

# Office International

du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux a. s. b. l.



## Innovative projects on Europe's allotments

Allotments

extremely valuable

grossly underestimated

shockingly unknown



Allotments: extremely valuable, grossly underestimated, shockingly unknown

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*We want to show you what we want, what we can do  
and what we do in the areas of:*

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# Foreword

Parks, private gardens and allotments belong to our history and our culture. For more than 200 years, the allotments also have shaped our cityscape. The allotment gardeners do not garden in a vacuum. They influence the quality of life. They are part of society.

Born out of the need to provide the people with food and rest, the allotments have adapted themselves to the development of society. Their popularity trend fluctuates with urban requirements.

Once they were displaced to the edge of the cities, when the cities developed rapidly to meet the demographic explosion. Then their value was again appreciated as the environmental protection idea, the need for a healthy diet, good interpersonal relationships, a higher quality of life etc. came again to the forefront and people were looking for space to establish them again „intra muros“.

The allotments have taken into account both the fact that in urban areas grounds have become rare and expensive, and the ever-growing trend of gardening. New forms of gardens have been developed to meet new desires. Sometimes ridiculed and cartoonized, the fewest people know what allotments really stand for, what a great deal of expertise the allotment gardeners have, what they do for society, nature and the environment and what innovative projects are realized on the sites.

They do not know what a great space the garden represents for personal fulfilment and self-realization, for communication between people and generations, and which world of adventure and experience it offers for all.

They do not realize that, in addition to their societal, integrative and social functions, the gardens also positively



• Malou WEIRICH  
• Secretary general of the Office International  
• du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux

influence the urban climate (improvement of the air quality, dust fixation, noise reduction, cooling effects, interruption of soil sealing ...), constitute a harbour for animals and plants, and promote biodiversity in urban areas.

And these are just a few examples of the contributions that are made by the allotments. Allotments are a colourful world for everyone!

Please read this brochure. You will surely be convinced that the allotment gardeners are not only part of our culture and a supporting column of a humane society, but also a must for our society today as well as tomorrow.



# Foreword

## Can one achieve great things with small gardens?

What can you do with a small garden? Probably little more than some fruit and vegetables grown for your own use or a small wellness oasis created for yourself?

In my opinion, these would already be extremely meaningful and desirable goals to reach for the individual allotment gardener or the individual family.

However, I would recommend that anyone who believes that the allotment movement only aims at enabling its members to have these possibilities, to take a look at this brochure. It will quickly become evident that the goals go far beyond this.

Many topics such as nature conservation, biodiversity, sustainability, social integration, healthy diet or quality of life in the urban environment are not empty phrases, but concepts which are specifically implemented.

The brochure shows inspiring examples from many countries which not only benefit individual allotment gardeners, but are also beneficial for our society as a whole, even if this is not directly visible to many people.

This brochure is of course an excellent means to show to all those who don't know this movement what is happening in the allotments. It is also an excellent means to



• Fernand ETGEN  
• Minister for agriculture, viticulture  
• and consumer protection

enable the active allotment gardeners to look over their own garden fence in order to get inspired by the great examples realized by other associations.

Consequently, everyone who reads the following pages will probably find: small gardens and allotment gardeners can grow far above themselves and create very innovative projects and change our society!



# Foreword

## Dear garden friends

In a fast moving world, an own garden can be a real gem.

Allotment gardens do not only have an important function for society, but they stand above all for the protection of nature and the diversity of species, that have originated through it and are hosted by it. If allotments are cultivated without pesticides and chemical fertilizers, they do not only offer a refuge to their owner, but also constitute an active contribution to the protection of biodiversity and quality of air and additionally provide valuable food.

Consequently, new initiatives in society favouring an alternative way of consumption and life also arise around the cultivation of collective gardens. Allotment gardeners create a valuable home for themselves, other people as well as for the fauna and the flora.

I therefore welcome this brochure, because it shows through interesting examples all over Europe the beauty, the abundance and the diversity of gardens. It is a proof of the know-how, the richness of ideas and the allotment gardeners' precious contribution to society.

I wish you much fun during your journey through Europe and subsequently when gardening at home.



• Carole DIESCHBOURG  
• Minister for Environment  
• Luxembourg



# Knowledge

The image of allotment gardeners is not always a positive one. They are considered to be dull, boring, narrow-minded and users of pesticides.

In reality allotments are very valuable for our society in many aspects: nature, environment and personal development.

An oversimplified image of allotment gardens and gardeners underestimates what has been achieved on many allotments and the high value this has in many aspects.

Despite their well-established advantages, the decision makers and the public know very little about what is happening on allotments.

If we, ourselves, are not telling the world about how good we are, we might be marginalized and our existence can become threatened despite the value of our allotments.

We can be proud of our achievements and skills in many different fields. In this brochure we will present: our knowledge, our interactions with society, our connections with nature, our responsibility for environmental matters and some developments in the field of innovative buildings.

There is an amazing amount of knowledge held by allotment gardeners. One of the surprising outcomes of a study in Great-Britain - focussing on professional farmers and allotment gardeners - was that the allotment gardeners' knowledge about food production from plants by far exceeded that of professional farmers. However, this is easy to explain because most professional farmers are specialised in only one to three crops and allotment gardeners do "everything". However, there is much more.



• The first impression of some allotments can be misleading. In reality many awards for best quality crops have been won by this allotment.



• On an allotment site in Leipzig (Germany), named after Karl Förster, the allotment gardeners have built and now maintain a long walking path through the allotment site, where at least some plants have flowers all year round.



## We want to tell the world ...

... that we manage more than 2 million gardens in Europe, on which more than 5 million people spend their leisure time

... that our main principle is a sustainable gardening in order to transmit a healthy soil and consequently an intact nature to the coming generations,

... that for a long time we have already been trying to awaken among the youngest of our community understanding and love for nature, and

... that in continuation of the green classrooms we form gardening advisers by offering training to interested allotment gardeners, who can then advise and help our members when problems occur on their plots.

We consider it as the most important challenge of our times to transmit a world to our children, which is in such a condition that we can say with a good conscience, that we did our best.



Other associations have created teaching paths that neighbours like to use during their walks.



On many sites green classrooms were often created with great efforts. They are often used with great pleasure by the teachers and pupils from the nearby schools in order to discover nature.



Many efforts are invested in lifelong learning measures for interested allotment gardeners. Here is an example of courses for pruning. These courses are given by gardening advisers trained in our federation's garden academies. Many gardeners like to take part in these courses.





An example of bird information in an observation room, on the Dutch allotment site Stadspark in Groningen.



This is an example of a presentation room for nature education in Reichenbach (Germany). The German organisation for young gardeners participated in this project.



Important indicators of a nature friendly gardening on our plots are the diversity of butterflies and beetles that can be found here ... Many associations and federations of allotment gardens put an enormous effort into nature education – here an information board about butterflies.



The careful use of water is also a main purpose of our movement. Clean water cannot be considered for granted and is, besides a healthy soil, the most important element for the coming generations.



In the European media a real hype developed around bees over the last years. The allotment gardeners were always concerned about them. The proof, thereof, are the beekeepers working on our sites who are supported by our associations. It is evident that allotment gardeners have already known for a long time that blossoms, pollinated by bees, bring a good harvest.





# Society

Contrary to the misconception that allotment gardeners are a closed group, many allotment associations undertake projects beneficial for society and realize social actions.

In many countries the origins of allotments are based on circumstances in society. In Germany the name Schre-

ber is connected to one of these early initiatives and in Leipzig an interesting museum – of course on an allotment site – keeps the memory alive.

A visit is strongly recommended to everybody who wants to know more about allotments and allotment gardening.



The allotment museum in Leipzig (Germany)



This part of the domed building, created in 1902 by baker Johan Peter Nielsen, was renovated in 1983 – 1984 after a troubling history. It is situated on the allotment site Vennelyst in Copenhagen (Denmark). Today it is the symbol of the Danish allotment movement.



The Søtter allotment house is another heritage protected building on the same site.



In Helsinki (Finland) the allotment site Vallila Siirtolapuutarha was built as a historic monument. The fact is that not only some of the historical buildings have been restored and are kept in shape, but that also the layout of the site is being restored and kept as well as possible.





In Vienna ( Austria) you find an allotment site right in the middle of the city. Nobody expects it to be there.  
 The allotment site "Zukunft auf der Schmelz" is not only a beloved green area, but next to the association's meeting room  
 you find a pub and restaurant used by the whole neighbourhood. The site is literally in the middle of society.  
 Every time, again it is a surprise to see such an enormous allotment site in the middle of a city.



As it happens many times, an allotment site in the Dutch town of Utrecht was threatened by a new development. The allotment gardeners resisted and the outcome was an agreement about the allotment becoming a meeting point and the green centre of the new development. On this allotment site there is now a board member, who is just a neighbour and doesn't even have an allotment.

Another allotment site in the same town had to move because of the construction of a motorway. Together with the local authorities a creative new solution was designed: allotments and commercial buildings as a positive mix. Hopefully this mixture, where both sides reinforce each other, will become an inspiring example for other cities and countries.





This is the meeting building of the allotment site Seilbahn in Leipzig (Germany) where they pay enormous attention to a good relationship with the neighbourhood. They even got diplomas from the municipality for their value to society. Of course gardening is important too. The allotment site is very beautiful and particularly well managed.



The local allotment association in Hamburg (Germany) observed that widowed ladies from couples that had been motivated gardeners for many years often had difficulties in keeping a garden up alone. The solution was the creation of a larger allotment where a group of ladies could garden together and also have social activities. And so they could keep on gardening!



In Falkenstein Auerbach (Germany) there is a project for the youngest children. A grandmother and grandfather like couple give the children their first lessons in gardening in harmony with nature. This project asks for patience and special skills to keep it organised. Before the children go to school they already have their first certificate – in gardening.



In the “green classrooms” in Markranstädt (Germany), children are taught about gardening and nature.



It is amazing how well-informed these kids can be, even at a very young age.





Castle Hill Allotments in Ipswich (Great-Britain) gives nature lessons to school children and thus gained support for having a meeting room.



On the same allotment site juvenile offenders do society service instead of going to prison and maintain rough areas on the allotment in a nature friendly way.



On Cold Barn Farm Allotments Wales (Great-Britain) a vegetable garden gives encouragement and motivation to potential teenage school drop outs. They are allowed to garden if they have been attending all lessons and the scheme is working out very well. After some time the organisation discovered that many mothers of these children had no cooking skills and consequently cooking courses were organised.



In Ipswich the Maidenhall Allotments (Great-Britain) has developed a project for keeping old species alive. It is precise work to keep seeds clean. Disabled people also take part in this activity. On the same site there is another initiative to make people acquainted with gardening. Interested people can start on a little piece of land to see if they really like gardening before they start on a much larger official allotment.



On the allotment site of Bronfair in Wales (Great-Britain) high raised beds make gardening available to disabled people. If one looks more carefully, one notices that the numbers on the high raised beds are readable for blind people. With some help at the beginning of the growing of a plant these people can have joy and satisfaction in being able to have an own garden.





• The allotment association "Himmelreich" in Suhl (Germany) has a close cooperation with a school for disabled children.



• In Dijon the French allotment garden association works together with communal initiatives and encourages them. It offers special gardens with high raised beds and with a special wheelchair facility for disabled people. It works out very well in practice.  
 • In the same town and again in cooperation with the French allotment garden association another initiative shows another innovative solution – a rotating garden. And of course it does not stand alone, but is situated in the middle of small plots available for people of the neighbourhood.

*A good gardening means cooperation with nature – especially allotment gardeners feel this relatedness with nature.*



# Nature

A good gardening means cooperation with nature. Especially allotment gardeners feel particularly close to nature and live accordingly. In fact nature rules in most of our small gardens. Flowers, herbs and brambles grow here. Here you still find fruit trees and often there are old species. There is a kitchen garden too with vegetables that you cannot find in the supermarket.

Above all it has to be underlined: The allotment gardeners cultivate in most of our towns a significantly higher diversity of plants and consequently host in their garden a more diversified fauna than urban green areas. In fact on many sites the open spaces are laid out in a nature friendly way.



On the allotment site "Moorkate" in Hamburg (Germany) a safe walking way was built across a high quality moor, a project, which now makes it possible to enjoy the high nature value of this moor.



Of course, you have to warn people about some of the dangers of such an area.





On the allotment site Stadspark in Groningen (Netherlands) an observation shelter was built facing an area with interesting birds. On the same allotment site they made an effort in giving information about nut and fruit trees – everybody is allowed to eat their fruit.



10 Juglans regia 'Buccaneer'  
 -Ookernoot  
 -Bloeit: groene aren in mei/juni  
 -Hoogte: 15 meter  
 -Oogsttijd in september



The allotment site Eigen Arbeid in The Hague (Netherlands) pays a lot of attention to the harmony with the surrounding nature. Many times people can hardly believe that this is an allotment site.



This toilet building with a green roof is situated on an allotment site in Bremen (Germany).



You find this bee house with its green roof on the pioneer allotment site Oer Erkenwick (Germany). The association is one of the forerunners in ecological gardening.





On this allotment site in Turku (Finland) all the hedges have to be raspberry plants.



Storks are attracted on Moorkate allotment site in Hamburg (Germany).



There is much nature on an allotment site in Ipswich (Great-Britain).

*Within their cooperation with nature it is more than natural that allotment gardeners are interested in questions concerning environment.*





# Environment

Since the beginning the allotment garden movement has been very important from a social, ecological and town planning point of view. Health, climate protection and above all biodiversity have become more and more important over the last years. That's why the allotment garden movement opened up towards a social and ecological added value. Allotments are climate-oases and at the same time places where people can meet.

Allotments are not only places to rest, but are also a shop with organic products, a pharmacy and a fitness centre. And above all they are a place contributing to avoid that people become strangers to nature because the young citizens have lost contact with nature. All over Europe the federations are developing programmes aiming at bringing people again into harmony with their environment and with nature.



By a nature friendly layout of the gardens, additional living spaces for animals are created on many allotments. This is not only for birds, but also for mammals, insects, amphibians and with some luck even for reptiles. On this picture you see a bird cage for sparrows. Their protection has meanwhile become absolutely necessary in urban areas.



Loosely stacked stones can also provide shelter to many animals and insects. Those walls are traditionally used as supports for slopes, separations of pasture areas, as paving or simply as a special contribution to biodiversity. They last for centuries, offer a living area for plants and animals that have meanwhile disappeared to a large extent.





Honeybees are having a difficult time, due to the damages caused by the use of pesticides. We can be proud of many allotment initiatives protecting bees and giving information about how useful they are. Especially the example from the Moorkate site in Hamburg (Germany) shows that they do not only care to have many bees, but also care to share information about them. If there are no bees in the garden, the consequences will be that the harvest in autumn will be less abundant. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to make the useful helpers visit our gardens. Additionally, time has come to protect the living space of the bees because also the populations of wild bees have been significantly reduced over the last years. This again represents a danger for the entire ecosystem.



Biodiversity is supported by not removing old tree wood. At least some dead wood should remain for those insects that need it.



Some insects can get help by providing the food they like.



Separation walls "braided" from old wood give shelter to animals and offer additional breeding space and protection to many animal species.





Garden waste and other vegetable waste can provide good improvement to the soil after composting.



In some Scandinavian allotments all gardeners have more than one – up to three – compost bins in operation.



Composting needs to keep heat – so there are heat insulated bins for colder climates.



A fantastic Swedish example of waste separation on the allotment site: Koloniträdgårdsföreningen Linnéa in Stockholm (Sweden).





Both the fluid and the solid part of our excrements can be very useful and provide improvement for the soil we work on. This result is achieved on several allotment sites by installing compost toilets. The fluid section can work well as soil enrichment if mixed with water.



Sealed surfaces are bad for the environment because rainwater directly flows away – overloading the sewer system and increasing the effects of the urban heat island. Paving that is not tight for water is much better – here on an allotment site in Germany.



This shed on a French allotment site in Dijon has been painted with a very environmentally friendly paint that lasts much longer than normal paint. Even these details reveal the environment consciousness of the local allotment gardeners.



This picture shows a good example of “paving” that is open for water. You see here a nature friendly path on a German allotment site.



Keeping valuable old species alive – here on the pictures allotment gardeners are working on a special old variety of beans in Great-Britain. With much skill and love many associations safeguard old seed varieties and spread them again.



# Innovative constructions

The constructions on the allotments show the richness of the allotment gardeners' ideas. In the years of shortages at the beginning of last century this was of course much more evident than today.

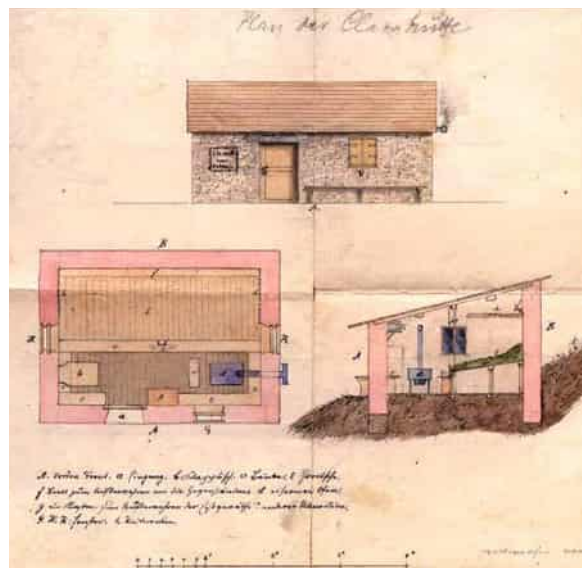
At that period one had to create a lot using a little and they were really successful. At that period the allotment gardeners' main aim was the harvest of vegetables and fruit in order to supply the family with food. However, both pioneering spirit and pride of the owner, joined to a great community spirit, enabled already at that time the realization buildings worth to be seen.

Today where in all our countries already the smallest shed has to be authorized by the building authorities and where there are prescriptions for their conception, an enormous amount of individualism is necessary to create something exceptional.

But you can still find these construction rebels – and even more those who want to try new things ranging from photovoltaic to low energy.



The construction materials with which our predecessors built their sheds and houses very often came from rubbish tips. Everything could be used and everything was used in the construction. It was not exceptional that in a house you found different sized windows and doors. Walls and roofs were covered with whatever you could find. Cardboard and sheet metal: it was only important that it protected.



The rules and prescriptions for allotment sites are different from country to country. In some countries small sheds are normal; in others you can only have a toolbox. Allotment gardeners have always been very creative and had an innovative spirit in building matters.

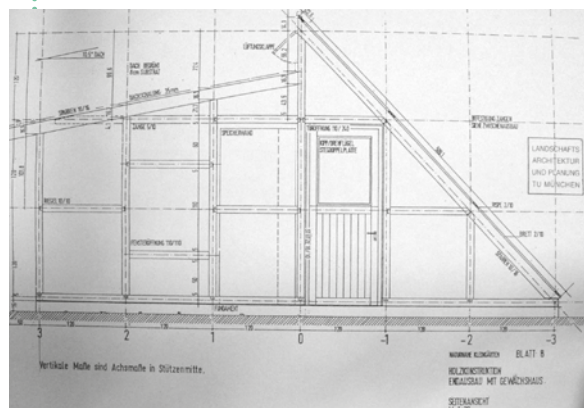




• An example of a particular environmentally friendly behaviour in Poland. You find there a small house on an allotment that was totally built in accordance with the rules for passive solar buildings.

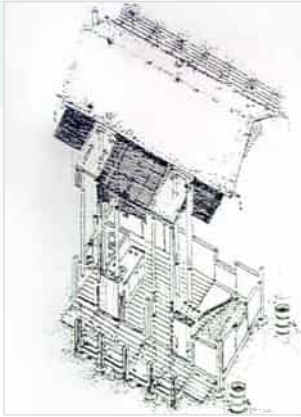


• In Vienna (Austria) there is the possibility to use the allotment as main domicile, if the town planning rules allow this.



• In Regensburg (Germany) an allotment site was built in accordance with sustainable principles – and of course the houses were built according to passive solar principles.





- From planning to realization: it is fascinating to see which skills
- the allotment gardeners develop when building their domicile.
- In Berlin (Germany) allotment houses were already built according
- the sustainable principles very early.



- In Häameetinna (Finland) the ground surface was effectively used by adding a
- small sleeping room on top. Moreover, passive solar principles were again used.





• In many towns in the Netherlands allotment gardeners are allowed to sleep in their little house – but only during summer.  
• In some towns it is even allowed to have one or two gardeners living there in winter if this helps to prevent burglary and vandalism. Allotment associations, however, prohibit this use for more than one year in a row, thus preventing permanent living on the allotment.



• A striking example of cultural differences and creativity. In a little forest between the allotment site and a lake in Finland nearly all gardeners have their own little sauna building.







• Solar collectors provide ventilation and prevent humidity in many Scandinavian allotment houses – an example from Stockholm (Sweden). Allotment gardeners are forerunners in the use of solar electricity.

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• Within the rules, allotment gardeners in Dijon (France) can build a shed – painted with environmentally friendly paint and collecting rainwater.

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*That was only the beginning,  
and there is much more!*

*Therefore be proud of us and support  
our movement*

*We will continue in this way!*



# Addresses

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## Impressum

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Allotments: extremely valuable, grossly underestimated, shockingly unknown

