



NBS 3

Community gardens in collective housing neighbourhoods

Project indicative: CJ3.4

Project type: policy and regulation proposal

Project starting point: 0-5 yrs.

Project ending point: 10-15 yrs.

Linkages: CJ3.1, CJ3.2, CJ3.3

FC Cluj-Napoca

Type of NBS intervention

NBS3 Policy and regulation proposal for adaption of community gardens as a common practice at city level, focusing on conversion of small-scale green areas (referred to as green-pockets) within collective housing neighbourhoods. This fiche provides the synthesis of a comprehensive document (elaborated in Romanian language), aimed at overcoming legislative barriers at local level, particularly the law that is prohibiting vegetable gardens in public spaces. The policy and regulation proposal advocates four typologies of NBS 3 interventions suitable for collective housing neighbourhoods' contexts: (1) Modular gardens – raised beds plantations; (2) Individual plots for gardening; (3) Urban orchards; (4) Multifunctional community green spaces that includes at least 1 of the previously mentioned typologies.

Logic of the policy/regulation proposal

During the 1960-80s period, collective housing neighbourhoods were established as social housing areas, providing high living standards until today. The modular developments feature numerous small-scale green spaces that collectively contribute to a high percentage of greenery and an overall pleasant landscape within the neighbourhoods. However, managing these green spaces proves challenging. Currently owned by the municipality, these areas receive minimal attention regarding vegetation maintenance and inclusion/adaptation of very relevant and valuable amenities for social interaction.

Because of the absence of formally established public spaces, these green pockets are either informally utilized by the local community or left neglected. Some residents of ground-floor apartments have converted these areas into impromptu vegetable gardens or leisure spaces, adorned with ornamental vegetation. This led to the urgent need to adapt - the municipality must endorse frameworks that empower residents to assume ownership of these green areas and participate in ecological activities in a structured and coordinated manner.

Vision



Scenarios

Do-it-all (extract)

CJ3.4

In the regeneration strategies/projects of collective housing neighbourhoods proposed within SIDU (see Local frameworks chapter), NBS 3 is permitted, and specific budgets are allocated for implementation. The intervention is piloted in key areas of intervention 1, 2, and 3 (Mânăştur, Nădăşel, Timişului), consolidating community gardens as a common practice in the Cluj-Napoca area. Awareness campaigns are organized, contributing to the increasing popularity of community urban gardens. The municipality is offering support for implementation. Through NGOs involvement transgenerational interaction is being encouraged. There is recommended that the gardens do not require any fee/costs from the users.

Do something meaningful (extract)

Community gardens have become required assets in collective housing unit neighbourhoods. The NBS is adopted at municipality level, and public authorities provide support for implementing interventions only based on a formal request by the housing associations. However, the solution is not integrated into future regeneration strategies, or such strategies will not be realized. Thus, specific dedicated budgets are not allocated. Support for housing associations will be offered in different ways, based on negotiations and available resources



Example of potential site

Developments have a modular morphology. Small-scale green spaces hold relevant value for adaptation of NBS.

Study area



Existing informal vegetable gardens in many neighbourhoods of Cluj-Napoca highlight citizens' willingness and need to make use of the available land (that is not managed as public space) and engage in gardening activities.

All areas selected present similar characteristics: presence of green "pockets" within urban blocks, low level of maintenance, informal interventions and improvisation initiated by residents.

It is key to create a framework that allows citizens to make use of the available land formally and socially inclusive, thus contributing to the green regeneration of the neighbourhoods.

Local planning frameworks

- (1) General Urban Plan (PUG). The areas are regulated as: Lc_A
- (2) SIDU (Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategy). There is recommended the elaboration of zonal or detailed urban regeneration documents (PUZ, PUD) for the reorganization and rehabilitation of the green areas in the collective housing neighbourhoods.
- (3) Law approved by Local Council (Hotărâre nr.311/1998) prohibiting parking of vehicles and animals on green areas or changing the use of green spaces in parking lots, vegetable gardens or landscaping of any kind.

General Urban Plan extract

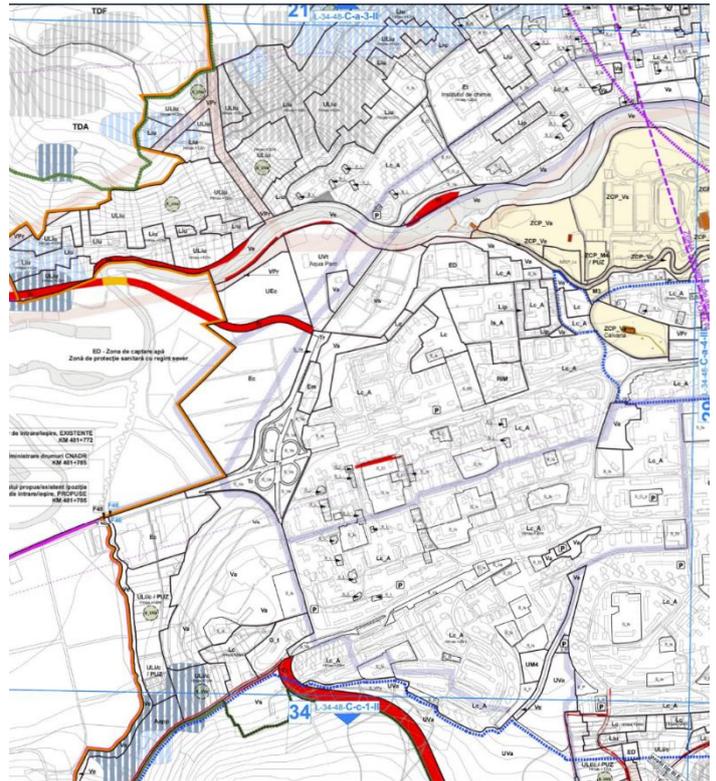


Photo of the current situation. Source: Codruț Popina

Status of the land

Green spaces around block/building is owned by the local authority, not by housing associations. Ownership limited to is the terrain of the building including the usual 80cm concrete border.

Beyond, maintenance and administration rests with the public authority. Therefore, the municipality should have allocated budgets (coming from taxes and resident fees) for maintenance and landscaping of the area. Thus, at least some of the future community gardens can be financed with municipality budget.

Depending on the number of requests from residents, different business models can support implementing urban gardens, taking resources from both parties: municipality and residents.

Handing over and empowering residents to maintain and manage these areas (under commonly agreed conditions) can reduce costs for the municipality in maintaining green spaces.

Challenges

Key challenge is to adopt a local level policy that offers instruments for the implementation, management, and maintenance of NBS 3 in collective housing units. As part of the Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategy 2030 (SIDU), the proposal includes the elaboration of a series of regulatory plans for the urban regeneration of collective housing units. It is recommended to include NBS3 in the future documents as a permitted intervention, assessing for potential locations.

For efficient adaptation of NBS 3 in future investments or initiatives, the municipality must be accountable and open to this proposal. For transparency, the public should have access to a short guideline or platform providing information about the possibility of creating such NBS interventions while showcasing a roadmap to make it happen.

Key characteristics and problems of the identified sites:

- (1) Modular arrangements of green spaces (identified 4 typologies – see next page)
- (2) Informal interventions only accessible by few community members.
- (3) Fences around green spaces hinder access and create "unfriendly" ambiance.
- (4) Waste dumping in neglected sites.

Key considerations

FC Cluj team, with support and coordination from URBASOFIA, has elaborated an extended policy and regulation proposal aimed to convince the political component and administration to abrogate the local legislation and invest in the transformation of green pockets in collective housing neighbourhoods into valuable assets for the local communities and the environment.

Policy impact

Urban gardens can help revitalising neighbourhoods affected by urban decline, deindustrialization, and can help regenerating marginalized urban areas. Key impact generated by the low-cost urban intervention is social, focusing on community members dialogue and citizen empowerment, rather than on urban agricultural productivity.

Thus, apparently "nobody's" spaces, or informally used by just few local community members, becomes open to all. It is recommended the interventions are carried out in collaboration with multiple stakeholders: residents, public authorities, non-profit organizations, and other actors with expertise of co-creation processes. This supports sense of community and citizens directly benefit while incentivising to maintain and care for NBS.

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)

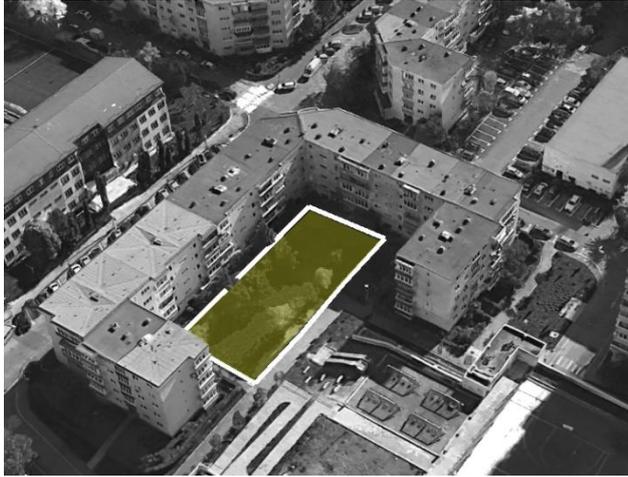
Users: Residents, and existing user of the informal vegetable gardens

Typology of eligible sites

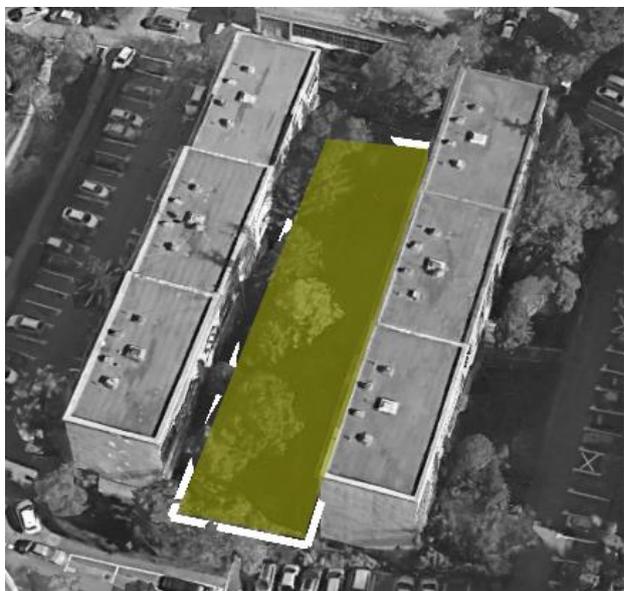
The identified typologies of potential sites are recurrent in the study area. Depending on local requirements, sites can be transformed into 1 of the 4 community garden models proposed.

Type A – inner courtyards (delimited by buildings)

Type B – “Green pockets” or small-scale green space



Type C – green strips (narrow green spaces)



Actions

Phase 0-5 year

Implement small scale initiatives

The municipality / public authorities initiate interventions. It is recommended to collaborate with local NGOs to choose suitable locations and target groups for the first set of community gardens. NGOs link municipality and residents, representing the trust factor and mediating the process.

Phase 5-15 years

Collaboration and Upscaling

Based on initiatives deployed in the first phase, residents are increasingly interested in having access to such facilities. The municipality will be open to receiving requests to implement community gardens. Requests can be made on an open community website or dedicated platform, along with information of other user requirements.

City planning

It is important to have the local law updated to allow community gardens in public spaces. The regulation imposed on the area has to be in line with the General Urban Plan (PUG) requirements. There will not be allowed interventions that change the utilization of the site – the function must be a green space with social function. No constructions, buildings, or relevant architectural structures are allowed (besides open pergolas and benches/relaxation areas).

The extended document for reforming the local legislation describes in detail zoning, functional and environmental requirements for future community gardens.

A key aspect relevant at district and city level is the carrying capacity of neighborhoods for accommodating community gardens. There must be a zoning limit and clear delineation of permitted areas/sites and prohibited areas. For example, it is proposed to forbid community gardens in green spaces in front of the main façade of the building adjacent to the main road.



Example of potential site for adapting NBS3

Proposed community gardens models

Type 1: Modular gardens – raised beds. Type 2: Individual plots for gardening.

Type 1 represents an optimal solution for small plots of land where the implementation of individual plots for gardening can affect the landscape and urban image, or in situations where local communities do not require high productivity land, or the soil is contaminated.



Example FRC Turin OrtoWow

Individual plots in community gardens where cultivation is soil-based. This method of urban gardening is more productive than Model 1 – Small Community Gardens. Minimum plot sizes of 300 sqm are recommended. Appropriate soil preparation required (land levelling, cleaning, creation of access road, fencing - if applicable).



Example: Vegetable garden in Cascois

Type 3: Urban orchards.

Urban orchard-type community gardens represent a flexible solution for several types of land, as alignment type plantations or planted areas can be created. Urban orchards include fruit trees planted, tended, and harvested by the community.



Source <http://ontheplatform.org.uk/article/roots-growing-movement>



Source <https://www.paradisverde.ro/intretinere-livezii/ghid-de-initiere-pentru-infiintarea-unei-livezi-familiale-cu-meri-peri-ciresi>

Type 4: Multifunctional community green spaces.

Multipurpose community gardens offer a variety of activities and services for the benefit of the community. Apart from growing food this type aims to provide multiple benefits/functions at the same time (socializing areas, playgrounds, rest, and relaxation spaces). The purpose of multifunctional community gardens is to ensure a "personalization" of public green spaces by residents in line with specific needs. During the co-creation process in proGleg, residents affirmed the need for multifunctional landscaped spaces that combine nature-based solutions and places for socializing, playgrounds, rest areas, areas with a natural appearance.



Source <https://landezine.com/pine-walk-by-eskis-landscape-architects/>