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## Urban Agriculture as a Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of Urban Communities



**What practices?** Typical practices are the cultivation of plants by traditional and unconventional methods (raised garden beds, permaculture, drip irrigation, etc.), organic-production, composting, balcony gardening or gardening on other urban spaces without available land.

**Who practices?** Predominantly educated people with a value orientation towards a healthy lifestyle, alternative thinking and civically active.

**Benefits.** Environmental education; Building trust; Higher quality of life, Emotional satisfaction, Psychological feeling of happiness; Healthier and better quality food; Direct producer-consumers relationship; Income generation and employment; Creating links between institutions and personal relationships between people.

**Problems.** (Lack of) policies for UA - so far, UA practices happen thanks to the goodwill of individual representatives of the local government. There are no set rules for these activities, they are performed ad hoc and with difficulty, which threatens their sustainability.

**Potential and Success Factors.** Functional connections between the different stakeholders; Interaction between local authorities - NGOs - civic initiatives; Building trust among all stakeholders to local authorities.

### Urban Agriculture in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria urban agriculture (UA) is still mainly exploited as an extravagant idea, seen in sporadic initiatives of non-governmental and civil organisations. These practices are not part of the official, institutionally dominated milieu of UA visions of urban planning, education, ecology and social cohesion. This is why they are left outside of the control and regulations of the institutions and the contribution they could have for improving the socio-economic status of urban communities is left unresearched and therefore – underexplored.

The project objective is to study the social, economic and ecological mechanisms, through which urban agriculture can improve the quality of life of urban communities and contribute to their sustainable development.

### Preliminary results from the in-depth interviews

**UA - functions.** Predominant opinion - the main purpose and function of UA are educational (to create and foster responsibly in children to their food and environment), environmental (greener urban environment and environmentally minded culture) and social (creating communities and networks).

**The economic effects of UA** - mainly related to small producer-suppliers to farmers' markets and shortening the food supply chains – are seen as far less important.



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Research methodology: Desk research; In-depth interviews and Focus groups with key stakeholders; Expert statements from representatives of Sofia Municipality. Representative survey of attitudes and opinions of 750 Sofia citizens about UA practices. Spatial-territorial survey: mapping land, water and other UA resources.