



# Case Study Briefing

Urban farming in Utrecht, the Netherlands



This project has received funding from the European Commission Horizon 2020 Programme Societal challenges: European societies after the crisis under grant agreement no. 649189

# Contents

- 01 Overview
- 02 Key policy implications
- 03 Context
- 04 Sources of evidence
- 05 Main findings
- 06 Impact & Implications

## 1. Overview

**The two urban farming projects in Utrecht offer a safe and peaceful environment where people who are not able to hold a job work on their personal learning, which eventually may lead to reintegration into the regular labour market. They combine coaching and personal development for vulnerable people with agricultural production of vegetables for the biological market.**

The social innovative element of the urban farms Amelishof and De Volle Grond is the combination of farming and care. Vulnerable people work in the gardens, sowing, planting, watering, and plucking weeds. They gain self-confidence and experiment with group work and social exchange. In both gardens, the greenkeepers and care workers work from bottom-up. De Volle Grond, especially, is value driven, starting from values of equality that every human being is able to learn and to work, and that everybody has the right to his or her own singularity and subjective experience, and also the right to ask for help. Income is earned from a Veggy Bag service for customers interested in fresh seasonal vegetables. The care clients fill the bags and help with their distribution.

## 2. Key policy implications

**The gardens offer on a small scale a new and inclusive model for care and reintegration of vulnerable people eager to reintegrate into society and regular work.**

The projects have a positive impact on the re-integration process to work. People dealing with burn out recovered in the garden and were able to reintegrate into their jobs or find another job. People with more complex problems made great progress in the building of self-confidence and realizing personal goals. Some of these people find their way to regular work.

The urban farming projects are regular social enterprises or cooperatives. For the care component they are closely working together with welfare organizations, such as the reintegration office (Wij 3.0) or neighbourhood social support teams. They are also paid by bigger welfare organizations such a daycare and activity projects for other welfare organizations.

In Utrecht urban farming and vegetable gardens are becoming recognized inclusive working environments for vulnerable people, as they offer each individual structure, safety and space for personal growth and development. This eventually leads to more self-confidence and reintegration to regular work.

## 3. Context

Amelis'hof and De Volle Grond are two very small scale urban farming initiatives linked to each other by a Foundation and originally managed by the same greenkeepers. The gardens are situated at the fringe of Utrecht city, on the old lands of Amelisweerd. This green area is a popular spot for recreation and leisure.

The underlying needs of people working at both Amelis'Hof and De Volle Grond are the wish to be a full-fledged member of society. Finding a regular job and being paid on a regular basis contributes to inclusion within society. The clients of both gardens have some needs in common to reach this objective. Care clients in both gardens need a safe and quiet environment, where they can recover and work on their own process. They need structure in the daily activities. However, the structure needs to be organized in such a way that they also feel free to choose the activities in the garden they like. The care clients wish to be accepted for the person they are and want to develop self-confidence and confidence in others. They wish to do meaningful work and are eager to work with others, although they often need to develop social and communicative skills. Care clients in both gardens want to be appreciated for who they are, not as care clients but as human beings. In fact, they need an environment where they can discover their own potential, interests and regenerate joy in work and life.

Whereas in the beginning people could work in the garden with maintenance of their social assistance fee, now the gardens are seen as places where people can work on their own development, activation and reintegration process in society and work. This means that former greenkeepers or farmers need to develop skills in social work and social care, in order to be able to reach the goals set by the government. They need to invest and be able a change their ways of working, and focus not only on the garden and on farming, but also embrace a specialization in care and social work. They also need to engage in social innovation. This includes finding new ways of financial sustainability and food distribution, and the constitution of flexible interdisciplinary teams who are always able to adapt to the needs of individual clients working on their own personal and professional development. De Volle Grond has found a balance by separating farming and care, although they follow the same basic principles and vision about care. As long as there is a common vision and meaning, new initiatives and other social entrepreneurs can be included, contributing to the development of a community around the garden, composed of coaches, farmers, care clients, volunteers, trainees, customers, visitors.

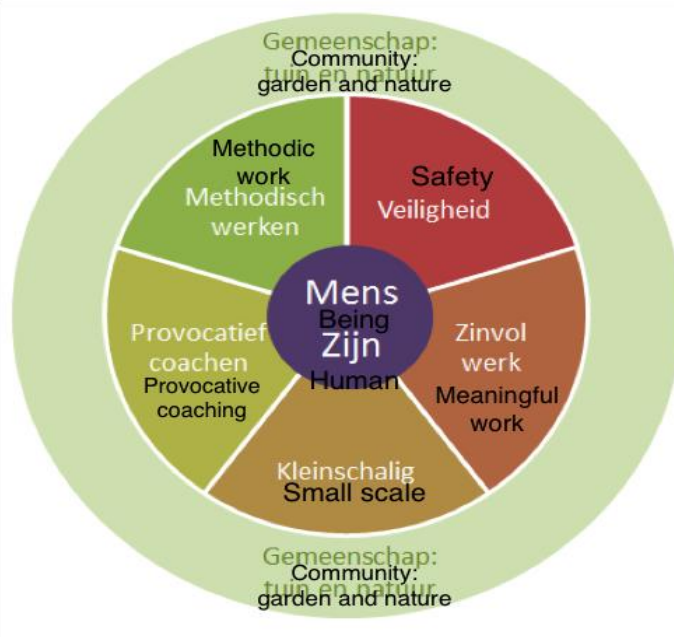
## 4. Sources of evidence

Both gardens should be considered as micro initiatives and especially De Volle Grond is an innovative social project. Because of its small scale and of the recent policy changes since 2010 (Social Support Act) the two urban farming projects could not easily be evaluated in a classical way. We decided therefore to follow the process of change thoroughly, through ethnographic research and detailed analysis of choices made by the social entrepreneurs that exploit the gardens. Developmental Evaluation (Quinn Patton, 2010) offered possibilities for adapting the scheme of “classical” evaluation. Quinn Patton underlines that developmental evaluation is not on going formative evaluation, based on continuous improvement. In fact, developmental evaluation, supports and documents development. The core question of evaluation would then be: “What is getting developed and what are the implications of what gets developed?” This viewpoint upon the evaluation of De Volle Grond initiative opens up new insights that could bring new ideas for future development of the project and the people involved in it. Also, the outcome and impact of the initiative are measured in terms of learning and development for all stakeholders involved in the project. This corresponds also to the value driven way of working being at the heart of both urban farming initiatives.

## 5. Main findings

The final aim of the project is being formulated by the care-farmer and coach Gertjan: “I hope that our way of working with clients will become recognized as a method that works and that also these people find ways of reintegrating society and work”. In fact De Volle proposes new ways and methods for taking care and reintegrating vulnerable people in society and in work.

Since 2010, the two Urban Farming initiatives developed quite differently. De Volle Grond evolved into a care farm in which farming and taking care are equally important. Both activities are taken care of by specialists: Mieke is a farmer and Gert Jan is a social worker, dealing with coaching of care clients. They are both independent social entrepreneurs, working on their own objectives. They can only succeed their individual project by cooperation and reciprocity. In fact they are interdependent. Whereas Amelis’hof developed a strategy to be able to continue the work as urban farming project, coaching some people who are recovering from burn out and work on reintegration at the labour market, next to some cultural activities around gardening and sustainability. The methodology of De Volle Grond is based on 7 basic ingredients, shown in the infographic below.



The approach at de Volle Grond is successful because of the following criteria: (1) care clients are working in community-based environment, in which the garden is a natural space to learn, to grow and let grow. The learning and working approach of De Volle Grond is based upon a (2) human centered worldview. In fact, “being Human” is at the center of the approach. All stakeholders at the garden build on trust and relations, more than on judgment and problems they need to face and resolve. The other conditions for success are (3) safety and security offered by the specific territorial boundaries of both gardens, the old stone walls at De Volle Grond and the fence at Amelishof, Working in the garden, taking care of the plants and the weeds shows intrinsic makes that people have the feeling to contribute. They do (4) meaningful work, (5) Both are small-scale activities, offering a setting for personal exchange and building of trust, (6) provocative coaching, is centred upon personal development and ongoing learning processes of clients, who are eager to participate fully in society and (7) methodic working, which is dealing with specific knowledge about coaching of vulnerable people. Activities are realized through trial and error, and activities may change. The common values are at the core of personal development, but also at the heart of business development.

## 6. Impact & Implications

On a micro level, people are very clearly happy with the way they made progress in personal development and reintegration. Since 2010, already two clients found their ways to a regular paid job. Others expressed the wish to reintegrate society and work fully, and they feel as if they are progressing to reach that goal.

On a meso level, both gardens have found a new balance and new ways for development. Instead of being a market garden in the old sense of the terms, both gardens cooperate with the Foundation for Historical Gardens in Amelisweerd, who manages, the Pergola project. A fixed number of people support the garden financially. In return they receive on a regularly basis a bag filled with vegetables from the garden. Care clients compose the bags and they assist in the distribution of them. This new way of managing the selling of products, is more efficient than selling at the market: a lot of vegetables got lost and the extra personal at the market was expensive. The financial situation of the gardens is fragile but positive. In both gardens, passion about the gardens and engagement for care is a driving force, not the financial gain. In both gardens, new initiatives and products are developed, such as mindfulness courses, drawing at De Volle Grond, but also activities for team building become an extra financial resource.

On a macro level we can see some impact. Since 2015, Dutch municipalities are fully responsible for policy making, monitoring and evaluation of social work and welfare activities. The Utrecht Municipality has observed many small scale initiatives in farms and parks, dealing with participation and integration of vulnerable people. This type of activity has become a successful trend.

Utrecht municipality is striving for direct contracting with these small scale service providers in the sector of labor reintegration, such as De Volle Grond and Amelis'Hof. However, direct contracting asks for a working organizational and administrative system in the gardens. Both initiatives are too small to be able to deal with the paper work. That is why most of the time they act as subcontractors such as Lister, Wij 3.0, important organizations in the social and welfare sector, dealing with reintegration of vulnerable people in society and at the labor market.

## 7. Further information

---

For further information on InnoSI: Innovation in Social Investment: approaches to social investment from the scientific perspective, visit our website at <http://innosi.eu/>

### Authors:



Roel Bax, Sandra Geelhoed, Rob Gründemann, Eva Hijmans and Dirk Postma

---



[www.innosi.eu](http://www.innosi.eu)

