

# International Gardens Dietzenbach

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Abstract in English

*“International Gardens Dietzenbach” is one of almost 100 gardening projects under the patronage of the Stiftung Interkultur (Foundation Interculture). Following the example of “International Gardens Göttingen”, in many German Cities intercultural gardening projects were initiated. However, the organisation and result of each gardening project are achieved by the members, who are mainly families with a migratory background as well as German families. One of the “intercultural” ideas behind the project is bringing together families with different nationalities or countries of origin.*

**Area:** Housing, Gardening, Quality of Life  
**Kind-category of project:** integration project, gardening  
**Kind-category of actor:** registered association “Internationale Gärten Dietzenbach – Interkultureller Verein zur Förderung von Eigeninitiative, beruflicher Integration und sozialer Entfaltung e. V.”, foundation “Stiftung Interculture”  
**Country:** Germany  
**City:** Dietzenbach  
**Year:** 2005-2006  
**5 key-words:** integration project, gardening, housing, gender, networking

## 1. THE PROJECT

### 1.1 Description of the project

“International Gardens Dietzenbach” is one of almost 100 gardening projects under the patronage of the Stiftung Interkultur (Foundation Interculture). Following the example of “International Gardens Göttingen”, in many German Cities (and even in one Bosnian town) intercultural gardening projects were initiated. The idea of making it possible for migrants and families with a migratory background to have their own garden was used and transferred to other cities and communities.

This example of an integration project features the “Internationale Gärten Dietzenbach”, a gardening project that took place in a fast growing city near Frankfurt. In short, the activities and objectives of the association and its members are:

- Integration and participation of families with a migratory background in the city's life
- Establishing German as the language of communication, also offering German language courses
- To support the independency of migrants

## **1.2 When and how long: structure and steps of the project**

The project "international gardens" in Dietzenbach took place between November 2005 and October 2006.

The first steps were:

- Gathering of the participants
- Starting German language courses
- Contact and negotiation with politicians
- Networking
- PR
- Looking for sponsors and donators, fundraising

From January 2006, when the lease agreement with the city of Dietzenbach was signed, the preparation of the ground took place

- distribution and design of the parcels
- preparation of the gardening, cultivation of the land

After the cold spell the planting of trees and bushes began. Additionally tool sheds, playgrounds and other facilities were built. On March 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 the ground breaking ceremony took place. During the following months the cultivation and planting was done by the families: chickpeas, lettuce, tomatoes, and pepper are now growing in the gardens. The community area is used as a meeting point and a playground by children. There has been put a fence around the area and the much-needed well has been built. For the future they want to build a community house and a compost toilet. Lately more fruit trees were donated so that an orchard could be planted.

From February to June 2006 the female members of the gardening group but also other women from Dietzenbach with a migratory background took part an alphabetisation course.

## **1.3 Place and context** (*social context description: which are the critical social and cultural aspects the project focuses on*)

### **About Diezenbach in Hessen**

The town of Dietzenbach is located the south-east of the urban agglomeration Frankfurt Rhein-Main. The city's structure is characterised by an old city centre but at the same time it is dominated by residential high rises that were built in the 1970s when the idea of a car-friendly environment with big streets became very popular and the population of Dietzenbach grew rapidly.

Especially the high rise neighbourhood “Spessartviertel” is an area of social conflicts.

### **Population**

Since the 1960s the population of Dietzenbach escalated from 3,000 to 35,000 inhabitants, among them a lot of commuters working in Frankfurt for instance. In contrast to other towns in the region, Dietzenbach has with a number of 30 % a relatively high percentage of migrant inhabitants, in some residential areas such as the Spessartviertel the number reached even 86 %.<sup>1</sup>

### **“Dietzenbach 2030 – definitely incomplete”**

Between 2001 and 2003 the project “Dietzenbach 2030 – definitely incomplete” took place. It was the aim of this project to arouse public interest for one of the most emerging problems of the city: the abundant but unused public space in the city. About 1,000 people used the contact point to inform the project workers about their ideas and possible plans about what to do with the sites. Even 250 people made a request for the actual use of the space and as the report states: “It was also possible to mobilise a group of people that were until this point not so involved in such activities: the citizens with migratory background, among these lots of female migrants. Also old German women, mostly pensioners, were more present than before.”<sup>2</sup>

One result of the project was that there was found a lack in providing the space for gardening especially for the population with a migratory background. 80 % of the requests for use concerned gardening and playgrounds. Particular high was the demand of female Muslims with a migratory background for so-called semi-public spaces.

### **Internationale Gärten Dietzenbach e. V.**

When, in spring 2005, the European Social Fund (ESF) provided the needed means, the idea of using the idle space for gardening and for creating living space was picked up again. Within the scope of the programme “Lokales Kapital für soziale Zwecke” (LOS, local capital for social programmes) which was conducted and financed by the German Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) the non-profit organisation “Internationale Gärten Dietzenbach e. V.” was founded in order to coordinate the following actions.

The number of the participants recently grew from 11 to 15 families from Dietzenbach who come from 7 different countries of origin (Afghanistan, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, the Czech Republic, Turkey and Germany). A further enlargement of the group is planned.

### **Stiftung Interkultur (Foundation Interculture)**

“Stiftung Interkultur” was founded in January 2003. It is based upon the long-standing cooperation between the Munich research association *anstiftung* and the “International Garden association in Göttingen”, the first gardening project of its kind. The immense success of this intercultural garden project and the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bund-bin.de/projekte/anzeige.phtml?id=3014>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bund-bin.de/projekte/anzeige.phtml?id=3014>

widespread interest in its contribution to the integration of immigrants inspired the research association *anstiftung* to establish the foundation Stiftung Interkultur in January 2003.

The foundation offers assistance to communities that want to start an international garden project and functions as a facilitator in the network.

#### **1.4 Target**

The targets of the integration project are:

- Integration and participation of people with a migratory background
- Providing help to learn and practise German
- To connect different groups of migrants and encourage the dialogue between the participants
- To generally improve the quality of life for the people (e. g. of the Spessartviertel)
- To participate actively in the design of the urban landscape
- To prepare a long-term social and economic basis for the project

The main target group of the project were the inhabitants of the problematic living area Spessartviertel, mostly people with a migratory background (but not only) living in high rises without many chances to have an own garden. Besides, especially women were encouraged to take part in the project. The aim was to have international members in the group of participants but at the same time to keep it as multinational as possible, i. e. to have not more than one or two families from the same country. Consequently this was done to encourage the intercultural exchange and to secure that German was used as a collective language for communication.

#### **1.5 Methodology**

From the beginning “Internationale Gärten Dietzenbach” was planned as a community projects, trying to involve as many people as possible and encouraging everyone’s own initiative. How the project workers want to enforce participation:

- To establish a face-to-face and direct contact within the group of participants
- Task sharing: to place responsibility on the families, to develop and discuss rules for the project together
- To organise events together: group activities such as contributing to and presenting oneself at public festivities leads to a common appreciation of the project on the side of Dietzenbach’s inhabitants and might also strengthen the participants self-confidence.

Participants do get their own parcels in the garden, but there is plenty of space for community life: a playground and space for celebrations and spontaneous encounter. In contrast to the usual type of German

“Schrebergarten” (allotment) there were no fences used to separate the single parcels to favour teamwork and make it more possible for the families to get in contact.

As already mentioned the optional German language course was offered to give all the participants the chance learn a language in which they can communicate.

## **1.6 Authors, funding and Networks**

The registered association was founded by several inhabitants of Dietzenbach. Now, there are 15 families involved in the project as members of the association. However, the project planners want to include more families in the project, which is at the moment dependent on the land capacities.

Financially, the project gets grants from German and EU funds. Additionally, private and local donators contribute to the construction and improvement of the gardens. The main sponsors are:

- Support programme “BIN” (Bürger initiieren Nachhaltigkeit/citizens initiate sustainability) Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)
- Support programme “LOS” (Lokales Kapital für soziale Zwecke / local capital for social programmes ) by the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ)
- The European Social Fund (ESF)

Furthermore, there are several cooperation partners on a more local level:

- City of Dietzenbach
- Administrative district Offenbach
- Foreigners representative sitting in the city council of Dietzenbach
- „Runder Tisch für ein humanes Miteinander“
- „Zusammenleben der Kulturen e. V.“
- Stiftung Interkultur (Foundation Interculture)

## **2. COMMENTS AND HINTS FOR AN EVALUATION**

### **2.1. Strengths: "striking new roots"**

Aside from proving a place to do seeding, planting and harvesting, the sites of international gardens serve also other purposes: to create communication, cooperation and new perspectives for and between the members of the gardens. To create an opportunity for the people to gain new ground and, similar to a plant, "strike new roots" is the spirit and purpose of the intercultural gardens. Here migrants can participate, make use of the knowledge they bring along, get to know new entities, ideas, mechanisms – and are able to develop and accomplish their own life perspectives.

The website of the “Foundation Interculture” mentions several reasons why the international gardens should be considered as real sites of integration:

- They enable people to ground, embed and find peace for themselves.
- Intercultural exchange and communication takes place
- They enable women to acquire space for themselves.
- Gardening is work of remembrance, in which sorrows and traumas are also processed.
- The gardeners can connect to their own culture of hospitality but nevertheless are able to independently locate themselves in the new environment
- The physical-corporal-sensual dimension of "striking roots" can be experienced.
- They enable a re-locating and a new range of possibilities to act.
- The migrants get the chance to reflect and mirror "their own", to that of others
- The refugees become public actors who highlight the universal problems of a country of immigration and make them a central theme
- They lead new ways - from a piece of land to a language course.

### **Examples:**

For Fariz Kamilov the little piece of land he can cultivate means a lot: it is a lot of independency for him, and a way to get away from the sorrow that are with him usually. He is a asylum seeker originally from Azerbaijan, two of his children are wheelchair-bound, and the whole family of five people lives in two little rooms. Fariz is waiting for a job, but still the work permit hasn't been granted yet. Thinking about “the garden” he says: “I go with a lot of problems to the garden, but when I am there, I can forget about them.”<sup>3</sup>

### **2.2. Critical points**

In general it is hard to find critical points about the international garden projects, because they all seem to function well once they have overcome the difficulties in gathering members, finding a place etc. Of course, as each single gardening practice depends on the members and simply the given situation, there can raise problems: are there enough people who want and can commit to the project, is there enough space and can it financially be afforded, and are there competence and openness to negotiate with politicians?

If one reads about the single projects there are sometimes obstacles that have to be overcome in the beginning, such as the just mentioned ones. At this point the foundation Interculture might be able to assist and to give advice. On their website, for instance, in the section “how to build up an

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/pre025.htm>

international garden” one can already find the answers to the very basic questions (<http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/prapra.htm>)

### **2.3. Conclusion: what is “exportable” in the project**

#### **- Themes**

The different “themes” that are touched by the international garden programme are various and many. However some can be seen as the most obvious and important one:

- Quality of life: having one’s own garden and the chance of escaping from too small homes means a big improvement. Besides the already mentioned psychological dimension shouldn’t be underestimated: carrying a certain kind of responsibility, creating something new and experiencing the outcome of one’s action can contribute to the self-perception of migrant families.
- Gender-aspect: especially in case of the women that used to live in a culture where there was only little public space for them to act in, it is important to have a place to go besides – so to say – home and supermarket. Intercultural gardens project workers also organise special language courses for women.

#### **- Methodology**

The motto “integration through participation” fits well to describe the methodology of international gardens. The realisation of each project is not done by politicians, social worker or others, but by the very members – “gardeners” and families with a migratory background and from Germany – to create a project to their own needs and expectations. Through this the participants are actively integrated in a city landscape shaping process, which might – on the long run – foster their self-perception and the perception of others. It is also important to mention that German families are also wanted to be active in the gardening project, so that it is not a “migrant-programme” but a true example of intercultural life. To establish German as the general language of communication is also done to help people, especially women, to train their language skills and make it easier for them to learn and practise it.

### **3. OTHER COMMENTS**

#### **Fotos**



Blick auf Dietzenbach  
(Copyright: Stadt Dietzenbach)



Vereinsvorstand mit einigen Mitgliedern, Mai 2005  
(Copyright: Tamara Kammermeier, Dietzenbach)





Blick auf die Parzellen, Juni 2006  
(Copyright: Petra Günther)



Erster Spatenstich, März 2006  
(Copyright: Jana Rosa)

**About the beginning of “International Gardens”**  
(taken from <http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/eng/prop0a.htm>)

The "International Gardens association" in Göttingen is the mother project of the Intercultural Gardens in Germany. The idea of this project arose during a lunch meeting of a group of Bosnian women in the Women's Café in the Göttingen Refugee Advice Centre. The women felt that, in the long run, they needed to be doing more than "simply drinking tea and making table decorations". They were eager to get out of institutions run by social workers, and finally take their everyday lives into their own hands again. The women themselves clearly pinpointed the importance of self-reliance and working for their own subsistence in order to lead what they perceived as a tolerable life in exile: "At home we had our gardens. That's what we missed the most. We so much wanted to have gardens in Germany as well." That was in 1995. One year later the International Gardens project leased its first piece of land. Starting with a gardening project for Bosnian women, the concept of the International Gardens developed gradually from practice.

Meanwhile many local and immigrant families and also singles from various ethnic-cultural backgrounds and various social settings, lifestyles and age groups have joined the garden to help and actively contribute. In total, there are about 280 people from 19 different countries who contribute to the managing and cultivating of four community gardens in Göttingen. On the basis of biological gardening, crafting as well as environmental education and language courses new fields of activity and experience arise for the participants. The "International Gardens" are nowadays a numerously awarded and federal wide approved project for intercultural work of integration as well as for engagement in Civil Society. Since 1999, the organisation is trying to disseminate the project's idea via public relations and consulting other garden projects on site.

#### **4. LINKS**

<http://www.bund-bin.de/projekte/anzeige.phtml?id=3014#0>

About the "Internationale Gärten Dietzenbach"

<http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/probrd.htm>

Mother organisation of all international gardens in Germany

[http://www.stadtteilarbeit.de/seiten/projekte/dietzenbach/definitiv\\_unvollendet.htm](http://www.stadtteilarbeit.de/seiten/projekte/dietzenbach/definitiv_unvollendet.htm)

In-depth information of the previous project in Dietzenbach "definitiv unvollendet"