

Les Jardins du Zéphyr



52 plots of 30 sq. meters, created in 2008.

Project summary

1. Improve the local residents' homes
2. Create intergenerational and intercultural social links
3. Encourage solidarity by sharing skills, know-how and helping each other
4. Educate people to citizenship

The context

Aulnay-sous-Bois's northern areas, 10 km north from Paris, count around 20 000 people which represent 25% of the city entire population. Those areas have a very negative image due to the problems they combine. The renovation project, which started in

2003, has deeply improved the urban area. Unfortunately poor quality buildings are not the only reason why this area suffers : there's also poverty, unemployment...

In this context, the association "Les Jardins du Zéphyr" ambitions to lead this renovating project to a global change for the area. It aims social relationship and ownership of common areas.

The project

This area, known to be a "tough neighborhood", creates a sense of failure for the people who live there. They believe there is no future for this place they live in. The project was built to fight that belief and to bring value to the area. The aims were to prove successful experiences, showing the area's innovating skills and people's potentials.

So in 2005, when it was suggested that local residents grow their own vegetables and flowers at the bottom of their buildings, they couldn't imagine that would be possible for them. The ground was covered with rubbish thrown from the windows...



There are no real neighborhood community centers in those tough areas. The closed area, the lack of commercial or cultural business, the high density of living, etc., are major obstacles to usability and interactions between people. So it is essential to re-create social interaction for local people and by local people, by meeting them on a playful basis such as gardens, but also by creating cultural activities which are physically implanted in the heart of the area. Wherever they were created, allotment gardens fulfill this

essential need in our modern cities for people to find places to live, places to have social relationships, to exchange, to meet and to celebrate. We can see that allotment gardens bring people together, no matter where they come from and no matter how old they are. Thus, by definition, a garden is a neutral space, free from violence and characterized by its natural, peaceful side.

The “Jardins du Zéphyr” association brings the different stakeholders of the neighborhood together : the City Hall, the social landlord, the associations : “Grajar” (street educators), Femmes Relais (association for Womens’ Literacy), ACSA (community centers), and especially the people who live there. It makes the people meet the associations, networking partners and creating links between those stakeholders.

At last, this project improves the place people are living in, thanks to that small green place in the middle of those 2 blocks called “îlot Zéphyr”. Thus this garden is a haven of nature, which is often missing inside of big cities, especially in Parisian suburbs. People will enjoy simple pleasures offered by nature everyday : singing birds, blooming flowers, fruits, fresh vegetables to eat... Inspired by this and by ecological and organic gardening ethics, the association leads wider actions about environment : cleaning the area, eating properly, saving energy...

In a few words, the association leads a project that improves the people’s place, from an environmental and a social point of view. They want to go on changing the area’s image and to fulfill an original, valuable experience, in order to be an example for new local initiatives. This experience probably is the basis for the sustainable city.

The results

Creating allotment gardens 2 years ago lead to positive results. Even if many problems still exist in those areas, it is obvious that :

- users do respect their gardens and there aren’t but a few malicious deeds from outsiders,
- entertainment for the people, especially for children, are very successful,
- little by little, the area looks better and bad behaviors decrease (for example, throwing rubbish out of the windows)
- there is a great demand for allotment gardens and the social landlord intends to create other sites.



The actors

- Le Logement Francilien : the social landlord, which was the project leader and financial support
- La Fédération Nationale des Jardins Familiaux et Collectifs : the National Association for Allotment Gardens, which was the technical expert, which met the local residents, defined and created the “Jardins du Zéphyr” association
- The “Jardins du Zéphyr” association, which manages the allotment gardens.