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Urban Gardening as Food Commons: METU Garden

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Abstract

The inadequacy of agricultural production due to environmental factors and injustices in accessing food as a result of increasingly profit-oriented production-distribution-consumption processes have led to the food crisis in many cities worldwide. The fragility of the current food systems in the face of all these problematic conditions calls for alternative strategies to be developed. Food commons, in this sense, emerges as a novel form of commoning that blends practical aims (sharing of land, resources, and tools) with social aspirations (fostering cooperation, self-management, and community involvement) of the urban commons to address food-related problems. In this context, this study focuses on collective food production within urban gardens while accepting urban gardening as a form of food commoning. It further explores the role of common spaces and the social dynamics of urban gardening groups for urban food production. All these are discussed through a selected case study: METU Garden (ODTÜ Bostanı). Accordingly, this research aims to relate the social structures and spatial qualities of the METU Garden to food commons theories and frameworks. Acknowledging how food commoning practices occur in community-led urban gardens such as METU Garden can contribute to developing novel, bottom-up, and inclusive design strategies to tackle food-related problems in cities.

Keywords: *Food commons, alternative food initiatives, urban gardening, university campus landscapes*

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Kent Bahçeciliğinin Kolektif Gıda Üretimi ve Müşterek Mekânları: ODTÜ Bostanı

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Öz

Tarımsal üretimin çevresel faktörler nedeniyle yetersiz kalması ve giderek daha fazla kâr odaklı hale gelen üretim-dağıtım-tüketim zinciri nedeniyle gıdaya erişimde yaşanan adaletsizlikler, dünya genelinde birçok kentte gıda krizine yol açmaktadır. Mevcut gıda sistemlerinin tüm bu olumsuz koşullar karşısındaki kırılganlığı alternatif stratejilerin geliştirilmesini gerektirmektedir. Bu anlamda, gıda müşterekleri kentlerdeki gıda ile ilgili sorunları ele almak için yeni bir müştereklestirme pratiği olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Gıda müşterekleri, kentsel müştereklerin uygulamaya yönelik amaçları (arazinin, kaynakların ve araçların paylaşılması) ve sosyal hedeflerini (bireyler arasında iş birliğinin, öz yönetimin ve topluluğa katılımın yüreklendirilmesi) gıdayı temel alarak birleştiren alternatif bir müştereklestirme modelidir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma kent bahçelerini gıdanın müştereklestirme biçimi olarak kabul ederek, bu bahçelerdeki kolektif gıda üretimine odaklanmaktadır. Ayrıca müşterek mekânların ve gıda topluluklarının sosyal yapılarının kentlerde gıda üretimindeki rolünü incelemektedir. Bu doğrultuda, bu araştırma, vaka çalışması olarak seçilen ODTÜ Bostanı'nın mekânsal niteliklerini ve bostan topluluğunun sosyal dinamiklerini gıda müşterekleri kuram ve çerçeveleriyle ilişkilendirerek tartışmaya açmayı hedeflemektedir. ODTÜ Bostanı gibi topluluk tarafından yönetilen kent bahçelerindeki müştereklesme pratiklerinin incelenmesi, kentlerdeki gıda ile ilgili problemlerin üstesinden gelmek için yenilikçi, katılımcı ve kapsayıcı tasarım stratejilerinin geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Gıda müşterekleri, alternatif gıda girişimleri, kent bahçeciliği, üniversite kampüs peyzajı*

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Introduction: Food, City, and the Commons

In recent years, the theoretical and empirical focus on the concept of the commons has been broadened through various studies. Different scholars have started to refer to the commons not only as "a fixed quantity of common pool resources" (Morrow, 2019a, p. 2) but also as "a self-organized system by which communities manage their resources (both depletable and replenishable)" (Bollier, 2014, p. 175). Community involvement in establishing self-sufficient systems has become crucial in creating and sustaining commons. The social capacity of community engagement has led to a shift from "the commons as a noun" to "commoning as a verb" (Morrow, 2019b, p. 203). Therefore, novel forms of commons, including urban, cultural, digital, and food commons have emerged parallel to the increasing attention given to the dynamic and alternative social processes in commoning practices (Morrow, 2019b).

Food commons, in this sense, emerges as a novel form of commoning that blends practical aims (sharing of food, land, resources, and tools) with social aspirations (fostering cooperation, self-management, and community involvement) of the urban commons. Social practices of urban food commons have also gained importance for their capacity to enhance civic participation to address increasing food-related problems due to "unsustainable and unjust urban food systems" (Morrow, 2019a, p. 1). Food commons, which encompass collective food production, preparation, and sharing, offer design opportunities for creating more inclusive, resilient, and socially vibrant urban spaces. Given all this, mostly citizen-led urban food initiatives (food communities, consumer cooperatives, collective kitchens, peasant markets, urban agriculture, and urban gardens) (Ayalp, 2021; Doğançayır & Kocagöz, 2019) can be reconsidered through the lens of food commons.

With this brief introduction, this research tries to shed further light on food, highlighting the pressing issues of the food crisis within urban environments. The inadequacy of agricultural production, which is gradually decreasing due to environmental factors, and injustices in accessing healthy and fresh food due to increasingly profit-oriented production-distribution-consumption processes have led to the food crisis in many cities worldwide. In addition, Vivero Pol (2018), an agricultural engineer who is specialized in Food and Nutrition Security (FNS), argues that the commodification and privatization of food, which is fundamentally a public good, have had negative

consequences regarding public health, food security, and justice. Therefore, the fragility of the current food systems in the face of all these problematic conditions calls for alternative strategies to be developed. Here it is important to note that food in the city should be recognized as a complex system incorporating a dense network of programs with varying social, economic, and environmental objectives (Franck, 2005a). Studies on food in the city should not only consider spatial design aspects of the space of food but also give importance to promoting more heterogeneous, equal, resilient, and inclusive urban life.

Considering these, professionals from design-related disciplines such as urban planning, architecture, and landscape architecture should focus on developing more holistic and innovative approaches to tackle the food crisis in cities. In this respect, individuals coming together to experiment with collective ways of living and find practical solutions to their food-related needs can provide guidelines. Community-based initiatives have developed various forms of food production and distribution systems to provide food to others who are incapable of accessing fresh and healthy produce easily. These systems encourage alternative production networks and incorporate (community) members' participation, collective decision-making, and a shared economy (Moreira & Morell, 2020). In this sense, alternative food networks can act as catalysts for social interaction and cooperation and provide "a wealth of design opportunities" (Franck, 2005a, p. 42). Furthermore, the grassroots food initiatives guided by principles such as resource sharing, self-sufficiency, community engagement in decision-making, and exchange of knowledge can offer valuable research material for the food commons literature.

This study focuses on collective food production within urban gardens while accepting urban gardening as a form of food commoning. It also recognizes urban gardens' limited capacity as a comprehensive solution to the growing problem of food crisis. However, the significance of urban gardens, notwithstanding their modest and transient nature, remains important in offering alternative tactics for food production, consumption, and distribution within cities. People coming together to engage in food-related issues within their urban environments can stimulate cooperation that helps to alleviate the food-related problems of citizens, rather than solving the entire crisis. Therefore, this study further explores the social dynamics of urban gardening groups that glue community members together while motivating them for collective action and the role of common spaces for urban food production.

All these issues are opened to discussion through a selected case study: METU Garden (ODTÜ Bostanı), located on the main campus of Middle East Technical University (METU). Accordingly, this research aims to relate the social structure and spatial qualities of the METU Garden to food commons theories and frameworks. Within the scope of the study, the activities carried out in METU Garden in the Fall Semester of 2022-2023 were observed as a participant. Some informal discussions were made through conversations with group members. The knowledge and experience acquired from the garden meetings were evaluated from the perspective of food commoning and collective food production strategies. Consequently, acknowledging how food production and sharing occur in community-led urban gardens such as METU Garden can offer valuable design data for developing novel, bottom-up, and inclusive strategies to tackle food-related problems in cities.

Sharing Food and Space: Food Commoning Practices in Cities

As a social practice, commoning involves community participation in sharing physical space and cooperation between individuals. It can potentially bring about radical change and transform the city into a liberating environment for social reproduction (Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2016). Therefore, an "open" and liberating city should consist of "pockets of (social and physical) order" (Sennett, 2019) that foster complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity, while promoting mutual tolerance, equality, and interdependence. As alternative pockets of order, common spaces hold the potential to encourage new shared experiences of "urban companionship" (Stavrides, 2016) and foster actions to cope with "the loss of urban commonality" (Harvey, 2012). Stavrides further characterizes common spaces as heterotopic spaces which are primarily open to diversity and reappropriation. Unlike public spaces which are relatively more fixed in terms of social and spatial characteristics, these heterotopic spaces allow for "collective inventiveness" to thrive, and more instant social occasions and encounters to occur. Common spaces also act as thresholds between public and private spaces since they are collectively used and neither controlled by a dominant authority nor privately owned. Boundaries between the public and private are also blurred in these threshold spaces (Stavrides, 2015, 2016, 2019).

Given all this, activities linked with food including growing, sharing, and eating also have the potential of blurring the boundaries between public and

private, inside and outside thus creating "third places" (Franck, 2005b) or, in Stavrides' terms, "threshold spaces" (Stavrides, 2019). Food as a boundary-breaker can replace Modernist tendencies including creating segmented and sterile cities where dining and shopping are hidden in interior spaces and where production occurs in distant locations or peripheries of cities (Franck, 2005a). In this respect, the engagement of citizens in growing food in urban lands recalls the principles of urban commons (Morrow, 2019a; Scharf et al., 2019). Citizens' collective practices to use and manage public spaces as common spaces for food provisioning enable them to reclaim "the right to the city" (Harvey, 2012). On the other hand, the concept of food commons also covers multiple approaches that challenge "the commodification and privatization of food and its ingredients—soil, land, water, seeds, and knowledge" and reclaim food as commons (Morrow, 2019a, p. 3). Correspondingly, an emerging body of research focuses on various urban food initiatives that extend beyond the use of urban lands for food provisioning.

As an example, Anna R. Davies and "SHARECITY" research team have formed "SHARECITY100" database which collects a variety of forms and activities of (urban) food sharing. Their accepted definition of food sharing refers to "having a portion of food with another or others" (Davies, 2019, p. 6) and incorporating joint practices of growing, cooking, and eating food while collectively occupying public spaces for such activities. Based upon this broad definition they have documented diverse practices from exchanging seeds, compost, and food products to sharing knowledge, skills, meals, and spaces (kitchens, eating areas, or gardens) (Davies, 2019; Morrow, 2019a). Although the study does not explicitly associate food-sharing initiatives with food commons, it is possible to establish connections between them. In this respect, every urban food initiative holds significance due to its unique approaches to establishing and sustaining food commons. Therefore, this study accepts urban food commons as immaterial (i.e. recipes, culinary traditions, and agricultural knowledge) or material (i.e. seeds, edible plants, compost, fresh produce, and land for food production) resources of food within urban spaces. It also recognizes urban food commoning as all community-led processes to own, govern, and manage these food-related resources (Scharf et al., 2019). By acknowledging the importance of each urban food initiative for the urban food commons, this study further dwells on urban gardening, a part of urban agriculture, and examines them as physical and social settings for urban food commoning.

Collective Food Production in Urban Gardens

Types of urban agriculture vary from small-scale interventions (window boxes, balconies, and roof gardens) to the use of larger lands for growing food (allotments, urban gardens, and community farms). Rather novel forms of urban food initiatives including community-supported agriculture, food sharing, and community kitchens also fall under the umbrella of urban agriculture (Doron, 2005; Hennchen & Pregernig, 2020). Because of urban agriculture's diverse scales and locations, it can be "the subject of all design professions – from landscape and urban design to building and interior design, and even product design"(Doron, 2005, p. 54). In addition, there are many social, economic, and environmental benefits of citizens' growing their own food in urban settings. Economic and environmental advantages are corollaries with each other. For example, growing food in the city shortens the distance between producer and consumer, and needs less packing and transportation, thus reducing energy consumption and costs accordingly. Regarding social benefits, growing food in cities positively stimulates social interaction and reinforces a sense of belonging and inclusion. Furthermore, community involvement in food-related activities most importantly "galvanizes people to cooperate on other issues of social concern" (Doron, 2005, p. 54).

As a subgroup of urban agriculture, urban gardening differs from other initiatives as it gives more prominence to community-bonding social aspects than producing food. The social importance of such communal initiatives comes from their promotion of alternative lifestyles, environmental ethics, and self-sufficiency (Doron, 2005). These initiatives also promote alternative ideas of solidarity, sharing, participation, and political protest (Hennchen & Pregernig, 2020). Furthermore, cooperation, group decision-making, and team-building are key elements in establishing and sustaining community-led urban gardens (Franck, 2005a). Urban gardens are mainly initiated by individuals cooperating to establish alternative food production and consumption methods. They rely on community engagement to sustain their operations. By doing so, they enable citizens to co-produce food-related resources through collective management strategies for their needs. Urban gardening also allows citizens to reinterpret vacant lands into common spaces within urban settings mostly dominated by public and private spaces. Individuals transform leftover spaces through participatory processes for growing food with intentions of serving the community rather than individual interest and allowing people to access fresh produce (Hennchen & Pregernig, 2020). All

these social processes in urban gardening initiatives encourage collective spirit and creativity thus creating a common ground.

Based on these, food commons can be an integrative element for urban gardening initiatives. Overall, the concept of urban food commons manifests itself in urban gardening at two scales. First, at the scale of the community, members try to establish a shared environment where "everyone having equal access to the equipment and resources provided by the garden" (Hennchen & Pregernig, 2020, p. 12). Second, on a broader scale, urban gardening initiatives aim for long-term and wider societal changes by encouraging alternative ideas and behavioral models (Hennchen & Pregernig, 2020). Therefore, understanding how food production and sharing practices are spatialized within urban gardens can contribute to the development of more innovative, grassroots, and inclusive design approaches. In this respect, university environments can provide valuable research material to experiment urban gardening for their potential to facilitate community-led initiatives, both through their social infrastructures and physical settings.

METU Campus Landscape and Its Potential for Creating a Social Milieu for the Food Commons

University students play a significant role in the social fabric of their respective universities. They are mainly open to cooperation, sharing, creating solidarity networks and exchanging experiences while pursuing their academic goals. Moreover, they tend to interpret campus spaces according to their social and recreational needs. However, due to their diverse social, economic, demographic, and cultural backgrounds, they are more vulnerable to urban risks. Food-related risks also affect students' health and social life. Therefore, it is important to ensure that they have access to fresh and affordable food. This objective can be accomplished through a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies. In this respect, encouraging students to participate in urban gardening initiatives on campus can effectively help them cope with above-mentioned food-related problems.

Middle East Technical University (METU), as an institution dedicated to higher education, has given importance to the preservation and cultivation of its landscape and natural environment since its foundation. Located in Ankara, the campus has become a vital component of the city's urban landscape and its social and cultural life. Professors of Architecture, Güven Arif Sargın and Ayşen Savaş (2016) highlight the importance of the METU Campus by

tracing its environmental history. In the METU Campus project, the founders aimed at establishing an exemplary university environment with its architecture and landscape. To this end, the design of the landscape was used as an important instrument to transform the selected site—a vast agricultural area on the Western axis of Ankara—into "a secular environment for academic and applied research" (Sargın & Savaş, 2016, p. 608). Correspondingly, two architectural competitions were organized in the late 1950s to design the university campus. The jury reports of these competitions highlight that design proposals were expected to include ideas for creating a holistic landscape with pathways, arcades, pools, fountains, terraces, sculptures, and street furniture (Sargın & Savaş, 2016).

As an essential component of campus life, METU Forest also provides a natural habitat for various species of plants and animals. It is a human-made forest that covers 4500 hectares of previously barren land (Askarov, 1995). Besides its environmental value to the city of Ankara, it provides recreational opportunities to the citizens (for example in the Lake Eymir region). The former president of METU Kemal Kurdaş, the architect Behruz Çinici, and the landscape coordinator Alaattin Egemen decided to cultivate 75 percent of the university land with general landscaping to reduce eroding soil and mitigate the effects of a harsh climate (Kurdaş, 1998). They created a unique reforestation program to plant mostly non-irrigational trees on empty lands, where tree species were selected according to soil and climatic conditions. The detailed landscaping and reforestation project aimed to cover 3100 hectares of non-irrigational plantings and 800 hectares of built-up landscaping with irrigational plants (Askarov, 1995).

The application of campus-wide reforestation began in 1961, with every member of METU participating. Thousands of people including METU students, faculty, and administrative personnel have helped to achieve this "sophisticated landscaping" since the 1960s (Askarov, 1995). The project participants' strong collaboration and dedication to creating a man-made forest demonstrate how actors with varying interests can work toward the common good of society. Reforestation has also been a dynamic and creative process for all members of the METU community. The annual Planting Festival, a collaborative effort of METU student clubs, faculty members, and administrative staff, has been established as a strong tradition to support and preserve the natural environment of the university. It does not only promote ecological conservation but also serves as a platform for the community to come to-

gether and engage in meaningful activities. It further cultivates a sense of togetherness among university members thus reinforcing an inclusive university community.

All these aspects of METU and the campus environment encourage community members to adopt alternative strategies for enhancing the ecological and social qualities of the campus environment. Student-led initiatives are vital in achieving these objectives. Several initiatives have been undertaken by students seeking to cultivate land within the METU Campus. One notable endeavor, known informally as Yalıncak Garden (Yalıncak Bostanı), emerged as a form of guerrilla gardening in 2014 (Ateş, 2015). A group of students, who called themselves guerrilla gardeners, selected a suitable site in Yalıncak Village and started cultivation without getting permission from the rectorship (Ateş, 2015). However, their unauthorized activities were met with disapproval from the university administration, resulting in a lack of organizational support. Additionally, various managerial challenges, such as limited access to the land, low participation rates, and the absence of an irrigation system, compounded the difficulties faced by the students. Eventually, students abandoned the cultivated lands and searched for alternative gardening opportunities (Ateş, 2015).

In this regard, the METU Garden serves as a unique opportunity for such gardening initiatives. It differentiates from the general landscape of the campus as it offers alternative uses and experiences to its users. METU Garden provides a comparatively more professional gardening system and organizational structure than Yalıncak Garden, allowing its members to engage in agricultural production within the campus boundaries. It was first established in 2015 in collaboration with METU Rectorship, Step by Step Organization (Adım Adım Oluşumu), and Buğday Association for Supporting Ecological Living (Buğday Ekolojik Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği), within the scope of the Seeds to Campus (Tohumlar Kampüse) campaign. Although the METU Garden was initially developed through a top-down approach, the way it is self-managed today serves as an exemplary model for food commons.

A Case for Urban Gardening: METU Garden

Step by Step Organization and the Buğday Association provided garden establishment, irrigational systems, composting, and ecological training to students on the campuses of 9 state universities between 2015-2016 (Beşirli &

Karagöz, 2019). They also distributed a video training set and a booklet on nature-friendly urban gardening and organized two meetings with university garden teams in Çamtepe, Kazdağları (Beşirli & Karagöz, 2019). The project aimed to promote access to healthy and safe food, create awareness about eco-friendly living, and provide information on nature-friendly alternative production and consumption methods. METU Garden is among the nature-friendly urban gardens established in different universities to achieve these objectives. It is located on the border of METU Forest, between the indoor and outdoor swimming pools, football fields, Baraka Sports Hall, and dormitories on the METU Campus. It covers a 250 square meter area with additional storage, sitting, and composting spaces.

Figure 1. Campus map showing the location of METU Garden (Source: Authors)

METU Garden can be accepted as a common space for agricultural activities carried out by METU members on their initiative. It stands out regarding its spatial and social characteristics and is as an example of ecological farming. Organic farming methods are adopted for food production in the garden. Synthetic substances such as pesticides and fertilizers are prohibited, while methods of organic origin including crop rotation, use of ancestry seeds, and companion planting are encouraged. Therefore, the aim is to provide access

to good quality, healthy, and fresh produce. In addition to traditional cultivation techniques that require maintenance, alternative agricultural production methods are also tested. These include recycling food waste through various composting methods to obtain organic fertilizers and promoting seed exchange practices (primarily exchange of ancestry seeds). Such alternative agricultural practices also help to reinforce the self-sufficiency of the garden.

Figure 2. Winter preparation in the garden (Source: Authors)

The social structure of the METU Garden community is non-hierarchical, although a core group of students oversees the gardening activities and organizes events. This core group comprises individuals who have been actively engaged in cultivation at METU Garden for an extended period and have gained experience through their participation in past events. New members can also become part of this group based on their level of participation. By regularly taking part in activities, new members gain knowledge about gardening processes, establish trust, and develop friendships with senior members. Then, the seniors encourage new members to take an active part in managing the garden and organizing future events. Decision-making within this main group is collaborative, with no single individual in charge of determining and organizing activities.

Since the establishment of METU Garden, the members have accumulated knowledge about appropriate planting techniques and suitable seasonal crops that can be grown in the garden. This agricultural knowledge has been acquired through trial-and-error processes and transferred from experienced to new group members. The collective insights gained over time have enabled the group members to determine the optimal time and method for planting each crop, based on shared knowledge and lessons learned from previous

years. Therefore, the main group members with shared knowledge collectively decide on the tasks required for agricultural production in the garden, as well as the structure, content, and schedule of gardening activities. Once a timeline is established, they disseminate information about the activities to be done and meeting times to the broader METU Garden community through social media. Participation in each meeting is voluntary, enabling every member to engage in gardening activities. While the majority of participants are students, academic staff from various faculties also contribute to the maintenance of the garden.

Figure 3. Agricultural activities in the garden (Source: Authors)

In addition to agricultural production, there are certain activities carried out at specific times of the year at METU Garden and different parts of the campus. The main group members are aware of when and how each event can be conducted. They distribute responsibilities and select volunteers among themselves to organize activities. Generally, the sharing of information about events and the call for participants are announced through social media approximately one week before the event. These activities include seasonal pickling workshops, vinegar-making from available fruits, collecting and drying seeds from plants on campus, and seedling planting. Many of these social activities are scheduled during the fall semester. Moreover, in each semester, group members arrange walks to the Yalıncak region which hosts an old village and an archaeological site.

Peer learning is also an important factor in sustaining the collective production process in the garden. In the winter months, when planting is not possible, some seminars and lectures by experts in the field are organized. Furthermore, experienced members who have been part of the team for an extended period and have conducted research on various food-growing techniques share their knowledge with new participants. An example of this is

the apple seed collection event which was organized during the observed period. Ten students took part in the workshop, which was announced through social media. First, a team member provided information on how to collect the fruits of the apple trees on the campus and how to obtain the seeds and then sprout them. Then the collection activity was carried out within the campus.

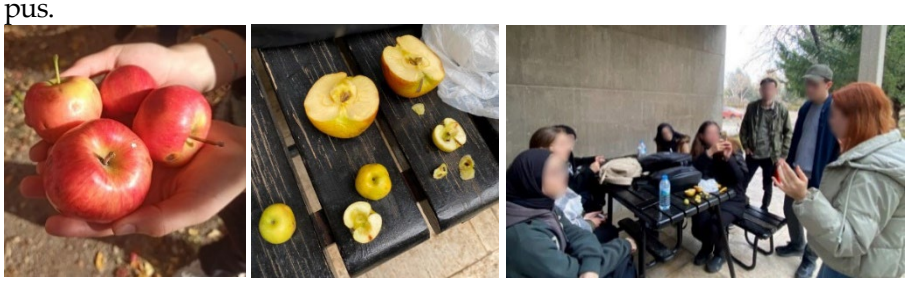

Figure 4. Apple seed collection event (Source: Authors)

Other student clubs use METU Garden as well. METU Green Campus Club (ODTÜ Yeşil Kampüs Topluluğu) jointly organizes various composting workshops in the garden. Food waste, rotten fruits and vegetables, and tea and coffee waste used in composting are collected by students from different parts of the campus. The fertilizer obtained from composting activities is used in agricultural production in METU Garden as well. Some members of the gardening community also participate in various seed exchange events. This provides social interaction with different gardening communities and reinforces interrelationships. Furthermore, the collective spirit established through gardening and social gatherings encourages members of METU Garden to participate in the activities of other initiatives. For example, some members took part in voluntary activities organized by Urgent Design Studio (Acil Tasarım Stüdyosu) to help people affected by devastating earthquakes in 2023, February.

Figure 5. Voluntary participation in Urgent Design Studio works (Source: Authors)

The fact that the METU Garden allows for many collective activities to take place supports its position as a common space for alternative food production. Due to its location and proximity to recreational, sportive, and accommodation areas, METU Garden is also open to different users. It is frequently used as a meeting place by the group members and students from different university clubs. Students who live in METU dormitories meet in the seating areas next to the garden to have their breakfast or lunch. These often spontaneous and informal meetings help students to socialize with each other and reinforce their sense of belonging to the garden where they grow food. As it has been observed during the process, METU Garden have become a place for not only growing food but also serving as a platform for educating environmentally conscious youth.

Discussion and Conclusion

The case of METU Garden embodies the ideals of the food commons by transforming an empty land into a common space for resource sharing, cooperation, and socialization. The garden serves as a platform for all METU members to engage in agricultural practices and to experiment alternative ways of collaborating with each other. Situated within a university campus with a carefully designed landscape, which is relatively more fixed and closed to reinterpretation regarding the use of spaces, METU Garden allows its users to reclaim their right to produce food. It also illustrates that urban gardens are more than agricultural lands; they are spaces for social exchange, peer learning, and experimentation. Experienced team members educate newcomers and foster knowledge sharing in the garden. Growing and sharing food also act as tools for community bonding that help to establish solidarity networks between different actors. Moreover, the garden also plays a role in educating environmentally conscious youth, inspiring other university campuses to create self-sustaining food communities.

In this respect, engaging individuals in gardening activities organized by universities is an effective way to increase public awareness about the environment and promote a closer relationship with nature. To that purpose, these gardens must be easily accessible by the public and open to anyone who wants to participate. However, individuals outside of the campus are not allowed to engage in gardening activities at the METU Garden due to security

reasons. Therefore, such gardening spaces should additionally be located at the peripheries of university campuses so as to provide access to participants from both inside and outside the campus thus literally enhancing their character as being "threshold spaces" for food production. This can also help the maintenance of gardens which is challenging in times of fall and spring breaks with lesser students on campuses. Accordingly, the participation of faculty members, administrative staff, and the public should be encouraged to sustain food commoning practices in gardens. Moreover, the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) networks should be developed to foster a sense of community and provide engagement among participants.

Last but not least, this study emphasizes the need for design professionals to engage in food-related activities and consider the spatial representations of food commons in the city. By blurring the boundaries between public and private, inside and outside, food-related activities can transform urban spaces into common spaces that foster diversity, inventiveness, and social cohesion. The grassroots food initiatives, in this respect, reinvigorate the theoretical underpinnings of the commons, shifting the focus from fixed common resources to self-organized social systems managed by communities. Communities gather to collectively address pressing needs, and in doing so, they combine practical aims of food and resource sharing with social aspirations of solidarity, cooperation, and self-management. By integrating these principles to the fabric of cities, designers can contribute to developing bottom-up, inclusive design approaches that address the food crisis in urban environments.

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