

ecocivitas

WERTO

URBAN COMMUNITY HORTICULTURE
FOR ALL IN THE TIME OF COVID

INTRODUCTION

Food production and distribution processes cause about 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions and today a large amount of food is produced hundreds or thousands of kilometers from where it is consumed. Although transport emissions represent a very small percentage of total food emissions (6% globally), remote production also has a negative impact on food security, food freshness and local economic growth. It also significantly reduces the connection between food and the people who consume it.

Today, 55 per cent of the world's population lives in urban areas and this proportion is expected to rise to 68 per cent by 2050. So food production in and around cities has great potential to mitigate food insecurity and the climate crisis. However, this potential is not being adequately exploited in Europe.

Urban community horticulture is an activity that can make a significant contribution to increasing the production and consumption of healthy vegetables and fruit in cities. At the same time it can generate a host of social, ecological and economic benefits, while contributing to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the people involved and their environment.

Although the number of urban community gardens in Europe has tended to grow, these constitute only a small fraction of the potentially usable space for horticultural activities, which in some European cities is equivalent to more than four times the current per capita footprint of commercial horticulture.

The lack of access to these spaces and the insufficient technical knowledge of a large part of the citizenry hinders the development of urban community gardens.

Although there is a wide range of information sources on horticulture, both online and in traditional media, very few use standardized resources that facilitate the application of the knowledge offered.

In addition, the precarious social cohesion characteristic of modern urban settings makes it difficult for interested people to establish and maintain the necessary connection to start up a community garden.

All these obstacles have become more difficult to overcome due to the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, today more than ever there is a need for a system that introduces horticulture in a simple and affordable way, offering the necessary knowledge and resources to cultivate in the space available at home while facilitating the connection among people in the same situation within a neighborhood, including the most disadvantaged sectors.

We plan to start this project working with local communities to develop 2 innovative community gardens (20-40 to members per garden) in 2 different district of Zaragoza, Spain.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

This socio-educational project aims to promote citizen integration and social dynamism, as well as to reduce the negative effects of COVID-19 in Zaragoza through a horticultural model that allows the use of available spaces at home to grow produce collectively, including all types of people regardless of their level of knowledge and experience in horticulture.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

WErto is an organic horticulture system, based on a set of innovative ideas and practices, that uses IT to optimize the development of community gardens in any urban environment, focusing on the social benefits of this activity, such as social dynamization, citizen integration, promotion of gender equality and the strengthening of communities.

A community garden is usually defined as the space used by a group of people to grow vegetables and other plants. **WErto** is based on the principle that a community garden is not that cultivated space but the institution (agreement) created by that group of people (community).

With this in mind, it is possible to develop a community garden, even without access to open spaces. Thus, a garden can be set up by a group of people, with each person cultivating in the space available at home (a terrace, a balcony or a window). However, in order to guarantee its proper functioning, this type of garden must have the following components:

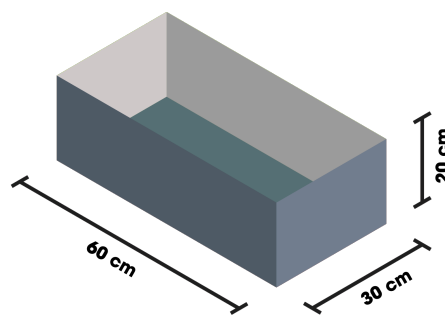
- 👥 **Social agreement:** set of principles and rules.
- 📖 **Horticultural handbook:** compendium of good horticultural practices
- 🗣️ **Communication channel:** platform that allows each member to access, expand and share relevant information.
- 📦 **Cultivation medium:** substrate that allows the growth of plants and container for that substrate.



WERto is based on successful community gardening experiences and simple, efficient and effective horticultural models that facilitate the process of setting up a community garden and simplify the activities of planting, caring for and harvesting vegetables.

The project starts with a series of talks and workshops that present the principles of the model, provide fundamentals on how to grow diverse vegetables at home and explain the benefits of doing this with others.

To optimize horticultural activities in places with limited space, **WERto** uses a standardized cultivation module consisting of an ecological and affordable substrate and a felt container, whose dimensions and properties make it ideal for cultivating in the spaces available at home (terrace, balcony or even a window).



Cultivation module

The use of standard modules greatly facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experiences among the people involved in the project. To stimulate and simplify the communication and cohesion among the participants, **WERto** offers a set of guidelines to make use of IT platforms such as Whatsapp, Telegram, Facebook, etc. Additionally, **WERto** will have a wiki and an online forum that can be used by participants to read, modify, expand and share relevant information to improve horticultural activities and the interaction and integration among participants and between participants and their communities.

This results in healthy food for people and the environment, creating ecological awareness and a greater connection between food and the people who eat it, while improving social cohesion and strengthening the communities involved.

The ability to do all of this from home is particularly important in times of pandemic, as it reduces the risks associated with conventional community garden interactions, while enabling the creation and consolidation of connections among neighbors and generating significant mental and emotional benefits for those involved.

The technical and social learning from this activity can be used to launch future citizen initiatives in post-COVID scenarios including community gardens in public spaces and other activities that strengthen and benefit communities.