

**Title:** **International Student's Community Garden at SZIU**

**Topic:** **Smart and Sustainable Regions**

**Author/s:** **RAMOS DIAZ, Maria Fernanda (Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences - MATE)**

When the measures of a lockdown in Hungary due to COVID-19 pandemic were announced in April of 2020, the "International Students Community Garden" at MATE formers Szent István University in Gödöllő, Hungary emerged as student-based initiative to alleviate the physical, emotional and economic impacts of the lockdown through the promotion of outdoors hands-on work, social development and the regular provision of healthy, fresh and affordable food for the members of the group.

The garden was established in a 400sqm field at the Horticulture Institute of SZIU. Students prepared beds, planted seeds, transplanted seedlings and water the garden in daily turns. The garden work was complemented with activities such as field visits to local gardens, participation in workshops to learn how to make compost and a natural fertilizer, harvesting events where the students could cook on the site and share traditions of different countries, planning and evaluation meetings among others.

The work of the students was recognized and supported by the University and the community of Gödöllő as the garden initiative was featured in a local newspaper and the webpage of SZIU. These appearances got the attention of the university's authorities, national government representatives and national celebrities who visited the garden and shared time with the students.

After just 2 months of work, the students began harvesting some of the 68 different varieties of the 42 species of vegetables, fruits, medicinal and culinary herbs, and flowers that were grown in biological way without the use of any artificial input. At the end of October, the garden provided about 850kg of food harvested, with an approximate commercial value of 1 million Hungarian forints (3000 euro). The food collected was distributed to the members of the garden free of charge. In addition, the excess products were available for sale every Thursday in a Community Market outside the university dormitory. Students and the university community in general, who did not participate in the garden work, had access to fresh affordable vegetables on a donation-based price. At the end of the growing season was established a Solidarity Market inside the dormitory to provide food for students in need.

The diverse group of participants (nationalities, ages, faculties) in the project were able to learn innovative agroecological principles and put them in practice, develop leadership skills, alleviate the stress caused by the uncertainty of the circumstances, increase their awareness about food and environmental issues, diversify their diet and save money, among other important lessons.

The success of the project was shown by the institutional recognition and the motivated group of participants who aspire to turn this initiative into a long-term project. The "International Students Community Garden" has moved to a new phase of development in a new more convenient location. In this new phase, in cooperation with a local NGO, it aims at becoming a reference point for agroecology in Hungary while providing leadership training, strengthen the relationship between international students, Hungarian students and the local community, and promoting sustainable development with agroecological base.