



# Hyphen 75

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## Table of Contents:

### Editorial

More garden space ... and our garden houses?	3
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### Future Prospect

Finland: A More Inclusive future of Allotment Gardening in Helsinki	5
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Great-Britain: The future of allotments	9
---	---

Great-Britain: The project of Beech Hill Allotments, an example of a different gardening	13
--	----

France: Climate change and allotment gardens	15
--	----

Netherlands: Open to All – New Trends among garden pioniers	18
---	----

Sweden: How to become attractive	21
----------------------------------	----

Addresses	24
-----------	----

Imprint	25
---------	----

# More garden space ... and our garden houses?

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VP SFGVI FSJF



Ph. Rossier/SonntagsBlick

This summer we have seen heavy rain and sometimes severe flooding all over Europe – and I don't even want to include the tragic catastrophe in the German Ahr valley – which have shown that the sealing of the soil, which has progressed over decades, must be reduced.

In our allotments, which are predominantly located in urban agglomerations, we are also challenged to do this.

An overarching viewpoint underlines this challenge once again: How much land is available to us as individuals?

A few weeks ago, I read a vivid account of this in an article in the "NZZ| Neue Zürcher Zeitung" entitled "Why

can one own land? It has always been there".

The following computation can be applied to **the majority of European regions** where we find garden areas of our national associations.

"If one were to distribute the 41.285 km<sup>2</sup> of Swiss soil equally among the inhabitants, then everyone from infants to the elderly would get 4,780 m<sup>2</sup>.

That's about two thirds of a football field.

My personal piece of Switzerland would consist of one third forest and one third agriculture. One quarter would be unproductive land, including

a lot of rock and scree, but also a lake the size of a volleyball field.

I would get twenty by twenty metres of land as a settlement area. Half of this would be available to me for my share of buildings, including land. In addition, I would have to accommodate, among other things, a six-by-twenty-metre piece of road and four square metres of golf course."

In this illustration, the area allocated to me personally would be 276 m<sup>2</sup>, although these 276 m<sup>2</sup> would also include shares in, for example, public buildings such as schools or hospitals.

Do we today use our garden plot, which in turn is also part of the afore-

mentioned 276 m<sup>2</sup> of this area, in our garden sensibly and in harmony with our goal of enjoying as much nature as possible in our areas?

### **A completely different perspective will also be given more weight to in the future.**

The times when people in the bombed-out cities after the Second World War were happy to find a roof over their heads in their garden houses are history.

Instead, today we often live out leisure activities in oversized garden houses, which we have included in the regulations over the past decades as concessions to the changing needs of our members.

The original 8 m<sup>2</sup> or even 16 m<sup>2</sup> area of a cottage was joined in step with the advent of the “do-it-yourself” era by conservatories, tool boxes, terraces, flagstone paths, concrete surfaces for barbecues, etc.

Unfortunately, in many places and increasingly so, garden houses have become bone of contention, occupying our voluntary officials, authorities and often also courts, while even more importantly, very often straining good neighbourly relations; often a structural addition – in whatever form – is part of the conflict.

Particularly frequent is the dispute over the transfer price of a plot in the case of a change of tenancy and the treatment and assessment of a permissible or impermissible building

measure carried out in the past.

This can be a headache for older members who – understandably – are often no longer physically able to carry out the regularly required maintenance on their own garden house.

In the future, already against the background of a new generation of tenants, it will no longer make sense to deal with garden houses and their individual “character”.

With the professional mobility of the “Y-generation” we will no longer have members for 20 or even 40 years, rather there will be changes at intervals of less than 10 years.

For large associations with several hundred plots, this is also an organisational challenge for our officials or, where relevant, also for the authorities involved in the lease, all the more so when the valuation of a garden house belonging to the tenant is also added.

My view for the next few years is based on a refreshing, current example: at a location in central Switzerland, the association’s former site was displaced by a building project. However, the city promptly provided compensation land.

Those in charge decided to provide only plots with association-owned “equipment houses” on the new site... of course, a club house is thought of.

Thus, from the very beginning, there is a focus on gardening, the collective

design of the club areas and the orientation of socialising and leisure activities towards the club house.

The maintenance of the tool shed is organised by the association. This eliminates the need for discussions about the cadence and extent of maintenance.

The corresponding garden regulations are also shorter and, therefore, easier to comply with and monitor.

Note: Thank goodness we have already had areas in a large Swiss city for decades where the plots have been leased out with small, association-owned garden sheds since their foundation.

On the basis of this concept and my added evaluations, I come back to the starting point of my thoughts: In areas where the soil for gardening is in the foreground and the individually cultivated or sealed area is predetermined from the beginning, changes in access paths or planting, which become necessary in the course of time or even as a reaction to meteorological changes can be implemented quickly and also more harmoniously.

In this New Year, let us dare to make adjustments where they are possible or required by external circumstances. Let us contribute to reversing the sealing of land and, additionally, let us get inspired for further activities by the examples presented in this issue of the Hyphen.

This article does not represent a fundamental position of the Swiss Federation. It articulates only the ideas of the author.

# Finland: A More Inclusive Future of Allotment Gardening in Helsinki

Xinyue Du

Nowadays, the pace of daily life is getting faster and faster and people tend to spend a longer time indoors than ever before. What can be a good way to relieve pressure and to get refreshment? For residents in Helsinki, nature and green spaces are not only embellishment of the city but also a good remedy for people's stress. Various types of urban gardens take different responsibilities and make up an indispensable part of the city.

Originally a way to relieve food shortage in the old days, allotment garden-

ing has nowadays become a popular activity in Finland. By chance, I got to know about allotment gardens and started an exciting journey during my Master's study. Impressed by how allotment gardens are contributing to the city, I started to wonder if there were even more potentials of what they can become.

Therefore, I visited multiple allotment gardens on sites and interviewed people passionate about gardening, regardless if they owned their allotment gardens or not. Some of them were

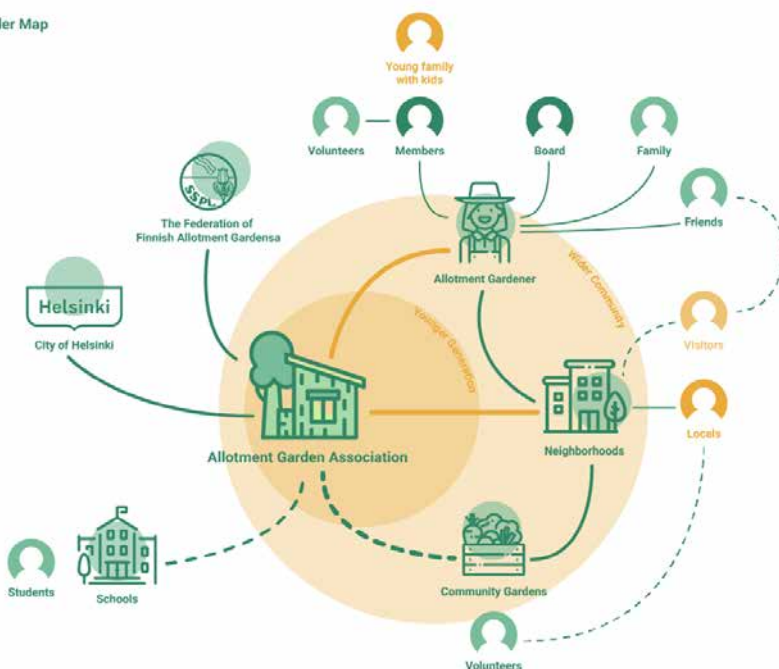
also brought together to a co-design workshop and invited to share their insights on how allotment garden can change for better in the future.

Given their diverse background, their inputs also varied greatly and therefore the workshop was very fruitful. Allotment gardeners demonstrated great passion for their gardens for various purposes, and they were also open for ideas and seeking for a new way to organize the community with an increasing number of young members to the community. "The wider community", a term I used to refer to the group of people who do not have their own gardens, but who are or might be involved in the gardening in the future, recognized the significance of allotment garden for the city and were definitely interested in experiencing gardening life.

When all pieces of the puzzle are brought together, it became clearer that the vision of future allotment gardens would be bright and exciting with all these diverse yet positive insights.

Finally, based on the findings, I developed a strategy roadmap for allotment gardens, in order to build a shared understanding between allotment gardeners and the wider community and make allotment garden a more inclusive place in the future. The roadmap aims to clarify the change in process and propose concepts and focused target groups in the big picture. It is more about defining what we can do on all stages rather than

Stakeholder Map



making a concrete schedule to follow. The process will be iterating based on the outcome and feedback.

Allotment gardening is envisioned to be an inclusive and flexible urban gardening activity for all people in the city in the future, to reach the goal of sustainability.

*In total, the transition of allotment garden will undergo five stages, which are*

- 1) Encountering
- 2) Inspiring
- 3) Sharing
- 4) Gathering
- 5) Blooming

### 1) Encountering

Mild interaction between gardeners and the wider community. Creating opportunities for encountering. Arouse the curiosity of the wider community through some small changes in current allotment gardens.

#### Concept Description

Every Friday, a 'pop-up' hut at the gate of the allotment garden with some wooden boxes and a notice board. In the boxes, gardeners can leave their extra fruits, vegetables as gifts

for their neighbors or people passing by. Non-gardeners can take the food, leave a message or a small amount of contribution to the garden community. When the gardeners plan external events, they can also have a voting on the board for collecting ideas or opinions from the neighborhood.

### 2) Inspiring

Organize internal activities to develop an active community for allotment gardeners. Arrange external public events with non-gardeners to promote closer communication. This is a stage for inspiring gardeners and non-gardeners to feel the community and create a sense of belonging.

#### Concept Description

Annually garden walk-through activity is held in allotment garden areas as a new tradition in the future. On that day, the garden area is opened to the public so everyone is welcome. The main pathway in the garden area is decorated and the culture and history of the garden will be introduced to the wider community. Allotment gardeners prepare organic food from their own gardens and make a garden food market along the pathway. Residents living nearby are invited to walk

through the allotment garden area, enjoy nature, communicate with gardeners and taste the food made by them.

### 3) Sharing

Getting familiar with the idea of sharing. Before further engaging with the wider community, allotment gardeners can experiment with the concept of sharing within the garden community. This is the stage for internal running-in and coordination between those active gardeners and the less active one regarding the sharing mindset.

#### Concept Description

When the neighborhood is vitalized and involved in allotment garden activities, it is time to make the inner garden community more open and flexible. In the future, an allotment garden can be shared by two individuals or families. In this way, young families with less money and time can split the workload and investment with their friends. Co-owners can customize the way of sharing and managing gardens via online contracts. The contract enables the possibility of sharing with strangers, which will be a common culture in the future. With different needs, there are different shared allot-





ment gardens: i. two separate cottages with a shared plot; ii. one cottage and a plot but split the time staying in the garden or iii. one bigger allotment garden for two families.

#### 4) Gathering

When the garden community has achieved an inclusive mindset, there will be less resistance against promoting wider inclusiveness. Gardeners can gather and interact with non-gardeners in the wider community and involve them in the allotment garden movement.



#### Concept Description

This allotment garden association platform is proposed to support the Federation of Finnish Allotment Garden Associations. The association platform enables new models of allotment gardening. Through the online platform, allotment gardens can be connected to the wider community on a larger scale via more flexible channels. With the support of the association platform, rentable allotment gardens will become a new way of experiencing gardening life.

In the future, young gardeners have less time to do volunteer works required by the allotment garden associations. A new way to handle it is to share the workload with others and at the same time provide chances for others to experience gardening activities. Via the platform, gardeners can recruit helpers from the wider community by using credits they earned through renting allotment garden or tutoring novice gardeners. The wider community can find the works they would like to help with or experience in allotment gardens.

#### 5) Blooming

This is the stage that gardeners and non-gardeners gather together in a new allotment garden community. In this

community, there is no boundary between gardeners and non-gardeners. Similarly, there are no specific areas for allotment gardening but only like-minded people with the same pursuit of a sustainable lifestyle. Consequently, the garden movement until this stage can be flexible and bloom in the city through the interaction among people with a parcel of land.

#### Concept Description

When enabling inclusivity is no longer a pressing task for allotment garden communities and the wider community, empowering wider engagement is the new goal for the new garden community. This example is a speculative concept of pop-up movement in the city. Allotment gardens do not have to be in one specific area, gardening is not only for gardeners. The pop-up garden engages all in designing their dream gardens with their expectations of a sustainable lifestyle.

#### Conclusion

It is exciting to look into the more inclusive future of allotment garden. The roadmap is by no means a concrete schedule to follow, but rather a proposal of what we can do in the various stages towards a more sustainable form of allotment gardening.

The journey was not without challenges, but the summer spent in allotment gardens was a great pleasure. Of course, the project would not have been possible without the help of all involved in the study who contributed by sharing their insights. And that is the magic of co-design, a design method that brings everyone onboard to envision a brighter future together. And that is also exactly what we hope of the future allotment gardening, by inviting more into the communities, we will definitely discover amazing

ideas that will make the community a better place for all.

*Introduction of the author:*

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# Great-Britain: The Future of Allotments

Phil Gomersall

President National Allotment Society, United Kingdom



UK allotments are constantly evolving to suit the current social climate and situation yet must remain within the limitations of the legislation to maintain the protection that the legislation provides.

Over the years from the beginning of the century there have been vast changes. The two World War years had a large influence on what went on at the allotments when the primary aim was to provide food for the nation due to food shortages. Yet again allotments have now come to the fore because of this recent covid 19 pandemic as allotments have provided and become a safe haven for many during to the nation's lockdown. They remain one of the few places that have been kept open for the duration of the pandemic as the Government has finally recognised the huge number of benefits that can be obtained from a visit to the allotment for a great number of the community. Fresh air and exercise, fresh fruit and vegetables but more importantly social in-

teraction (albeit at a distance) keeping morale high for many.

For many years, the allotment has generally been the domain of the male retired and elderly blue-collar worker who gardened on the allotment and are now rather rudely referred to as the 'flat cap brigade' (they do have a tremendous amount of gardening knowledge which can be passed onto our new gardeners). However, in more recent years the tide has turned and a much younger clientele with young families now occupy many allotment plots and, in many cases, up to 50% of plot-holders. The swing towards younger people and their busy lifestyles has also influenced plot requirements. Where in the past demand was for full 250 sq. m. plots or multiples thereof, now the demand is for much smaller plots, half plots 125sq. m. and even quarter plots 62.5 sq. m. due to time constraints in their busy lifestyles. The younger people also demand more communal activities such as Easter egg hunts, scarecrow, pho-

tographic, and art competitions and whole range of communal activities such as BBQ's making the allotment a more friendly and social place. Many allotment sites have open days for the inclusion of the general public.

Allotment sites are a patchwork of all manner of weird and wonderful gardening styles where crop yield is not necessarily the prime objective anymore. Allotment sites are viewed by many as a safe haven or refuge from the world of work, where friends can be made, and spare vegetables, and plants are given freely.

The vast majority of plot holders grow vegetables, fruit and flowers for the plate and vase plus the multitude of benefits such as wholesome fresh food, exercise, fresh air and not forgetting companionship. There are still however quite a good number of plot-holders growing vegetables and flowers for the show bench and a fair number of sites still hold garden shows each year.



The UK's open borders have seen an increase in many different nationalities coming onto the allotments with their many different gardening techniques. There was the Chinese gentleman growing crops in a number of buried and waterlogged domestic baths (he had not yet mastered English, so I never found out what the crop was he was growing) to the gentleman from Eastern Europe growing

a large crop of cucumber on trailing vine.

Having talked about the clientele and some activities, the growing practices on the allotment are equally diverse. As previously mentioned, there are the show gardeners who grow vegetables, fruit and flowers primarily for showing, some using every means at their disposal to grow the biggest and the best and often using artificial and chemical aids to achieve these results.

Then we have gardeners who belong to Ideological groups such as the permaculturalists who have the ethical principles of caring for the earth, people and sharing fairly. I think most allotment gardeners hold a good number of these principles as a matter of course but unfortunately like most ideological groups a few tend to develop some extremes with gardening techniques which do not comply with allotment rules thus causing conflict.

Many sites now have a wildlife area developed on a patch of poor land helping towards biodiversity but again some wildlife enthusiasts actively cultivate weeds for wildlife on their plots and this in turn can cause irritation and conflict with other plot-holders. For all the differences in gardening techniques most reasonable gardening activities are now tolerated. Schools are actively encouraged to take on an allotment plot, but many have plots back in the school grounds.

Why do we need allotment rules some people ask? Well, our beloved recreational activity is protected by legislation in the UK by the various allotment acts. If the site does not comply with those acts or has a change of use it could then lose that protection and without rules and good practice procedures, there could be absolute mayhem. On most allotment sites there is an unwritten rule that a certain proportion of any one plot should be actively cultivated to comply with the original

intentions of allotment gardening in providing produce for the family. 1922 Act, an allotment garden must, by definition be 'wholly or mainly cultivated for the production of fruit and vegetable crops for the consumption of the plot-holder or his family'.

This is also to prevent plots being covered in structures or simply planted as orchards which can be grown anywhere without taking up valuable allotment land.

It is also illegal to sell produce for profit from an allotment as there is a general prohibition for any trade or business, however small, being conducted on an allotment. Sale of surplus produce can only take place if it is mainly for the good of the allotment site.

Like every-where else Government financial cutbacks have affected the allotment world and created many problems not only for allotments but parks also. Where there used to be administration staff for allotments and a dedicated maintenance team, this is no longer the case. Financial support has also been cut back to a bare minimum. It is no wonder authorities are looking to find alternatives to make allotments self-sustaining. One solution is self-management of allotments but volunteers to run them need to be found and currently volunteers are difficult to find. It is a well-known fact that self-managed sites are in general a lot tidier and better managed than Council run sites. To make a management structure transfer such as this does take time and commitment by the local authority and a few councils have managed to achieve this aim. Unfortunately, many councils are just opting for the easy solution to offload their responsibility to any organisation which will take them on, a very worrying trend indeed.

For those sites already under self-management there is a movement to increase the length of lease; this has been brought about by exter-



nal funders wanting to have at least five years of active lease to those applicants applying for funding. Generally, 25 years seems to be the common length of lease being sought and even 99 years in a few instances, this too does have its own problems with legal set up costs but feels more secure.

Most self-managed sites are unincorporated organisations with Trustees who are solely responsible for the sites' proper and lawful management. Finding people to take on this responsibility has become quite difficult in recent times. An option of self-management structure which is being increasingly sought is to become a Limited Company, this shares the responsibilities with all members and is a much more flexible and secure management structure. The National Allotment Society can help here and now

offer a simpler and cheaper option for setting up under an umbrella scheme.

With present planning laws being relaxed and the huge demand for housing, this has brought additional threat to some sites in prime locations. Although our allotments are protected to a certain extent by law a few local authorities will stoop to use any means to acquire land for development. It is essential to ensure sites are fully occupied and fortunately the present demand for allotments has done just that. In one major city there is not one vacant plot and a waiting list of 1500 people.

Another means of safeguarding our allotments is that allotment sites can apply to become an Asset of Community Value, whilst this does not totally protect a site it does give a breathing space for the allotment plot-holders to argue their case against disposal and in some exceptional circumstance's associations have put a bid to have the land purchased to retain as allotments.

It is pleasing to see that a good number of new allotment sites are being created by albeit a minority of housing developers as a requirement of their planning permission. A few authorities say that new allotments will be created if a housing development is over a specific size and based on the following "Provision of statutory allotment plots on a development site will be sought when the level of residential development creates a need for 1750 m<sup>2</sup> of statutory allotments, equivalent to 7 statutory allotment plots". The National Allotment Society have listed 30 new allotment sites linked to new housing developments and considered there are a good number more that have not yet been listed. This is a very encouraging development which hopefully will continue. It is hardly surprising that there is a demand for allotments on new developments when you see the minuscule garden space with new housing. The

National Allotment Society will offer help and advice to any authority wishing to regenerate or create new allotments.

At present there is an additional unprecedented demand for allotments because of the pandemic, as people have realised the multitude of benefits allotments have to offer. It is hoped this demand can be catered for, so many more can enjoy the multitude of benefits that our beloved allotment gardening can offer. As mentioned previously a quick fix remedy is to reduce plot size as they become available for reletting. An incredibly challenging and demanding time lies ahead in trying to create more allotments with little funding available.

There have also been many changes to our National Allotment Society. A major restructuring has taking place to have its Regional Bodies become branches of the organisation. There are huge efforts underway to reach our grassroots members using modern communication technology to achieve this which is working very successfully. Additional membership benefits are also being offered e. g. free individual allotment plot insurance in an attempt to recruit more members, another successful regime. The Society is also providing in house training courses online on many aspects of allotment gardening and even more importantly courses for the management of allotment sites which is crucial if the allotment movement is to progress. It is a long list but in addition to the above, the Society now offers webinars to all local authorities on the management of their direct managed allotments which has been very well received and is in great demand. Furthermore, the Society is encouraging local authorities to address additional allotment provision in their local plans.

There is a worldwide directive and funding to improve the environment, for benefit of and the future of man-



kind. It can be safely said that our allotments achieve nearly all the aims of that directive.

It can also be said allotments are the saviour for many in these difficult times and will continue to be in the future. With the present situation in the UK it is considered demand for allotments in the future will remain high due to present financial, employment and social situations.

**The Future is Looking bright for Allotments.**



# Great Britain: The project of Beech Hill Allotments, an example of a different gardening

Mungo DalGLISH



## To begin in the middle

It is late summer, around the harvest festival of Lammas, in the year 2021. Lammas day also known as Loaf Mass Day, is a Christian holiday celebrated in some English-speaking countries in the Northern Hemisphere on 1st August.

## Look

There nestled amongst the mowed lawns, grazed pastures, and golf courses of Cheshire grows a wild-

ing heart: 27 acres of long grass and bluebell woods, flowering thistles and new-planted trees. Look closer and you'll see a permaculture garden, pastured pigs and chickens, and 26 new allotment kingdoms peopled by little Kings and Queens. These gardeners both young and old, experienced and new, have all signed up since March 2021 to grow on a 'No Dig', organic/chemical-free, peat-free, agroforestry, and wild-friendly basis.

## To give a bit of context, we are Beech Hill

An embryonic project desiring to live simply and regeneratively according to Natural Farming / Permaculture / Wilding principles, with a core disposition of deep, attentive listening to self, land, other, and Source. This means growing our food in a way that builds soil, boosts biodiversity, and leaves the land in a more spirited condition than we found it. It means learning from nature's innate capacity for abundance and balance. It means changing how we think about land and what is considered 'beautiful' and 'productive'. We want to cultivate an authentic relationship with place that benefits all beings, including rewilding outwards and inwards to let life back in. Beauty is growing in the messiness, order in the chaos, and we hope others also enjoy seeking it.

As part of this iterative unfolding, in spring 2021 we had the idea to create

a mixture of 26 half and full-size allotment plots on approximately 2.5 acres of one of our fields (historically horse pasture), designed with 'agroforestry' tree alleys between double-plots. The timeline between the seed of the idea and its germination was very short so it was a bit of a scramble to get it all organised in time for the growing season!

It felt important to us that this seat-of-the-pants development was in keeping with our wider ethos, and so our Tenancy Agreement 'conditions of use' stipulate 'No Dig', chemical-free, and peat-free growing, as well as guaranteeing the welfare of any chickens or bees. These mandatory conditions – failing to observe them terminates the tenancy – were accompanied by a more informal recommendation to honour the principles of soil health (limiting disturbance; keeping soil covered at all times with live plants, mulch, or compost; striving for diversity above and below ground; and maintaining living roots in the soil as long as possible).

Given many people had not heard about No Dig growing, and others had not practised it, we ran a couple of 'Intro to No Dig' workshops, including a tour of our own more established 1/4-acre No Dig, semi-wild Kitchen Garden. This offered us a good opportunity to talk through the basic principles and how to get started. We also set up



a website ([www.beechhillallotments.co.uk](http://www.beechhillallotments.co.uk), sistered with [www.Beech-Hill.org.uk](http://www.Beech-Hill.org.uk)) with a private members' forum for the sharing of news and resources, and FAQs – for example 'Can you grow potatoes No Dig?(Answer: Yes, easily and abundantly!) – and linked people to the work of pioneering No Dig organic grower Charles Dowding, with whom I briefly trained. Dowding's generously free Youtube channel is a real goldmine.

We weren't sure whether anyone would actually sign up but every plot was occupied within a few weeks!

#### Our vision for the site was:

- To help rebuild local food resilience, and give more people access to growing space.
- To invite people into deeper relationship with the living land and regenerative growing practices (including No Dig organic).
- To provide an income more congruent with our values than renting out over-grazed horse pasture.
- To support soil health, wildlife, and wild life.

Did you know there are 2 billion microorganisms per gram living in good, undisturbed soil? They are the ones that feed your plants (unless they are damaged by artificial fertilisers, fungicides, pesticides, and other chemicals)!

Did you know our common native 'weeds' are usually our most important wildlife plants? Dandelions feed bees before any other forage has appeared!(Think of them as 'wild plants' or 'right plant, wrong place').

Did you know digging soil over once (or even 'a light forking') makes your vegetables more susceptible to drought, disease, and poor growth because of the disruption to mycorrhizal networks, earthworm burrows, and the rest of the living 'soil food web'?

We have been amazed and heartened by the enthusiastic response from local people keen to grow food and willing to honour our methods and experiment with our philosophy. Already there is a sense of community, which we hope to further develop with a communal shed and a self-managed community plot, as time, skills, and resources become available. It's been wonderful to see cardboard and compost being spread to make new beds, and many plots have had some great vegetable successes even in this first challenging season! And each year our ploholders dance more harmoniously with nature's sacred and time-tested rhythms – layering organic matter on the surface rather than digging it in – the fertility, depth, and vitality of the soil will continue to grow and grow.

# France: Climate change and allotment gardens

Justin Collard

FNJFC (Fédération Nationale des Jardins Familiaux et Collectifs)



Climate change is on everyone's lips: a flood here, a heat wave there, a loss of crops elsewhere. Not to mention the degradation of the ecosystems, which only indirectly affects the human population. Far from giving in to catastrophism, climate change represents a formidable challenge for humanity: how to transform your way of life to ensure a peaceful future for yourself, your loved ones, and your descendants? Initiatives are multiplying to respond to them: resilience is back in fashion, local projects are developing and interactions between humans, biodiversity and ecosystems are better and better understood, hence respected by the day.

Urban agriculture is fashionable: countless are the new roof vegeta-

ble terraces, urban wastelands transformed into vegetable oases, even underground or vertical farms. But this trend is as old as humanity: from the appearance of the first urban settlements, humans have practiced agriculture as a source of nutrition close to their living environment. Over time, agricultural models have evolved, for example they took the form of community gardens when there was not enough space in the city. With climate change, these gardens must adapt and assert themselves as central levers to improve the diet, health and well-being of city dwellers.

Let's start with a simple observation: climate change has a comprehensive impact on agriculture. First of all, harvests are suffering from increased cli-

matic hazards. Indeed, heavy rains, floods, prolonged droughts, untimely and milder winters, erosion and disappearance of humus (the fertile layer on the surface of the soil), shortage of water resources, are not only just as many disturbances of the production of vegetable plants but also of the stability of the plant environment.

Then, as one disturbance is often leading to another, the relationships of cultivated plants with other living beings are disrupted: new and more frequent pest attacks, pollination prevented by earlier and shorter blooms or by excess mortality of pollinating insects, greater pressure on the environment with the proliferation of invasive species (second cause of threats to biodiversity according to the IUCN – In-

ternational Union for Conservation of Nature), less healthy soil which weakens the resistance of the plants ... a sound environment needs sound relationships between living things.

Finally, "Nature" and "Culture" do not mix well: the development of society takes place at the expense of the preservation of natural resources, which in turn provokes crises, while the population continues to increase. Scarcity of water resources, loss of refreshing and depolluting green spaces, reduction of permeable soils due to larger concretized land areas, disappearance of living environments for biodiversity, insufficient supply of healthy and local food to city centres ..... Climate changes as perceived since the end of the 20th century are only the beginning, we will have to get used to experiencing hotter and drier summers, milder and wetter winters, a procession of plants, who will be different from what we are used to and who will migrate further north. Who would have thought anyway that Great-Britain would take up wine growing?

How to tackle climate change? What can we do in the garden to support sustainable production and a sustainable living environment? The solutions are both simple and numerous, combining innovations and tradition ... It is so simple that there is something for everyone! In summary, all the initiatives below have one thing in common: resilience.

The principle of resilience is simple: "we commit and we adapt". We are committed to preserving unused spaces, we are campaigning to vegetate our environment, we are pushing to change urban policies. We adapt by changing our farming practices, by practicing permaculture, by being united. Urban agriculture, allotment-, community- and collective gardens are resilient solutions improving the quality of life of city dwellers in the light of climate change and its impact on the economy and the society.

**Now let's turn our attention to concrete solutions in our gardens, both on a small, medium and large scale:**

- **Use water resources sparingly:** reduce evaporative losses by shading crops from taller plants or artificial plants, etc. By combining vegetation and crops in three dimensions, more sensitive plants can take advantage of shade and less exposed environments. Also remember to cover the soil with plant residues, mulch, bark, green waste. Another solution is to ensure that the soil has sufficient water reserve.
- Prefer an aerated soil, i. e. a light humus, crossed by root galleries or by earthworms. This is a soil where water can be stored. In order to have an aerated soil, it is necessary to promote soil life by feeding earthworms and micro fauna (compost, mulching), by hoeing, by stopping deep plowing, by tilling the soil only on the seed/plant lines (strip-till technique<sup>1</sup>).
- **Economise external water supplies:** give preference to rainwater irrigation by e. g. increasing the number of water collectors. Also remember to irrigate parsimoniously<sup>2</sup> water in the morning (at the start of the photosynthesis process and before the sun causes evaporation), water at the base of the plants and not on the foliage, think of autonomous and economical irrigation systems: by means of e. g. Oyas® pots<sup>3</sup>, by dripping, by programmed automatic irrigation ... The solutions are as numerous as there are gardening experiences.
- **Be inventive in planting varieties and using the available space.** Plant hardy varieties that are not very vulnerable, think of old varieties, plant different varieties ("so as not to put all

your eggs in one basket" and risk losing your entire harvest if the conditions would be bad). To allow crops to thrive in the best possible conditions, adequate knowledge of the exposure and microclimates of your vegetable garden is also necessary.

- **Take advantage of and embrace the wild biodiversity, which sometimes offers unexpected benefits in vegetable gardens:** by planting and combining borage, marigold and nasturtiums in the garden, it is almost certain that vegetables will be protected from pest attacks. Currant bushes guarantee the arrival of titmice, the guardians of the gardens against larvae and harmful insects. Some gardeners even breed snails and place them in a corner of their garden to attract their predators all year round (ground beetles, song thrushes, toads, hedgehogs, ducks, chickens ... ..). This unusual technique offers gardeners optimal and constant protection of their vegetable garden in the event of a massive attack by snails. By accustoming these predators to this diet, gardeners encourage them to come back to enjoy the snails, which in turn are just out there to devour your vegetables.
- Collaborate with scientists to study the impact of climate change on cultivated plants and ecosystems in the vegetable garden and pave the way for innovative solutions: such as new and more tolerant varieties, new techniques for sustainable agriculture / permaculture.

On a medium scale, we must continue striving to develop urban vegetation and urban agriculture in particular: there are many vacant communal lands, courtyards, roof terraces, wastelands, all lifeless. Residents should work with the municipal



ities in order to improve these sites and, if possible, make them not only productive, but also to share and use them as places to build up experience. In short, to improve the well-being of the city inhabitants. Developing urban agriculture also means promoting local food supplies and food self-sufficiency in cities. Even if only 2 % of the food consumed by the inhabitants of Paris is produced in Ile-de-France, it was 45 % in 1950 and 80 % in 1895. Local food supply is therefore not just a mirage, even in the largest metropolises. Urban expansion<sup>4</sup> and soil artificialization are not inevitable.

Finally, on a large scale, we may consider vegetable gardens, both private and communal, as spaces of all kinds of exchange: the various interrelationships of biodiversity, exchanges of views between neighbours, sharing of knowledge, contribution to overall well-being, intergenerational social link and link between different environments ...

These spaces must become as important a place for city dwellers as post offices, schools, hospitals and other offices. Because in these multipolar places<sup>5</sup>, we find a country in miniature!

This list is neither limitative nor exhaustive. We are confident that all of you have been able to adapt your gardening practices to the climate. Practices you are proud of, share them with others, let us know!

Finally, we must be willing to face alternative solutions with an open mind: we must not get stuck in what we have already learned, we must be willing to listen to others and to try new methods, we must dare to fail and learn. Above all, we need to know how to question ourselves and how we can adapt ourselves to the best of our abilities. And above all .... be curious!

1) **Strip till technique** includes the treatment and fertilization in stripes of the sowing/planting interested area, before seed planting. The worked stripe is from 15 cm to 20 cm wide and from 10 cm to 25 cm deep. The soil between the stripes is not treated because covered by the crop residues. Strip Till offers benefits on the soil structure and supports ideal circumstances to permit the seed germinate with the best conditions of moisture, temperature and porosity.

2) The concept of **parsimony** is used to help people identify the best solution to a problem, based on the complexity of the available options. Specifically, according to the principle of parsimony, when looking for the best solution, you should select the simplest one.

3) **Oyas**<sup>®</sup> are clay pots buried in the ground near plants and filled with water. Since terracotta is porous, it gradually lets the necessary moisture escape. Plants absorb the water they need and the soil remains loose and well aerated, instead of being compacted by conventional irrigation.

4) **Artificialised soils** are non-agricultural, non-forest, non-natural soils, covering most of the areas being used for human activities (towns, economic infrastructures, transport networks).

5) **Multipolarity** is a concept used in international relations; in the metaphorical meaning given to it here, this means that allotment gardens are places where different parties treat and consult each other on an equal footing.

# Netherlands: Open to All – New Trends among Garden Pioneers in the Netherlands

Ans Hobbelink

member of the AVVN board and allotment gardener in Utrecht



*Neighbourhood residents and allotment gardeners discuss together in the association house about a better access to the garden park for older people.*



*Children of allotment gardeners and from the neighbourhood in the clubhouse practising a dance.*

## Allotment gardens are becoming more and more popular in the Netherlands.

If you visit an allotment garden nowadays and think you will only find pensioners there, you will be disappointed. Women and men, people with a migration background, families with small children, pensioners and young people in their twenties garden side by side and with each other. The allotment garden is a place where people from all backgrounds are connected with each other. The gardeners are increasingly a cross-section of the population. The demand for allotment gardens is much greater than the supply. The demand for allotment and community gardens

has even “exploded” in 2020. A shift from ornamental gardens to vegetable gardens can be seen. Due to the Corona crisis, more and more people are learning how important it is to be active in nature.

The **AVVN samen natuurlijk tuinieren**, the national organisation for allotment gardeners, sees enormous differences in the size and character of the various garden parks, as the allotment garden sites of the past are now named. These range from a neighbourhood garden for vegetable growing and day recreation to a paradise park with deciduous trees where gardeners can spend the summer months in their garden shed.

## Green contact point in the district

A new phenomenon of our time is the openness of allotment garden sites. This shows itself in different ways depending on the situation. More and more allotment garden sites are turning out to be the green meeting and knowledge centre in the neighbourhood. Others attract the public by offering special plants and vegetable harvests, sharing their clubhouse or inviting people to events, guided tours, workshops and exhibitions. Due to the high garden demand, some associations split garden plots in two parts so that more members can use the plot and so to make more people happy. It is also noticeable that new citizens’



Ans Hobbelink



Werner Heidemann

*Ans Hobbelink (l.) accompanies visitors through her allotment garden site in Utrecht.*

initiatives prefer more the neighbourhood garden type. So diversity everywhere. What all allotment gardens have in common, however, is that they are about community gardening, en-

vironmental awareness and biodiversity.

**Cooperation strengthens the community**

Partnerships of associations with others strengthen the community. In Utrecht the boards of the 15 garden parks form a working community. Sometimes a city councillor sits at the table at the meetings, but always the person responsible for allotment garden policy is present. It is a learning organisation with functioning cooperation, not a school, not even an official federation. The board members name their problems and questions. A working group looks for answers or good practices and may invite an expert.

It can be about asbestos, but also about conflict management, keeping the locks clean, security, the far too long waiting lists, etc.

This collaboration sometimes leads to surprising insights. An example: in 2017 the allotment garden associations carried out an inventory of the number and species of bees in the 15 garden parks. Thanks to the efforts of beekeepers and gardeners, this led to surprising results. There are too many honey bees, which are crowding out the wild bees in their search for food. We are now aware of this and promote the habitat of wild bees and bumblebees through nectar plants and nesting opportunities.



Werner Heidemann



Werner Heidemann

*Open garden parks in Utrecht - there is a lot of space for nature, visitors and schoolchildren*



Werner Heidemann

*Allotment gardens offer future perspectives for a liveable city*

**Cooperation at national level**

In the last 3 years, AVVN has entered into partnerships with related organisations, depending on the content and objectives. The three most important are Stichting Steenbreek, Stadslandbouw Nederland, and Deltaplan Biodiversiteitsherstel. Here we work together for more green, biodiversity and garden parks.

**Plans in Amsterdam for more openness and nature-oriented building**

Amsterdam suffers from the pressure of a fast growing city with a shortage of building land. 40 allotment garden sites on more than 300 hectares were at risk.

The municipality of Amsterdam is striving to preserve the beautiful allotment garden sites, which have been part of the city for over a hun-

dred years, for the future. For the municipality it is important that more Amsterdammers can enjoy them. If the allotment gardens become more open, they can become part of the urban fabric. This means better accessibility, more openness and more space for social co-use. Education, health, sustainability and urban agriculture are important aspects of this. All this fits perfectly into the city's green vision (see box).

In 2021, the decision to implement will be made and the first garden parks will start the process of change. In this process, the associations of the garden parks will be supported by the municipality.

In about 10 years, three allotment parks will move to a new neighbourhood to be built, this is the result after some scary years for the gardeners.

They will now get another place. It will be in the middle of the neighbourhood, but they will be able to continue gardening. Much more comfortable, for everyone, isn't it?

**Green Vision Amsterdam**

- The Green Vision is based on four pillars: Nature, climate adaptation, health, social cohesion.
- The allotment garden sites make important contributions here: Their abundance of greenery as well as waterways have a high nature value and contribute to biodiversity.
- The high proportion of unpaved surfaces promotes the absorption of rainwater, the abundant green spaces cool the city and absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. The greenery provides fresh air, gardening provides healthy relaxation and exercise, and locally produced (organic) food contributes to a healthier city.
- Sometimes hundreds of people from a wide variety of backgrounds form often close-knit communities. Education, income, age and background do not matter: the shared love of gardening has a strong bonding effect.

**AVVN samen natuurlijk tuinieren**, as the national garden association, promotes communal gardening in town and country. The association has 235 garden sites on about 3,800 ha. with about 34,000 gardeners – not counting family members and volunteers.

[www.avvn.nl](http://www.avvn.nl)

Green visions in Amsterdam



Werner Heidemann



Werner Heidemann



Werner Heidemann

# Sweden: How to become attractive

Ulrica Otterling

secretary general



*Hazel (Corylus avellana) hedge at nighttime*  
Illustrator Fredrik Brännström



*Cloudberries*  
Illustrator Lina Ekstrand



*Aronia*  
Illustrator Jonna Fransson

To become more attractive, to our present and to our potential members – that is the main challenge for the Swedish Allotment Federation. The way to do this is to become an organisation that this group of people wants to be a member of and to be visible.

For the past two years of the Swedish Allotment Federation has focused on the following three areas:

***To make the many advantages of allotment areas more known to society as a whole, to the general public and to decision makers.***

This is important as the densification of cities becomes an increasing threat for allotment areas built on land leased from the council. We

need more allotment areas, not fewer! Increasing prices and long queues proves this. To be able to make the allotment movement more visible, the Federation needs to rally the allotment holders in our member associations to join us in this work by organising activities locally, inviting politicians, press etc.

***To keep our present members and recruit new ones we need to become a more attractive organisation.***

The Swedish Federation has a slowly decreasing number of members, for various reasons. An important explanation is that we have not successfully managed to tell our members the benefits of the membership. We need to change that and become more visible to our allotment holders and the potential ones.

We also need to become better at meeting the needs of our members. An important example is the growing number of allotment holders with a lack of knowledge and experience regarding the management of allotment associations and of being a board member. This is potentially a threat to the democratic processes. Looking at the positive side, this creates a possibility for us as a Federation to give our members the support they need in forms of courses, information and advice. And at the same time become more relevant and visible.

***Promote our federation's Environmental programme.***

Our goal is to double the number of member associations who have joined the programme by the end of 2024. This programme is not only about sustainable gardening, but also includes



*Allotment holder Mattias Iwarsson shows a variety of appels at The Allotment Garden Day Aug 28 2021 at Bergshamra Allotment Association*



*Arboretum, Ulrica Otterling, Secretary General of the Swedish Allotment Federation helped planting a tree and inaugurated an arboretum at Dalkarlsleden's Allotment Association in Skellefteå. Also on Aug 28 2021.*

water management, increasing biodiversity, use of environmentally friendly materials and spreading knowledge. Sustainable gardening, growing your own food and ornamental plants is the heart of the allotment movement and promoting this programme strengthens our image/trademark.

### Working with a theme

Along with identifying these three focus areas, another important part of our federation's strategic work has been to start working with a theme. For 2020-2021 it has been biodiversity. Let's face it, allotment areas have so many positive aspects that they make a long list. Before we chose to focus on one thing at the time, we usually tried to include too many in our communication, which made nothing stand out. Working with a specific theme, as biodiversity, has given us focus and a much clearer and more successful communication, both inside and outside the Federation.

We chose biodiversity as it is threatened and is one of the global environmental goals in Agenda 2030. Biodiversity is also something that thrives in allotment gardens. We wanted our allotment holders to know this and to learn more about how they can help biodiversity in their gardens. As all cities in Sweden work with improving biodiversity, we also wanted to give the Federation and our associations a tool to help inform politicians about the rich biodiversity in allotment areas.

### Communication and PR

In April 2020 the Federation hired a person who works with marketing and communication part-time. Now our communication is much more coordinated and our joined efforts have made it much stronger. For 2021 we started working with a PR Bureau and this has proven a great success. The Swedish Allotment Federation and our anniversary activities has received more publicity than we ever expected and newspapers and magazines have written more about allotment areas than ever before. And they have written about topics that we wanted them to write about.

### 100th Anniversary 2021 – Strategy in practise

During 2021 the Swedish Allotment Federation has celebrated its 100th Anniversary and our aim has been to

work with our theme and our communication in accordance with the three focus areas mentioned above.

We prestarted the activities for the centennial already in 2020 by initiating the campaign "Allotments love trees" with the aim to plant 2021 new trees or shrubs in allotment areas by the end of 2021. Planting a tree is the single best thing you can do in your garden to improve biodiversity. Trees are not allowed in all allotment areas, therefore we also included shrubs. As the corona pandemic started early 2020, we mainly promoted the campaign through our magazine and encouraged people to register the trees and shrubs on our webpage. We were very happy to reach 991 during 2020 – halfway there.

The campaign was used to inform and spread knowledge about biodiversity among our members. We also promoted it as a tool, a reason, to make contact with their local politicians, to invite them to a tree planting (a good outdoor, corona adapted activity), to give them an opportunity to show the politicians their allotment area and talk about biodiversity.

During 2021, the proper Anniversary year, we organised a number of webinars open both for our members and all other gardeners. The topics were things like Growing tomatoes, The history of Allotment Gardens in Sweden, Pruning, Planning your Allotment, How to create a rich soil, Fermentation etc. The webinars have been very popular and have given us many new followers on Facebook and visitors to our webpage.

The finale of the Anniversary was on 28th August on the Allotment Garden Day. Many member associations celebrated with us by organising various activities, many of them connected to biodiversity. The week before, we reached the goal of the Tree Campaign – 2021 newly planted trees and shrubs.



*Newly planted arboretum with 70 trees and shrubs.*

So far in 2021 we are plus three on new member associations and a growing number of our members have started working on the Environmental programme.

The work with developing a strategy for the Swedish Allotment Federation continues. During the autumn in 2021 the board and the office personal have worked on creating and documenting a strategy with a 5-10 year perspective. This will help us choosing the right steps towards the future.

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