



Hyphen 74

News from the Federation

c Internationale des Jardins Familiaux
association sans but lucratif | October 2021

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Thoughts (and fears) concerning the future of allotment gardens – corrections of orientation

Otmar Halfmann

President of the Swiss allotment federation



Ph. Rossier/SonntagsBlick

Historically we find most of the large allotment areas in urban centres and for a good reason: Against the background of the working population's self-sufficiency more than 100 years ago and again after the Second World War, they were precisely located there.

Today, the industrial plants have disappeared from many of these locations, but the concentration of urban life has not predominantly changed there. On the contrary, the pressure on grounds has increased in many places due to a growth of the population and a variety of building projects, and in the last decade – as a consequence of historically low interest rates – it has been fuelled by a speculative real

estate boom.

In contrast, the traditional rents for our sites have remained low, in part extremely low.

Parallel to this development, the general need for publicly accessible green spaces and recreational areas has risen and continues to rise.

The hot spells of recent summers have also prompted urban planners to consider more intense greening of urban areas.

In many places, the focus of allotment gardening has gradually shifted from self-sufficiency in vegetables, berries

and fruit towards general leisure activities. This is understandable at first sight against the background of changed consumption habits.

However where scarcity arises or already prevails, envy or even resentment arises, even if these may present themselves differently in the argumentation of authorities.

“Corona” has boosted the demand for allotment plots throughout Europe, but also because of the limited mobility of the urban population, its attention has been increasingly drawn to these “gated areas”*where barbecues can happily be held on shady, green plots and parties being held,*

subject to the respective restrictions on the number of people. Swimming pools, zoos and other recreational areas, however, remained closed.

As we cannot expect an easing of the land shortage in urban areas, increasing pressure on our areas will be felt here in the future. There are already more than a few signs of this visible in Switzerland. With a similar population density, this development can also be transferred to other comparable urban regions.

Let us not be too sure that national legislation will form an insurmountable barrier here. Laws are never set in stone, even if they grant us a temporal protection zone.

My plea: Accentuated reorientation towards the cultivation of vegetables, berries and fruit, gradual dismantling of garden buildings that resemble holiday homes, limitation of the dimensions of the replacement buildings to a minimum, reduction of sealed areas and, above all, as much as possible proactive opening, even if this requires the redesign of the sites and specific safety precautions.

Likewise, current and future holders of allotment plots must be aware of their privileges: For a little cost, they have unrestricted year-round access to a recreational area, which would not be affordable for most if commercial standards were applied.

Measures of respect at the occasion of the organisation of associative or private events will be required in the future even more than in the past; we influence the neighbourhood's perception and evaluation as well as the ones of walkers and passers-by. These in turn are reflected in moods and find their way into the formation of political opinions and the view of authorities. Likewise, the design and planting of our sites requires reflection, especially as far as their biodiversity and the targeted promotion of native plants are concerned; and, not to forget, the quick suppression of various, irritating "plant protection constructions" that are "modelled" on commercial greenhouses.

In order to meet these challenges, which will certainly not come to us all together and from one day to the next, we need associative structures that can take them on.

This will be less and less possible with only volunteers. Inevitably, therefore, we will also have to increase the association fees, because only in this way we can build up structures with the necessary compensation for those acting in our interests; corresponding capacities for the professionally demanding and time-consuming work in the interests of the allotment gardeners are indispensable.

So, let us consider ourselves now and in the coming years with a more self-critical eye. In this way, we are more likely to appear convincing and, above all, to achieve a convincing effect.

In this and in the following issues, will follow considerations of the federations and some examples from associations on how we can react to these challenges.

Bruno RAJAUD has passed away

Malou Weirich

Secretary general of the Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux



Bruno RAJAUD

Just before closing this Hyphen we received the sad news of the death of Bruno RAJAUD on September 5th.

Bruno RAJAUD (1934 – 2021) was president of the French allotment federation and president of the International Office from 2002 until 2005. He took over the presidency in York (GB) from John FARMER and handed it over to Eugeniusz KONDRACKI (Poland).

With joviality, a constant smile and a good mood, he was concerned to always have a good relationship between his federation and the other national federations as well as the International Office.

During his international presidency, much was done to increase the internal and external representation of the International Office and so, for example, the memoranda concerning fresh water, sport and the agenda 21 were worked out. During the campaign: "Children and the environment" our brochure: "Allotments- areas for children to discover nature" was published. During this period we also had the first discussions with the Japanese allotment gardeners in order to find out if and how a cooperation/membership would be possible.

His international presidency ended with the successful 34th international congress in Lyon with the future oriented subject: "Allotment gardens in the heart of the city". The aspects concerning biodiversity and town planning were discussed among others, subjects that are still important today. We could also get better informed both on the development of the French allotment gardens and the French culture.

An unforgettable closing was the final dinner in the Abbaye de Collonges in Mont d'Or, where we were welcomed by the sounds of the fairground organs of Paul BOCUSE's collection and could enjoy one of his menus.

During this period discussions took place within the French federation to

open up for other kinds of gardening and so to be ready to develop new types of allotment areas on the request of the authorities with the help of the internal study and planning bureau. Following these discussions the federation's name changed to Fédération Nationale des Jardins Familiaux et Collectifs.

Bruno RAJAUD was an appreciated colleague and a convinced supporter of the International Office. Until recently he was happy to get the Hyphen and news, even if he had no other contacts with the allotment movement anymore.

We thank Bruno for all his contributions and support and will keep him in best memory.

We express our deepest sympathy to his wife and his family.

Allotment gardens in transition – fit for the future?

Dr. Heike Gerth-Wefers

project manager for research and CEO Weeber+Partner,

Institute for urban planning and social research



The importance of the allotments for the townspeople is increasing. Apiculture on the allotment site "Am Reitschulschlag", Hildesheim. Thomas Wagner



Allotment sites accessible for the neighbourhood – „Rent a Beet“ on the allotment site „Döhrnkamp“, Hamburg. LV Hamburg der Gartenfreunde

Allotment gardens and allotment gardening have a long tradition in Germany – not least in the big cities, where the demand is moreover continuing to grow, currently further intensified by the corona pandemic and the restrictions associated with it. Allotment gardens are currently experiencing such unpredictable interest all over the country, even in places where there have been difficulties in recent years. Being outdoors, getting exercise, doing something meaningful, being able to meet other people at a distance and – last but not least – “getting out of the house” and having a destination if you can’t travel as in the “normal” years are some of the reasons why allotment gardens are so popular.

But what is basically the future for allotment gardens when cities become more and more dense and free areas become rarer and rarer? These questions were the focus of a study by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) and the Federal Ministry of the Interior, for Building and the Homeland, in which specialist administrations and allotment garden organisations from more than 120 municipalities took part. “Allotment Gardens in Transition – Innovations for densely populated Areas” was published in September 2019.

The answers show that even after more than 150 years of history, the allotment garden sector is still an in-

tegral part of the cities. There are almost one million allotment gardens and statistically – all over Germany, whether in villages or towns, in areas with one-family-houses or apartment buildings – there is one allotment garden for every 100 people. It became very clear, however, that – as in many areas of society – the allotment and leisure garden sector is also undergoing almost contrary developments. While allotment gardens are in high demand in the large and growing cities, gardens are missing and the pressure on allotment garden areas is increasing, about 65,000 gardens were empty at that time, especially in smaller and shrinking municipalities. Here it remains to be seen to what extent the pandemic-related demand is sus-



*Important demand for allotments in German big cities – allotment garden site „NW 06 Familienhilfe“, near the centre of Munich.
Thomas Wagner*



*Many allotment gardens are protected by the German federal allotment law. Allotment site “Flora I” situated in the heart of the town of Dresden.
Thomas Wagner*

tainable and will be able to reduce the considerable vacancy rate.

Allotment garden organisations, politics and local authorities, therefore, have to deal with both phenomena – bottlenecks and vacancies – and struggle for solutions. The Federal Allotment Garden Act passed in 1983 has proved its worth in this respect – especially in the processes in growing towns and regions. It protects allotment garden sites from rapid access or requires replacement when conversions can no longer be avoided, and guarantees that allotment gardening remains affordable despite all the inflation in growing cities.

But the law does not release allotment gardeners from their responsibility: The scarce green space is becoming more and more valuable for the whole urban society; the connecting of green and open spaces is more necessary for the urban climate and last but not least for social cohesion. Allotment gardens therefore have to be constantly cultivated, allotment garden sites have to be open to

the neighbourhood, even without being leaseholders, and the gardeners have to share their plots with others and move closer together when there are no other alternatives. Even more so if – as in times of the pandemic – the cities become the sole centre for their inhabitants and the only place they could be.

Conversely, it is precisely this increase in importance for the urban society that makes allotment gardens more valuable and safer, while at the same time it is leaving local authorities the scope they need for their further development. The on-site investigation showed that this is possible and what is necessary for it. We have found numerous approaches in the course of this investigation: consensus-capable, binding and financially backed strategies and plans, voluntary commitment paired with a great deal of professionalism on the part of the actors, allotment garden sites as links to green infrastructure, allotment garden parks that are open to the public and can be used, new concepts with smaller plots of land that are cultivated ecological-

ly throughout, a lot of common green space, allotment gardens in the middle of the residential quarters and not in the periphery, consistent densification or new sites in housing projects, offers for neighbourhoods, kindergartens, schools or senior citizens’ facilities in cooperation with other associations, initiatives and federations and much more.

Despite increasing space bottlenecks in the cities, the allotment and leisure garden sector itself has so far been largely spared losses, according to the results of the survey, and the financial results are almost balanced. In order to ensure that this remains also so in the future, it is important not to slack in the search for suitable strategies, concepts, allies, creative solutions and also financing.

Belgium: Belgian allotment garden systems¹: An exploration of tradition, possibilities and challenges for the future



“Yesterday’s paradoxes are tomorrow’s truths.”

E. R. De Labonlaye

Willy Goethals, MSc

Honorary President of allotment park ‘Slotenkouter’, Ghent

Board member of East Flanders’ Provincial Allotment Association

Belgium

It will not be unknown to the reader that the Belgian state structure is complicated for a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this article. In order to keep things comprehensible, we limit ourselves to the Flemish, French-speaking (Wallonia), German-speaking communities and the Brussels-Capital region. In

most of these entities allotment garden activities are being developed, albeit in an extremely diverse and mutually uncoordinated way. Be that what it may, it should become clear from this article that the Flemish Community has by far the most widespread and active form of allotment gardening. Consequently further in this article we shall mainly, if

not exclusively, talk about Flemish allotment gardens (belonging to the Flemish Community).

But first, let us focus for the benefit of the foreign reader on the land use and an actual bird’s eye overview of allotment garden activities throughout the whole country.



Land use and Demographics

The land area of Belgium consists of 44 % agricultural land and 20 % forest. 9 % of the territory consists of residential area and 7 % is used for transport and communication.

Residential areas continue to expand year after year, mainly at the expense of agricultural land. Forests and other nature areas remain virtually stable.

The territory of Belgium consists of 30,668 km² of land and 3,454 km² of the North Sea. Wallonia takes up slightly more of that land area than Flanders, namely 55.1 % against 44.44 %.

However, the population density in Flanders is twice as high as in Wallonia. The Ardennes in particular are relatively sparsely populated.

At the national level, organic/biological agricultural areas now correspond to 6.9 % of the utilized agricultural area. In Wallonia, this share is up to 11.5 %.

On January 1, 2019, Belgium officially had 11,431,406 inhabitants. 57.6 % of that population lives in Flanders, 31.8 % in Wallonia and 10.6 % in the Brussels-Capital Region. Finally, just under 1 % of the population lives in one of the municipalities of the German-speaking Community.

On January 1st, 2019, Belgium had 1,391,425 persons of foreign nationality, or 12.2 % of the total population..

Official statistics on allotment gardens are nowhere to be found. Disrespectfully, one could say that allotments do not officially exist as an unmistakable part of the socio-economic-cultural fabric. In reality they do exist, of course. And how! The fact that they are a valuable catalyst in many social processes is widely recognized by everyone today.

However, there is still a long way to go before the phenomenon can be tackled in a structural, institutionalized way.

Meanwhile, based on recent research, we can present the following current overview of allotment parks in Flanders;

Current State of Allotment Gardens

Flanders and the Brussels-Capital Region together have approximately 5,300 allotments, spread over 130 allotment parks with a total surface area of approximately 160 ha. Most allotments are located in the province of Antwerp, the vast majority of which are in the metropolitan area of Antwerp. West Flanders and Limburg have the smallest share.

In Flanders, various associations are actively engaged in allotment parks. The landscape looks quite diverse. But let that be precisely a strength through which different visions and opinions can be addressed. Belgians are, historically spoken, quite adept at such matters.

The largest is **Tuinhier**² with 200 departments and approximately 20,000 members, spread over individual gardens and some 65 allotment parks.

There is also **Velt**³. They speak of “community gardening” and manage or work together with some 50 allotment parks.

Landelijke Gilden⁴ are also making a contribution. They do not in itself manage allotment parks. With their campaign “Heartfelt Gardens” they have set up allotment gardens in 40 healthcare institutions. Usually it concerns small plots on the domain of a healthcare institution on which local residents and their family members

<i>Allotment parks per province</i>				
Allotments	Number of parks	Number of gardens	Gross area (ha)	%
Antwerp	48	2.395	68,2	43
East-Flanders	32	1548	45	28,5
West-Flanders	16	383	9,1	5,8
Limburg	12	360	13,9	8,8
Flemish part of Brabant and Brussels	22	597	22	13,9
Totals	130	5.283	158,2	100



can garden. In a number of cases, the board of the local Landelijke Gilde provides for assistance.

Between 2012 and today, the **Flemish government** invested over 2 million euros for the establishment of more than 150 allotments, with an emphasis on collaboration with young people and/or with the welfare sector. Protagonists include municipal authorities, public social welfare centers, community work, schools and a variety of socio-cultural associations and care institutions.

Finally, there are **individual projects** scattered on a variety of grounds and locations.

Some examples:

- Neighbourhood vegetable gardens⁵
- Urban farms and vegetable picking farms
- Aquaponics⁶
- Abandoned professional greenhouses that are made available for gardening purposes
- Large backyards that are made available to younger people by elderly residents
- “Guerilla gardening” in the cities
- Public lands lying vacant provisionally pending further development and final destination⁷
- Vacant land nearby monasteries, hospitals, psychiatric institutions, former castle grounds, university and college campuses; sports complexes (e. g. the psychiatric nursing home “Onze Lieve Vrouw” in Bruges has laid out gardens on their campus)
- School gardens
- Housing allotments with a strong phasing
- Unfinished residential extension areas
- Vacant business sites (In the working-class neighbourhood “Rabot” in Ghent it was done and with great success)
- Roofs of supermarket chains, parking garages and SME buildings
- Vertical vegetable gardens⁸
- Facade gardens⁹

- 1 m² gardens
- The so called food forests¹⁰
- Permaculture sites¹¹
- Recycling gardening (the so-called Jean Pain method)
- Biodynamic gardening¹²
- Courtyards of beguinages
- The large gardens of abandoned rectories

The number of allotment gardens along the railways in Flanders is also worth mentioning. The reason for this is that the National Society of Belgian Railways rents out nearly two thousand gardens along the railway lines.

The political landscape in Belgium lies at the root of the fact that other organisational forms have been formed in the Brussels-capital area and in the south of the country.

In Wallonia, there are a series of local and provincial initiatives under the umbrella of the “Fédération royale des sociétés horticoles de la communauté française”, which do however not manage allotments or allotment parks.

No significant allotment sites are to be mentioned in the German-speaking part of Belgium.

Brussels Environmental Department manages 14 vegetable garden sites and makes approximately 400 individual plots available – along a scenic route for slow traffic or in city parks (scattered around the capital) – to amateur gardeners (see image on the next page).

As you notice; The Belgian allotment landscape is mainly Flemish ... an amalgam of various sturdy trees with many vigorous shoots!



Aspects Evolutions in society that have increased the demand for allotments

A number of social and climatic evolutions since the beginning of the 21st century have increased the importance of and the demand for allotments (parks). In Belgium we distinguish four aspects that contribute to this.

1. A change in both the sociological profile of the population (increasing aging and immigration) and the time use pattern of the population (more free time as a result of working time reductions, early retirement and unfortunately also unemployment).
2. Urbanization, evolution in the real estate market and in the field of spatial planning towards more apartments and less country-based homes (as a result of rising land prices). This increases the need for green space which

allotment parks can respond to due to the nature of their activity. The evolution in spatial policy towards the development of green poles in the outskirts of the cities (as a result of the densification of urban centers) therefore offers important opportunities for the expansion of the allotment area.

3. Younger generations are more involved with food systems. Projects related to origin of the food, slow food, short chain supply, community kitchen and gardens, ecological and organic cultivation methods are initiated all over the place. They want to have more control themselves over their food. Various initiatives in this area in the Flemish part of the country each form their own and growing community, all of which are strongly value-driven. Local initiatives where authentic contact, attention and dialogue are central, are increasingly successful. Citizens who are connected through "food" unite via various platforms and create sustainable communities around healthy food systems.

4. Influence of global events
 - a. Climate change, critical voices about globalization and its consequences for people and nature and the continuously growing world population question the previously calm certainty about food production, food transport and food availability. As a result, people are increasingly choosing to take matters into their own hands and prefer to become a gardener.

b. In addition, the drastic measures in the wakefield of the Covid-19 pandemic have radically changed people's use of time. Daily life is turned upside down, separate spheres of life such as work, leisure and family suddenly converge. The annual vacations

are been transformed into stay-cations. All these changes lead to an increase in the target audience for allotments. It remains to be seen, of course, whether the growth in applications due to the pandemic will also have a lasting effect.

Allotments are and remain however vulnerable

Allotment parks are however vulnerable to oppression due to more intensive forms of use of space in the event of rising land prices. Allotment parks are regularly threatened by urban restructuring. The idea behind this is that the land yields more if housing or business establishments take place on it. Allotment gardeners do everything they can to maintain their association. They make it clear that they manage a green area valuable for people and society and take the initiative to give their garden park added value for the city residents.

Targeted measures such as increasing the intensity of use (by offering adapted gardening options to specific target groups), increasing the diversity of use (by offering educational and recreational facilities to non-gardeners), increasing accessibility (through better linking with the environment and increasing accessibility) and increasing support (through well-considered networking) can reinforce the threatened position of the allotment garden sector.

However, let us remain cautious in making predictions. After all, what was unthinkable yesterday may be inevitable tomorrow! The recent pandemic has made us abundantly aware of this.

Allotments in the city and in the countryside

Allotment parks are located throughout the country, especially in or on the outskirts of cities. However, due to the unavoidable densification of the Flemish village centers in the future, the need for small allotment initiatives is also growing there. In addition to the dozens of classic allotments, other forms are also becoming increasingly popular as explained above.

The allotment system of the future is particularly suitable for the large cities. There it is consistently recognized as a specific and equivalent part of a neighbourhood-related urban green infrastructure close to home. Allotment gardens are becoming an undeniable positive factor in large cities.

They stand

- for green islands that can be used and experienced close to home
- for functioning communities in organized vegetable garden activities
- for social involvement in the care and maintenance of the value of public green and open space
- for the fact that it is also possible to realize individual horticultural interests in large cities



By 2050, Ghent wants to be a climate-neutral city through an ambitious urban renewal project. About twenty other cities and municipalities have endorsed the current energy and climate challenges. Allotment gardens and urban agriculture will play an important role in this process.

Small-scale allotment infrastructure can also be licensed in agricultural areas if the general purpose of the land is not compromised. However, it remains important that relevant policy and planological concepts are developed around this.

Actual Policy Recommendations

If we want to achieve great heights in the distant future with allotment gardens in Belgium, a solid foundation must be laid here and now. We discuss a number of actual and urgent action points below. Some have already been fully or partially implemented, others are in the starting blocks and require more focus and attention.

1. Ample availability of plots

1.1. Based on empirical research, an attempt has been made to draw up a general guideline for determining the needs of allotments in Flanders. The reasoning is as follows:

- Population density is a more important factor in determining the needs of allotments than population size, because high population densities generally reflect the lack of green space.
- Since an allotment park has an average range of 3 km, it is important to determine the population density per spatial unit of 3 km (i. e. per district or per statistical sector) and not at an aggregated level (per municipality) because the density differences are hereby leveled out.

The guideline standard is based on

three variables between which there is a demonstrable linear relationship: the population density per district, the relative density of allotments per district and the pressure on the waiting lists per district (i. e. the number of people waiting in relation to the number of available gardens). The following can be deduced from this:

- In neighbourhoods with a population density of less than 20 inhabitants per hectare, there is no need for allotments.

- The desired area of allotments per district can be calculated by means of the formula ($y = 0.0003x - 0.0068$). The x value represents the population density of the district. The y value represents the percentage of the area of the district that should be provided for allotments to meet the permanent and latent demand. By multiplying the area of the district by the y value, the desired area (in ha) of allotments can be calculated.

1.2. Allotment gardens in agricultural areas

Within agricultural areas there are also possibilities for the provision of allotments. After all, no urban planological permit is required for the mere use of land for gardening purposes. "Allotment gardens are rather part of a large residential core, and not of professional agriculture", is the saying.

However, "The Flemish Spatial Planning Codex" states that socio-cultural or recreational shared use of land with a specific purpose is permitted insofar as the activities due to their limited impact do not jeopardize the realization of the general purpose.

Allotments smaller than half a hectare can be said to have only a limited impact on the realization of the agricultural area. For allotments larger than half a hectare, a planological initiative on the part of the municipality remains necessary.

2. Planological anchoring

Research shows that some 35% of allotment parks are in danger of disappearing in the short or medium term as a result of the underlying planological destination of the land (residential area, residential expansion area, business zone). On the other hand, half of all allotment parks are located in zones whose underlying planological destination is in line with the nature of the allotment gardening activity (36% park area, 5% agricultural area,

7% day recreation, 2% small garden area). This category of allotments can easily be planologically anchored in accordance with the regulations for small garden areas.

3. Budgetary recognition

Allotment gardens are not recognized in sports, nor in recreation policy, nor as a healthy outdoor activity, nor in social policy, nor in the nature policy of the Flemish Government, whilst it became overwhelmingly clear that allotments foster important recreational, social and ecological functions. The recognition of the allotment sector by each of these three policy areas could make it possible to release financial resources for the (re) construction of existing and new allotment parks.

4. Increasing the social return

Allotment parks are always in danger of disappearing as a result of the pressure from more intensive forms of use of space. Three strategies are to be recommended to anchor the current allotment parks in the urban fabric;

- Increasing the using intensity by offering adapted gardening options to specific target groups.
- Increasing of using diversity by offering educational and recreational facilities to non-gardeners.
- Increasing accessibility by aiming for a better connection with the environment.

5. Centralized contact facility at Flemish government level

Currently, the contribution of the Flemish government related to allotment parks is mainly limited to the subsidization of training activities. This subsidy is coordinated by the Department Agriculture and Fishery. As mentioned above, subsidy was also made available for a number of new allotment projects during the last decade.

However, by limiting ourselves to just

the spatial aspect of allotment parks, one has to conclude that a lot of Flemish government departments are involved, such as:

- Department Agriculture and Fishery
- Department Spatial Arrangement, Housing Policy and Real Estate Heritage.
- Department Spatial Planning
- Nature and Forest Agency
- BLOSO Agency¹³.

In order to streamline the policy within the Flemish government, but also with a view to the provision of information and services to civil society organisations and local authorities, it is recommended that a **fully-fledged contact point 'allotment parks'** is developed at one of the above-mentioned governmental departments, all the more so because this contact point will also fulfill policy preparation tasks.

The tasks of such a point of contact may include:

- Coordination of policy preparation and policy implementation work with regard to allotment parks.
- Screening for relevance of policy-preparing and policy-implementing initiatives that are developed within the various policy areas at governmental level
- Collection of information for the benefit of local governments and civil society organisations.
- Likewise, a contact point at provincial level could perform the following tasks;
- The Flemish socio-cultural landscape is rich in a variety of associations working around nature and gardening. Sometimes

parallel, sometimes ignorant of the existence of each other. Some streamlined provision of information, networking and joining of forces could prevent the hot water from having to be reinvented again and again.

- Provincial test centers, which today exclusively serve professional farmers and horticulturists, can undoubtedly be meaningful too to the individual allotment gardener. It would in any case be useful to further investigate this line of thought.

6. 'The Bremer town musicians' effect

Undoubtedly, the reader wonders what the relevance of Grimm's fairy tale may be in this article. You shouldn't. The moral of the story subtly points towards the unexpected perspectives that open up when different parties are willing to cooperate, whilst each retains its specific talents and qualities.

Belgium has two types of "federations": regions (territory bound) and communities (language bound). Each

with its own socio-economic policy.

However, on a socio-cultural level (allotments), efforts could be made to achieve more cross-pollination. However, we must keep in mind that in society different things are important to different groups. The **conversation and exchange** of views are recommendable. But as a prerequisite this requires recognition of the differences between the conversation partners. It needs no further explanation to assess that such an approach is more difficult to achieve than just embracing the container word 'diversity'.

Allotment garden systems of the future

Playing field

Let us first look at the playing field that is expected to be allocated to the future allotment garden systems.

If we want to preserve open space, we have to achieve densification. However, this must be done in a different way in cities and in villages. Some of today's expert insights also advise to put a stop to ribbon development which is so typical for the Flemish landscape.

Because of the growing population, the ongoing family dilution and the aging of the population more homes and other forms of living will be required. If we want to preserve the open space in Flanders, we are driven to densify the already built-up areas in an appropriate and respectful way. The question remains open whether or not there's an alternative?

Densification in built-up areas appears to be a necessary step to save the open space and, where possible, even restore the open space by selective demolition. However, there is a great temptation to equate densification with apartmentization all too easily at the moment.

The predictable consequence: a number of rural municipalities have serious reservations about this imminent apartmentization.

Apartmentization: ghost or shadow?

The share of apartments in the total housing stock in Flanders has indeed increased from 19.7 percent to 27.3 percent in the last twenty years. This means that almost three quarters of all housing units are still not apartments and it would take more than 100 years before we would all live in an apartment.

A recent study shows that 82 percent of Flemish people still prefer a house over an apartment. For the ages of 18 to 44 this is even more than 90 percent. The danger of the apartmentization of rural municipalities should therefore certainly not be overstated. But how then to densify?

Ribbon development

In recent decades, we have been living very fragmented in Flanders, in rural residential ribbons that are often far from all amenities and can only be reached by car, resulting in traffic jams and poor air quality. Despite all the good intentions, ribbon development is still ongoing.





One neighbourhood is not the other

Research shows that 80 percent of Belgians attach importance to the neighbourhood where he or she lives. In fact, about 25 percent of those surveyed – especially young people – attach more importance to the neighbourhood than to the home itself.

Urban densification is perfectly possible by conceiving neighbourhoods with more apartments, so that at the same time there is more space for local greenery, such as a neighbourhood park, and for social integration. Multi-storey buildings linked together form a harmonious whole around a local community center with local amenities, public transport and services. This does not require major innovations, just the openness of mind to look around the most successful neighbourhoods of attractive cities.

Respectful densification in rural municipalities means opting for more (row) houses in the village centers, possibly supplemented by a limited number of low apartment buildings, organized around green squares and charming alleys, following the model of our historic villages. In this way you not only create more open space and public space, but also cozy, compact villages, to attract new residents and generate sufficient capacity to keep the local facilities liveable.

Future priorities for the allotment gardening (in densely populated areas)

Any physicist will tell you that according to the laws of nature you have to carefully aim in front of and higher than a moving target in order to be able to hit it! This metaphor makes us abundantly aware of the fact that the allotment system of the future confronts us with a number of challenges that should not be underestimated. In view of these challenges, research shows that the following important action areas and priorities for the future development of allotment garden-

ing, especially in large cities, but also in rural areas, must be taken into account c. q. continued.

1. Plots availability calculation

This matter has already been described in detail earlier in this article.

2. Simple, clear legislation

Safeguarding open space requires additional constructions in the already built-up areas to meet the ongoing demand for new homes. That is why there is an urgent need for a simple and clear vision and, above all, simpler and clearer legislation.

This legislation should support a faster licensing policy and limit the endless possibilities of appeal. There is also a need for a fiscal policy that stimulates major conversion projects. Only in this way will the necessary densification take place in a way that smoothly fits into the city and the village.

3. The sustainability of the allotment gardening in growing cities

must be prepared strategically and developed in consensus between allotment garden organisations, administration and politics. Allotment garden development concepts are a suitable instrument if they are binding, formulate consequences for implementation and financing and, in the end, if all participants benefit from them.

Allotments belong to the agricultural hobby category according to the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. Allotment parks must be located within the urban demarcation line of the urban areas, and adjacent to the centers for residential areas in the rural area. However, the binding part of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders lacks quantitative guideline standards for urban greenery. There is also no coherent legal framework for the protection of urban green (a decree on landscaping), which makes allotment parks very vulnerable to other spatial claims.

In order to bring nuance to this debate and to achieve a better ordering of our available space, we ought to make a firm distinction between urban and rural areas.

A successful, beautiful city is composed of a collection of diverse neighbourhoods, each with their own identity, their own local amenities, their own public (green) spaces as well as the occasional supra-local infrastructure that contributes to the city itself.

A successful rural area is a collection of villages, each with its own specific identity and local amenities, which together form a region with its own character such as the Flemish Ardennes, Pajottenland or Haspengouw. Cities as well as villages have their “raison d’être”, their advantages and disadvantages, and will benefit from densification, but in a different way.



There is only one regional plan in Flanders in which an urban development regulation can be found that relates to allotments. This concerns the Aalst-Ninove-Geraardsbergen-Zottegem Regional Plan with the additional urban development annotation 'small garden area'. A small garden area can be designated as such at the initiative of the municipality for the construction and exploitation in an organized context of small horticulture.

The small garden areas should be bordered with a green screen; constructions that are necessary for the exploitation and cannot serve as residential accommodation are permitted. This supplementary urban development regulation has only been applied once to protect an allotment complex in Geraardsbergen. In other regional plans the demarcation and zoning of allotments is completely non-existing.

Nevertheless, about half of all allotment parks are located in zones whose underlying planning destination is in line with the nature of the activity of allotment gardening (36 % park area, 5 % agricultural area, 7 % day recreation, 2 % small garden area).

With regard to the protection of green quality, the most important principles for qualitative management are cur-

rently included in the management vision "Harmonic Park and Greenery Management". However, in order to legally anchor the principles of this management vision, implementation decisions are again necessary. These executive orders are largely absent today, but could serve as a basis for establishing criteria for the recognition or designation of allotment parks in the future.

4. Municipal planning and strategies for local green infrastructure networks must consider allotment gardens even more. This requires not only public accessibility and permeability, but above all the commitment to share public green spaces with others. Measures for greater openness and permeability in allotments and for raising their specific character are effective but must also be consistently demanded and implemented. In this way, the meaning of allotment gardens for large and densely populated cities becomes even clearer and at the same time achieves the public perception and recognition that are necessary to safeguard the existence and perspectives of allotments.

Optimal use of the specific strengths of allotment parks (internal) makes it possible to respond optimally to the opportunities (external) that will arise in the future. The examples below re-

late to the optimal use of the strengths and are mainly aimed at increasing the social return of allotment parks.

Some examples of this can already be found in the Flemish landscape, such as;

- Allotments of Gentbrugge are integrated in the 'Gentbrugse Meersen' green pool
- Allotment gardens 'Slotenkouter' in Sint-Amandsberg are also organizing neighbourhood-related activities and are integrated in a municipal plan that also provides for housing, sports infrastructure and active/passive relaxation.
- Allotments of Ename are located on the archaeological site of a 17th century abbey (tourist attraction)
- Allotment gardens 'Boerse Poort' are located near a densely populated working-class neighbourhood in Ghent
- Allotment gardens Sleidinge are located in a large garden behind the old rectory
- Allotments of Bruges are located in the well attended provincial domain Tillegembos





More theoretically, it can be said that increasing the social return can be achieved in four ways:

- a) By increasing the intensity of use
- b) By increasing the diversity of use
- c) By increasing accessibility
- d) By increasing the support

a) Increasing intensity of use

The intensity of use of allotment parks can be increased by offering adapted gardening options to specific target groups such as:

- **Elderly.** The large investment of time and heavy physical labor are two main reasons why elderly people stop renting an allotment garden. The need can still be met by providing smaller gardens or communal gardens
- **Youth.** A school garden is an allotment that is divided into several smaller plots and is maintained weekly by school-age youth or children. In addition to school gardens for biology lessons during school hours, this can include after-school activities.
- **Physically and mentally disabled.** Provided that specific adjustments are made, allotments

can be made accessible to disabled people. This could include raised gardens for people in wheelchairs, wider public paths, larger garden sheds, ...)

b) Increasing diversity of use

The diversity of use of allotment parks can be increased by offering facilities to non-gardeners (mixed functions). This could include the combination with:

- **educational functions.** The educational value that many garden parks have due to the presence of special plants and animals can be further utilized, for example, by organizing school visits, by installing an information point where local residents can go with questions about nature and the environment or where pruning waste can be handed in. Further, offering of educational facilities such as beehives, toad and frog pools, butterfly gardens, etc.
- **Recreational facilities.** Providing communal facilities such as canteens, playgrounds, sports fields, picnic courts in the allotment parks allows for multiple use of space and increases social control.
- **Public greenery.** The spatial interweaving of allotments with public greenery can significantly increase the scenic and ecological significance of it without increasing maintenance costs (allotments are to be "self-sustaining")



c) Increasing accessibility

Public access to allotment parks can be easily increased with a number of spatial interventions.

- Linking up with the environment by, for example, providing more entrances, better designing the access, better location of the access, including walking or cycling routes through the park, etc.
- Increasing accessibility by planning new allotment parks in function of accessibility by public transport, bicycle, etc.

d) Increasing support/networking

Governments and umbrella organisations know that they cannot take care of all garden projects. As a result, more attention must be paid to provide individual garden projects with the necessary know-how and training. This offers the opportunity to bring together representatives from a growing number of participating organisations; local politicians, planners, farmers, gardeners, social workers, project developers, landowners, engineers, health workers and academics.

5. Allotments belong in the cities. In the future, allotments will have to be preserved as small green islands in inner-city residential areas even under the primacy of inner-city development. Even with high growth pressure and demands on these coveted areas, peripheral relocation should rather be the exception. If residential construction projects are nevertheless implemented on allotments and require relocation, parts of the existing allotments should be retained as far as possible and compacted. In the case of new neighbourhood developments with comprehensive multistorey and mostly high-density residential construction, allotments as a green and social infrastructure must be considered from the outset in open space concepts and planning.¹⁴¹⁵

At first sight, it may seem that there is little difference between the twentieth-century rural allotment gardener who cultivates a potato field and the current figure of the new urban gardener or allotment gardener. Nothing could be further from the truth; the careful observation of allotment gardening in Belgium challenges traditional dichotomies between work and leisure, but it also shows how gardening is increasingly embedded in a complex web of meanings and relationships. While allotments used to be described as a rather consensual form of recreation, recent scientific research indeed shows that their effects are more complex than generally believed.

Today, allotments are not only seen as a purely recreational activity but are related to political issues, such as appreciation of a different, more meaningful form of work, the relocation of food production systems, the demand for short-chain food strategies, the citizen's desire towards input in urban development and spatial planning or the demand for green areas in and near the major cities.

6. Historical research shows that, in the context of allotment parks, most, if not all, have come about through initiatives and decisions made by a group of people based on previous individual (gardening) experiences. Today, however, **broader influences** that have become inherent in the design of allotment parks must be taken into account. Existing allotments in growing communities must also be used more effectively in the future than before. Allotment garden organisations have already developed a good approach for this: sharing plots, joint use of tools and storage space, offering space for external groups and alternative garden concepts.

7. If new allotment gardens are developed, new paths should be taken furthermore. Current challenges to the allotment gardening set the direction for concepts and designs. At present, the emphasis is **on economical use of space, conservation of resources, multicoding, nature orientation, more individuality and diversity**, but also on a renaissance of simplicity. Preference is being given to small facilities near urban residential buildings. These cornerstones should also be maintained in the future.



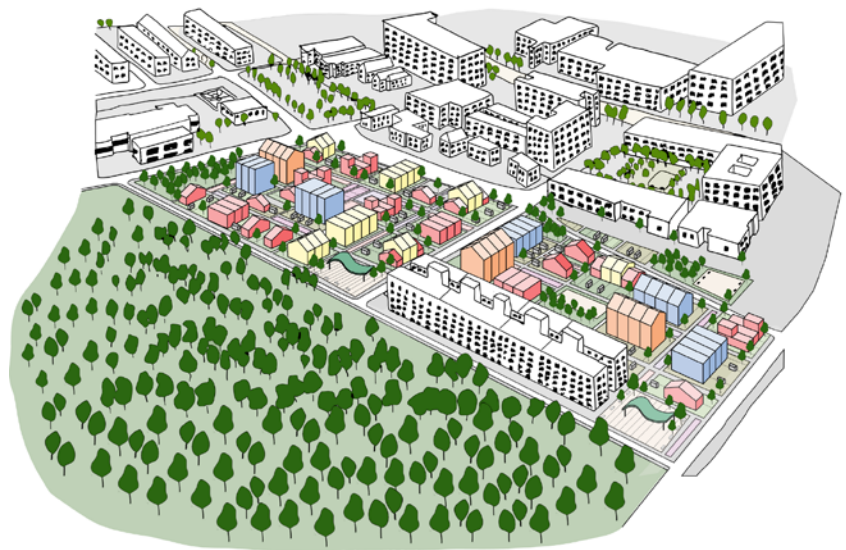
We need to understand the gardening practices of migrants. The vegetables they grow, as well as the way the plots are organized, contribute to the diversity of allotment landscapes and urban gardening.

Urban gardening research and policy making have been largely focused on allotments, whether in parks¹⁶, on wastelands or other public land. This emphasis, while important to many cities, can obscure the significance of privately owned land and their crucial connections to gardening. Policies and practices related to gardening and green space management in the cities can transcend the narrow visions of urban agriculture. Green space management is after all more than just urban agriculture.

8. In large and densely populated cities with a high pressure on public open spaces, allotment garden facilities must increasingly be more than primarily individually usable garden areas. Developing communal areas as publicly accessible green spaces and offering them to other target groups for use in a variety of ways needs to be taken more into consideration.

We recommend creating inviting entrance areas, no or few fences, integration into existing path networks, play and recreation areas, as well as restaurants, info boards, nature trails and more public events overall. These developments already started in many areas, but municipalities and allotment gardener organisations need to follow them even more closely. It requires mutual understanding and support, also conceptually, but above all regarding the responsibility for the maintenance and care of the community areas. The development of allotment parks can serve as a model.

9. The chosen path of biologically and ecologically managing allotments must be consistently pursued to secure the effects on nature and the quality of life in cities. The work in the associations and the expert

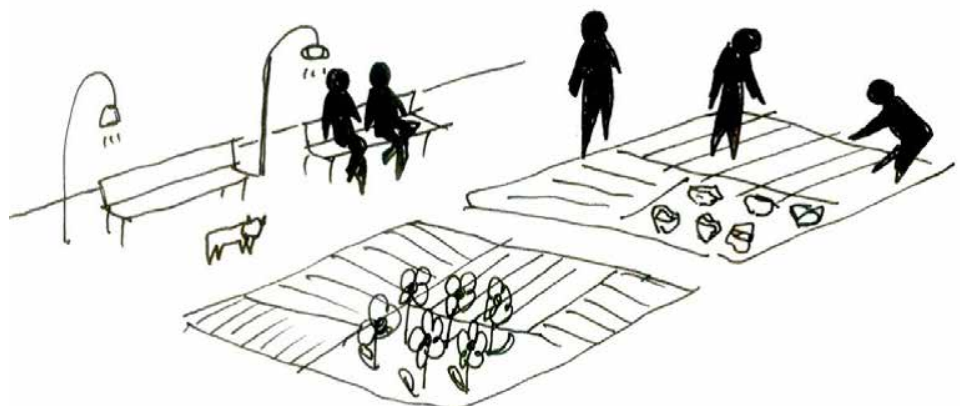


advice that has already strongly advanced these developments in recent decades must target these goals as well. Suitable areas and measures should be used as compensation potentials and developed accordingly in allotment gardens that are existing or newly created in the long term.

10. The allotment gardening must also be open to all interested parties, no group may be excluded. New garden tenants must be taught that allotment gardening interests and uses need to be at the centre. Allotment gardens must remain affordable, which concerns less the current costs than the transfer fee for gardens in growing municipalities and inquired facilities. To this end, equipment and

individual investments must remain within reasonable limits. In addition, it is helpful if local authorities or allotment gardener organisations provide subsidies for households with lower incomes.

11. Intensive cooperation and lively exchange between allotment garden associations and their diverse neighbourhoods must maintain to be part of everyday life in large and densely populated cities. The resources that allotment gardens represent for nature experience, outdoor play, environmental education, knowledge of plants, knowledge of healthy nutrition and processing of local garden products, among other things, must be shared with other city dwellers who have not





leased gardens. The necessary volunteer work in the associations as well as the civic engagement must be valued and supported more publicly.

12. In view of the new challenges, allotment garden organisations must become more **professional**, especially at the municipal level, as the allotment gardening, which is based on voluntary work, often reaches its limits. Within the municipalities, consensus on **local significance**, development options and shared responsibility must be reached among the administrative departments involved in allotment gardening and in politics. In this context, the responsibility for the numerous tasks, which are primarily in the public interest, must also be clarified and if necessary reorganised. The effects of growth pressure in large cities on the allotment gardening must be increasingly communicated with good examples, possibly results of competitions.

13. If considerable bottlenecks must be dealt with, or replacement measures need to be implemented due to lack of reserve areas, suitable facilities must be compacted in the medium and long term. These very complex **restructuring processes** cannot

be handled by allotment gardeners' organisations themselves. It can only be done with the municipality as owner, which has the necessary planning competence and implementation power. To move closer together, the allotment gardeners need to be understanding for today's challenges. Municipalities must be open to work with them.

It takes a lot of effort to get allotment sites suitable to be used, and it is a complex process that requires expertise.

Participants in this process must have enough of knowledge and expertise to assess, develop and deploy sites, including understanding planning and legal frameworks, site history, resources and infrastructure needs.

Finally, points of attention that live today

During a short consultation period (by phone, email, and personal interview) a number of gardeners, allotment associations and people from the public sector were contacted regarding the feasibility and the desirability of the themes discussed above.

The most important findings are listed below;

- An image change of the allotment gardening is noticeable and must be continued. On the one hand, this is evident in the media, because allotment gardening, like gardening in general, is becoming more attractive and increasingly belongs to the mainstream. This is reflected in numerous TV reports as well as print media reports. The image change is at the same time a result of the intensive work of the allotment gardener organisations, their increasing openness and the fruitful work of their board members.

- The allotment garden is rejuvenating. The generation change becomes more noticeable. The average age of the members in the clubs and associations has decreased in recent years, mainly due to stronger demand from young households, mostly families with children. In big cities the club members are often younger than in smaller cities.

- Many concerns were raised about the current food supply system, food quality, food availability and the impact of climate change on agriculture in general.

- The loss of skills in food production, harvesting and preparation, especially among the younger generation as compared to the older, has been repeatedly cited. This was seen as a problem in connection with sustainability of the assumed gardener's responsibility.

- Suitable allotment land should be accessible, close to home, safe, free from contamination and with access to water, electricity, sanitary and storage of garden materials.

- The proposal was made to assess and inventory the free lying grounds of churches,

factories, public social welfare centers, cities, monasteries, schools, railways, public and private owners on their potential for gardening.

- All participants agreed on the health, social and therapeutic benefits of gardening. Gardening makes a significant contribution to individual, community and family well-being and public health. This is because of physical work in the open air, less loneliness and a greater commitment to healthy eating.
- It is feared that a lot of people will want to become a gardener thinking that it will be easy. Many will be gardening for the first time, underestimating the continuous work and not aware of the lacking of their skills. After a while they will lose interest and the plot will be neglected ... support and encouragement will be needed. How will this be organized?
- The allotment gardening has an important social function, which is particularly important in densely populated and socially heterogeneous cities and residential areas. The common interest in gardening connects people of different social status, ethnic origins and generations in many allotments, contributes to a stronger coexistence through the structures of association and thus also fulfils an

important integration function. The extensive range of nature and environmental education offered, should take place in cooperation with neighbouring educational institutions.

- Skilled volunteers are essential to guide projects and keep them on track. It was questioned whether this work could be done through a paid position, for example for a few hours a week, if possible, to create continuity, coordination and a sense of welcome. The lack of this presence and this possibility was seen by some as a limiting factor to sustainability. The danger of 'burnout' among the key responsables was also seen as a problem, and the need to support groups in the formation, decision making and sharing of workload and responsibility was considered essential to ensure the sustainability of projects.
- The need for a broader network of interested parties and stakeholders in all its aspects was considered essential by everyone. Despite everything, there are still gardening associations that have no idea of "extra muros" possibilities and continue to experience common problems.
- The organisation of the allotment gardening is based on voluntary work. The board members invest a lot of free time and personal commitment in this activity. In

view of the many new tasks resulting from the developments described above, but also from coping with the structural vacancy, the work has become more extensive and demanding. Many members of the management boards have been active for many years. The generation change must continue with new enthusiastic, passionate, skilled and persistent members in management functions.

- The interest in gardens and gardening is growing, the interest in the population has grown, slightly more frequently in some big cities. This manifests itself in a growing number of garden and environmental initiatives, but also a greater demand for allotment gardens. Overall, this reflects an increasing need to be more involved in nature conservation and environmental protection and to use, secure and make green and open spaces especially in urban centers as places of rest and relaxation.

Thanks to the reader for the sustained effort and attention. Sometimes one sentence says more than an entire article that may slowly evaporate over time like puddles of water after a summer thunderstorm. Let this one sentence be Albert Einstein's inspiring quote from 1952 "Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere".

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- * STATBEL, het Belgisch statistiekbureau
- * Vlaamse Confederatie Bouw

* Cabinets of

- Mrs Hilde Crevits, minister of agriculture and fishery of the Flemish Community
- Mrs Astrid De Bruycker, municipal counsellor of public green in het city of Ghent
- Mrs Céline Tellier, minister of the environment of the French-speaking Community
- Mr Alain Maron, minister of the environment of Brussels-Capital region
- Mr Oliver Paasch, minister-president of the German-speaking Community

* Representatives of Landelijke Gilden, Velt, Tuinhier, cities of Hasselt, Bruges and Antwerp

- 1 We have deliberately chosen the term "systems" to emphasize the diversity and the dynamic character of the phenomenon of allotment gardens in Belgium. Regular adjustments and compromises with regard to changes and new influences from inside and outside the system are characteristic.
- 2 Tuinhier is a volunteer association that organizes and shapes amateur gardening in Flanders. The non-profit organisation promotes interest in sustainable, pleasant and environmentally conscious gardening, focuses on gardening as a meaningful and healthy leisure activity and encourages the construction of allotment parks.
- 3 Velt organizes its activities exclusively around ecological gardening
- 4 Landelijke Gilden is an association of farmers and gardeners who attaches great importance to the quality of life in the countryside and agriculture and gardening. The association brings farmers and gardeners and rural residents together in one movement.
- 5 The city of Ghent has some 27 neighbourhood vegetable gardens spread over the territory with a total land area of 1.5 ha for 530 gardens
- 6 Aquaponics combines hydroculture (growing vegetables on water) with aquaculture (growing fish and shellfish)
- 7 "De Moeskopperij", as the vegetable garden project is called, is a temporary use on a piece of land owned by the public social welfare centre Ghent. While waiting for construction projects, the residents of the nearby working-class neighbourhoods Muide and Meulestede are allowed to garden there.
- 8 A vertical vegetable garden ensures that you can grow a lot, without having to have a lot of space. This is useful if you only have a balcony or if your garden is not very big. A green wall is also a nice way to brighten up a less cozy, bare wall or fence.
- 9 In streets with little of no greenery
- 10 A food forest is a system designed by humans, aimed at sustainable food production. The design of a food forest is inspired by the structure of a natural forest as we still find it in some places in Europe. A tropical rainforest is also a good example.
- 11 Permaculture is about designing a sustainable living environment. How can you meet the general need for food, drinking water, energy, housing and (even) social connection in a sustainable way?.
- 12 Gardening method that assumes that a plant develops better in a soil that is full of life and in accordance with the cosmic forces.
- 13 Bloso is the agency of the Flemish government responsible for sports policy in the Flemish Community
- 14 DOK Ghent was a successful temporary use of a vacant lot in the old city docks where, in addition to all kinds of activities, "community gardening" was also practiced
- 15 Allotment gardens Slotenkouter in Ghent is at times the setting for open-air cinema and open-air street theater performances and folk sports are practiced. A cycling route runs through it and it is the natural, traffic free connection between two residential courtyards
- 16 Parks and vacant lots are seen as more restrictive; after all, the policy for parks is to provide clean, accessible, safe, green open spaces. It has taken time, patience and a lot of money to set up planting schedules in the park, and most of all, vandalism and theft are common problems. There are also concerns about additional costs for surveillance and security. Complaints are feared about "rubbish lying around" from, for example, fruit trees, vegetable waste, weeds, all kinds of construction, greenhouses, ...

Germany: “How can we secure our allotment garden sites in the long term and set them up for the future” and what goals should be envisaged in this context?

Wilhelm Spieß

Chairman of the National Federation of Nordrhein-Westfalen



Location plan of the garden park and surroundings

Like everything else in human life, the allotment garden movement is subject to change. This is also something the study “Allotment gardens in transition” verified. The study identified challenges and development approaches for the allotment garden movement and suggested various solutions. One focus is on the com-

petition for space between housing, infra-structure and green and open spaces. The question arises as to how the further development of allotment garden sites can respond to this situation. The benefits and added value for the population as a whole must also be taken into account in order to increase the acceptance of allotment

garden sites within the population, but above all in administration and politics. Individual needs and wishes of those interested in gardening, who are often younger, must be responded to. Within the framework of the possibilities offered by the federal law on allotment gardens, it is certainly possible to find scope for the further develop-



Garden for singles, multi-generation garden

ment of the allotment garden movement. This further development must also be seen against the background of the respective urban development and financial situation in the cities and municipalities.

In addition, in the following example, the cooperation between administration, politics and the allotment garden organisation must also be taken into account.

In order to be able to face the structural changes, a working group consisting of representatives of the Dortmund allotment garden federation and the department of urban greenery of the city of Dortmund was formed as early as 1997. This working group worked on the further development of the allotment garden sites and the different green elements associated with them under the guiding principle "People – City – Green".

At this point it is important to point out a special feature of allotment gardening in Dortmund. In Dortmund a general lease agreement between the local federation and the city has been in force since the middle of the 1960s. This contract stipulates that the feder-

ation must appoint and elect a representative of the city to its board. This alone results in a close relationship in the supervision of the allotment garden associations.

This working group developed ideas for the future of allotment gardening. The unanimous opinion was: "The allotment garden sites can only develop further and be anchored in the public mind if the different uses can be made clear and made available to the population". Apart from the well-known effects on nature, the environment and the individual allotment gardener, the allotment garden site must also bring benefits for the population in general. After all, how can the public understand a facility whose benefits for the public rest on a few pillars and are often reduced to the private use of land!

The garden park project must be developed and planned with foresight. As part of the open space development programme of the city of Dortmund, a sub-plan "Allotment Gardens" was drawn up as early as 1989. The plan presented existing and development possibilities for allotment gardens. In the course of time, it was continued and added to, according to

changes in the urban development situation. It can therefore be regarded as a precursor of modern allotment garden development planning.

It is precisely the drawing up of allotment garden development plans that can lead to the safeguarding and preservation of the allotment garden movement, if the subject of new development and redesign of the sites is dealt with in a contemporary and needs-oriented manner. One aim can be to show the added value of allotment garden sites for the population, nature and urban climate, but also for urban development.

Only if allotment garden sites have an added value for the cities and municipalities will they be accepted and respected by the population. In addition to various alternatives to redevelopment, which cannot be the subject of this article, the idea of garden parks was developed and presented to the city's administrative leadership and council.

Various resolutions of the council in the past had also always demanded and stipulated public green areas for allotment garden sites. A first idea for a garden park "Am Segen" was developed for the Federal Garden Show in 1959 and implemented by embedding three allotment garden sites in a green area. Later on, public green areas between 25 % and 40 % were decided by the council for new allotment garden sites.

It is important to point out another special feature of the general lease agreement: The City of Dortmund waives the entire lease income. In return, the federation has to care for and maintain all the facilities and the public parts. It is only against this background that the generous development possibilities for the public parts of the allotment garden sites can be understood. There is always a need for close cooperation between the federation and the parks depart-



Global view of the herb spiral



Herb spiral

ment, which is also practised and coordinated with the council and its committees. One needs to know this background in order to then be able to understand the development of the garden park “Innenstadt-West”.

But now let us look at the individual development steps on the way to the garden park.

The four garden sites are embedded between a partly multi-storey residential development, but also parts of a former mining settlement with historic buildings, detached houses and terraced houses, and a commercial area on the north side of the site. To start with, it was decided not to draw up a final design plan for the garden park, but rather proposals were developed for individual sections, which were then further developed in cooperation with the various stakeholders. Here too are some examples: A green area of the St. Charles Borromeo parish, which was no longer needed, was leased by the city association and was to be used for the creation of new allotment gardens. The working group discussed this. Small plots of about 200 square metres were created, which are of interest to singles. A multigenerational garden was created. There are raised beds with vegetables, a barefoot path, which was created and is maintained by a youth

organisation. An arbour was created as a meeting point and playground equipment was installed that can be used by all generations. The gardening group of the Martin Luther Comprehensive School also meets in this garden. Two days a week, students grow vegetables and do gardening work with the support of the allotment gardeners.

A school garden was opened and handed over to the kindergarten St. Karl Borromäus – Gemeinde for gardening with the youngest children. All this was done in close coordination with the groups involved.

On a little-used meadow area in the entrance area of the allotment gardens, various garden elements such as dead-wood piles, an herb spiral and other small ecological measures were planned. Here, employees of the city federation made a revolutionary suggestion. A walk-in herb spiral could be installed as an attraction for visitors. This idea was well received and an herb spiral was created that can be used by wheelchairs, walkers and prams. On an area of 18 m in diameter, 200 t of basalt gravel and 120 t of quarry stones were heaped up to a height of 2.20 m. The spiral is now home to 90 different herbs. On the spiral, 90 different, signposted herbs

are now growing with perennials and roses as accompanying planting. The herbs may also be harvested by visitors and allotment gardeners. The overall concept and the possibilities for use have meant that there has hardly been any plant theft or vandalism so far.

The allotment garden “Glück auf” forms the end of the garden park and the connections to the adjacent district cemetery as a further green element. In front of the associative home, a playground with plenty of seating invites parents and children to play and linger. Bouncy games are painted on the pathways of the site using simple means. Instructions and rules are attached to the respective game in a weatherproof way. A pergola with a roof partially spanning the path offers shady resting and recreation areas. Small ecological measures such as insect hotels, deadwood piles, dry stone walls and nesting aids are located throughout the surrounding greenery. Information boards on facilities and notes on users and their habits round off the information on offer.

The attraction of this facility is the bee garden created by the association and looked after by a beekeeper. The eye-catcher here is a round bed with selected plants as bee and in-



Bee garden

sect pasture. An oversized honeybee points out the purpose of this facility and the plants are well signposted everywhere. Beehives and nesting aids for solitary and wild bees are also part of the garden, as is the opportunity to view the inside of a honeycomb. The educational offer of this garden is rounded off with information on bee and insect protection.

Summary:

This garden park and its facilities have succeeded in meeting the objectives mentioned at the beginning, such as acceptance and added value for the population. The garden park convincingly demonstrates the possibilities that arise for the most diverse groups of the population and visitors in addition to the use by the garden tenants. The benefits of allotment gardens for people and animals can be experienced here at close quarters and in reality. All the facilities are created, looked after and maintained by the allotment gardeners. Of course, such a project is only possible with financial but also idealistic support. Financial aid has been provided by the City of Dortmund, the “Stadtverband Dortmunder Gartenvereine” and by the State of Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW).

With regard to the financial aspects, some remarks specific to the state and the city are also necessary. Within the framework of an independent allotment garden promotion scheme, the state of NRW provides budgetary funds for, among other things, the creation, extension and conversion of allotment garden sites. Funds from this budget can be applied for by the municipalities at the respective district government and were used for this project.

These were supplemented by funds from the city’s association subsidy. The city federation and the association provided further funds to realise this project.

The entire development of the garden park was built up through a long-term, collaborative and eye-to-eye cooperation between politics, administration and allotment gardeners. Everyone was able to contribute their thoughts, motivations and development proposals. They were examined for feasibility, financial viability and benefit, discussed and decided upon. This required a high degree of tolerance and perseverance on the part of all those involved and also involved a great deal of time and idealism.

Every visitor who walks through this garden park experiences it as a place to rest, stay and learn. The garden park thus represents a considerable contribution to the acceptance and safeguarding of the facilities and also contributes to more environmental justice for the population.

Biotop and flower meadow in the allotment site “Kortental”



Denmark: Challenges and strategies seen from a Danish point of view

Preben Jacobsen

Chairman, Danish Allotment Federation



A little more than 100 years ago allotment gardens were thought to be for rather poor people, living in small, unhygienic apartments. Not only were the allotments a source for cheap vegetables and fruit but they also gave an opportunity to get some fresh air, get away from the big city's temptations and to be an oasis for both grownups and children where it was possible to relax from the hard daily life. The price was low, everybody could afford an allotment garden.

Luckily today, the living conditions have largely improved. Allotment gardens are now mainly above all green oases, where people can relax from the daily stress. People cultivate their

own fruit and vegetables because they want to harvest their own food and not because they financially need it. The allotment is good for the physical and mental health. Everyone can benefit of it because the rent fee is kept at an acceptable level.

In Denmark, many people want an allotment garden

The allotment garden's importance regarding the physical and psychological wellbeing for people is in accordance with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. To young and younger people this has great importance and is expressed in their great interest in acquiring an allotment garden.

Are the Danish allotment gardens forever?

In Denmark, the law protects two thirds of the allotment gardens against closing. But of course, this law can be changed if a majority of the Folketing (The Danish Parliament) agrees to it.

If the illegal buildings are not legalized, if the rules of handling the discharge water are not followed and if you stay in the allotment garden all year round though this is not allowed, the legislators can decide that low prices for renting an allotment garden shall stop. Then you must pay the market price. This will make it impossible for quite a few allotment garden-



ers to keep their allotments, that part of the population who most needs an oasis and who cannot afford to buy a summer cottage.

Difficult rules

If the authorities are of the opinion that the allotment gardeners do as they please they might be tempted to tighten up the rules. But the rules are difficult to handle in the garden societies. They must be supported in enforcing the rules.

The few allotment gardeners who do not follow the rules may make the lives difficult for the many who obey the rules.

The allocation of the tasks between a garden society, the tenant and the authorities should be clear and the garden societies and the districts they belong to must have the help they need to enforce laws and regulations. It is a difficult task for people, who on a voluntary basis, have taken upon themselves to oversee garden societies and districts.

The purpose with the allotment movement may disappear

Even though younger people want allotment gardens they are not that willing to take part in the voluntary organizing jobs. It is a big challenge and may evolve into a democratic problem, which must be solved if the allotment movement is to survive. It is to the young and younger people we must look as they must be involved in the development of the allotment movement.

Younger members participate in organizing jobs if it is to see the results and for a limited time. As our organization is today, organized in committees for allotment societies, districts and finally two executive committees it is confusing and a long way to go if a member wants to join the voluntary job in the executive committee placed just below the congress.

Work in progress

The Danish Union of Horticultural Societies continually prepares material to help the voluntary jobs. It is difficult as many allotment gardeners first and foremost enjoy their allotment and do not think of any problems until they themselves are involved in them.

It is important to continue to prepare material to ensure that the purpose with the allotment movement does not disappear in what may look like small, detached houses or summer cottages with following claims on market rent, taxation, road lighting, sewerage and so on.

The future strategy

In 2018 the congress decided to do something about the democratic problem and to prepare a new and more transparent organization to be discussed at the congress in 2021.

This is a difficult job and together with an external consultant company we try to involve as many as possible in the process. Unfortunately, the whole Corona-situation has delayed the process and we have had to postpone our congress to 2022.

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HYPHEN is published three times per year by the Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux a. s. b. l.

Editor: Malou WEIRICH, Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux

Distribution: E-Mail by the Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux

Concept and realisation: Zentralverband der Kleingärtner und Siedler Österreichs

Layout/DTP: Werbegrafik-Design Karin Mayerhofer, BeSch, Ing. Beate Scherer

Source of pictures: The federations of Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland

Date: October 2021