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by Tim Schneider

NutriHAF day excursion:

Discovering social innovations in urban agriculture in Cologne, Germany

At the end of September, the NutriHAF team gathered in Bonn: The colleagues from Ethiopia and Madagascar joined their German partners from ZEF (Centre for Development Research) to attend the Tropentag conference together, which took place in Bonn this year. During the conference the NutriHAF team gave poster and oral presentations about the progress of their scientific work.

The following weekend the whole team went to Cologne to visit an urban gardening project. As awareness about global environmental degradation is increasing, agriculture is becoming more relevant in the urban context. The purpose of the trip was to give insight into social innovations in urban agriculture. Destination of the day excursion was the project *NeuLand Köln*, located in the South of the city on a former brewery area. Dr Alexander Follmann, a geographer at the University of Cologne, who has been engaged in the project for five years, gave the group information about the history of *NeuLand*: The idea to found an urban garden arose in 2011, when local residents decided to make use of the 16.000m² abandoned area in their neighbourhood. After getting a temporary permission by the federal state government in March 2012, the motivated gardeners could start growing their own vegetables, fruits, flowers and even fruit trees. Everything is planted in self-constructed wooden boxes made of recycled materials to ensure mobility of the garden in case the project has to move one day.

The group was impressed: Flowers and fruits were flourishing wherever one looked and many insects and birds enjoyed the urban oasis. In the near future, it is also planned to get chickens. Next to the boxes for planting, huts were constructed manually: a greenhouse, a garden shed, composters, and a bicycle workshop. Another building provides office space and a meeting room. Some art objects are spread across the area. There are also ecological guidelines for gardening, like not using chemical fertilizers and harvesting and replanting seeds in order to create a circulatory system. Different working groups are engaging with more specific issues: bee keeping, soil fertility, or testing different composting systems. Also refugees and children are involved in the urban garden project.



A topic of discussion was one of the basic principles, which is applied by the gardeners: Following the concept of the *commons*, the garden is an open space, which can be entered and actively used by anybody. In order to avoid the misuse of the project – the so called *tragedy of the commons*

– it is the obligation for every person to take care of the project. However, there have been some problems; e.g. vegetables were robbed, or not harvested.

In general though, Dr Alexander Follmann is convinced that the project is working well and has a social impact: *NeuLand* is enriching the neighbourhood. It is a non-commercial yet highly valuable space where urban citizens can easily reconnect with nature, gardening and seasonality without leaving the city. Furthermore, the project aims at creating awareness about ecological food production.

Although *NeuLand* is more of a social experiment and not focussed on high productivity, NutriHAF team members were impressed with the relatedness of the projects: For example, awareness creation about (urban) horticulture and the value of local production as well as the community-building aspect are central ideas of both projects.

After the tour the group thanked Dr Alexander Follmann for the great and inspiring tour and continued the day programme with a joint visit of the Cologne Cathedral – another type of oasis.



For more information on the NutriHAF project please visit our project website:

www.zef.de/project/NutriHAF-Africa

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