



Hyphen 78

News from the Federation

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Table of Contents:

In Memoriam

Jean Kieffer **3**

Metty Loos **4**

Karl Svoboda **5**

Editorial

Opening up and getting known **6**

Opening of the gardens to the public

Belgium: Should we all open our allotment garden sites to the general public? **8**

Germany: Allotment gardens considered and rethought in urban planning **12**

Netherlands: About a necessary but rewarding process **17**

Germany: The colony Wildkraut e. V. **22**

Addresses **24**

Imprint **25**

Jean Kieffer

has passed away forever

Malou Weirich

General Secretary of the International Federation of Allotment Gardeners



Jean Kieffer

On 27th January 2023, Jean Kieffer, former president of the Luxembourgish federation, passed away at the age of 77 after a heart attack.

Thus, within only six weeks, the Luxembourgish federation has lost its two honorary presidents and we, in the International Federation, have lost two Luxembourgish colleagues, who were very much appreciated.

Jean Kieffer was a member of the Luxembourgish allotment garden movement for many years. After his activity at local and regional level, he was elected to the central board in 1982 and was then president of the Luxembourgish federation from 2002 to 2015. During this period, and until the elections in 2017, he was also Luxembourgish representative in the International Federation and, at the same time, member of the executive committee and treasurer.

Jean Kieffer followed in the large footsteps as successor to three very distinctive, but also very different personalities having presided the Luxembourgish League, Jos Olinger, Joseph Leyder and Metty Loos. He maintained the close relationships between the Luxembourgish and the International Federation that had been built up since its foundation.

Jean Kieffer was convinced of the importance of the international allotment movement as well as of the util-

ity these contacts could have for the national federation.

Travelling together to our international meetings made it possible to discuss issues that arose as well as those that held promise for the future, to consider more problematic points and to consider further action.

Jean Kieffer took an interest in our international movement right up to the end, and I had a very interesting telephone conversation with him in mid-January.

Jean Kieffer was known for his kind and constructive cooperation, coupled with extreme accuracy and linguistic correctness. His friendliness and sociability were much appreciated by his colleagues.

We will always have fond memories of Jean Kieffer.

Metty Loos

embarked on his final journey

Malou Weirich

General Secretary of the International Federation of Allotment Gardeners



Metty Loos

On 20th December 2022, Metty Loos unexpectedly left us forever at the age of 91.

Metty Loos was a “association man” and remained so until the end. He still attended a association party on 20th December and then started his final journey when he returned home.

Metty Loos is one of the veterans of the Luxembourgish and of our international allotment garden movement.

Metty was active in the Luxembourgish allotment garden movement for more than 70 years and this in several functions: first in the local allotment garden association, then since 1962 on the central board of the national federation, from 1974 onwards representative in the Office and president of the national federation from 1984 to 2002. During his presidency he continued to be the representative of the Luxembourgish federation in the Office, was also Office treasurer, member of the board. At the 25th International Congress in Paris in 1986, he became President of the Office International and then handed over the presidency to Sören Cronsjöe from Sweden in Luxembourg in 1988.

Metty was convinced of the importance of our international movement and helped to prepare the future. Together with Günter Gartz (D) and Willi Wohatschek (A) he did the necessary lobbying and supported the Office so that allotment gardens could be included for the first time in an international text, i. e. the European Urban Charter of the Council of Europe. Together with Günther Garz, Willi Wohatschek and the Office, he also tried to give the allotment gardens more in-

fluence on a European level, but this could only be achieved to a limited extent. “Stumbling blocks” were the Maastricht Treaty and the difficult and very strict EU requirements.

Internally, Metty Loos tried to mediate in difficult moments, which always occur in movements, to involve all protagonists in conflict resolution and, if necessary, to cheer things up and relax the situation with his legendary storytelling and jokes.

Metty Loos kept on gardening into old age. He worked in his greenhouse with much love and enthusiasm until the end and helped us all with his expertise.

Metty, with his courage and positive spirit will always be with us in thought and can be a role model for many.

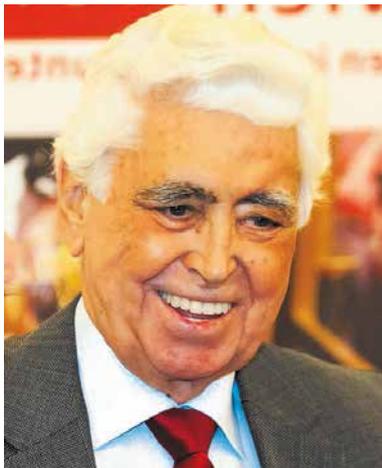
Metty, on behalf of the International Federation and personally, thank you very much for your commitment, your countless advice, and your extraordinary work for the national and international allotment garden movement.

Karl Svoboda

Memories of a promoter of allotment gardening

Wilhelm Wohatschek

Chairman of the International Federation of Allotment Gardeners



Karl Svoboda

A friend and companion of our community for decades has died. Karl Svoboda, retired member of the provincial parliament, died at the age of 92 on 1st November 2022.

Karl Svoboda was a district councillor in Vienna before he moved to the municipal council, where he was mainly responsible for the issue of trans-

port from 1979 to 1996. From 1988 to 1996, Karl Svoboda was also Chairman of the Social Democratic Municipal Council Club. So much for his work for the people of Vienna, which was also associated with numerous honours.

However, we allotment gardeners were always of great concern to him, not only because he himself had an allotment garden in the 10th district of Vienna with his wife, but also because already in the early 80s he advocated more environmental awareness and training for our expert advisers. It was also he who made the idea of year-round living in Viennese gardens and thus also the change in building regulations not only socially acceptable but also a reality with his calm and level-headed manner.

The allotment garden movement owes a lot to Karl Svoboda, he was a great friend and supporter who always had an open ear for the Viennese allotment gardeners and had solutions for

many problems. He was a man with handshake quality, but he was also not afraid to say clearly when something was not going well. Even after his professional career, he was always a welcome guest at the meetings and events of the Austrian federation.

But even these are not all his merits for the allotment garden movement. For his commitment was not only to the Austrian allotment gardeners, but as an ardent European he was also active for our international allotment garden movement.

Among other things, he played a decisive role in the resolution that was the basis for the inclusion of allotment gardens in the European town charter. He also contributed his ideas and views in a constructive way at many international meetings in which he always participated with pleasure.

We will always remember Karl Svoboda with gratitude.

Opening up and getting known

Ruud Grondel

President of AVVN, Netherlands



Ruud Grondel

Being part of the International Federation is not only interesting but also very useful. I am meeting colleagues from the different countries and exchange experiences and ideas. At our regular meetings I am always learning about the differences but even more about the common practice around our allotments in the different countries.

This issue of Hyphen is inspired by the discussion which took place at our last meeting in Stockholm about the threats and chances for the Allotments in Europe. It appeared that in a lot of countries gardens are experiencing pressure from the local government. Building planners are always looking with greedy eyes at the "empty" places on their maps which are now successfully being planted and enjoyed by our members.

A successful way to stop this, is to convince our neighbours, the planners and the councils that these areas are not empty but are very important not only for the gardeners but for the whole of the community.

We know that the importance of our allotment gardens is, on the one hand, their contribution to biodiversity, which is regularly proven by scientific research. On the other hand, it is also the provision of food and a green environment that makes our gardeners, but also the city, healthier and happier.

I also tell politicians in the Netherlands they underestimate how important the community of gardeners is for strengthening the social network in our modern cities, as a counterbalance to individualism.

To secure the future of our allotment gardens it is important that the local community, the politicians and the civil servants know us. So, in the Netherlands and as I learned in Stockholm in a lot of other countries, we are telling our members to open up for the community around them.

There are very inspiring examples of different ways to achieve this in this number of the Hyphen.

The common denominator is being important to the world around us, for instance, for the people who live in our neighbourhood or to social networks, businesses and working people in their lunchbreak.

Be it by inviting them to walk in our allotments, to share in activities, or to make small gardens to be used by children. Every situation is different, so look for opportunities. The thing is to be known as being important, not only for our members but also as part of the public green space in the city.

In Holland we have a proverb which says: If the rabbit has a name, it's hard to put it on the table.

We as the national board are sending this message to our members regularly, but of course there are hesitations and resistance to change. People fear "strangers" in their parks or even burglary, and this must be taken seriously. Actively opening up your park not only requires an open gate, but thinking about the layout of the park, putting up signs, making contact with visitors so they feel welcome and known. I know of an allotment in Amsterdam that is situated next to a secondary school. The pupils discovered the allotment garden and started coming in their breaks. Initially there was no contact, and gardeners complained to the board about shouting and litter. The board of the allotment contacted the school, and now every year the first-graders are invited to the park, meet gardeners, learn about being a gardener, and the rules of being a visitor. It is a success, people greet each other and the pupils enjoy their green break (and take their litter with them).

Sending out our message to gardeners and cities is easier in situations

where there is an actual discussion about building plans of course. Since this has led to clashes in different big cities recently, with big actions from our gardeners we see city planners and media picking up our message. In recent negotiations we notice cities start demanding that our members open up the allotment as a garden park as a rule, because they start to realize a green spot that is main-

tained without much cost to the city can also be a good green spot in the city, as good or even better than an old fashioned park.

In this Hyphen you can read about the story of a very successful park in Utrecht, which illustrates the theme.

Enjoy reading!

Belgium: Should we all open our allotment garden sites to the general public?

Willy Goethals

Honorary President of allotment garden park 'Slotenkouter', Ghent, Belgium
Board member of East Flanders' Provincial Allotment Association



Preface

Whether or not it's useful, necessary or desirable for allotment garden parks to be enclosed entities or made accessible to the general public is difficult if not impossible to describe in its generality in an European context.

Indeed, it depends on a variety of factors, including, among others: rural, urban or suburban context, who are the landowners, large or small site, local customs, morality, habits and traditions, prevailing political and economic climate, related costs.

Be that what it may, we will therefore limit ourselves in what follows to some general (historical) considerations from which everyone can draw his/her own conclusions based on the local context.

People throughout all of their history have always tried to shield the land they consider theirs from outsiders by means of enclosures: be it by erecting fences, barriers or walls.

Enclosures define dividing lines and make them visible, but since when exactly have they existed? On Stone Age paintings, for example in the famous Lascaux cave, grid structures are repeatedly found alongside animals, which some scholars interpret as enclosures. A few thousand years after these first painters, people settled here and there permanently and made claims on the land they worked on. Demarcation became necessary to make clear who worked which piece of land, but also to secure it from unwanted visitors.

The original sin

For the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the fence was the symbol of all evil from the beginning. According to Rousseau, people in their original state were equal, happy and content. This was in contrast to bourgeois society, characterised by inequality and distrust. In the fence, Rousseau saw the cause of conflicts between people: „The first man who surrounded a piece of land with a fence and had the idea of saying, 'This is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of bourgeois society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how much misery and horror he would have spared humanity if he had pulled out the poles or stepped over the ditch and shouted to his fellow men, „Beware of believing this imposter; you are lost if you

forget that the fruits belong to all, but the earth belongs to no one.”

So for Rousseau, the fence was the cause of inequality between people, and he would probably be proved right today if he saw the so-called „gated communities“ that have taken off in many countries of the world as a sign of distinction. Those who can afford it live shielded and among their like-minded fellow men in one of these ‘gated communities’.

The separation from other social classes, the fear of real or perceived crime and the affirmation that one can afford this style of living contribute to the popularity of such complexes in many countries.

Critics, however, see in this way of life the danger of certain classes separating themselves from the rest of the population, staying in their bubble and thus weakening social cohesion.

The fence also plays a role in the Christian art of the Middle Ages; the genre of the ‘hortus conclusus’, i. e., the enclosed or fenced garden, developed in the Gothic period. It goes back to the biblical Song of Songs, in which the bride is compared to a „closed garden“. In these artworks, Mary is shown in a garden that is shielded from the sinful outside world by a fence or a rose hedge. Flowers such as lilies or roses grow in the garden itself, representing Mary’s purity.

We also find traces of this in linguistics: while the word (Zaun) in German means a border or barrier, relatives of this word such as ‘town’ in English and even more the Dutch word ‘tuin’ refer to an enclosed area enclosed by a fence.

Allotment gardens have always been subject to major changes but modern tendency is to integrate them better not to say wholly into the surrounding social fabric. As a consequence, in a lot of cases, the tenants see their



privacy threatened. There’s a great deal of fear of losing privacy when strangers suddenly look over the fence into the garden.

A paradise on a Monday morning

Most of our readers will be able to effortlessly recall the picturesque scene below: if there’s a paradise on a Monday morning, then it is the allotment garden, anywhere in or at the outskirts of a major city. Warm late summer light shines at ten o’clock in the morning and there is a stillness as if the seriousness of life was light years away. The long, hot summer and the working zeal of the gardeners have provided for a splendor of flowers. All around, fruits and vegetables are being harvested, raspberries, potatoes, beans, tomatoes. From a distance, only the rattling of a passing train is reminiscent of the hustle and bustle of the city, but who cares?

Gardeners are sitting under the canopy of their garden shed, in front of a coffee and a glorious day. Nevertheless, they are dissatisfied. Their idyll is threatened by a small but nasty revision of the law that the city council is about to vote on: In the future, the allotment garden areas are to be developed with individual walking and cycling paths and made accessible

to the general public for all kind of activities.

This “social dimension of the allotment gardens”, as it is called in cheerless administrative language, should bring added value for the population in the city heated up by climate change. From gardeners’ point of view, it means the end of privacy in a piece of home.

Every city government knows that things get complicated when they focus on garden areas.

In many cities, investors are seeking space for flats and offices, but at the same time, green spaces are becoming increasingly important in the face of climate change, urban warming, and urban densification.

For many city dwellers, gardens are a cheap refuge in a ‘countryside’ and represent a slice of individuality and privacy. Every city government knows that things get complicated when they tackle allotment garden areas.

Public health and exercise were always at the forefront of allotment gardening. Poor nutrition and precarious living conditions had a disastrous effect on health during industrialisation, and there was a fear that

the youth would go down the wrong path. In the early 20th century, more and more countries became aware of the necessity for an allotment garden movement.

Gardening becomes a civic duty

At the turn of the century, allotment garden initiatives emerged in many European cities, which ultimately became an integral part of social policy. The factory workers depended for their livelihoods on potatoes and vegetables in their gardens.

During the First World War, the situation worsened: thefts in the gardens increased, which is why the gardeners joined forces. It quickly turned out that just guarding the gardens alone was not enough.

In the Second World War gardening even became a civic duty. Gardeners felt obliged to grow potatoes, using the same arguments that count again today with the emergence of the ecological footprint: milk and meat from 40 ares of land fed only one person, the authorities calculated in advertisements but potatoes on the same area six people. Food was so scarce and expensive that allotment gardens once again became vital for many people.

Only with the economic boom after the Second World War did self-sufficiency lose its importance. Gardening developed into a leisure activity, vegetable beds were reduced, and lawns, ornamental shrubs and barbecue areas were used instead. At the same time, demand fell and many areas disappeared. The cities used them as land reserves or overbuilt them.

In many cities there are only half as many allotment gardens today as there were in 1945. But even when the economy was booming, the parcelled green spaces reflected the sociological realities: from 1960 immigration made itself felt, and the allotment gar-



den concept had to adapt to this new reality. More and more, the gardens developed into a place of relaxation for a wide variety of city dwellers.

Littering, theft, vandalism

Gardening is a piece of luxury at an affordable price: at Slotenkouter allotment garden park in the city of Ghent gardeners pay +/- 100 euro a year for an area of around 200 square metres.

Some gardeners are all the more horrified at the thought of people suddenly strolling through the gardens. They fear an increase in littering, vandalism and theft. Numerous already are the examples of garden houses and sheds set on fire in allotment parks.

For many, the idea alone of opening the garden site to the general public is looked upon as an intrusion into their personal lives.

Much of the garden debate is reminiscent of the resistance that every reform necessarily brings along and to the victims it inevitably creates. After all, one cannot expect the fattened calf to share the angels' enthusiasm over the return of the lost son.

There are numerous examples where governments have faced opposition to their plans to open up allotment parks to the general public.

The new longing for rural life

The dispute makes it clear where the journey is going: city authorities will increasingly demand that allotment park sites leave their isolation and integrate fully into the urban fabric. With the urban longing for rural life and with every hot summer, interest in green open spaces increases. We ourselves observe that more and more people are appearing among the gardeners who are neither connected to nature nor have a green thumb.

The family garden scene is still reacting sceptically to the attempt to better integrate the areas into the city fabric. But if I am not mistaken, the new walkways through the allotment gardens are just the beginning: a hundred years after their spread, allotment gardens are given a new urban planning and sociological function – and more weight. And in my opinion, nothing will be able to stop this trend.

Those of us who are lucky enough to live near parks, open spaces, and green areas know the joys they bring: the calming views of trees and green lawns, the singing of birds, the fresh air, the scent of flowers. Overwhelming evidence demonstrates the benefits of city parks. They improve our physical and psychological health, strengthen our communities, and make our cities and neighbourhoods

more attractive places to live and work.

We as garden professionals and citizens need to join the effort to bring parks, open spaces and green areas into the neighbourhoods where all can benefit from them. While government plays a vital role in the creation of public parks, governments cannot do the job alone to set up and maintain all of these allotment sites. We have to come forward and help the government (at community level) by forming small committees or trusts to maintain the parks/green spaces within our community. Working together, we can help many more people and our next generations to experience the joys of jogging down a tree-lined path, of a family picnic on a sunny lawn, of shar-



ing a community garden's proud harvest. We can create the green spaces that offer refuge from the alienating

city streets, places where we can rediscover our natural roots and reconnect with our souls.

Germany: Allotment gardens considered and rethought in urban planning

A way to more quality of life in the residential environment

Sandra von Rekowski & Eva Foos

Researchers, Federal Association of German Garden Friends (Bundesverband Deutscher Gartenfreunde e. V.)



Allotment gardens should be a permanent part in the urban planning portfolio.

For the foreseeable future, urban and regional planners will have to reckon with a constant influx of people into prosperous conurbations as well as medium-sized centres in Germany. One of the greatest challenges will be to provide sufficient and high-quality green spaces despite the increasing demand for residential areas.

Green space maintenance made easy

In prospering urban centres, on the one hand, a high and, for the time being, increasing demand for living

space is to be expected. On the other hand, the demand for attractively designed living environments is also increasing. However, since space in cities and municipalities is a finite commodity, solutions must be found that reconcile living and green space in close proximity to each other. Another finite resource is the money that cities and municipalities have to spend on staff and maintenance of public green spaces. More than basic maintenance measures and the preservation of traffic safety are hard-

ly possible with the current resources of many green space offices. As a result, public green spaces are often not as attractive for the urban population as they could be with sufficient green space maintenance. In addition, there are cases of vandalism and problems with littering, the removal of which incurs high costs for the municipalities.

Green spaces in the city must be maintained. There is no way around it. This applies to public parks as well as to the spaces between apartment build-



From apple to sugar melon: the value of allotment gardens in providing home-grown food is inestimably large.

ings. Hedge and tree pruning and, for example, alternate plantings are very labour-intensive. Due to a lack of resources, their maintenance in public green spaces is cut back or limited to a few showpieces. Another point is the ecological maintenance of green spaces. Although it is on the rise in the municipalities, the corresponding training and further education of employees in public green space maintenance is still being developed. In the case of the green spaces of the housing associations, with sometimes generous lawns with play areas for children and also smaller herbaceous and woody plantings, on the other hand, a significantly higher utilisation by the residents would be conceivable, whether for recreational purposes or also for gardening.

Allotment gardens as a sustainable model for urban development

Let us move away from the idea of having to do everything ourselves. Who says that 100 percent of a public park has to be maintained by the city? Why not think about beneficial

cooperations from which many can benefit? Why not simply call on those who have gardening in their blood? Why not hand over responsibility for the green to those who want to use and maintain it?

Here it is worth taking a look at what allotment gardening is all about. For gardens already have a social value that goes far beyond private gardening and the garden fence.

The allotment garden movement: Model for social and environmental justice in cities

An estimated 5 million people of all ages with different financial, social and cultural backgrounds make use of the advantages of the allotment garden movement, which is protected by the federal allotment garden law: at a low rent they have access to affordable horticultural land and recreational space close to home.

Allotment garden associations and federations: self-organised and self-empowering

The non-profit-making clubs and associations are financed by small membership fees and are largely organised on a voluntary basis. The tasks involved are extremely varied and, depending on the allotment gar-

den structure, range from managing the change of tenants to administrative tasks and gardening advice. At the top of the list is the „ecologisation“ of the allotment garden sites and, of course, in the case of the federations, the political representation of interest.

Allotment gardening for self-growing

The purpose of allotment gardening is „non-profitable horticultural use“ taking into account the „interests of environmental protection, nature conservation and landscape management“. The value of allotment gardens for the supply of food should not be underestimated. If they know how, a small family can provide itself with healthy, ecologically produced food of local origin for almost the whole year by growing fruit, vegetables and herbs on a plot. It is certainly worthwhile to shed light on the advantages of this „form of small-scale agriculture“ – against the background of the abuses of the prevailing industrial agriculture that have become apparent.

Allotment gardens as a source of health

In addition to a healthy diet, there are other positive factors for human health, such as meaningful activity, physically varied gardening, recrea-



Community gardens in allotment sites invite to garden and trying new things - new contacts can be made along the way.



In allotment gardens, even the youngest find many possibilities to try new things and gather experiences of nature.

tion, belonging to a community and experiencing nature. When asked what else she should do for her health, an over 80-year-old extremely active allotment gardener with a passion was told by her family doctor „Keep doing what you're doing“.

Allotment gardens as ecological refuges and climatic compensation areas

It has been proven that a high diversity of flora, both cultivated and wild plants, and fauna can be found on the various areas used for gardening. In addition, allotment gardens contribute to climate protection, especially through the carbon storage of the humus-rich garden soil and provide a pleasant microclimate that can radiate into the neighbourhood and cool the city in hot summers. The unsealed areas are also important buffer zones during heavy rainfall.

Allotment garden associations as a social community

Allotment garden associations facilitate interpersonal encounters across otherwise separate population milieus and origins. This is also reflected in the higher proportion of people with

a migration background compared to the rest of society. People can also grow old in the gardens in community, at best healthy and happy, instead of isolated. Mutual help and learning from each other are part of everyday life and take on new forms today due to the change of generations, as is currently the case in the area of digitalisation.

Allotment garden associations as places of education and learning

Whether through organised free seminars and gardening advice, informally over the garden fence, the theme gardens and nature trails for the interested public or by means of diverse projects with schools, day-care centres and nature conservation associations. Education is very important in the allotment gardens. In addition, there is “learning by doing” both in gardening and in taking on honorary posts such as garden adviser or on the association board.

Cities and allotment gardens in transition

It is obvious: areas, also and especially in urban centres, are well used as allotment gardens and are valuable for society as a whole. The allotment garden movement offers a function-

ing dynamic model for multifunctional land use in cities! On top of that, the municipalities hardly incur any costs. This initial situation is remarkable and is unparalleled internationally. It is not uncommon for us here in Germany to be the envy of international guests and otherwise active leisure gardeners. Of course, all these positive aspects are not self-evident. The emergence of allotment gardening some 200 years ago and its continuous development is due to a large number of committed and far-sighted people.

The social challenges local authorities, urban and regional development are facing today are enormous and have reached new proportions. Allotment garden clubs and associations – like all other social groups – find themselves in the middle of these complex and urgent processes of change. Once again, the federations and associations are called upon to develop creative approaches to solutions. The commitment to even more biodiversity and climate protection, even more natural climate-friendly gardens as well as further low-threshold offers for the neighbourhood, e. g., through community gardens in allotment garden sites, have received an enormous boost in recent years and are promoted through seminars, ex-



In allotment gardens, education is very important: seminars, expert advice and diverse projects offer ongoing education opportunities.



pert advice and magazines of the associations and federations. However, when it comes to approaches such as the conversion and new construction of entire allotments, associations and societies reach their capacity limits. Such development potentials can only be exploited together with the local authorities and other partners and with sufficient funding, e. g., through appropriate incentive programmes.

It is clear that the allotment garden movement and its members have a lot to offer and are ready to actively help shape towns and communities in the future!

Whether a local allotment garden association expands its existing area by adding more plots, or allotment garden areas are newly created, the overall package is unbeatable in its multifunctionality and can be designed according to local needs and requirements:

Ecological and climate-friendly, diverse and attractively designed gardens and allotments, close to housing and within walking distance, are managed by the association with its members. The green spaces are a social meeting place in the urban district, inviting and open to the neighbourhood, and offer a variety of facilities such as community and theme gardens, environmental education, spaces to experience nature, playgrounds, seating areas and walking paths, all with flowing transitions to the surrounding public green spaces and as part of the urban biotope network.

At the same time, costs and efforts for municipalities are reduced and they can generate leasing income for large parts of the green space. In addition, the permanent and sustainable provision of the land and its management by local allotment garden organisations can create social infrastructure such as kindergarten, school, community or senior gardens. The social work in the neighbourhood is

then carried out in the allotment garden association as a sort of sideline.

So what is the point?

Strengthening the allotment garden movement at the local level. Allotment garden sites must be strengthened in a trusting, constructive and goal-oriented cooperation between politics, municipalities and associations as an integral part of a superordinate green system, for example through permanently established committees in the municipalities.

Allotment gardens as a fixed component of the urban planning portfolio.

Within environmentally sound urban planning, increasing importance is attached to improving the urban climate. Allotment garden sites would have to be taken into account even more and hopefully as a matter of course in the future in the design of green spaces or in open space, landscape and climate concepts for the whole city.

Create incentive programmes. Politicians must create programmes that explicitly aim at the further development of allotment garden sites according to needs. The focus should be on the expansion, development and conversion and the safeguarding of modern, ecologically oriented allotment garden sites.

Well-equipped allotment garden organisations. Professionalisation is the key word. Ambitious projects can hardly be realised on a voluntary basis and without financial resources. An

adequate membership fee structure of the allotment garden organisation and correspondingly committed staff, who also feel up to new challenges, are indispensable in order to be able to strike out in new directions. Not everything can be done in an honorary capacity.

Bringing along young academics. The numerous, high-quality contributions to the BDG Science Award 2023, which show that young academics have recognised the potential of allotment gardens, give cause for optimism.

Allotment gardens can be intelligently designed in future urban and regional planning as part of varied, attractive green spaces – which also incur low maintenance costs for the public – and contribute in a wide variety of areas to a more efficient use of the limited green and open spaces available in our cities, which is valuable for society as a whole. The design possibilities for allotment garden sites are manifold and can range from small plots, also used communally, between multi-storey flats to spacious allotment garden parks.

The will to break new ground is there. Many examples of allotment garden sites, e. g., from Berlin, Hamburg and Karlsruhe, bear witness to this – not least visible in the 26th Federal Competition Gardens in Urban Development. They make clear that it is worthwhile to think allotment gardens further and to consider urban and regional planning and allotment gardening as an overall package.

25th Federal Competition "Gardens in Urban Development" 2022

Last year 22 allotment garden sites from 15 federal states qualified for a place in the federal competition "Gardens in Urban Development" 2022. Together with the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Building, the BDG organises this competition "Gardens in Urban Development" every four years. In the summer of 2022, the jury had the difficult task of touring the allotment garden sites and exchanging views and evaluating the participants for the award of gold, silver and bronze. Apart from "Allotment gardens: urban green meets harvesting happiness" – the motto of the com-

petition – special attention was paid to the urban integration of the sites, the urban climatic function, environmental and nature conservation aspects as well as the civic commitment of the associations. In many of the municipalities participating in the competition it has been recognised that it is indispensable to promote and support the allotment garden movement in the current period of change. With their exemplary function, allotment garden sites have an impact on the whole region. They hold surprises and inspire. An excursion to at least one of the award-winning allotment garden sites is worthwhile and not at all difficult, as they are loosely distributed throughout the whole of Germany.

<https://kleingarten-bund.de/de/veranstaltungen/bundeswettbewerb/>

<https://kleingarten-bund.de/de/veranstaltungen/bundeswettbewerb/broschuere/>

Netherlands: About a necessary but rewarding process

Ans Hobbelink

Member of the Management board of AVVN and allotment gardener in Utrecht



As a garden park, why open and cooperate with the surrounding area?

There are many reasons why you might want to involve the area around an allotment park in your garden association.

Possibly it is too much work to manage the allotment gardens properly and helping hands are needed. Perhaps there are people outside the garden gate waiting to be of service. Lending a hand with chores or working in the garden. Or gardeners may not feel seen and known for their useful work for nature, biodiversity and healthy food in the outside world, because the association is too closed.

Another reason could be a lurking threat to the survival of the allotments. This could be a termination of a contract with the municipality or owner, because of other plans like housing development.

But the purpose of opening up a garden park will always be to maintain yourself as a garden association in the long term. Even better: revalorising an allotment site and association into a more highly valued place and organisation in an urban area.

What to do when pressure and threats increase?

There is growing pressure on open space in the Netherlands. The government wants a lot of new houses to be built in the Netherlands to be located within existing urban areas since the beginning of this century. Allotment gardens feel the pressure, unless their high social and environmental value.

The allotment association of Ons Buiten in Utrecht experienced a serious threat at the beginning of this century. The beautiful park had to disappear, houses should take the place of the ornamental allotments, the small an-

imal pasture, the vegetable gardens and of course also the gardeners. How could this association convince the city board of the importance for the urban environment? How could the board and the gardeners continue to garden in the place they had made so beautiful and natural together?

These were the main questions to find answers to.

They needed help. Fortunately, they were able to engage Wageningen University to conduct research.

How to become indispensable to the city and the municipality?

The researchers realised a participatory study together with gardeners, people from the neighbourhood and representatives of institutions such as the neighbourhood council, schools and AVVN. The leading question was: how to make ourselves indispensable



to the city and the municipality. This resulted in a manual that could lead to success in the next decade.

This happened in 2006.

Some 10 years later in 2016, a successfully operating partnership has been realised between Gardenpark Ons Buiten and the environment.

Many allotment parks in the Netherlands have since benefited from this process and this way of working. Even municipalities nowadays embrace this set-up to benefit from garden parks in the pursuit of more greenery and biodiversity in urban areas. Of course, it is important to be able to further tell this story to our European friends of the Federation. At the end of this article, there are useful places on the internet for more info.

How do you realise added value in the face of threats?

It is important to make a well-considered start.

To start a change process, it is important to be well organised internally. Keep in mind that your association's vision or organisational structure may need to be changed, to properly handle the desired future. Consult other similar initiatives, learn from others. Be flexible.

Consider these points:

- Formulate a clear need (e. g. at garden park Ons Buiten: "to stay here in the city we need to reinvent ourselves, otherwise houses will be built here").
- Examine the current functioning with the entire association (e. g. at Ons Buiten garden park a meeting was organised for members to express all criticisms, ideas and wishes, and very important: to be included in the plans)
- Draw up a vision (e. g. We want to mean something to the whole society as an association)
- Inform everyone about plans and developments (e. g. make newsletters and welcoming informational meetings)
- Structure the planned changes (make a plan of action, working groups, make the changes visible in an annual plan e. g.)
- Quickly take the first irreversible steps of achieved successes and quick wins (e. g. a new name: Tuinenpark Ons Buiten (= garden-park), local residents were allowed to use a vegetable garden, the animal pasture was expanded).
- Create informal meeting moments (e. g. organise a treasure hunt for children, organise a dinner for all interested persons, members and people from the neighbourhood).

Searching for a new and appropriate direction and role for the allotment site involve exploring their meaning

for the members and the people living and working in the neighbourhood.

If you want to cooperate with the environment, it is important to go through a number of steps to gain insight into changes you can make.

You can figure this out easily. Identify the qualities of your association and your garden park. Ask various people and institutions in your area what they think and want of your association and activities. Find out from the results what you have to do to meet the desired future image

In the case of Garden Park Ons Buiten, the following conclusion was drawn in summary: Many qualities but too closed to the outside. Needed were an inviting attitude and attention to the outside, openness, democracy and cooperation inside. It became clear that the social and ecological values of Tuinenpark Ons Buiten were not always fully appreciated or utilised. As members they were often not as welcoming as they could be. They felt they could offer more to the adjacent neighbourhood! But how to organise this in a successful way?

Social value in three layers: ecological, social and cultural.

Garden Park Ons Buiten organised the approach to innovations as follows.

A garden park's significance to society has an ecological, a social and a cultural level:

Ecology (such as environment, food quality, biodiversity, soil) forms the basis. It is important not only for the location itself, but also for the natural value and liveability of the city. On top of that, the social level (such as friendship, cooperation, desire to belong) develops. On top of the social we find the cultural layer (such as landscape elements, garden styles, artistic elements and an eye for beauty).



They made working groups into which the inventoried measures to be taken fitted logically:

- working group “green management”
- working group on accessibility and buildings
- working group “public and social activities”
- working group “communication”
- working group for purchasing and management

Concrete measures were many, sometimes small, sometimes far-reaching. Such as putting up signposting, recreational shared use borders, sensory garden for the elderly, making inviting signs, placing benches and picnic tables, getting rid of hedges or pruning them low, welcoming volunteers for the animal pasture, opening the clubhouse to organisations from the area,

organising activities for children, updating the clubhouse, offering services to the neighbourhood, renovating paths in the garden park, strengthening the ecology, add information about interesting plants and trees, inviting neighbours to take place in committees or board, information about do's and don'ts, resolving a conflict with a street, making a script for a film about this process on local TV, ensuring a dazzling presentation for the public and media.

Participants in working groups could sign up during meetings or were invited by fellow members. The delegates of the groups formed the steering committee. The chairman of the steering committee, also a board member, was the linking pin with the board and the proposed decisions in the General Assembly of Members. This set-up made it possible to continue the change process without disrupting normal board work. At the same time, it was possible to work on a change process internally in the association. Especially because a lot of members were active in the working groups.

After about 8 years, the work was completed and incorporated into the association's policy. Even after these years, the initiated process of change appeared to continue. To this purpose, the association uses the instrument of member consultation meetings. As soon as new policy proposals emerge, they are jointly discussed before decision-making takes place. This has led, for example, to an energy-neutral policy: green roofs, green lighting, solar panels, central water point, everything organic.

What should you pay attention to when creating added value?

A change process as described here can only succeed if the efforts are rewarding for all participating parties. Several forms of joint efforts with desired success are possible. Some examples show how to deal with this.

One of them is cooperation. During the process, Garden Park Ons Buiten started cooperation with two neighbouring garden parks, De Pioniers and Ecological Garden Park de Driehoek. They took measures for prevention and security together with the police and the municipality. This positively influenced the change process, as it strengthened trust for a good outcome.

A second way is to form a coalition. This means that two or more parties agree to work together to achieve a common desired outcome. It also means that together they are willing to compromise.

An example is the resolution of a conflict between the public strip on the north side of the park and the street located there. Both parties were mutually in discord on both sides of a small canal. The neighbours in the street were suffering from too much shade from tall trees and a messy appearance, while the gardeners were expe-





riencing disturbances due to children of neighbours appearing in their gardens too often. The municipality was aware of overdue maintenance and came to the rescue financially. Garden Park Ons Buiten started a project led by a landscaper. After an inspection on both sides, both parties appeared to agree 80 per cent and everyone was able to tackle the project. The discord disappeared into a beautiful collaboration. Some neighbours became active in the association and one neighbour even joined the board. To this day, residents help the association keep this now beautiful natural strip tidy. They say they are lucky to live there with the view of a beautiful park.

An important way of mutual benefit manifests itself in a contract. As mentioned, the municipality was planning to build houses on this site. During the period of change, the end date of the association's collective rent contract with the municipality was approaching. Fortunately, the interim successes had reached the municipal council

and the city council through successful PR, and the mood was in favour of retaining the garden park. In preparation of a new contract, the association, together with the other garden parks in the city and AVVN, pleaded for a longer contract than the then current 10 years. This succeeded with a contract of 2 x 10 years successively. In addition, the municipality, in cooperation with the allotments and the AVVN, provided a policy document that was officially adopted by the city council in 2012. A satisfying thought for the allotment holders that with the path taken, they were also able to secure contractual security.

Finally, the best part: celebrating the success achieved. It is now a tradition at Ons Buiten garden park: the annual Groenmoetjeden day with activities such as wheelbarrow races, open gardens, live music. It is a warm welcome for members, local residents and others. It is an urban day, so all visitors are welcome. Most times, some officials and political representatives come for a drink and a chat. Sometimes the association invites the mayor to mark a special event. We mention: the opening of the new chicken house, the birth of a goat, the adoption of an animal from the animal pasture, events with a nod to background interests. Informally connecting with each other and light-hearted networking makes many flowers bloom.

Result: Gardenpark Ons Buiten became indispensable for the neighbourhood.

- Ecological green management realized
- Created a meeting place and added value for the neighbourhood and allotment gardeners
- Anchored in networks and institutions
- Talents discovered, resources found and invested

- Improving the quality showed that more people are using and enjoying the park.
- **And the neighbourhood became indispensable for Gardenpark Ons Buiten**



Want to read more?

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Germany: The colony Wildkraut e. V.

Eco allotment without fences

Eva Foos

Researcher, Federal Association of German Garden Friends
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A shaded seating area invites to stay.



In the Berlin colony „Wildkraut“, the focus is on ecological and nature-oriented gardening.

Profile:

State/City: Berlin

Allotment garden site: Öko-Kolonie Wildkraut

Year founded: 2008

Area [ha]: 1.9

Of which garden area [ha]: 1.5

Community garden area [ha]: 0.5

Number of allotments: 45 plus communal compost area

Number of members: 45

Website plus Film: <https://www.kleingaertner-sind.net/kleingarten-anlagen/wildkraut/>

When in 2007 the area of a former tree nursery closed after reunification was offered to them by the district for the construction of a new allotment garden site, the answer of the then chairmen of the district federation in Berlin-Steglitz Ralf-Jürgen Krüger and Dr. Ullrich Sommer was: „Yes, but only ecologically!“. As if that was not enough, their vision was a facility without fences between the plots. The district agreed to the „experiment“.

The first impression this site gives is that of one large diversely designed garden with a pond, birds, frogs and insects, in which small, individually de-

signed arbours can be found here and there. This sight creates a very inviting character. But how did this extraordinary garden come about?

After intensive negotiation processes, the contract was concluded. The district exchanged the contaminated soil. The district association provided the water connections on the later

250-330 sqm plots; no electricity connection, no septic tanks.

There had to be 40 new tenants for the newly founded association to be viable. Some of the new tenants were convinced of the vision, others wanted a „normal“ allotment garden. In the beginning only 16 were willing to garden without fences. Thus, in one area of the site, plot fencing was allowed.

Mostly students, young families and people in their mid-forties from all over Berlin laid out their gardens and the surrounding greenery and built small arbours. Some still only use a

shelter or tool shed, others share an arbour.

It is clear that artificial fertilisers, chemical pesticides and peat are not used. The members of the association learnt about ecological and nature-oriented gardening in practice. Pioneering work, careful observation, good communication among themselves and exchange of experience were particularly important for the beginning.

To this day, one looks in vain for fences. With so much reclamation, the energy would have been lacking,

and with time, scepticism waned. Plot markings that are hardly visible from the outside are creatively designed, e. g., with berry bushes and pavement slabs. The gardeners agree that without fences and with history, people get closer and learn a lot from each other.

They encourage other communities and allotment garden associations to set out to establish eco-allotment garden sites. It is important not to set the standards too high, to let people make their own experiences and to bring along a lot of tolerance and patience. If you are interested, just get in touch! It's worth it!

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