

Rooftop Gardens: Growing greens for social inclusion

Submitted by the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities, Barcelona

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Size of organisation

50-100; people involved: 6-10

Type of sector

Education; Environmental protection, climate change and agriculture; Health; Public order and safety, justice and human rights; Science, research, innovation; Social protection

Key words of project

Disabilities; Inclusion; Green Urban Space

The shortage of building land in the city of Barcelona has led people to explore new ways of fostering horticulture in the city. Besides a network of urban allotments that includes 19 public garden plots, 355 allotments related to schools and 85 gardens opened due to community demands, the City Council has opened 5 new spots currently not used for gardening vegetables and herbs.

In 2016 the City Council decided to take advantage of these spaces on the rooftop of municipal buildings to create innovative urban allotments. Run by the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities (IMPD), the project 'Rooftop Gardens' promotes an increase of green spaces in the city as well as the well-being of people with disabilities, who are direct beneficiaries of the experience.

The pilot project began when the IMPD placed an urban allotment on the rooftop of its headquarters building, right in the centre of Barcelona: it involved the IMPD as the public local organisation responsible for the experience, the Institute of Agri-Food Research and Technology (IRTA) and three occupational centres for people with disabilities. Three years later, Barcelona has five urban allotments on the rooftop of several municipal buildings, run completely by organisations of people with disabilities (about 120 people from 6 social organisations in 2019). Two new allotments are to be opened during 2019.

The project has created new synergies between the participants:

- Persons with disabilities (intellectual, physical and mental health): the task of gardening implies taking over new routines, working outdoors, training, meeting people, socialisation. In short, valued activities for the empowerment and improvement of social inclusion.
- Employees of the city administration: the staff get to know the participants, can follow the whole process of growing and eventually they even become a kind of ambassadors of the project.
- Specialists in innovative horticulture from IRTA: they are responsible for training the gardeners and for carrying out research that guarantees the quality of the produce.
- Other NGOs: the surplus produce - initially earmarked for the participants' own consumption - is delivered to organisations helping vulnerable groups (such as food banks), thereby fulfilling a social function while also fostering the idea of locally-sourced consumption. It has also created new links between organisations based in the same community.

The participants themselves are responsible for making the donation. This means a change of role, as they move from a passive role (receivers, service consumers, beneficiaries) to an active role (donators and producers, decision-makers). The project has shown significant benefits in the quality of life and personal development of people with disabilities. The rooftop allotments have become a space for co-existence, inclusion and learning, while also being a green space that encourages sustainable agriculture.