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PP-511 [Beekeeping for Rural Development]

URBAN BEEKEEPING: benefits and detriments

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ABSTRACT

Urban beekeeping is an interesting activity, flourishing with the popularization of beekeeping in general. In some world capitals, it has experienced rapid growth over the last decade, reminding us of the importance of living in healthy environments and green cities. Urban beekeeping and bee products can also contribute to locally produced food with a low carbon footprint, no transport and, above all, a symbolic message about the importance of growing our own food in an environment free from pesticides and the poisons associated with intensive agriculture.

Urban beekeeping can also be used for a wide range of educational activities in cities with positive social impact. However, recent evidence shows that densifying and increasing the number of honeybee colonies does not only have benefits. The carrying capacity of space is limited and as the number of hives has increased, honey yields have started to decline - partly due to climate change. Increasing scientific research shows that too many honeybees mean a lack of forage not only for bees but also for other important, unmanaged pollinators - and concentrating honeybees also helps spread different pathogens faster. A "heretical" idea emerged that honeybees do not necessarily have only positive effects on biodiversity and that the limitless expansion of beekeeping is not the best thing we can do for nature conservation.

We should therefore behave responsibly and think about the number of honeybees we care for and the impact on the environment - the carrying capacity of space has its limitations. Thus, urban beekeeping, which has experienced fast growth in the last decade, should be approached in a more careful & holistic way.

KEYWORDS

urban beekeeping, honeybees, pollinators, carrying capacity, social impact, food chains, environmental impact, sustainability, conservationism

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- practicing beekeeper since 2010
- semi-professional beekeeper, managing 45 beehives
- president of the **Urban Beekeepers' Association of Slovenia** (est. 2014)
- beekeeping instructor, member of **Beekeeping Academy of Slovenia**
- first urban beekeeper in Slovenia with eco/organic certification (since 2024) for all bee products

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DRUŠTVO URBANI ČEBELAR

GREEN CITIES OF TODAY & THE FUTURE

68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF URBAN BEEKEEPING

- limited working / storage space
- limited location availability
- difficult general logistics
- public prejudices and fears
- overpopularization, leading to high hive density
- overcrowding the given space with honeybees
- greenwashing / beeswashing (question of integrity)

(MORE) NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF URBAN BEEKEEPING

- careless hobby approach, frequent swarming
- bee-health issues: spreading pathogens
- limited foraging resources
- honeybees dominating over other important pollinators
- possible incidents – allergic reactions to bee stings

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF URBAN BEEKEEPING

- symbolic message / environmental issues
- creative free time activity
- community building
- general novelty and differentiation
- local food production / short food chains
- tradition / identity
- empowerment of underprivileged

(MORE) POSITIVE ASPECTS OF URBAN BEEKEEPING

- possibility of getting top quality bee-products
- high demand, fast-growing operations
- a positive media attitude & support
- changed customer habits
- part-time business opportunities
- ESG & sustainability reporting for the partner companies
- environmental pollination service

FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE – KEEPING THINGS IN PROPORTION

- limiting the number of hives with honeybees
- upgrading the beekeeping practice
- improving the foraging conditions
- conserving all pollinators
- thinking about environment preservation
- keeping wild green areas

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Urban beekeeping is an interesting activity, flourishing with the popularization of the world beekeeping in general. In some world capitals, this activity has experienced rapid growth over the last decade. It reminds us of the importance of living in healthy environments and green cities. Then there is the reminder of the importance of food self-sufficiency. Urban beekeeping and bee products can contribute to locally produced food with a low carbon footprint, no transport and, above all, a symbolic message about the importance of growing our own food in an environment free from pesticides and the poisons associated with intensive agriculture. Urban beekeeping can also be used for a wide range of educational activities in cities and can have a positive social impact. However, recent evidence shows that densifying and increasing the number of honeybee colonies does not only have positive effects. The carrying capacity of space is limited and as the number of hives has increased, honey yields have started to decline - partly due to climate change. There is increasing scientific research that says that too many honeybees mean a lack of forage not only for bees but also for other pollinators that are equally or even more important - and increasing and concentrating honeybees also helps spread different diseases faster. A "heretical" idea emerged in scientific circles that honeybees do not necessarily have only positive effects on biodiversity and that the limitless expansion of beekeeping is not the best thing we can do for nature conservation. Then there's also a topic that is still not talked about enough: the carbon footprint of beekeeping, which is far from neutral. As beekeepers, we should therefore behave responsibly and think about the number of bees we care for and the impact on the environment. The carrying capacity of space has its limitations and we cannot overcome biology with our ideology. Thus, urban beekeeping, which has experienced the fastest growth in the last decade, should be approached in a more holistic way. If we're serious about sustainability, this activity should be seriously considered from different perspectives.