



Hyphen 66

News from the Office

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The changing world of allotments, UK

Phil Gomersall

President of the NAS



*Phil Gomersall
President of the NAS*

I start with an extract from the National Allotment Society literature to put in context the background of UK allotments.

What is an allotment in the UK?

Allotments have been in existence for hundreds of years, with evidence pointing back to Anglo-Saxon times. But the system we recognise today has its roots in the Nineteenth Century, when land was given over to the labouring poor for the provision of food growing. This measure was desperately needed thanks to the rapid industrialisation of the country and the lack of a welfare state. In 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act came into force, placing a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, according to demand. However it wasn't until the end of the First World War that land was made available to all, primarily as a way of assisting returning service men (Land Set-

tlement Facilities Act 1919) instead of just the labouring poor. The rights of allotment holders in England and Wales were strengthened through the Allotments Acts of 1922, but the most important change can be found in the Allotments Act of 1925 which established statutory allotments which local authorities could not sell off or covert without Ministerial consent, known as Section 8 Orders. The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society have published a paper that sums up the situation in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. Councils can provide allotments but do not have a statutory duty to do so. Further legislation has been listed over the intervening years which have affected allotments, the latest of which is the Localism Act 2011.

UK allotments are so diverse I would not be able to explain or cover all the many and varied aspects of allotment gardening even in a large book.

Over the years from the beginning of the century there have been vast changes. The two World War years had a large influence on what went on at the allotments when the primary aim was to provide food for the nation. Today's gardening practices are a far cry from those early years.

For many years the allotment has generally been the domain of the male retired and elderly blue collar workers who gardened on the allotment and are now rather rudely referred to as the 'flat cap brigade' (they do have a tremendous amount of gardening Knowledge which can be passed onto

our new gardeners). However in more recent years the tide has turned and a much younger clientele with young families now occupy many allotment plots and in many cases they represent up to 50 % of plot-holders. The swing towards younger people and their busy lifestyles has also had an effect on plot requirements. Where in the past demand was for full 250 sqm plots or multiples thereof, now the demand is for much smaller plots, half plots and even quarter plots due to time constraints on their busy lifestyles. The younger people also demand more communal activities such as Easter egg hunts, scarecrow competitions and whole communal activities such as BBQ's making the allotment a more friendly and social place.

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

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



Show bench



New site created by Developer

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

The National Gardens Scheme which opens domestic gardens to the public to raise funds for charity are very keen to involve allotment sites into their scheme as they can be very attractive and interesting places. English Heritage also likes to involve allotments as they are a major part of our English Heritage. This scheme opens many public buildings and amenities not normally accessible to the public annually on a weekend in September.

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

Then we have gardeners who belong to Ideological groups such as the

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

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

Why do we need allotment rules some people ask? Well our beloved recreational activity is protected by legislation in the UK from the various allotment acts. If the site doesn't comply with those acts or has a change of use it could then lose that protection and without rules and good practice procedures there could be absolute mayhem. On most allotment sites there is an unwritten rule that a certain proportion of any plot should be actively cultivated to comply with the original intentions of allotment gardening in providing produce for the family. 1922 Act, an allotment garden must,

by definition be 'wholly or mainly cultivated for the production of fruit and vegetable crops for the consumption of the plot-holder or his family'. This is also to prevent plots being covered in structures or simply planted as orchards which can be grown anywhere without taking up valuable allotment land.

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

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

A few councils have managed to achieve this aim. Unfortunately many councils are just opting for the easy solution to offload their responsibility to any organisation which will take them on, a very worrying trend indeed.

For those sites already under self-management there is a movement to increase the length of lease; this has been brought about by external funders wanting to have at least five years of active lease to those applicants applying for funding. Generally 25 years seems to be the common length of lease being sought, this too does have its own problems with legal set up costs but feels more secure.

With present planning laws being relaxed and the huge demand for housing, this has brought additional threat to some sites in prime locations. Although our allotments are protected to a certain extent by law, a few local authorities will stoop to use any means to acquire land for development.

Sites can now however apply to be-

come an Asset of Community Value, whilst this doesn't totally protect a site it does give a breathing space for the allotment plot-holders to argue their case and in some exceptional circumstances put a bid to have the land purchased to retain as allotments.

Previously with the aid of ARI and presently with NAS personnel new allotment sites up and down the country have been created due to demand and pressure by residents and the local communities.

It is pleasing to see however that some new allotment sites are being created by albeit a minority of housing developers as a requirement of their planning permission. A few authorities say that new allotments will be created if a housing development is over a specific size and based on the following "Provision of statutory allotment plots on a development site will be sought when the level of residential development creates a need for **1750 m²** of statutory allotments, equivalent to 7 statutory allotment plots". This is a very encouraging de-

velopment which I hope continues. It is hardly surprising that there is a demand for allotments on new developments when you see the minuscule garden space with new housing.

It is also really pleasing to see a slight increase in demand for allotments again and I hope this continues so many more can enjoy the multitude of benefits our beloved allotment gardening can offer.

We have also seen many changes to our National Allotment Society. A major restructuring is taking place to have its Regional Bodies become branches of the organisation. There are huge efforts underway to reach our grassroots members and offering additional benefits to them. We are also looking at providing in house training courses on many aspects of allotment gardening. Furthermore the Society is encouraging local authorities to address allotment provision in their local plans.

Indeed it is a time of change and change for the better.

History of the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux 1926 – 2016

8th part

Malou Weirich

secretary general of the International Office

Conclusion

The short overview concerning the development of allotment gardening, which you could read in the previous seven issues, shows that the national and international movement first had a great aura and that the allotments constantly developed from the period of their foundation until the Second World War.

But then, due to the improvements in the living conditions of the population, which were necessary and longed for, our movement stagnated and even declined. The movement lost some of its aura.

However, more recently, when people started to become engaged for a healthier environment and healthy food, the population and the authorities reconsidered the value and the contribution of the allotments for all. At the same time, the allotments underwent a functional change or – more correctly expressed – rather organised a functional extension. Today, they have both a private function, focused on the allotment gardeners and a public and urban development function. The latter is extremely important in the eyes of the authorities. The adaptation to the urban landscape is necessary as well as the sharing of the common parts of the sites with the public as a public green area.

A new “adversity” now lurks in some countries: “Urban gardening”. This phenomenon, however, also presents an opportunity for the modernisation of the allotment gardens and makes an adaptation to the people’s new needs possible.

The movement of community gardens coming from the United States places a priority on the social contacts among gardeners, who are often people living in the immediate neighbourhood, even if for some, and especially since the economic crisis, the cultivation of vegetables has again become necessary. Therapy gardens, school gardens, gardens for disabled people etc. are created. However, these are also projects that can be implemented on allotments. Numerous examples already exist throughout Europe.

Furthermore, the new societal conditions demand a re-thinking. The working pressure makes it impossible to cultivate a large plot. The smaller families today no longer need them. The young town dwellers also have little or no experience in gardening. In addition, the price of land often makes the creation of traditional allotments impossible. The pressure on allotments is growing due to the densification of the cities. The demand, however, for an allotment has again increased significantly.

The allotment gardeners have to react and on one hand find solutions in order to reduce the waiting lists existing in urban areas and on the other hand avoid the vacancies that can be noticed in rural areas. The reduction of the plot size on one hand and innovative solutions and projects on the other hand are often absolutely necessary.

Our movement has to rethink its practices and innovate.

In many places, allotments are being created at the foot of blocks of flats, in parks, on rooftops and allotment sites are being linked with green spaces. Allotments offer an education of all for our environment and favour a discovery of nature nearby. They also create the necessary conditions for the integration of all, unify same-minded people and create a social network. They are an oasis for man and nature. And this not just in those countries, where allotment gardening has a long tradition. Allotments and community gardens are emerging in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain.

It is thus clear that the allotment gardeners have made their own the saying: “Preserve the old with loyalty and built the new on it artistically” and have clearly renewed and expanded the functions of allotment gardening.

These functions are now our trump cards. Additionally, modernisation and project implementation are a way to attract young people. Furthermore, the stability of our allotment sites and the provided expert gardening advice on site are an undeniable advantage of allotments. All this proves that allotments are not a relict from the past, but that they are still up-to-date and meet the current needs and new demands.

The right course for the future, so that our cities will not soon be without any human life, has been set by most of our federations. The positive results achieved so far show that we are on the right track.

The national representatives also unanimously agree that we still need an international umbrella organisation, an effective figurehead, an efficient advocate of all affiliated allotment gardener families.

However, the Office only can do its job and support the national federations' visions for the future, if all allotment gardeners in Europe really feel that they are involved in this common work. That's why the words of Preben Jacobsen, president of the Danish allotment garden federation: "The federations have to take more and more ownership of the Office" have to be put into practice. All our members have to become more involved and the Office has to get the necessary means to be active. We have to make sure that our members are excited to do something in common. We have to rely on our similarities and shouldn't underline the differences too much.

Yes, with individual efforts in the federations, much can be done. However, the biggest goals can only be reached through the united work of all affiliated federations. Only together can we assert ourselves and make our contribution to the whole society. The power of joined efforts is unlimited.

In addition, the allotment garden movement, both on national and international level, has to be increasingly moved into the general focus. Only if the authorities and people are really aware of the objectives of our movement, really understand what it stands for, what benefits and services it provides, they can embrace the allotment movement, can consciously benefit from it and make it an unavoidable cornerstone for the city and the future.

Willi Brandt said: "There is nothing that could not be better". So, in the future, the national federations and the Office, both on national and international level, have to try to present themselves attractively and to increase membership. We constantly have to consider how we can change in order to grow as an organisation. We cannot allow ourselves to stand still.

The national federations and the Office must tackle the new challenges of our time and offer solutions to the problems of today's population, and of today's cities. We have to open up, adapt our gardens and take courageous steps towards the future. Allotment gardens must be recognised, protected and developed as an element for more environmental justice.

More than in the past, we must cooperate with partner organisations to better present our concerns and so to reach our goals more easily.

We need to innovate at all levels, to carry out innovative projects, and as it was already underlined before, to increase our PR work in order to underline the values of the allotment gardens. It is time to raise our voices together, to take over again a leadership position and to defend our noble goals. We have to fight day after day to secure our existence in a competitive environment.

We must not only manage the past, but courageously move forward and bring about, wherever necessary, the required changes and built the future.

The expression of Joseph Goemare at the beginning of our movement: "A piece of land for everyone to rest, a piece of heaven to breathe", is just as important today as it was in the past. It will even be more important than ever in the future, in our fast-moving time, in the densely populated, often grey cities.

"A vegetable garden, an apple tree will soon become a luxury item. Their protection will give more and more work to the allotment garden movement" (Dan Kersch, minister of the interior in Luxembourg). We have to believe in ourselves and in our power. We must continue to establish our services in the long-term and work for the well-being of the allotment gardeners, society, our nature and the environment i. e. our planet. As Ban ki-moon, former secretary general of the United Nations, so adequately expressed it: "There is no plan B, as we have no planet B". Our planet belongs to all of us, our children and grand-children. We have to protect it and the allotment gardeners with their plots can and must make their contribution.

We all, united in the International Office, without any hesitation, have to seize every opportunity. Paths are made by walking them.

Let us also do this together over the next years. Yes, we can.

End

The garden site De Groote Braak in Amsterdam (NL) received the diploma for ecological gardening



About 6 years ago, Garden Site de Groote Braak introduced natural gardening. It started with an inspection by the AVVN and an advice for the next few years. The Committee on Nature and Environment was installed and slowly a shift was made on the garden site. In addition to more traditional gardening, parts of the park were maintained in a natural way. Ecological gardening had made its entrance! The last 2 years were given an extra boost with the support of an advisor of the AVVN. This resulted in the obtaining of the National Quality Mark Natural Gardening with the

maximum of 4 dots on the ladybug, the highest number of points ever obtained at the first inspection.

Reuse of raw materials *Finely chopped materials*

Pruning wood is shredded and reused. Chopped materials are used in the public green parts of the garden site and by gardeners in the private gardens.

The willow braids have been introduced to the park (from the willows in the park and from the nature reserve next to the park). A storage place for the chopped materials made of plaiting osiers was built. There are also planters of plaiting osiers.

Composting

This has taken a great flight. Apart from the public green of the garden site, garden waste from the individual gardens is also composted. At the moment the compost is only used for the public parts. We hope to have soon plenty so that also gardeners can benefit and use it on their gardens.

In addition, we motivate the gardeners to compost on their gardens. This is done by publishing practical information in the Garden Newspaper and during workshops.

Waste disposal

Glass, paper, grease, household waste and plastic are collected separately and this can be recycled again.





Animals

Butterfly garden, insect hotel, bee hive, "Stobbenwal", Hedgehog castle

In several places, small insect boxes are made and one eye-catching box. A stobbenwal (rows of branches and stumps deposited for animals) for soil organisms and the first bee hive is populated. Next year there will be a second hive. In order to provide good food supplies, a butterfly garden has been laid out, there are several banks with sowed wild flower seeds. The bedding will be planted with plants and shrubs that will provide sufficient food for all kind of animals.



Toad pool and nature friendly banks, floating islands

Besides a place for amphibians, birds such as ducks have found a place to stay. There is an educational trail along the toad-pool made by placing name plates at plants.

Furthermore, a number of floating islands were made for waterfowl.

Bat houses, kingfisher wall, kestrel box, Tawny owl box, green woodpecker box, stork's nest

These nests and breeding places were made or created. The birds of prey help to solve the problems with rabbits in a natural way.

A long-eared owl also has found its spot in the park and the gardeners see many spotted woodpeckers.

Beds, herb garden and lanes Jan Koolhof, De Punt, Bos en Struweel, bed by cateen, Piets bed, de Brink, Prairie stroken

These beds have undergone a change of shape and have been given a more natural character by thinning and reconstruction.

Herb garden

Recently, De Groote Braak started a herb garden. This will be extended

in 2018. Garden members can pick these herbs for their own use.

Sheep dike

This dike exists just as long as the park. There has always been an ecological way of working it and it has retained its own identity over the years. An oasis of tranquillity.

Pollard willows lane

In 2016 branches were put in the ground, they are well-founded and now start to grow into trees. Eventually they will become a row of full grown willows.

Trees

A *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* was compromised next to a similarly large tree. The other tree was cut so the *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* would have more space. The less developed side now begins to catch-up. In the open place a weeping willow is planted.

Besides the birch, beech, chestnut and many more species of trees, the *Ginkgo biloba* also has a place. A spontaneous next to the mother tree grown *Liriodendron* has been replaced.





Mowing policy

Two years ago the garden site started the phased mowing. Since then this has been expanded. The aim of this way of mowing is to create an as large as possible diversity of plants (e. g. orchids, wild flower edges) and animals (e. g. Dragonflies and amphibians).



Account is taken of the gardeners who like a more traditional way of gardening and part of the site is cut in a more traditional way.

Ecological products

The shop only sells nature-friendly garden products and cleaning agents.

A steam weeder was purchased to control the weeds on the paths.

Hiking trails and information signs

There is a circular walk on the park that runs along the special places in the park. In these places, information signs are placed with explanations.

Water management and culverts

Last years, the water mills were renovated for a better flow. The main ditches were dredged. With a structured policy the garden site tries to bring the small ditches into an ecological balance. An overall ditch management plan is in preparation.

Communication

Via The Garden newspaper, website, newsletters, workshops, information signs, guided tours and additional explanations to new gardeners, all gardeners are informed about natural gardening.

The garden site Wijkergouw in Amsterdam (NL) received the diploma for ecological gardening



After a 2-year project, the garden site acquired the National Quality Mark Natural Gardening, with the maximum score of 4 dots. An estimated 75% of gardeners actively or unwittingly participate in natural gardening. On a regular basis the members alternately organise debates and practical lectures concerning the ecological practices. They participated in discussions on water quality, septic tanks, composting with and without worms. There were tree walks, children's activities and workshops: how to knot willows responsibly, plaiting osiers, building floating islands.

Indigenous flora and fauna

The Water land north of the IJ, on the old promenade near Schellingwoude, existed with an impenetrable wildernesses of alder, birch and willow with undergrowth of eupatorium, *Solanum dulcamara*, blackberry, *Chamerion angustifolium* and *Calystegia sepium* un-

til the 11th century. Mining consisted of the construction of roads alongside the clay-banks of rivers in the peat. There are reed marshes, fed by groundwater and wadis, fed by rainwater. In The Netherlands it is said: „A fish cannot swim there and a cow cannot walk there .”. Garden site Wijkergouw was built in 1962 for and by city dwellers. The changing time spirit is visible in the gardens; Special nature-friendly projects are side by side with more traditional garden designs. The outside is designated to become grass, so that the boundaries of the park offer a more natural look.

Water management

Good water management ensures dry feet in this area. Gardeners work together with neighbours and government (Water Authority) to help with dredging and maintain banks. Dredging quality is monitored and waste water is kept or made as clean as possi-

ble before it enters the water system. Of course there is an additional mooring place (the little harbour) for whisper-quiet canoes and rowing boats. There are also marshes and pond gardens and several banks are made more natural.

Fauna, migration and internationally vulnerable populations

Garden site Wijkergouw within the ring A10 borders the Weersloot. They strive to secure migration opportunities for internationally vulnerable populations with guide species such as the ring snake, the Nordic vole mouse and the otter. As a result, other populations enjoy the park. There are hedgehog fortresses and hedgehog staircases made and some gardeners built shelters for martens, polecat, weasel, ermine, etc.



Insects, birds and bats

The beekeeper association, local residents and gardeners have together set up a separate terrain as a bee-park with melliferous plant and honey bees. In the butterfly garden elsewhere on the park, butterflies, dragonflies and various types of bees and bumblebees live on flowers and in hiding corners like sand heaps, rock-stone-garden and branches. Scattered around the park live bats in special nest boxes. There is a bird boulevard with housing for all kinds of birds. Birdwatchers track observations and count among other things protected birds such as blue heron, swifts, Kingfisher, eared Owl and Sparrowhawk.

Composting, water and soil live

In the 'Composting forest' garden waste is recycled, besides composting on one's own garden. Members bring garden waste and collect soil, wood is shredded, soil is converted and there is a place for the exchange of plants: free to bring or take. Striking is the beautiful critters housing along the walk from entrance Zuiderzeeweg. This is a 30 to 50 meters contiguous edge with dry stone walling, little holes, water spots and clutter heaps, ingeniously built by reuse of surplus materials. The path has grown organically and still extends. There is a lot of invisible life and animals can be found like salamanders, frogs, toads, snails, worms, beetles, etc. The Butterfly Garden has a toad-pool and a part of the reed marsh is restored to its original state.

Natural playground

The playground is available for different ages with a water pump and a water course, playhouse, climbing frame, swings and slide. Gates and huts are made of osiers and there are stepping games made with tree trunks.

Clubhouse, shop and little terrain

The farm Arbeid Adelt serves as a clubhouse and 'nerve center' for the gardeners. Built in 1886 and rebuilt around 1996 after a fire. A few years ago an

authentic farmhouse garden and a herbal corner were built. The gardeners meet there, enjoy healthy lunch from their own garden and attend lectures and workshops. In 2017 they started an exhibition of natural gardening and from now on there are exchange exhibitions in 'the farm'. All chemicals have been removed from the store and responsible gravel, sand and other garden material is purchased.

Communication, cooperation and co-use

A sign-posted hiking trail over Wijkergouw and five neighbouring garden sites is open to the public during the season. Visit the website http://www.volkstuinrouteboveny.nl/pdf/wijkergouw_def.pdf. Through civil society organisations such as Cordaan, people with disabilities have meaningful daytime activities by working with the gardeners in the green. Besides members, candidate members and local residents are also actively involved in activities. Gardeners organise seasonal markets (seed and cutting fair, harvest festival, garage sale) and entertainment (Saturday lunch, Garden art day, performances of choir and harmony). Different target groups are informed via the website, a paper club magazine and with digital newsletters. At the entrances and buildings there are several announcements boards.

Evolutionary loop

Garden site Wijkergouw is never finished, gardening remains the adventure. More ideas await realisation, such as: establishing a common greenhouse for growing plants and vegetables, rent out square meter trays to interested parties, setting up a circulation center for swap objects, building a learning path for children, create unity in the variety of informative signs, places of picnic tables and benches of natural material, shaping the next exhibition. We let ourselves be guided by the rhythm of the season. Every year our garden site becomes eco-logical!

Germany: Sustainable gardening

Dr. B. G. Wolfgang Preuß

Member of the BDG Executive Committee, responsible for member training

As allotment gardeners we do everything we can to put the garden into a condition that makes it possible for us to get a rich harvest year after year. That is only possible while being in balance with nature, which means with sustainable soil management, the consideration of crop rotation and paying attention to the material cycles in the allotment garden overall.

This means in detail:

1. Use of the diverse possibilities of biological fertilisation instead of chemical synthetic fertilisers ("artificial manure")

Sustainable gardening means not using chemical synthetic fertilisers. Instead we use the resources and principles of nature, like making plant manure, putting on compost or buying fertilisers that comes from natural sources (f. e. Algae calcium) or is made out of them (f. e. horn shavings, lamb's wool pellets).

Especially compost is a very good biological fertiliser. The principle is copied from nature: Organic materials like kitchen and garden waste are being decomposed by worms, bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms and are turned into valuable humus. The generated humus contains all important

plant nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, macronutrients, calcium, iron, sulphur, as well as micronutrients such as molybdenum or zinc, that are especially important for our vegetable plants. Even the chicken eggs often used in the household supply many plants with calcium carbonate if their shells are crushed.

2. Advantages of cultivation with crop rotation and mixed culture

It is important to combine the rules of crop rotation with plant protecting cultivation methods. Especially in vegetable cultivation one has to pay attention to which plants influence each other positively (plants help plants). So, for example dill in combination with basil keeps away mildew from cucumbers and enhances their growth. Thereby one should take into account which plants need certain rotation breaks while considering crop rotation, which is especially important when you have only the limited area of an allotment garden.

3. Use of rainwater that conserves resources

Rainwater collected in barrels in the allotment garden not only saves valuable and expensive drinking water, but is also ideal for our plants due to

its low degree of hardness. Rainwater contains important nutrients and is low in lime.

4. Biodiversity in the allotment garden

Especially the diversity of the species is an important basis for the balance between flora and fauna in the garden. If this balance is right, harmful organisms are repressed; our plants grow healthier and reward us with better yields. In order to achieve this balance and to have as many beneficial insects as possible among the birds, mammals, insects and microorganisms in the garden, we must create the conditions for this. For example, wild flower meadows, Benjes hedges, dry stone walls or small biotopes are suitable "lures" for our garden animals.

In summary, it can be reduced to a common denominator: Sustainable gardening means the targeted use of nature's material and energy cycles in the garden. Those, who deal with them garden more consciously, harvest in organic quality, improve their CO₂ balance and pay attention to plants and animals, but also to themselves and others. And so sustainable gardening leads to sustainable consumption and a mindful lifestyle.

Great-Britain: How does your garden grow?

Di Appleyard

Mentor, Marketing and PR Co-ordinator

Allotments are now diverse places with all ages, genders and nationalities following a variety of gardening philosophies. They all rub along together although there is potential for conflict – a dandelion is a weed to some and a salad ingredient for others. Pesticide spray can drift on to other plots but so can dandelion seeds. In this article we take a look at how some of the different growing methods approach steps in the cultivation calendar.

Organic Principles

Soil preparation

- Minimum soil cultivation apart from working in green manures or digging clay soil to allow frost to break up clods or to deal with soil compaction.
- Keep soil covered with thick mulches of organic materials e.g. composted leaves, home-made compost or green manures, this both protects and adds nutrients.
- Crop rotation important to prevent build-up of pests and diseases.

Choosing seeds

- Organic seeds are harvested from plants grown without synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and fungicides and therefore harbour no residues from these chemicals.

Growing on and feeding

- Only use organic fertilisers such as chicken pellets, rock dust, seaweed meal etc where a soil deficiency has been recognised.

- Feed plants with liquid seaweed extract, compost tea or mulch with home grown nettle or comfrey leaves.
- Start off with healthy material tubers, plants etc.
- Grow produce that is suitable for your soil and region.
- Water the soil, not over the plants.
- Grow varieties with resistance to disease.
- Sow and plant at times that avoid pests e.g. sow carrots in June to avoid carrot fly.

Crop Protection

- Prevention is better than cure; a biologically diverse plot will have a healthy ecosystem with beneficial insects and natural predators.
- Feed plants (compost tea, seaweed extract) to encourage their natural defences.
- Any pesticide use will break the food chain and may be harmful to other life forms, so should be avoided and biological controls used sparingly.
- Use barrier methods and physical methods to remove pests.

Permaculture Principles

Permaculture is not just about gardening; it covers all areas of human life and has three main ethical principles – caring for the earth, caring for people and sharing fairly. The design of the growing area is important and must be considered in three dimensions not just two, as the relationships between the various elements will affect the temperature, soil fertility and energy etc.

– caring for the earth, caring for people and sharing fairly. The design of the growing area is important and must be considered in three dimensions not just two, as the relationships between the various elements will affect the temperature, soil fertility and energy etc.

Soil preparation

- No-dig technique is popular with permaculturists
- Only use materials produced within the plot system e.g. green manure, garden compost to mulch.

Sowing and choosing seeds

- Save your own seeds from the plot
- Buy Open Pollinated seeds

Growing on and feeding

- Grow different crops together in the same bed e.g. the North American “3 sisters system” where sweetcorn, squash and climbing green beans are grown together.
- Feed with compost tea, mulch with comfrey or nettle grown on the plot.
- Use companion planting to influence health and growth of other plants.
- Use swales (a gully) to harvest water – channeling rainwater to where it is needed at the plants roots.

Crop Protection

- Using nature to achieve a balance.
- Avoid use of chemicals.

Bio-dynamics

Founded by Rudolf Steiner this method uses non chemical management principles, planting and sowing according to the phases of the moon and the addition to the soil of 'horn manure', which is a preparation of cow manure that has been buried and fermented in a horn and 'horn silica', which is finely ground quartz meal 'energised' through spending all summer in the soil inside a cow horn. The preparations mentioned must then be diluted and stirred at the correct time of day – when the earth is either breathing in or out.

Soil preparation

- Best done in the last quarter phase of the moon

Sowing and choosing seeds

- At the new moon plant above ground annual crops that produce their seeds outside the fruit. Examples are lettuce, spinach, celery, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and grain crops.
- At the second quarter of the moon plant annuals that produce above ground, but their seeds form inside the fruit, such as beans, melons, peas, peppers, squash, and tomatoes.
- The full moon is a favourable time for planting root crops, including beets, carrots, onions and potatoes.

Growing on and feeding

- In the fourth quarter of the moon there is decreased gravitational pull and moonlight, and it is considered a resting period. This is also the best time to weed and mulch, make compost and manure teas, harvest, transplant and prune.

Crop Protection

- Bio-Dynamic followers believe that by following the Lunar Planting Calendar gardeners will utilise the cosmic forces to improve crop growth and development which increases the power of plants to resist any pest and disease incidences.

Traditional Soil preparation

- Many people enjoy the ritual of digging over their plots and enjoy the exercise of Double Digging – this is a technique for digging over your allotment which was widely practiced a generation ago. It involves digging a trench two spades deep and bringing the bottom layer of soil to the top, aerating the soil and breaking up big clumps. However there is also a school of thought which believes the practice serves little good, as the subsoil is often low in nutrients, meaning there is little benefit to your plants. These critics prefer a technique of digging just one spade's depth and turning the soil as you go. If digging over winter, leave it roughly dug to allow the frost to help break up the clumps, before raking and forking in the spring to a fine tilth, ready for planting.

- Rotovation to break up the soil.
- Liming the soil routinely.

Sowing seeds

- Waiting until the soil was warm enough for direct sowing of seeds was the traditional method before we had central heating and could start plants off on window sills.

Growing on and feeding

- Traditional allotment gardeners follow many of the same principles of organic gardeners, rotation is vital to preserve a healthy soil and mulching with manure and other organic materials has been practiced for centuries; however they do use inorganic products such as Grow-more to promote growth.

Crop Protection

- Non-organic gardeners are more likely to use chemical herbicides and pesticides along with barrier methods but we hope that the current concern for the health of humans, bees and the planet will mean the use of these chemicals amongst allotment holders will begin to reduce.

Having your own allotment is the best way to provide affordable, fresh, healthy fruit and vegetables for you and your family. The hot topic at the moment is to whether to produce them organically using the more traditional growing methods or inorganically using modern sophisticated chemicals. On your allotment plot you have the choice and control over how you want to grow them. The important thing is to make a responsible and enlightened decision based upon all of the up to date information that is available – especially in respect to pest and disease control.

France: Bio-indicator plants (weeds or useful herbs?)

Jean-Claude Féraïl



Some plants are considered bad, as is the case of weeds. Why? Because the gardener did not plant them. Yet they do not grow there by chance and can be useful for many reasons. Useful because they can be harvested and prepared for different uses (cooking, medicine, processing, etc.), but also because they give indications about the ground where we intend to cultivate our vegetable garden.



To germinate, the seeds must have very specific conditions that differ from one plant to another, including climate, temperature, soil type, mineral elements, planting method, etc. Bio-indicator plants are therefore wild plants that grow spontaneously in a place where all the conditions are right for their growth. Therefore, if one knows what their "favourite" ground type is, it is possible to know the different types of soil.

It must also be borne in mind that soil is a living thing and that plants make it possible to better understand it. It is possible to classify them as plants indicating different conditions:

- an excess (organic matter – manure for example),
- a deficiency (in nitrogen – N – in potash – K),
- the quality of soil life (presence of earthworms, micro-organisms, etc.).

Some principles to remember.

- There must be a sufficient number of plants (5 to 10 rooted plants per square meter), and dominant compared to other species present, if it is to be an indicator.
- As seed distribution is generalised, it does not mean that when plants go to seed over a wide-spread area that a strong population can be expected next year. A seed sprouts only if we create the right conditions for it.
- For each plant, the natural environments in which they developed without human intervention were sought out.

The table below gives you some elements for determining the type of soil based on the natural plants that grow there.

This is why it is so useful to be able to recognise wild plants.

Other documents (books or internet) can help you to determine what the soil is like in your garden.

Use of manure

- Horse manure is rich in carbon (C)
- Cow manure, balanced out with straw
- Sheep manure is rich in nitrogen (N) and potassium (K), to be balanced with horse manure
- Chicken manure is rich in Phosphorus (P), to be balanced with other manures.

Plants	Indications
Buttercup (gold button)	Moderately moist
<i>Ranunculus</i> or creeping cinquefoil	Saturated in water (e. g. clay), compacted, trampled ...
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Asphyxiates , causing blockages, (in phosphorus for example)
<i>Rumex violoncello</i>	Compacting (mechanical or natural)
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> (sheep sorrel)	Destructuring of soil
<i>Rumex acetosa</i> (common sorrel or garden sorrel)	Balanced conditions
Chickweed	Good amount of organic matter, Good microbial life, Presence of nitrogen (N), Well balanced conditions
Lamb's-quarters	Excess application of animal organic matter, not or poorly composted, Soil worked in overly dry weather, Water contrast on nitrate soils, Excess nitrogen (N)
Red-root amaranth (potentially toxic)	Too much fertiliser or organic matter, Excess of N and K
Gillyflower (e. g. Shepherd's purse)	Indicating that the soil contains bases (which may generate blockages), Useful in green fertilisers in soils with high pH (limes), do not use in soils where the pH is <6 (acid), Acidic ground
Dandelion	Organic matter bottleneck
Yarrow (pollinator)	Leaching of organic matter, Dry earth, clay and limestone
Rye grass	Anaerobic, Wet ground
Thistle	Anaerobic, pH blocking
Bindweed	Excess nitrogen (N), Heavy soil and clay
Daisies	Decalcification, Acidic soil
Wheat grass	Soils that are worn out and unstructured, Digging too deep (impermeable layer)



Sweden: A sustainable lifestyle

Ulrika Flodin Furås

Translation: Ulrica Otterling



The cottage is small, but gives an airy impression.

Nathalie and Foreting Johonewe's allotment garden has its own unique character. Here they are creating a sustainable paradise based on the ideas of forest gardening and permaculture.

The black wooden façade shines like an uncut diamond in the light of the summer sun. Right in the middle of Älvtomt Allotment Association in Örebro you will find a cottage that is built to last at least 100 years. The wooden façade of the house got its black color after first having been burnt with a torch, plank by plank, and then treated with oil, according to a Japanese method called shou sugi ban, that makes the wood basically maintenance free. The method is several hundred years old and consists of burning the surface of the wood until it is charred. The surface can then either be left untreated, be brushed or be brushed and oiled. The charring makes the wood resistant to damp, sunshine, mold, pests and such.



Nathalie and her husband Foreting met in Papua New Guinea, now they live in Örebro, Sweden.

Nathalie and Foreting have not been allotment holders for long, so their main focus so far has been on the cottage, which is new and includes a section that is a green house. Many details, such as windows and doors, are recycled materials. The interior walls are painted with egg oil tempera. There is a loft that is used for sleeping and even though the cottage is small, it gives an airy impression.

The building of the house as well as the budding vegetable patches around the cottage, are based on permaculture's ideas of a sustainable life style. Permaculture originates from Australia in the 1970s and is a dream about living in a sustainable way in harmony with nature. It encourages the use of recycled things and materials rather than buying new ones.

"I follow the ideas of forest gardening and permaculture in my garden and when it comes to growing vegetables

I mean to focus on edible perennials", explains Nathalie.

A forest garden is an edible garden inspired by the forest, where each edible plant has at least one extra purpose – flowers for the pollinators or nitrogen fixers for example. In the garden there are different layers of plants and trees, where the tallest trees create a nice micro climate for other plants etc. The big lawn in front of the cottage is slowly being transformed into a vegetable garden. At the moment it is covered with a ground cover fabric and underneath is a soil factory. Before she covered the lawn Nathalie placed grass cuttings, leaves, compost, bokashi, charcoal and similar materials on top of the grass. Very soon, when everything underneath the cover has turned to soil, the area will be ready for cultivation. The soil will be bristling with nutrients and will have a perfect structure.



Nathalie and Foreting used the several hundred years old Japanese Shou sugi ban method for the façade. The wood is first burnt, then treated with oil. The Shou sugi ban method makes wood basically maintenance free.

This method of covering soil with grass cuttings and such to fertilize the soil and improve its structure as well as protecting it from dehydration is something that Nathalie will continue to do when she starts cultivating vegetables. That way the garden becomes self-sufficient when it comes to fertilizers and can better resist draught.

“Here I have built a raised bed”, says Nathalie and shows a clever vegetable bed with a miniature greenhouse on top of it. The greenhouse consists of a two-glass window that has been opened up as an upside down V. The bed itself is framed with logs from birch. The raised bed is created according to the same principles as the soil factory. Layers upon layers of various green materials are slowly turning into compost on top of a layer of branches and twigs, which are the last to molder. The composting process also makes the bed warmer than regular soil, which facilitates planting earlier in spring.

In the green house, which is built in one corner of the house, there are cucumbers and tomatoes growing all the way to the ceiling high above. Solar panels, placed on the roof of the cottage, supply the family with electricity. Along one side of the allotment garden a beautifully carved wooden fence creates a border to the walking path that runs along the allotment on the outside of the fence. The same carefully carved wooden details are also found elsewhere on the ladders leaning towards the side of the cottage and in the wooden gutter.

The work on the cottage and the vegetable garden continues without stress. All will be finished in due time.



The interior walls of the house are painted with egg oil tempera.



The green house is just outside the kitchen window and is also part of the house.

Netherlands: Permaculture in the food forest at the Stadspark allotment garden in Groningen

Lieuwe Jongsma and Rieks Reuvers (The Netherlands)



Volunteers building a raised plant bed

In general, parks and garden sites are under threat from encroaching urban development. Against that background, the AVVN regularly emphasises the fact that garden parks must offer added value to their surroundings. To live up to that challenge, since April 2017, we in the Gardening and Recreation Association “Stadspark” in Groningen have been hard at work laying out our own food forest.

The aim of a food forest is to demonstrate the responsible production of healthy food in combination with nature on the basis of the principles of permaculture. We have at our disposal a plot of land occupying around 0.8 hectares, but our eventual aim is to turn the entire park into an edible landscape. This will be achieved by expanding the already existing ‘tasting route’ (elsewhere in the park) to include a wider variety of edible plants and trees. We are also attempting to

boost the interest among members for applying the principles of permaculture in their own gardens. The food forest offers us the perfect opportunity to demonstrate how permaculture works.

What is permaculture?

In a permaculture garden, you design an edible landscape that is self-sustaining. This is achieved by encouraging biodiversity and through a careful choice of plants. The art is to put nature to work on your behalf and that is why permaculture above all makes use of edible trees, shrubs and perennials, and self-seeding vegetable varieties. That eradicates the need for reworking the soil every year, followed by seeding and planting. That is what distinguishes permaculture from traditional forms of agriculture, even organic and biodynamic growing systems.

Permaculture operates according to three ethical principles; concern for the earth, concern for people and sharing abundance. What this effectively means is establishing a harmonious relationship between people and nature and between different groups of people, since our continued existence is dependent on cooperation. These ethical principles then form the basis for the 12 design principles according to which permaculture can be put into practice, and on the basis of which the conditions are created for a living and productive ecosystem.

These principles for example include: generating crop yield, using and appreciating renewable resources and services, producing zero waste, establishing cycles, designing (natural) patterns to a detailed level, using and appreciating diversity. For a further explanation of the design principles, visit the website (in Dutch) www.puurpermacultuur.nl.

In addition, in permaculture just like in nature, the soil is permanently covered with a layer of organic material, a process known as mulching. The biggest advantage is that it prevents dehydration and erosion. A layer of mulch also encourages soil life, so nutrients, air and moisture are better absorbed. Mulch also restricts weed growth and protects the soil against heat and cold.

To ensure a crop yield, especially at the start, we also use annual varieties of vegetable. Normally speaking, per-

ennial plants need a few years before they reach maturity. The space between these plants can then be used by other varieties.

What is a food forest?

A food forest is a sort of permaculture. In food forests, agriculture is combined with nature for sustainable food production. The concept is based on the ecological principles of a natural forest or more precisely, the forest fringes. These are the areas that are home to the greatest biodiversity and that retain sufficient light to allow different plants to grow. In short, in a food forest, we simulate the situation in a forest fringe.

The basic structure of a food forest or forest garden consists of seven layers as observed and described by Robert J. Hart in England, in the 1960s.

1. Canopy (climax trees) consisting of original and planted large trees;
2. Low tree layer consisting of dwarf nut and fruit trees;
3. Shrub layer of currants and berries and shrubs;
4. Herbaceous layer of perennial herbs and vegetables;
5. Ground cover: layer of plants that spread horizontally;
6. Underground or root layer of plants with edible roots and tubers;
7. Climbers: a vertical layer of climbing plants and shrubs.

Experience has shown that a food forest needs between 3 and 5 years before generating a reasonable yield. At that point things start to run them-



selves. The biodiversity also means that the soil does not become exhausted; instead a process of regeneration is initiated, which makes the soil ever more fertile thereby boosting overall yield. Nature does its job and we can above all pluck the fruits. That at least is the idea.

Choice of plants

A wide variety of plants means even more biodiversity. We therefore make use of a wide selection of species from similar climate zones such as Europe, China, Russia and America. The explanatory notes to the ground plan give an impression of the variety used.

We purchase our plants from nurseries including Halesia in Zuidlaren, Arborealis in Wilhelminaoord and Foltz in Meeden. We purchase seeds for a whole variety of food forest species from Vreeken's Zaden, De Bolster, de Cruydt-Hoek and Zaadhandel Van der Wal.

Unity through food

The principle behind our initiative is to demonstrate to members and to any interested visitors that you can grow food anywhere. The idea is not

only to do ourselves a favour but to also serve as an example for the surrounding area; food as a source of unity. That is the motto of the food forest, and it refers not only to the food itself, but to all the related activities. What we aim to do is to share the abundance of nature. However, this abundance relates not only to the physical fruits, but above all also to the values that emerge in growing healthy food, such as wholesome vital nature, an attractive landscape, cohesion, recreation, education and a healthy natural and living environment. In other words, sharing is in general wellbeing. However, there is always room for improvement. Imagine that in addition to the existing trees, we were to plant fruit-bearing trees and shrubs throughout our country. The result would be a gigantic edible landscape. In our opinion, that prospect represents huge opportunities for gardening associations to deliver added value to society, and to fulfil a pioneering role.

For more information visit the following sites:

www.permacultuurnederland.org

www.puurpermacultuur.nl

www.voedselbos.com



Explanatory notes to the food forest ground plan:

1. The front section: Here are the fruit-bearing shrubs and trees from a previously laid-out but never completed permaculture garden. There was no successful herbaceous layer between the plums, chokeberries, red currants and gooseberries. We interplant a variety of perennial vegetables such as Chinese artichoke and Jerusalem artichokes. We also planted herbs and flowers.

2. This middle section was a field covered in wild brambles and fallen willow trees. We removed everything with the exception of three oak trees. Among the newcomers are the black mulberry, the Szechuan pepper, weeping olives, blueberries and honeysuckle berries, a purple raspberry and a whole variety of perennial vegetables and herbs.

3. This rear section is home to numerous mature trees that once belonged to a nursery, including Mirabel plums, rowanberries and small Mirabel-like domestic plums. Below these is a whole raft of shade-loving plants such as wild garlic, woodruff and March violets. The forest also features numerous open glades with fruit bushes and climbing plants (such as kiwi, hop and the magnolia vine).

News from the federations

a NATIONAL MEETINGS

a) Belgium

Congress of the federation (date not yet known)

Meeting for all teachers/experts (date not yet known)

b) Finland

March 30th 2019: A seminar dealing with legal issues of the member associations

April 9th 2019 in Helsinki: Partnership in arranging a seminar/webinar on invasive plants

Free regional courses for allotment gardeners through the summer.

August 10th in Rovaniemi: Meeting for the presidents of the member associations.

c) Germany

Seminars

Management: 22nd – 24th March 2019 in Neumünster
Up-to-date management of an association and a federation today

Public relations: 12th – 14th April 2019 in Braunschweig
To chair and to present – what does the allotment movement look like?

Environment: 10th – 12th February 2019 in Bad Breisig
The insect friendly garden – allotment sites, a tool to fight the reduction of species

Legal matters I: 24th – 26th May 2019 in Wismar
Statutes and internal regulation of an association

Gardening advice I: 14th – 16th June 2019 in Oldenburg/Vechta
Education for gardening advice in the-

ory and in practice

Gardening advice II: 27th – 29th September 2019 in Hamm
Plants – their use in the allotment garden

Legal matters II: 25th – 27th October 2019 in Kassel/Baunatal
The allotment lease agreement

Meetings of the federal bodies and other fixed dates

18th – 19th January 2019 in Dresden

05th – 06th April 2019 in Berlin

08th – 09th June 2019 Day of the garden

05th – 07th September 2019 in Dresden

10/2019 in Berlin

01st – 02nd November 2019 in Hannover

For more information:

Concerning seminars see under:
www.kleingarten-bund.de/veranstaltungen/bdg_seminare/uebersicht_2016

Concerning events see under:

www.kleingarten-bund.de/der_bdg_informiert_news

d) Japan

In Japan, natural disasters, such as earthquakes and typhoons, often occur.

An allotment garden exhibits various functions according to the situation of a disaster. For example, a fire prevention function, reservation of an evacuation area, food supply after suffering a calamity, and people support each other etc.

The allotments can also perform various disaster prevention correspondences. Support for a disaster site is possible and an emergency restoration can be performed etc.

Meetings and seminars 2019

February 2nd 2019: Study group with information on the measures to be taken, based on the experience gained by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Meeting 2019: One of the themes could be the measures to be taken in the case of an earthquake on basis of the experience gained at the occasion of the earthquake in East Japan.

e) Luxembourg

7th April 2019: National congress in Roodt-Syre

f) Netherlands

22nd June 2019 National congress

g) Sweden

8th-9th September. The Stockholm Urban Garden Show held at Tantolunden/Drakensbergsparken

B DOCUMENTS

a) Finland

The magazine Siirtolapuutarha-lehti published by the federation is available online (with a one-issue delay) <https://issuu.com/siirtolapuutarha-lehti>

b) Germany

Publications

DER FACHBERATER, specialised magazine for allotment gardens, ecological politics and environment protection; 4 issues per year

“Grüne Schriftenreihe”, documentation of the seminars organised by the Bundesverband, is published 6x a year

Final document 24th federal competition "gardens and urban planning" 2018

All publications can be downloaded under
www.kleingarten-bund.de/de/service/publikationen/

Weekly plant portrait in the Internet under
www.kleingarten-bund.de/de/garten-praxis/zettelkasten/

Monthly gardening tip in the Internet under
www.kleingarten-bund.de/de/garten-praxis/gartentipp/

c) Japan

The Government intends to make regulation for social activities to ease positively in present Japan.

For this reason, in Japan, everyone can now establish an allotment garden.

There are different kinds of people able to establish allotment gardens ranging from a farmhouse to a NPO and also an incorporated company.

The result thereof is that there are various types of allotment gardens.

Our allotment garden association arranges the form of those allotment

gardens on a table, shows it in a study group etc. It is also advising the persons concerned by it, so that a better allotment garden may be established.

d) Luxembourg

Review: Gaart & Heem (Garden & Home): 6 issues per year for all the members

Pocket booklet: Gaart & Heem (Garden & Home) Subject: Garden tourism in Luxembourg – Why not?

Our homepage offers all current information to our members.

C USEFUL INFORMATION

a) Finland

The Finnish Federation has made a Society's Commitment to sustainable Development (<https://commitment2050.fi/>) According to the Commitment two extensive surveys were carried out in 2018 and during 2019 the federation will encourage the member associations to designate representatives for sustainable development. Best practices will be distributed to the members.

b) Japan

General Centre for Study of Urban Farmland Use, which is a governmental auxiliary organization, is tackling promotion of city horticulture for several years.

As one its activities, the "centre" nominates a "city farmland practical use adviser". It is a specialist who is related to city horticulture. He is dispatched to a national area, and is supporting those gardeners

So Yoshinori Kasuya and Yoshiharu Meguriya from Association for Japan allotment garden were nominated.

Yoshinori Kasuya is taking charge of the allotment gardens at large focusing on the theme of horticulture welfare and an allotment garden.

Yoshiharu Meguriya is a specialist in allotment garden and agricultural administration, and as he is also a practitioner, he is taking charge of all about allotment gardens, such as vegetable cultivation in an allotment garden, establishment and management of an allotment garden, an allotment garden community, and regional vitalisation.

c) Luxembourg

Special competences of the federation:

Specialised courses for our member associations

Management training course

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