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Foundatio Zamah : FOCUS GROUP, 09 November 2023.

Online, via the jit.si platform

Present:

- 1) Mirela Despotović – CCI
- 2) Jana Prević Finderle – Pazin
- 3) Anton Finderle – Pazin
- 4) Nikolina Turčinović Dupor – Green Click
- 5) Daša Filipčić – Green Click
- 6) Bruna Fember – association Zdravi pinklec
- 7) Adriana Stanivuk – Zagreb
- 8) Drago Vrucinić – Swing
- 9) Ana Balić – Zamah/ Zdravi pinklec d.o.o.

Started at 17:00, finished at 18:50

Mirela Despotović, as moderator of the focus group, welcomed the participants and made an introduction to the project, the role of focus group members and the goals of the focus group. After the inspection, the present members of the focus group introduced themselves and their commitment to urban agriculture and ecology in general.

This was followed by an exchange of knowledge and opinions on 11 pre-set questions, which the facilitator formed into 3 groups:

### **1. How to start a community gardening? What are the basic assumptions that a potential grower should fulfill?**

In response to the first question, through the general attitude of the focus group members, we can conclude that for starting a community garden there are several basic assumptions that a potential grower should fulfill. These assumptions may include:

- There is a need to identify a suitable location: Find a suitable space for the community garden, such as a vacant lot, unused land, or even rooftops. Ensure that the location receives adequate sunlight and has access to water.
- Secure land Permission: Obtain permission from the landowner or relevant authorities to use the chosen location for community gardening. This may involve contacting local government agencies, community organizations, or private landowners.



- Form a Core Group: Gather a group of interested individuals who are passionate about community gardening. This core group will be responsible for planning, organizing, and managing the community garden project.
- Establish Goals and Guidelines: Define the goals and objectives of the community garden project. Determine the guidelines for participation, such as membership requirements, plot allocation, and maintenance responsibilities.
- Engage the Community: Reach out to the local community to generate interest and support for the community garden. This can be done through community meetings, flyers, social media, or local newsletters. Encourage community members to get involved and contribute to the project.
- Plan the Garden Layout: Develop a layout plan for the community garden, considering factors such as plot sizes, pathways, communal areas, and water access points. This plan should accommodate the needs and preferences of the community gardeners.
- Establish Garden Rules: Create a set of rules and guidelines for gardeners to follow, including guidelines for organic gardening practices, pest management, and maintenance responsibilities. These rules will help ensure a harmonious and productive community gardening experience.
- Provide Resources: Identify and secure necessary resources for the community garden, such as gardening tools, compost, seeds, and water sources. Seek partnerships with local businesses, organizations, or government agencies that can provide support or donations.
- Foster Collaboration and Education: Encourage collaboration and knowledge-sharing among community gardeners. Organize workshops, training sessions, or educational events to enhance gardening skills, sustainable practices, and community engagement.
- Maintain Communication: Establish effective communication channels to keep gardeners informed about updates, events, and important announcements. This can be done through email lists, social media groups, or regular meetings.

By meeting most of the above assumptions, it is possible to lay the foundations for a successful community gardening project, encouraging community engagement, promoting sustainable practices and creating a vibrant green space for the local community. Some of those present emphasized that everything depends on the motivation of the one who initiates it

## **2. What is the obstacle to urban food production and its development? what is the impact of climate change**

The prevailing opinion in the group is that there are several reasons for the obstacles to urban food production and its development. One significant obstacle is the limited availability of land in urban areas. Urban environments are often characterized by



high population density and limited open spaces, making it difficult to find suitable land for agriculture.

Lack of access to resources such as water and sunlight. Urban areas have limited access to clean water sources, and buildings and infrastructure can create shading, reducing the amount of sunlight available for plant growth.

In addition, urban agriculture faces challenges related to soil quality and contamination. Urban soils can be contaminated with pollutants, heavy metals or chemicals, which can affect crop health and productivity.

Furthermore, the high cost of land and limited financial resources can prevent the development of urban food production. Urban agriculture requires investment in infrastructure, equipment and resources, which may not be financially feasible for individuals or communities with limited resources. The attitude of those present is that more or less everyone who is interested today does not have enough financial resources.

Climate change can lead to increased temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns and extreme weather events such as droughts or floods. These changes can disrupt agricultural production, affect crop yields and food availability.

Urban areas, with their heat-absorbing infrastructure and limited green spaces, are particularly vulnerable to the urban heat island effect, which exacerbates the impacts of climate change. Higher temperatures can stress plants, increase water demand and make urban agriculture more challenging.

Climate change is also affecting pest and disease dynamics, leading to increased risks to crops. Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns may favor the spread of pests and diseases, requiring additional management strategies and resources to protect urban crops.

In summary, barriers to urban food production and development include limited land availability, resource scarcity, soil pollution, and financial constraints. The impact of climate change on urban food production includes increased temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, and increased risks from pests and diseases.

**3. What is your opinion about potential obstacles for urban growers regarding the changes in atmospheric and climate conditions in cities compared to rural areas. What possibilities are there to still produce healthy food with little effort?**

We face several potential obstacles due to changes in atmospheric and climatic conditions in cities compared to rural areas. Urban environments often have higher temperatures, reduced air quality, limited space and increased levels of pollution,



which can affect food production. However, there are opportunities to produce healthy food with little effort by applying certain strategies:

1. **Vertical Farming:** Vertical farming involves growing crops in vertically stacked layers, using artificial lighting and controlled environments. This method enables efficient use of space and reduces the influence of atmospheric and climatic conditions on crop growth.
2. **Hydroponics and Aeroponics:** Hydroponics and aeroponics are soilless growing techniques that use nutrient-rich water or mist to grow plants. These methods can be carried out indoors or in controlled environments, reducing the impact of atmospheric conditions and enabling year-round production.
3. **Greenhouse Cultivation:** Greenhouses provide a controlled environment for plant growth, protecting crops from extreme weather conditions and air pollution. By regulating temperature, humidity and light, greenhouse cultivation can help urban growers produce healthy food with less sensitivity to atmospheric and climate change. It is difficult to find space and fulfill other requirements related to urban space.
4. **Rooftop Gardens:** Using rooftops for gardening can help mitigate the impact of atmospheric conditions in cities. Rooftop gardens can provide insulation, reduce the heat island effect and improve air quality. They also offer opportunities for urban growers to produce fresh food in limited space.
6. The majority of attendees agree that community gardens provide a space for urban growers, hobbyists and ordinary citizens to come together and encourage sharing of resources and overcoming obstacles together. By pooling efforts and knowledge, community gardens can make urban food production more accessible and successful.
7. **Sustainable practices:** Applying sustainable practices such as composting, water conservation and organic farming techniques can help urban growers produce healthy food while minimizing the impact on atmospheric and climatic conditions.

#### **4. What are the possible advantages of urban gardening compared to rural areas**

Urban gardening offers several advantages compared to rural areas. Some possible advantages include:

**Accessibility:** Urban gardening brings food production closer to where people live, making fresh and healthy produce more accessible to community members. Urban gardening maximizes the use of limited space in cities. By using rooftops, balconies, vertical structures and community gardens, urban growers can produce a significant amount of food in a small area, making efficient use of urban land. Urban gardening reduces the need to transport food long distances from rural areas to cities. In addition to financial savings, this can help reduce transport-related carbon emissions and contribute to a more sustainable food system. Community gardens are thought to



provide a great space for people to gather, share knowledge and build relationships, creating a sense of belonging and community cohesion.

Urban gardening can contribute to environmental sustainability. Green spaces in cities help mitigate the urban heat island effect, improve air quality and provide habitats for biodiversity. In addition, urban growers can adopt sustainable practices such as composting, rainwater harvesting and organic farming techniques. Representatives from the Green Clique emphasized that urban gardening offers educational opportunities for individuals, schools and communities, which they regularly do. It provides hands-on learning experiences about food production, nutrition and environmental protection. Urban gardens can serve as outdoor classrooms and promote awareness of sustainable food systems. All agreed that urban gardening promotes physical activity, reduces stress and improves psychological well-being. Access to fresh, locally grown produce can also contribute to healthier diets and overall health outcomes.

#### **5. What foods are most important to grow in the city? What helps urban food to become more resilient**

In urban areas, it is important to prioritize the cultivation of certain foods that are well adapted to the urban environment and contribute to the resilience of urban food systems. Some key foods that are important to grow in the city include: Leafy greens: Leafy greens like lettuce, spinach, kale and Swiss chard are highly nutritious and can be grown in small spaces. They are harvested relatively quickly and ensure a continuous supply of fresh greens.

Herbs: Herbs such as basil, mint, parsley and cilantro are a popular choice for urban gardens, and are especially easy to maintain on balconies. They can be grown in containers or vertical gardens and add flavor to a variety of dishes. Root vegetables: Some root vegetables such as radishes, carrots and beets can be grown in urban gardens. They require well-drained soil and can be grown in raised beds or containers.

Berries: Certain types of berries, such as strawberries and raspberries, can be grown in urban gardens. They can be grown in containers or vertical structures and produce a tasty and nutritious harvest. Several factors can help to increase the resilience of urban food systems:

Sustainable practices: Applying sustainable practices such as organic farming, composting and water conservation helps reduce the environmental impact of urban food production and increases its resilience.

Community engagement: Building strong community networks and involving residents in urban gardening fosters resilience. Sharing knowledge, resources and experiences can help overcome challenges and ensure the long-term success of urban food systems. Local partnerships: Collaboration with local organizations, businesses and government agencies can strengthen urban food systems.



Partnerships can provide access to resources, funding and expertise, contributing to the resilience and sustainability of urban food production.

## **6 What political decisions are necessary to establish new concepts for urban agriculture**

In order to establish new concepts for urban agriculture, it is necessary to make political decisions. These decisions may vary depending on the specific context and country. Everyone agrees that local politics is not very favorable to the development of urban agriculture, nor to encouraging young people to engage in it.

National and local policies can designate zones for urban agriculture, pass laws on incentives and how land is used: This can include designating specific areas or zones where urban agriculture is allowed and ensuring that regulations are in place to support its development.

## **7. How to deal with bureaucratic challenges that are major barriers to the expansion of urban farming.**

Cooperation with local government: It is crucial to establish a dialogue with local government officials and relevant departments responsible for urban planning, agriculture and land regulations. By engaging in constructive discussions, urban farmers can raise awareness of the benefits of urban agriculture and advocate for policies and regulations that support them.

- Building partnerships with community organizations, non-profit organizations and advocacy groups should be encouraged. They can amplify the voice of urban farmers and create a collaborative effort to address bureaucratic challenges. These organizations can provide resources, expertise and support in managing bureaucratic processes.

Urban farmers can work for policy reforms by actively participating in public consultations, submitting proposals and participating in advocacy campaigns. By highlighting the economic, environmental and social benefits of urban agriculture, they can influence policy makers to revise regulations and create more favorable conditions for urban agriculture.

Implementation of pilot projects and demonstrations can demonstrate the positive impact of urban agriculture on the community. By providing tangible examples of successful urban agriculture initiatives, it becomes easier to convince bureaucrats and policy makers of the value and potential of urban agriculture. We emphasize that good cooperation with the media is necessary here.

Simplifying and streamlining the permitting process for urban agriculture can help overcome bureaucratic challenges. This may include creating specific permits or permits tailored to urban agriculture, reducing administrative burdens and establishing clear guidelines for compliance.



In Croatia, problems often arise due to fragmented decision-making in different government departments. Encouraging interdepartmental cooperation and coordination can help streamline processes and ensure holistic support for urban agriculture initiatives. Educating the public about the benefits of urban agriculture can build support and pressure bureaucratic systems to adapt. Public awareness campaigns, workshops and community involvement initiatives can help dispel misconceptions and build a wider understanding of the importance of urban agriculture.

### **8. What is, and if it is, How does the potential of urban agriculture influence an important role in community development?**

Urban agriculture has the potential to play an important role in community development. It offers various benefits that can positively impact communities in several ways.

Firstly, urban agriculture can contribute to food security and access to fresh, nutritious produce. By growing food locally within urban areas, communities can reduce their dependence on distant food sources and have greater control over their food supply. This is particularly significant in areas known as "food deserts," where access to affordable and healthy food is limited.

Secondly, urban agriculture can promote environmental sustainability. By utilizing vacant lots, rooftops, or vertical farming techniques, urban agriculture maximizes the use of limited urban space. It reduces the need for long-distance transportation of food, thereby decreasing carbon emissions and environmental impact. Additionally, urban farming can contribute to improved air quality, biodiversity, and urban heat island mitigation.

Thirdly, urban agriculture can enhance community engagement and social cohesion. It provides opportunities for individuals to connect with nature, learn about food production, and engage in meaningful activities. Community gardens and urban farming initiatives often foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and shared responsibility among participants. This can strengthen social ties, promote cultural exchange, and improve overall community well-being.

Furthermore, urban agriculture can have economic benefits. It can create employment opportunities, particularly in areas with high unemployment rates. Local food production and sales can stimulate the local economy, support small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs, and contribute to the development of a sustainable and resilient local food system.



In summary, the potential of urban agriculture to influence community development is significant. It can address food security, promote environmental sustainability, enhance community engagement, and contribute to economic growth. By integrating urban agriculture into community development strategies, cities can create healthier, more sustainable, and inclusive communities

**9. In your opinion, is urban agriculture a part of a broader horticultural approach to urban greening that encompasses more than fruits and vegetables? If so, why?**

Yes, urban agriculture is indeed a part of a broader horticultural approach to urban greening that encompasses more than just fruits and vegetables. While urban agriculture primarily focuses on the cultivation of food crops in urban areas, it is not limited to fruits and vegetables alone. It also includes the cultivation of herbs, spices, medicinal plants, and even ornamental plants.

Urban greening aims to enhance the green spaces and vegetation within urban environments, providing numerous benefits such as improved air quality, reduced urban heat island effect, and increased biodiversity. Urban agriculture contributes to these goals by incorporating various types of plants, not only for food production but also for their aesthetic, ecological, and health-related benefits.

In addition to providing fresh and locally grown produce, urban agriculture can include the cultivation of flowering plants, shrubs, and trees that beautify urban landscapes, attract pollinators, and provide habitat for wildlife. It can also involve the use of green roofs, vertical gardens, and urban forestry practices, which further contribute to urban greening efforts.

Furthermore, urban agriculture promotes sustainable and regenerative practices such as composting, rainwater harvesting, and organic farming methods. These practices not only support food production but also contribute to the overall health and resilience of urban ecosystems.

Therefore, urban agriculture is an integral part of a broader horticultural approach to urban greening as it encompasses a wide range of plant cultivation, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, ornamental plants, and various sustainable practices that enhance the ecological, social, and aesthetic aspects of urban environments.

**10. How urban agriculture affects the air and how to improve it, in what way urban agriculture can connect other areas**

Urban agriculture can have a positive impact on air quality in urban areas and can also serve as a means to connect different areas.

1. Air Quality: Urban agriculture can contribute to improving air quality in several ways:





- Carbon Sequestration: Plants absorb carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change.
- Pollution Filtration: Vegetation in urban agriculture can act as a natural filter, trapping and reducing air pollutants such as particulate matter and harmful gases.
- Oxygen Production: Through photosynthesis, plants release oxygen into the atmosphere, increasing oxygen levels and improving air quality.
- Cooling Effect: Vegetation in urban agriculture can provide shade and reduce the urban heat island effect, which can help lower temperatures and improve air quality.

2. Connecting Areas: Urban agriculture can serve as a means to connect different areas in several ways:

- Community Engagement: Urban agriculture initiatives often involve community participation, bringing people together from different backgrounds and fostering social connections.
- Shared Spaces: Urban agriculture can create shared spaces such as community gardens or rooftop farms, providing opportunities for interaction and collaboration among residents.
- Food Distribution: Urban agriculture can connect urban areas with nearby rural or peri-urban areas, facilitating the distribution of fresh, locally grown produce to urban communities.
- Green Corridors: Urban agriculture can be integrated into green infrastructure planning, creating green corridors that connect different parts of the city and promote biodiversity.

To improve the air quality through urban agriculture, some strategies include:

- Planting a diverse range of vegetation, including trees, shrubs, and flowering plants, to maximize the air purification potential.
- Implementing sustainable farming practices that minimize the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, reducing air pollution.
- Encouraging the use of composting and organic waste management to minimize methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas.
- Promoting the adoption of green infrastructure, such as green roofs and vertical gardens, to increase vegetation cover and enhance air quality.

In terms of connecting other areas, urban agriculture can be integrated into urban planning and development strategies. This can involve creating networks of community gardens, establishing farmers' markets, supporting urban farming cooperatives, and implementing policies that encourage the use of vacant lots for agricultural purposes. By connecting different areas through urban agriculture, communities can benefit from increased access to fresh food, improved social cohesion, and enhanced environmental sustainability.



## **11. What are the incentive policies of new agricultural policies, which directly affect the reduction of the impact of climate change**

Financial incentives: Governments can provide financial support to farmers through grants, subsidies or tax incentives. These incentives can help farmers invest in climate-smart technologies, such as precision agriculture, renewable energy systems or efficient irrigation methods.

Everyone agrees that incentives can be a great tool for young people who want to engage in agriculture. Urban agriculture and incentives for it can be the first step for young people to try their hand at this vocation. The members of the focus group are of the opinion that very few people dare to embark on these ventures without government incentives.

Governments can allocate funds for research and development in agriculture, specifically aimed at climate change mitigation and adaptation. This can lead to the development of innovative agricultural practices, crop varieties or technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to climate change.

Training and technical assistance: Incentive policies often include provisions for training programs and technical assistance to help farmers adopt climate-friendly practices. This may include workshops, demonstrations or one-to-one support to ensure farmers have the knowledge and skills to effectively apply sustainable farming techniques.

Certification and labeling programs: Governments can establish certification or labeling programs that recognize and promote climate-friendly agricultural products. These programs can encourage farmers to adopt sustainable practices by creating market demand for environmentally friendly products.

### **Conclusion:**

The conclusion is that everyone present thinks that urban agriculture is an interesting and necessary direction, especially when viewed through the lens of climate change. In order to popularize urban agriculture, the attitude is that education is necessary, as well as the purpose that comes from it. Existing initiatives are not enough to encourage not only young people, but also everyone else to change. If there were a proposal that would come from the system (at all levels), urban agriculture would find its users faster and easier.