

Guerrilla gardening as a challenge in environmental education?

Jana Dundelová

- MENDELU
- Faculty
- of Business
- and Economics

Introduction and the goal

Today's students are primarily educated **on a theoretical level**, and in their free time they are often in the grip of **digital technologies** and social networks and they are **separated from the real contact with nature**.

One of the ways how motivate young people to environmental activities is the **controversial activity - guerrilla gardening**, the benefits and risks of which are discussed in this paper.



Materials and methods

This paper is based on the overview of relevant written sources and continues with the SWOT analysis of guerrilla gardening in environmental education.



Theoretical background

• Khusainov et al. (2015) -...“to be self-aware as a **part of the nature**... As the result pupils get a **habit of environmental friendliness** and finally they do everything that is necessary for environmental development of their districts, schools, gymnasiums etc.“



Theoretical background

- The main contribution of guerrilla gardening in environmental education is that it is **outside activity**, the work with real **visible results**, that **reduction of the stress and the feeling of adventure**. Using adventure activities for education were studied in many papers (e.g.: Thomas, 2005; Hanna, 1995; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; McKenzie, 2000; Shooter & Furman, 2014; Martin, 2004; Dresner & Gill, 1994; Attarian, 2001; Brown & Jones, 2021; Sandell & Öhman, 2013; Karppinen, 2012; Palmberg & Kuru, 2000).



Theoretical background

- ✓ The term 'guerrilla gardening' was introduced in 1973 by Liz Christy, a young oil painter living and working in New York. She noticed tomato plants growing in the mound of trash in her neighbourhood.
- ✓ In the 1970s, guerrilla gardening began as a grassroots protest against urban decay and derelict spaces in New York City. (Thornton, 2023)



Theoretical background

There are two categories of guerrilla gardening operation. The first involves undercover work. Often performed at night, when outdoor workers are absent and potential witnesses in bed, the project is executed quickly and quietly. In the other type of the operation you work by day. You do not skulk or hide behind dark hoodies or bandana masks. You wear work clothes and work gloves and a safety vest. - A worker's vest is like backstage pass. (Tracey, 2007)



Theoretical background

According to Black (2013): “The overall **reaction** to the garden from neighbours and passers-by **is positive**, and people are generally happy that the gardeners are doing something with land that was largely abandoned. People out walking stop to admire the flowers and chat with the gardeners....But a little bit different is the situation when the guerrilla gardeners transform a public space into a place **for growing food**; it can be perceived as **provocative or even disgusting.**”



Theoretical background

- ✓ It seemed that guerrilla gardening had become **normalised law-breaking**, a form of urban intervention that was broadly accepted and a welcome part of everyday living in certain neighbourhoods. The police were not thought likely to intervene and in one instance encouraged the planting of a guerrilla garden outside a local police station. Local politicians were happy to pose for photographs with the gardeners and landowners were – in most cases – perceived to be uninterested. (Millie, 2023)

Theoretical background

- ✓ to transform guerrilla gardening into “**a less guerrilla form**” that is perhaps less adventurous but more respectful of property rights and the law; i.e. seek out the landowners and ask for permission to garden on their land.



Strenghts

- ✓ **Adventurous** and challenging activity
- ✓ **Recreational** activity
- ✓ **Reduce stress**
- ✓ **Motivation** to environmental activity
- ✓ Requires participants' activity
- ✓ **Very creative**
- ✓ Popular for young people
- ✓ Quite cheap
- ✓ **Visible results** of own work
- ✓ **Critical environmental thinking**
- ✓ Enables to see the environmental changes
- ✓ Enables to see results of own work
- ✓ Feedback from others
- ✓ Enables to see various point of views
- ✓ Supports the thinking about **community**
- ✓ Supports **environmental perception and sensitivity**
- ✓ Supports environmental activities
- ✓ Develops responsibility
- ✓ Develops environmental responsibility

Weaknesses

- ✓ **Illegal activity**
- ✓ Incitement to criminal activity
- ✓ **Does not respect ownership**
- ✓ Brakes the law
- ✓ No planning permission
- ✓ **No risk assessments**
- ✓ For the reasons mentioned above it can be hardly a part of school practical education
- ✓ **Requires a lot of time**
- ✓ Suitable mainly for very **active participants**
- ✓ Requires to be familiar with **botany** and biodiversity (at least the leader of the group)
- ✓ Requires long time active and **responsible students** (otherwise the plants can die soon or they will be not cultivated)
- ✓ Requires an **experienced and adventurous lecturer**

Opportunities

- ✓ **Can motivate** also less motivated students
- ✓ Included environmental **investigative activities**
- ✓ For less motivated students with a motivated lecturer
- ✓ **For children** from 10 years
- ✓ **For managers** who want to be environmentally friendly and socially responsible
- ✓ **For environmentalists**
- ✓ **For activists**
- ✓ **For leisure time groups, courses**
- ✓ **For self-development**
- ✓ Can be used as **relaxation activity**
- ✓ Can be used as a part of **teambuilding activities**

Threats

- ✓ **Can be destructive** without botanical knowledge
- ✓ The danger of spreading of **invasive plants**
- ✓ Irresponsible gardeners can only start their project **without continuing care** and interest
- ✓ Participants of this activity can feel that it is ok to be involved in **illegal activity and it can be generalized**
- ✓ The participants can be attracted with **the adventure more** than with the real **environmental goals**
- ✓ **Unskilled lecturers** can choose wrong plants, wrong place and do not think about the future care about the plants

Thank you for your attention!!!

jana.dundelova@mendelu.cz



● MENDELU
● Faculty
● of Business
● and Economics