FOCUS ON ALLOTMENTS
KLEINGÄRTEN IM FOKUS

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Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux
association sans but lucratif | automn 2014

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Leading article

Catharina Tarras-Wahlberg, Chairman of the Swedish federation of allotment gardening

Catharina Tarras-Wahlberg

The allotment movement has a long tradition in Sweden as well as in several other countries. In Sweden it started in the year 1895, but Sweden was not the first country with allotment gardens. At that time the Swedish cities were crowded and often very many people lived in the same apartment due to the lack of apartments. The politicians then took their responsibility and organised allotment gardens to give the city dwellers a possibility to have their own land. On these allotments they could grow fruit and vegetables which made it possible to reduce their own food costs.

In Great Britain we see a similar history. But there the number of allotment gardens increased heavily during the two world wars. During the wars it became an important way to secure that people had food to eat. And after the wars it also gave the possibility to offer sanctuary for soldiers who had problems to adapt to normal living after the wars.

Allotment gardening has also from the beginning offered an opportunity for the tenant and his family to relax.

Today we have another situation in Europe, but the interest in allotment gardening has remained and is increasing. It is encouraging to note that young people get more and more interested in allotment gardening, especially in urban allotment gardening.

The allotment gardens without a cottage for overnight size from about 50 sq. metres up to a couple of hundred sq. metres. A sign of the increasing interest is that there are several cases of so called guerrilla gardening especially in the cities. It is well kept gardening in a smaller scale on land owned by the local municipality. The politicians on a local level have met the demand and have chosen to stimulate this trend by arranging small growing containers with a wooden frame e.g. in parks in the cities. These wooden containers give an opportunity to grow in a small scale. This is a very low cost arrangement and if the local municipality needs the space, it is easy to move these wooden containers to another place at nearly zero cost.

This is a result of good contacts with our politicians. It shows clearly the importance of having such contacts. We know that allotment gardening has a good impact on health and quality of life. Furthermore it is good for a sustainable development of the environment. More and more allotment gardeners choose to grow ecologically. That is one of several reasons why we must continue to “teach” the politicians on local and national level the importance of stimulating allotment gardening. And if the politicians are reluctant you can continue by describing the positive environmental effect of allotment gardening.

If we work with the same approach in the European organization, we will be a stronger voice in our efforts to maintain and develop allotment gardening.

XXXVIIth International Congress of the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux held in Utrecht

from 28th – 31st August 2014 Focus on allotments

ALLOTMENT GARDENS – GREEN WITH A HEART

Allotment gardens are an indispensable part of the services of general interest in our cities and municipalities. In these public parks, social interaction can unfold in various ways; they are green, with a heart.

All over Europe, more than three million allotment gardeners are actively involved with associations and their gardens. This involvement goes beyond gardening. The social interaction has a strong positive influence on city life and life in municipalities.

Furthermore, the importance of allotments gardens in urban spaces has increased continually. While self-sufficiency and recreational activities used to be their main purpose, they have turned into indispensable green spaces of particular significance for the climate in populated areas, for the ecology and for soil and species conservation.

These beneficial effects need to be more firmly anchored in the public awareness as well as in the conscience of political and administrative officers and decision makers.

There's a good reason why we exist

At international events in Zurich, Berlin and Utrecht, we have been impressed to find out about how many

valuable initiatives are taking place in our allotment garden sites.

However, we also had to accept that these achievements are rarely known outside the garden sites or our organisation. At best, public awareness takes place in the immediate surroundings. The media show negligible and short-lived interest.

On the other hand, the media refer to the hype of green living and inform that many young families are looking for opportunities to get an allotment garden.

Allotment sites are the "green lungs" of a city. Therefore, they should be an integral part of town development and should not be pushed to its edges. The increasing need for allotments must be integrated in the urban development plans and put into practice.

The American trend of the "Community Gardens" is often represented as near-revolutionary in the way it opposes the current ways (of life) with alternative practices.

This is overlooking the fact that in allotment garden associations the connexion between gardening, food politics, economics, society, art and urban planning has for a long time been an integral part of allotment gardening. Allotment garden associations don't

just have a strong internal social structure. Many associations also cultivate distinct and durable relations and organise joint activities with their neighbourhoods. Thus „Community Gardening“ is a reality in many allotment garden sites nowadays.

It needs to matter to others that we exist

Unfortunately the many positive activities taking place in our associations and the beneficial effects of the allotment gardens are little known to the public.

Allotment garden sites provide essential support for biodiversity, species diversity, climate and soil conservation in residential areas.

Allotment gardeners contribute to the preservation of knowledge about old fruit and vegetable varieties.

Allotment garden associations fulfil an important role in the administration and conception of large green areas in cities and municipalities. They contribute to a reinforcement of social cohesion within the association as well as in the residential areas in their immediate surroundings.

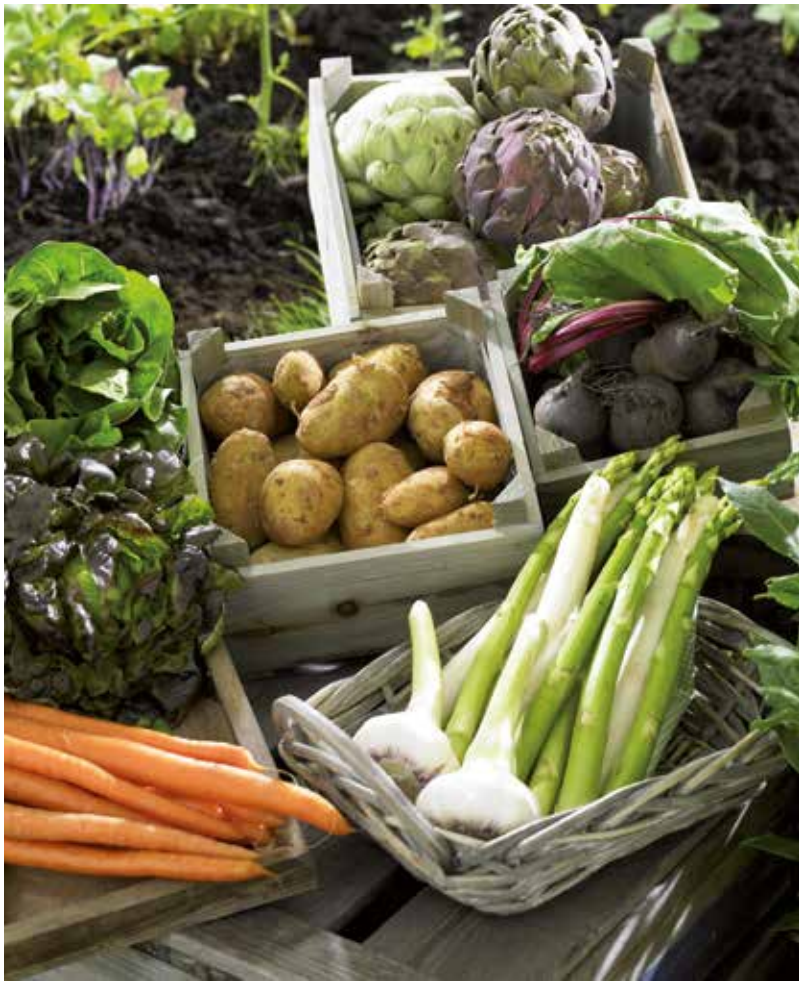
Allotment associations make an important contribution to a social living together by their projects aiming at educating children about nature and the environment, at integrating elderly people, people with a migration background and disabled people into the allotment movement.

In order to guarantee our continued existence, we need to actively work towards

anchoring the allotment garden movement and its positive effects in the conscience of society;

maintaining the role of allotment garden sites as a natural and integral part of urban development;

getting political decision makers, administrations and urban planning bodies to respect the existence of allotment garden sites as a contribution to services of general interest in cities and municipalities.



Our goal needs to be

to make the public‘s appreciation of allotment gardens one of the pillars supporting our future.

Together we are stronger

The Office International is an association of allotment gardeners globally representing the interests of allotment gardening both internally and externally.

The Office International can reinforce and support allotment gardeners‘ interests on an international, national and local level thanks to its visible presence.

Furthermore, a clear and noticeable presence of the Office International as the body representing the interests of all European allotment gardeners can attract the media‘s attention.

We all have to make our contribution to creating a long-term positive image of the allotment garden movement.

We have to become visible to others and be more present in public life.

We have to present allotment gardening in a positive and convincing manner.

We have to give priority to our common goals in the context of our activities and live in awareness of these goals.

We have to exude confidence and self-assurance.

These tasks should be our common goal for the years to come.

Utrecht, 30th August 2014

Decision protocol of the general assembly

held in Utrecht on 28th August, 2014

Were present: the federations of Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Great-Britain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland

Was absent: the federation of Denmark, Norway, Slovakia and Sweden

1. C. ZIJDEVELD welcomes all the delegates, especially those taking part in a general assembly for the first time.

2. C. ZIJDEVELD informs that two French researchers will present their research during the general assembly.

3. Two topics are added to the agenda, which is then adopted with unanimity.

4. The decision protocol as well as the report of the March general assembly are adopted with unanimity.

5. M. WEIRICH informs that together with J. KIEFFER she has presented the International Office to the new ministers in Luxembourg. The Office should as well be supported financially by the government in the future.

6. On proposal of the executive board, the general assembly decides with unanimity to grant the diploma for innovative projects to Pontnewynydd Allotment Association (GB).

7. The Office has received no additional proposals to modify the text of the resolution. The resolution is considered as adopted with unanimity and will be presented to the congress in this wording.

8. After having received some more written proposals for amending the Charter, the text in its present wording is adopted with unanimity and will be published. If the Office will shortly receive a picture of a Norwegian garden-house/allotment site, this picture will be added to the text.

9. A written report concerning the cooperation with the international organisations was sent to the federations. M. WEIRICH additionally informs on the climate conference in Paris in 2015.

10. The federations have been informed in writing about the affiliation fees for 2015. They include the automatic adaptation decided in 2008. E. KONDRACKI informs that following the new legislation ± 10% of the allotment gardeners will leave the federation. This new data will be considered at the beginning of 2015.The problem, that occurred due to the suspension of the membership of the Walloon federation (part of the Belgian federation), will be solved in discussions with the representatives of the Belgian federation.Under observation of these two points, the affiliation fees for 2015 are adopted.

11. K. KENNY is nominated as accountant to finish the mandate of A. REES.

12. Follow-up of the decisions taken by the general assembly in Luxembourg

a) **Europa Nostra:** W. WOHATSCHEK informs that the meeting in Vienna was only a social event. There was no content that could interest the Office.
It is decided to continue to pay the affiliation fee, but not to take part in the activities.

b) **Cost – Urban Allotments:** The Finnish federation has intensified its contacts.
The federations from Sweden, Switzerland and Austria sent their comments on the national data included in the book proposal.

c) **Cost – Urban Agriculture:** E. KONDRACKI informs on the meeting in Warsaw. This project seems to head to its end. There seems so to be no necessity for the Office to take part.

d) **Activity children and nature:** The Office received good examples from Germany, an example from Belgium, Poland and Switzerland.
The Finnish examples sent to the Office do not match the subject. The Finnish federation will send an adequate example.
It is decided that all the other federations will send one or two examples as quickly as possible.

e) **Pesticide Action week:** The federations report on the situation in their country. It is decided to elaborate a good text with alternatives for 2015. The German federation will submit the material.
K. KENNY underlines that one has to be careful when proposing alternatives (legislation).

f) **Seed regulation:** All the federations taking part in the general assembly, except Poland, have put the position paper online.
It is decided that the Office, together with the federations, have to continue to work in this direction in order to be more visible in the media.

g) **Homepage and Internet forum:** The homepage is regularly updated. The federations have to send more information.
The Internet forum still doesn't work.

h) **Demand of affiliation:** Egebergløkka Parsellag (Norway): The members underline that the Norwegian federation (Norsk Kolonihageforbund) is member of the Office and that no second federation from Norway can be member of the Office.
The question if there is a possibility for the association Egebergløkka Parsellag to cooperate with the Office is an internal Norwegian problem. Is has to be solved on a national basis.

i) **Proposal of P. PASCHKE to mention the affiliation to the Office on the national letter paper:** The Dutch federation has decided to mention the membership on their national letter paper. The aim is that by 2016 all federations will mention their affiliation in the Office on their official documents (letter paper etc.)

13. Non-payment of the affiliation fees.
The Swedish affiliation fee has meanwhile been paid.
The Belgian problem concerning the affiliation fee will be solved in discussions with the representatives of the national federation.
(see point 10)
The Norwegian representatives will receive the necessary documents in order to regularise the situation.
W. WOHATSCHEK will try once more to contact the Slovakian federation and to solve this problem. Should he not succeed to have discussions with the Slovakian federation, one has to apply the specific statutory rules.

14. J. KIEFFER gives information concerning the study session 2015 in Luxembourg. It will take place from 27th until 30th August 2015.
J. KIEFFER presents a draft programme. The subject is: The specific gardening advice in respect to sustainability and responsible use of the resources.

15. The delegates are asked if home-gardeners are members of their federations. This is so in Great-Britain, Germany, France and above all in Belgium, Luxembourg and probably also in Slovakia.
This subject will be discussed shortly.

16. M. WEIRICH explains why the Office calendar has been elaborated and what is its aim and purpose. It is decided to use it as well on national level.
The federations, that have not yet ordered their calendars in the general assembly, should do it before 1st October so that a bulk order can be made.
Follow-up: All the problems concerning not paid affiliation fees are solved.

Retrospective in pictures from the congress in Utrecht

C. ZIJDEVELD opening the congress

Address of the representative of the minister of agriculture

Address of the responsible of the town of Utrecht

Lecture by R.FOX-KÄMPER on the Cost project

Lecture by K. KOSSE on the bee problem

Delegates at work

Welcome in the allotment gardens

Visit of the allotments

Visit of the allotments

Delegates at work

Remittance of the diplomas

Remittance of the diplomas

Signature of the resolution

Dr BEDLAN: Presentation of the congress subject 2016

W. WOHATSCHEK, President and H. BONNAVAUD, Vice-President: 2014 – 2016

European Day of the Garden: Mayor J. VAN ZANEN addressing the participants

Remittance of the Golden Rose to the town of Utrecht

Protection of the allotments in Utrecht

Media coverage of the allotments

Statue as souvenir of the 37th international congress and the European Day of the Garden

Closing dinner with the Ijssellmannen

The International Office has granted the Golden Rose to the City of Utrecht (NL)

The city of Utrecht has since the nineties a pro-allotment policy and is very allotment minded on political as well as on civil servant level. In 1993 Utrecht approved its first “allotment policy plan” and in 2012 the successor of the first policy plan was approved by the city council. In these policy plans the garden sites are labelled as protected green.

Utrecht protects its garden sites as much as possible. In the past two decades Utrecht has initiated new concepts and has integrated garden sites more and more in housing development sites. Two of the best Dutch examples of in development areas integrated garden sites can be found in Utrecht.

The legal position of the garden sites are guaranteed by long term rental agreements and in legal binding zoning plans. To keep the garden sites in an excellent state Utrecht gives a subsidy every year for larger maintenance work on the garden sites. The garden associations, co-ordinated by the AVVN, yearly decide among themselves what should be done on which garden site.

Furthermore the city of Utrecht subsidizes each year innovative projects on garden sites that stimulate multifunctional use or projects that improve the safety on the sites. In order to improve the ecological quality of the garden sites Utrecht makes it financially possible for associations to participate in the National Quality Mark for Natural Gardening.

Since 1993 the City of Utrecht and the allotment associations meet twice yearly to discuss all matters concerning the garden sites and the allotment associations.

Last but not least, Utrecht was from the start of our contacts very eager to get the International Congress of the Office International. Where possible they give their support to the organization of this event.

The allotment garden association "Dijkzicht" in Amsterdam (NL) has received the diploma for ecological gardening

Garden site ""Dijkzicht" was founded in 1938 and is located at the present location since 1957. "Dijkzicht" has 204 gardens with an average size of 300 sqm and a total surface of three hectares.

In 1996 "Dijkzicht" decided it wanted to meet the strict standards of the National Quality Mark for Natural Gardening. After a few years of hard work "Dijkzicht" was rewarded with three of the maximum 4 dots of the ladybird quality mark, with a total score of 56% of 100%. In 2002 the score was 70%, in 2005 it declined to 60% but in 2009 the score rose to 74%. At the re-inspection in 2013 the score exploded and was 104%. "Dijkzicht" was cum laude rewarded with the maximum of 4 dots.

This impressive improvement was a reward for the large number of projects related to natural gardening and management that was realized by "Dijkzicht". It was made possible because more and more gardeners actively participate in natural gardening.

Nationally "Dijkzicht" has the one of the best scores of all the associations participating in the National Quality Mark Natural Gardening. They produced for all its member gardeners a beautifully illustrated brochure with the history of "Dijkzicht" and the natural gardening and management of the garden site (1996-2013), in which they explain in what way the public green and the twenty specific areas where developed and are maintained and what social and educative activities they have developed.

A non exhaustive summary of the activities since 1996:

- Since 1998 the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides is prohibited and if necessary only natural means are used;
- Phased mowing and stimulating the seeding of flowers, constructing paths of green and chopping materials and borders of wild flowers;
- Improvement of the herb layer and an increasing variety of indigenous flowers and plants, hedges, bushes, trees and of the aquatic vegetation;
- A green house for growing annuals and biennials indigenous plants for the public spaces and specific areas in the garden site;
- Since 2000 a toad pool, experiments with different kinds of camp shot (use of willow) and in 2013 the

construction of the first natural embankment;
- Inventory of all that is alive and growing;
- Construction of an insect garden and orchard and the purchase of special plants and trees in order to provide butterflies, bees and other insects with food;
- Construction of a bird bush, piled branches, mowing management, plantation, construction of dry and wet stone walls and piles of stone to improve shelter and nesting possibilities. Also a number of insect hotels, nesting boxes for tits, nuthatches, bats and owls and since 2013 a shelter for martens, a hedgehog nest box and a heap for snakes were created;
- Use of sustainable energy and of environmental friendly products, LED-lights and CFLs in the buildings;
- Separate waste collection: paper, glass, domestic waste (and in the near future plastics);
- Collecting garden waste for the compost heap; reuse of pruned wood (chopping, separating) and green waste (compost) and of debris (stone walls and fences);
- Communication through leaflets, the brochure "Tuinieren op Dijkzicht", the newspaper "Dijkzichtkrantje", and information signs and the website "tuinparkdijkzicht.nl";
- Education through workshops for gardeners about subjects like pruning, chopping, wicker braiding, composting, butterflies, bees, birds, toad mushrooms and trees on "Dijkzicht";
- Since a few years education for children of "Dijkzicht" and schools in the neighbourhood. In 2013 over 250 children took part in the nature lessons. Also an educative gnome path was constructed;
- Information for other garden sites that want to start natural gardening and management;
- An annual working plan for the management and maintenance of the public green and 20 special areas;
- And future plans to build a wall for kingfishers, a vegetation roof, reuse of rainwater, use of day light panels and many more.

Natural gardening is supported and implemented by around 90% of the members of "Dijkzicht".

The allotment garden site "De Koekelt" from the allotment association VAT in Ede (NL) has received the diploma for innovative projects.

Some years ago the members of the garden site "De Koekelt", decided on a proposal of their board, that the closed and by a high fence surrounded garden site should be changed into a multifunctional site that is open to the neighbourhood. In 2012 the multifunctional garden site was a fact. The site consists of 4 clusters separated by low hedges and meandering footpaths.

The Agricultural University Wageningen helped the VAT Ede and "De Koekelt" to develop their plans. The University did several researches and wrote several reports. Gardeners as well as people and organizations of the neighbourhood were consulted.

In 2012 this resulted in a completely renovated garden site.

Why is the garden site "De Koekelt" so special?

"De Koekelt" is the first garden site with vegetable gardens, that has transformed into a multifunctional garden site and opened up to the public. This is unique in The Netherlands. In The Netherlands there are more and more multifunctional garden sites but they always are ornamental gardens or mixed gardens that have a part with ornamental plants and a part with vegetables and fruit.

Furthermore "De Koekelt" has:

a) 153 gardeners of 12 different nationalities
b) A bee hive
c) An insect hotel
d) Special gardens reserved as school gardens and after school care
e) An education and information space
f) A meeting place for gardeners and people of the neighbourhood

Because of the reconstruction and opening up of the garden site the people living in the neighbourhood now have a substantial increase of their recreational space.

Garden site “De Koekelt” has become for both its gardeners and their neighbours a very important part of their recreational activities. Social contacts between gardeners and neighbours have strengthened.

Activities, like making Sauerkraut, making Christmas pieces, drinking coffee and taking part in the barbecue organized by “De Koekelt” are open for member gardeners as well as the neighbours.

The important spatial qualities of garden site “De Koekelt” are:

a) Green in the city

b) Breathing space for men and animals

c) a hospitable house for everyone

That is Garden site “De Koekelt”; a multifunctional garden site!

a) Green in the city

Green: was retained (garden site “De Koekelt”) and was expanded by the planting of an orchard; along the footpaths of “De Koekelt” existing trees were expanded with (fruit) trees.

b) Breathing space for men and animals

Spatial quality: improved considerably; from a closed site with a high fence it was transformed into an open multifunctional garden site;

Expansion of the recreational space; the footpaths of “De Koekelt” connect the recreational area Veldhuizerbos and the residential Veldhuizen;

The way the area is experienced has improved strongly; social contacts have intensified with the member gardeners as well as the neighbours;

Provider of food for men and animals;

Sustainable: the garden site “De Koekelt” was integrated in a sports area, a recreational orchard Veldhuizerbos and the residential area Veldhuizen. “De Koekelt” has its own water supply and does not use tap water for sprinkling purposes. It is an example for other garden sites in The Netherlands

c) Hospitable house for everyone

Meeting place for gardeners and neighbours

Educational and information space

Participation of neighbours: they take part in working groups

153 member gardeners of 12 different nationalities;

All kinds of workshops for gardeners as well as neighbours

Pontnewynydd Allotment Association (GB)has received the diploma for innovative projects

Recently the Pontnewynydd Allotment association completed a Lottery funded project - to build an area with raised beds, a shed and a greenhouse that will provide growing space for people with disabilities.

"The Disabled Plot" was funded with a grant of £4,999.00 from the Big Lottery fund. After a lot of work and effort by mainly volunteers, this project has been highly successful. Many thanks have to go out to Rob Taylor who masterminded the project and carried out most of the ground work. Unfortunately for the association, Rob is no longer a member but we would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to him for his efforts in getting this project underway. Also big thanks go out to Paul Taylor who helped his brother Rob get this project started. Thanks to Stuart Green, Marc Newman and his college students for carrying out the rest of the works to help towards completion. We would also like to extend a big thank you to Sharon Ashill for all her hard work and guidance towards the catering for the open day and participating on the day. Sharon also raised £120.00 from Knauf Insulation for the barbeque, well done and many thanks Sharon for your dedication and commitment on this special day for PAA.

The "open day" was a success. The presence of Allan Rees, Chairman of South Wales (NSALG), Neil Mason Mayor of Torfaen and all those people who helped and gave their time and efforts to progress and finish the "Disabled Plot" contributed to this success. A letter was received from HRH Prince of Wales who gave his best wishes and asked that we keep him informed of the project. He sent his apologies for not being able to attend as it was such short notice and he had already had other engagements. The National Lottery "Big Lottery Fund" sent their best wishes and would like photographs and press cuttings of the event. The Woodland Trust also sent their best wishes and asked that we send photographs and a write up of the day's events on open day.

Now the project is complete, PAA have to account to the Lottery Fund for all monies spent on site, once this has been officially passed by them that will bring this project to a close. Anyone know of people (with disabilities) who would like to rent a bay on the disabled plot with the use of the shed and greenhouse, then please do not hesitate to let them know to contact the secretary.

The allotment gardeners from Poland present themselves

Structure
26 district federations, 4,926 allotment garden sites, more than 1,000,000 members

Allotment gardens
963,351 allotment gardens with a size between 300 and 500 sq metres

Administration
Voluntary work and paid employees

Ownership
The ground belongs to the communal respectively state authorities

The Polish allotment garden federation is registered with the national register for NGOs. It is based in Warsaw, ul. Bobrowiecka 1. It has 26 district federations with 4,926 allotment garden sites containing 963,351 allotment gardens. The average allotment size is 350 sq metres, and the overall total of allotment gardens is 43,236.97 ha. The yearly affiliation fee amounts to 0.04 € per sq metre i.e. 14 € per allotment garden. From this amount 65 % (9.1 €) remain at the disposal of the site, 3.26 € are paid to the district federation and 1.63 € to the central federation.

The district federations and the central federation have paid employees. At all levels of the allotment garden federation the work is done on a voluntary basis.

At federal government level the allotment gardens fall within the remit of the Minister of Infrastructure. Neither the federation nor its sub-organisations get financial support from the government.

The federation has at every organisational level its own control authorities and an internal arbitration process for all disputes between garden user and administration.

The way of functioning, the use of allotment gardens and the functioning of allotment federations are regulated by the allotment garden law from December 13th 2013.

This law was prepared by the Federation and submitted to the Parliament as a citizens draft law, supported by the signatures of more than 924.000

Polish citizens. The new law not only protects their existence, but also guarantees their development.

Among the most important rights the law guarantees that the gardeners are entitled to:

- right to the plot which may be revealed in the land and mortgage register,
- ownership of plants, buildings and equipments located on the plot,
- exemptions from selected taxes,
- compensation and a new plot in the event of allotment garden liquidation.

The land, on which the sites have been created belong to the local authorities. This land is used free of cost.

All equipment and crops belong to the individual gardener, the infrastructure of the site (water pipes, electricity network, association buildings etc) belongs to the federation. When the garden changes hands, the new allotment gardener has to pay his predecessor the value of all crops and equipment.

The allotment gardens must neither be used as a permanent dwelling nor to exercise a professional activity. The allotment garden is set aside for the cultivation of horticultural products and for the recreation of the allotment gardener and his family.

The plot can be equipped with a shed of a maximum surface of 35 sq metres.

Every garden is connected to water. The water supply to allotment gardens can vary very much. Some allotments have their own water points or a common well if they are connected to the urban water system. Some allotment garden plots have their own well. Most allotment garden sites are connected to electricity so that the individual gardeners can have a connection to the electricity net. Water and electricity costs are billed to the allotment garden site. Each individual gardener has his own meter for the payment.

Urban allotment garden sites have communal toilets. Outside the towns however you find only communal toilets in those sites that have an association building. Individual toilets can only be installed within the garden houses. In urban gardens you find mainly chemical toilets. In those sites situated outside the towns the toilets are linked to septic tanks. More and more often these toilets are linked to a purification station built on the site. Some allotment gardens are connected to the urban sewage system.

According to the regions community buildings hosting the allotment garden administration can be found in 20 – 50 % of the allotment garden sites.

An education programme was developed. A long lasting programme for the development and modernisation of the family garden sites has been developed and applied.

The executive board of the federation issues a free of charge information leaflet for associations. It publishes an allotment gardener information newsletter which is published on the notice boards in allotment garden sites. The federation also issues information posters, brochures relating to different subjects. A complete information service can be found on the websites of the central federation, the district federations and the individual allotment garden sites.

Polish allotment gardens have been saved!

Eugeniusz Kondracki, President of the Polish allotment garden federation

After many months of struggle, the Polish allotment gardeners have been successful in ensuring that Parliament passed a new law which ensures the existence and development of allotment gardening in Poland. This success is all the greater because it is the brainchild of the gardeners themselves who prepared and submitted it to Parliament as a citizens' draft law, supported by the signatures of more than 924.000 Polish citizens. This is one of the first cases in our country where a citizens' draft has been made into a law. This shows the great determination, unity and strength of the allotment community in Poland. Thanks to an enormous effort and the integration of all the forces it was possible to save almost 5,000 allotment sites for a million citizens, and also keep a strong, nationwide organization that effectively represents and defends the gardeners' interests. This is a remarkable feat, given the fact that even a few months ago the liquidation of allotment gardening in Poland was an authentic threat.

For the last 18 months the Polish gardeners and their organization were in a dramatic situation. This resulted from the judgment of the Polish Constitutional Court dated 11th July 2012, which challenged the provisions constituting the legal basis for the functioning of the Polish Federation (PZD). The Court concluded not only that the PZD held a monopolistic position in the area of managing allotment gardens, but also that the rights to the garden land excessively restricted the powers of the State and municipalities as the owners of the sites occupied by allotment gardens. This judgment obliged the Polish Parliament to pass a new law before 21st of January 2014. If a new appropriate law was not to be passed by the Polish Parliament before the mentioned date, the PZD would cease to legally exist and this would result in the expiration of all of the property rights to the allotment land and infrastructure, which would also deprive the gardeners of their rights to their plots. Such a situation would mean the devastation of a 115-year-old legacy of the Polish allotment gardening movement.

Therefore, the key issue was to quickly prepare such legislative proposals that would prevent the liquidation of the allotment legacy in Poland. For this reason, without waiting for the politicians, the gardeners and their organization took matters into their own hands. In just a couple of weeks they prepared a good draft law and then started a promotion campaign and collected signatures for this draft. The legal requirement for citizens to submit a draft law to Parliament is to collect at least 100,000 signatures. During the three winter months the gardeners gathered an unprecedented number of almost a million signatures of support and submitted their draft law to Parliament. This support was much larger, as it was also expressed in thousands of letters as well as by petitions which came from individuals and collective bodies. Such a massive support was due to the fact that the draft law did not only comply

with the guidelines set forth by the Constitutional Court, but also preserved the rights of the gardeners, which ensured the existence and development of Polish allotment gardens.

However, at the time when thousands of volunteers gathered signatures, some parliamentary parties, including the ruling party, supported their own bills based on ideas totally contrary to the expectations of the allotment community. Their aim was the elimination of the independent and self-governing social organization, the PZD, as well as the nationalization of its property (without due compensation), which would dramatically worsen the legal position of the individual allotment gardeners (by depriving them of rights acquired under an act of law). This gave rise to concern, since the termination of these rights would mean the lack of a legal basis for the functioning of almost 5.000 allotment sites and the use of land by nearly one million Polish families. That's why, unlike other proposals, the main objective of the citizens' draft law was the preservation of these rights, because it was a key issue for the further existence and the development of allotment gardening in Poland.

The General Assembly of the International Office also expressed its view on this issue, taking a clear position in support of the citizens' draft law and calling upon the Polish authorities to accept it. Moreover, hundreds of European allotment gardeners sent their petitions to the Polish authorities with their support for the citizens' draft law. Unfortunately, this important voice was ignored by those political circles, which were planning a radical weakening of the allotment movement in Poland.

Therefore, the Polish gardeners undertook more decisive steps and throughout the country they organized picketing at the offices of MPs hostile to the citizens' draft law and later on prepared large demonstrations in front of the local offices of the public authorities. In Warsaw, gardeners protested before the Prime Ministers' Office, who received a delegation and listened to their demands. As a result of these actions, the Prime Minister visited one of Warsaw allotment sites, where he declared his support for the main proposals stipulated in the citizens' draft law. This declaration changed the position of MPs from the ruling party, who approved the citizens' draft law as the basis document for the further work of the parliamentary committees.

This event awakened huge hope in the allotment community, which expected a quick passing of the law. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's declarations did not end the struggle of the Polish gardeners. A fight against time and the future shape of the law had begun. The constructive work on the draft began in July 2013, i.e. five months after the lodging of the draft in Parliament, so less than half a year remained to pass the law. During that time 12 several hour-long meetings of the Parliamentary commissions and subcommittees

were held, during which nearly 250 amendments were proposed. The effect of the approved changes to the draft (mainly voted by MPs of the ruling party) was that the draft, written by the gardeners, had been modified into a document that was highly unbeneficial for them. There were a number of amendments that would surely in time lead to the liquidation of the allotment gardens. The citizens' draft had been deformed and turned into its own caricature. During all the meetings of the commissions and the subcommittees, the representatives of the allotment gardeners: President of the PZD Eugeniusz KONDRACKI with Tomasz TERLECKI and Bartlomiej PIECH struggled to preserve the integrity of this document. If there hadn't been the consistent struggle for each provision, the new law would have a completely different shape today. This was repeatedly stressed by many MPs who hold a very positive opinion of the role played by the allotment representatives in Parliament.

Regardless, the gardeners themselves manifested their own outrage concerning the attitude of many MPs who distorted the draft law backed by almost a million people. Throughout Poland one day demonstrations took place at the regional public offices. As this did not give the expected results the allotment community organized a nationwide manifestation in Warsaw on October 10th 2013, attended by nearly 15,000 gardeners from all over the country. They objected to the harmful changes introduced to their draft, which deformed the meaning of specific provisions that assured the preservation of gardens and provided legal and organizational stability of allotment gardening. They also demanded the speeding up of parliamentary work, since at this time there were only 3 months left to pass the new law.

The efforts of thousands of gardeners were not fruitless. During the nationwide manifestation MPs of the ruling

party withdrew most of their harmful amendments and the draft regained its rightful content, including the protection of the gardeners' rights. Only one obstacle remained in order to reach a political agreement. The draft still contained a controversial provision concerning the transfer of land property to the gardeners. This provision was a clear political proposal. It was unconstitutional and contrary to the very idea of allotment gardening, therefore, threatening not only the new law, but also the existence of the allotments in Poland. For many weeks this issue blocked the resumption of parliamentary work. Then on November 15th 2013, at the initiative of the allotment representatives, there was a ground-breaking meeting with the Prime Minister, during which both sides agreed on a compromise. It was agreed that this controversial issue would be dealt with in the future in a separate law.

Then parliamentary work resumed in a rush. The Lower House of Parliament passed the law almost unanimously (only two MPs were against it). All the Parliamentary parties expressed their general support for this allotment initiative. MPs also expressed appreciation for the consistent struggle of the PZD and all its members. Afterwards the Senate almost unanimously passed the law with four amendments. The law had to go back again for a vote in the Lower House of Parliament, which on December 13th 2013 accepted it again, this time agreeing with the Senate's amendments. The completion of the entire legislative process, however, occurred on December 18th, when the President of Poland signed the new law on family allotment gardens. This came just three days after the law was presented for the President's signature, which triggered a huge joy in the whole Polish allotment community.

The new law entered into force on the 19th January 2014 - two days before the deadline set by the Constitutional Court. This allowed to save the legacy of allotment gardening in Poland, including almost 5,000 garden sites. The new law not only protects their existence, but also guarantees their development. In addition, it fully adjusts the law to the Constitution. It provides the gardeners with a full freedom of association, guarantees the plurality of allotment organizations and respects the rights of the owners of the garden land. In particular, each allotment site will be able to leave the PZD structures, set up its own association and keep the property assigned to its site, provided of course that the majority of plot-holders vote to take such action. At the same time, the law

guarantees all the gardeners' rights. It especially maintains their rights to the plots and their property (e.g. infrastructure, sheds).

Among the most important rights the law guarantees that the gardeners are entitled to:

- register their plot in the land and mortgage register,
- transfer their rights on the plot directly to another gardener,
- ownership of plants, buildings and equipments located on the plot,
- exemption from taxes,
- uncomplicated procedure concerning the transfer of the rights to the plot in the event of death or divorce,
- compensation and replacement ground in the event of allotment garden liquidation,
- a wide judicial protection of the allotment gardeners' rights

The achievement of such a good law is undoubtedly a huge success of the Polish allotment gardeners and their organization. This was only possible thanks to the unity of the whole community which together, and with great determination, fought for their fundamental rights. Together we achieved something that seemed almost impossible – we quickly prepared a draft law regulating a complicated subject matter, collected a million signatures and struggled for months to persuade Parliament to pass the law in a difficult political environment and before the expiration of the deadline set by the Constitutional Court. This unusual accomplishment should be credited to all allotment gardeners and the PZD. An important contribution was also made by the International Office, the national associations and European gardeners, who showed their solidarity in supporting the Polish efforts to get a new law passed. This support has been extremely valuable and was particularly appreciated by the Polish gardeners, who were grateful for the help in the struggle to save the allotment gardening movement in Poland.

Overview of the work of the Landesverband Sachsen der Kleingärtner e. V.

A significant partner of the local communities 2nd Part

Peter Paschke, President of the Landesverband Sachsen der Kleingärtner

3. Social missions – to continue to extend the social function as a strength of the allotment garden movement

The changing economic structure and demographics are two fundamental processes that have characterised the situation for some time, especially in towns. The two have an enormous effect on allotment gardens.

A third process is added to this, which is not as fundamental for all of society but poses just as many challenges for allotment gardeners. This is the integration of people with a physical or mental handicap. They are becoming an increasing part of general social life.

These are different groups of people and types of citizens that the allotment garden movement has to consider. The allotment garden associations must address significant social missions and take on a social responsibility internally and externally. At the same time, their appeal to many people but also to those responsible in town can grow or begin.

Here are some of these tasks in the social sphere:

The elderly (senior citizens):
The older members often represent more continuity in the allotment garden sites than families where occupational mobility is required. Conversely, older gardeners can even help look after and educate children of young families in an intergenerational way. The elderly can also be a great help in the executive committee, as they generally have more time for this voluntary activity than younger people with professional commitments.

The disabled
It would be beneficial to create surroundings in the allotment garden associations to integrate this group of people into nature and the communi-

ty too: paths without barriers for people in wheelchairs, places for people with reduced mobility to sit down or the creation of raised gardens to allow handicapped people to look after them. We also recommend working with associations and establishments in this area, which are available for questions on accessibility.

Families with children

Membership levels of this group of people in the allotment garden associations have clearly increased over several years. The associations have a mission to integrate these families, especially children, into the sites. It is good to give them the chance for children to occupy themselves on the association's site, particularly in the association's play area or in a children's garden on the site. It is equally important that parents who want to teach allotment gardening to their children, and also to teach them to respect nature and protect species and the climate, are supported and integrated into the community.

People with an immigrant background

Immigrants form a large group that expresses a lot of interest in the allotment garden movement but they remain – in general – a small part in our allotment garden sites. There are good examples of immigrants being integrated in our allotment gardens. Immigrants' expectations of using gardens are often different to those of German allotment gardeners. Nevertheless, it is an important task for committees and members of allotment garden associations to show that they are open with regards to immigrants and to carefully introduce them to the German allotment garden movement.

4. Environmental missions – to use environmental opportunities as a contributing factor to adapting to climate change

The issue of protecting nature and the environment is a priority amongst member gardeners.

Features include:

- Composting and good use of rainwater
- Using shelters for beneficial organisms to ensure the biological protection of plants in allotment gardens
- Supporting gardening in allotment gardens through mulching
- Creating aromatic herb gardens
- Using resistant fruit trees and bushes

Creating mixed cultures to promote the health of plants is one of the essential elements of the gardening practice on our sites. In order to guide this process on our garden sites, the Landesverband offers since 1995, through the creation of the Sächsischen Gartenakademie (gardening academy) in Dresden-Pillnitz, the formation of consultants during a 150 hours' training course. These consultants carry out training in the allotment garden associations to put in place a gardening process that works in harmony with nature.

In this way our member gardeners contribute fundamentally to maintaining the flora and fauna in our allotment garden sites. The allotment garden movement is the only area in which the diversity of species and their upkeep are guaranteed.

5. To drive PR activities and lobbying

What we want to achieve with our PR activities and lobbying is a closer collaboration between the local authorities and the local allotment garden movement. The allotment garden movement's participation in local events, organised in different towns, should be ensured and promoted. Another part is organising competitions with allotment gardener asso-

ciations to identify the "best" garden site. These competitions must be held as part of joint activities between the local authorities and the gardening associations and the presentation of competition prizes should be organised by the local authorities.

In Saxony, there is a staggered competition:

- Town competition (yearly)
- Regional competition within Saxony (2012)
- Saxony state competition (2013)
- Federal competition "Gärten im Städtebau" (2014)

There has been a good participation in these competitions for a while now and the winning associations are keen to take part in the federal competition.

6. Organising and financing in addition to promoting the allotment garden movement

For the allotment garden movement to function, it is necessary to distribute skills in a precise organisational unit (skill sets) within the local administration. The local authorities should, as far as they are able, support the voluntary work on existing allotment

garden sites. Opportunities that already exist and are acted upon should be spread across all of the local authorities. In this way, and it already happens now, some local authorities make part of the rental income available to the allotment garden movement for the upkeep of the public area of the allotment garden site. Another help is the deregulation of the land rental payment for the allotments that are not used or are unoccupied (for more than a year). In this way the tenants who are still there are not responsible for an additional burden. Where there are centres of allotment garden sites, the local authorities and associations should decide to manage, as part of a redevelopment, "allotment garden parks" and expand the publicly accessible part of these sites to make a large recreation area available to the public.

It seems to me to be equally important to promote and to recognise the voluntary work by the local authorities. The volunteers should be more integrated into the volunteer culture of the local authorities. The following possibilities in this regard are:

- Volunteers' day
- Associations' day
- Community events

Great-Britain: Le Tour de Yorkshire Allotments

Phil Gomersall, President, Yorkshire Allotment Gardeners Federation Allotment Mentor, National Allotment Society (Yorkshire Region)

Publicity Officer, Leeds & District Allotment Gardeners Federation Also Secretary and plot holder, Victory Garden Allotment Association

This year Le Tour de France has come to Yorkshire so it seems appropriate that we should also not only admire the wonderful Yorkshire scenery but also some of the wonderful Yorkshire allotments and the dedicated folk that run them as volunteers, as they would say in Yorkshire dialect 'we run 'em for nowt'.

There is nowhere better to see the social aspects of allotment gardening. Quite often allotment gardeners can be seen leaning against the fence chatting, putting the world to rights and discussing the finer points of tending the crops. Some of our sites organise shows, outings, socials and summer barbeques and the like.

Allotments are, not only good for your health but are also good for the community. Meanwood Parkside Allotments in Leeds for instance, are a self-managed site and a real asset to the community. They hold a flower and vegetable show every year attended by 400+ visitors. A lot of work is put in by the 'allotmenteers' to make it a success. There is a jazz band and refreshments and all the produce after being judged is auctioned off at the end. All profits from the event go to a charity. On average £2,000 are raised each year for charity.

It doesn't stop there, the local Primary School children are invited onto the site. They are given a short talk, a tour around the site and then split into smaller groups to study what is happening and growing on individual plots. They don't leave empty handed either; all go home with a bag of fruit and vegetables picked during the visit. The allotment association participates in other local events too. They have a stall selling produce and refreshments, again to raise funds for these local organisations. Finally not forgetting their members, there is a pie and pea supper and a talk by a visiting speaker, free!! of course, after all this hard work. How many other recreational activities can offer such a wide range of benefits and still offer so much to the community?

Then there is the family involvement. Allotment gardening can give so much pleasure. Apart from the light exercise, which will help to keep you fit into old age it can also be fun for the children. I was walking up to the allotment on a rather overcast and dull day, as I got closer it was so refresh-

ing to hear squeals of joy and laughter. The source of all this laughter was the children of the McIlmoyle family who recently took on a plot at our site, Victory Garden Allotments, again in Leeds. The children were having great fun jumping up and down, compressing the autumn leaves which had just been added to the leaf-mould enclosure. It was a joy to see. A lot more natural than a trampoline, and was equally as much fun.

It brightened up what was an initially dull day. For children to be involved with nature and watch the seeds that are sown grow into mature plants can give so much satisfaction. Then there is the added bonus of a healthy diet as they can eat the freshly picked fruit and vegetables, the flavour of which is far superior to what you can buy in the shops.

People take up allotment gardening for all sorts of reasons. In Yorkshire there are the organic gardeners growing their own vegetables so they can be sure of what they are eating. There are the competition gardeners growing the biggest or most perfect vegetables or flowers. I've seen onions bigger than footballs and the most magnificent and fragrant sweet peas imaginable. Many people do allotment gardening to improve their health or to just wind down from the strain and stresses of work and then there are those who simply get a great deal of satisfaction from it.

There are long waiting lists in most parts of Yorkshire and most City and Borough Authorities are doing very little to appease the situation but people's power and perseverance can sometimes overcome the many obstacles put in the way of starting a new allotment site. We do have a number of new sites in Yorkshire. One very successful site was started as a private enterprise by a farmer on the outskirts of Beverley in the East of our County. It is doing so well it is already expanding. As an Allotment Mentor with National Allotment Society, I was helping a group at Boroughbridge in the North of the County to set up an allotment association and also negotiate with the Town Council to get land for allotments. Things went very well and within a year a site was found. I had the privilege to visit the site recently. It has expanded twice since opening to cater with demand. They are now about to drill a borehole for water, instead of paying for mains water, a measure being looked at by many sites.

Whilst holding the initial meetings with the above group another group from the adjacent town of Knaresborough joined in the meetings whilst we discussed the setting up of an association and points to consider when setting up a new allotment site. Having taken on board what was discussed they too have formed an association and now have got a brand new site which looks quite splendid.

Leeds and District Gardeners Federation is by far the largest Federation in the County with 45 member sites and 2,500 members, in fact 80% of the allotment population of Leeds City.

A couple of years ago the Leeds Federation were invited to create a demonstration allotment garden at two of Yorkshire's most prestigious

shows, the Harrogate Spring Flower and the Great Yorkshire Show, an opportunity not to be missed, to promote this wonderful recreational activity of ours.

The Federation went on to achieve a 'Best in Show', 2x 'Large Gold Medals' plus 2x 'Champions Certificates' for the demonstration allotment gardens created. Following this success the Federation has now gone on to apply to attend the very prestigious Chelsea Flower Show in London, with their demonstration garden and we received official acceptance to create an allotment garden at this year's show on the 20th–24th May in the Discovery section of the show. The demonstration allotment garden had a similar theme to last year's display 'The Techno Allotment Garden' which included examples of Solar voltaic power and solar thermal undersoil heating system using an old domestic radiator and an ice cream tub and lastly not forgetting the robotic scarecrow with its flashing eyes and waving arms. There were also be some additional innovations all created on a shoestring.

This was a great opportunity to promote our wonderful and healthy activity of allotment gardening nationwide, as this show receives a great deal of media coverage. We are very proud to be attending the show on behalf of allotments all over the country but also to be representing our home county of Yorkshire. The whole Federation was elated at the news but even more so were the volunteer allotment gardeners from the Federation, directly involved in the shows, who were extremely excited and looked forward to the challenge.

The team were overjoyed and extremely proud when awarded a silver medal for their first attempt at creating a garden in the Discovery section of the Chelsea Flower Show and even more so considering they were com-

peting with some professionally backed organisations.

There were so many good and positive comments about the garden from so many people from all walks of life and so many different countries, it was most gratifying, and made all the hard work in creating the garden worthwhile.

It was an extremely busy year for the Leeds Federation as they created new allotment gardens at the Harrogate Spring Flower Show, 24th–27th April and the Great Yorkshire Show, 8th–10th July with new themes and new innovations. At this last show they not only achieved a gold medal for their “Techno Allotment” display, but they also received a Champions Certificate for being the best educational stand.

The stand was admired by the Countess of Wessex when she stopped by on her tour round the show and spoke with Phil Gomersall, Publicity Officer for the Federation.

To crown it all though on the last day of the show they gained a further award as they achieved second place in the ‚Peoples Choice‘ and were awarded a further certificate.

It was a very proud day for the volunteers who created the garden on behalf of the Federation.

All this amounted, however, to a lot of work and preparation, some of which had been underway for some time now through the winter, even the growing of plants, which had to be wrapped up and molly-coddled through these cold winter months.

There is however a rather worrying trend developing not only in Yorkshire but nationwide with the present economic climate and all the cut backs to local authority spending. Some local authorities are trying to sell off allotment land to cover costs, others simply increasing rental charges, but unfortunately some authorities are going against legislation and increasing charges to such an extent as to be making a profit.

Some allotment groups are attempting to take these authorities to the High Courts to challenge this practice. Unfortunately justice comes at a very high price and is not very accessible to the ordinary allotment plot holder but fortunately Yorkshire allotment gardeners are a determined bunch of people and are rising to the challenge.

In fact the Leeds local authorities also proposed to increase rents and make changes to monies allowed for associations to manage sites in the city

The Leeds and District Allotment Garden federation was concerned the changes may put off people having an allotment and also price many current plot holders out of a hobby they love.

With the help of the National Allotment federation and many others the Leeds and District Allotment Garden Federation introduced a Court action against these Council plans.

On August 5th 2014 the High Court in Leeds ruled that the proposed new rents from 2014 onwards were unlawful.

P.S. I do get to my allotment occasionally.

France: The gardens of Zéphir near Paris

Hervé Bonnavaud

52 plots of 30 sq. meters, created in 2008.

Project summary

1. Improve the tenants' quality of life
2. Create intergenerational and inter-cultural social links
3. Encourage solidarity by sharing skills, know-how and helping each other
4. Educate people to citizenship

The context

Aulnay-sous-Bois's northern areas, 10 km north from Paris, count around 20,000 people which represent 25% of the city's entire population. Those areas have a very negative image due to the problems they combine. The renovation project, which started in 2003, has deeply improved the urban area. Unfortunately poor quality buildings are not the only reason why this area suffers: there's also poverty, unemployment...

In this context, the association's „Les Jardins du Zéphyr" ambition was to lead this renovating project to a global change for the area. It aims social relationship and ownership of common areas.

The project

This area, known to be a „tough neighbourhood", creates a sense of failure for the people who live there. They believe there is no future for this place they live in. The project was built to fight that belief and to bring value to the area. The aims were to prove successful experiences, showing the area's innovating skills and people's potentials. So in 2005, when it was suggested that local residents grow their own vegetables and flowers at the bottom of their buildings, they couldn't imagine that this would be possible for them. The ground was covered with rubbish thrown from the windows...

There are no real neighbourhood community centres in those tough areas. The closed area, the lack of commercial or cultural business, the high density of living, etc., are major obstacles to usability and interactions between people. So it is essential to re-create social interaction for local people and by local people, by meeting them on a playful basis such as gardens, but also by creating cultural activities which are physically implanted in the heart of the area. Wherever they were created, allotment gardens fulfill this essential need in our modern cities for people to find places to live, places to have social relationships, to exchange, to meet and to celebrate. We can see that allotment gardens bring people together, no matter where they come from and no matter how old they are. Thus, by definition, a garden is a neutral space, free from violence and characterized by its natural, peaceful side.

The “Jardins du Zéphyr” association brings the different stakeholders of the neighbourhood together: the City Hall, the social landlord, the associations: “Grajar” (street educators), Femmes Relais (association for Womens’ Literacy), ACSA (community centers), C. S. F. and especially the people who live there. It makes the people meet the associations, networking partners and creating links between those stakeholders.

At last, this project improves the place people are living in, thanks to that small green place in the middle of those two blocks called “îlot Zéphyr”. Thus this garden is a haven of nature, which is often missing inside of big cities, especially in Parisian suburbs. People will enjoy simple pleasures offered by nature everyday: singing birds, blooming flowers, fruit, fresh vegetables to eat... Inspired by this and by ecological and organic gardening ethics, the association leads wider actions about environment: cleaning the area, eating properly, saving energy...

In a few words, the association leads a project that improves the people’s place, from an environmental and a social point of view. They want to go on changing the area’s image and to fulfill an original, valuable experience, in order to be an example for new local initiatives.

This experience probably is the basis for the sustainable city.

The results

The creation of allotment gardens two years ago led to positive results. Even if many problems still exist in those areas, it is obvious that :

- users do respect their gardens and there aren’t but a few malicious deeds from outsiders,
- entertainment for the people, especially for children, are very successful,
- little by little, the area looks better and bad behaviours decrease (for example, throwing rubbish out of the windows)
- there is a great demand for allotment gardens and the social landlord intents to create other sites.

The actors

- Le Logement Francilien : the social landlord, which was the project leader and financial support
- La Fédération Nationale des Jardins Familiaux et Collectifs : the National Federation for Allotment Gardens, which was the technical expert, which met the local residents, defined and created the “Jardins du Zéphyr” association
- The “Jardins du Zéphyr” association, which manages the allotments.

Austria: The Austrian federation and the association KoMit cooperate for the benefit of disabled people

Sylvia Wohatschek

KoMit provides working and activity possibilities for people with mental and/or multiple disabilities. The Austrian Federation provided land and - together with some partners – all the necessary infrastructure so that the clients of KoMit have a piece of land where they can cultivate plants for therapy purposes.

The idea of the project is to give mentally and/or multiple disabled people the possibility to work in and with nature for therapy reasons. For the clients of KoMit it is a fulfilling experience to see how plants grow and how they have to be cultivated.

The reason to locate the therapy garden in the 21st district of Vienna was that the Austrian Federation of Allotment Gardeners had an allotment site there with enough free space to cultivate plants and to build a house for the clients.

KoMit started this project by asking the Austrian Allotment Federation to provide some cheap land for therapy reasons. The Austrian Federation then decided to help and started to look for an adequate location. After the place was found the federation had to check whether it was possible to build a small house there because the dedication of the ground would usually not allow any bulidings. It managed to get a special authorisation. After that the federation asked

some longtime partners for support. All firms gave their menpower for free and also provided the necessary material. Some volunteers also helped. Naturally the Austrian Federation also supported the project with money and menpower.

The success was guaranteed because the Austrian Federation had the financial resources to provide all infrastructures without any help from others.

Nowadays the actors are KoMit and the Austrian Federation of Allotment Gardeners. The Austrian Federation provides the land and pays the lease for the ground where the therapy garden is located. KoMit provides the plants and takes care of the garden. The management is up to KoMit.

Besides the benefits for the disabled people maybe there is another added value of the project i.e. that the other inhabitants of the allotment garden site loose their fear of contact with mentally disabled people.

The main difficulty was to get the building permission on a ground where building houses is usually prohibited.

We would like the project to go on for many further years because we do see the value of it for the clients of KoMit.

Everything workes fine. One has to mention that it was the first project the Austrian Federation has in this specific area.

Learning together in Finland

Text and photographs by Maija Roinila

Allotment gardeners are eager to learn new things as well as to brush up their old skills. This is a fact that has been recognized by the Federation of Finnish Allotment Gardeners for ages. Since a long time the Federation has encouraged its member associations to organize various kinds of learning sessions for their allotment gardeners. The maximum of 200 euros per year will be granted at request to any member association willing to organize a training session of any length, mostly a few hours at a time, related to gardening, running an association or, let´s say, handicrafts. The allowance is used for covering the fee of the trainer, transportation costs, catering or eventual other expenses related to the training session. On top of granting financial support to their member associations the Finnish Federation has a long history of organizing training in the above mentioned subjects.

The history of Gardening Courses at Lepaa (a unit of Häme University of Applied Sciences) dates back to the year of 1949. For a period of several decades there were two 5-day courses organized every spring, either in March or April. At best there were 50 allotment gardeners every year learning together about the wonderful world of gardening. During the past few years, there has been only one session every spring. The maximum number of students has recently been 24. The learning method at Lepaa is very interactive: students ask questions and teachers answer them. Trimming sessions in the apple and berry orchard are included in the curriculum. Every student has a chance in practice to test his trimming skills under the supervision of a professional gardener. Evenings are spent with fellow allotment gardeners exchanging ideas and experiences, going for walks by the breathtakingly beautiful lake area and enjoying sauna baths and swimming. Visits to the nearby Lepaa winery, where wines and liqueurs are made of Finnish berries, are a popular pastime, too, after lessons.

In the spring of 2014 the Federation worked together with Ahlman School of Food and Agriculture in Tampere in organizing a course titled “Recycling in garden”. Twenty-eight allotment gardeners from all over Southern Finland were gathered at Ahlman´s ready to soak in Krista Mäkelä´s ambitious and interesting ideas about promoting ecology at the plot. According to Krista it is important for the gardener

to make it clear for himself what he wants from his garden. Work and rest or beauty and benefit or both of them. As soon as those elements are in balance, garden and gardening provides one with a lot of pleasure and relaxation. It is also important to keep in mind the basics of recycling in the garden i.e. try and make your garden a place where you neither dispose of anything nor buy new things for it. To illustrate her lecture, Krista Mäkelä gave practical examples of ecological gardening: constructing greenhouses of empty bottles, using pallets as a rack for herb pots or using egg shells as organic pest control, just to mention a few. Surprisingly it is possible to keep food cool and fresh without a fridge at the plot: just two terra cotta pots and some sand! (More examples at www.gardenglove.com)

There is a tiny little allotment garden association with 14 members in the town of Kouvola. Despite the small size the association is very active in co-operating with professionals and organizing various kinds of training courses for the members and their families. Last summer allotment gardeners at Pentsoja were trained in making garden utensils of wicker like racks for creepers, pot holders, protective pots and partitions. In the summer of 2014 they studied how to use herbs in cooking creatively. The “Entertaining herb and cooking course” by chef Terhi Pesu gathered most of the members at the barbeque site to learn about herbs, like parsley, dill, basil, thyme, coriander, oregano, sage etc. and to sample appetizers, main courses and desserts fixed by Terhi in a very creative way. What a delicious afternoon it was! And what a rewarding and empowering experience to share new things with like minded people. Highly recommended!

Annual report of the Association for Japan Allotment Garden 2013/2014

Yoshiharu Meguriya, president of the Japanese allotment gardeners

Members 2007:

891 allotment gardeners, 83 individual members, 12 companies, 4 local associations and organizations in Hokkaido, 17 allotment sites in Chiba-ken, Sizuikaken and Nagasaki

Activities

1. We promoted the **creation of new allotment gardens**, the organization of the allotment gardeners and the networking of allotment garden activities.

a) We did following activities in cooperation with each local allotment garden association:

- support of farmers and organizations who like to create allotment garden sites.
- Information given to the allotment garden owners about the operational management of the garden site.
- advise given to allotment garden site owners and allotment gardeners on how to organize themselves and create a network of garden sites.

b) We gave advice on how to organize a regional community between 3 cities (Hioki city in Kagoshima prefecture, Matsue city in Shimane prefecture, and Toda city in Saitama prefecture.)

2. We continued the **exchange with the allotment garden associations in other countries**.
We did not visit allotment gardens in other countries, but had exchanges with the national allotment garden societies using the Internet.

3. We are promoting **allotment garden leaders**. (We call them allotment garden coordinators.)

a) The allotment garden coordinator is an adviser on organizing and managing allotment gardens. They have to take an exam in order to get the qualifications.

b) To improve their knowledge, we give them regular training. Moreover, we are supporting them so that they can act smoothly.

c) We have now 50 allotment garden coordinators. They work in Hokkaido, Miyagi-pref., Tochigi-pref., Saitama-pref., Tokyo-to, Chiba-pref., Yamanashi-pref., Shizuoka-pref., Osaka-fu Shimane-pref. Ehime-pref. and Nagasaki-pref.

4. We **organize allotment garden sites**, **and support the allotment garden activities** of each site.

a) In cooperation with the allotment garden coordinator we stimulated

un-organized allotment garden sites to get organized.

b) We promoted organizing and making networks through regular meetings (society) and the activity of a regional society

5. **Collecting and spreading information** on allotment gardens.

a) We surveyed and collected information on allotment gardens in Japan and Europe.

b) We offered our information to people related to allotment gardens: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the local government.

c) We widely spread information by using the media (news organization and magazine).

6. **Others**

a) We tried that as many people as possible understood the following ideas.

- The allotment garden is a place where people understand that agriculture is very important for the population.
- The allotment garden is a place of community.
- The allotment garden is a place where environmental education is given to children and others.
- The allotment garden is a place where gardening welfare is practiced.

b) We are continuing a small support service to the area affected by the East Japan great earthquake.

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