

**Conference:** Green Urban Commons?  
Green Urban Activities in Public Space – between Gentrification,  
Privatization, Socio-Ecological Transformation and Right to the City

Vienna, October 2015

## Abstract

### **Green Urban Activities in Vienna – Between Neoliberal Citizen Participation Projects and Reclaiming the City “from below”**

Sarah Kumnig

Community gardens and collective urban agriculture projects are often discussed as examples of citizen (re-)appropriation of urban space, as collective actions tackling individualization and as steps to take back food production in times of multiple crisis.

At the same time colorful urban gardens and the taste of participation and “do-it-yourself” fit perfectly well into a “smart” and “attractive” neoliberal city, raising the competitiveness and position in city rankings.

In Vienna green urban activities are a broad and heterogeneous field of action where some of the urban gardening and collective agriculture projects are tolerated, supported or even initiated by the local state while others are faced with repression.

In the presentation I want to discuss how this possible field of action for green urban activities in Vienna is structured and how participation processes in, around and against those activities can be understood as a technology to govern the neoliberal city.

Based on participant observation, policy-analysis and interviews with community garden and collective agriculture activists, as well as members of the city administration, planning institutions and semi-state organizations the following three technologies to govern the neoliberal city will be analyzed:

1. *Participation* as a strategy to activate individuals as creative subjects taking over tasks that the local state no longer assumes; to pacify resistance and organize consensus for specific urban development plans; to institutionalize bottom up initiatives.
2. *Defining and structuring the possible field of action* through urban development plans and guidelines where the “frame of the possible” is presented as natural, rational, socially neutral and unchangeable; where highly political issues are reduced to mere technical questions that are dealt with by experts; where maps, plans and models play a key role in the process of producing space and creating realities.
3. *Repression* and juridical means to exclude and weaken incompatible initiatives.

The second part is dedicated to the question of how community gardens and collective agriculture projects in Vienna respond to these technologies to govern. I want to conclude discussing the possibilities of a radical green urban community organizing, which cannot be engrossed by neoliberal interests too easily and reclaims the city “from below”.