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THEY WILL BE HEALING GARDENS...

nature helps man and man, in turn, helps nature

ACADEMY MODEL

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INTRODUCTION

The Academy Model presented in this document is the result of a collaborative process carried out by the international partners of the *They Will Be Healing Gardens* project, developed within the Erasmus+ KA210-VET programme. From the very beginning, the partnership chose to start from a simple yet essential question: **which professional profiles work, or should work, within a healing garden, and what competencies do they truly need to operate effectively in such a context?**

The partners analyzed the state of the art in the different countries regarding healing gardens, the professionals involved, and the competencies required. This shared analysis led to two key findings:

- **multiple professional profiles contribute to the creation, management, and use of a healing garden**, each with a specific and complementary role;
- **not all of these professionals possess, in their initial training, the competencies needed to work in a healing garden**, where technical, pedagogical, therapeutic, and relational dimensions must coexist.

Through dialogue among partners from Italy, Spain and the Czech Republic, the project identified four professional groups on which to focus the development of the Academy Model:

1. **Architects, agronomists, and designers**, responsible for the conception and design of healing green spaces.
2. **Gardening operators**, who must integrate technical skills with a new awareness of functional, inclusive, and therapeutic design principles.
3. **Horticultural therapists**, a central yet not formally recognized professional figure in the partner countries.
4. **Socio-educational and socio-health operators**, who work daily with vulnerable individuals and can use the garden as an educational, rehabilitative, and well-being tool.

This selection was not arbitrary: it emerged from a shared assessment of **which profiles require an expansion of their baseline competencies** in order to work effectively in a healing garden. As mentioned, the professional roles identified are not the only ones operating in these contexts. Other profiles, such as psychologists and physiotherapists, are also involved, but the analysis highlighted those roles where expanding competencies was most needed.

At the same time, the consortium considered **which profiles the partners, according to their competencies and areas of activity, and ENAIP, as the vocational training provider in charge of the testing of the 30-hour module included in the project, could concretely support** through curricular modules and professional development pathways. The objectives identified are as follows: enhancing existing training programs and/or proposing the approval

of new competencies and/or new professional profiles, recognizing and certifying certain professional roles, and expanding career opportunities for all of them.

This led to the specific focus defined above. For example, **gardening operators** are already involved in iVET programs and directly engaged in the piloting of the 30-hour module; moreover, for **socio-health and socio-educational operators**, work is ongoing on the development of upskilling and reskilling pathways, including the design of dedicated training paths and the definition of lifelong learning programs for organizations in the sector. The same applies to professionals responsible for conception and design, as well as to the formal definition and recognition of the horticultural therapist professional profile.

Another important aspect that emerged from the international comparison concerns **terminology** and its translation into English, particularly regarding the terms *well-being garden*, *healing garden*, and *therapeutic garden*, which each have a precise and distinct meaning.

While the term well-being garden is more general, aimed at promoting relaxation, stress reduction, and overall wellness rather than targeted clinical recovery, the other two terms are progressively more specific, with an explicit reference to structured therapeutic programs guided by healthcare professionals and therapists only in the case of therapeutic gardens. In fact, while all therapeutic gardens can be considered healing, not all healing gardens are focused on specific therapeutic goals.

However, as emerged from conversations with partners and from project documents, **when translating from their native languages into English, it has not always been easy to convey some of these terminological distinctions**. These differences arise not only from linguistic aspects but also from cultural variations across countries. A rigid translation would risk oversimplifying concepts that, in practice, are interconnected and context-dependent. **Depending on each partner's experience, operating context, perspective, and sensitivity, each partner has used the terms they considered most appropriate.**

While respecting the cultural and professional specificities of each profile and each country involved, the Academy Model aims to provide a clearer and more shared framework. For this reason, and to remain consistent with the terminology used in the application, **the term healing garden is preferred in more general contexts, with reference to therapeutic aspects reserved only for the specific circumstances that require it.**

ARCHITECTS, AGRONOMISTS AND DESIGNERS

Architects, agronomists and designers are in charge of designing healing gardens, understanding and managing regulations, and coordinating the other professional profiles who work inside these contexts. These professionals are involved in the planning of private gardens, landscape architecture, and urban projects.

ITALY

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Architects, agronomists, and designers play a key role in the planning of healing gardens, ensuring knowledge and compliance with current regulations and coordinating the various professionals involved. They are responsible for organizing spaces, selecting furnishings, decorative features, and plant species, as well as supervising construction and garden maintenance. **Their work guarantees coherence between therapeutic objectives, environmental sustainability, and accessibility.**

When they do not possess the required professional qualifications, registration with a professional body or legal authorization to sign projects, they collaborate closely with licensed professionals who are legally entitled to approve and sign large-scale or public projects where such credentials are mandatory.

Among the professional figures involved, the following can be identified:

- Architects
- Landscape architects
- Agronomists
- Landscape agronomists
- Landscape designers
- Garden designers

Below is a detailed table providing a description of each professional role.

Architect and landscape architect

	ARCHITECT	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Educational qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree in Architecture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree in Architecture with postgraduate specialization / Master's degree in Landscape Architecture
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State professional qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State professional qualification

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration with the Order of Architects, Planners, Landscape Architects and Conservators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration with the Order of Architects, Planners, Landscape Architects and Conservators
Project signing authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Architectural and building projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscape projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open spaces, gardens, parks, and urban landscaping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gardens, parks, and complex open spaces
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build works and infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building works related to the landscape
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May design landscapes but does not replace agronomic expertise for complex botanical and management aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the most comprehensive professional profile for integrated space-landscape-built environment design

Agronomist and Landscape agronomist

	AGRONOMIST	LANDSCAPE AGRONOMIST
Educational qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master's degree in Agricultural Sciences / Forestry Sciences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree in Agricultural / Forestry Sciences with Master's degree or specialized training in Landscape Architecture
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State professional qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State professional qualification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration with the Order of Agronomists and Foresters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration with the Order of Agronomists and Foresters
Project signing authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agronomic and green space projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscape and garden projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green infrastructure, parks and gardens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green and land management interventions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental management, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CANNOT sign building or architectural works

	<p>maintenance, and conservation plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CANNOT sign building and architectural works 	
Notes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not a separate professional order but an agronomist with a specialization in landscape design
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May coordinate complex landscape projects in collaboration with architects/engineers for building-related components

Landscape Designer and Garden Designer

	LANDSCAPE DESIGNER	GARDEN DESIGNER
Educational qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master's degree or courses in Landscape design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized training through design courses only
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No autonomous professional order 	
Project signing authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CANNOT sign projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CANNOT sign projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAY collaborate in design activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAY collaborate in design activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAY provide consultancy, concept development, and creative support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAY provide consultancy, concept development, and creative support
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MUST operate under the signature of an architect or agronomist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MUST operate under the signature of an architect or agronomist

In Italy, professionals working in green and landscape design generally operate as freelancers or within small and large multidisciplinary design studios, active in both the public and private sectors. These studios commonly bring together different technical and scientific profiles,

including architects, engineers, environmental engineers, agronomists, natural scientists, foresters, and environmental science specialists. This collaborative structure makes it possible to address landscape projects at different scales, from territorial and urban planning to the design of public parks and private gardens.

The design of healing gardens requires an even higher level of interdisciplinary cooperation. In addition to design professionals, therapeutic green projects involve close collaboration with public administrations and, most importantly, with healthcare professionals such as psychologists, geriatricians, and other medical specialists, as well as sociologists, biophilia experts, and therapeutic horticulture specialists. An integrated design approach that brings together all these professional figures is essential for the successful development of therapeutic landscapes and represents a core component of professional training in this field.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Technical knowledge

- Landscape design and applied botany: ability to plan and design green areas, gardens, and therapeutic parks by integrating activities, pathways, and systems, while selecting appropriate plant species according to climate conditions, seasonal variation, safety, and therapeutic benefits. This includes an understanding of plant growth cycles, maintenance needs, and environmental resilience. It also encompasses the conscious choice of materials in terms of durability, permeability, thermal behaviour and water absorption, furnishings, rehabilitation equipment, and decorative elements.
- Ergonomics and universal accessibility: knowledge of inclusive design principles aimed at ensuring safe and independent use of outdoor spaces by people with diverse abilities including older adults, people with reduced mobility, cognitive or sensory impairments.
- Environmental psychology: awareness of the effects of green spaces on psychophysical well-being, emotional states, cognitive performance, spatial orientation, and stress reduction.
- Foundations of non-pharmacological therapies: knowledge of non-drug-based therapeutic approaches such as social and therapeutic horticulture, multisensory stimulation, occupational therapy, and rehabilitation activities supported by the natural environment.

Social, relational and creative skills

- Interdisciplinary teamwork: ability to collaborate effectively with healthcare and social care professionals such as occupational therapists, geriatricians, psychologists, nurses, educators, and social workers.

- Inclusive and participatory design: active involvement of local communities and users in the design process, encouraging shared responsibility, engagement, and a strong sense of connection to the space.
- Active listening and needs analysis: ability to understand the real needs of end users including older adults, patients, families, caregivers, and translate them into concrete and effective design solutions.
- Health-oriented creative thinking: ability to combine aesthetics with therapeutic function through the intentional use of colours, scents, textures, pathways, furnishings, and sensory elements.

BEST PRACTICES IN ITALY

The following is a list of Italy's most well-known and recognized healing gardens. These gardens serve as points of reference and exemplify best practices in the country.

- Rooftop Healing Garden – Agostino Gemelli University Hospital Foundation (Rome): a green space designed as an immersive and multisensory pathway within the hospital to promote psychophysical well-being for patients, in particular oncology patients, families, and healthcare staff.
- Giardino dei Semplici – Gemelli Polyclinic (Rome): a green area with pathways, vegetable gardens, and medicinal plants, designed for relaxation, regeneration. The garden also includes an educational/botanical laboratory for students and patients.
- Healing Garden – Nursing home, Arzaga (Milan): a healing garden in a residential care facility for older adults, with raised beds accessible to people with reduced mobility and sensory-stimulating plant species.
- San Faustino Garden – Milan: a healing green project for seniors and the community, developed in an urban context with the involvement of residents and citizens.
- Garden of Happiness – Cidas (Ferrara): a green space created within a nursing home, with areas dedicated to socialization and rehabilitation in a natural setting.
- Alzheimer's Garden "Il giardino ritrovato" – Cerino Zegna Foundation, Mongrando (BI): a garden for people with Alzheimer's disease that offers a sensory pathway, recreational areas, pet therapy zones, and therapeutic horticulture spaces.
- Alzheimer's Garden "Il faggio" – Casainsieme Onlus, Salerano Canavese (TO): a garden dedicated to people with Alzheimer's disease that includes a sensory pathway, resting areas, and a sound trail.
- Healing Garden – Bellinzago Novarese (NO): a garden within a nursing home that includes a historical-sensory pathway, a greenhouse, a medicinal plant garden, and a physiotherapy path.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

In Italy, there is currently no professional register or formal certification system for healing gardens, nor are there specific national guidelines for their design. Although various publications recognize the positive impact of green spaces on health and well-being and offer theoretical guidance and best practices, these contributions are not regulatory and do not serve as formal operational references.

A potential model for developing structured guidelines could be found in the United States, where the tradition of healing gardens originated, though any approach would need to be carefully adapted to Italy's cultural, climatic, and regulatory context. Once shared guidelines are established, it would be desirable to implement a certification system for healing gardens. Such a system could ensure not only the quality and coherence of design, but also the proper implementation of care and management practices aligned with therapeutic objectives.

From this perspective, maintenance activities and the actual use of the garden should be considered an integral part of the therapeutic process and supported by an appropriate monitoring system. Post-occupancy evaluation could serve as an effective tool to assess the garden's performance over time and determine its suitability to be officially recognized as a healing garden.

SPAIN

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

In Spain, architects and designers usually work in architecture firms, construction companies, real estate agencies, public planning departments, or independently. Landscape designers often run their own studios and collaborate with builders and engineers, while urban planning also involves professionals from law, sociology, and environmental sciences to address regulations, heritage, and sustainability.

Spanish urban planning promotes greener cities not only for ecological reasons but also to improve people's well-being. Parks and green spaces are meant to encourage physical activity, provide educational and social value, and strengthen community life¹. Inclusive elements, such as adapted playground equipment or outdoor exercise areas for older adults, reflect this goal.

However, parks are still often designed mainly for visual appeal, and their potential to actively support health and inclusion remains underused. Green spaces could better serve older

¹ https://www.miteco.gob.es/content/dam/miteco/es/biodiversidad/temas/ecosistemas-y-conectividad/eniv_2021_tcm30-515864.pdf

adults, people with intellectual disabilities, and other vulnerable groups if they were designed around their specific needs rather than simply adding equipment.

For this reason, **stronger collaboration between architects, designers, and health and social care professionals would be beneficial**, helping ensure that public spaces truly promote health, inclusion, and everyday usability through a careful analysis of the real needs of the population.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Technical and scientific knowledge

- Landscape design and botany: appropriate plant selection, knowledge of growth cycles, maintenance needs, climate adaptation, and selection of suitable materials (durability, heat and water absorption, etc.).
- Ergonomics and accessibility: knowledge of how people with different abilities such as older adults, people with reduced mobility, cognitive impairment, etc. move through and interact with space. In Spain, Fundación ONCE is a valuable reference for guidance on this topic².
- Environmental psychology: the study of how spaces affect mood, cognitive stimulation, and stress reduction.
- Foundations of non-pharmacological therapies: including social and therapeutic horticulture, multisensory stimulation, and occupational therapy.

Social and creative skills

- Interdisciplinary collaboration: the ability to work alongside health professionals such as occupational therapists, geriatricians, psychologists, nurses, and social workers.
- Active listening to users: identifying the real needs of those who will use the garden, including older adults, patients, families, and caregivers.
- Inclusive and participatory design: involving the community directly in the design process.
- Creativity applied to health: integrating aesthetics with therapeutic function through elements such as colours, fragrances, pathways, and sensory furniture.

BEST PRACTICES IN SPAIN

Although Spain is not at the forefront of best practices in the implementation of healing gardens, it does offer several positive examples that can serve as a base:

² <https://www.fundaciononce.es/es/accesibilidad>

- Mediterranean approach: the use of native, drought-resistant species helps reduce water consumption and supports adaptation to climate change.
- Respect for historical and urban context: efforts are made to preserve and restore historic gardens and integrate new designs within existing urban contexts.
- Greener cities: numerous urban renaturalization initiatives are underway, such as Madrid Río, the Superblocks in Barcelona, and the Green Belt in Vitoria.
- Basic accessibility standards: features like ramps, wide paths and entrances, adapted paving, and inclusive playground equipment are now considered essential.
- Emerging therapeutic landscaping practices: some hospitals, nursing homes, and public parks are beginning to include healing gardens, although this approach is not yet widespread.

Some examples are: *Real Jardín Botánico* (Madrid), *El Jardín de los Sentidos* (Coslada), *Centro de Neurohabilitación de Casaverde* (Valladolid), *Residencia Nuestra Señora Perpetua Socorro*, *Jardín Botánico* (Malaga), *Jardí Fenix* (Barcelona).

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

Currently, all public spaces must comply with minimum accessibility standards. However, in Spain the only specific guide for the design of healing gardens is the one developed by the AEHJST (Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening). The association has established a set of criteria to define when a garden can be considered therapeutic, published on its website. Designers who believe their projects meet these requirements can request a review by the association in order to obtain **certification**. Therefore, it would be advisable to continue promoting the association's guidelines and to consider expanding them to address a wider range of contexts and user needs.

CZECH REPUBLIC

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Landscape architects in the Czech Republic work nationwide, either in their own studios or as freelancers, and are active in both the private and public sectors. Their work spans from design to full implementation and maintenance of private gardens, parks, terraces, balconies, and other public spaces. They collaborate with cities, municipalities, companies, and private investors, and often provide guidance on subsidies or supervise construction projects.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

The following is a table of the activities these professionals typically perform, along with the corresponding competencies and skills required:



ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS
Design	Creation of garden and landscape designs, including green structures (trees, shrubs, lawns), outdoor furniture, urban parterres, water features, and the selection of plants and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of landscape architecture and garden design principles • Plant and material selection, including climate and soil considerations • Creativity and aesthetic sense for outdoor spaces, furniture, and water features • Spatial planning and composition skills • Understanding of user needs and accessibility requirements
Project documentation	Preparation of project documentation in accordance with the Building Code and applicable laws and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the Building Code • Knowledge of and relevant laws/regulations • Attention to detail and accuracy in documentation • Understanding of project workflows and legal compliance
Implementation	Coordination and supervision of project execution, including author's supervision to ensure designs are properly implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management and coordination skills • Supervision and quality control abilities • Problem-solving skills to handle on-site challenges
Greenery care	Assessment of the condition of existing vegetation, proposal of maintenance or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of horticulture, arboriculture, and plant maintenance

	improvement measures, preparation of procedures for the care of gardens and parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to assess plant health and ecosystem conditions • Planning maintenance programs for parks and gardens • Understanding of ecological and sustainable practices
Other activities	Consulting and advisory services, inventory and “passportization” of greenery, integration of sustainable and ecological solutions, collaboration with clients, suppliers, and other professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting and advisory skills, including client communication • Inventory and documentation skills for greenery • Knowledge of sustainable and ecological landscape solutions • Collaboration and teamwork with clients, suppliers, and multidisciplinary professionals • Strategic thinking and ability to integrate environmental and social considerations

BEST PRACTICES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic is home to several well-known and highly regarded healing gardens, botanical gardens and parks which serve as points of reference and examples of best practices in therapeutic landscape design. Notable examples include:

- Hamza Sanatorium for tuberculosis treatment for children, Košumberk, Luže, 1901. More information here: <https://www.hamzova-lecebna.cz/>
- Psychiatric hospital Bohnice, Prague, 1909: <https://bohnice.cz/>
- Here is a list of botanical gardens and parks of the Czech Republic: <https://www.kudyznudy.cz/co-chcete-delat/priroda/botanicke-zahrady-a-parky>



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or here: <https://ebotanika.webnode.cz/ceska-botanika/botanicke-zahrady-a-arboreta/>

- This interactive map shows all Garden Therapy Association members: <https://asociace-zahradni-terapie.webnode.cz/mapa/>

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

At present, there are no specific guidelines for healing gardens in the Czech Republic, as the topic of healing gardens and the role of garden or horticultural therapists has not yet been regulated by legislation. Architects must follow the basic standards and laws that apply to public green spaces, but the planning of healing gardens largely depends on the initiative of individuals who are aware of international trends and the therapeutic potential of nature. While not entirely new, this field is still emerging and remains largely driven by dedicated professionals rather than formal regulations.



GARDENING OPERATORS

A gardener is a professional who cares for green spaces, cultivating plants and maintaining the spaces. Gardeners may also be responsible for maintaining parks, and landscaped areas, also playing an important role in the proper and safe use of sector-specific tools and machinery.

They have practical technical skills related to the design, creation, and maintenance of green spaces, parks, and gardens.

ITALY

In Italy, the profession of gardener/green maintenance operator/gardening operator is regulated in terms of training and professional qualification.

Recognized qualifications and training include:

- Secondary education
 - A five-year high school diploma with an agricultural or forestry specialization (or an equivalent qualification) provides a solid theoretical and practical foundation for working in the sector.
- Regionally accredited professional courses
 - Qualification courses for Green Maintenance Operators (for example, programs lasting at least 180 hours, combining classroom learning and hands-on practice, delivered by accredited training providers).
 - The standard minimum duration is 180 hours, with at least 60 hours of practical training, in order to obtain a nationally recognized certification.
- Additional or alternative qualifications
 - VET qualifications as Agricultural Operator/Technician, including internships and work placements with landscaping and green maintenance companies³.

Within the context of a healing garden, broader and more specific training, such as in botany, ecology, landscape design, participatory planning, and accessibility, is a significant and essential added value. It enables professionals to understand not only how to care for plants, but also the importance of selecting the right plant species to ensure that green spaces effectively support users' well-being.

³ The following are the recognized VET qualifications in Lombardy (Italy):

https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/dettaglio_profilo.php?id_profilo=13394&codice_repertorio=SE

https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/dettaglio_profilo.php?id_profilo=13472&codice_repertorio=SE

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Gardening operators can work in a wide range of professional contexts, reflecting the diversity of functions that green spaces play in contemporary society.

They are commonly employed in public and private green areas, such as municipal parks, urban green spaces, residential gardens, private terraces and green roofs, as well as shared areas in apartment complexes and commercial properties. Their skills are also in demand in sports facilities, nurseries and garden centres, and within companies specializing in the maintenance of public and private green spaces.

Other important employment contexts include cooperatives and social enterprises, historic parks and villas, and natural or protected areas, where maintenance work often requires sensitivity to heritage and environmental values. Gardeners may also work in hospitality settings, such as hotels, agritourism facilities, and resorts, where landscape quality is closely linked to guest experience. Many professionals choose to work independently, offering green maintenance services as self-employed practitioners.

The healing garden context

Within healing gardens, the role of the gardening operator takes on a more specialized and socially oriented dimension. In these settings, green spaces are not merely decorative but form part of a functional environment designed to support health, care, and wellbeing.

Professionals may work in healthcare facilities (such as hospitals and long-term care residences), rehabilitation centers and day-care centers, as well as schools, therapeutic communities, and spaces with a social value that encourage interaction and socialization. In these contexts, their work combines botanical care with a strong awareness of users' physical, cognitive, and emotional needs, as well as the well-being goals associated with the space.

The role often involves close collaboration with educators, occupational therapists, and designers, ensuring that the garden remains effective, efficient, safe, accessible, and consistent with its purpose of being a source of well-being, while continuing to offer a high-quality, living environment for those who use it.

Within a healing garden, the gardening operator plays a role that goes beyond traditional plant care. Their main responsibilities include:

- maintaining plants and spaces so they remain efficient, safe, accessible, and fully functional for therapeutic use
- ensuring accessibility and usability for people with varying abilities, through well-maintained paths, seating areas, shaded zones, and clear spatial organization.
- applying sustainable and safe maintenance practices, contributing to a healthy and restorative environment.

In contexts where green spaces are meant to promote healing, gardening operators need to shift their focus from aesthetic green areas to functional ones, where design and operational choices are guided by the specific needs of the garden's end users.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Technical skills

Gardening operators are expected to possess a broad and well-structured technical skill set that enables them to manage green spaces efficiently, safely, and sustainably.

- Botany, agronomy, and plant physiology: knowledge and practical skills related to plants, their biology and functioning, and the soil–climate–plant system to ensure their proper cultivation.
- Knowledge of soils and substrates: knowledge of the physical and chemical properties of soil and the concept of fertility, to select the appropriate agronomic interventions to optimize its functionality.
- Green maintenance techniques: such as pruning, mowing, sowing, transplanting, fertilization, mulching, irrigation systems management, and seasonal care.
- Use of professional tools and machinery: the proper and safe use, as well as routine maintenance, of manual tools (e.g., for soil preparation, cleaning, or cutting) and motorized equipment (such as lawn mowers, brush cutters, blowers, and tillers)
- Plant health and protection: the ability to identify, monitor, and manage key plant diseases and physiological disorders, always with a view toward sustainable practices.
- Basic irrigation and water management: efficient use of water resources, installation and maintenance of irrigation systems, and adaptation to current changing climatic conditions.
- Reading and interpreting project plans and implementation protocols: understanding planting schemes, maintenance plans, and technical drawings.
- Compliance with regulations: knowledge of the main environmental, safety, and plant health regulations relevant to green space maintenance activities.

Soft skills

Technical expertise is complemented by interpersonal and organizational abilities that support effective day-to-day work.

- Teamwork and communication skills: working collaboratively with colleagues, supervisors, clients, and other professionals.
- Attention to detail and observational skills
- Problem-solving and adaptability
- Time management and reliability: organizing tasks efficiently and meeting maintenance schedules.

- Physical endurance and manual skills: comfort with outdoor work and physically demanding activities.
- Environmental awareness: sensitivity to biodiversity, ecosystem services, and sustainable land management practices.
- Cultural awareness: understanding the social and symbolic value of landscapes and gardens.

Skills specific to healing gardens

In healing garden contexts, technical skills are integrated with a strong **human-centred approach**.

- Understanding of users' psycho-physical needs: particularly for different age groups, people with disabilities, or individuals in rehabilitation processes.
- Empathy and relational skills
- Ability to observe user-space interactions: recognizing how people use the green space and adjusting implementation and maintenance practices accordingly.
- Focus on safety and accessibility: maintenance of paths, surfaces, handrails, raised beds, and elimination of physical hazards.
- Knowledge of plant selection for therapeutic use: avoidance of toxic, allergenic, or hazardous species; preference for sensory and restorative plants.
- Collaboration with healthcare and socio-educational professionals
- Respect for routines and therapeutic programs: scheduling maintenance activities to avoid disrupting users and care activities.

BEST PRACTICES IN ITALY

Examples of best practices in the Italian green maintenance sector highlight the importance of quality, responsibility, and continuous professional development.

- Continuous training and professional development: green care is a traditional but constantly evolving field, influenced by new techniques, growing attention to biodiversity, climate change adaptation, and sustainable water and soil management. Investing in ongoing training, upskilling courses, and specialized skills is therefore considered a key element of professional excellence.
- Multidisciplinary collaboration: high-quality projects, especially healing gardens, are often based on collaboration among different professionals, such as agronomists, landscape architects, therapists, educators, and social workers. Participatory and interdisciplinary approaches help ensure that green spaces meet environmental, functional, and human needs.
- Sustainable management of green spaces: sustainability is a core principle, it includes the use of environmentally friendly materials, respect for natural ecosystems, and careful seasonal planning of maintenance activities. Common sustainable techniques

include mulching, composting, smart and efficient irrigation systems, and the selection of plant species with lower demands and greater resilience to growing conditions.

- Safety and regulatory compliance: proper use of personal protective equipment and strict adherence to workplace health and safety regulations are essential, particularly in outdoor and “green construction” settings. A strong safety culture protects both workers and users of green spaces.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

In Italy, **the profession of garden operator is regulated by a structured legal framework that defines training requirements and professional standards.**

Key references include:

- Law 154/2016, Article 12, which regulates the professional activity of garden operators and requires specific qualifications or training certificates to practice legally.
- State–Regions Conference Agreement of 22 February 2018, which defines recognized qualifications and equivalent titles accepted in place of formal training certificates.
- Regional regulations (for example, Lombardy Regional Resolution no. 5777/2018), which specify details of training pathways and implementation at the local level.
- Municipal regulations on urban green spaces, which govern maintenance standards and public space management.
- Regulations on the use of plant protection products, including mandatory certification for the use of phytosanitary products.

These regulations make attendance at recognized professional courses, or possession of equivalent qualifications, mandatory. Without them, it is not legally possible to operate as a green maintenance professional.

Currently, people training to become gardening operators are rarely trained on topics related to healing gardens. However, since these professionals play a central role within such green spaces, it is increasingly important that they acquire the skills and competencies needed to work in healing gardens while preserving and supporting their intended function. They should therefore be familiar with these types of green spaces, understand the reasons behind design choices, plant and materials selection, be aware of the characteristics of the gardens’ final users, and be able to collaborate with the other professionals involved at different stages and with different roles.

Enaip Lombardia, as a VET provider, offers training courses for young people after lower secondary school in the field of green maintenance. Thanks to this project, it has been able to develop a training module on healing gardens to be integrated into these programmes. The aim is to provide students with new employment opportunities and a

broader and more conscious understanding of green spaces. The development of this module and its pilot implementation will be discussed in a dedicated section of this document.

SPAIN

Garden operators are responsible for the maintenance of gardens, ensuring they remain clean, aesthetically pleasing, and fully functional. **In healing gardens, functionality is particularly crucial, as it involves not only accessibility but also the preservation of the garden's therapeutic and social roles. To meet these requirements, garden operators need a broad range of technical and soft skills.**

In Spain, many gardeners have formal professional training. The most common qualification is Technician in Gardening and Floristry, while others hold Basic Vocational Training or specialized courses. Growing awareness of the value of green spaces has contributed to significant expansion in this sector.

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Gardening operators work in gardens and park and other public spaces such as roundabouts. In Spain, most are employed by small or medium-sized private companies (around 70%), while others work for large construction companies. Their clients include both private homeowners and public institutions.

Their main tasks focus on **maintenance activities**: pruning, lawn mowing, clearing leaves and branches, soil replenishment, and planting new vegetation. Only occasionally are they involved in design-related decisions, for example by suggesting plant species, layout adjustments, or new techniques such as mulching. Collaboration with site managers exists but is often limited, as gardeners are traditionally seen as maintaining a finished garden rather than shaping its evolution. As a result, they often work independently or only with other gardening operators.

In therapeutic or healing gardens, closer collaboration with the therapeutic team, such as horticultural therapists and social or healthcare professionals, is essential to understand the specific needs of users. This cooperation can help guide maintenance and planting choices, such as selecting edible plants or sensory-stimulating species.

Garden operators should also maintain regular contact with garden designers, as healing gardens are intentionally created to support well-being and their design principles, such as curved lines and plant diversity, must be preserved over time. **Collaboration among operators, designers, and therapeutic teams is mutually beneficial**: operators contribute practical plant knowledge, while designers and therapists help ensure the garden continues to meet its therapeutic goals.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Technical skills

- Botanical knowledge: the ability to identify plant species and select appropriate ones for specific climates and conditions, together with an understanding of growth habits, watering, and light requirements
- Horticultural techniques: competence in planting, pruning, weeding, propagation, composting, and soil care, carried out efficiently and effectively
- Irrigation management: installation, maintenance, and optimization of watering systems
- Tool and machinery handling: safe and responsible operation, maintenance, and care of gardening tools and equipment
- Pest and disease control: early detection of issues and selection of safe, sustainable treatments (ecological, integrated, or chemical when necessary)
- Waste management: proper handling, recycling, and disposal of organic and inorganic garden waste
- Ecosystem awareness: basic knowledge of local fauna and ecological interactions.
- Sustainable practices: application of environmentally friendly methods such as mulching, composting, use of native plants, regenerative techniques, and reduced chemical use.

Soft skills

- Empathy and sensitivity: understanding users' needs, listening to social and therapeutic objectives, and respecting the healing purpose of the garden
- Curiosity and lifelong learning: openness to new knowledge and ongoing professional development
- Safety awareness: ensuring safe environments for all users, particularly in public or therapeutic spaces, by managing tools, irrigation systems, and potential hazards such as toxic plants.
- Mindfulness and adaptability: tailoring tasks and environments to different ages and abilities, fostering a calm and inclusive atmosphere, for example, avoiding noisy equipment during relaxation activities or choosing quieter, adapted tools when necessary.

BEST PRACTICES IN SPAIN

In Spain, **new trends** are arising leading to best practices:

- Mulching: the practice of covering soil with a protective layer such as bark, straw, leaves, gravel, or plastic. It helps retain moisture, reduce weed growth, regulate soil

temperature, and protect plant roots. Organic mulches also enhance soil structure and fertility as they decompose.

- “Alcorques vivos” (living tree pits): small green areas around the base of trees in streets, gardens, or squares that replace bare soil or paved pits. They are planted with ground covers, aromatic plants, or flowers to increase biodiversity, improve water filtration, reduce soil compaction, and enhance the urban landscape. They also support pollinators and contribute to more sustainable cities⁴. Examples of areas that have introduced them are: Rivas-Vaciamadrid (119 new ones in 2024), Calatayud (Zaragoza), Miranda de Ebro, Huesca, Córdoba
- Selective pruning: careful approaches that focus on maintenance and remove only damaged, diseased or dangerous branches, while respecting the natural structure of the tree.
- Use of native plants and “dry gardens”: green spaces that require minimal or no irrigation by using drought-resistant species or plants adapted to dry climates.
- Efficient and smart irrigation: water-saving systems that optimize irrigation through sensors, programmed schedules, and drip irrigation, ensuring precise delivery and avoiding water waste.
- Ecosystem-based gardening: viewing the garden as a living ecosystem rather than mere decoration, by promoting plant diversity, choosing species that attract pollinators, leaving some areas undisturbed for wildlife, and minimizing the use of chemical pesticides.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

There are numerous **resources available** for garden operators; however, many of the newer trends are still not widely adopted in everyday practice.

Below are some existing guidelines issued by different municipalities and books on the topic:

- Guía de Buenas Prácticas para una Jardinería Sostenible (Puertollano): it emphasizes sustainable gardening practices, including the use of native plants, water conservation, and ecological maintenance⁵.
- Manual de Riego de Jardines (Andalucía): practical advice on efficient irrigation techniques, in order to reduce water consumption in garden maintenance⁶.
- Manual de Buenas Prácticas en Jardinería: it focuses on environmental impact awareness providing solutions for sustainable gardening practices (ecological plant care, waste management, etc.)⁷.

⁴ <https://hidrobiology.es/naturalizacion-urbana/>

⁵ https://www.puertollano.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/guia_jardineria_sostenible.pdf

⁶ https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/export/drupaljda/1337165055Manual_de_Riego_de_Jardines_BAJA.pdf

⁷ <https://www.elkarkide.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Manual-de-Jardineria.pdf>

- Guía de Buenas Prácticas de Jardinería en Barcelona (Barcelona): it examines the relationships within ecosystems, focusing on soil, vegetation, and fauna interactions to conserve and enhance biodiversity.⁸
- Manual de Jardinería Ecológica: this book promotes low-impact gardening using native species, organic fertilization, and pest control methods.
- Guía del jardín sostenible Mucho más que un jardín⁹ (Madrid)
- La Casa Encendida: “Social and Therapeutic Gardens and Allotments: Enhancing Well-Being”, a basic and practical training on the care of an organic garden and its use as a therapeutic and social resource¹⁰.

Although many guidelines are already available, **there is a need for official standards for sustainable gardening that require the adoption of modern best practices**, such as composting, mulching, and a basic level of plant diversity. It would also be beneficial to develop guidelines or resources that link gardening techniques to social and therapeutic objectives. Such resources would not only explain plant care, but also illustrate how gardens can support therapy and community engagement, giving practitioners a clearer understanding of the garden’s broader purpose.

CZECH REPUBLIC

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

The competencies of a Czech gardener include growing, planting, maintaining, and harvesting plants, as well as protecting them from pests and diseases. The role also involves practical tasks such as tying flowers, maintaining green spaces, and operating gardening machinery. Depending on the area of specialization (e.g. gardener or grower), these competencies may be further expanded to include orchard work, fruit and vegetable production, and landscaping activities.

Basic competencies include:

- Growing and maintenance: planting, cultivating and harvesting plants, vegetables, fruit and flowers
- Plant care: watering, fertilizing and treating plants to ensure healthy growth
- Plant protection: applying plant protection products and addressing pest and disease issues

⁸<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ecologiaurbana/sites/default/files/Bones-practiques-jardineria-2016-CAST.pdf>

⁹https://www.madrid.es/UnidadesDescentralizadas/Educacion_Ambiental/ContenidosBasicos/Publicaciones/HuertoJardineria/GuiaJardinSostenible.pdf

¹⁰<https://www.lacasaencendida.es/formacion-para-el-empleo/huertos-y-jardines-sociales-y-terapeuticos-una-mejora-del-bienestar?eventId=2987>

- Mechanization: operating and maintaining agricultural and horticultural machinery and equipment

Specialized and additional competencies include:

- Horticulture: growing and maintaining ornamental plants and trees, lawns and carrying out landscaping activities in gardens, parks, and urban green spaces
- Fruit and vegetable production: manual and mechanized cultivation and harvesting of vegetables and fruits
- Floral arranging: tying and arranging flowers, creating wreaths, and producing other decorative items
- Maintenance of public green spaces: caring for parks and other public green areas

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

In the Czech Republic, gardeners typically have a secondary school education, followed by general training courses for gardeners. At present, there are no specific guidelines or specialized courses.

However, **it would be highly valuable for them to develop competencies related to the specific characteristics and maintenance of healing gardens**. Creating targeted training courses focused on well-being, the therapeutic value of green areas, and the use of green spaces for therapeutic purposes would significantly enhance the professional profile of gardeners.

HORTICULTURAL THERAPIST

A horticultural therapist **develops therapeutic programs tailored to individuals or groups, using gardening and plant-based activities to support well-being and recovery**. Their work may include activities such as sowing, cultivating, and harvesting plants, propagating and caring for greenery, and managing gardens or allotments. They set clear, measurable goals, physical, cognitive, and social, and carefully monitor progress over time, evaluating outcomes to ensure effectiveness. Importantly, these activities are integrated into broader rehabilitation or educational programs, making the therapeutic experience meaningful and structured.

This profession is currently not officially recognized in any of the countries participating in the project.

ITALY

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

In line with international models, horticultural therapists can work in a variety of settings, including hospitals and rehabilitation centers, mental health facilities, residential care and elderly services, schools and educational programs, prisons and therapeutic communities, social farms, as well as therapeutic and healing gardens.

In Italy, many of these activities are carried out through social cooperatives or in collaboration with local health authorities and municipalities.

Horticultural therapists always work as part of a multidisciplinary team; their interventions are integrated rather than independent. They collaborate closely with doctors and psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists, professional educators, social workers, agronomists, and landscape designers.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

The American model, established by the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA), identifies **three core areas of competence** for horticultural therapists:

1. Horticultural and horticulture-related skills
 - Botany, plant cultivation, and green space management
 - Design of accessible gardens and therapeutic plots
2. Social and healthcare skills
 - Psychology, education, and rehabilitation
 - Knowledge of diseases, disabilities, and vulnerabilities
3. Specific therapeutic skills
 - Designing horticultural therapy programs
 - Setting therapeutic goals

- Evaluating outcomes and effectiveness

In the United States, training typically includes an interdisciplinary university degree (four years), a supervised internship of 840 hours, and professional certification as a Horticultural Therapist Registered (HTR). The American experience may serve as a reference point for the development of the profession in Italy.

BEST PRACTICES IN ITALY

The profession is currently not officially recognized in Italy. However, there is a growing demand for professionals working in this field across a variety of settings. Many examples can be found in residential care facilities, Alzheimer's centers, healthcare centers, and third-sector associations.

There are also cases of practitioners who have entered the field after completing training at the Scuola Agraria del Parco di Monza or through the Master's program in Therapeutic Horticulture at the University of Bologna.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

There are currently no official national guidelines, nor is the professional profile of a horticultural therapist formally recognized or regulated in Italy. Training in the country remains fragmented, with short courses and master's programs typically lasting around 400 hours.

The training pathway could be structured into two levels:

Social Horticultural Operator

- Basic training (150–300 hours)
- Focus on horticultural skills and basic relational competencies
- This would not be a therapeutic role

Horticultural Therapist

- Advanced training ($\geq 1,000$ hours)
- Requirements:
 - Foundational knowledge in health, psycho-educational fields, or integrated agronomy
 - Supervised clinical internship (≥ 500 –800 hours)
- Capabilities:
 - Designing therapeutic plans
 - Assessing clinical outcomes
- This would be a therapeutic role

Both professional profiles should adhere to established standards, including a code of ethics, minimum certified competencies, a professional registry (ensuring formal recognition under Italian law), mandatory supervision, and compulsory continuing education.

SPAIN

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SPAIN

In Spain, a horticultural therapist is currently considered **a professional who has completed accredited horticultural therapy training abroad (mainly in the UK or the USA)**, possesses strong interpersonal skills, and has training or experience in horticulture and gardening. These professionals use plants and therapeutic gardens as primary tools to foster the relationship between people and nature.

Several practitioners come from backgrounds such as occupational therapy or social work and have completed an extended 50-hour course with the AEHJST. While they are not formally recognized as horticultural therapists, professionals with extensive experience working in gardens are considered **horticultural therapy practitioners**.

Three main fields of practice are identified:

1. Therapeutic (clinical): individual interventions with clinical objectives, where nature is used as a therapeutic tool (e.g. supporting stroke patients in regaining mobility).
2. Social and therapeutic: group-based activities where social interaction plays a key therapeutic role (e.g. nature-based group activities, forest bathing).
3. Work-related or community integration: programs aimed at people with disabilities or at risk of social exclusion, focused on learning horticultural skills.

In Spain, **the most common fields of practice are the social-therapeutic and community integration areas**, although some health institutions have begun to use healing gardens for clinical therapeutic purposes. A horticultural therapist may work across all three fields; however, clinical practice requires in-depth knowledge of patients' conditions and is therefore usually carried out by professionals with a background in occupational therapy. In the other fields, professional backgrounds are more diverse and include social workers, healthcare operators, psychologists, horticulturists, and educators.

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

As **there is currently no officially recognized role in Spain**, it is not possible to clearly define where horticultural therapists work. However, it is possible to analyse professionals who carry out horticultural therapy activities without holding an official title. These professionals often form part of **multidisciplinary teams**, complementing pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies as part of an integrated approach to care.

On the therapeutic/clinical side, they typically work alongside psychologists, physiotherapists, nurses, healthcare professionals, and doctors in settings such as hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and elderly care facilities. Examples include psychiatric hospitals (e.g. Hospital Universitario de Alcorcón) and rehabilitation hospitals (e.g. CasaVerde, Valladolid)

On the social and community integration side, they collaborate mainly with social workers and psychologists, and to a lesser extent with educational professionals. Examples include Fundación A La Par (disability support) and Huerteco in Burgos (autism).

In some settings, both approaches coexist, serving clients with different objectives: clinical treatment on the one hand, and social inclusion and well-being on the other. In these cases, professionals work with diverse goals and collaborate with different specialists. An example is Los Sentidos Therapeutic Garden in Coslada, where occupational therapists work alongside physical activity technicians, social workers, psychologists, and doctors.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Since there is currently no clearly defined role of a horticultural therapist in Spain, it is not possible to provide a specific description. However, we can outline the **key elements** that horticultural therapists should possess:

- Horticultural expertise: knowledge of general horticulture, food production, biodiversity management, and the ability to plan and deliver meaningful, seasonal activities for participants of all abilities, with awareness of sustainability and ecological principles.
- Understanding of green care and nature-based well-being: ability to use nature to promote mindfulness, foster connection with the environment, and encourage social engagement.
- Knowledge of therapeutic models: ability to set objectives, design meaningful activities tailored to clients' needs, assess individual requirements, establish measurable therapeutic goals, and monitor and evaluate outcomes.

For professionals working in the more clinical/therapeutic field, additional competencies include:

- Clinical knowledge: Basic understanding of anatomy, mental health conditions, and cognitive or sensory impairments; awareness of safeguarding, risk assessment, and confidentiality protocols; and the ability to collaborate effectively with healthcare professionals such as nurses, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists.

BEST PRACTICES IN SPAIN

In Spain, there are various **educational courses available** for professionals:



- AEHJST (Asociación Española de Horticultura y Jardinería Social y Terapéutica) offers both introductory and advanced courses in social and therapeutic horticulture that cover both theoretical and practical aspects.¹¹
- University of Zaragoza offers a microcredential which includes practical training entitled “Use of Therapeutic Horticulture and Social Gardens in Socio-Sanitary Settings for Older Adults”¹².
- La Casa Encendida, together with Germinando, offers the course “Huertos y jardines sociales y terapéuticos: una mejora del bienestar”, which provides basic training on ecological gardens and their therapeutic and social use¹³.
- Jardines Terapéuticos PalmLöf offers training programs focused on therapeutic gardens, covering design, planning, conduction sessions, and adapting activities for different users¹⁴.
- Granja Masphaël delivers a course which combines horticultural therapy with animal-assisted therapy and includes practical sessions¹⁵.
- Introduction to Therapeutic Gardening and Horticulture (IMSERSO), a resource that provides an introduction to different types of therapeutic gardening, including social gardening, therapeutic horticulture, sensory gardens, healing gardens, and receptive gardening.
- Introduction to Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening (EUIT-FDSLL), an online course providing basic guidelines for starting a social or therapeutic garden project, including fundamental knowledge about minimum requirements and basic garden management.

Moreover, there are various associations in Spain that have introduced orchards and gardens for therapeutic purposes. These include Fundación Apsuria, a therapeutic garden for people with severe intellectual disabilities in Madrid; CEE Chacona, Centro de Educación Especial in Alicante; CEPE “El Camino de Villamayor”, Centro de Educación Especial in Salamanca; Colegio de Educación Especial de Madrid CISEN in Madrid; and Fundación Intrás in Valladolid.

In addition to these associations, several hospitals and nursing homes have implemented therapeutic gardens. Examples include Hospital Asociado Universitario Guadarrama in Madrid, Hospital de Neurohabilitación Casaverde in Valladolid, Hospital General Universitario de Elche in Alicante, as well as residential care facilities such as Residencia Amma Mutilva in Pamplona, Residencia GesMed in Valencia, and Residencia Nuestra Señora de Perpetua Socorro in Madrid.

¹¹ aehjst.org

¹² microcredenciales.unizar.es

¹³ lacasaencendida.es

¹⁴ jardinesterapeuticos.com

¹⁵ granjamasphael.org

Furthermore, public initiatives have also supported therapeutic gardening. For instance, in Madrid, social services have invested in a public therapeutic garden, demonstrating growing recognition of the benefits of these spaces for community well-being.

The therapeutic use of orchards and gardens is gradually increasing in Spain. While it is not yet widespread, more projects are emerging across the country. This trend is creating a growing need for horticultural therapists to become formally recognized as professionals. In the meantime, social-health professionals and occupational therapists must acquire the knowledge and skills to use these spaces effectively.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

There are currently no official guidelines on the methodology for horticultural therapy or nature-based therapy in Spain. This is largely because the field is not yet widespread, and **the profession is not formally recognized.** However, existing courses are based on a combination of international knowledge, national professional standards, local regulations, and practical experience from Spanish healthcare and educational settings.

For example, **at Jardines Terapéuticos PalmLöf, a methodology has been developed** based on occupational therapy principles and best practices from other countries, such as Sweden's Alnarp project. This methodology is taught in the company's courses and includes a set of activities designed for therapeutic gardens.

Research is also underway to define new guidelines for nature-based therapy. One example is the Recetas project, which aims to develop guidelines for reducing loneliness and improving quality of life in urban contexts through social prescription of natural spaces. Such initiatives highlight the growing need for professionals trained in nature-based therapy.

Although there is a lot of scattered information, courses, and training centers, **the field lacks unification and professional recognition.** Formal recognition of therapeutic gardening as a profession is needed. Just as there are standards defining what a therapeutic garden should include (AEHJST), there should also be clear guidelines for conducting therapeutic sessions. These should cover group size, objectives, types of activities, and adaptations to participants' needs and abilities.

It would also be valuable to develop guidelines linking specific patient needs to particular nature-based activities. This would help professionals design appropriate activities, set meaningful objectives, and provide tailored recommendations for their clients.

CZECH REPUBLIC

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

There is currently no dedicated university degree for garden therapists in the Czech Republic; however, the field is growing through **lifelong learning programs**, such as those

previously offered at Mendel University in Brno (this particular program was unfortunately cancelled). People typically qualify as garden therapists by completing specialized courses and internships in settings such as senior care facilities, psychiatric hospitals, or special education schools. To further support the profession, **initiatives are emerging to bring practitioners together, including the Czech Republic association of garden therapists.**

The **responsibilities** of a garden therapist include:

- using interaction with nature and plants to support therapy, rehabilitation, and personal activation
- assisting individuals with physical and psychological challenges, including mental disabilities and sensory or physical impairments.
- promoting the development of motor skills, social interaction, and cognitive abilities
- facilitating activities that help release frustration, encourage teamwork, and expand knowledge and awareness

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

A horticultural therapist possesses a combination of horticultural, therapeutic, and interpersonal competences that enable the effective use of gardening and nature-based activities to support clients' physical, mental, cognitive, and social well-being.

Professional competencies:

- Knowledge of horticultural therapy principles and the ability to plan, implement, and reflect on therapeutic processes aimed at improving or maintaining clients' functional abilities and self-sufficiency.
- Expertise in therapeutic gardens, including the selection, cultivation, and maintenance of plants suitable for garden therapy.
- Skills in gardening and basic horticultural practices necessary for the care of therapeutic gardens and the safe use of tools and materials.
- Ability to plan and organize garden spaces and horticultural therapeutic elements in accordance with therapeutic goals and the needs of specific target groups.

Interdisciplinary and therapeutic competencies:

- Basic knowledge of general psychology, ecopsychology, occupational therapy, rehabilitation, and caregiving.
- Understanding of the physical, mental, cognitive, and social characteristics and needs of different client groups (e.g. seniors, people with disabilities, children, or individuals with mental health conditions).
- Ability to adapt activities and approaches to individual capabilities, health conditions, and therapeutic objectives.

Soft skills:

- Communication and interpersonal skills for working with individuals and groups in a supportive and motivating manner.
- Empathy, ethical awareness, and the ability to work responsibly within multidisciplinary teams.
- Reflective skills to evaluate therapeutic outcomes and adjust interventions as needed.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Therapeutic horticulture courses are currently offered only by private organizations:

- JABOK, a Higher Vocational School of Social Pedagogy and Theology, provides courses covering the fundamentals, practical applications, and methods of garden therapy¹⁶.
- Chaloupky offers activities in the field of garden therapy, including indoor solutions and consultancy services for institutions¹⁷
- the Association of Horticultural Therapy organizes courses and seminars on garden therapy topics¹⁸
- Lipka, an environmental educational organization, offers courses and programs for children and adults on these topics¹⁹

In addition, a list of botanical gardens and park of the Czech Republic can be found here <https://www.kudyznudy.cz/co-chcete-delat/priroda/botanicke-zahrady-a-parky> or here <https://ebotanika.webnode.cz/ceska-botanika/botanicke-zahrady-a-arboreta/>.

These examples can be considered best practices in the field.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

The Garden Therapy Association of the Czech Republic is currently working to include the profession in the national register of professions. In addition, the Czech eco-center Chaloupky submitted an application in 2025 for the registration of the profession of therapeutic-horticultural worker, which was forwarded to the Czech Garden Therapy Association.

However, **at present there are currently no specific guidelines regulating the field.** The development of clear professional standards and officially recognized training programs would

¹⁶ <https://www.jabok.cz/en>

¹⁷ <https://www.chaloupky.cz/vzdelavani-pracovniku-socialnich-sluzeb/>
<https://www.chaloupky.cz/velke-mezirici-baliny/>
<https://www.facebook.com/p/Klub-Lebeda-100063633610099/>

¹⁸ <https://asociace-zahradni-terapie.webnode.cz/>

¹⁹ <https://www.lipka.cz/>



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be highly beneficial, supporting both the professionalization and the effective practice of horticultural therapy in the country.



SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL-HEALTH OPERATORS

Socio-educational and social-health operators are professionals who **work directly with individuals and groups to support social, educational, and health-related needs, with the overall aim of promoting well-being, inclusion, and personal development.** They typically work in nursing homes and social and healthcare facilities, operating at the intersection of care, education, and health support.

On a daily basis, these professionals support vulnerable individuals, older adults, people with disabilities, individuals with cognitive, sensory, or motor impairments, and minors with special educational needs. **They represent the direct link between care, education, rehabilitation, and everyday well-being, ensuring continuity between therapeutic goals and daily life.**

Within healing gardens, their role evolves from that of “support staff” to that of well-being facilitators. **They actively use the garden as an educational, rehabilitative, and relational tool;** facilitate sensory, motor, and cognitive activities; and observe and interpret the specific needs of each target group. In collaboration with horticultural therapists, designers, and gardening operators, they integrate garden-based activities into Individual Care Plans and educational pathways, while promoting a safe, inclusive, and functional use of the garden.

Their contribution is essential to transforming the garden into a living therapeutic environment used on a daily basis as part of care and educational practices, rather than merely as an outdoor or decorative space.

ITALY

WORK SETTINGS

Professionals in the health, social, and educational sector operate in a wide variety of settings, supporting people who, for physical, cognitive, emotional, or social reasons, require structured assistance and meaningful opportunities for wellbeing. Across these contexts, healing gardens can become an integral resource, offering spaces for rehabilitation, education, socialisation, and emotional regulation.

These professionals are employed in **nursing homes and day care centres** for older adults, where gardens support gentle physical activity, sensory stimulation, reminiscence, and relaxation, helping to reduce agitation, apathy, and isolation. They also work in **centres for people with disabilities**, where healing gardens provide safe and inclusive environments to foster learning, exploration, and autonomy through structured or spontaneous activities.

In **hospitals and rehabilitation units**, they collaborate with clinical teams to support recovery from trauma, surgery, neurological conditions, or chronic illness. Here, gardens complement therapeutic and rehabilitative interventions by enhancing motivation and emotional balance.

Finally, they work in **educational communities, residential services, and schools**, particularly ASACOM professionals (Specialist Support Assistant for Autonomy and Communication), where healing gardens support inclusion, communication, sensory regulation, and social learning. At the community level, they collaborate with local social and educational services, using gardens and green spaces for inclusive, intergenerational, and community-based activities.

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Health, social, and educational professionals operate within a broad and interconnected **network of collaborations that is essential for the effective integration of healing gardens into care and educational pathways**. A central role is often played by the horticultural therapist, when present, who designs and leads nature-based therapeutic activities. Health and social operators support these sessions by adapting activities to individual abilities and observing behavioural and emotional responses. They also work closely with gardening operators to ensure that garden maintenance choices preserve its functional, sensory, and therapeutic qualities.

Architects and designers are involved in the creation or adaptation of healing gardens, while health and social professionals contribute crucial insights into users' abilities, limitations, and daily routines to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. Within facilities, they collaborate with educators, psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and healthcare staff to integrate the garden into educational, therapeutic, and rehabilitation plans. Families and caregivers are equally important partners, offering valuable knowledge about users' histories, preferences, and needs, and often participating in garden-based activities to strengthen continuity of care.

To fully embed healing gardens into practice, these professionals rely on a multidisciplinary network that enables shared planning, coordinated interventions, and continuous monitoring. Collaboration with social, health, and educational facilities supports training initiatives, pilot projects, and community-based actions, while vocational training centres contribute to both initial and ongoing education on nature-based approaches. Partnerships with local associations and volunteer networks enhance community engagement, and cooperation with municipal services and welfare systems facilitates the development of healing gardens in public spaces, promoting social inclusion and access to green areas for vulnerable groups.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

All social-health operators need a set of core skills that allow them to provide safe, effective, and compassionate care. These can be grouped into technical skills and soft skills:

Technical skills



- Basic health care: supporting personal hygiene, mobility, nutrition, and administering prescribed medication.
- Knowledge in geriatrics and disability: understanding the specific needs of older adults and people with functional diversity.
- Risk prevention and first aid: responding to emergencies, falls, or other critical situations.
- Support in activities of daily living: assisting with routines that promote autonomy and independence.
- Use of socio-healthcare tools and techniques: implementing individualized care plans, protocols, and progress records.

Soft skills

- Empathy and active listening: understanding emotions and needs, alongside observation skills to detect physical, cognitive, or emotional changes.
- Interdisciplinary teamwork: collaborating with doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, or gardeners.
- Emotional management and resilience: handling stress and managing the challenges of caregiving.

Beyond the basics, social-health operators can broaden their competences to embrace tools and approaches that help patients regain independence and improve their social and mental well-being. This reflects the newer trend of holistic health:

- Promotion of active aging: creating social, cultural, and stimulating activities.
- Non-pharmacological therapies: such as cognitive stimulation, music therapy, or nature-based activities.

In the case of nature-based therapies, such as healing gardens, to apply these properly, operators must understand the theory behind them: *How do they work? How are these spaces used? What is the method?* And, when working directly with healing gardens, social-health workers should have at least a basic understanding of horticulture, botany, sensory stimulation techniques, and adapting garden tasks to different abilities.

BEST PRACTICES IN ITALY

Healing gardens are becoming increasingly common in institutional settings, which creates a growing need for social and healthcare professionals to understand how to use them effectively. Some institutions, such as those mentioned above, invest in staff training or employ professionals with expertise in nature-based therapies. However, other institutions have gardens but fail to provide adequate training, thereby missing a significant opportunity to enhance the well-being of their clients.

Hospitals and Rehabilitation Units

In hospitals, healing gardens are commonly designed as internal courtyards or roof gardens connected to clinical wards. They serve as spaces for pause and decompression for patients, families, and staff, and are often equipped with walking paths, ramps, varied surfaces, and seating to support motor rehabilitation and emotional regulation.

The literature reports reduced stress and anxiety, improved pain perception, better adherence to treatment, and higher satisfaction among patients and healthcare professionals.

Relevant examples include:

- Niguarda Hospital (Milan): healing garden accessible from multiple wards, used for oncology psychological support, staff decompression, and outdoor physiotherapy.
- Meyer Children’s Hospital (Florence): pediatric healing garden integrating play, sensory pathways, and outdoor learning to reduce anxiety and support families.
- Sant’Orsola Hospital (Bologna): pediatric garden with sensory and play elements to reduce pre-procedure anxiety.
- Udine Hospital: neurological rehabilitation garden with differentiated surfaces and handrails for motor training.

Nursing Homes, Residential Care Facilities, and Day Centres

In services for older adults, healing gardens are typically enclosed and safe, with looped paths, frequent seating, shaded areas, and raised beds. “Memory gardens” using familiar plants and scents support reminiscence, sensory stimulation, social interaction, and mobility training, particularly for people with dementia.

Representative examples:

- Alzheimer Day Centre (Treviolo – Bergamo): healing garden with looped paths and raised beds, used for reminiscence, sensory stimulation, and light motor activity.
- Giardino della Felicità (Ferrara): co-designed garden involving residents and staff, supporting group activities, cognitive stimulation, and emotional well-being.

Centers for Disability and Rehabilitation

In centers for physical, intellectual, or sensory disabilities, gardens prioritize accessibility and multisensory experiences. They are used for autonomy training, group activities, communication skills, and, in some cases, pre-vocational pathways linked to horticulture and green care.

Schools and Educational Settings

In schools, healing or enhanced school gardens support emotional regulation, sensory breaks, inclusion, and experiential learning. For students with disabilities, gardens provide calming

environments and meaningful contexts for movement, exploration, and augmentative and alternative communication.

EXISTING GUIDELINES

As mentioned, **there are currently no specific guidelines for nature-based therapy in Italy.** At the international level, there is no single global standard either, but the literature converges around several **shared reference points.**

Key contributions include Design Guidelines for Healing Gardens in the General Hospital (Frontiers in Public Health, 2023), which proposes a method for translating case-study evidence into design guidelines for general hospitals, focusing on accessibility, safety, comfort, privacy, sensory stimulation, orientation, and contact with nature. Similarly, Recommendations for Implementing Therapeutic Gardens to Enhance Human Well-Being (Sustainability, MDPI) offers cross-sector recommendations addressing design, management, user participation, and sustainability across healthcare, educational, and community settings.

The Therapeutic Landscapes Network, while not a regulatory guideline, represents an important reference repository, collecting evidence-based examples of healing gardens in hospitals, nursing homes, and rehabilitation centres (views of greenery, safe paths, plant selection, microclimate management, wayfinding, etc.).

Across review articles and academic guidelines, **recurring principles** include the centrality of target users (patients, families, staff), universal accessibility, safety, comfort, privacy, personal control, and a careful balance between sensory stimulation, social interaction, and quiet spaces.

Overall, the literature emphasizes that **healing gardens** should not be treated as decorative elements, but as **integral parts of care or educational pathways.** They must be designed for specific user groups, rely on active staff engagement for daily use, and be supported by context-specific operational guidelines (e.g., hospitals, nursing homes, schools, disability services), rather than by a single abstract standard.

SUGGESTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SECTOR

For these professional profiles in Italy, it appears promising to focus on both **initial training** and **lifelong professional development.** **Fondazione Enaip Lombardia is currently developing initiatives in both areas** with its qualified staff, and will continue to do so after the end of the project.

1. Initial Training (for Social Care Assistants – **ASA**, Social and Health Care Operators – **OSS**, Specialist Support Assistant for Autonomy and Communication – **ASACOM**)

Specific modules can be integrated into the different qualification pathways:

- In the Learning Unit “Techniques of Animation” (for OSS/ASA)



- In the Learning Unit “Autonomy and Communication” (for ASACOM)
- Curricular internships in facilities that have a healing garden

During qualification, modules and internships allow them to develop skills to use gardens for educational, reactivation, and sensory-cognitive activities, particularly with older adults.

Recommended contents:

- Introduction to healing gardens and their therapeutic potential
- Educational and reactivating activities in the garden
- Safety, supervision, and accompaniment
- Observation and documentation of outcomes
- Collaboration with horticultural therapists and green-space professionals

The goal is for social and healthcare operators to understand how well-designed and maintained green spaces generate measurable well-being, supporting sensory, cognitive, and emotional activation in patients, especially older adults.

2. Lifelong learning (post-qualification)

Lifelong learning can be structured along **three complementary tracks**:

- Professional update modules (upskilling): these modules, open to already qualified OSS, ASA, and ASACOM professionals, could introduce green care competencies and enrich existing skills. They may be offered both as professional updates and as motivational “relief” courses aimed at enhancing staff well-being and engagement.
- Lifelong learning for social and healthcare facilities: training and professional development programs for all staff and management in social and healthcare facilities. These programs could be tailored to specific roles and cover relevant regulations, planning, and procedures for establishing and managing a healing garden, including design, implementation, and maintenance. They could also focus on developing and managing user-centred activities for therapeutic purposes, structured recreational activities, well-being initiatives, collaborative care of green spaces, social interaction, stress reduction, and nature-based team building for staff.
- Corporate welfare for companies in any sector: this could include the design, creation and management of indoor or outdoor workplace well-being gardens in corporate settings such as break areas, meeting rooms, and conference spaces. Depending on the role, activities may cover training on regulations, planning, and procedures for establishing and managing a well-being garden, as well as implementation and ongoing maintenance. These programs could also support using garden spaces for relaxation and light exercise during breaks, stress and burnout reduction, nature-based team building, collaborative care of green spaces, and the cultivation of herbs, and small-scale vegetable gardens.

SPAIN

Social-health operators are professionals who support individuals needing assistance in their daily lives due to physical, psychological, or social challenges. Their work is holistic, combining healthcare with social support and help in everyday activities.

Within this field, different profiles exist. Some focus primarily on caring for the person, assisting with daily routines, mobility, hygiene, feeding, etc. Others aim to enhance the individual's well-being through various types of therapy.

Occupational therapists play a central role in this sector. They are university-trained professionals specializing in rehabilitation, helping people regain independence in daily activities. Their goal is to improve autonomy and quality of life, helping individuals overcome physical, cognitive, or social barriers.

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Social-health operators typically work with people with special needs. In Spain, the most **common workplaces** include:

- Nursing homes and day-care centres for older adults
- Hospitals and health centres
- Home-care services
- Centers for people with disabilities
- Special education schools

These professionals operate within multidisciplinary teams, collaborating with doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists/psychologists, and social workers. Depending on the facility, they may also work alongside support staff such as cooks, cleaners, hairdressers, and administrative personnel.

Teams work in a coordinated manner to assess each person's needs and define shared care objectives. They use tools such as Personalized Care and Life Plans or Care Plans, and hold regular meetings to review progress and implement measures to ensure high-quality care.

Currently, **nature-based therapy is not widely practiced in Spain**. While outdoor green spaces are common in settings such as nursing homes, they are often flat, simple, and underutilized, with patients typically going outside only for walks. For this reason, **it would be highly beneficial for social-health professionals to collaborate with garden operators and horticultural therapists**. Such collaboration could help **integrate green spaces into patient care more effectively**, for example through horticultural therapy sessions or sensory stimulation activities.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

All social-health operators need a set of core skills that enable them to provide safe, effective, and compassionate care. These skills can be grouped into technical skills and soft skills:

Technical skills:

- Basic healthcare: assisting with personal hygiene, mobility, nutrition, and administering prescribed medication.
- Knowledge in geriatrics and disability: understanding the specific needs of older adults and people with functional diversity.
- Risk prevention and first aid: responding to emergencies, falls, or other critical situations.
- Support in activities of daily living (ADLs): helping with routines that promote autonomy and independence.
- Use of socio-healthcare tools and techniques: implementing individualized care plans, protocols, and progress records.

Soft skills:

- Empathy and active listening: understanding emotions and needs, alongside observational skills to detect physical, cognitive, or emotional changes.
- Interdisciplinary teamwork: collaborating effectively with doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, and healing gardeners.
- Emotional management and resilience: handling stress and managing the challenges of caregiving.

Beyond these basics, social-health operators can expand their competences to support patients' independence and overall well-being, reflecting the trend toward holistic care:

- Promotion of active aging: organizing social, cultural, and stimulating activities.
- Non-pharmacological therapies: including cognitive stimulation, music therapy, and nature-based activities.

In the case of nature-based therapies, such as healing gardens, operators must understand the underlying theory: how these therapies work, how the spaces are used, and the methods applied. When working directly in healing gardens, social-health workers should have at least a basic knowledge of:

- Horticulture
- Botany
- Sensory stimulation techniques
- Adapting garden tasks to different abilities

BEST PRACTICES IN SPAIN

As mentioned above, there are already several **educational courses that social-health operators can enrol in to develop the skills required to practice horticultural therapy**. Additionally, **some institutions have begun to introduce healing gardens, creating a clear need for staff to understand how these spaces can be effectively used**. In some cases, institutions provide training for their staff or bring in professionals already trained in nature-based therapies.

However, other institutions have gardens but do not invest in educating their staff, which results in a significant lost opportunity to maximize the therapeutic benefits for their clients.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

As already mentioned, there are no existing guidelines for nature-based therapy in Spain. The recognition and definition of the profile of Horticultural Therapist would be highly beneficial to the field.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Health and social workers in the Czech Republic help individuals cope with adverse social situations related to illness, disability, old age, or loneliness. **They provide comprehensive support that combines social, health, and legal guidance, helping clients navigate the system of social and health services and coordinating the necessary assistance.**

Specifically, health and social workers:

- Provide social and health advice: they advise patients and their families on social and legal issues connected to health conditions.
- Address social challenges: they assist clients in overcoming problems such as loss of self-sufficiency, social isolation, or lack of social support.
- Ensure access to services: they help discharged patients secure follow-up care, including nursing, home care, stays in elderly homes, hospice care, or rehabilitation institutions.
- Collaborate with institutions: they coordinate with other professionals, authorities, courts, and institutions to ensure the best outcomes for the patient.
- Conduct social investigations: by visiting clients' homes, they assess needs and propose and implement psychosocial interventions or other supportive measures.
- Promote prevention: they proactively identify at-risk individuals, especially seniors and children, and carry out health and social screenings.
- Support social integration: they assist clients in reintegrating into society through activation programs or social-therapeutic activities.

Overall, health and social workers play a central role in bridging healthcare, social services, and community support, ensuring that vulnerable individuals receive holistic and coordinated care.

A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS

Health and social workers in the Czech Republic are employed across a variety of settings, including health facilities, social services, government offices, and non-profit organizations. Their work often bridges these sectors, for example in hospitals, where they help patients address both medical and social needs.

Where they work:

- Health facilities: hospitals, outpatient clinics, home care services, and hospices.
- Social services: homes for the elderly, nursing services, asylum homes, children's homes and facilities for children requiring immediate assistance, crisis centers, and other social care institutions.
- Authorities and state administration: municipal and city authorities, social affairs departments, labour offices, social security administration, Departments for Social and Legal Protection of Children (OSPOD), and social curators.
- Non-profit organizations: civic associations, non-profit companies, foundations, church organizations, and counselling centres (e.g. civic counselling centres).

Clients and collaborators:

Health and social workers serve a diverse range of clients, including individuals in need of health or social care, as well as their families and loved ones who are part of the care process.

They cooperate with a wide network of entities, from the clients themselves to public and state agencies such as courts, police, and employment offices. In addition, they work closely with healthcare and social facilities, including hospitals, hospices, and home care agencies, as well as with health insurance companies and various non-profit organizations.

Key collaborators include:

- Healthcare: hospitals and other health facilities, ambulatory doctors, health insurance companies, home care agencies, and hospices.
- Social services and care: labour offices, municipal and city social departments, homes for the elderly, nursing services, asylum homes, and hostels.

Overall, health and social workers act as a central link between clients, families, healthcare providers, social services, government authorities, and non-profit organizations, ensuring coordinated and comprehensive support for individuals in need.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Competencies and skills required to work in this field include:



- Knowledge of social work and therapeutic skills: familiarity with social care principles, occupational therapy techniques, and methods for supporting individuals with physical, cognitive, or social challenges. Ability to plan and conduct meaningful activities that promote well-being, inclusion, and social interaction.
- Psychological abilities: skills in understanding human behavior, emotional needs, and group dynamics. Ability to establish trustful relationships, motivate participants, and adapt activities to individual abilities and needs. Awareness of mental health considerations and the capacity to provide empathetic support.
- Knowledge of horticulture and basic botany: understanding plant biology, cultivation, seasonal cycles, and garden management. Ability to select and care for plants suitable for therapeutic and social purposes. This knowledge is becoming increasingly important as garden-based therapies gain recognition and as healing gardens become more common in health facilities. It is also closely linked to the profession of horticultural therapist, which, as mentioned, is not yet officially recognized in the country.
- Soft skills: effective communication, teamwork, observation and assessment skills, and the ability to reflect on and evaluate the outcomes of therapeutic activities.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

As far as best practices in this field are concerned, reference can be made to what was previously indicated for the other professional figures.

EXISTING GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

At present, **there are no established guidelines for nature-based therapy**. It would therefore be highly beneficial to **strengthen education and promote closer collaboration** between the fields of green/garden work and the health sector, including socio-educational and social-health services.

30-HOUR MODULE FOR AGRICULTURAL TECHNICIANS (FONDAZIONE ENAIP LOMBARDIA)

Introduction

The development and design of the **30-hour training module** is the result of the work carried out by Enaip Lombardia throughout the project, building on the various planned activities. Among these, storytelling activities (exchange of best practices, reflections, and online meetings among partners), exchange visits, and workshops played a key role in shaping the module.

In particular, the workshops provided an opportunity for **active collaboration between trainers from the Enaip centres in Monticello Brianza and Busto Arsizio**, the two locations where Agricultural Operator/Technician courses are present. These moments of exchange made it possible to design a dynamic, experiential module tailored to the needs of the students who would later take part in it.

Based on all these inputs, the module was further refined in detail by a technical trainer from the Monticello Brianza centre, Dr. Agronomist Marco Bernava, who also led and delivered the pilot phase.

The module was tested with a fourth-year class of the **Agricultural Technician course (EQF Level 4) at the Enaip centre in Monticello Brianza, from January 29 to February 13, 2026**. The pilot involved four trainers and one educator. Among the trainers, three specialized in technical subjects, while one contributed to the introductory phase and the more transversal aspects of the module.

A total of **12 students** participated, 11 of whom attended more than 75% of the training hours delivered. Relevant timesheets are attached²⁰.

The module aimed to introduce the concept of healing gardens into the curriculum, with a particular focus on the relationship between green spaces and well-being. Considering the specific target group, students aged 17–18 enrolled in the fourth year of a vocational training program leading to a professional diploma as Agricultural Technicians, the topics concerning the therapeutic value of green spaces and the various forms of vulnerability among potential users of a healing garden were introduced through a theoretical framework, followed by a strong emphasis on practical laboratory activities, and ultimately consolidated through classroom discussions summarizing the key results and core concepts.

²⁰ It should be noted that four students, who were absent during some of the sessions, made up the missed hours on February 16, 2026, together with the trainer responsible for the piloting, Marco Bernava. The timesheet for this day is also attached.

This approach was chosen in order to foster a shift in perspective among students: **from viewing green spaces as purely aesthetic elements to understanding them as functional environments designed with specific features depending on the needs of their users.**

Furthermore, the module focused on enhancing and specializing existing professional profiles rather than creating new ones, building on competencies already recognized by the Lombardy Region within the training program in which the module was implemented.

Among the **guiding principles** that supported the development and pilot of the module, the following should be highlighted:

1. Experiential/deductive approach: an experiential model was adopted, starting from the students' own experiences and allowing them to concretely explore the characteristics and needs of healing garden users. The focus was placed mainly on target groups of different age ranges, while disabilities were addressed mainly through examples and hands-on activities. This choice was made after observing the class's positive response and level of maturity when first introduced to these topics, especially considering that some students in the group present vulnerabilities themselves. The methodologies adopted within this approach included brainstorming sessions, group work, and hands-on experiential workshops, which replaced the initially planned game-based activities. This adjustment was made in response to the students' high level of engagement, ensuring that the laboratory component was neither diminished nor oversimplified.
2. Guided approach: students were provided with a range of concrete examples, both positive what to do, and negative what not to do, aimed at supporting their understanding of a new perspective on green spaces, where the user of the healing garden is at the centre of the experience. This approach seeks to raise students' awareness of green spaces as environments designed to promote users' well-being.
3. Circular approach: to ensure the module is meaningful and aligned with a technical training pathway related to green spaces, it was structured using a circular approach:
 - starting from the students' current perspective;
 - encouraging new reflections;
 - applying these insights to reshape their understanding of green spaces.

All of this promotes a shift in perspective: from “using green spaces” to “experiencing green spaces.”

Initially conceived as an interdisciplinary unit that could also involve non-technical subjects, the module ultimately focused on technical and vocational disciplines, in order to obtain clear and direct feedback on both content and methodologies. However, the possibility of expanding the range of subjects involved is not excluded in future developments.

Structure of the module

The module was organized into thematic morning sessions dedicated to the topic (**6 days of 5 hours each**) and was structured as follows:

TITLE	THEORETICAL CONTENT HOURS	LABORATORY HOURS	TOTAL HOURS
MOD. 1: INTRODUCTION TO HEALING GARDENS	2	4	6
MOD. 2: DESIGN OF A HEALING GARDEN	5	4	9
MOD. 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF A HEALING GARDEN PROJECT	2	3	5
MOD. 4: MAINTENANCE OF A HEALING GARDEN	4	6	10
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS	13	17	30

At the end of the 30-hour module, an **anonymous questionnaire**²¹ was administered to the participating students, with the aim of assessing:

- the acquisition of key concepts necessary to approach an agricultural profession related to healing gardens;
- the development of awareness regarding the central role of target users in an healing garden;
- the effectiveness and overall appreciation of the methodology used;
- the time allocated, the content covered, and the balance between theoretical lessons and experiential activities.

²¹ The questionnaire and the answers are attached.

MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO HEALING GARDENS

Competencies

- Collaborate in the design of green areas, parks, and gardens based on the site's characteristics and the client's needs.

Objectives

- Starting from an awareness of the well-being/nature relationship from a professional perspective, to develop a new and more conscious vision of green spaces, including healing gardens and therapeutic horticulture;
- To identify and understand the different types of users (targets) who can benefit from green spaces (through a deductive and experiential methodological approach);
- To gain knowledge of the various professional roles involved in the design, implementation, maintenance, and management of healing gardens, and to manage relationships and communication with these professionals.

Topics and contents

1. Healing Gardens

- 1.1. Brainstorming on the meaning of “garden” and “well-being”: contact with nature as a source of well-being;
- 1.2. Active and passive well-being: managing the therapeutic dimension of green spaces according to the autonomy of the target group;
- 1.3. Physical and psychological well-being: a different perspective on green spaces and functional spaces.

2. Users of healing gardens (targets)

- 2.1. Identification of target groups based on context, not solely on pathologies;
- 2.2. Possible targets/contexts and presentation/definition of their characteristics (schools, public spaces, social and healthcare facilities).

3. Professional profiles in healing gardens

- 3.1. Professional profiles and their interactions during the design, implementation, and maintenance phases of healing gardens (architects, agronomists, designers, technicians, operators);
- 3.2. Reference professionals working directly with target users (healthcare assistants, teachers, educators, psychologists, etc.);
- 3.3. The importance of teamwork and effective communication flow;
- 3.4. Effective communication techniques with both target users and professionals;
- 3.5. Active listening techniques with reference professionals (e.g., interpreting regulations as expressions of user needs and the importance of complying with them as conveyed by designers).

Themes and associated workshops

- **“The ancestral human being”**: the biological theory of the effect of the colour green on human psychology and the unconscious; the value of the land within the agricultural culture we come from.
- **Well-being**: following the rhythm of nature (not only in work activities) generates well-being and promotes a sense of balance.
 - **Workshop “well-being”**: students often choose to study in the green sector because they say they “feel good outdoors.” Starting from this motivation, a reflection is proposed on how different target groups may seek different forms of well-being through contact with green spaces. Through a brainstorming activity, students are invited to associate different user groups with their possible interpretations of well-being related to green environments. It is emphasized that the well-being generated by green spaces can take many forms and, in some cases, may simply consist of “being in a green environment,” without the need to carry out specific activities.



Figure 1: Students during the activity



- **Workshop “time”**: following the journey of a seed, from germination to growth and fruition, or its failure to thrive due to insufficient time or unsuitable environmental conditions, helps students understand the essence of life and the natural rhythms that characterize agriculture. *(This workshop was not conducted)*
- **Nature is social**: it does not ask or judge, and is inherently therapeutic.
 - **Workshop “Experiencing green spaces”**: students are guided to a natural area, ideally a wooded space, where they are given time to “feel” the surrounding environment in silence (during the pilot, this activity took place in the ancient forest of Villa Greppi). Afterwards, they can choose how to experience the space: remaining seated to explore a sense of stillness, or walking to engage with it more dynamically.

In a second phase, students are brought to a designed green space, ideally an ornamental garden (during the pilot, the Italian-style garden of Villa Greppi), and are again invited to listen to and observe their own sensations.

The goal is to compare two types of green spaces, natural and anthropized, which generate different forms of well-being simply through their use. This introduces the concept of a “designed garden,” created not just for aesthetic purposes but to promote the well-being of specific user targets.

The activity ends with a collective reflection on the differences between natural and designed green spaces, and on the desire to reconnect with the well-being that natural environments can offer, even simply by spending time in them without performing any activity.

This workshop will also serve as the final activity of the whole module, encouraging a final discussion on the role of green spaces and the different ways they can promote well-being.
- **Care**: taking care of the environment is taking care of people, and vice versa.
 - **Workshop “Targets”**: students create worksheets dedicated to different target users (e.g., children, adolescents, adults, elderly, individuals with physical or psychological vulnerabilities), identifying their main characteristics. These sheets will be used as reference in subsequent workshops.

In the first phase, the focus is on age groups, without initially addressing disabilities. Students are divided into groups or pairs, and each group is assigned an age range (0–5 years, 6–11 years, adolescents, adults, elderly). Based on this assignment, students characterize the target by reflecting on possible needs, ways of interacting with green spaces, and associated well-being requirements.



0 - 3 ANNI

BISOGNI:

- RELAZIONI
- STARE IN COMPAGNIA
- CONDIVIDERE PASSIONI
- RINSCIARE AD ACCEDERE IN QUALSIASI CANTINA DEL PARCO
- FARE RITROVARE E MOZIONI POSITIVE
- DIVERTERSI
- ESSERE SPENSIERATI
- STARE BENE
- GIOCHI DA TAVOLO
- LEGGERE

CARATTERISTICHE:

- SCARSA ROTELLE
- MAL DI SCHIENA
- NON RUSCIRIA A MUOVERSI BENE
- STANCHEZZA
- FRANGIBILITÀ
- MANUALITÀ
- RIZALI
- ATTIVI
- VOGLIA DI FARE



- INCONSAPIBILITÀ (MANTOVA PERFEZIONE DEL PERICOLO)
- IMPERTINENZA
- VOGLIA DI STOFFARE
- POCA MANUALITÀ
- POCHISSIMA CAPACITÀ INTELLETTIVA
- DIFFICOLTÀ NA RESCONE ARDITE

Figure 2: Example of worksheets prepared by the students for the activity

MODULE 2: DESIGN OF A HEALING GARDEN

Competencies

- Collaborate in the design of green areas, parks, and gardens based on the site's characteristics and the client's needs.
- Intervene in the cultivation of tree, herbaceous, and horticultural-floricultural plants, ensuring specific standards related to consumer safety and environmental balance.

Objectives

- With the aim of contributing to the design process rather than executing it entirely, understand the essential technical elements in order to reconsider the concept of functional spaces and the design requirements related to the needs of the target users.

Topics and contents

1. **History of gardens:** responding to needs during different historical periods.
2. **Individualized design:** not only focused on aesthetics or production, but translating the target users' needs into functional areas.
3. **Design starting from the person (target):** existing examples of what *to do* and what *not to do*
 - 3.1. Functional zones and communication between them;
 - 3.2. Selection of plant species;
 - 3.3. Choice of materials.
4. **Site survey with an ecological perspective** to facilitate the handover of the healing garden
 - a. Focus on natural potential rather than anthropocentric vision;
 - b. Recycling materials as a connection to urbanized environments.
5. **Design decisions based on the handover of the space to the target and to the accompanying professionals:** maintenance thus becomes “caring” and a deliberate design choice.

Themes and associated workshops

- **Workshop “Open design”:** to stimulate the psychological perception of green spaces, students are invited to put themselves in the position of a specific target user. Each student temporarily experiences a limitation in a specific ability, introducing the concept of physical and cognitive challenges rather than disability, with the aim of fostering a more empathetic understanding of the different ways in which spaces can be experienced.

Through this activity, students actively test a space where a design intervention could take place, identifying in a practical and intuitive way the potential design needs related to a specific target.



During the pilot, this workshop began with an activity carried out in pairs, focusing on physical fragilities. One student was blindfolded to simulate a condition of limited vision, while the other assumes the role of a guide (caregiver). They then switched roles. Students moved within a defined, flat area of Villa Greppi and later share the sensations and difficulties they experienced. Based on these observations, they identified critical aspects of the space in relation to the needs of both the user and the accompanying person.

The second part of the activity focused on cognitive fragilities. Students were given instructions to perform simple tasks in the same park area, but these were communicated in Spanish. This allowed them to directly experience the difficulty of understanding and executing instructions. The activity became an opportunity to introduce and reflect on user groups with specific cognitive or communication challenges.



Figure 3: pictures of the students during the workshop

- **Workshop “Active listening”**: a specialist introduces a given target group characterized by physical or cognitive fragilities, outlining its general characteristics, and presenting a specific site identified for a potential design intervention.



Students are invited to ask questions and request further details and specific needs from the subject-matter expert, with the aim of gaining a clearer understanding of the intervention area in relation to the target's requirements. This phase encourages an interdisciplinary approach and helps place the target at the centre of the design process, fostering students' ability to analyse real needs before envisioning possible solutions.

During the pilot, the workshop was carried out as follows: in collaboration with the educator supporting the learning pathway, the main characteristics and needs of visually impaired individuals were presented to the students. Building on the experience from the "Open Design" workshop, students then engaged with the educator, sharing observations that emerged from the previous activity.

Through this exchange, students were able to more precisely define the characteristics, needs, and design considerations related to the target group. These elements then became key reference points in the subsequent phases of designing, implementing, and maintaining a functional and inclusive green space.

- **Workshop "Target – Space – Functional areas"**: given a specific target group, students are asked to place it within a particular type of green space and to divide that space into functional zones, based on the target's characteristics and needs, providing justification for their design choices.

The activity then continues in groups, maintaining the previously assigned targets. Students work on the same area analysed during the class on design (the green space behind the classrooms). Each group is asked to identify and represent, also graphically, the different functional areas and the ways they are connected, taking into account the needs and specific features of the selected target group.



ZONA RELAX:
PAVIMENTAZIONE IN PRIMO
PANCHINE IN LEGNO CON CUSCINI, FONTANELLA
PIANTE:
ORZOMBELO
TULIPANI
NARCISSI
SALVIA
ROSMARINO
VIOLE (FIORIRE TRA UNA PANCA E L'ALTRA)
LA SCELTA DI QUESTE PIANTE È STATE PER I
COLORI SCARLAGNATI E UNA GENERAZIONE DI VIVACCI E
PIÙ TOPO ALLO STESSO TEMPO
PIANTE:
ACEDRO GIAPPONESE, PER UNA "BARRETTA" DIFFERENTE
MIMOSA, PER IL CUORE PASTICCIE IN FIORITURA
LIQUIDAMBARE, PROPRI PER CREARE UNA NEZZA LIBERA

PIANTE PER ZONE VERDI

TIGLI
SIEPE DI FORTINA
FORSTZIA
ZONA VERDE → AIUOLA DI ROSE
QUERCIA IN AREA RELAX

Figure 5: Example of worksheets prepared by the students for the activity

- **Design examples of the green-well-being relationship**
 - Social farming (e.g., projects in Campania on land confiscated from organized crime)
 - Bollate Prison: plant nursery production
 - Reference to experiences in Nordic countries, where doctors can prescribe cultural and outdoor activities for therapeutic purposes

MODULE 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF A HEALING GARDEN PROJECT

Competencies

- Create, care for, and maintain green areas, parks, and gardens while respecting environmental balance.
- Intervene in the cultivation of tree, herbaceous, and horticultural-floricultural plants, ensuring specific standards related to consumer safety and environmental balance.
- Work safely and in compliance with hygiene and environmental protection regulations, identifying and preventing potential risks to oneself, others, and the environment.

Objectives

- Translate a design into a set of functional zones, following the guidelines and carrying out planting and installation activities in accordance with the needs of the target users.

Topics and contents

- **Regulations and design guidelines as a reflection of target needs:** the importance of following them as conveyed by the designers.
- **Interpreting graphic or written directives for the creation of functional zones:** the “reading” of the project must always keep the target user at the centre.
- **Proper communication and respect for different roles on site:** correct project execution aims to ensure the space is usable and beneficial for the target.
- **A different perspective on work progress:** respecting the target’s needs as a criterion for monitoring and intervention on site.
- **Importance of consistency in furnishings and their installation** according to the target’s specific requirements.
- **Importance of proper planting of vegetation** in accordance with the target’s specific needs.
- **Automatic systems for green space management** as an application that respects the target’s needs: an introduction to maintenance.

Themes and associated workshops

- **Workshop “Target – Functional area – Furnishings”:** the activity continues in groups, maintaining the previously assigned targets. Students are asked to identify the most suitable furnishings, or activities that require specific furnishings, for the different functional areas included in their proposed transformation of the green space under study. All choices must be consistent with the needs, patterns of use, and specific characteristics of the target group being considered, and must be coherently justified.



arrredo area outdoor 6-11 anni

1. Melador no-dig: vazoni in plastica/alluminio 2x4 (max 2 vasche)
2. attorei in plastica: PE
3. passamano in corda navtica con palletti in legno
4. Bancani da lavoro rialzati



AREA RELAX

TAVOLI IN LEGNO

PIAZZO

FONTELLA

PROTEZIONE IN FERRO

PUNTA PER OMBRA; L'APPOCCIAMO

CHIOSCO PREFABBRICATO IN LEGNO

Figure 6: Example of worksheets prepared by the students for the activity

- **Workshop “Graphical interpretation”:** students are provided with the graphic design of a real green space and are asked to interpret and analyse it, identifying potential functional issues in relation to a specific target group. They are then invited to propose alternative solutions to improve the usability of the space and better respond to the target’s needs. During the pilot phase, the workshop was carried out in groups as follows: students were given the graphic design of the renovation of the Italian-style garden at Villa Greppi and asked to analyse it assuming the space was intended as a healing garden for visually impaired users. From this perspective, they were required to identify any critical aspects of the design in relation to the target’s needs and, where necessary, proposed alternative solutions to enhance accessibility and functionality.



Centinaia:
SCALE, RAMPE INESSENTI
PAVIMENTAZIONE, GIUNTA, TAVOLA
SPAZI ESTERNI PER LE CARROZZINE
LUGARI PER CANTANTI SENZA BARRIERE

Altre note:
L'IMPLEMENTAZIONE, TAVOLE SENZA A... IN TUTTA LA ZONA O...
CREAZIONE SPACI...
CREAZIONE INGRESSI E...
INDICAZIONE...
ZONA...
PAGGI...
SOSTITUIRE...
CORRERE...
ES. 3.

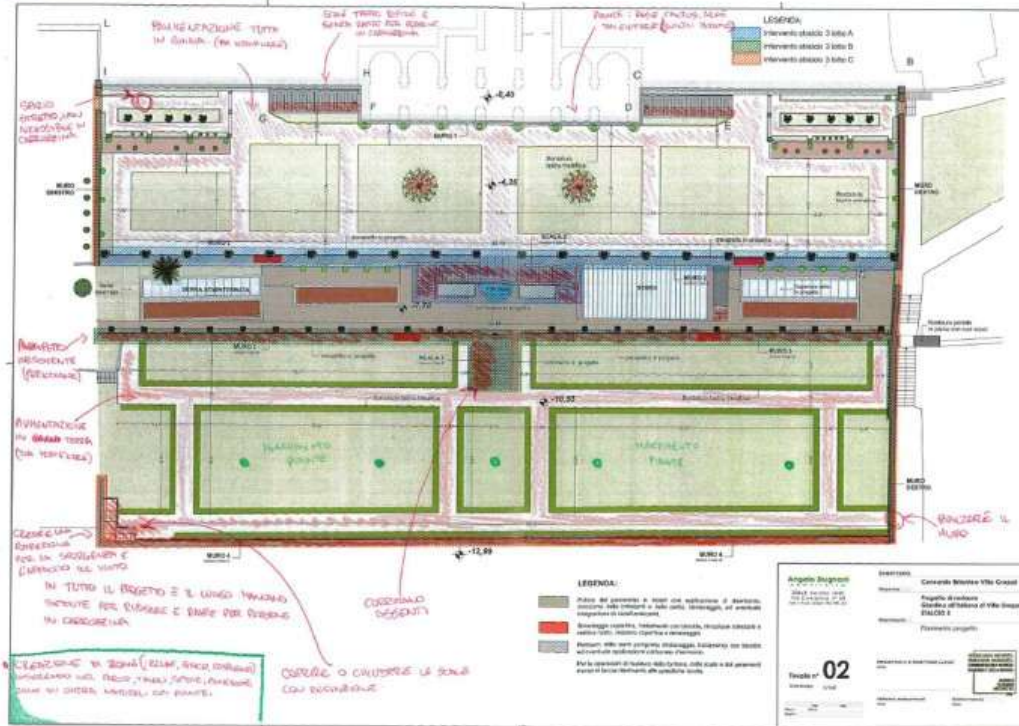


Figure 7: Example of worksheets prepared by the students for the activity

- The implementation of **no dig and soilless cultivation** systems as a strategic choice for certain target groups: this topic is introduced during a lecture as an example of a functional area, highlighting how structures and furnishings must have specific features depending on the needs and characteristics of the target users.

MODULE 4: MAINTENANCE OF A HEALING GARDEN

Competencies

- Intervene in the cultivation of tree, herbaceous, and horticultural-floricultural plants, ensuring specific standards related to consumer safety and environmental balance.
- Create, care for, and maintain green areas, parks, and gardens while respecting environmental balance.

Objectives

- Plan and manage the maintenance of the healing garden, taking into account the potential therapeutic purposes of the activities themselves.
- Hand over the healing garden to the relevant professionals who will work there, organizing and sharing the activities needed to care for the space.

Topics and contents

1. Planning maintenance activities

- 1.1. What is meant by “maintenance” and the shift in perspective toward “caring”;
- 1.2. Handover to the client: the role of the “trainer” who teaches how to “use” the spaces of a healing garden.

2. Identifying which activities should be “done” and which can be “delegated” within the maintenance plan, based on their potential to promote well-being and in line with the specific needs of the target users.

3. Maintenance strategies: selecting appropriate approaches according to the target group.

4. Maintenance equipment: choosing tools based on the characteristics and needs of the target.

5. Applying active listening and effective communication techniques with both professionals and (where possible) target users, to ensure a proper and shared handover of the site.

6. Automation of maintenance operations: using technology to support the care of green spaces while respecting the well-being of the target users.

7. Enjoying green spaces as a source of well-being: experiencing a space both through “doing” activities and simply “being” within it.

Themes and associated workshops

- **Workshop “Do-and-Delegate”:** Older or more experienced students collaborate with younger or less experienced peers in performing maintenance tasks, with the aim of understanding the abilities and limitations of fragile users: what a person can do, cannot do, does not want to do, or struggles with. This approach allows students to realistically

identify which maintenance tasks can be entrusted to the beneficiaries of the healing garden.

- **Workshop “Understanding do-and-delegate”**: students are asked to perform a task under physical or cognitive constraints, helping them understand the real challenges of maintenance and determine which operations can be safely, effectively realistically entrusted to the target group to promote well-being.

During the pilot, students performed maintenance tasks using only one hand (keeping the other behind their back), such as raking leaves, collecting fruit, or operating motorized tools. This hands-on experience enabled them to confront the difficulties faced by fragile users directly, reflect on the different capacities for reaction and adaptation, and gain practical insights on how tasks can be organized and adapted to ensure safety, autonomy, and overall well-being.



Figure 8: students during the workshop

- **Workshop “Target – Functional area – Maintenance”**: following the approach of previous modules and building on the earlier workshops (Do-and-Delegate, and Understanding do-and-delegate), students work in groups, maintaining the targets assigned in the previous activities, to develop a maintenance plan for the functional areas. In this plan, they determine which tasks the target can perform independently and which must be carried out by a professional maintenance worker, taking into account the target’s abilities, limitations, and specific needs. Justification for the choices must be provided.

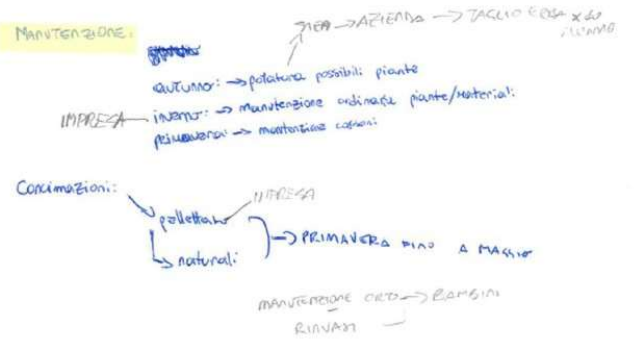


Figure 9: Example of worksheets prepared by the students for the activity

- **Workshop “Target with disabilities”:** A brainstorming session is conducted in collaboration with an educator, who acts as the reference professional for the target group. In a single session, students design functional areas, select plants, materials, and furnishings, and envision the transformation of the site analysed in the “Graphical Interpretation” workshop into a healing garden for a target group characterized by physical or cognitive fragility, chosen by the students. Each group then documents in writing the solutions they developed for each functional area.

During the pilot, given the positive response and sensitivity shown by students when addressing visual impairment, the trainer proposed a brainstorming activity in collaboration with the educator, who took on the role of specialist for the target group. Building on the gaming approach previously applied to different age groups, students were asked to design functional areas and select plants, materials, and furnishings to transform the Italian-style garden of Villa Greppi (analysed in the “Graphical Interpretation” workshop) into a healing garden for visually impaired users.

The activity was carried out in groups, and each group documented in writing the solutions developed for each functional area, providing justification for their design choices in relation to the needs of the target group.

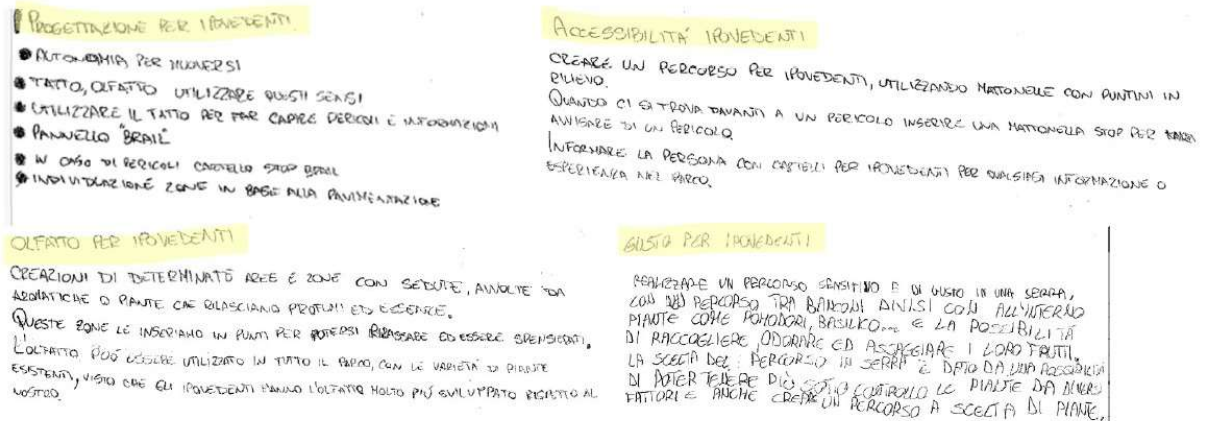


Figure 10: Example of worksheets prepared by the students for the activity

- **Circular workshop:** this workshop offers an experience similar to the “Experiencing Green Spaces” workshop, but in a less structured format. Students are free to explore first a natural green area and then a designed/ornamental space, reflecting on the sense of well-being generated by experiencing the green environment and on the importance of designing spaces with the specific needs of the target group in mind. The workshop is conducted as the conclusion of the module, providing a practical and reflective synthesis of the knowledge and skills acquired.

Conclusion

Student feedback was collected, as mentioned, through a final questionnaire administered after the end of the program. The responses, attached to this document, highlight that:

In terms of contents:

- The topic generated genuine interest among the students.
- Students’ understanding of the concept of well-being linked to green spaces evolved, both in terms of personal perception and professional perspective when considering different user groups.
- The concept of the target group, as a guide in the creation of a healing garden, was understood, along with the methodology used to achieve the objective, which combines a deductive and experiential approach and proved effective.
- Students recognize both the importance of the professional figures involved in the design and use phases of a healing garden and the need for agricultural technicians and operators to establish effective working relationships with them.

- Students understand how the maintenance of a green space can influence the well-being of its users, potentially taking on a therapeutic role for specific target groups, while keeping in focus the role of agricultural technicians and operators in this phase.
- The method and topics covered stimulated awareness, interest, and engagement among students, leading to positive outcomes in terms of learning, critical thinking, and technical and operational evaluation skills.

From the perspective of methodology and course structure:

- The combination of deductive and experiential approaches was highly appreciated, to the point that students expressed interest in using it beyond this module.
- Despite the presence of students with vulnerabilities, addressing topics related to physical or cognitive challenges did not create difficulties, suggesting that the program can also address target groups beyond specific age ranges.
- It is recommended to integrate more interactive tools into the training, such as images, examples of existing projects, real cases, and gaming activities, without undermining either the students or the content.
- Allocating extensive time to practical activities and workshops is advantageous, concluding sessions in the classroom with concise summaries of fundamental concepts: starting from the practical to reach the theoretical aspects.
- The effectiveness of the method and the course requires close and coordinated collaboration among trainers to ensure continuity and consistency between workshops and lessons.
- The overall evaluation of the course, in terms of both duration and organization into monographic days, is positive and confirms the validity of the structure as a specialization module for agricultural technicians.

Feedback from the trainers involved in the module's pilot phase was collected through discussion and exchange sessions among them. Overall, the trainers agreed with the students on the effectiveness of the adopted methodology, while noting that it could be further enhanced by incorporating a greater number of experiential activities and deductive-style lessons.

The importance of close and coordinated collaboration among trainers was also highlighted, as this is essential to clearly and effectively convey the concept of functionality in relation to the target group. At the same time, it is necessary to carefully assess the characteristics of the students participating in the module, in order to avoid creating situations of discomfort or difficulty. Certain topics, particularly those related to disability and health conditions, can be sensitive and not always easy to manage.

In this regard, it was suggested to emphasize the topics addressed through a deductive approach that does not rely on gaming, but rather on structured experiential workshops organized around specific objectives and activities. To support this process, the provision of graphical materials organized into practical and concrete examples was considered useful to facilitate understanding of certain phases of the work.

Another point that emerged concerns the duration of the module: it was suggested to extend it by approximately ten hours, allowing for adjustments to workshops and activities in progress, making them more effective and better suited to the group of students involved.

Finally, regarding the modules focused on the design and implementation of healing gardens, it is recommended to reinforce the legal and regulatory aspects, at least in relation to selected example target groups.

Based on these findings and the positive outcomes achieved, **Enaip Lombardia will continue the pilot and integration of the module described here within its programs for Agricultural Technicians (EQF 4)**, even following the conclusion of the Erasmus project They Will Be Healing Gardens. Consideration will also be given, on one hand, to introducing an initial introductory section for Agricultural Operator programs (EQF 3) and, on the other hand, to expanding the total hours allocated to the module, as suggested by the trainers who participated in the pilot. Finally, the experimentation, which began at Enaip Monticello Brianza, will be extended to the Enaip centre in Busto Arsizio, whose trainers also contributed to the module's design.

CONCLUSION

Through this joint work of analysis, comparison, and mapping, the partners have outlined the current state of several professions active within healing gardens and identified the areas where it is most urgent to integrate new competencies and skills, update existing professional profiles, and promote targeted training pathways.

The project has already led to the development of initial concrete proposals, which will continue to evolve beyond its official duration. With regard to **gardening operators**, in Italy the model developed by Enaip is being submitted to the Lombardy Region proposing the introduction of a module dedicated to healing gardens within sector-specific iVET programmes, as well as a possible update of the competencies included in the relevant professional profile. Thanks to ENAIP's role and the European nature of the project, this proposal can be transferred and adapted to the training systems of the other partner countries.

At the same time, training pathways are being developed for the **social, healthcare, and educational sectors**, offering not only professional development modules (upskilling) for those working in contexts where healing gardens may be present, but also projects linked to corporate welfare. They will be formalized and shared with all partners so that it can also be implemented in their respective national contexts. This area represents a key component, as professionals who work daily with vulnerable individuals are among the main users of healing gardens as educational, rehabilitative, and well-being tools.

Another important aspect that has emerged concerns the role of the **horticultural therapist**, present in all participating countries with valuable experiences and best practices, but still lacking formal recognition. The project highlights the need to define a clear, officially recognized, and certified professional profile, along with the development of a suitable university-level training pathway to ensure quality and professional relevance.

Similarly, for **architects, agronomists, and designers**, who have been working on healing garden design for nearly twenty years, the importance of formally defining the requirements of this specialization and its related professional certification is reaffirmed. The growing spread of healing gardens requires specific, integrated, and recognized skills to ensure design quality, safety, accessibility, and alignment with therapeutic goals.

The work carried out has clearly shown that the design, management, and use of a healing garden require an interdisciplinary approach and structured collaboration among professionals with diverse but complementary skills. For this reason, the partners intend to continue along this path, with the aim of contributing to the creation of a system in which all involved professionals can operate with appropriate, recognized, and certified competencies, for the benefit of individuals and communities who experience and use these spaces.

Furthermore, the process initiated by the project, can help expand employment opportunities and the range of roles available to these professional. For example, Enaip is exploring how integrating modules on healing gardens into the training program for Agricultural Operators could attract more female students, who have so far been underrepresented in this sector, thus promoting greater gender equality.

In conclusion, **the project has laid the foundations for a cultural and professional shift that will continue to develop in the coming years:** from the definition of shared standards to the creation of innovative training pathways, from the enhancement of best practices to the building of European professional networks, all to support the growth of healing gardens as tools for well-being, inclusion, and care.