

Allotments: An unavoidable element for the town development

On 5th September, 2015, the delegates have at the occasion of their 27th general assembly in Rostock adopted with unanimity the position paper “Kleingärten: Nachhaltige Stadtentwicklung muss grün sein”, (Allotments: a sustainable town development has to be green)

This is a document, which authorities, stakeholders, planners, partners, decision makers..... should read carefully not only in Germany, but all over Europe. The statements in this text apply in fact to all the allotment federations affiliated to the International Office du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux.

This important text is joined as appendix.

Position paper of the German allotment garden federation (BDG) adopted during the 27th federation general assembly in Rostock on 5th September, 2015

Allotment gardens: A sustainable town planning must be green

Urban green spaces are synonymous with quality of life. To make a town, city or region a dynamic place to be, it needs a sufficient amount of green space. This is because green spaces create an attractive way of life and leisure activities, as well as economic and cultural spaces, today and for generations to come.

From food producer to the forefront of sustainability

Already two centuries ago, allotment gardens allowed citizens to grow their own produce, to have access to nature and to relax every day. Since then, the community of allotment gardeners has adapted constantly to the changing conditions of society. It is open to new influences and new challenges, without necessarily giving into every passing craze. If the growing of vegetables to make sure families don't go hungry was the first goal of allotment gardens, the quest for more nature, light, air and greenery has rapidly become one of the first motivating factors for allotment gardeners.

Whilst the latter used to aim for the biggest returns possible, the emphasis today is placed not only on the pleasure of gardening and relaxing in nature, but also on the quality of the produce. Specialist gardening advice on allotment gardens allows everyone to get the best out of their patch by teaching the allotment gardeners the rules of environmental protection and sustainability. Because of this, amateur gardeners have an almost avant-garde side to them. They have all known for a very long time that only a garden managed in a sustainable fashion can bear healthy produce. That is why an amateur gardener, who benefits from the best advice from his or her association and federation and is aware of the necessity of an ecological behaviour, will always put sustainability at the centre of his or her actions.

To make sure the environment remains intact, every citizen must be responsible for his or her immediate surroundings. Because of this, the German allotment garden federation (BDG) puts an even stronger emphasis on the ecological valorisation of allotment gardens and on a nature friendly gardening. Broadly speaking, this means restoring, conserving and improving the soil's fertility; giving up the use of man-made chemical fertilizers; growing healthy and high quality vegetables for personal consumption; stimulating and developing biodiversity in gardens; rejecting plants, micro-organisms and other products that have been genetically modified; growing more "old" plants and species; using less polluting raw materials and restoring the fairly closed cycle of nutritional substances, and finally limiting any interference with and the pollution of water and soil. Allotment gardeners are committed to protecting the environment and nature and preserving the countryside. Allotment gardens will in this way continue to represent the most sustainable and reliable method of urban gardening.

The green oases in the community: the role of allotment gardens

The users of allotment gardens have been fighting successfully the environmental challenges facing towns and cities for a long time. For decades, they have been developing and maintaining knowledge of natural gardening. In a world more and more dominated by an agricultural industry that uses more and more land and that turns exclusively towards increasing revenue and monoculture, allotment garden associations are amongst the rare defenders of a way of growing that is in harmony with nature; true founts of knowledge for generations to come.

In this way, allotment gardens constitute an essential part of urban green spaces, especially in town centres. They promote biodiversity and improve the microclimate of residential areas. Furthermore, the towns, with often precarious finances, do not even need to contribute financially towards maintaining this part of urban green spaces. On the contrary, allotment garden associations mean not only that those towns do not have to fund the maintenance of public green spaces, but they offer them a source of extra income by the rent paid by the allotment gardeners.

Additionally, all gardens constitute an essential part of social life: they allow residents of towns and cities to do meaningful leisure time activities in nature. They are a green corner that is accessible to all. They are a natural experience – in the centre of town. Residents who are not members of the local allotment garden association also benefit from the positive effects of the allotment gardens: thanks to various projects, many allotment garden associations also have an impact on the social life of neighbouring residential areas – this could be through teaching children and teenagers about the environment, as a meeting space for neighbours, as a playground, a local place to relax, etc. In these times of a deteriorating social life, many allotment garden associations make so an important contribution to social cohesion, to bringing different parts of society together and integrating various groups. In this way, allotment gardens are the link between environmental sustainability and social cohesion in urban areas, as well as an integral, green and social part of local infrastructure and, in this respect, a supplier of quality of life.

Allotment gardens as part of “green” town planning politics

The topic of “green spaces” is currently experiencing renewed enthusiasm on a political level. For more than 15 years, sustainable town planning has been a key part of development law in Germany and interlinks economic, environmental and social aspects. Genuine local players, allotment gardeners continue to contribute more and more to the realisation of future towns, and therefore contribute, thanks to their gardens, to a sustainable urban development from a social and environmental viewpoint. In fact, when you talk about “social towns” and “more green space in towns and cities”, you cannot fail to mention allotment gardens. All responsible politicians must have the necessary regional development of allotment garden sites as an objective.

The future of the BDG in “green” town planning

The BDG is the naturally of all federations and organisations working towards more ecology and nature in towns and cities. In this respect, we must support each other even more. In fact, it is only by joining forces that we will be able to sustainably fight against any other use of allotment garden sites close to people’s homes in the thriving town centres.

At the same time, it is necessary to improve communication with town planners. All too often, allotment gardens are of no interest to young landscape planners and land management professionals. This is less related to refusal than to ignorance. Changing this attitude is a major challenge in the coming years, a challenge that the BDG cannot lead without the help of its member federations. Today and tomorrow, we must first of all reinforce the network of everyone involved in town planning, ranging from students up to local decision makers, in order to influence and improve the image of allotment gardens, so that they finally get the place they deserve.

Supporting a green infrastructure

Our aim is that, in the future, allotment gardens can remain accessible to all areas of society. Together with our allies, we lobby for a sufficient number of allotment gardens. Modern town planning politics should not consider concrete, glass and asphalt as the only infrastructure. Rather, they should consider at the same time an adequate and balanced development of green spaces.

To this end, we express our concrete expectations of the decision makers from the point of view of the federation and the *Länder*.

- Going forwards, in cases of large infrastructure programmes linked to town planning, the development of green spaces and allotment gardens must be explicitly mentioned as one of the possible measures. It is only in this way that allotment garden sites will be able to continue developing to meet needs.
- Particularly in areas of high demographic growth, reworking the compensation mechanism offers new opportunities for the whole of town planning. If allotment garden sites that are sustainably valued from an environmental viewpoint, are recognised as an area of balance and compensation, then that will allow the demands of humans, nature and town planning to be reconciled.

It is only when these demands are met that allotment gardens will be able to meet their purpose as part of social and environmental infrastructure in the future. The German allotment garden federation therefore focuses all its activities on preserving and developing land dedicated to allotment gardens in urban areas, as well as on the slow and controlled adjustment, together with all stakeholders in areas, where needs are changing.