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The Role of Regional Identity in Urban Agriculture



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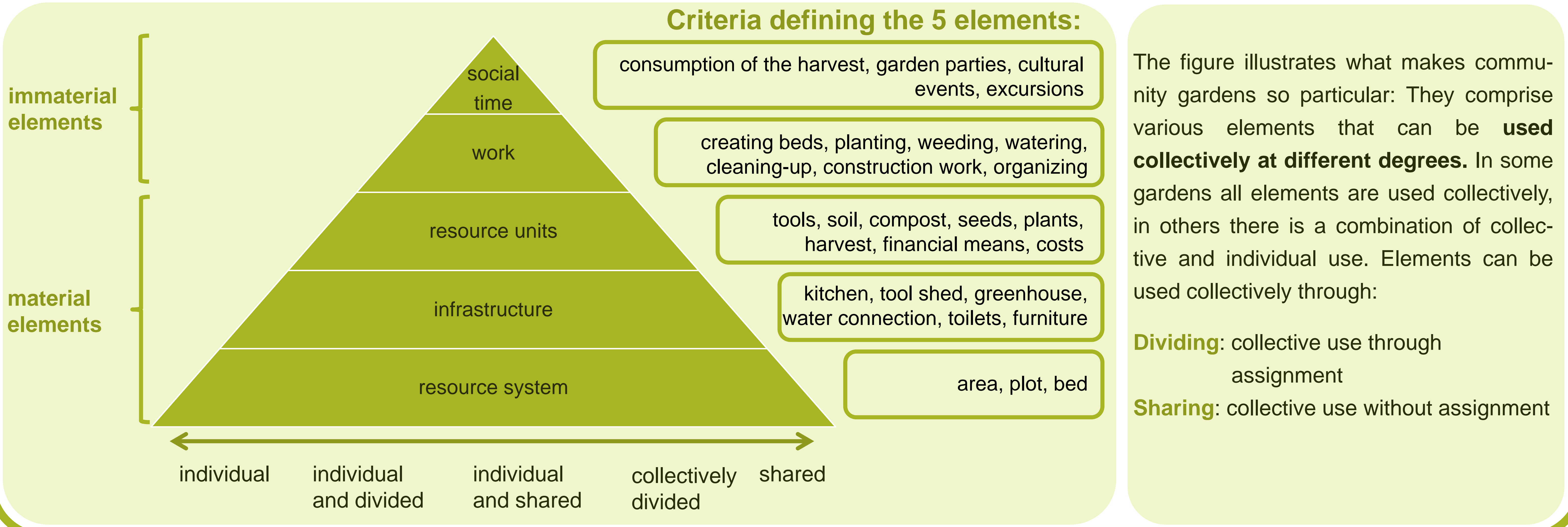
GEWISOLA Conference, September. 2016, Bonn

Introduction

Urban agriculture has become a rapidly growing international movement, practiced by around 800 million people (FAO, 2010), among others through urban gardens. Many urban gardens are established, organized and managed collectively. These community gardens, particularly in developed countries, are special in the motivation why people get organized: participation in city development, democratic use of public spaces, desire for locally and organic produced food, space for recreation and education. Yet, the scarce “resources” that calls for collective action is rather that **people lack opportunities and time for socializing**.

Method

5 elements defined by various criteria were developed, to explore collective action and aspects of socializing in community gardens.



Results

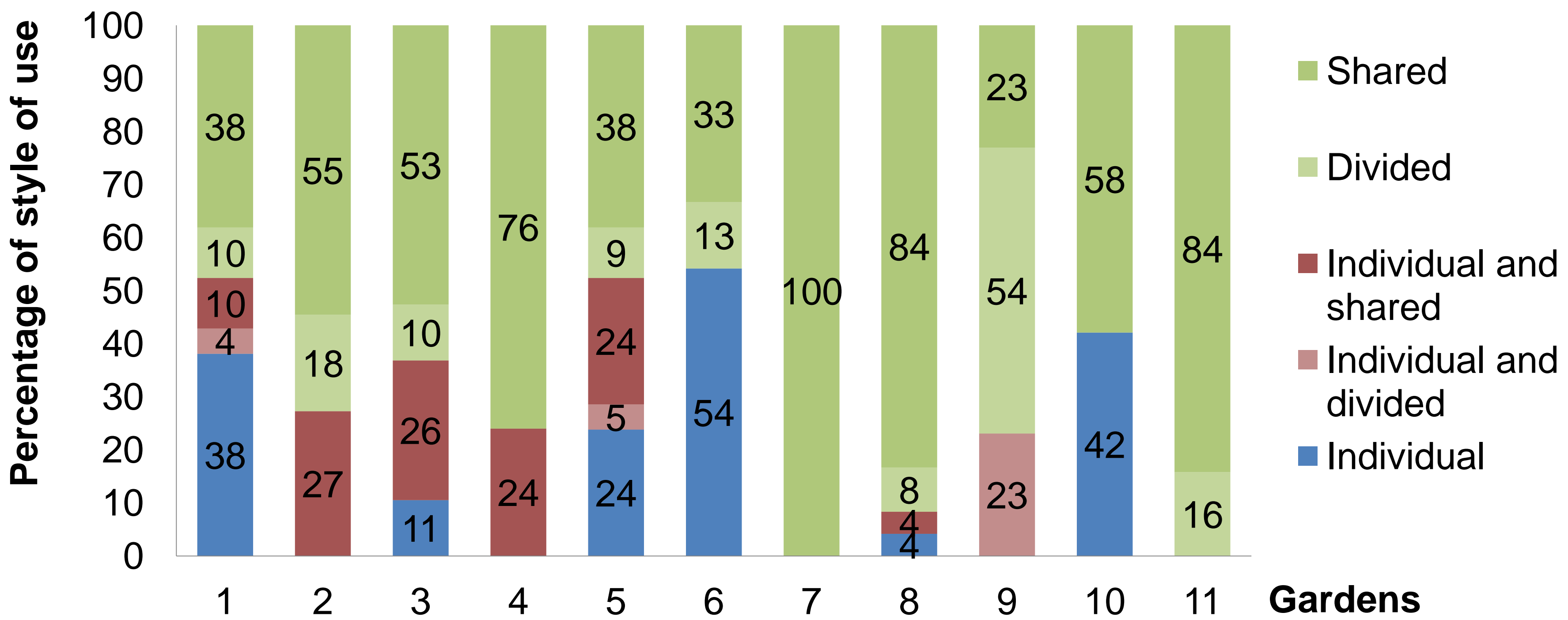
We compiled a complete sample of 22 community gardens in the Rhine-Ruhr agglomeration, one of the most important dense areas in Germany (11.7 km², 11.6 mio inhabitants) (BBSR & IKM 2012). The response rate was 50%.

The percentage of a style of use of a garden (for the considered element) is calculated by the sum of the weighting factors of the criteria used in that style, divided through the sum of all compiled criteria (of that element).

Formula:

$$U(S) = \frac{\sum f_s}{f_n}$$

U = percentage of style of use
S = style of use (ranging from 1 = individual to 5 = shared)
f_s = weighting factor of criteria (of style of use)
f_n = sum of weighting factor of all compiled criteria



The eleven gardens differ widely in their degree of collective use of elements: In some gardens, such as in Garden 1, a vast variety of styles of use exist, while in Garden 7 all elements are used through sharing. Further, garden 6 is a prime example where most criteria are used individually. However, the predominant style of use in all elements is sharing.

Regional Identity



We can show that many community gardens, as part of the urban agriculture movement, offer the possibility to build new regional identities through the option of participation in public decisions and in democratic processes that lead to rules for sharing various elements, not only material, but also immaterial ones.

Conclusion and Outlook

Producing regionally food is just one reason for citizens to engage in urban gardens, moreover the collective action regarding various elements is in the center of their activity. The examples range from material to **immaterial elements, such as work, social time, as well as knowledge**. We have shown the degree of collectivity that can be reached with governing these elements. Urban agriculture may be one building block of a more sustainable lifestyle in future cities and a way of building regional identity. We will expand the study to the German-wide database of “anstiftung and ertomis” (N=566) to build a typology based on the degree of collectivity and to elaborate on the determinants for success of community gardens.