

Seminar of the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux

Conclusions

Ghent (Belgium) from September 7th till September 9th, 2009

Statement

From 7th to 9th September 2009, 116 participants from 11 national federations discussed the issues of a sustainable ecologic use of allotment gardens in a seminar of the OFFICE INTERNATIONAL du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux a.s.b.l. organized in Ghent (Belgium).

Special attention was given to apple and vegetable species as well as to the global environmental issues with regard to current market conditions.

After the various specific lectures, two workshops discussed the following subjects:

- 1 How can allotment gardeners become the ambassadors of environmental protection?
- 2 The future of the allotment gardens

These discussions offered the opportunity to show (based on a variety of practical examples) how allotment gardeners can meet the existing requirements. The presented ideas and suggestions are future-oriented and show the way of how allotment gardeners can contribute to a sustainable environmental policy.

The seminar also allowed preparing the international congress planned for 2011 in Copenhagen.

The following summary of the outcome of the seminar provides the current findings, which will be used as a basis to further develop a future-oriented concept for allotment gardens.

The participants of the seminar declare to implement these findings in their federations.

Work group I : In what way can allotment gardeners be ambassadors for environmental protection?

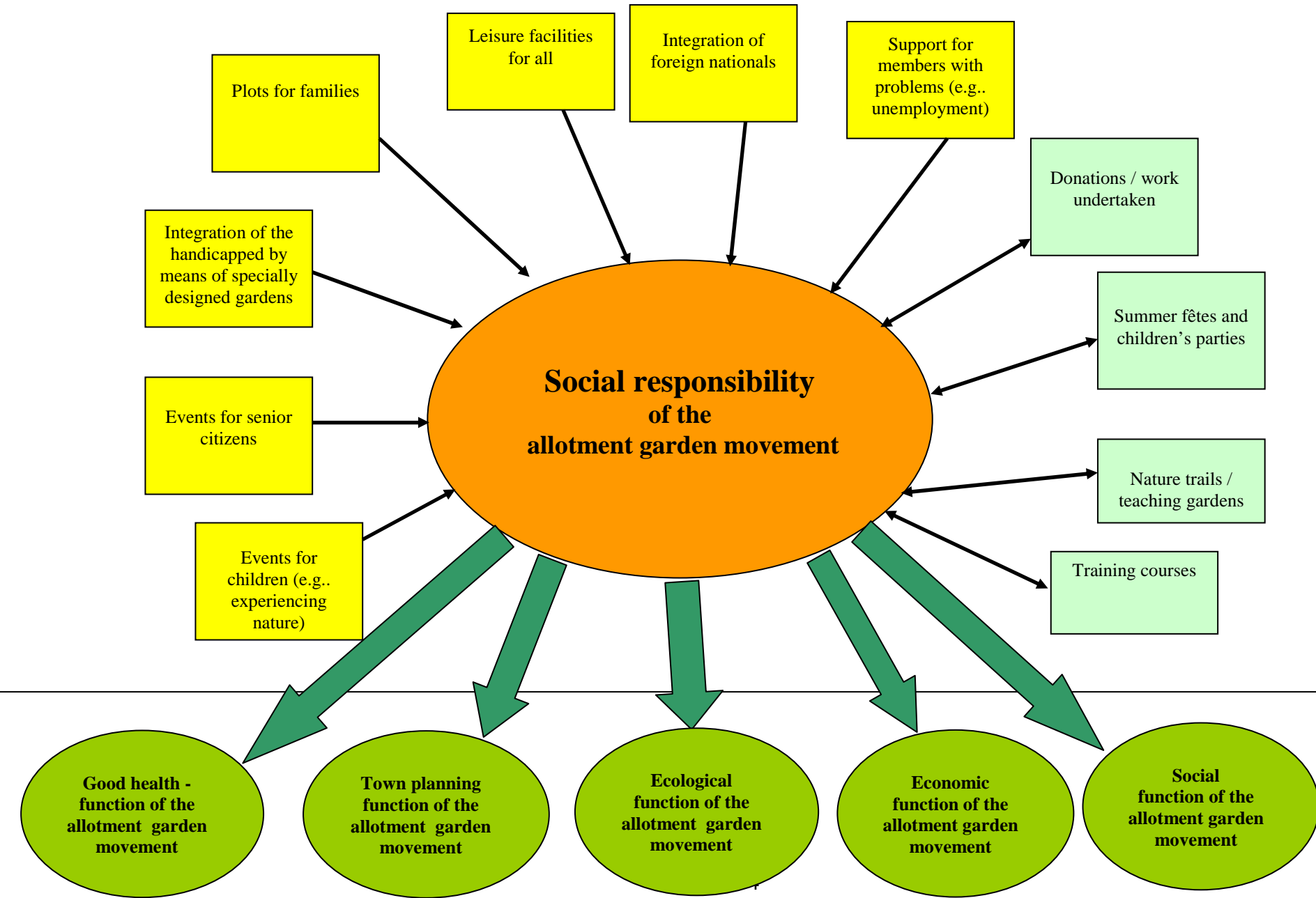
Dr. Norbert Franke

- The participants in the Seminar noted that -- in addition to the manifold social activities carried out within the allotment garden movement -- all the leagues believe that the conservation of nature and the environment is one of the movement's major functions and activities.

The Seminar participants cited various convincing examples of the crucial role played by the allotment garden movement not only in the protection and conservation of flora and fauna, but also in the field of climate protection.

- Representatives from six countries joined in the discussion of this topic, commented on it and provided examples from their homelands.
- Participants agreed that the allotment garden movement had many different functions; they supported the chairman in his evaluation of their importance, both inside and outside the movement.

The contributors to the discussion confirmed the fact that the allotment garden organisations in the various countries shared identical views on the ten aspects of the social responsibility of the allotment garden movement displayed in the graphic -- even if they did assume different forms in each country.



- Under the heading “**Do good and tell the world**”, the following points were emphasised:
 - Allotment gardeners make all kinds of contributions to society.
 - The allotment movement is making an impact both internally and externally.
 - More and continuous publicity is to be given to the achievements of the allotment garden movement.
 - These achievements are to be made known to politicians and public authorities – forming the basis for both requests and demands.

- Allotments are an essential part of society; this statement of a basic principle must be written into the programme of every league.

The discussion moved on to a second stage, in which issues concerning the protection of nature and environment were expanded to include the ecological function of the allotment garden movement.

The main ways in which the allotment garden movement serves the countries are as follows:

Ecological function

- ✓ **Protection of nature and environment**
- ✓ **Upkeep of public green spaces**
- ✓ **Green zones in urbanised districts**
- ✓ **Conservation of biodiversity**
- ✓ **Protection of older species**
- ✓ **Refugium for flora and fauna**
- ✓ **Centres for the ‘green water’ cycle**

During the discussion, the representatives of the countries provided illustrations of the problems dealt with by the Seminar and suggested ways in which some of the ideas might be put into practice (projects).

Here are some of the points that were stressed in this context:

- Belgium
 - Allotments are very important in urbanised areas.
 - Green spaces should be accessible to everyone.

- Austria
 - Work on a project on pesticides, whereby only those who can prove they are knowledgeable about pesticides should be able to use them.
 - Common areas in the form of flowering meadows on which bees can be kept. (Consultations between German and Austrian experts on this topic would be a good opportunity for cooperation.)

- The Noah's Ark Project to form a centre for the preservation of older species of plants.
(Plant collection)
- France
 - There is a need for education and training, as these are important in preventing the mishandling of land (no application of pesticides).
 - Continued cooperation with local authorities is an essential factor in the long-term safeguarding of plots of land.
- Germany
 - Nature trails and teaching gardens not only help to protect nature and the environment, they also educate people of all generations (especially the young).
 - The Biodiversity Project (which found that German allotments are home to 2094 different plant species).
 - The annual Day of the Garden is a show which both celebrates allotment gardeners' achievements and demonstrates their dedication to ecology.
- Poland
 - The fight to safeguard the allotment movement has been successful.
 - The federation believes its main task lies in undertaking considerable efforts to protect nature and the environment.
 - The integration of allotments into urbanised areas is an important measure with regard to environmental protection and town planning.
- Luxemburg
 - Environmental protection is one of the chief tasks facing allotment gardeners.
 - If fruit and vegetables are grown on allotments and consumed within the family, this will greatly ease the burden on the environment. There will, for instance, be savings in the field of transportation (and all that this involves).
 - International Day of the Garden in Bremen – new and much-needed attempt to publicise the achievements of the allotment garden movement.

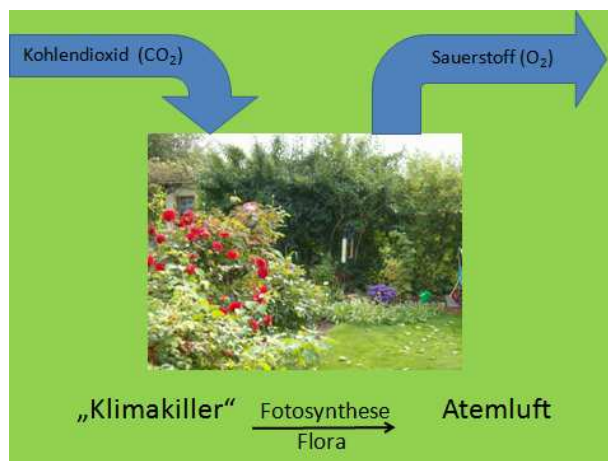
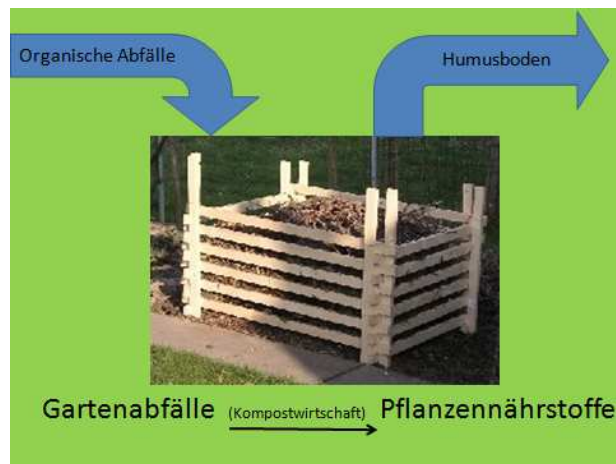
In a third stage of the discussions, the Seminar participants stressed that the ecological function of allotments was becoming increasingly tied up with the protection of natural resources.

It is important to emphasise the fact that the roughly 2.5 million allotment gardeners in Europe not only do good work in protecting flora and fauna, but they also treat natural resources with respect, and use them economically.

This concerns in particular:

- water (green water cycle)¹⁾
- soil (composting)
- air (oxygen production).

Politicians and the public authorities should be made aware of this good use of resources.



¹⁾ Water cycle with the help of flora

[Key to the pictures on the previous page:]

[Picture 1:]

Organische Abfälle = Organic waste
Humusboden = Humus soil
Gartenabfälle = Garden waste
Kompostwirtschaft = Composting
Pflanzennährstoffe = Plant nutrients

[Picture 2:]

Regen = Rain
Pflanzennahrung = Plant nutrients
Sprengwasser = Sprinkler water
Regenwasserauffang = Collecting rain water
Erhalt der Wasserressourcen = Conservation of water resources

[Picture 3:]

Kohlendioxid = Carbon dioxide
Sauerstoff = Oxygen
“Klimakiller” = “Climate killer”
Fotosynthese = Photosynthesis
Flora = Flora
Atemluft = The air we breathe

The protection of these natural resources must become an increasingly important goal for the allotment garden movement, which means that greater efforts have to be made

- to bring this issue to the public’s attention.

In future, the allotment garden movement must, at the same time, adjust its programmes and goals to reflect the fact that

- allotment gardeners preserve the climate.

This fact must be mirrored in specific projects.

The Seminar concluded with an important summing-up:

We must do more to publicise the achievements of the allotment gardeners in the outside world and use these achievements as a basis for our requests and demands – in all the countries.

Work group II : the allotment garden of the future

Mag. Sylvia WOHATSCHEK

1. Attention should be paid to the fact that on one hand the land on which there are allotment gardens will be maintained and on the other hand that new land will be used to set up more allotment gardens.
2. We allotment gardeners should be a role-model for future generations of allotment gardeners.

Three main points should be underlined:

- a. We have to transfer our values to future generations to maintain the community.
 - b. We have to show new allotment gardeners how to grow vegetables and flowers in their own allotment gardens.
 - c. We have to work hand in hand with educational institutions to introduce the youngest members of our society to the pleasure of working in nature.
3. We have to pay attention that our movement remains attractive for young people in the future.
 4. We can achieve this, for instance, through active PR work. Public Relations are of course also a means to convince the public, as well as the politicians, of our ideas.
 5. We all agreed that the diversity of garden designs should be maintained. Eventually everyone – of course respecting the community – should be able to use his garden as he wishes. It is irrelevant, whether the focus is on growing vegetables, flowers or any other purpose. Moreover, the economic situation as well as health and environmental considerations will determine what will grow in the allotment garden.
 6. The last point is that it is absolutely necessary to convince young people to take mandates in our associations and federations. They have to receive proper training so they are ready to carry out these functions. Only if future generations are ready to take responsibility, allotment gardens will have a future.