

Community gardens in Mănăştur

FC Cluj-Napoca



NBS 3



NBS 6

Project indicative: CJ3.1
Project type: complex project
Project starting point: 0-5 yrs.
Project ending point: 0-5 yrs.
Linkages: CJ 3.4

Estimated costs: 300-500K (can vary a lot depending on the extend of infrastructure work)

Type of NBS intervention

NBS 3 is mixing: (1) Individual plots used by residents based on an agreement with the municipality (1 to 3 year contract granted based on application – there is already a proposal for the selection criteria and administrative procedures developed by local NGO); (2) box gardens integrated into new landscape design (intervention will play a secondary role of community public space) – with shared maintenance by local community members; (3) multifunctional public space: relaxation and leisure areas.

The interventions in the area aim at transforming the gardens into an accessible green corridor by ensuring easy access from the upper part of the slope/hill and towards the lower part and existing pathways. Two existing staircases are proposed to be renovated, the – greenery adjacent to the staircases will adapt pollinator-friendly plantings – see image below.

Description of planned interventions

The site currently represents a physical and visual barrier (low level of accessibility and view towards garages and invasive vegetation). Therefore, the plan needs to improve connectivity, ensure accessibility from the south (upper part of the slope) and north (lower part of the slope), integrate existing gardens and modernise them.

Vision



Source: proGreeg – Food forest and permaculture orchard in Huckarde



Current situation – the area is constituted as an ecologic corridor. Source: ADIZMC



Example: community garden in Cascais



Staircase proposed for rehabilitation. Source: Codruț Popina

Scenarios

Do-it-all (best-case)

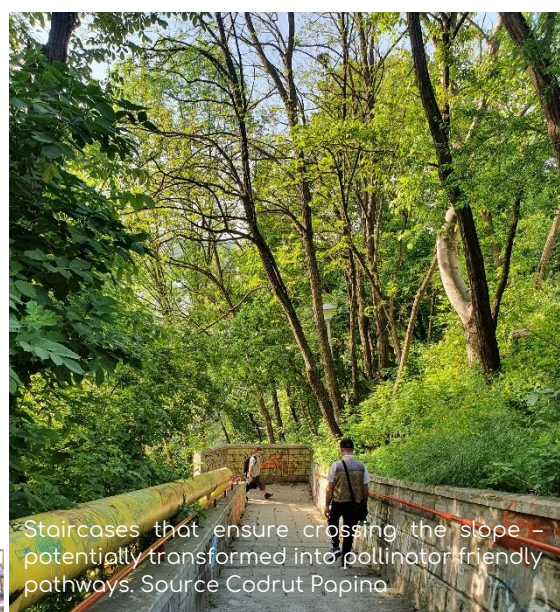
The existing gardens will become the first pilot project for urban gardening in Cluj-Napoca. Residents are the driving forces behind this transformation having constructed the informal gardens (considered key target group), collaborating with the municipality and local NGOs involved in sustainable topics. The existing gardens are being modernised and extended while new facilities are easily accessible, representing a significant improvement to the local landscape of the neighbourhood. This creates context for enhanced community interaction.

Do something meaningful

The existing gardens will be modernised and secured, without any extension. Local community members will continue to benefit from the area in an organized and secure manner. Former users of the informal gardens will be required to adhere to the new regulations according to established local policy. Complying with regulations will ensure long-term use of the facility



Existing informal vegetable gardens. Source Codrut Papina



Staircases that ensure crossing the slope - potentially transformed into pollinator friendly pathways. Source Codrut Papina



Study area

The study area has an approximate surface of 1.1 ha - representing an important component of the existing green infrastructure consisting of a steep slope with dense vegetation. Despite some valuable vegetation the area is in need of cleaning actions and implementing measures to properly secure the site (notably in case of demolishing the existing garages). The area features informal vegetable gardens established by the local communities, indicating a clear need for legalising, and extending NBS 3 interventions. The existing facilities must be formalised and open to all interested community members. Piloting this initiative is recommended to be free of costs for the users.

Local planning frameworks

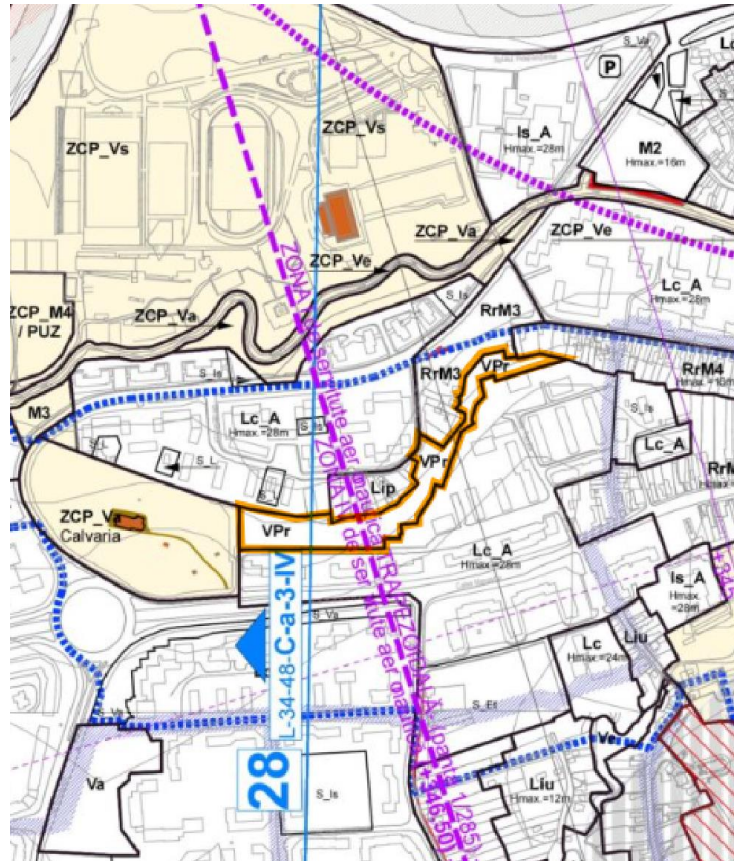
Three key documents are relevant in relation to specific regulations and conditions:

1. **General Urban Plan:** The land in question is designated as *Vpr*, which represents green areas protected against major infrastructure development. Its purpose is to provide sanitary protection and facilitate the planting of vegetation to stabilize slopes and support ecological reconstruction. Various types of planting are allowed (high, medium, and low) as per specific norms outlined for each category of land use. Additionally, certain uses are permitted including pedestrian pathways, platforms, bike tracks and landscaping interventions, provided they adhere to the specified conditions with primary focus on the protective role of green areas.

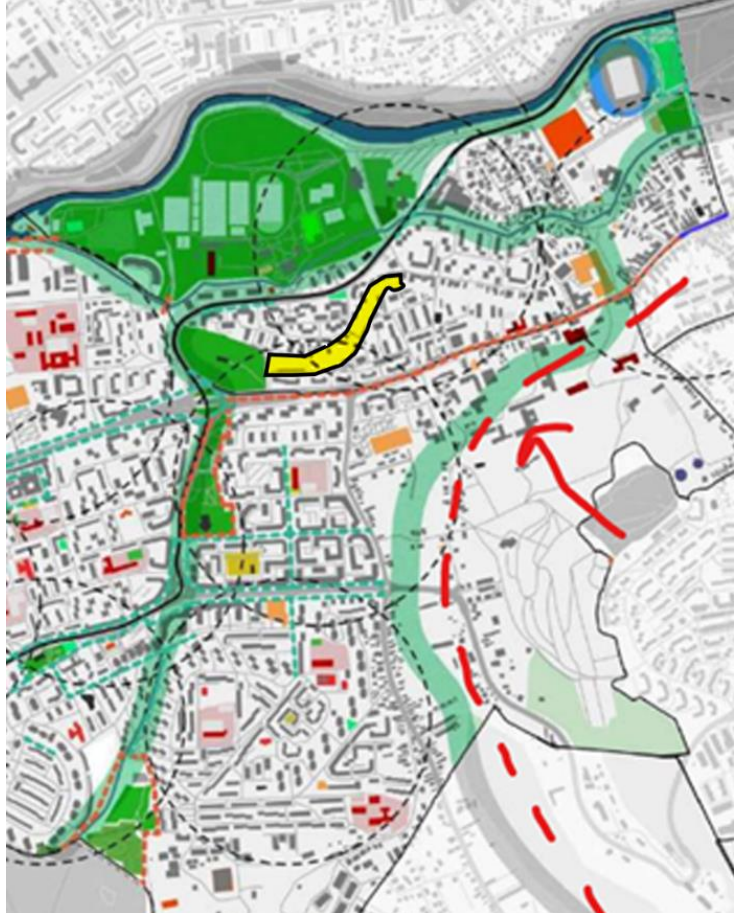
2. **Law approved by the Local Council (Hotărâre nr. 311/1998):** This law explicitly prohibits parking vehicles and animals on green areas. Furthermore, it restricts any changes in the designated purpose of green spaces, disallowing conversion into parking lots, vegetable gardens, or other landscaping forms.

3. **SIDU (Integrated Urban Development Strategy):** A comprehensive analysis of the neighbourhood has been conducted as part of this strategy. Based on the findings, several recommended interventions and measures have been identified, particularly relevant to the design of NBS3 (Neighbourhoods-Based Solution 3). These recommendations include preparing urban regeneration documents for the neighbourhood, aiming to enhance the quality of existing green spaces in collective housing areas. Additionally, the strategy proposes establishing connections with future interventions around Canalul Morii, reconfiguring parking areas, and creating additional green corridors (vegetation alignments) along the neighbourhood's main streets.

General Urban Plan extract



SIDU 2030 extract



- PUBLIC SPACE
- Realised interventions
- - - Interventions ongoing/finished
- - - New proposed interventions

Challenges of the site

- Accurately transforming the current vegetable gardens into a community garden presents a pertinent challenge, requiring the active involvement and empowerment of existing users as local garden managers.
- Lack of a seamless pedestrian connections to future green areas of Canalul Morii.
- Inclusive accessibility and the creation of safe pedestrian pathways (due to the sloped terrain).
- Local law (HCL 311/1998) prohibiting community gardening on public land.



Key considerations

Informal gardens must be transformed, modernised and OPEN to other RESIDENTS. Besides the informal nature, the gardens are not inclusive! Only some members took initiative and responsibility to create this space. It is key to work with the existing users of the “illegal” garden and to involve them gradually. They can become advocates of the garden and “managers” or administrators. Also, they can be the ones to pass the knowledge to future users.

Operational objectives

- Rehabilitation of the public space.
- Improved local landscape – transformed into a productive and ecologic area.
- Improved accessibility with and rehabilitation of existing staircases, and additional pedestrian connection on the slope
- Create a successful first urban gardening pilot for mainstreaming the solution in the Cluj area.
- Empower residents and conduct training sessions for sustainable agriculture techniques, ensuring the sustainability of the community gardens.

Targets:

- 200-300m of green pedestrian pathway crossing the slope.
- Rehabilitated/Modernised vegetable gardens: 300 sqm.
- Extended plot gardens: 500 sqm, equivalent of 20-25 individual plots (along with space for pedestrian pathways).
- Multifunctional social interaction space: 100-250 sqm.
- Raised box gardens: 10-15 units (2x1m).

Partners

Beneficiaries: Municipality in collaboration with housing association and members of the local community

Additional Investors / Shareholders: NGOs, Local Municipality, Association of Intercommunal Development Cluj (ADIZMC), OAR Transylvania, Universities (UBB, USAMV)

Users: Residents, and existing user of the informal vegetable gardens

Actions

Formalize agreement with existing garden users to become advocates for other users of the garden extensions and "managers" of the new community garden. Involve local NGOs in the process.

Landscaping actions: removing invasive vegetation, additional planting with ecologic and ornamental role, and planting acting as buffer zone.

Improve public space and related infrastructures: demolish garages, improve accessibility by cleaning the site, modernize existing gardens, secure the site (lighting and fence for steep slopes)

Raise awareness and ensure constant public communication on pilot progress. The success of CJ3.1 will heavily affect the deployment of local policy for formalizing and mainstreaming community gardens in Cluj area.

City planning

The project considers the ongoing projects on the Someș Riverbanks. According to SIDU 2030, it is recommended to develop the Masterplan and PUZ corridor for Canalul Morii. Project ideas for this area have been identified during the analysis process: the proGleg project proposes strategic interventions in the continuation of the future Canalul Morii park - the Mânăștiur cornice area - Strada Plopilor. In relation to the interventions on this land, proGleg proposes the development of community garden interventions (NBS3) in the area of collective housing



Design requirements

Accessibility:

- Rehabilitate 2 existing stairs – explore options for inclusive accessibility (steep slope may require a series of ramps)
- The main stairways west of the site: to be transformed into a multifunctional public space, arranging vegetation with leisure/relaxation spaces, and connect the platform with the modernized vegetable gardens.

Landscaping:

- Use distinct (but locally adapted) vegetation to mark the entrances (pollinator-friendly species)
- Clear the site from invasive vegetation and maintain the valuable mature vegetation.
- Create terraces for the community gardens, arranged in the lower part of the slope.
- Ensure a vegetation buffer in the lower part of the site, in relation to the new community gardens.
- Leisure/relaxation space is recommended to be arranged in relation to the alley at the lower part of the slope.
- Arrange garden boxes in relation to the staircase platforms and integrated them into the design of the multifunctional community garden.

Security/Safety:

- Ensure the creation of a buffer zone (min 5m) from the individual housing lots that are adjacent to the site.
- Instal transparent railings where the slope is too steep.

Aesthetics/ambience:

- The dense spontaneous vegetation creates an area with a low level of visibility and a sense of insecurity. It is important that the area is carefully cleaned to create a more open and inviting ambience.

Sustainability/Maintenance:

- Training sessions should include modules/explanations of growing food sustainably (permaculture, inclusion of pollinators in the gardens to improve productivity, use of ecologic solutions for pesticides or fertilizer).
- The existing vegetable gardens use water from existing springs (underground streams). Water quality needs to be checked and create proper infrastructure to use local water resources sustainably.
- Solutions for garbage collection, local composting and a circular economy of waste must be established.

Annexed functions and activities:

- Annexes (sheds) are recommended to be created for the tools. Depending on the process of involving the locals in the detailed co-design of the project and co-implementation of the gardens, the option of having 1 shared facility with tools/equipment must be assessed.

Urban furniture and equipment:

- Benches and leisure areas encouraging for community interaction must be realised using ecologic materials. It is recommended to use the wood resulting from site cleaning, together with other ecologic materials, to create benches, pergolas, fences, or wood-paved pathways/platforms.

Infrastructure works

- The site requires infrastructure works for making it safe: lighting and potential fences are needed after the garages in the upper part of the slope are demolished, together with the above-mentioned accessibility requirements. For public lighting, it is recommended to utilize solar panel powered lighting poles.