

AGENDA 21: Process in the allotment garden movement

1st part

Theses

1. Allotment gardens are by their social, ecological and urbanistic functions forming an integral part of the long-term development of housing areas in the sense of the Agenda 21. It is the desire of governments, states and communities to maintain and develop this characteristic, as it is the wish of allotment garden organizations. The allotment garden movement has to adapt its offers to the social evolution and changes in order to keep its place.
2. The contemporary city and the city of the future may not be envisaged without gardens. This statement of contemporary urbanistic planning has to provide for sufficient space for allotment gardens.
3. Allotment gardens provide special adventure worlds for children and adolescents; they favour their physical and mental development, create awareness for nature and the environment, forge their personality and influence their behaviour throughout their entire life. They are therefore an essential element of nature-oriented education and the creation of awareness.
4. For the culture in allotment gardens preference should be given to ecological principles in relation with integrated plant protection and a consistent application thereof. The plants in an allotment garden area should provide for a maximum of diversity in local species while maintaining fruit and vegetable culture. Expert advice therefore becomes increasingly important.
5. Ecological oriented culture of allotment gardens and their environment furthers, in connection with an efficient advisory support, the continuous education and creation of awareness of adults inside and outside the allotment garden organization.
6. The positive impact on health of garden work should be highlighted, acknowledged and valorised accordingly throughout the public.
7. The integrative effect of allotment garden associations in the social domain is of increasing importance given the conditions of current changes in society.
8. The activities deriving from the principles stated in Agenda 21 take for granted the organizational operation of allotment garden associations and federations. Without a good functioning, it is not possible to carry out specific association activities.
9. Communes have the obligation to set up local agendas. Allotment gardeners

would like to be included into this process and participate, in a consensus, in all local initiatives.

Status regarding Agenda 21

The Agenda 21, decided upon by the Conference of the United Nations for Environment and Development in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro focuses on the necessity of a long term development in current and future economic, ecological and social objectives regarding the evolution of human society.

Ideas in this regard are based on the necessity for the current population living and working on this planet to have the obligation towards future generations to not negatively impact their perspectives for a high quality of life.

The movement of allotment gardens, too has the task to widely communicate and put into practice the ideas of long-term evolution in its domain. In this context, successes already obtained and provable in the ecological domains should be further developed and adapted to new requirements and social aspects as well as urbanistic aspects should receive more consideration.

Of a total of 40 chapters of the original document of the Agenda, at least 10 allow a direct link to the movement of allotment gardens and fall under the social, ecological and urbanistic functions of this movement. To the social aspects correspond such domains as child and adolescent work (chapter 25), promotion of school education, public awareness (chapter 36), protection and promotion of human health (chapter 6), increased role of non-governmental organizations (chapter 27) and initiatives of communes to support the Agenda 21 (chapter 28). The ecological questions which are relevant for the allotment gardener relate to chapters 14, 15 16c and 18 with priorities given to a long-term agriculture, biologic diversity, increased protection of the environment and protection of water resources.

Chapter 7 (promotion of a long-term development of housing areas) leads to reflections regarding the objectives of allotment garden areas in the European cities and communes, too.

The still important social functions of the allotment garden movement derive from these premises.

The indescribable living conditions in housing plots of the founding years lead to the creation of the allotment garden movement. A main element of the founding activities was the desire to provide free space for children and adolescents to favour their healthy physical and mental development. Even under the currently changed social conditions this aspect remains of importance.

Allotment gardens are still forming an oasis for children where they can play, stimulate their five senses and develop them, when they can discover the (garden)

world and experience the change in time of the day and of the seasons and their impact on plants and animals. They learn about climatic conditions and their

influence on humans and nature, the mutual dependency of living and non-living nature as well as about ecological relations. The garden provides the knowledge that the production of food is hard work, requires objectives and patient waiting (evolution cycle of plants), that there are risks (pesticides) and cycles (compost) and that natural resources (earth, water, air) are not replaceable or substitutable.

There are many more possibilities. Allotment garden associations and federations provide educational gardens, receive pupils, support and organize competitions of school gardens, offer biotopes of the most various kinds for observation, learning, teaching and analysing purposes.

Educational paths serve to communicate knowledge and thus further the creation of awareness even for adults.

It is acknowledged that regular physical activity prevents the impact of modern lifestyle on health. In addition to the proposition of popular sport activities, gardening can also be beneficial.

The garden is without doubt an open-air and sun-tanning fitness opportunity adapted to any age with positive impacts on the physical and mental health of allotment gardeners.

Fruit and vegetables produced in the allotment gardens favour a healthy nutrition and can contribute significantly to discharge the household budget.

Part 2

Ecological oriented ideas are not new to today's allotment gardeners. Allotment garden areas have lead to many initiatives and activities, which increasingly favour an environmentally correct gardening. Intensive advice on all levels of the organization has contributed to achieve this. The objective is not a "back to nature" statement but rather should the scientific acknowledgments be put into practice.

The characteristics that are important for growing plants and a long-term use of the soil are the respect of resources (protection of soil, water, air and safe-guard of production grounds) and the maintenance of the diversity of species.

The marks of ecological gardening (multiple use of soil, refusal to use chemical and synthetic pesticides and manure, low quantities of manure on the basis of analyses of nutritive substances, organic manure and vegetables as source of nitrate, use of mechanical and physical measures to fight against weeds and damaging organisms) are the characteristics, that serve as an orientation for cultivation of an allotment garden.

The dramatic regression of plant and animal species in current times confronts everyone who is interfering with the natural cycles, with the question about the possibilities he has to act against this evolution. The diversity, which can be obtained in the framework of allotment gardens with recommended garden plants is far from being exhausted. In a mixed culture, according to the example of an agricultural

garden, close to nature, ecological or even biological, this should be the vision of the allotment garden of the future.

The positive impacts of flowers and plants of many different species, be they culture or wild, as the premises of a rich fauna are supported by artificially set up living areas (biotopes) as for instance old wood, dead wood, stones, humid areas, ivy walls and pergolas, nesting opportunities for animals and hibernation possibilities of any type. In this context, the main principle should be that a larger biotope makes more sense ecologically speaking than several small ones.

Using this and many other possibilities does not mean that allotment garden areas should be considered in future as protected nature areas. Gardens should still be in accordance with the individual expectations of their users. A family garden is and should be laid out differently than the garden of an elderly person. A garden only intended for growing vegetables will not correspond to the vision of a lover of nature. Soil and water protection are strongly related to the question of using manure and plant protection. Regular standard soil analyses and the use of manure, based on a nutritional survey, are therefore continuous and unavoidable elements.

Refusing to use easily solvable manure and turf, achieving soil improvement by preferring compost, soil covering, an adequate culture planning and green manure is most important for an environmentally correct manure strategy.

These measures as well as an additional watering in accordance with the actual needs are also a major contribution to the protection of underground water.

The allotment and leisure garden offers the unique possibility to cultivate by a deliberately chosen method in respect to the environment healthy fruit and vegetables for the domestic consumption.

The plant protection measures applied in the leisure garden follow the principles of the integrated plant protection.

This means that the leisure gardener uses first all preventive plant protection measures as f. ex. optimal fertilization and adapted plant varieties, mixed cropping and careful crop rotation with the aim to avoid as much as possible the use of pesticides.

The careful choice of plants especially for fruit and vegetables is very important for the preventive plant protection. Resistant species and adapted varieties (local climate and soil structure) have to be preferred. These environmentally adapted measures for plant protection will be completed by the use of predators and plant fortifying products as well as by use of cultivation nets and tissues.

Associations and clubs, as a community of persons with the same objectives, interests and activity fields, and thus also allotment garden associations, are best positioned to set up agenda plans, to group them and to carry them out.

From the committees this will require an extensive and continuous information, promotional and motivation work.

It is appropriate in this context to set up an action plan on the basis of an analysis of the current situation in the activity field with a sound vision for the future and to have these plan and vision approved by the members of the association.

Agenda projects may and should involve as much members as possible, if not all of them, and require their participation. Only in this case will they correspond to the spirit of the agenda 21. In order to achieve this objective the association will have to increase its implication in a significant way.

The concept of the "local agenda", requests from the communes to make a concrete contribution for the long-term development. In a first step this allows to direct the abstract aim of "long-term development" to specific aims in the communal and political fields, with measures and projects. Allotment gardeners are requested to participate in this process. The aim of this participation is to coordinate and realize their objectives and initiatives in a consensus with other organizations, the economy, administration and politics. One fact they can be sure of in their efforts and offers is:

That there is no such field in communal objectives, which is not directly or indirectly related to the movement of allotment gardens. There should be no fear of physical contact but rather an offer towards close cooperation and a request for help and support. The activities in this field will eventually, in the strict and in the large sense, serve the implementation of the social goal of the allotment garden movement: "green space for everyone".

Garden and association work as well as benevolent work provide many and multiple integration possibilities for all levels of the population, from children to single parent families, unemployed, elderly people and foreigners.

The city cannot be imagined without gardens. This statement of current urbanistic planning has to include allotment gardens. This requires that allotment gardens are located close to housing plots and that any attempts for the conversion of such surfaces should be energetically fought against.

Allotment gardens have a fixed place in the process of a long-term urban development but they have to adapt to the changing society as well as to concurrent tendencies and other leisure offerings by remaining flexible and reactive in order to insure their continuity and role in this society.