

Externalities in connection with a community garden

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Abstract: This publication contains data collected as a part of a research¹ carried out into the area of establishment and operation community gardens as well as the opportunity of applying mediation in this environment. The subject matter of this article is to demonstrate externalities occurring in connection with community gardens in the examined Hungarian sample. I would like to illustrate some of those by means of a specific example, too.

The aim of this brief note is to mention several factors by which people who may be concerned can face related to a community garden in order to find out, why it is worth establishing a community garden, or becoming a member of that. There are some factors of which nobody would think about. For example, the leader's organizing ability which is a positive externality or excessive media coverage, which is a negative one. At the same time this article does not intend a full list of the factors and representative examination of their prevalence in Hungary.

1. Community gardens and externalities

We know it well, that the market players' interaction, or activities of one of them may have a positive and negative effect on the exterior characters not taking part in the act. The latter is qualified as an exterior party because the market activity is not counterbalanced though. These effects are called externalities. There is a difference between these factors according to the type of the effect. Positive externality generally means that the costs of the activity concerned will be reduced or the consumer's profit grows. The negative type of externalities means the opposite of the interpretation described above. In connection with the other classification types of the externalities, this article basically regards each „market player” as „producer”. Thus it will be mainly about the so-called producer's externalities. The consumer's externalities will be slightly demonstrated because of the subjectivity of the classification. This article also contains some examples referring to the locality's role. [1] [2] [5] [10]

The result of maintainer level decision of the community gardens' foundation may have positive and negative externalities for the decision makers, for example in

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the life of the municipal institutions' colleagues, and the concerned inhabitants in their environment.

It is necessary to take into consideration that the Hungarian community gardens in the present sample look back only a few years' past. The deduction of long-term inferences is not possible temporarily because of this. That gardens who have been working abroad for more decades have much serious experience. For example in Canada and United States, the founders of the community gardens wanted to facilitate the situation of the people living between heavy circumstances [3] [4]. On the contrary, there are more gardens in the domestic sample, which condense well-off, educated members. The name of a community garden does not mean the same one inevitably, either, than in Hungary [6]. The Hungarian gardens elected into the sample as „community gardens” show a rather mixed picture if we see their property background and other status features (community space, rent etc). The so-called P-Patch type community gardens working for example in Seattle (USA) seem to be very similar based on the rent money and other features (e.g. community space). Their survival was vague universally initially (after the P-Patch programs with an urban level had began). Later it turned up as a more stable one as a result of the gardeners' vigorous appearance. There is also a more homogeneous combination regarding the parameters of the above features (community space, rent money), due to the uniformized regulation. [7] [8] [9]

2. Research methods

The ground research was going on during 2013 March, April and May.

The gardens have been selected by snowball method. Due to the later interviewees in the network of the contact persons it has been managed to get an insight into the operation of several different types of gardens.

The questionnaire was started in 13 gardens. There were 7 working gardens and 6 ones in an initial phase in the beginning of the research. The query has finally been conducted in 9 gardens. This was due to, inter alia, that the establishment processes suddenly slowed down significantly in case of two gardens, than stalled in one in initial phase, so there was no point in further research at these sites. Four of the nine gardens are working gardens, four gardens are in initial phase, and one forms a transition. The latter's essence is, that some people from the community already did some gardening in 2012 at the same place and several members are good friends for years, but the community garden is expected to start later. All of this came to light during the research. To overcome this problem, beyond the questionnaire I prepared short interviews with some men before the current garden meeting from among reserved ones already were on the site earlier.

I persisted that the structured depth interviews contain, inter alia, questions relating to externalities, foundation, barriers, advantages and disadvantages of a community garden with altogether 27 people, namely with exclusively on a maintainer level working persons at the majority of the gardens (10), characters fulfilling a managerial or other function at 3 gardens and with garden members (5 people) in one of the gardens. It was the turn of informal talks in some garden communities.

The overlap between the gardens being subject of the interviews and the questionnaire search is almost full, I mean there was also a questionnaire query generally, where an interview was being made. Although the questionnaire was not a goal originally, after some more important parameters of the gardens showing a difference had turned into known for me, and newer research expectation had been formulated during the process, it seemed to be necessary two questionnaires both in differing contentwise and extent compiled. A short one for the starting gardens and an almost 40 questionnable long questionnaires for the working ones. At the latter one, as generally in case of the long questionnaires, a lower response inclination was expected. This increased further because the garden members already were beyond several simple questionnaire query at the time when the research started, and their enthusiasm later lowered because of this.

In the interest of the faster and simpler query there was an opportunity onto responding to electronic² or traditional self-service charger questionnaires. The in aspect of externalities relevant questions were found first of all in the long questionnaire.

3. Results

All inferences and statements are typical in some examined gardens, or in totality of gardens in the sample.

3.1 Positive externalities

3.1.1 The maintainer level

Between the motivations of the municipal characters opting for the foundation of the garden the community garden appears sensibly as a prestige increasing factor, that is as positive proceeds, which is important from a political term, inter alia.

² Google Drive. The software had modest potential which allowed limited formulation of more complex issues.

The role of the gardens may be growing in the near future since the time of the national and municipal elections are very near. A community garden can increase "green" minded politicians' popularity in governments' constituencies handling the issue of the environment or the orderly cityscape of high priority. The community garden proved to be so much popular in more districts that during the recruitment not only initial gardens, but the later planned gardens were oversubscribed, too.

Where the support of the garden is independent of belonging to a party, there is an example onto the improvement of the dialogue between the politicians. There is not any information about, if this change with a positive direction affects topics being linked only to the garden or also other issues. It may mean a new, exciting task for the local governments' employees or background institutions' colleagues, and may be inspiring looking at it that themselves would become members or even leaders of community gardens. The above viewpoint may be important for a foundation or an association or if we think of private founders, for an economic company, or a private person, too. Basically this would not constitute an externality, since the local government or an other maintainer are not present as a passive party. On the other hand, if the garden already lives an independent life and the maintainer hardly has to intervene in the function, the appearance of the garden depends on the gardeners from then, and their activity will primarily has some kind of effect on the maintainer's fame in connection with the garden. For example, if they take care of the garden nicely, then this effect will be positive, if they neglect it, then negative.

3.2.1 Garden community level

I classified here factors meaning externalities to the environment, the garden community, and the garden leaders.

A libraryful substance would be possible to collect about the positive externalities or rather side effects can be realized for the environment due to the press materials appeared till now. It may be a positive effect that it may practise salutary effect on the general condition and behaviour of bystanders, a bigger inclination may appear on the keeping nearby condominia's reception.

The garden community's members may enjoy its effect bringing about the reduction of the stress, provided the champing and understanding each other dominates in the community. Besides it may be a recreational opportunity, insure the healthier food which can be manufactured cheaply and identity amplifier effect of belonging to the community. The latter one may have a strange significance in a present Hungarian society struggling with phenomenon of anomie. Last but not least, it can mean positive experiences gained empirically (own planted, great tasting vegetables) not only for adults but also for children, the future generation.

The barter also counts as a profit. It can take place corp and seeds exchange between garden members and with outsiders (seed exchange and Earth Day) as well. The exterior sponsors' offers for the garden count positive local externalities. Swap may come true here, too: the garden community undertakes, that advertises the sponsor's undertaking on his website, for example. There is an example also for voluntary offers: grass trimmings and seedlings. The more vigorous contact capital inside the garden and in connection with the garden outside, growing enthusiasm and the bigger inclination on the volunteership were observable in the garden leaders' case.³

3.3.1 Externalities exerted by community leaders for members

Based on the received informations: more efficient information flow, growing enthusiasm, increased activity, greater willingness to volunteering. More people (9) mentioned the garden leader's good community building ability, looking out on the community as an advantage in the questionnaires of the selected garden. There were some formulating otherwise so, "peace of mind, that there is somebody, who arranges and organizes things."⁴

The 24.3. question related to this directly: "Who is the greater cooperation in the garden due to?" The bigger cooperation is due for the official garden leader primarily. It could about from the high response inclination within the small sample (14 out of 12 people) and the fact that 7 out of 12 people marked the current garden leader, compared to the rest, ranked informal leaders or coalitions. This indicates that the official leader has salutary effect on the community here: it is able to attain a bigger cooperation. I classify this here, too, than the positive externality exerted for the community.

3.2. Negative externalities

3.2.1 Maintainer level

Transaction costs (surplus time and energy costs etc.) arose, but the respondents did not report any effects, which was independent of the maintainers' activity.

Power struggles and professional relations with conflicts in connection with the garden on maintainer level were reported consistently by parties the dispute mostly involved in case of two gardens. Only one party mentioned this in two further gardens.

³ Compiled from the interviews and informal talks and the answers of 4 question related to the occurrence of possible positives since start of community garden.

⁴ Compiled from the answers of 11, 19, 25 and 26 questions related to the three most preferred factors in the earlier and current leader's work and measure of satisfaction with the work of the maintainer and founder, and reasons for that.

Inhabitants' protests took place in case of foundation of some gardens of the sample. The subjective evaluation of residents opposing gardens may become negative externalities. In this case, the purpose of the maintainer is to win and restore confidence.

Aiming for the keeping of the fame may have meant beyond handling the problem inside own groves e.g. stressing for it, that it made a statement to, there was not any kind of conflict, and the conceptual opportunity of the application of mediation was rejected.

If they emphasize this so much, it may be that there is just such a conflict, where the situation may be sort out much more easily due to the mediation techniques or the procedure so that all stakeholders would be more satisfied.

A part of the inhabitants protested at one of the gardens on the population informative forum, then later on their own general meeting, based on the majority of the votes, they rejected a community garden to be established nearby. They were not the only concerned ones in this case. The local government was also affected in (inter alia, because the area is a municipal property), and the nearby inhabitants, who would have liked it, that let the community garden be here. A community's general meeting apparently not the forum where outsiders, on the other hand the parties concerned in the problematic situation take a part. It did not take place to involvement of all people concerned here, and the situation was solved by bringing an one-sided decision. The local government accepted this decision, and an other area started to search. The population protest coming forward in connection with the foundation of the other garden did not put on sizes like this. Independently apart from this fact, the maintainers applied mediation techniques instinctively on both informative meeting.

Even in the case of a simple questionnaire query can be crucial the importance attached to personal / organizational prestige. There was a garden coordinator (a person performing managerial functions in terms of the garden community, quasi garden manager) who has made impossible the garden community questionnaires citing inadequate (e.g., "we do not work that way in the garden"), and in reality unfounded reasons, because he (maintainer) was afraid of the maintenance organization's and his own authority. So the maintainer presumed the questionnaire affording of that it has a negative impact on his good reputation. This attitude is the full misunderstanding of the subject of the research. It has not been a goal to gardeners to decide on the basis of a questionnaire, the popularity of maintainer. Furthermore it cannot be expected, that let all gardens receive a personalised questionnaire, because then just a statistical summary (e.g. frequency) can not be counted or other conclusion can not be drawn at least for the sample, either. In my opinion, there are enough optional or open questions stood

for a provision for demonstrating individual features (e.g. whether the leader of the garden is elected by vote or not, etc).

Possibly the subject of a later research could be to explore what is more important for the maintainer: the personal/organizational authority, or the profit which can be realized by the gardeners.

3.2.2 Garden community level

It occurred that one of the local government's decision makers were worried about the concomitant of the community garden being the row of the huts and the neglected area, or the nearby inhabitants because it will be noisy. There were also negative prejudices, e.g. the community cooperation does not last out a season. The above ones did not come true based on the informations obtained in the course of the garden visits and queries, at least until now. It would worth visiting again the currently examined gardens after years, and to look at if something changed on this space.

The undermentioned ones occurred occasionally, they are not general phenomena. Based on the received informations:

- Produce theft was mentioned by 7 people out of 14 respondents among their qualmes in the demonstrated garden. Despite of the fact that everyone knew about the theft, only 4 people out of 12 respondents held important to mention. There was no reply at 2 case. The overlap was 3 people and there was only one person who was not worried, but indicated the occurrence.
- In more gardens because of the proximity of the vegetable ones, surrounding parcels was found getting infected or concerned the pests spreading, if one was neglected until longer time.
- Slower crop growth also occurred due to owershadowing - owing to the characteristics of the seedbed location. This resulted in a loss of profit compared to the other bed product volume. Two people signaled this in one garden.
- There was a garden where burglary and damaging happened. This is definable negative externality exerted by environmental characters for the garden community's members.
- Deteriorated friendship, dissension, power struggles, malicious gossips. Maintainers, garden leaders and garden members reported on a phenomenon like this in three gardens.

- Tension and conflicts because of proprietor and garden community members' different ideas concerning a garden usage, the unclearness of the entitlements, obligations, and responsibilities. The owner - in a contrast to his previous promise - has the area rebuilt, which entails the restructuring of the garden, or may make uncertain the garden's additional survival.
- An excessive media performance which cuts the garden member from his garden tasks. Participation with an excessive measure in the garden popularising and in charities – the garden may turn from a joy source into a burden for the leaders and members.
- More general the insecurity because of it, if the property is in private hands, and it may be planted any time, it may be sold, so onto it is possible to plan it mostly at one growing season. Thus the lack of the chance of the long-term planning is a problem. The chance of this at the territories in the municipal property (7 gardens out of 15) is sensibly smaller.⁵

3.2.3 Externalities exerted by the community leaders for the members

Based on the received informations: perplexity and incertitude in three gardens. Growing lack of information, concerned considerable difference in the aspect of the informational asymmetry between the single members in all gardens. In the presented garden 3 people out of 12 respondents and 6 people out of 27 respondents otherwise mentioned tension, negative mood and clique, until on the interviews in connection with 3 gardens and repeatedly on the informal talks, respectively. The members mentioned coarsening communication in a writing and a word in two gardens, and the following terms have been referred to these: "sociopath parcel owner, regimentation, manipulation". In the presented garden it could be observed as leaving out of consideration of gardening expert members' advice.⁶

⁵ Compiled from the interviews, informal talks and answers of 6 question related to the occurrence of possible negatives since start of community garden.

⁶ Compiled from the interviews and the answers of 12, 20, 25 and 26 questions related to the occurrence of possible negatives since start of community garden, the three most non-preferred factors in the earlier and current leader's work and measure of satisfaction with the work of the maintainer and the founder, and reasons for that.

4. Inferences

The results so far show that both the maintainers and the members insist on "their gardens". Less of a problem, or at least less importance being given to those by people concerned, rather than abandoning of the bio-products and community life.

In the garden has been mentioned as an example that three parcels changed hands in a session during the time elapsed from the foundation until the end of the fieldwork in. Based on this fact, the fluctuation can be considered low.

Based on the ones until now I think that the community garden is attractive among the metropolitan and the rural population as well, despite all of its disadvantages. The weight of difficulties arising during the establishing process or the measure of being successful in the single gardens may decide it, how much it is worth founding community garden or whether it is worth being a garden member. It is differentiated by each garden.

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