08 URBAN GARDENS IN EUROPE
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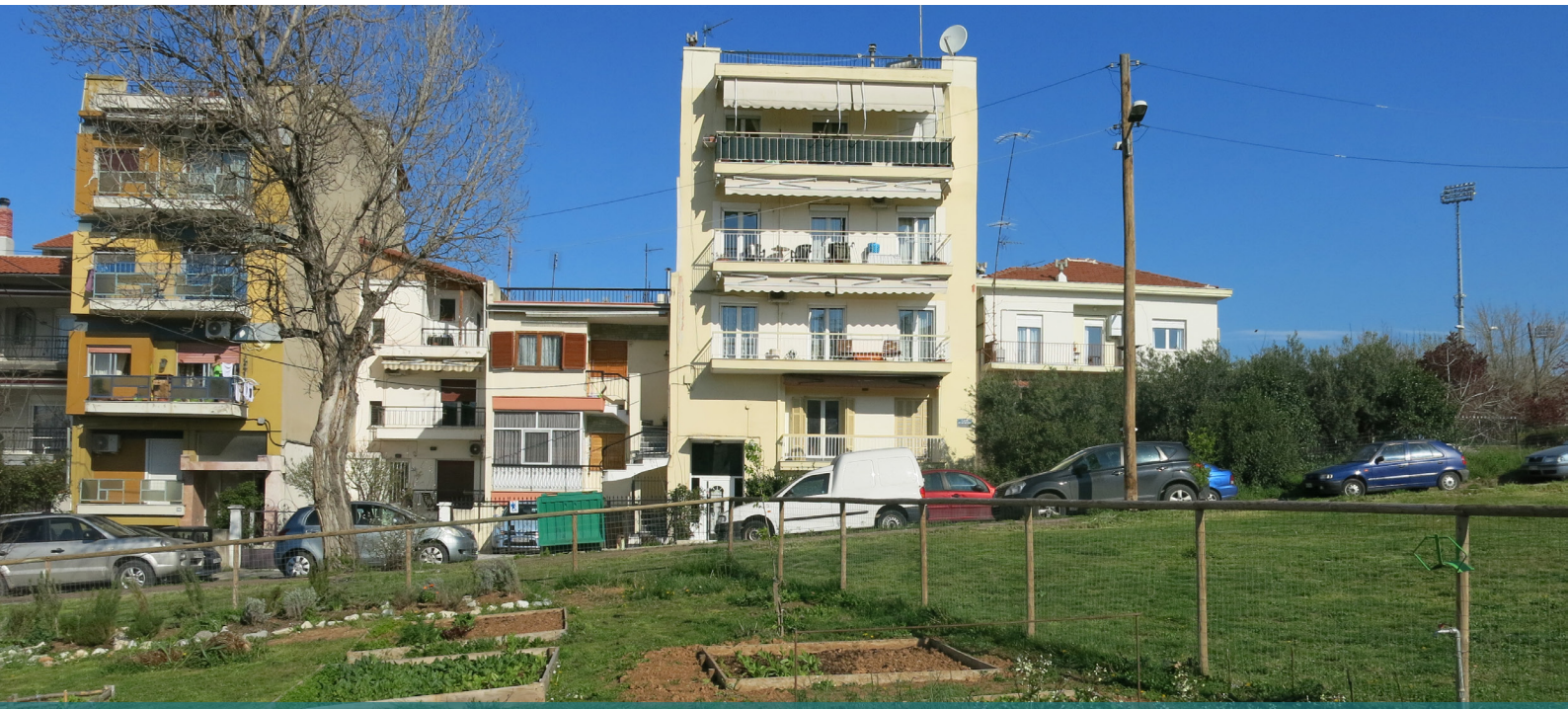

WHAT IS A GOOD LOCATION FROM AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE?

Challenge

The location of an Urban Allotment Garden (UAG) can have an important influence on gardens and user's health. UAGs are often located on temporary sites on residual or unused areas, or as buffer zones between noisy infrastructure and residential areas. The selection/choice of an UAG should take into consideration an environmentally safe location, which can bring additional benefits such as improved health and well-being or nutritious and healthy food.

This factsheet explores how to avoid environmental and human health risks and considers which indicators are useful to help decision-making in location choice.

Gardeners who wish to feel a sense of well-being and to grow healthy and abundant produce will find advice on how to evaluate the impact of local land use on the garden (or on the potential location) alongside the implications of past land-use.

Policy makers (authorities, urban planners…) whose concern is to provide a garden in a safe environment that contributes to increase ecosystems services and social cohesion in the city will find advice on how to support their projects from an environmental perspective.

Image 1 - Garden in close proximity of inhabitants in Thessaloniki, Greece. Photo: Annette Voigt

Image 2 - Birmingham Edible Eastside. Former large industrial zone, England. Photo: Susan Noori

Image 3 - Flooding in Freising, Germany. Photo: Annette Voigt

Advice for Gardeners

What is important to think of in regard to location?

Well-being

- The location should be close and/ or easily reachable by foot, bike or public transportation (proximity, reachability).
- The accessibility for garden tools should be taken into account.
- The garden should be accessible for people with reduced mobility.
- The garden should be enjoyable and safe: not too noisy, no flooding, with communal areas, a good balance between sunshine and shade, no vandalism, no risk of injuries when working in the garden, open for the public.

Abundant and healthy produce

- The soil should be fertile: acidity vs basicity, neither too sandy nor too sticky (medium water retention), organic matter and nutrient rich soil.
- A water supply point should be present.
- Your vegetables will be of good quality i) if the amount of nutrients is enough for vegetable growth, ii) if no pesticides are used, iii) if there is no soil pollution.

What can you do?

- Visit the neighbourhood and talk to residents.
- Avoid brownfield and derelict areas.
- Find areas close to potential gardeners.
- Analyse public transportation as well as bike networks to select an easily accessible site.
- Ensure a barrier-free access to the garden (gentle slope, avoid stairs...).
- Visit potential sites and their surroundings to select a location as far as possible from noise and contamination sources (traffic, industry) as well as from flood risks.
- Visit the site during different hours to evaluate the exposure of plots to sunlight.
- Try to gain information about previous land-use and current impacts. Sometimes city administrations provide relevant information through noise maps, land use registers, contamination assessment, noise maps, etc.
- Use simple, commercially available, tests to assess the quality of soil or seek assistance from environmental experts to evaluate the soil pollution.
- Check the presence of wells, access to water networks and the possibility of rainwater storage.
- Check the possibility as well as the necessity to add amendments to the soil.

Learn More

References:

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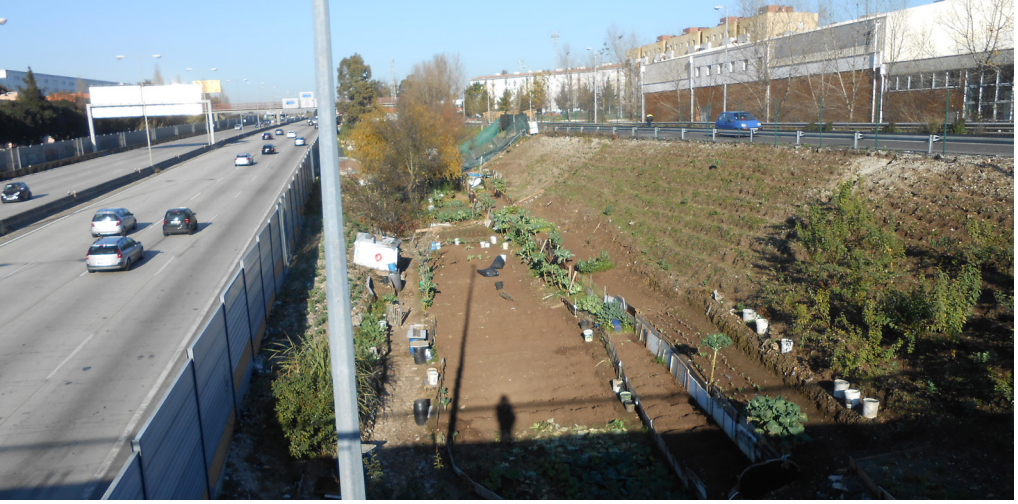

Image 4 - A spontaneous garden near infrastructures, Lisbon, Portugal. Photo: Teresa Leitão

Image 5 - Wind protected garden & communal area, Coueron, France. Photo: Béatrice Béchet

Information for Policy Makers

How to support the project?

Find a location without risks

- Consider the history of sites (former land use) and underlying geology to determine risk of soil and water pollution as well as food contamination and risk of injury.
- Evaluate the impact from current local industrial activities and infrastructures in the neighbourhood.
- Select a site free from natural risks.

Provide plots with good soil quality for growing vegetables and flowers.

The garden may have a positive impact on ecosystem services

- UAGs create or amplify urban green networks/belts and enhance ecosystem services.
- UAGs enhance biodiversity potential.

Where to find information and advice?

- Consult the databases of geological surveys and of former industrial activities.
- Consult noise and wind maps to evaluate the potential noise pollution and impact of activities on air quality and direct soil contamination.
- Evaluate the potential for runoff and flood water from risk maps.
- If you have doubts on soil quality, commission a soil contamination study and determination of quality, basic indicators (texture, pH, organic matter, electrical conductivity, and nutrients over all phosphorus and nitrogen).
- Water is essential: check the feasibility of providing drinkable water or, if this is not possible, check the quality of water that would be pumped in wells (compare with standards).
- Think about using rooftops, raised beds or renewing the soil if there is a risk of soil pollution.
- Select a site adjacent to existing green spaces or wetlands.
- Open the UAG for public recreation.
- Ensure ecological persistence by codifying and including the garden in urban development plans (quiet zones, green belts...).
- Select sites with ecological potential: trees, proximity of wetland or water course, existing habitats for animals, endemic plants.

Learn More

Useful links

http://www.urbanallotments.eu/

http://urbangardenguide.com/

http://www.foodsecuritynews.com/Publications/Community_Garden_Best_Practices_Toolkit.pdf

Case study

The Crapaudine park in Nantes, France and **Parque Hortícola da Granja** in Lisbon, Portugal are good examples of the "parc potager" concept, that is an area where gardeners and other citizens are together sharing space for food production and leisure (playgrounds, pic-nick area, lawns…). As part of the Crapaudine park (public green area), the Crapaudine allotment garden is the living heart of the area along the year (i.e organisation of musical events, scholar group welcome…).

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