AESOP4FOOD

Warsaw Living Lab: Report

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1. The subject / theme

The focus of the Warsaw Living Lab and the case study was the MOST cooperative farm. The MOST farm is a unique, first-of-its-kind initiative in Poland – we studied their internal organization, the legal bases upon which the cooperative functions, the goals of their initiative and the means by which they plan to achieve them, etc.

Their main goal is to promote and develop urban agriculture and agroecology. MOST farm was established in December 2023 through the joint efforts of CoopTech Hub and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The farm is located in the Siekierki area and operates on a cooperative basis, meaning that each member contributes and shares responsibility for the crops and other activities carried out on the farm. The document on which the activities and operation of the cooperative are based is the Articles of Association of the Bridge Cooperative, specifying: subject of activity, rights and obligations of members, rules and procedures for admission of members, termination of membership, deletion and exclusion of members, the principles of convening the General Meeting of Members, deliberating at it and adopting resolutions, other organs of the Cooperative, intra-cooperative proceedings, economy of the Cooperative. The Cooperative is a voluntary association of an unlimited number of persons to carry out joint economic activities in the interests of its members and is established for an unlimited period of time. The MOST farm is an alternative to traditional allotments, offering a more accessible and inclusive solution for city residents. The entry fee for MOST is PLN 200. In addition, it is necessary to buy two shares, which totals PLN 600. The farm is open to all interested parties, who can come and participate every Saturday.

The farm's main activities are growing and processing food, creating a space for new experiences, and incubating innovative social and technological solutions. One of the most interesting aspects of the project is the concept of a "nature person," where land is treated as a full-fledged member of the cooperative, highlighting its value and importance in the urban ecosystem. The project also has an educational and social dimension, promoting mental health through contact with nature and building social ties. It also helps people acquire skills related to growing food, which is particularly important in the context of the growing environmental and social crises.

2. The aim of the research

As part of our study, we cooperated and brainstormed with the members of the MOST cooperative farm and associated parties to determine what are the main problems on the farm, as well as what are the first steps we can take to mitigate them. We also aimed to map the potentials the farm presents and the main actors relevant to it (how they relate to the farm currently and how their relationship with the farm can develop in the future). The study was largely carried out at the lab workshops which took place in March 2024. The goal of the afore-mentioned activities was to improve the functioning of the farm.

3. Aspects for analysis

During the workshop, discussions took place that systematized our knowledge about the situation on the farm, which allowed us to determine which of the problems the farm is currently facing are the most urgent. The list, partially a transcript from the workshops, is as follows:

1) Theft: one of the main problems turned out to be theft, which occurs regularly on the initiative's premises. There is theft of items belonging to members of the cooperative, guests and even homeless people living there who were interviewed
2) Lack of fence and clear borders: The lack of clear farm boundaries increases danger on all sides
3) Lack of funds and issues with finding a suitable investor: Due to the cooperative nature and limited capital, there are problems with funds on the farm
4) Lack of shelter: The lack of any shelter makes it difficult not only to work on the garden, but also to conduct workshops and events that are strongly dependent on weather conditions
5) Lack of coherent organization: Causes unnecessary misunderstandings
7) Lack of dendrological inventory and planting schedule
8) Lack of greenhouse: Temperature sensitive crops need to be sown later
9) Lack of water source for watering of crops

All these problems require solutions as soon as possible to ensure the continuation of the development of the farm. Many of the problems are temporal, such as the lack of a greenhouse and a water source – they require seemingly obvious solutions that are made complex by lack of funds. A lack of safety on a farm results in risks that all visitors to the farm must take, resulting in fewer visitors or poorer experiences. This, in turn, results in limited opportunities and problems with finding investors. Without investors and their funds, there is no further action.

4. Methods and analysis

The above-mentioned issues constituted the different areas we needed to research. During the workshops we were divided into smaller groups, each of which was given one of the points for researching possible solutions and their possible cost and mapping out the pros and cons of each. We then reconvened to discuss and debate our findings and together create a plan of the area using the agreed-upon solutions, as well as a timetable of plantings.

We also created an inventory of the trees and shrubs of the part of the farm closest to the central glade. We printed out aerial drone photos to use as a base map and carried out fieldwork (on April 27th) to gather data such as: plant type, species, height, trunk circumference at 1.30m, averaged diameter of the crown (or area in m^2 in the case of shrubs) and condition of the tree using the Pacyniak-Smólinski scale. At the behest of the farm, in the spreadsheet used to record the data we also noted if there were bird nests in the tree and added fields where the members of the farm could add the period of flowering, whether the plant produced fruits and what was the yield. The results of the inventory were then visualized as a map, created in Q-GIS and modified to add additional data in AutoCad.

In terms of the mapping of actors, we researched local organizations and groups that have the potential to affect the farm, compiled the information the members of the farm have gathered on them (in part through their personal interactions) to understand their attitude towards the farm, and discussed the potential they hold for the development of the farm in the future. Based on this we created an alignment chart.

5. Results and conclusions

The results can already be seen physically on the farm. Thanks to the timelines, priorities and goals established during the workshop, the placement of a water pump and the construction of a greenhouse for protection and accelerated growth of sensitive crops was possible. There are plans for the construction of a fence and a shed in the near future. The results of the dendrological inventory are an excel spreadsheet with the gathered information which can be viewed and edited by members of the farm to fill in the data on fruit production and birds' nests, as well as a map of the trees and shrubs on the farm which can be used to visualize the data and for further planning purposes.

Fig. 1: Photos of us visiting the farm, discussions and planning during the workshop, and construction of the final product: the greenhouse and the water pump.

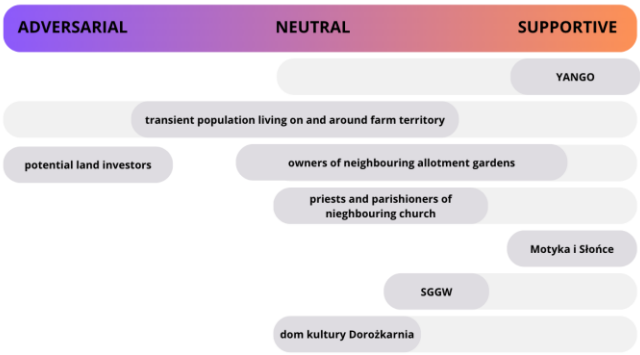

Fig. 2: Actor alignment chart

Fig. 3: Dendrological inventory spreadsheet and tree map

6. Evaluation of the process

Overall, the workshops were very useful in terms of getting us acquainted with the concept of the farm and its' current issues. The ability to work with MOST members was invaluable as their first-hand experience and knowledge of the land, the processes and the people connected to the farm was instrumental in gaining an understanding of what this specific undertaking entails (as well as urban agroecology in general). At times we felt we didn't have enough in-depth knowledge of the farm to be able to give input on the issues, but the fact that we were outsiders was to an extent beneficial to the members, as we were able to give outside opinions. The AESOP lecture material was informative – and very useful specifically in the mapping process – however, oftentimes too broad to be directly applicable to MOST because they are at the initial stages of establishing the farm. The work done at the living lab was part of an ongoing process that will require a lot more work, research and input from a larger group of people. The next step for us specifically will be the completion of the dendrological inventory for the remaining sections of the farm.