secondo me, è andato a buon fine nel 2019 e poi nel 2021 22 è stata fatta una proroga



degli attuali concessionari, ovviamente di quelli che c'erano, perché nel frattempo c'erano state delle concessionarie che avevano rinunciato. Quindi non tutti quelli che ci sono quelli iniziali, diciamo così. Quindi nel 2022 è stata fatta una proroga dell'assegnazione, agli stessi concessionari che erano presenti nel 2022, fino al 2025. Ora nel 2025 teoricamente ci sarà il nuovo bando.

**Maria Zamperetti**

E quindi prevederà che cambino tutti i concessionari?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Potrebbe succedere o anche no, perché comunque non credo che sia facile neanche trovare 37 nuovi concessionari o 36.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Non ci sono molte persone che dimostrano interesse per l'iniziativa?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Oddio sì, adesso c'è un po' di richiesta, ultimamente siamo nell'ordine di 3 4 richieste in lista d'attesa, diciamo così. Mi pare siano 2, 3 che sono in lista d'attesa per appunto per avere l'orto, però ovviamente adesso abbiamo appena sistemato gli ultimi che hanno rinunciato e quindi sono subentrati quelli che avevano fatto richiesta per primi e quindi adesso ne abbiamo, credo due o tre, insomma in graduatoria.

**Maria Zamperetti**

L'amministrazione pubblica in questo, a parte ovviamente per la gestione e l'assegnazione dei lotti, che altro ruolo ha all'interno dell'orto, per esempio la manutenzione?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Allora la manutenzione ordinaria è a carico dei concessionari, perché ovviamente loro devono fare la manutenzione dei propri vialetti e anche degli spazi comuni, diciamo così perché se c'è da pulire l'erba piuttosto che ecco, diciamo che la manutenzione ordinaria è a carico dei concessionari.

In realtà loro si organizzano anche per fare un po' di straordinaria spicciola, per esempio ci sono le strutture in legno, e, da quello che mi raccontano, negli ultimi anni i concessionari mi si sono messi insieme e hanno gestito la manutenzione. Perché io sono arrivata nel 2020 e ho preso in mano gli orti del 2022, quindi ho perso tutta la storicizzazione, e la persona che se ne occupava non c'è più, è andata in pensione. Quindi di fatto loro si occupano anche di fare un po' di manutenzione straordinaria, tipo le strutture lignee di cui fanno la manutenzione, danno un po' di vernice, di colore eccetera. Quindi si mettono insieme, tirano fuori un po' qualcosa a ciascuno e fanno questo tipo di intervento. Il comune interviene quando ci sono dei problemi più importanti. Per esempio quest'estate è successo che la pompa dell'acqua che dove pescano

l'acqua non funzionava più, quindi il comune è dovuto intervenire lì. Interviene su manutenzioni importanti, insomma, secondo me.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Quindi mi diceva che a livello di richieste, comunque, ce ne sono un po'. Nel senso, la Comunità ha risposto abbastanza bene, mi pare a questo progetto.

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Le dirò che fino al 2022 non avevo grandi richieste. Noi abbiamo anche prorogato per quel motivo lì, cioè per evitare che fossero le stesse persone a fare sempre domanda. Quindi l'amministrazione ha fatto una delibera dicendo inutile che facciamo fare un bando perché facciano domanda sempre le stesse persone. Dopo nel 2022, 23, 24 è cominciato un po' ad aumentare la domanda. Quindi adesso nel 2025 l'amministrazione dovrà fare un bando. Non ci sono solo anziani che fanno richiesta, ma anche persone giovani, Eh?

**Maria Zamperetti**

Volevo capire, appunto se fosse destinato, principalmente ad anziani o se sia in verità aperto a tutta la Comunità.

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Adesso io non ho la statistica esatta di quanti sono gli anziani, quanti sono le famiglie, eccetera, però devo dirle che nell'ultimo periodo sono anche famiglie giovani che chiedono.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Adesso io le chiedo anche una sua opinione perché capisco che non c'era all'inizio, per cui non mi aspetto che sappia. Ma come mai si è deciso proprio di aprire un orto invece che qualcos'altro? Viene associato qualche valore preciso all'orticoltura rispetto ad altre attività che si potrebbero attivare?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Ah, ecco, allora in questa ulteriore relazione si dice che sono nati come un'esigenza della popolazione che aveva iniziato a fare degli orti spontanei in una zona vicino la linea ferroviaria, e lì erano sorti questi orti, prevalentemente da parte degli anziani, ma non solo. E avevano trovato un certo interesse, un certo seguito. Allora il comune ha deciso di regolamentare questa attività, trovandogli una collocazione un pochino più idonea, e si è utilizzata questa area che adesso viene frequentata e organizzata eccetera. Quindi mi verrebbe da dire che appunto che è nata quasi come una conseguenza del fatto che i cittadini si erano già organizzati per conto loro. E quindi lei sa che lungo le ferrovie ci sono magari delle aree che non sono utilizzate perché magari fanno parte del demanio ferroviario eccetera. Probabilmente si erano messi lì. E dopo il comune siccome aveva fatto questa nuova rotatoria, ha deciso di spostare lì gli orti. Così da

togliere dalla ferrovia o magari nei pressi di qualche casa cantoniera questi orti, visto che non ci potevano stare.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Quindi insomma, si può dire che è stata la popolazione a richiedere questi orti.

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Diciamo che questo è un capoluogo di provincia e non è come nei paesi limitrofi dove la stra grande maggioranza dei cittadini ha l'orto. I paesi intorno a Rovigo sono tutti piccolissimi in confronto. Faccia conto che Rovigo fa 50.000 abitanti scarsi, mentre i comuni intorno non fanno più di 5000. Quindi, nei comuni intorno la popolazione ha l'orto, invece a Rovigo potrebbe essere che ci sono delle persone in appartamento. E quindi questa iniziativa ha senso su un comune come Rovigo.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Perfetto e quindi invece le sfide che avete incontrato negli anni con questo progetto ce ne sono state?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Sfide non ce ne sono state di insormontabili, perché comunque diciamo che questi orti hanno vita a sé. L'unica sfida, se vogliamo, è che c'è comunque una manutenzione delle strutture che col passare degli anni sarà sempre più necessaria e quindi mentre adesso magari i cittadini, i concessionari, son riusciti in qualche modo a far fronte alle varie necessità, a fare un po' manutenzione, adesso le strutture cominciano a cedere. Quindi probabilmente ci sarà una manutenzione più importante nei prossimi anni, perché ormai siamo quasi a 10 anni dalla formazione di questi orti.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Certo. Adesso le chiedo appunto, io sto mi sto concentrando anche sulle attività culturali. L'orto in sé potrebbe essere già considerato un'attività culturale perché permette appunto alle persone di riconnettersi con la terra eccetera, ma mi chiedevo se non ci fosse mai stata l'intenzione di avviare anche delle attività culturali o promuovere delle attività culturali all'interno di questi orti o se semplicemente vengono forniti i terreni.

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Ecco la seconda delle due, perché in realtà in questo momento l'assessorato non ha ancora preso in mano dal punto di vista culturale questo tipo di esperienza. Quindi al momento si esaurisce con la gestione degli orti da parte degli utenti e basta. Non c'è un coinvolgimento dell'assessorato per iniziative collegate correlate. Siccome poi è anche appena cambiata l'amministrazione, può darsi che l'amministrazione nei prossimi mesi possa prendere in mano questa esperienza e magari creare valore aggiunto con altre iniziative correlate.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Il WWF comunque adesso è ancora assegnatario di un lotto?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Sì, sì.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Però non si sa, non si sa bene cosa per cosa lo utilizzino, che attività facciano?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

Veramente io non lo so, posso immaginare che lo utilizzino anche come punto di appoggio per eventuali piantumazioni di piante particolari o piccole piante. Però lo dico così d'impressione non lo so. Non sono stati mai poi interpellati per verificare, fare un monitoraggio dello Stato dell'arte di questo progetto, anche perché non credo che ci fosse una Convenzione. Qualcosa non credo. Credo che fosse proprio solo un'assegnazione, pure semplice.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Che futuro si prevede per questo progetto? Si pensa di portarlo avanti?

**Umbertilla Bisco**

L'interesse della popolazione c'è sicuramente. Meno di così no, nel senso che comunque il progetto va avanti. Resta inteso che più si va avanti più le strutture avranno bisogno di interventi; quindi, speriamo che possano essere garantiti dalle strutture del comune. Però penso per il momento almeno fino al 2025, sicuramente penso che andrà avanti, e anche dopo. Poi, essendo appena cambiata l'amministrazione, non posso sapere se l'assessorato poi vorrà prendere in mano la questione e cercare di trovare una correlazione con eventi culturali fare qualcosa.

**Maria Zamperetti**

Io ho finito le mie domande, anzi grazie per aver partecipato e se vuole aggiungere qualcosa che magari non ho menzionato io nelle domande, mi dica pure.

**Umbertilla Bisco**

No, diciamo che l'amministrazione sicuramente ha interesse quindi a mantenere anche questa realtà, non fosse altro perché ci sono dei cittadini che la richiedono quindi insomma, quindi sicuramente proseguirà questo progetto. Sarebbe bello che avesse uno sviluppo più attinente, anche con la partecipazione del WWF. Cioè, che proseguisse nell'intento iniziale. Adesso si è un po' fermato alla fase proprio solo di conduzione degli orti. Sarà bello magari cercare di trovare una chiave più culturale sull'iniziativa questo sicuramente. Come dice un mio amico: "i progetti camminano sulle gambe degli uomini". Ci vogliono sempre le persone motivate che tentino di creare un qualcosa perché, se le persone non hanno tempo, come nel mio caso, o non hanno magari anche la cultura o l'interesse, è chiaro che è più difficile. Io dico

sempre che tutto quello che nasce, nasce perché ci sono delle persone che ci credono. Quindi io stessa sono proveniente da un comune piccolo dove ci sono gli orti, dove io ho l'orto, quindi diciamo che la mia personale attenzione c'è perché comunque io vivo la realtà dell'orto vivo quello che è. Quindi anche questo, secondo me, ha un valore aggiunto. Non perché sono io, ma perché è una persona, insomma, che di orti se ne intende. Dopo sarebbe bello avere il tempo e soprattutto la possibilità di coniugare l'aspetto culturale, ecco. Speriamo di riuscire con la prossima amministrazione.

(Talking about the management of the single plots)

### **Umbertilla Bisco**

Ci sono concessionari che sembrano avere l'orto che sembra un giardino, mentre altri è un'altra roba. E però lì non gli puoi dire, è come casa tua, no? Nel senso, ci sono delle persone che vivono bene in una casa super ordinata, ci sono delle persone che vivono in una casa più disordinata. Quindi dipende dalla sensibilità di ognuno di usare le cose in un modo o nell'altro, perché è la stessa cosa. Una persona la vede come disordine e un'altra persona la vede come una, come un modo di gestire. Ecco, qui ci sono degli orti che alcune persone dicono sono disordinati. Io che sono andato dico no, non sono disordinati, sono gestiti così. Lasciano i pali lì nei pressi, i supporti per le piante eccetera, oppure lasciano lì l'erba. Ci sono delle persone che non tirano via l'erba perché dicono che l'erba fa ambiente, concime, eccetera. Dipende dalla sensibilità. Io ho un vicino di casa che gestisce l'orto, che è un biologo, il quale ha l'erba alta 2 m. Allora uno dice, ma cosa gestisci lì? No, lui dice, l'erba è in sé un ambiente che ha insetti, capito? Ecco, se fosse un'altra persona direbbe, Ah, quello lì ha tutta l'erba in mezzo all'orto.