PRELIMINARY COMMUNICATION

Exploring linkages between urban agriculture and social capital in Sarajevo region

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Abstract
Social capital refers to the networks, norms and values that enable people to act collectively. Urban and peri-urban agriculture is about food production and processing within and around cities. This preliminary study aims at exploring linkages between urban agriculture and social capital in Sarajevo region. The paper is mainly based on semi-structured interviews, carried out in autumn 2011, with 30 urban gardeners. It focuses on urban agriculture social impacts in the community gardens of Mala Bašta (Stup – Sarajevo) and Suncokret (Kula – Istočna Ilidza). Taking into consideration the research results it can be assumed that urban agriculture contributes to social capital strengthening, gender empowerment, social cohesion, and inter-ethnic reconciliation and cooperation between the constituent peoples in the post-war Sarajevo.

Key words: urban agriculture, social capital, Sarajevo.

Introduction
Urbanization and cities growth will increase the importance of urban and peri-urban farming (FAO, 2005). Urban and peri-urban Agriculture (UPA) is perceived as agriculture practices within and around cities. Important sectors of UPA include horticulture, livestock, aquaculture, and forestry. Urban agriculture, refers to small areas (e.g. vacant plots, gardens, verges, balconies, containers) within the city for growing crops and raising small livestock for own-consumption or sale in neighbourhood markets. Peri-urban agriculture refers to farm units close to town which operate intensive semi- or fully commercial farms to grow vegetables and raise livestock (FAO, 1999).

Urban agriculture is frequently undertaken through community organizations. When successful, such community efforts are an effective means of empowerment. Urban agriculture also contributes to a community’s well-being by improving its solidarity as neighbourhoods that include urban agriculture generally have higher levels of social interaction. Urban farming improves as well social equity (Smit et al., 2001). The development of UPA requires active institutions and organizations. There are currently over 8,000 registered NGOs and non-profit organizations in BiH, but the number of active organizations is generally estimated to lie between 500 and 1,500 (Barnes et al., 2004). Moreover, there is a growing but uncertain number of informal community-based groups and organizations (CBOs) (Sterland, 2006).

Currently, there are six registered associations that deal with urban agriculture in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): “Our Parcels” association (municipality of Jajce); “Family Garden” association (municipality of Zenica); “Small Garden” association (municipality of Sarajevo); “Linden Tree” association (municipality of Tuzla); Association for the Promotion of Small-Scale Gardens “Sunflower” (municipality of Istočna Ilidza); and Association of Community Garden “Sweet Basil” (Doboj municipality).
Community gardening helps building different forms of capital (social, human, financial, economic, physical, natural, etc.), contributes to longer-term resilience and can reduce the impact of future shocks (Adam-Bradford et al., 2009).

Putnam (1993, 1995) defined social capital as “the features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. According to Black and Hughes (2001), social capital refers to the patterns and qualities of relationships in a community. Winter (2000) defined social capital as “social relations of mutual benefit characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity”. Different types of social capital have been identified: bonding, bridging and linking. Putnam (1993) made a distinction between bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to kinship and other intra-group networks or formal associations. Bridging social capital refers to those networks or formal associations linking individuals and groups beyond major social categories and cleavages. Woolcock (2000, 2001) introduced a third type of social capital, linking social capital, which unlike the two others has a vertical dimension. Linking social capital refers to the links people have with higher levels of decision-making and resource allocation.

In the “Local Level Institutions and Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina” study, social capital was broadly defined as the “networks, norms, and values that enable people to act collectively to produce social benefits”. The study – conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods and in accordance with the Social Capital Assessment Tool (SCAT) (cf. Bamberger, 2000; Krishna and Shrader, 1999) - extended the concept of social capital to include civic engagement as reflected by membership in formal voluntary associations (World Bank, 2002).

This preliminary study aims at exploring linkages between urban agriculture and social capital building and strengthening in Sarajevo region.

Material and methods
The paper is based on an extended literature review and on primary information collected by semi-structured interviews, carried out in autumn 2011, with 30 urban gardeners from two urban community gardens in Sarajevo region: Mala Bašta (Small Garden) garden at Stup - Sarajevo and Suncokret (Sunflower) garden at Kula – Istocna Ilidza (East Sarajevo); managed by the Community Gardens Association (CGA).

Results and discussion
Sarajevo region was devastated by the civil war with thousands of internally displaced people and refugees. Experiences show that refugee agriculture is not only a survival strategy for displaced people but also a valuable livelihood strategy. Urban agriculture can play an important role in all aspects of the disaster management cycle and is a multifunctional policy instrument and tool. However, when relief agencies depart outside support and resources for UPA decline (Adam-Bradford et al., 2009).

Urban agriculture initiatives in Sarajevo region depend on a few ambitious NGOs (e.g. Community Garden Association of BiH - CGA) supported by international donors (e.g. American Friends Service Committee).

The reasons to support agriculture-related activities in the post-disaster phase are numerous. Urban agriculture can contribute to food security; provides livelihood and income-generating opportunities and contributes to wider social and economic rehabilitation. Home or community gardening activities can improve skills and knowledge, while potentially contributing to restoring the social fabric of disaster-affected communities (Adam-Bradford et al., 2009).

Community Garden Association of BiH (CGA) guides urban gardeners through working
process, monitors their activities and provides them with funds. The main aims of CGA are to promote multiethnic urban gardening, to train urban gardeners, and to insure healing therapy for people especially those with post-war syndrome. CGA mainly chooses poor participant urban gardeners upon recommendations from some organizations, mainly religious ones, such as the Red Cross, Merhamet, Caritas, Dobrotvor and Centres for Social Work in municipalities where they got land for use. It should be highlighted that most of the urban gardeners have low education level which makes communication with and providing support to them more difficult (Davorin Brdjanin, president of the CGA, personal communication).

The Association for the Promotion of Small-Scale Gardens “Sunflower” has 83 members (24 families). The ethnic structure of gardeners is: 24.1% Bosnian Muslims, 3.6% Croats, and 71.1% Serbs. Urban gardeners belonging to the different Bosnian constituent peoples celebrate together national and religious holidays. Since 2005, the association uses a land area of approximately 9000 m² provided by the municipality of Istocna Ilidza (RS). The majority of gardeners are displaced persons (54%); some of them have been living in collective accommodation facilities for more than 10 years.

The Small Garden association in Stup (Sarajevo) has 59 members (17 families): 69.1% Bosnian Muslims, 20% Croats and 9.1% Serbs. During the civil war in BiH, 1992-1995, this location was the frontline. Nowadays, gardeners use this site for the production of vegetables and flowers. The garden surface is about 5000 m². War trenches were buried and planted with vegetables. The Association donates 25% of the production to children’s homes (i.e. orphanage) and the home for the elderly and disabled people in Sarajevo. Additional activities in the garden include also a small school on basic concepts and rules of playing chess for children and grandchildren of association’s members and also for other children who live in the surrounding area.

The average age of respondents was 60.7 showing that mainly elders are dealing with urban agriculture in Sarajevo region. As for respondents’ gender, 71% were women. The average surface per respondent is 250 m². Each household has 2-6 members. No respondent has university degree and most of them have only primary education. The main sources of income of respondents are urban gardening, pensions, and wages.

According to the respondents, the main reasons for dealing with urban agriculture are profit (57%), personal satisfaction (71%) and healthy food (100%). Respondents also mentioned friendship and as a coping strategy as they have no and/or a low income especially for internally displaced persons and pensioners with meagre pensions.

According to the interviewees, the main social impacts of UPA are psychological and physical healing (86%); better relationship with neighbours (57%); trust (29%); friendship and social inclusion (29%); increased solidarity (14.2%); cross-ethnical and cross-cultural cooperation and inter-ethnic conciliation (14.2%); gender empowerment (14.2%); and social capital strengthening (14.2%).

Most of the respondents (71%) are members of urban gardeners’ associations. Urban gardeners’ associations represent a form of bonding social capital, and contribute to linking urban gardeners to other groups as well as to public institutions and decision-making arenas.

The majority of urban gardeners (60%) are satisfied with the services provided by the urban gardeners’ associations. Some urban gardeners (29%) are also pensioner associations’ members.

The main reasons of such a high share of urban gardeners that are members of participatory organisations can be explained by their awareness of the benefits that can be gained from a membership (e.g. access to urban gardening plots and some support from municipalities and other international donors and NGOs).
One of the benefits of community gardens is that they help build the character of a neighbourhood through sustainable community development. Community gardens are sites for a combination of activities: food production, sharing of basic resources such as land and water, and recreation. As a result, community gardens provide many opportunities for social and cultural exchange (Raja, 2000).

Urban agriculture brings about many multifaceted benefits to urban dwellers in Sarajevo region especially the poor and food insecure ones. According to respondents, impacts of UPA include as well health benefits; local economies development; local communities revival; food security; environmental education especially for children; refugees’, displaced persons’ and pensioners’ living conditions improvement; improving landscape in cities, etc.

Urban agriculture can perform different functions of common interest for urban communities. Urban agriculture activities are often associated with new forms of social relationship between farmers, citizens and economic operators fostering the inclusion and integration of marginalized community social strata (Antonelli and Lamberti, 2011).

**Conclusions**

Urban agriculture can help improving living conditions of urban residents’. It can also bring about social benefits to urban areas and dwellers in Sarajevo region. According to the perception of the interviewed urban gardeners, urban agriculture can contribute to social capital strengthening, gender empowerment, social cohesion, psychological healing, cross-ethnic cooperation, and inter-ethnic reconciliation between the constituent peoples in the post-war Sarajevo region.

Awareness about benefits of civic engagement led urban gardeners to act collectively in groups and organizations to produce common social benefits and public goods. In fact, a large share of urban gardeners is involved in participatory and voluntary organisations.

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**References**


