



# Looking back dOCUMENTA 13 - a new experience for urban gardening and an organic agriculture life style

SISIRA S WITHANACHCHI<sup>1</sup>, DAMIEN FRETTSOME<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>: University of Kassel, Germany

Every five years an art exhibition is held in a city called Kassel, in Germany, which lasts for one hundred days. This art exhibition, of specifically modern and contemporary art, is called dOCUMENTA and the thirteenth edition takes place this year. The first dOCUMENTA was held in 1955 and was the creation of artist Arnold Bode. The director of Documenta 13 is Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev who states that dOCUMENTA (13) is “dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory. These are terrains where politics are inseparable from a sensual, energetic, and worldly alliance between current research in various scientific and artistic fields and other knowledges, both ancient and contemporary.”

To try and articulate this there are several different venues dotted around Kassel. The Fridericianum and Documenta Halle are central locations where the main exhibitions are shown but there are also exhibits shown in the Neue Gallerie and Ottoneum. Interestingly there are also many exhibits which are outdoors in the Karlsaue park.

Kassel is situated in the centre of Germany but one would not assume that Kassel is a city at the centre of the art world in the five years which pass between each dOCUMENTA edition. The city was heavily bombed by the Royal Air Force during the Second World War which gives the city its somewhat planned and functional layout. This has led visitors to Kassel to comment on how ugly and grey the city is, especially when compared to the city of Göttingen which lies just north and was more or less untouched by bombs. However, when the dOCUMENTA begins Kassel transforms. Now the whole of Kassel literally becomes a museum and art exhibition. With a population of approximately 200,000 people there is a distinct shift in the people who frequent Kassel when dOCUMENTA begins. The restaurants are fuller and the bars are busier.

When walking around the outside art installations there

is the obvious cosmopolitan feel to the event with multiple languages being spoken by the hordes of art enthusiasts which carry the thick green dOCUMENTA guide book. Their enthusiasm for dOCUMENTA can not help but rub off on the locals.

The theme this year is the “may be”. It “reflects the fact that knowledge are difficult to express and hard to pin down, and that art and artistic research often avoid any form of stable meaning”. Thus this dOCUMENTA (13) “indicates the impossibility of reducing art—and any other complex form of knowledge—to a single explanation, question, subject matter, or paradigm”. A further theme which is tied up in the dOCUMENTA (13) intricacies is agriculture and urban gardening.

## Organic Agriculture as a new trend...

Organic agriculture has become popular in the whole Europe, especially in Germany. Therefore a major role in dOCUMENTA was allocated for organic agriculture and urban gardening as a pattern of life. While dOCUMENTA mainly focuses on historical and contemporary arts, there is a clear focus on the how green consumption of people in day to day life can be embedded in art. Organic agriculture is an old tradition in small scale farming, with environmentally friendly farming styles used to gather their harvest. However, fertilizer companies and multinational GM (genetically modified) companies involved the agricultural sector into chemical oriented and GM agricultural patterns. However, new trends have arisen. Many social groups and research groups stand against this agricultural tradition which is environmentally unfriendly, unhealthy to humans and destroys diversity by monoculture. Organic agriculture in the German context fulfils its definition. Included is: a localisation of the agricultural system, the empowerment of rural or small scale farmers, the protection of bio-diversity in agriculture and the use of organic fertilizer for growing vegetables. The Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection in Germany introduced the concept of har-



Photo credit: Peter Wassenaar



Photo credit: Sisira Withanachchi

**Figure 1:** The Urban Garden and Tea Hut



Photo credit: Sisira Withanachchi



**Figure 2:** The Urban Garden and Tea Hut

mony with nature as the guiding principle of organic farming. It aims to promote sustainability through soil conservation, water conservation, species conservation and welfare-oriented animal husbandry.

### **And And And -Urban Gardening and Tea Hut**

At dOCUMENTA (13), the group of global artists who are dedicated to the organic agriculture movement are called And And And of which they introduce their cultural impression of promoting organic agriculture and urban farming. The aim at dOCUMENTA of them was to amalgamate agriculture with culture and art. Their slogan at dOCUMENTA (13) was "fair food instead of fast food". Among their open and experimental public programmes at dOCUMENTA (13) was their organisation of a natural and healthy tea drinking stall. This And And And stall makes clear that the first aim of this programme is to convey the necessity of introduce a consumption system based on herbal and natural tea. Moreover, there is the aim to promote organic farming system and con-

sumption patterns which do not harm nature. People could drink four varieties of herbal tea at the "Tea Hut" (Figure 1).

The herbal tea was prepared with a mixture of Anis+Calendula+Mint, Rose+Black Tea+Anis, Calendula+Cam-milla+Mint and Calendula+Mint+Cola.

All of the ingredients were taken from their garden in front of the "Tea Hut". The lesson of the programme is to create awareness among people about the possibilities to prepare their own tea from their garden. Also in the garden was an example of urban gardening towers (Figure 2). The towers are made up of organic content such as degraded leaves, natural fertilizers, sand and soil.

These towers allow vegetables and fruit to be grown in a limited space and are an example of a cultivation system which is suitable for highly urbanised areas where there is no space for planting or farming.



**Figure 3:** small organic shop in the Orangerie Park

### Organic small scale agriculture-Networking between farmers and consumers

The next area of interests concerning agriculture was a small organic shop in the Orangerie Park (Figure 3). The shop was a hive of activity, with many customers. The shop contained the organic food products of small scale farm production in Kassel. Customers could buy dairy products, varieties of fresh fruits including strawberry, berries, cherries, small apples, grapes, red currants, fresh vegetables including cucumber, radishes, and varieties of tomatoes. There were also sandwiches, pastries, and cheese rolls available. Ms. Patricia Nuegart was working at the shop on the day of our visit and said:

“This shop is installed by a group called And,And,And to show the strength of small scale farmers in food production. This is a self service shop where people can buy products from the Kassel region. Today we have cherries which come from farmers in Witzenhausen. The cost of production is included in the price which goes to the farmer and a small slice going to the And And And organisation.

The urban gardens which are located next to the shop belong to the Claire Pentecost Association. The group combines with And And And. The aim of the urban gardens is to demonstrate how fruit and vegetables can be grown in urban areas with little space. The tower takes up only a small area on the ground and is built vertically. You can also see these urban gardens near to the Herbal Tea shop”.

One customer in the shop who had a particle interest in urban gardening and consuming organic products was Ms. Barbara Mumm (Figure 4) from Blücherstraße in Kassel. In her opinion urban farming was getting popular in Kassel and other parts of Germany.



**Figure 4:** The talk with Ms. Barbara Mumm

Ms. Mumm was part of an urban gardening project where 33 members contribute to an urban gardening commune which based on organic methods of agriculture. She said young people are especially enthusiastic in joining this urban garden cultivation. Moreover, she also said that this urban garden acts as a playground for children who could roam around the garden. This meant they could learn about bio food culture from an early age. In her opinion, people would like to buy or grow organic vegetables, organic fruits and dairy products



rather than buy foods which were grown using chemical fertilizers. Obviously, organic food production is can quite expensive for some families. However, in the long run organic foods can benefit consumers through good health and the producers like small scale farmers who are able to keep growing food organically. In some instances, consumers can buy their foods at home because farmers visit residential areas with their products on a weekly basis. This highlights the fact that food is locally sourced meaning that carbon emissions are low in this food production chain.

Overall, the urban gardening and organic farming aspect adds value to the dOCUMENTA (13) experience because it highlights different forms of life through the arts with a clear message of the value of a sustainable model of food consumption and the support of small scale local farms, rather than the current system of multinational companies dominating agricultural systems.