



# Hyphen 67

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# The French allotment gardens throughout history

Daniel CAZANOVE

Vice-president of the French allotment and collective garden federation



Very sensitive to all the social problems of his time, father LEMIRE created the allotments in Hazebrouck (city in the north of France) in 1896 and then founded the French "ligue du coin de terre et du foyer" (allotment federation).

The purpose of this ecclesiastic was to provide the head of the family with a piece of land, both to grow the vegetables necessary for home consumption, but also to have a healthier activity away from the pubs.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the league experienced a tremendous rise under the impetus of the "doctrine du terrianisme", according to which every man has the right to enjoy a piece of land. Father LEMIRE created associative structures in order to allow the workers to free themselves from the guardianship of their employer. All available spaces near homes and factories were cultivated in northern France, but also in most major cities, like for example in Saint-

Etienne under the leadership of Father Félix VOLPETTE.

In 1928, France had 383,000 allotment gardens, 70,000 of which were cultivated by railwaymen on land put at their disposal by the railway society. Starting with this new period, the profile of the gardeners began to change with the arrival of new socio-professional categories: employees, tradesmen, craftsmen ...

With the beginning of the Second World War, the occupation and the resulting shortages, the number of allotments almost doubled to 700,000 in 1945 before falling to 150,000 thirty years later. The glorious thirties, the creeping urbanisation, the surge of the consumer society with the opening of supermarkets, passed by, giving the gardens a cheesy and old-fashioned image.

However, for the last twenty years, the desire for allotments has continuously grown. Consequently to their willing-





ness to reconnect with nature, to cultivate their own vegetables, the pledge of a healthy diet, but also their willingness to contribute to the greening of the city, more and more city dwellers are knocking on the doors of town halls or associations that manage these small plots of land generating long waiting lists.

The crisis has also again brought people closer to the earth in order both to save money and of course to eat healthier products without pesticides (now banned in France). The increasing land pressure, as well as the changes having occurred over a century have contributed since the 2000s to a diversification of the types of gardens. Besides the traditional allotments, the sizes of which are shrinking in order to adapt them to the time available for gardening, new forms of gardens have emerged, especially in the big cities: gardens at the foot of buildings replacing sometimes neglected green spaces, shared gardens, gardens on the roofs. These gardens are mainly initiated by social landlords and local communities. The consideration of these types of gardens is a subject of reflection within the French federation.

Whatever the form of the garden, the goal in France and in Europe is to create social bonds, conviviality, as well as to stimulate meetings and exchanges between families of gardeners. The ecological dimension is also most important in the motivations of the candidate gardeners. Sitting in the shade of a garden shed with one's neighbour to admire the work done, to follow the progress of the plant growth, are great both for the morale and the mind. Across Europe, allotments are an element for greater environmental justice.

I will end with this quote from father LEMIRE, social and visionary priest:

*"The earth is the way,  
the family is the goal".*



# Added value allotment gardening: creating more environmental justice

Dr. Jons-A. Eisele

The issue of environmental justice is gaining more and more attention in the environmental debate, especially in connection with urban and district development. Numerous examples recorded and examined in a number of studies that were conducted in the last years, show that the issue is gradually reaching the municipal planning and implementation practice, too.

Already in 2011 at one of the first nationwide congresses on environmental justice, the environmental and social associations requested in a resolution from politicians that environmental justice should be given greater consideration in the fight for social equity. In 2016, the environment ministers of the German states demanded a participatory approach involving all stakeholders for the implementation of the issue on the federal state level and the consideration of environmental justice in subsidy programmes and planning. The Federal Ministry of the Environment presents the issue of environmental justice as benchmark for its policies and orientation in different areas of activity.

## What's behind the term of environmental justice?

Starting point is the documented connection between environmental quality, health and social situation. Environmental justice is on one hand aiming for the avoidance or rather the reduction of the spatial concentration of pollution and on the other hand for guaranteeing a fair access to environmental resources independent

from social and spatial position. The social and spatial inequality, such as of residential areas, in relation to being affected by pollution on one hand and the access to environmental resources on the other hand, should be eliminated.

Environmental impacts could be triggered through traffic noise at much frequented roads or aircraft noise on approach paths of airports, through air pollution because of traffic or industry, a high surface sealing or inadequate supply with green and free spaces and could be spatially distributed differently. They can significantly affect the living conditions in the urban districts.

The city construction programme 'Soziale Stadt' (social city) especially focuses on disadvantaged urban districts. Because socio-cultural problems, wrong-doings in city planning, as well as environmental and health burdens are in direct correlation, funding programmes as part of the 'Soziale Stadt' should universally consider aspects of planning, environment and health.

## Green spaces are multifunctional

Green and free spaces are of an outstanding importance for the environmental quality of your living environment. The extent and quality of these spaces, as well as their access are a significant field of action in connection to environmental justice. Green spaces have a positive effect on the





microclimate of their surroundings, are important prerequisites for biodiversity in the city and offer space for local recreation, leisure time, movement or could be used for nature and environmental education. This multifunctionality is an essential feature for the quality of green spaces.

Allotments can notably combine positive environmental impacts and social requirements. The access to allotment gardens should be especially ensured for people and families that are socially disadvantaged. The lease price that is regulated by law and the restrictions regarding the design of the garden sheds and their furnishing permanently ensure that allotment gardens can also be leased or rather be taken over and passed on without high financial expenses. Nowadays, ecological aspects are an integral part of the common areas and individual gardens. That includes the creation of habitats (waters, hedges, flower rich spaces), nesting aids or beekeeping. Allotment gardens with high structural diversity are significant elements of the local biotope network in settlement areas. Allotments fulfil an important balancing function in relation to climate, temperature, humidity and dust absorption. Leisure time and movement capacity, but also experiencing nature, recreation and not least the contribution to a healthy diet through the cultivated fruit and vegetables show the diverse functions and utilisation potential of allotment gardens.

### Social networking becomes more and more important

Often there is a close network in the social environment of the urban district. Collaborations with schools and nurseries use the potential that allotment gardens offer regarding nature and environmental education, while collaboration with local associations and organisations can fulfil important social functions.

Numerous examples, which are presented especially at the regular competitions, show the diversity and creativity of individual associations. Current social issues are reflected in the structures of many allotments, here they often develop amazing solutions with local stakeholders. Multiculturality, integration, neighbourhood assistance, inclusion or voluntary social engagement in many areas – associations have to face up to these challenges. Functioning concepts in allotment garden associations are an important prerequisite for fair access and use of the environmental resource that allotment gardens represent in the city district. This is the “bottom up” implementation of environmental justice.

#### Keyword: green networking

More and more frequently allotment gardens are integrated in the entire municipal green area system and developed by connecting open space elements to allotment garden parks. The free accessibility to the facilities increases the access not only for the allotment gardeners, but also for the general public as a public green space. The interconnectedness of green spaces that are as diverse as possible is emphasised in a study commissioned by the North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry of the Environment in 2014 as an essential aspect for exploiting the potential of urban green spaces close to the towns. The degree of diversity and the interconnectedness of green spaces influence their balancing function in the context of the environment, health

and social situation. While the diversity of allotment gardens can be influenced primarily by the associations and gardeners themselves, connecting elements and integration into the green space structure are tasks of municipal planning and development. The closer both stakeholders work together, the more successful the implementation will be.

Gardens as a functional open space in the urban environment meanwhile also go beyond allotments in the traditional sense. Many positive examples show the possibilities for locally connecting stakeholders interested in gardening in the city as a part of various (allotment) garden projects. Mobile community gardens such as the Neuland project in Cologne, collaborations between allotment associations and international community gardens such as the ‘Bürgergarten Habinghorst’ in Castrop Rauxel or alternative allotment garden concepts such as the ‘Ökotop Heerd’ in Düsseldorf impressively demonstrate the variety of opportunities for joint gardening in the city. Different approaches can thus meet very different demands of the horticultural use (and beyond) of urban open spaces.

**Example:** Following an initiative of allotment gardeners, an international civil garden was built in Castrop-Rauxel on a free urban space within the programme ‘Soziale Stadt’. This civil garden is directly connected to the neighbouring allotment garden site and is supported by many. The 5000 inhabitants in the district belong to 45 nationalities. The garden initiators wanted to use this ethnic diversity as well as the variety of cultures and crops and bring it together via the civil garden in order to create a neighbourly and social network and to strengthen the coexistence in the district. A supporting group consisting of four associations, the district association of allotment gardeners Castrop-Rauxel / Waltrop, the allotment garden association Castrop-Rauxel Nord, the

Bosnian-Islamic cultural centre and DITIB-Turkish Islamic Community developed the garden conceptually in the starting phase of the project and subsequently planned it horticulturally. With parties, celebrations and special activities, this support group has supported the public relations work that has made the project known and is now also supporting the process of consolidation. The allotment gardeners have made it possible to share the toilets and the power supply. Some families from the gardeners of the civil garden have already changed their membership and become members of the allotment garden association.

**Example:** The 'Ökotop Heerdt', is an actual 'dinosaur' among community gardening projects. The initiative for the 'Ökotop' emerged from a playground group, existing since 1972. In 1982, citizens got together and developed a holistic concept that intertwined life, housing, building, environment protection, ecology and gardening. 60 close-to-nature built and managed gardens are grouped into six rounds with 10 gardens each. The

central spaces in the middle are common areas and hold a manual pump ready for water extraction. Otherwise there is no electricity and no running water in the gardens. The individual gardens have a size of 300 square meters. The garden sheds were designed according to ecological aspects and have a very individual design.

The 'Ökotop Heerdt' has organised itself as a registered association. The association maintains an ecological centre, which operates among other things as a centre point of action, impulse generator and mental gathering point, offers environmental education, is a meeting place and organises work with senior citizens.

Development of the potentials of local green and play areas under the aspects of environment, health and social situation; Study commissioned by the Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Agriculture and Consumer Protection North Rhine-Westphalia, ed. Planungsbüro Stadtkinder, 2014.

# The Netherlands: The allotment site De Hoge Weide in Utrecht (NL), a unique site, an element for more environment justice



It received the Office diploma for ecological gardening in 2018

The Amateur Gardeners' Association De Hoge Weide is located in Park Groenewald in Papendorp in the polder of Utrecht since 2003. The park-like design, the combination with the office villas and the public character of the garden site are unique in the Netherlands. In 2010 the association started the project natural gardening. In 2017, they received four dots for the natural management of the park.

The members of the association do general work in the park on a regular bases and in the theme gardens in which natural gardening has become common place. De Hoge Weide can also proudly report that about 90% of their members maintain their own garden in a natural way.

## Natural gardening

Four of the five theme gardens on De Hoge Weide are laid out to promote the diversity of flora and fauna.

- In the Compost garden, all the park waste of the public areas is composted.
- With the pond, tree trunks, pergola and the planting of different kinds of plants, shrubs and trees, the Bird Garden offers food and shelter and nesting possibilities to birds.
- The Butterfly Garden is not only a true paradise for butterflies, bees and bumblebees, many visitors also find it pleasant to relax here.
- The four sheep have a winter residence in the Sheep Garden. They

keep the green strips around the garden site short, a natural way of maintenance.

## Projects

- In the Willow Garden, borders are laid out with stinzen plants, there is an insect hotel and it offers space for a toad pool/pond, a rock and a prairie garden.
- The project: "The Nursery" with its own garden for the pre-cultivation of plants provides members with information about sowing and growing plants. The result is planted along the banks.
- The entrance and front garden with flower borders invite people to take a walk on the garden site.





- In two gardens bee hives are placed.
- A new project with early spring bloomers is currently under development.
- The association also started a project concerning renewable energy.

**Management and maintenance**

The maintenance of the park is organised by the working group “Natural Management”. According to a schedule, work is carried out and activities are organised for members and visitors. The working group also identifies problems in individual gardens. The working group maintains contact with the coordinators of the theme gardens and the other working groups. For example, the banks of the ditches are cut with a scythe according to schedule. This provides special wild plants a chance to flourish. The paved paths keep the garden site accessible to visitors and are kept weed free with a burner.

**Special element**

The fifth theme garden is laid out as a vegetable garden. The yield is donated to the food bank in Utrecht.

**Communication**

- On a regular basis workshops are organised where knowledge of members is shared with other members. For example a wild pick walk on the garden site, com-

posting in the private garden, the nursery about sowing and growing plants, wild life in your garden, pruning of fruit trees. De Hoge Weide offers external parties, such as Groei & Bloei, the opportunity to give workshops on their site.

- The workshop: Help, I have a garden! provides new members with an introduction to natural gardening and helps them on their way in their new garden.
- Several times a year a cutting market is organised where members can exchange seeds and plants.
- The Association participates in the annual “Groen moet je doen!” (make everything green) day in the city of Utrecht and on a regular bases they welcome international groups for a tour of the park.
- The signposts and information boards lead visitors through the garden site. The large information boards in the theme gardens have an educational value. A map with a walking route is available for visitors. A large part of the visitors work in the offices in and around the park.
- Monthly the members of the association are informed by the board by means of a digital newsletter and regular messages appear on the Facebook page.

# Belgium: Ecological gardening: An added value for allotment gardeners, neighbourhood, fauna and flora

Daan VAN DE VIJVER, Project manager



## Tuinhier: Ecologic garden label

In 2015 we started our garden label in Belgium, after being inspired by the AVVN in the Netherlands our northern neighbours.



## What is the Ecological Garden label?

It is a label awarded to an exemplary allotment garden in ecological gardening and behaviour. It is a way to reward active boards for the work and effort they put into an allotment garden. A second goal is to innovate and modernise older parks.

The sites can earn four stars, each star represents a certain topic:

1. Park design
2. Management
3. Equipment/ facility
4. Awareness/ sensitisation

A professional and external jury evaluates and gives advice during several evaluations. Because of their independence, the advice is more easily adopted by local boards and town councils. The jury members are all active in universities, research centres and academies.

## Awarding of the first ecological garden labels

The association "De Roshaag" in Peer was the first allotment site to receive the ecological garden label in 2017. It received four stars. It was followed by the demand of the association "Slotenkouter" of the city of Ghent. The procedure is, however, not yet finished. It has to be mentioned that these two associations "De Roshaag" and "Slotenkouter" received the Office diploma for ecological gardening. The city of Torhout and the town of Bornem were our 3rd and 4th projects that signed up. After three evaluations and a two year journey these two projects received their final judgement in September 2018. Our external jury awarded both projects with three out of four stars. This is a good score for these two young projects. Tuinhier asked in 2019 the Office diploma for ecological gardening to be granted to the association "De Smallen Entrée" in Torhout.



### Torhout “de smalle entrée”

Some of the starting advice:

- The terrain lacked multi-functionality, other than growing vegetables.
- Make a long-term plan for the communal green parts. Apart from bee-friendly plants make sure there are ‘host plants’ for wild animals.
- In the gardens there were trees from an old orchard. These trees have to be protected; (Pruning, protection of the roots) preferably with the advice of experts with a clear action plan.
- Rules and measures to prevent over-fertilising: analyses, advice and checks

#### Conclusion:

There is a good vibe in this park, sociable and cosy. Three gardeners guide the less experienced gardeners, the neighbourhood is involved and invited to activities. There is a good mixture of activities e.g.: BBQs, barter trade, workshops, small competitions,... The neighbours are encouraged to develop their own garden.

There were still underdeveloped projects concerning the design of the park e.g.: a composting toilet was still absent, the green roofs on the large sheds and the demo-garden had to be further developed. For these reasons the jury awarded the project with 3 stars.

### Bornem

Some of the starting advice:

- Create more group dynamics and make the ecological label known with the gardeners so they all participate
- Create a demo-garden with good practices
- Create a better composting area
- Create an action plan for the green areas separated from the house rules
- Remove the American cherry (invasive species)
- More attention to biodiversity in the park

#### Conclusion:

In the two years a tremendous amount of work was done. And the participants grew more and more interested in the project along the way. They attracted people with the right mindset to lead this project with the necessary dynamism. All the starting advice from the jury was addressed. It is still a “work in progress”, and so a continuation of the group meetings and schooling is necessary. The demo-garden is still getting in shape, but they’re heading in the right direction and the delivered efforts were rewarded with 3 stars.

The garden label will now be reformed and extended. For example: expanded ecological area, accessibility, social function, education ...

# France: Vegetable gardens like no others



*Culinary entertainment: Tasting of dishes from "green waste" (vines, leaves, vegetable stalks from the vegetable garden) for the visitors.*

An unusual organisation for urban vegetable gardens, perhaps even unique! In fact, these gardens that are managed by the "Rosny Potagers" Association (Rosny vegetable garden association), are collective – a team of several gardeners cultivates the same plot and shares the harvest when it's ready. This activity is based on weekly workshops led by an organic or permaculture trainer, and on a very modest annual contribution of 20 €, or even less for people with financial difficulties.

The idea came up in 2009, as the general public began to develop an ecological awareness, but too slowly and too superficially in our opinion. We were a small group of people living in Rosny, who worried about the multiple violations of the environment, without there being an awareness amongst the citizens and the politicians.

We first experimented with distributing organic tomato plants in small pots in some parts of the city to start



*Louis Aragon Media Library in the city centre*

the dialogue. This rather well-received initiative allowed us to discuss with the residents and learn some of their expectations. Many did not even have a balcony to grow plants. Some had contact with the land in the past, but it was quite a long time ago. Others would have liked to do gardening, but they admitted that they knew nothing about it. Most regretted that they had no access to gardening and so had to buy vegetables from supermarkets the growth of which had been forced by chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

By bringing together all the components of the problem, we considered creating gardens in the most disadvantaged parts of the city where there were no vegetable gardens and residents had no choice but to eat products from industrial agriculture. For this purpose, we transformed some abandoned lawns, which had originally been intended for decorative purposes. After that we had to accompany the future gardeners to establish (or re-establish) contact with the soil and to learn gardening.

We found one, then two, then three people who had both the knowledge and experience of organic gardening and the qualities of instructors in a context where learning had to be first and foremost a pleasure and a relaxation.

A weekly workshop in each vegetable garden is still the best solution for organising the calendar, but above all for socialising. Together we can share our questions, our experiences, help each other out and have fun.

The results are encouraging, because compared to 2011, when the first vegetable garden was established, the association already had eight in 2017. Created in public or private common spaces (socio-cultural centres, social residential areas, dormitories for young workers and more recently also in urban spaces in the city centre), the path we have to go is often full of administrative, legal and regulatory obstacles that must be overcome with patience and perseverance.



Vegetable garden of the Cercle J in the city centre at the beginning of August 2017



Vegetable garden of the new Casanova quarter "Résidence du Bois d'Avron"



Vegetable garden of the socio-cultural centre - "Le Pré Gentil" district



OSICA residence "Les Maillards" - "La Boissière" district



ALJT residence for young workers - "La Boissière" district

The greatest difficulty in our development is to obtain funds in the form of public or private grants, mainly to pay the trainers who run the workshops and to buy equipment and accessories (tools, seeds, ...). We have benefited from private foundations that support this type of initiative, such as the Truffaut Foundation, which co-financed our first two vegetable gardens in the Pré Gentil district in 2011 through the socio-cultural centre.

Each vegetable garden has its own small team of gardeners, most of whom come regularly, while others come from time to time. By participating in the weekly workshop, they get to know each other, coordinate their level of knowledge, agree on what they want to grow, decide on the location of the crops and organise what to do outside the workshops (watering and various small jobs). In this way, relaxation, outdoor crafts and social interaction are combined in a neutral environment: nature.

It is a hands-on training. There are no theoretical courses as such. We garden with the trainer, who explains why he practices this or that gesture and gives botanical explanations while working. The main crops are local vegetables from the Paris region, but also Portuguese vegetables, aromatic plants to improve southern cuisine. The Christophine of the Tropical Islands was recently welcomed.

The gardens are generally very well-received by the local population, who enjoy vegetables and flowers to revive these small corners of nature, which are generally rather sad places. It is an opportunity to exchange a few friendly words with the gardeners when passing by, to try a tomato and get offered some mint for the kitchen.

We are committed to promoting the association and its culture in the city. "Rosny Potagers" participates in most neighbourhood festivals, especially during the Sustainable Development

Week. The use of our products in delicious recipes is a good way to raise awareness among residents: cooking workshops and an organic menu are organised every year with the active participation of our chef and trainer.

We had the opportunity to start our association at a time when the local authorities started to get involved in an Agenda 21 process. As one of the few local associations covering the three pillars of sustainable development, we were active in various functions. The local authorities support us in our approach and helped us with the initial development of the land. This year, at their request, our last two vegetable gardens were created in the city centre in front of two symbolic cultural sites, the Louis Aragon Multimedia Library and the Cercle J (Cultural Centre for Young People) as part of the new "Gardening in the City" project. The FNJFC (French allotment federation) is also contributing financially to the success of this exciting project by providing a grant from FACLA<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>: FACLA is a Truffaut Foundation-funded grant that contributes to the sustainability of new vegetable gardens.

# Great-Britain: The allotments in the United Kingdom, an element of environmental justice

Di Appleyard, National Allotment Society UK



*“If Environmental Justice is the right of everyone to have access to a healthy environment and an acknowledgement that it is the poorest and least powerful who suffer most from environmental burdens then we can confidently say that our allotments in the UK are firmly rooted in an environmental justice movement”.*

Allotment Gardens in the UK were initially created to alleviate the injustice resulting from the enclosure, by the nobility, of the common land that had been used for centuries by the common man to grow crops and graze animals. This process had begun in the 17th century but by the start of the 19th century that loss of land along with poor harvests, the Napoleonic Wars and lack of employment meant that there was a large section of the population who were hungry, cold and resentful. The provision of allotments in the 19th century was seen by reformers as a way of alleviating poverty and by the ruling classes as a way of reducing reliance on the Poor

Law, which was paid for by their taxes. Sites were created by the Church, philanthropists and landowners, supported by the Labourers Friend Society and it is estimated that by the mid- 1850s there were 100,00 plots and 449,00 by 1890. The number of allotments continued to grow and the first significant legislation was passed in 1908 placing a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, according to demand. Further legislation in 1922 and 1950 has given certain types of allotments (statutory) in the UK protection against disposal of the land. However, to retain this protection this land must be used, in the main, for its primary purpose of supplying individuals with the opportunity of growing food for their families. Many present- day allotments were created as a response to food shortages during the First World War and WW2 saw a temporary rise in sites to alleviate food insecurity; there were 1,399,935 plots in 1943; it is now estimated that there are around 330,000

plots. One recent survey concluded that an average of 8 people benefit from each allotment plot, this includes family, friends, work colleagues and food banks. It is estimated that 12% of the population in the UK struggle to feed themselves healthily.

In Bristol there are several projects based on allotment sites that offer local residents the opportunity to learn how to grow and cook healthy food in a supportive, communal space. The Let’s Grow Community Allotment occupies 1.3 acres of land on the Springfield Allotments in South Bristol, one of the most deprived areas of the city, where there is less demand for allotment plots. Demand for allotments in Bristol is very high in the more affluent areas of the city and there are long waiting lists. Also in South Bristol, there is Greens Community Gardens, which is part of Molesworth Allotment site, a project run by Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group. HHEAG run a variety of pro-

jects to support residents of an area of Bristol that has been classified as a “food desert”. The food grown by the volunteers is used in the Community Kitchen or sold in the shop. There are five polytunnels and also some open allotments for growing crops. In addition, there is a small orchard, which also supplies apples, pears and plums for HHEAG’s use. They grow sufficient produce for all their needs and a little more for the volunteers who help with the growing.

In 2018 the UK Government produced a 25 Year Environment Plan, which acknowledges that connecting people to their environment will improve their health and well-being. Public Health in the UK is the responsibility of Local Authorities and the government would like to see access to the natural environment put at the heart of all local authority Health and Wellbeing Board strategies. This central government paper also cites their intent to build on work done by the National Health Service in South Yorkshire on a social prescribing scheme that offers appropriate therapies such as gardening on an allotment, alongside traditional physical and mental health services.

One example of a Social Prescribing project is the Vale Community Hospital Allotment Scheme in Gloucestershire. This project used spare land in front of a new Community Hospital and offers access to quality green

space and therapeutic activity to patients, vulnerable people and the wider community. The project is managed by Down to Earth (a social enterprise) supported by the Gloucestershire County Council, Vale Community Hospital League of Friends, Dursley Town Council, and the NHS. Individuals can apply for an allotment through the new social prescription initiative and can be referred by their GPs and other health staff. Support is available in starting an allotment and workshops are run on different aspects of growing food successfully. Each allotment is a raised bed measuring 5m x 41.2m. There is special matting and ramps to allow wheelchair access, plus a large shed for storage of equipment, seating and tea and coffee making facilities. A lively allotment community has developed that includes residents from the surrounding housing and NHS patients. The ploholders volunteer, run events, share produce and chat to fellow plot holders, helping to combat social isolation. There is also an orchard area and, in the summer of 2018, Natasha Houseago worked with the allotment community to produce a green oak carving that celebrated the allotment produce and the plot-holders work and wisdom; a carved owl sits at the top of the sculpture.

The afore-mentioned initiative does offer individual tenancies and has increased the local authority’s allotment portfolio but many such projects only

offer collective gardening experiences and use land on statutory allotments sites. Whilst the UK National Allotment Society recognises, that in some circumstances collective cultivation can be complementary to allotment gardening, we believe that whilst there are people on waiting lists for allotment gardens it is inappropriate for land that is designated for use as allotment gardens, and is either currently or potentially fit for that purpose, to be newly allocated instead to forms of cultivation other than allotment gardening. The Society does however recognise the inherent value of other ways of organising gardening and acknowledges that authorities will want to continue to offer such facilities.

Allotments continue to offer both social health and environmental benefits and influence and support eco-system services. Many UK allotment sites contain natural areas and apiaries in hard to cultivate areas whilst individual plot-holders encourage solitary bees and other beneficial insects. School children visit to learn about food growing; plots offer contact with nature and healthy exercise, especially for flat dwellers and sites provide social inter-action. However, along with rights there are always responsibilities and present-day plot-holders in the UK inherit a responsibility to ensure that a healthy environment and our allotment resource exists for future generations.

# Norway: Etterstad allotment garden, a gem for all in the middle of the town



*Etterstad allotment garden site is located at Oslo's East End and surrounded by block buildings. The overview shows part of the garden in April.*



*It is not far between the allotment garden and the blocks behind. The garden is situated in the middle of an urban area.*



The vast majority of allotment gardens in Norway originated in the early 1900s. "Etterstad" allotment garden, like most other gardens, meant a lot for common large families. Each family got a small garden patch in the middle of the city and access to land where it was possible to cultivate different vegetables and fruit. Initially, it was allowed to set up a toolshed or a small bower, but eventually it was allowed to build also small cottages.

Today the population of the allotments is far more varied. If you have a permanent address in Oslo, you can register on the waiting list of one of the capital's nine allotment gardens. There are several thousands on the waiting list today.

"Etterstad" allotment garden is located in the old working districts of Oslo East End. The garden has 88 plots with 88 families of different compositions. In the garden there is room for all kinds of people old and young. For the children it is nice to live in a garden in the summer, with a greater freedom of movement than you may have as a child in the middle of Oslo. People

*Maximum size of the cabins is 28 sqm. Many of the cabins have only one room. The staircase in this cabin leads to a sleep hem. The cabin has a kitchen sink and inlaid water.*

will also develop a more conscious approach to cultivating ornamental and fruit crops. In Etterstad allotment garden many people live permanently in the cabins throughout the summer. It is not allowed to inhabit them during wintertime.

In addition to all the cabins in the garden, the "House" is a gathering place for the members at the annual autumn party and spring festival and on different other occasions. The House can also be rented by the members of the association for baptizing ceremonies, birthdays, confirmations, weddings etc. The garden also has a small pavilion as well as a separate house with toilets, showers, washer and dryer. The common house was completely renovated in a joint effort by the inhabitants themselves 2012/2013.



*In the night the badgers come out looking for something to eat. During the day they sleep under a cabin. At Etterstad there are permanently 2-3 badger dwellers. Children find this very exciting.*





Anne C. Eriksen, Etterstad Kolonihager

*Etterstad Kolonihage's annual music and cultural festival Hagelarm is organised in August with activities on a main stage and on several garden spots. There are concerts, exhibitions, painter workshop, fruit and vegetable and delicious local food on offer. The festival is well-visited, regardless of weather. The girls in the picture sell homemade lemonade.*

There is much to be done in the allotment garden. Every summer the garden site organises its own music festival - Hagelarm. The programme is large and varied with music and cultural experiences for young and old. Most strikingly you may enjoy different events in and around individual cottages, in addition to everything happening at the "festival place" by the common house. At the festival square you will also be served delicious homemade food and cold and hot beverages at a reasonable price.

The public areas of the garden are also used for recreation by many in the local area. The association has a particularly good relationship with "Vålerenga Living and Service Centre" (for elderly people). The garden members arrange every year and several times during the season flea markets, whereby the city's population is invited for a guided tour of some of the gardens with subsequent coffee and cakes. The garden is open to the public from 9 am – 21.00 pm in the summer season.



Anne C. Eriksen, Etterstad Kolonihager

*Live music in the summer for members and neighbours, for young and old.*

# Germany: The German allotment gardeners resolutely work for more environmental justice

Social engagement and ecological gardening are a lived reality: Hereafter three examples in word and pictures



## Rhineland-Palatine: Landau

Population: 46.006  
 Allotment area: 99.3 ha  
 allotment sites: 7  
 allotment gardens: 380

### Allotment site: Am Ebenberg

Founded in 2012  
 Area: 0.82 ha  
 of which 0.57 ha garden area  
 allotment gardens: 34



### Where the future grows

From Landau it's only a stone's throw to France. A preference for excellent wines and good food lies in the blood of the Palatine people. And horticulture also counts a lot in Landau: the State Horticultural Show took place here in 2015. Due to this event the small, but very fine allotment garden site "Am Ebenberg" was created.

tree – as a communicative centre, fully in line with a village square. It is the ideal place for festivals and spontaneous encounters. However, this is not so only for members. The enthusiastic gardeners are actively searching for contact with the public. They are



The site may have a short past, but it is really trend-setting. Many younger people and especially families with children have gathered here to garden together. The development of the site, for example the association's house, was built together by the allotment gardeners with great personal dedication. That's uniting: The association in no way sees itself as a means to an end; they feel more like a little village community in the city. Matching that is the lovingly created community garden around an old walnut





the site. That's how non-gardeners too can profit from fresh food from the site, for a little donation. Who knows, maybe some will get the taste to try to cultivate their own vegetables.

Fully in line with the sustainable spirit of our time, the Landauer allotment gardeners put ecology high on their list of priorities when their association was founded. Organic-ecological gardening is firmly rooted in their regulations and they also try to use resources as sparingly as possible. A shared scullery makes the allotment gardeners here trend-setters in the Sharing-Economy. Many gardening tools like wheelbarrows, compost screens or shredders don't have to be bought by each tenant individually – they can borrow them from the joint tool shed without any bureaucratic expense.



used to streams of visitors from the time of the State horticultural show and until today the doors of the site remain widely open. If the green alone doesn't lure you, the people of Landau offer something special: every weekend there is a market stand from the association – with fruit and vegetables from the plots, depending on the season, or with homemade food from

Their love for nature is gladly shared by the allotment gardeners. At the entrance area, "educational raised beds" invite you to learn about kitchen herbs, edible flowers and exotic vegetables. Children can collect useful knowledge about insects in the "bee school". For one-and-a-half hour they discover the world of the honeybee together with the beekeeper. If their interest for bees continues, they can, in a second step, complete an "activity passport". For that the little ones accompany the bee population with the beekeeper



throughout all the seasons. So the young association doesn't have to worry about having enough future gardeners.

*"We don't see our association as a means to an end, but rather as a social, rural community, where people gladly spend their free time."*





**Schleswig-Holstein:  
Kellinghusen**

Population: 8.092  
Allotment area: 4.65 ha  
allotment sites: 2  
allotment gardens: 86

**Allotment site "Kellinghusen -  
Vorbrügge"**

Founded in 1955  
Area: 3.05 ha  
of which 2.7 ha garden area  
allotment gardens: 52

**Stronger together**

The small town lies at the edge of the idyllic nature park Aukrug. It offers gentle hills as well as ponds, forests, moors and heaths. The area is very popular for holidays in Germany.

If you have beautiful nature on your doorstep, you may also feel a special need to protect it. The allotment gardeners in Kellinghusen are in any case focusing on nature friendly gardening. They do not use valuable drinking water for watering their gardens, but collect rainwater or use their own well. So that the feathered garden inhabitants feel well, the Kellinghusers set up nesting boxes and provide the birds with watering holes so that nobody has to die of thirst. A wet biotope attracts insects and amphibians to the site. Of course, garden waste ends up on the compost of the association. The allotment gardeners also have said goodbye to asbestos-containing Eternit, which was used on

garden sheds. If it is still present on individual plots, it is removed during a change of tenancy. In order for everyone to be able to learn more about nature, the Kellinghusers have created an educational fruit trail: In each garden there is a type of fruit tree, which has an information sign each; the reason being that you protect better what you know about.

However, not only animals and plants should feel good in the gardens. What counts particularly for the allotment gardeners, is the community. Immigrants are naturally welcomed into the north German garden community and can find a new, green home here. Together all tenants take care of the orchard and run a food bank garden for the needy of the village. In the communal herb garden, everyone can make use of the aromatic leaves and branches. A plot of land is reserved for the local beekeepers' association so that the harvests are right and everyone can learn more about the important role of the bees. If you want to try beekeeping, this is the right place for you. Moreover, pupils can learn here how to handle bees correctly and why they are indispensable for our ecosystem.

One thing is clear in Kellinghusen: they take care of each other and help each other. When it comes to gardening, everyone is the same anyway - whether it's nurturing the plants or fighting the inevitable weeds. By the

way, weeds can here effectively be called weeds. Even if they are not inherently bad - if unwanted plants are not kept in check, fruit and vegetables will have a hard time at some point.

*"One thing's clear in Kellinghusen: they take care of each other."*





**Hesse: Kassel**

Population: 201.097  
 Allotment area: 208 ha  
 allotment sites: 36  
 allotment gardens: 5.121

**Allotment site: Döllbach-Aue**

Founded in 1941  
 Area: 4.5 ha  
 of which 3.7 ha garden area  
 allotment gardens: 120

*One place for all*

Kassel is located (nearly) in the middle of Germany: The city is only 70 kilometres away from the geographical centre of the state. Not only the nearness to the centre, but also the location in the basin makes the climate in Kassel special, too. Here it is significantly warmer and milder than in the low mountain ranges around the city. In summer in the lower situated areas of the city it can occur that it is three to five degrees Celsius warmer than in the surrounding area.

The city district of Rothenditmold, where the association “Döllbach-Aue” is situated, is a classic industrial site in Kassel. Despite the many industrial sites there is a “green lung” around the name-giving Döllbach and the allotment site is part of this oasis. But not only green is on the programme, the allotment gardeners also especially nurture social relations towards the city district. The association is member of the working group “Working group Rothenditmolder Associations” and in



the local sponsoring association “We for Rothenditmold” and, therefore, it is involved in many events of the city district. The own summer festival of the association is a long-established tradition and is even known as the “Rothenditmolder community fair”.

For the older people, a senior garden has been created from funds of the association and donations from the allotment gardeners. With two raised beds they can garden respecting their backs, there is a little greenhouse and a little tool shed. Relaxing benches are here for recreation after gardening work.

Children can explore the sweet world of regional fruit in the “Naschgarten” and the elementary and secondary school run their own school garden. Together with the institute “Sculpture e.V.” the association additionally helps long-term unemployed people, who can get a glimpse of gardening and landscape building on specifically leased plots.



A little pond is the only spawning area for frogs in the area, but for the children’s safety it had to be fenced. With a clever filtering system, the pond water is successfully being held clean. Allotment gardeners with dogs can let their dogs run freely on the dog lawn. The lawn is cared for by all gardeners together.

All together the Kasseler allotment gardeners impress, especially with their social commitment, which is an important contribution to the community in a city district like Rothenditmold. The allotment gardeners prove that sometimes it takes just some courage and commitment, to make a place for all out of an allotment association.

*“If one loves nature, you’ll find it beautiful everywhere.” – Claim of the association, freely after van Gogh.*



# Austria: Socially motivated support services by the central federation of allotment gardeners in Austria



Allotment federations have to tackle a variety of tasks that are performed with great commitment by the people in charge of them. Because of the predominant preferences in Europe today the “green idea” is put in the limelight on every occasion.

However, our federations are much more than “just” green organisations. We are offering so much more which others cannot provide and sometimes don’t see as part of their image either.

In addition to our services in the areas of environmental protection, biodiversity and ecology, we are a social organisation too, that is also aware of its responsibility towards society.

The central federation of allotment gardeners in Austria assumes its social responsibility for the allotment gardeners and the allotment garden movement in many different ways. That also shows in the motto of the central federation, that no allotment

gardener who has fallen into financial distress through no fault of his own should lose his allotment garden as a result of this. In order to do justice to this motto the Austrian central federation created various funds.

## Social fund

This fund covers once the cost of the lease for an allotment gardener, who cannot pay it, so that the allotment garden can be preserved. The fund is fed by the central federation and partners from the insurance and banking sector. There are precise guidelines on how to apply for assistance. The allotment garden associations play an important role here, as they have direct contact with their members and also best know the personal circumstances of their members.

## Solidarity fund

The solidarity fund is fed by parts of the membership fee and resources from it are given to the associations. They get an interest-free offset

advance, to implement infrastructural measures in their association like, for example, path restorations, path lighting or the construction of a clubhouse. In order to minimise the burdens for the members, who ultimately finance these projects, they can apply to pay half of the total costs over three years via the central federation.

## Catastrophe fund

The catastrophe fund is also endowed by parts of the membership fee. It



provides fast and unbureaucratic assistance if an association suffers damage as a result of a natural catastrophe. These damages are mainly flood damages, as there are some associations in Lower Austria which are located close to the Danube and, therefore, are repeatedly affected by floods.

**Paying by instalments**

The central federation of allotment gardeners as general leaseholder and owner manages considerable areas and calculates many lease fees. Under certain circumstances the local allotment association is not charged for these lease payments, but instead they are directly sent to the individual allotment gardeners. This applies in particular on allotment sites where no association management has been formed. Here the federation not only undertakes the accounting of the leases, but also of all the operating costs. Should an allotment gardener have problems with paying the whole

amount at once, he can pay in instalments.

It has to be noted that the associations themselves often offer their members the possibility of paying their lease in instalments, although the grand total has already been delivered to the federation.

That's only a glimpse into the possibilities the Austrian central federation has created to support their allotment gardeners. These funds reflect the socially minded stance of the federation. One or another will claim that financial support or aid is not social, but it is one of the few possibilities as a national superior federation to provide support to an individual member or association.

Apart from the financial cushioning of hardship cases, the associations themselves do invaluable work, for example, by providing help in the form of activities: be it the performance of

physically heavy gardening work or going shopping. However, the integration into the social network of the allotment garden association plays above all a central role in this area.

The federation itself supports an organisation that works with people with multiple disabilities by having set up a therapy garden for these clients on one of its sites. This garden is looked after by the organisation with a lot of love and devotion and the people cared for really benefit from it. The therapy garden has already been described in detail in Hyphen no. 54.

Beyond that the central allotment garden federation is of course in any case ready to support its associations with their activities, in order to be able to also further proudly maintain that the allotment garden movement is not only a green, but also a social movement.

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