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THEY WILL BE HEALING GARDENS...

nature helps man and man, in turn, helps nature

STORYTELLING



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INTRODUCTION

The European project *They Will Be Healing Gardens* focuses on the connection between nature and health, emphasizing the importance of creating gardens tailored to users' needs that encourage social interaction and participation, with the aim of promoting physical and mental well-being across different groups.

The Storytelling Activity, in particular, revolves around the exchange of knowledge and best practices between the countries participating in the project: Italy, Spain and Czech Republic.

During this phase of the project, a wide range of materials has been collected and compiled into this document, including the **history of the partner organizations and their activities, the development of healing gardens in the different countries, the current state of the art, the exchange of best practices, experiences and skills related to healing gardens, as well as impressions and reflections gathered during the exchange visits.**

The **exchange of know-how** among professionals working in, and contributing in various ways to, the fields of green and health will lay the foundation for the creation of a common, shared and transnational Academy Model, which will be one of the main outputs of the project.

Particular attention has been given to the themes of inclusion and diversity, with the aim of promoting learning opportunities for all.

STORYTELLING

OIKOS COOPERATIVA SOCIALE A.R.L.

THE ORGANISATION¹

The **OIKOS Cooperativa Sociale** was founded in 2000 in the province of Bergamo (Italy) as an **agricultural and winemaking project**. Over the years, it has expanded into the sectors of **green maintenance, cleaning services, and transportation** for the elderly and for people with disabilities. **It provides job opportunities and social reintegration for individuals with fragilities.**

In all its activities, OIKOS strictly applies two principles: **sustainability** (environmental, economic, and relational) and **quality**. It operates in the open market, offering competitive products and services.

Key principles include the following:

1. Work is the first source of inclusion in society
2. We are all different, all welcome and all a resource for OIKOS
3. We are a team, we help each other
4. OIKOS is ours, everyone is responsible for the results of the Cooperative
5. Our activities always protect and improve the environment
6. We build quality work: we are never labour brokers
7. Working well and living well, together we want to build both things

The real challenge for OIKOS is to **create an inclusive context** where everyone is recognized as a valuable resource for their potential, embracing diversity, ensuring full participation, and viewing individual fragilities as opportunities for the growth and development of the community.

In order to achieve this, OIKOS works with a **strong network of relationships in the area**, including local administrations, social cooperatives, VET providers, social services, associations, industries, entrepreneurs' Organizations, and others.

Moreover, OIKOS can count on numerous volunteers who support the cooperative in the job placement of people with fragilities and take part in dissemination and promotion activities.

THE GARDENS OF WELL-BEING

Since 2022, OIKOS has placed a strong focus on “green welfare” and healing gardens. After years of experience in the traditional design and maintenance of green areas, the cooperative

¹ <https://www.oikoscoop.it/>

has expanded its activities to offer tailored and innovative solutions aimed specifically at enhancing the well-being of its beneficiaries.

In a world that is becoming increasingly chaotic, OIKOS believes that healing gardens can offer a safe and peaceful place, supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of people. The well-being that comes from contact with the natural environment can translate into *healing* in healthcare facilities, *relaxation* in commercial spaces, and *relationships* or *safety* in industrial contexts.

OIKOS provides the design and maintenance of green spaces dedicated to people with disabilities, minors, hospital patients, and elderly people, so that green areas become true places of care and well-being.

Additionally, OIKOS is responsible for organizing training courses on the topic of Healing Gardens. In particular, **since 2023 it has been organizing an Academy called *The Gardens of Well-Being, green spaces in companies, healthcare facilities, and public areas***. This series of seminars is addressed to all those who are interested in the design and creation of green therapeutical spaces in their facilities: architects and landscape designers, agronomists, public green space managers, health and social-care professionals, and HR managers. The Gardens of Well-Being provide basic knowledge, both on technical topics such as botanical and environmental choices and on issues related to the relationship between human and nature from a therapeutic perspective.



HEALING GARDENS IN ITALY

Good practices and first initiatives on healing gardens

The **first courses and in-depth studies on therapeutic greenery** and healing gardens arrived in Italy between **2005** and **2008**.

Below is a brief timeline of the most important courses and events related to the topic.

- **In 2005**, the **Agricultural School of Monza**, started offering a 40-hour course on therapeutic agriculture. The course is based on a professional profile recognized by the Lombardy Region called *Esperto in orti e giardini del benessere* (Expert in Healing and Well-being Gardens).
- **In 2008**, the first course on healing gardens was activated at the **Università degli Studi di Milano**, Faculty of Agriculture. Unfortunately, to date the faculty only offers seminars related to the topic.
- **In 2012**, the **Italian Association of Horticultural Therapy** (Ass.I.Ort) was founded. Monica Botta is recognized as a founding member. Over the years, the association promoted awareness about therapeutic greenery but did not go as far as submitting the role of the Orthotherapist to the Italian government.
In 2022, the Italian Association of Horticultural Therapy dissolved. As of today, there is no Italian horticultural association.
- **In 2015** the **Therapeutic Landscape Design Course** was activated **at the Politecnico di Milano**, aiming at deepening the knowledge related to therapeutic greenery. The course was directed by Professor Stefano Capolongo of the ABC Department of the Politecnico di Milano and had the technical direction of Architect Monica Botta.
- **In 2022, the first Italian conference** on healing gardens was organized by **Vivaio Mati** in Pistoia.
- **In 2022**, the **Università di Bologna**, Faculty of Agriculture started offering a **post-graduate Degree in Therapeutic Horticulture**.
- **In 2023**, the Academy **The Gardens of Well-Being** was launched for the first time.
- **In 2024**, the **Italian Institute Design** started organizing a course on healing gardens. This course is still offered by the Institute.

Especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, interest in therapeutic greenery has been growing in Italy, with numerous conferences and events highlighting the role of nature in the healing process. Likewise, several Italian universities have been promoting research on the benefits of green spaces, including degree theses, surveys, best practices and scientific publications. This research aims at bringing attention to what has been achieved both in Italy and internationally in the fields of therapeutic gardens and horticultural therapy.

Despite this increase in interest, the professional profile of the horticultural therapist has not yet been formally recognized in Italy, resulting in both a regulatory and a skills gap. On one hand, in fact, there are no official guidelines to follow when designing a healing garden; on the other, there is a **shortage of professionals with the necessary competences and skills to design therapeutic green spaces or work within them.**

REPORT OF THE EXCHANGE VISITS

At least two representatives from Oikos were present at every exchange visit within the Erasmus project.

During the **Italian visit** at the Enaip centre in Monticello Brianza, participants highlighted the high quality and well-structured training programmes in agronomy and agriculture. The tour provided valuable insight into Enaip's activities and educational approach, as well as into the site's remarkable historic features, including the old granary, the Italian-style garden, and the surrounding park, allowing participants to appreciate how the estate integrates practical training with cultural heritage.

The Spanish exchange offered an in-depth look at healing gardens as tools for community wellbeing, inclusion, and intergenerational engagement. "Los Sentidos" in Coslada stood out for its welcoming, activity-rich environment, showing how an accessible design can naturally support older adults and the wider community. This garden was particularly impressive as the concept of a public healing garden is not yet present in Italy. The second site, the garden at the Residencia Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro, demonstrated how the same principles can be successfully applied even in restricted spaces. Here, the group also received a specialised evaluation questionnaire for healing gardens, adding methodological value to the project. Finally, the walk through the Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid added a broader educational perspective, particularly regarding accessibility and programs designed for people with disabilities. Spain offered a strong example of how municipalities and private actors can collaborate to create inclusive, activity-rich green spaces embedded in community life.

The visits in Czech Republic gave the strong impression that the country is advanced in the field of garden therapy. At Kotlaska, the integration of social reintegration, community engagement, and creative green design felt both mature and innovative. The dementia-friendly care home showed an understanding of how outdoor and indoor environments can meaningfully support cognitive wellbeing, far beyond what is commonly seen elsewhere. Medina Medici, one of Chaloupky's centres, further reinforced this impression: the quality, inclusiveness, and professional approach to therapeutic landscapes and activities, both horticultural and craft-based, demonstrated a highly developed model of nature-based care. Altogether, the experience revealed a country where garden therapy is not an experimental

practice, but a well-established, thoughtfully implemented part of social and educational services.

FONDAZIONE ENAIP LOMBARDIA

THE ORGANIZATION²

Fondazione Enaip Lombardia is a foundation that has been operating in the Lombardy region for over 50 years, playing a key role in education, vocational training, and employment services. Enaip Lombardia has a network of **24 accredited training centres** across the region and relies on around 300 employees and more than 900 external collaborators.

Enaip Lombardia is a recognised and highly qualified training provider, delivering a wide range of high-quality educational and vocational training programmes. It is known for its ability to design and adapt training courses and services in response to changing labour market needs, ensuring flexibility, efficiency, and innovation.

Vision and mission

The vision of Enaip Lombardia is to be a point of reference for education and training in Lombardy, **promoting educational innovation and the development of human and professional skills**, for an inclusive, sustainable, and constantly evolving labour market.

The mission of Enaip Lombardia focuses on:

- supporting the human and professional development of every individual, taking into account personal contexts and aptitudes
- promoting integration into the social and economic fabric of the territory and the productive system
- upholding equal opportunities based on the principles of democracy and solidarity
- encouraging social inclusion and providing support for the most vulnerable individuals, including those at risk of marginalization or with special educational needs and specific requirements
- contributing to the growth of local and global economies and enterprises
- strengthening the Third Sector, civic engagement, and the social economy.

In all its activities, **Enaip places the person at the centre**, valuing learners' potential through active, hands-on, and experiential learning methodologies and building **strong relationships with local communities and enterprises. Innovation in teaching methods and content**, with a focus on a **digitalisation, sustainability and future-oriented skills** are also a priority.

² <https://www.enaip Lombardia.eu/>

The Foundation actively promotes environmental sustainability and gender equality, integrating principles of social responsibility into all its activities. Initiatives aimed at reducing environmental impact and combating corruption demonstrate a concrete commitment to ethical and sustainable management.

Activities and impact

Fondazione Enaip Lombardia cooperates with more than 6,000 companies and provides training to approximately 15,000 citizens per year.

Key areas of activity include:

- iVET compulsory education (14–18 years)
- higher technical specialisation courses (over 18)
- employment services for young people and adults, including coaching, counselling, job placement, and outplacement
- reskilling and upskilling programmes for adults
- lifelong learning and customised training for companies

Enaip delivers around 500 training courses annually across a wide range of sectors, including wood and furniture design, bakery and pastry, catering, wellness and hairdressing, tourism, mechanics, electrical systems, heating and plumbing, logistics, ICT, graphics, motor vehicle repair, agriculture and logistics, among others.

Students enrolled in compulsory initial Vocational Education and Training (iVET) programmes are approximately 4,500, while first-level apprenticeships involve over 300 companies and over 400 learners.

Enaip Lombardia also supports hundreds of beneficiaries a year with a strong focus on vulnerable groups and people with disabilities, facilitating labour market reintegration through internships and training programmes. It is also active in the penitentiary system, providing training and work-inclusion pathways.

The international area is also expanding significantly, with growing outgoing and incoming mobility experiences. Through regional and European programmes, Enaip implements around 100 international internships and cooperates with European partners on projects focused on sustainability, digitalisation and innovation in teaching methodologies and contents, fostering the exchange of good practices and global competence development.

Enaip Lombardia systematically monitors labour market and training trends, focusing on demographic transition, population ageing, skills mismatches, youth unemployment, and NEETs, so that its activities can respond effectively to the changing needs of society.

In order to do so, Enaip Lombardia maintains close cooperation with local and public institutions, trade associations, professional bodies, employers' associations, lower and upper secondary schools and universities and companies.

EXPERIENCE IN THE GREEN SECTOR

Enaip Lombardia has consolidated experience in the Agri-food services and Agricultural sector with **basic training courses** related to ***Agricultural Operator and Cultivation of Herbaceous, Horticultural and Woody Plants in Open Fields and Greenhouses***³.

The course offers comprehensive training for those who wish to work in the green sector and landscape architecture. Throughout the training program, students will acquire the knowledge needed to grow plants and flowers both outdoors and in greenhouses, care for gardens, parks, and green areas, combining creativity with technical skills in the design and maintenance of green spaces.

The course is held in the Enaip centres of **Busto Arsizio** (Varese) and **Monticello Brianza** (Lecco) and is aimed at young people who have completed lower secondary school. The program lasts **3 years (990 hours per year)** and includes both practical and theoretical activities related to the cultivation of ornamental, fruit-bearing, aromatic, and flowering plants, the maintenance of green areas, and garden management. Students will also learn essential techniques such as grafting, transplanting, pruning, harvesting, and selling products, as well as develop IT and commercial skills useful for starting and managing a business in the agricultural and floriculture sector.

At the end of the program, employment opportunities are numerous. Graduates may find work in the horticulture and nursery sector, in nurseries, garden centres, flower shops, green space maintenance companies, private gardening firms, or cooperatives. There is also the possibility of starting an independent entrepreneurial activity.

After three years, students obtain a **Professional Qualification**, while completion of the **fourth year** leads to the **Professional Diploma as an Agricultural Technician**, qualifications recognized and valid at both national and European levels. Subsequently, students may access IFTS (Higher Technical Education and Training) programs or attend a fifth year to obtain a Upper Secondary School Diploma.

Moreover, over the years our programs have enabled us to build strong partnerships with companies across the entire supply chain and to develop highly specialized technical courses. These include adult education, continuous training for companies, and programs focused on

³ Agricultural Operator: https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/dettaglio_profilo.php?id_profilo=13394&codice_repertorio=SF
Agricultural Technician: https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/dettaglio_profilo.php?id_profilo=13472&codice_repertorio=SF

specific professional profiles, all aimed at promoting the best possible match between workforce supply and labour market demand in the sector.

EXPERIENCE IN THE SOCIAL HEALTH CARE SECTOR

Enaip Lombardia also has long-standing experience in the social and healthcare sector, offering qualifying programs for adults to become *Social and Health Care Operators* and *Social Care Assistants*. Courses are held in Bergamo, Busto Arsizio, Cremona, Lecco, Magenta, Mantova, Morbegno, Romano di Lombardia, and Voghera.

Social and Health Care Operator (Operatore Socio-Sanitario – OSS)

They work in **hospitals, in residential, day-care, and home-based social and healthcare facilities and services**. They provide a high level of **social and healthcare integration**, working in collaboration with other professionals responsible for healthcare and social assistance. They work in close contact with nurses, educators, and social workers.

The course lasts 1000 hours, including an internship and practical exercises. At the end of the course, students will be awarded a **qualification** recognized nationally in Italy.

The course content is designed to provide comprehensive preparation in the field of social and healthcare assistance. It covers direct support and domestic help, as well as hygienic, healthcare, and social interventions aimed at ensuring the well-being of individuals. Participants will acquire skills in management, organization, and training support, together with competencies in direct personal care and in carrying out specific healthcare-related interventions.

A strong emphasis is placed on **communication and relational skills**, particularly in working with the assisted person, their family, and the multidisciplinary work team. The program also focuses on ensuring comfort, hygiene, and safety within living, care, and assistance environments. In addition, learners are trained to organize, monitor, and review their own activities within structured work planning, fostering effective integration with other professionals and services. Ethical principles guiding the role of the Social and Health Care Operator in providing assistance and support to individuals are a fundamental part of the training.

Social Care Assistant (Ausiliario Socio-Assistenziale – ASA)

They carry out activities aimed at **maintaining and/or restoring a person's physical and mental well-being and reducing the risks of isolation and social exclusion**, assisting them in all daily life activities and essential personal functions. They work in **residential, day-care, and home-based social and healthcare services**, operating in collaboration with other professional figures.

The course lasts 800 hours, including an internship and practical exercises. At the end of the course, participant will be awarded a **professional qualification certificate**.

The course content focuses on developing **practical and relational skills** required to provide effective personal assistance. It includes direct personal care, support with social and relational activities, and the maintenance of hygiene and care within the living environment, as well as personal hygiene and grooming.

Participants will learn how to assist with meal preparation and feeding, carry out simple hygienic and healthcare tasks that are non-nursing and non-specialist in nature, and manage small errands and basic administrative duties. The program also emphasizes the ability to manage relationships with public services, informal support networks, and the local community. In addition, learners will be trained to communicate effectively information regarding issues, needs, and requests expressed by users and/or their families, ensuring continuity and quality of care.

REPORT OF THE EXCHANGE VISITS

The visits were attended by two or three representatives from Enaip, including a member of the International Area and a technical trainer from the Monticello centre with an academic background in agronomy.

The Italian visit offered an initial understanding of how healing gardens function within social and healthcare settings. In Treviolo, the group observed a garden designed for people with Alzheimer's disease and learned how its therapeutic value depends not only on the physical space but also on the competence of the staff who guide activities. The fact that patients actively participate in simple maintenance tasks, such as collecting leaves, highlights how everyday activities can contribute to the therapeutic function of the green space. To achieve this, however, staff need to be properly trained. Since Enaip is involved in the training of personnel working in social and healthcare facilities, it aims to focus on this aspect both during the project and after its end. The visit to Oikos further expanded this perspective by showing how agricultural and environmental activities can support fragile workers and be integrated into broader social initiatives.

The Spanish experience provided a structured and methodological view of healing garden design, observing how they are designed, managed and integrated into social and health contexts. The Palmlöf gardens visited in Coslada (Los Sentidos) and Madrid (Residencia Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro) are designed around four modules for active aging and sensory stimulation, and characterized by accessibility elements. A very thorough and specific evaluation model was also analysed during the visit of the Residencia in Madrid. The Spanish experience ended with the visit to the Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid, which offers educational

programs for schools, families, adults, and green professionals, combining science, sustainability, and well-being, using nature as a tool for continuous learning.

It was interesting to observe how the Palmlöf model systematically integrates design, therapy and maintenance, ensuring that the Coslada garden is not just green spaces, but a real therapeutic tool. Moreover, the garden is perfectly integrated into the center of Madrid and the population appreciates its purposes and functionality, and there is a form of 'social respect' that allows for its maintenance and safety.

The Czech Republic visit introduced yet another perspective, centred on community participation, sustainability, and the natural relationship between people and the environment. The visit to Kotlaska revealed how gardens can serve as meeting points for diverse groups, people in reintegration pathways, families, children, and individuals with disabilities, creating spontaneous social interactions. The association Kokoza reinforced the idea that “every garden is therapy,” especially when ecological practices such as composting and rainwater use are part of daily routines. The modern nursing home in Proseč u Pošné and the Chaloupky centre further illustrated how healing gardens can be integrated into care facilities and educational environments, combining nature, animals, and hands-on workshops.

Across all countries, it was observed as the success of such green spaces depends on the integration of design, maintenance, and therapeutic activities, all coordinated by trained and multidisciplinary staff. Community involvement and sustainability also emerged as a crucial themes.

These insights have strengthened ENAIP’s intention to develop a healing garden at the Monticello centre, not only as a physical space but also as a concrete educational tool for the students and for the community at large. The exchange visits have therefore laid the foundation for both the design of the garden and the creation of training module that Enaip will develop and pilot in its courses for Agricultural Technicians.

JARDINES TERAPÉUTICOS KDJ S.L

THE ORGANISATION⁴

Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ designs, promotes, and manages therapeutic gardens: spaces specially designed and adapted for conducting outdoor therapies that promote the health and well-being of users, focusing on the needs of each individual.

Inspired by Scandinavian models, which place fundamental importance on outdoor life and in the contact with nature as a means of improving the quality of life of older people, Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ has developed a programme that harnesses the stimulation and motivation of nature through activities and therapies, working to maintain health. **Their goal is to maintain**

⁴ <https://www.jardinesterapiuticos.com/>

and promote personal autonomy and independence through active ageing, offering therapeutic services in the natural environment provided by an adapted garden. Enhancing physical and cognitive abilities and strengthening users' psychological resilience, JTP provides a strategy for the prevention and promotion of physical and mental health among different groups.

Jardines Palmlöf believes in the **integration of people with disabilities into the workplace.**

The promotion of health and well-being addresses **four areas of intervention:**

1. Fosters identity and fights loneliness by strengthening social connections and community building.
2. Maintains cognitive health through cognitive stimulation (improvement of memory and attention by performing exercises guided by therapists).
3. Maintains physical health and mobility by the encouragement of movement and exercises outdoors.
4. Reduces stress and anxiety in people with high needs through the exposure to natural environments.

Moreover, **well-designed green spaces have positive effects across multiple areas:** they ensure that all members of a community can benefit from the positive effects of nature, promoting social equity; they contribute to better health, helping to reduce pressure on the healthcare system; they improve urban landscape and promote environmental awareness by incorporating sustainable design practices.

Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ's services and activities

Their approach consists in a personalised design, tailored to the needs of the community, and in the integration of sensory and cultural elements. The comprehensive approach they offer also takes into account both aesthetic and therapeutic elements.

The organization designs therapeutic gardens, healthy parks and urban green infrastructures, and provides direct management of the spaces they design, allowing for greater **consistency between the design of the gardens, their maintenance and care and the therapies** that take place in them.

They also provide training in multiple disciplines of outdoor therapy design, management, and methodology, aimed at both professionals in the field and the centres.

The gardens they designed have more than **2000 regular users.** Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ is also part of the guide of Healthy Cities from the Ministry of Health and is recognized as an innovative project by the FEMP (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias - Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces).

EXAMPLES OF HEALING GARDENS

Therapeutic Garden “Los Sentidos” (Coslada)

The garden in Coslada is the first therapeutic garden in Spain. Design, therapy management and weekly maintenance are managed by Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ. It includes four modules for active ageing and sensory stimulation therapies and was designed to facilitate accessibility to spaces (handrails, raised garden beds, etc.).

Therapies are led by professionals that use the Palmlöf Methodology for active ageing and for the cognitive and mental health of young people with intellectual disabilities.

Maintenance activities cover maintenance of the plot, ensuring safe and clean spaces (paths without cracks or moss, control of toxic plants, etc.), climate protection (providing shade according to the season), and the vegetable garden (supporting its therapeutic use, facilitating irrigation, fertiliser and tools).

Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro (Madrid) – Elderly care home

Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ was asked to renovate the existing garden at the residence and transform it into a therapeutic garden.

The garden consists of three modules: TRÄD®, GÅRD®, MINNENAS LUND® on the plot where the residence garden was located and connects the garden environment to the building and the exits to the garden. Each module contains elements and plants to enable specific therapeutic objectives to be worked on.

Alzheimer Center, Fundación Reina Sofía (Madrid)

Madrid City Council has commissioned Jardines Terapéuticos KDJ to design the main courtyard plus nine courtyards in its living unit and the main corridor. The pre-existing garden, in fact, was not suitable for the enjoyment of the centre's elderly residents.

Four modules were designed: TRÄD®, SINNENAS GÅRD®, MINNENAS LUND®, LOOP® in the main courtyard, and spaces adapted to the residents were created in the nine courtyards and in the main corridor. In the design, the importance of creating a layout where users could easily find their way around the different spaces was emphasized.

Other examples

- Elderly Care Home Gesmed, Quart de Poblet, Valencia⁵
- Neurorehabilitation Hospital, Valladolid

⁵ https://www.elperiodic.com/quart_poblet/quart-pobletestrena-jardin-sentidos-centro-tipologia-mixta-pionera-espanajardineria-terapeutica_923529

HEALING GARDENS IN SPAIN

Good practices and first initiatives on Healing Gardens

Below is a brief timeline of the most important events related to the topic:

- **Between 2002 and 2005**, at **Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM)**, Professor J.A. Corraliza conducts **research** on environmental psychology (Estudios sobre infancia y naturaleza, psicología ambiental – studies on childhood and nature, environmental psychology).
- **In 2005**, the **first Therapeutic Garden in Villa Florida**, Barcelona, with a “foot spa” (a walk in a warm pool) and a path with different textures is designed and developed.
- **In 2010**, the **landscape architecture company Buxus** (where K. Palmlöf works) designs nature-based waiting rooms at a hospital in Madrid and Porto.
- **In 2015**, two women from Galicia are working with social inclusion project and introduce the therapeutic use of gardening in Spain. Both were trained in short courses of Therapeutic Horticulture in UK.
- **In 2016**, **Jardines Terapéuticos Palmlöf (JTP)** is founded.
- **In 2018**, the **AEHJST** (Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening) is **founded** to promote Therapeutic and Social Horticulture in Spain.

In Spain, healing and therapeutic gardens have been associated for many years to “institutional gardens”, including those in care homes, hospitals, prisons, special schools, and rehabilitations centres.

However, outside institutional settings, initiatives aimed at promoting the relationship between people, plants, and nature take different forms, for example community urban gardens, neighbourhood horticulture and physical activity in parks. Unfortunately, most of these initiatives are not adapted to allow vulnerable or disabled people to participate in the activities. **By combining two different schools (EEUU/UK and the Swedish Alnarp design principles), JTP is working exactly in this direction: a public therapeutic garden for prevention and wellbeing.** To achieve this, **the organization actively manages both the design process and the therapeutic activities**, allowing the possibility to receive feedback and adapt the activities in line with culture and sociodemographic changes.

Association

The *Asociación Española de Horticultura y Jardinería Social y Terapéutica*⁶ (Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening) was founded in 2018.

Its main **objectives** are:

⁶ <https://aehjst.org/>

- to disseminate knowledge and information about STH
- give educational programs and short courses
- build frameworks and definitions of the profession and the healing gardens
- gather professionals to exchange experiences and knowledge

To date there are **57 associates** belonging to the professional categories of therapists, psychologists, landscape architects, gardeners and other professionals from the care sector. They come from all over Spain and meet monthly online sharing experiences, inviting authors, etc.

Moreover, AEHJST has redacted and published numerous information sheets and articles and has attended several conferences. During the 6 years of existence, it has also delivered more than 20 courses (between 20-40 hours), and has participated in European projects, such as *no gap* and *greenMe*.

In 2025, the association was given a plot of urban land by the local government of Madrid to establish its first physical headquarters (Project Barrios Productores).

The Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening (AEHJST), in collaboration with Jardines Terapéuticos Palmlöf and Inforesidencias, issues the **Therapeutic Garden Certification**. The certification is a guarantee of quality and proves that a garden meets minimum criteria and that it implements a therapy programme. Among the evaluation criteria are accessibility, design, planting, comfort, orientation, paving, variety of activities, type of furniture, privacy and social areas, sense of belonging.

Training courses

Courses on horticulture and social and therapeutic gardening are offered by the **Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening**:

1. Introductory course on horticulture and social and therapeutic gardening (HSTG)
Duration: 20 hours (5 sessions on-line)
Contents of the course: introduction and therapeutic framework of HSTG, designing an HSTG programme, HSTG in Spain
2. Advanced course on horticulture and social and therapeutic gardening
Duration: 93 hours (8 online sessions + 2 practical sessions)
Contents of the course: horticulture and social and therapeutic gardening, development of a HSTG project (programming and organisation, resources and requirements), practical examples
3. Personalised courses

Courses on Healing Gardens are also offered by **Jardines Terapéuticos Palmlöf**:

1. Online and blended courses in gardening therapy and outdoor therapies (general)

2. Training courses and implementation of garden therapy in centres
3. Therapeutic garden masterclass (8 hours)

Currently, **Spanish universities do not offer courses in this field**. In addition, none of the professionals that lead nature-based therapies in Spain are recognized as such; the **role of the horticultural therapist is not officially recognized**, there is no professional register, and no local or national regulation exists. The only existing definition is the one provided by AEHJST.

In the Madrid regional government, the term “garden therapy” is recognized and considered in the allocation of public places in care homes.

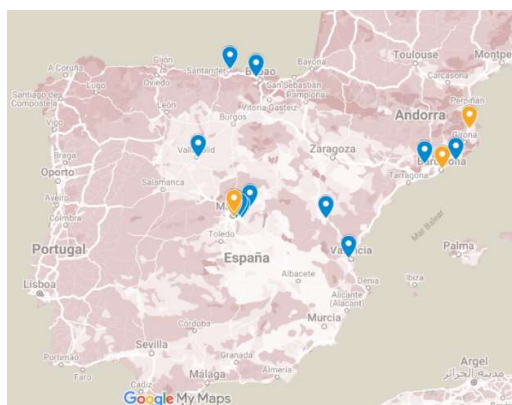
Research

Research is also carried out thanks to **European projects**, for example *GreenMe*, *Mental health for all through nature* and *Healing Gardener*.

- GreenMe⁷: aims at identifying ways in which effective nature-based therapies and a broader green care framework can be scaled-up to improve adult mental health and wellbeing equity in Europe, while contributing to multiple socio-ecological co-benefits.
- Healing Gardener⁸: it is a training program on therapeutic gardening addressed to people with different disabilities to learn how to establish a healing garden and the benefits that the nature brings in our lives. The gardens are established in Spain, Greece and Germany during a learning by doing training course.

A map of the presence of healing gardens

This represents a map of the presence and spread of healing gardens in Spain⁹:



⁷ <https://greenme-project.eu/>

⁸ <https://www.healinggardener.eu/>

⁹ https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1_HzkBQzFCgNQ2yuk82Gh7-kR0V03XcM&ll=41.184544245681856%2C-4.484235653283475&z=7

REPORT OF THE EXCHANGE VISITS

Two persons from Jardines Palmlöf attended all the exchange visits included in the project.

In particular, regarding **the visit to Italy**, the participants highlighted very positively the extensive work carried out by Oikos in the area of Bergamo on the issues of green maintenance and job inclusion of people with vulnerabilities and/or disabilities. In their opinion, it could be interesting for Oikos to take advantage of all their contacts in the area to start a “pilot healing garden” that could work as a “show room” and a starting point for the development and promotion of healing gardens in socio-educational and socio-healthcare facilities, offices and schools.

The visit to the Enaip centre in Monticello was particularly interesting because it helped them understand all the educational and training activities that Enaip carries out in the field of green care. It was also fascinating to see how a historic site of such value is reviving thanks to students and teachers. The possibility for the park around the centre to become a place where students can learn about and experience healing gardens appears very promising.

As far as **the visit to Czech Republic** is concerned, a strong connection with nature and the importance of being in contact with natural areas was strongly perceived: caring for nature so that it can, in turn, care for us, which echoes the project’s subtitle. This aspect seems to pervade local culture more than in other European countries. The visit to the residential care home and its garden was also inspiring. Here, wellbeing, autonomy, contact with nature and familiar places that help residents feel at home are placed at the centre.

To conclude, two main themes need to be highlighted. The first one concerns the absence of the role of the occupation therapist, who works to design programmes aimed at maintaining or improving residents’ abilities. This professional profile, particularly common in Spain, can also plan therapeutic activities using the garden as a key tool. Contrary to Spain, in Czech Republic these activities are carried out mainly by social workers.

The second topic for reflection, common to both countries, concerns the difficulty of finding adequately trained staff for garden maintenance. Maintenance tasks in Czech Republic are usually carried out by the staff of the facilities as part of their daily work. Despite this, gardens are extremely well cared and their commitment is evident. In Spain, on the other hand, they face challenges in ensuring that the gardens they design are properly maintained so that they can continue to fulfil their therapeutic function.

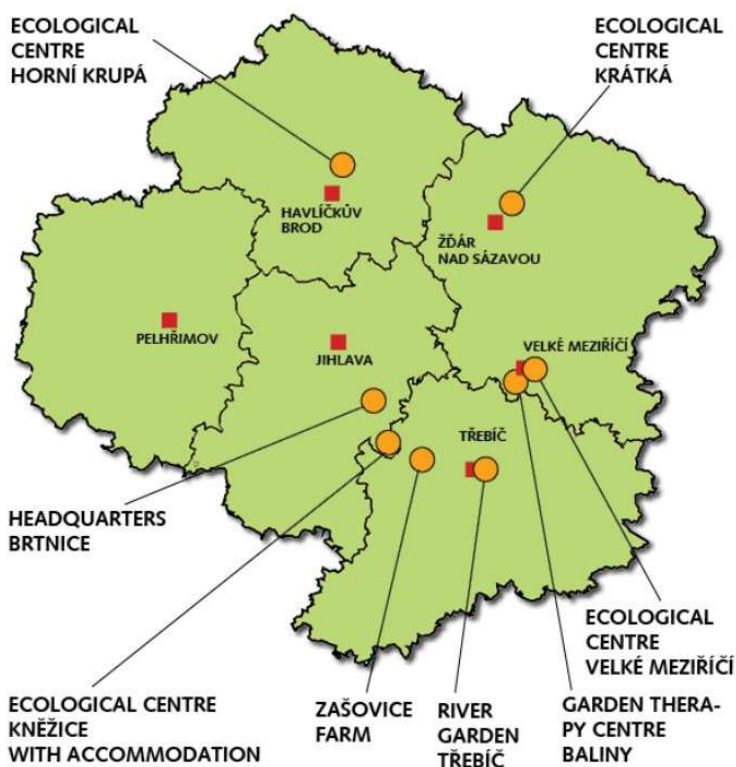
CHALOUPKY O.P.S. A LESNÍ MATEŘSKÁ ŠKOLA

THE ORGANISATION

Chaloupky is a private non-profit organization that operates in the **region of Vysočina** (Czech Republic).

As they state in the website¹⁰, their **objective** is to “show children, young people and adults the secrets of nature as well as its depth and fragility”, they “support such knowledge, skill and attitudes, which create respect and consideration towards nature as well as ecologically responsible behaviour and a sustainable life”.

In order to achieve this, they run **eight centres** in the region with 40 employees in total:



On the farm, they produce dairy products for their own programs as well as for external customers. They also raise sheep to help maintain the landscape. In addition, they partner with another social enterprise that produces joinery products and contributes to landscape management. They also offer accommodation and educational activities in a centre run in an environmentally friendly manner.

¹⁰ <https://www.chaloupky.cz/en/>

Main activities

They organize a wide range of activities for both children and for adults. Here are some examples of the **activities for children**:

- Environmental education programs for schools: they teach children from nursery age to high school mostly outdoors about nature, nature protections, local traditions, life in a farm, etc.
- Summer camps
- Forest kindergarten
- After school activities and clubs
- Nature science competitions

As for **adults**, here are some examples of activities offered to them:

- Training for teachers and support for their teaching methodology
- Public events for families
- Social service - garden therapy
- Nature gardens certification
- Consultancy, for example through the organization of workshops
- Support for school gardens and nature gardens

EXAMPLES OF HEALING GARDENS

Garden therapy and garden pedagogy in the therapeutic centre in Baliny

The **centre in Baliny** opened in 2014 with the aim of creating a place, not only for people with disabilities, where they can enjoy the benefits of nature through therapeutic gardening and natural spaces. The centre, funded thanks to the European Regional Development Fund and a cooperation between Austria and Czech Republic offers a **non-residential social service of social rehabilitation**.

The setting features a natural garden, an edible fruit garden, and a forest playground. There is a small pond, a sand area, a willow arch, water features, a playground, and a fireplace. Additionally, it includes flower beds, raised flower planters, herbal beds, a greenhouse, potted plants, and indoor plants. There is also a woodworking lab for hands-on activities.

The site is home to a variety of animals, including a cat, a rabbit, exotic birds, and an aquarium with aquatic life.

The **areas of interest** include:

- Garden Pedagogy: activities designed for pupils and students aged 5 to 19, focusing on learning in the garden and hands-on experiences. In 2024, the participants were nearly 3000.

- Social Service Club Lebeda: daily living activities and well-being programmes for people from 15 to 64 years old. The number of clients is limited to a maximum of 8 per day, with 6 employees providing a one-to-one approach.
- Senior Club Lebeda: activities designed for individuals aged 64 and above.
- Summer Camps for disabled children (6 - 36 years)
- Day programs open to the general public

The centre also offers **courses**, attended by more than 250 people since 2017, on topics approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and it released a publication entitled “Methodology for providing garden therapy in social services”.

The daily activities carried out with their targets encompass: growing herbs and vegetables from their seeds, taking care of them during growing season and then processing the crop, cooking and eating what they have planted, fermenting, and drying. Among the products produced are herbal tea, herbal salt, herbal soap, candles, beeswax, napkins, herbal oil, perfumes and insect repellents.

During these programmes, participants have the opportunity to develop and practice a variety of skills:

- Physical skills, such as fine and gross motor skills, balance, strength, hand-eye coordination
- Cognitive skills, such as reading, writing, counting, memory, orientation and general coping abilities
- Psycho-emotional skills, such as experiencing joy, a sense of achievement and stress reduction
- Social, including building friendships, strengthening their sense of identity, and developing vocational competencies

HEALING GARDENS IN CZECH REPUBLIC

History of Healing Gardens in Czech Republic

Being present in churches, monasteries, castles and town squares, gardens and parks have always been a part of society life, but at the beginning there was no therapeutic use.

The first initiatives were related to the care of people with mental disorders, which was a responsibility either of the church or of the municipality. These experiences relied on first-hand recognition of the benefits of green spaces but lacked support from evidence-based knowledge.

During the middle age, there was a rise of monastery herbal gardens. Later, in the 18th century, first botanical gardens started to appear. At the beginning of the 20th century, first psychiatric hospital and health clinics with gardens and farms planned specifically for therapeutic use

began to emerge¹¹. The two world wars and the communist regime that followed caused significant stagnation in the field. During this period, psychiatric patients and people with disabilities were often segregated in big facilities with large walls, like former castles. These complexes often included vast parks where patients commonly worked. There was, however, no planned therapy. The field of horticultural therapy was later linked to ergotherapy. Throughout this period, school gardens were flourishing, but they were mainly used to grow vegetables and were not intended to offer more sophisticated or conscious therapy for pupils.

At the end of the 20th century there was a trend for de-institutionalize social care services. Patients were very often relocated from large former castles to new smaller sheltered living homes, often featuring courtyard gardens.

Nowadays, **Czech Republic is experiencing a boom in therapeutic greenery**, with a significant expansion in the number of gardens for various target groups, in-city or community gardens, school gardens, prison gardens, public gardens etc.

The significance and healing effects of nature are in fact increasingly being recognized by society, the public, and professionals from various fields. Green tendencies are spreading in social and health care, in psychiatric care and in educational institutions; additionally, new movements like therapeutic horticulture, natural gardens, ecotherapy, walk and talk, forest bathing and wilderness therapy are becoming more and more popular around Czech Republic.

Association and training courses

The **Association of Garden/Horticultural Therapy of Czech Republic was founded in 2019**¹². It has now **58 members**, of which 14 are organizations. The aims of the association are spreading knowledge about the field, supporting the interests of the members, and working towards the registration of the profession in the national list of occupations.

The association offers various courses, conferences and projects for different target groups, organizes field trips, and it cooperates on regional, state and European level.

Training courses on horticultural therapy are organized by private institutions:

- **Chaloupky:** <https://www.chaloupky.cz/vzdelavani-pracovniku-socialnich-sluzeb/>
- **Jabok school:** <https://www.jabok.cz/en>
- **Lipka:** <https://www.lipka.cz/>
- **Association of Garden/Horticultural Therapy of Czech Republic:** <https://asociace-zahradni-terapie.webnode.cz/>

¹¹ Here are some examples:

Hamza Sanatorium for tuberculosis treatment for children, Košumberk, Luže, 1901. <https://www.hamzova-lecebna.cz/>;

Psychiatric hospital Bohnice, Prague, 1909. <https://bohnice.cz/>

¹² <https://asociace-zahradni-terapie.webnode.cz/>

All these courses are relatively new, as the field of horticultural therapy started to spread in Czech Republic quite recently.

As the profession is not yet formally recognized, there is no formal state education on the topic. Nonetheless, therapeutic greenery is increasingly becoming the centre of degree theses, and some universities, such as the Faculty of Horticulture at Lednice (Masaryk University) are starting to address the topic as part of their lectures on landscape architecture.

Additionally, although most professional publications and websites refer to foreign research, there are some research activities taking place in the Czech Republic¹³. Unfortunately, these efforts are not coordinated in any way.

A map of the presence of healing gardens

It would be very difficult to map all the healing gardens in the country, because they are being established in a large number of nursing homes, schools, hospitals, social care facilities, etc. However, here you can find the members of the Garden Therapy Association:

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

Here there is a list of all botanical gardens and parks of Czech Republic:

<https://www.kudyznudy.cz/co-chcete-delat/priroda/botanicke-zahrady-a-parky>

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

REPORT OF THE EXCHANGE VISITS

Chaloupky was always present at the exchange visits with at least two members of its staff, offering them a rich opportunity to explore different models of healing gardens and training systems across Italy and Spain.

In Italy, the visit to Oikos was very interesting and enriching, with particular appreciation for the historical and cultural value of the monastery garden and the strong cooperative structure of the organisation. The potential to involve organisations employing disadvantaged people in the maintenance of healing gardens was highlighted, seeing this as a meaningful social innovation emerging from the Italian experience.

The visit to Enaip Lombardia suggested a well-developed and complex training system, with many opportunities and several training centres across the region. The partner suggested that integrating topics such as garden maintenance in healing green spaces could significantly enrich Enaip's training offer. Inspired by this, they expressed the intention to develop and

¹³ The Research Institute of Masaryk University has developed an application with virtual nature for oncology patients and university students. For now, it is a meta version. Contact person: doc. PhDr. Alena Slezáčková, Ph.D.; Research into the virtual forest is being carried out under Charles University. Contact person: Mgr. Lukáš Hejtmánek, Ph.D.

organize a training course on garden therapy and healing gardens for gardeners and landscape architects in the Czech Republic.

During **the exchange visit in Spain**, Chaloupky was impressed by the variety of therapeutic garden models, from the community garden Los Sentidos to the private garden for elderly women and the Royal Botanical Garden. They particularly valued how Los Sentidos is used for therapeutic activities across different target groups and benefits from strong municipal cooperation. They also noted the unique character of the garden for elderly women, shaped by its religious focus and unusual location between concrete and underground parking space. Among the suggestions, they proposed incorporating elements of climate-responsive garden design into therapeutic gardens. They also welcomed the idea of developing uniform criteria for therapeutic gardens and expressed interest in initiating this discussion within the Czech Association for Garden Therapy.



CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISON ON HEALING GARDENS

	ITALY	SPAIN	CZECH REPUBLIC
Association	<p>No (2012 – 2022)</p> <p>AssIOrt – Associazione Italiana Ortoterapia – funded in 2012, dissolved in 2022</p>	<p>Yes (2018)</p> <p>Asociación Española de Horticultura y Jardinería Social y Terapéutica, funded in 2018</p>	<p>Yes (2019)</p> <p>Association of Garden/Horticultural Therapy of Czech Republic, funded in 2019</p>
Mapping healing gardens	<p>No</p> <p>No single official map of healing gardens in Italy</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1_HzkBQzFCgNQ2yuk82Gh7-kR0V03XcM&ll=41.184544245681856%2C-4.484235653283475&z=7</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>https://www.kudyznudy.cz/co-chcete-delat/priroda/botanicke-zahrady-a-parky</p> <p>https://ebotanika.webno.de.cz/ceska-botanika/botanicke-zahrady-a-arboreta/</p>
Training courses	<p>Courses by private organizations:</p> <p><i>Academy of Wellness Gardens</i> by Oikos Cooperativa Sociale</p> <p>Courses by educational institutions:</p> <p>Courses in <i>Healing and Well-being Gardens – Horticultural Therapy</i> by Agricultural School of Monza</p>	<p>Courses by private organizations:</p> <p>Courses on <i>Horticulture and Social and Therapeutic Gardening</i> by Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Gardening</p> <p>Courses on <i>Healing Gardens</i> by Jardines Terapéuticos Palmlöf</p>	<p>Courses by private organizations:</p> <p><i>Chaloupky</i></p> <p>https://www.chaloupky.cz/vzdelavani-pracovniku-socialnich-sluzeb/</p> <p><i>Jabok school</i></p> <p>https://www.jabok.cz/en</p> <p><i>Lipka</i></p> <p>https://www.lipka.cz/</p> <p><i>Association of Garden/Horticulture Therapy of Czech Republic</i></p>



	<p>Seminars by Faculty of Agriculture in Milan (<i>the course is no longer active</i>)</p> <p>Therapeutic Landscape Design course by Politecnico di Milano (<i>no longer active</i>)</p> <p><i>Healing Gardens Design Course</i> by Italian Institute Design</p>		<p>https://asociace-zahradni-terapie.webnode.cz/</p> <p>Courses by educational institutions:</p> <p>Various universities, such as the <i>Faculty of Horticulture at Lednice, Masaryk University</i>, partially address this topic as part of their lectures on landscape architecture</p>
Research on the topic	<p>Italian universities are promoting research on the topic of the benefit of greenery: degree theses, surveys, best practices, scientific publications</p>	<p>Research and projects co-funded by the European Union such as:</p> <p><i>GreenMe</i>, Mental health for all through nature: https://greenme-project.eu/</p> <p><i>Healing Gardener</i>: https://www.healinggardener.eu/</p>	<p><i>Research Institute of Masaryk University</i>: development of an application with virtual nature for oncology patients and university students.</p> <p><i>Charles University</i>: research into the virtual forest</p> <p>Therapeutic greenery and medicinal gardens are increasingly becoming the topic of final theses during university studies.</p>
University degree	<p>Post-graduate Degree in Therapeutic Horticulture – University of Bologna</p>	No	No
The orthotherapist	Not recognized	Not recognized	Not recognized



	Lombardy Region recognizes since 2023 the profile “Expert in Healing and Well-being Gardens” (EQF4)		
Comments	Since the post-Covid period, attention to therapeutic greenery has been rising in Italy with numerous conferences and events that highlight the value of nature in the treatment process	Therapeutic Garden Certification by Spanish Association of social and therapeutic horticulture and gardening, in collaboration with Jardines Terapéuticos Palmlöf and Inforesidencias	The development of garden therapy and therapeutic greenery was very significantly (and negatively) influenced in the 19th century during the world wars and under the communist regime

CONCLUSION

This document, which summarizes all the material collected during the Storytelling Activity of this project, clearly demonstrates that the **inclusion of targeted green spaces within workplaces, healthcare facilities, residential areas, and recreational environments is currently a strong international trend.**

Research is being conducted by universities, associations and European projects, while training courses are offered mainly by private institutions. Yet, there is still an **insufficient availability of specialized professionals to support this field and its expansion.** Most importantly, **the professional role of the horticultural therapist is not formally recognized** by any country, and there is still no legislation addressing these topics.

Moreover, **the exchange visits carried out in Italy, Spain, and the Czech Republic offered a rich comparative perspective** on how healing gardens are conceived, implemented, and integrated into social and educational services across Europe. Each visit highlighted different cultural approaches, levels of development, and operational models, allowing partners to deepen their understanding of nature-based learning and wellbeing practices, all converging on the core idea that gardens become truly healing only when design, maintenance, and activities are intentionally integrated and supported by trained staff.

In conclusion, the **exchange of good practices** between countries and the discussions among professionals working in the field made possible thanks to this project acquire significant value in **raising awareness among professionals, general public and authorities about the importance of these issues and their regulatory definition.**