

# Agenda 21 and Allotment Gardens

by Dr. sc. Achim Friedrich

## Protecting and promoting human health (Chapter 6)

It is a known fact that regular physical exercise tends to counteract the negative effects that modern lifestyles have on our health. We can get this exercise by engaging in a sport activity and we can also get it by working in the garden. Doing light gardening work for an hour is equivalent to walking for thirty minutes and it burns off 160 - 190 calories ( GUTZWILLER).

BYRNE emphasises "that daily light exercise helps to prevent heart disease". The mental effects of gardening work are no less positive than the physical effects. Gardening work is becoming increasingly important as a form of therapy for mental diseases.

NEUBERGER notes on this score: "In understanding gardening work both as work and as a therapy the underlying assumption is that working with plants and getting exercise outdoors is good for people.

According to polls taken by the Allensbach Institute 45% of the people interviewed indicated that they keep fit by doing gardening work.

SCHMIDBAUER sums up his study of the health-related value of nature and greenery as follows: "Experiencing nature can resocialise criminals, heal the mentally ill, and prevent neuroses. This is why gardening therapy has been developed in major cities of the United States."

Without a doubt allotment gardens are age-appropriate workout rooms and tanning studios at the same time.

This is very important, given that allotment gardeners are among the older members of our population and, as such, tend to be more susceptible to health problems.

With this in mind, let us look at a further health-promoting or health-preserving aspect of garden work: the consumption of fruit and vegetables.

The agricultural crisis caused by the BSE and FMD epidemics has raised consumer awareness levels. The experience that food produced in one's own garden is fresher and tastes better than what is sold at supermarkets is added to by the knowledge that food from supermarkets can be dangerous to your health. Seen from this standpoint there is no alternative to producing fruit and vegetables in one's own garden.

Allotment gardens are of considerable importance in health policy terms, a fact that is currently not perceived clearly enough by the public.

# Strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations (Chapter 27)

Clubs and associations made up of persons sharing the same objectives, interests, and areas of activity, such as allotment garden clubs, have the best prerequisites for formulating, combining and implementing agenda projects. A large amount of information, advertising, and translation work has to be done in this connection.

As a rule, this work is done by the club officers. They are the ones whose volunteer activity fills the life of the club with content and it is their duty to deal with club-specific problems. It makes sense in this connection to analyse the current situation and, on the basis of that analysis, to formulate an objective with an accompanying plan of action and to have it approved by a meeting of the members. Approval of a decision of this kind is necessary, since implementation of the decision will not be based on initial enthusiasm for something new, but rather require a considerable amount of self-discipline. Once this step has been taken the process of practical implementation can begin with the formation of working groups.

The Agenda process will only be successful if it focuses first and foremost on the internal problems of allotment garden clubs and associations.

As a rule the Agenda process takes place in three stages:

1. Measures in one's own garden/on one's own field.
2. Measures taken at the club level.
3. Measures of importance at the local authority level.

An effort must be made right away to stop people from being in awe of the word "Agenda". The best thing to do is to provide practical examples. When biotopes such as ponds, deadwood piles, rock piles, hedges, wildflower meadows, various nesting opportunities, pathway greenery, etc. are recognised as Agenda-type measures, then a great deal will have been accomplished, since these things already exist in many gardens.

More extensive projects that will affect all the club members require a situation analysis.

Important questions are, for instance:

- How effective is the advisory service?
- How do we deal with resources (e.g. electricity, humus)?
- What is the makeup/condition of the soils?
- What is the condition of surface water and ground water?
- How high is the percentage of land covered by buildings and pavement?
- How large are the near-natural habitats?
- How high is the percentage of native trees and ornamental shrubs?
- What contribution do our gardens/complexes make to the network of biotopes?
- What is the communication like between older people and younger people?
- What means of transport are used to get to the allotment garden complex?
- What recreational value does our allotment garden complex have for the rest of the local population?

- What is communication like between the club and the rest of the local population?

It is obvious that the potential constituted by a large number of club members is needed to answer these questions, to draw the necessary conclusions, and then to implement the conclusions.

With regard to advisory services, for instance, it is evident that advisers may have trouble giving satisfactory answers to all the questions thrown at them, given the

complexity of the subject matter and how much is known about it today. It would make sense to have specialists available who could give advice on fertilisation needs based on soil analyses, specialists for plant protection, as well as specialists for the selection of site-appropriate plant species and varieties.

The question arises as to whether or not it might be appropriate to have a joint compost pile in the interest of ensuring correct composting. The question also arises as to whether or not inexperienced newcomers should be taught the basics of gardening before they get started?

There are doubtless other things that could be added to this list which would also show that clubs are assuming an increasingly important role in addressing the problems associated with implementing the Agenda objectives.

The literature origins can be asked for [at the secretariat of the International Office](#).

## **Local authorities' initiatives in support of Agenda 21 (Chapter 28)**

Special importance attaches to local authorities in Agenda 21. The „local Agenda 21“ concept calls upon local authorities to make their contributions towards sustainable development. The initially abstract objective of achieving „sustainability“ is focused on concrete local objectives, measures, and projects. In this way local authorities promote sustainable development as a key element of their ecological, economic, and social development.

The prerequisite for this is broadly based and result-oriented public involvement (consultation process) aimed at the development, definition, and implementation of a binding local authority action programme. Management of this process is the task of the local communities.

There are now f. ex. nearly 1,700 local authorities in Germany that have approved a decision to formulate local strategies for sustainable development ( Nitschke). The allotment gardening clubs and associations need get involved in these processes. They would need to coordinate their ideas and objectives with those of other initiatives from local government, administration, industry, and other organisations. This will not always be a smooth process.

The activities undertaken by all the parties concerned should always be focused on the objective of reaching a consensus.

In the context of their efforts and activities allotment gardeners can be certain of one thing: there is no area of local authority activity that does not affect the allotment gardening sector in one way or another. There is no need for them to be shy. They should offer their assistance or ask for support.

The activity of leaseholders makes allotment garden complexes more attractive for the gardeners themselves, for future leaseholders, as well as for the local population in general. It also makes these complexes more environmentally friendly. Their treatment as permanent facilities and the possible creation of new facilities is now an interest of urban development planning and is no longer a frequent object of schemes aimed at getting rid of those located in inner city areas with as little conflict as possible.

The creation of allotment garden parks should also be a subject of discussion in this context.

Garden art and landscape architecture could provide impetus and motivation for new trends and focuses. In the end the local community would become more liveable and lovable for its citizens and would move a step closer to achieving the objective of being a people-friendly city.

## Final remarks

When we note that in Germany only about 13% of the population knows what the word "sustainability" means, and that in other European countries the percentages aren't likely to be very much different, then the size of the task being faced by allotment garden organisations, among others, becomes apparent. Many might want to throw up their hands in despair in view of the obstacles and problems that have to be dealt with. The measures aimed at achieving sustainable development require that people develop a greater sense of awareness, and that they change or give up established behaviour patterns and practices, including consumer behaviour. Are plans and objectives of this kind merely visions and dreams?

Let me respond to this question with a quote from German perennial breeder and garden philosopher Karl Förster: „Those who want to realise their dreams have to be more awake and to dream more deeply than others“.

The literature origins can be asked for [at the secretariat of the International Office](#).