

Gardening for good in Porto



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Residents and local communities have joined an innovative and practical scheme to help create numerous new kitchen gardens in the suburbs of the region of Porto (Portugal).



The 'Horta à Porta' collective gardening project for the growing of organic vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs etc is the brainchild of LIPOR – a waste treatment organisation for eight of the region's 11 municipalities. The idea is through gardening to encourage people to return to their roots (i.e. to traditional values and cultures of the land) to build active involvement and to mobilise and engage local communities.

Launched in 2004, the new community gardens are found mainly in the northern suburbs of the metropolitan region of Porto (population c. 2 million) in *Porto, Matosinhos, Maia, Pova de Varzim* and *Vila do Conde*.

Waiting list

With a total budget of around €240 000, the project is co-financed by the EU's LIFE+ programme and Cohesion Fund and by LIPOR. To date, there are 23 gardens covering a total of four hectares – with a large-scale increase forecast in the near future as more and more local residents and communities express an interest in becoming involved. According to LIPOR, there are more than 1 000 people on a waiting list to become involved in one or other of the green areas.

The project works on the basis of an expression of interest from local individuals, communities or associations to form a new 'Horta à Porta' garden within the network. Once accepted onto the scheme, each garden is then run as a separate entity i.e. with its own specific objectives and spatial context. Importantly, however, strategies are developed in partnership with the other gardens and with technical guidance, support and training from LIPOR. For example, professional gardening and composting experts are available, as well as recycling training and assistance in decision-making.

Community dynamic

There is a strong community dynamic throughout the network of gardens. While the production and management of each individual plot are individual responsibilities, overall responsibilities are collective and, in some cases, virtually self-managing. Exchange of produce between growers is also encouraged, rather than their sale – helping to promote mutual recognition and an overall enhancement of gardening.

Finally, the gardens have been very well-received by the public and by local communities. Residents in the district of

Maia (on the edge of Porto), for instance, were interviewed about their user satisfaction. Many families emphasised their importance to the community. Moreover, one interviewee reported that she had become increasingly estranged from her daughter over a period of 25 years. The garden, however, has changed this and brought them back together in a new context.

Horta à Porta

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