

## **You are our heroes**

5th December is the International Volunteer Day

The voluntary office in its original sense is an "honourable" and voluntary public office which a citizen accepts without remuneration. Nowadays, the term sometimes appears a little dusty and is therefore replaced by terms such as "voluntary work" or "citizenship engagement". After all, the term "honorary office" has long since been separated from its connection to a public office.

### **Changes in the honorary office**

Today, persons around the world make a voluntary commitment for a fixed - usually relatively long - period of time within the context of groupings (organisations, associations), initiatives or institutions. Although often explained, the concept of the honorary office is not easy to grasp in its full breadth and depth, since it has innumerable aspects and facets in today's multi-faceted world.

In Germany the honorary office has a long tradition. More than 20 million people currently volunteer in a wide range of areas. Without the voluntary, honorary commitment of citizens, many projects and areas of social and public life would hardly exist. The state has long recognised this fact and encourages voluntary citizen commitment: fiscally, in insurance and through official recognition. This in fact works quite well and many projects based on voluntary commitment are very much right in the spotlight. However, there is often a suspicious silence about the allotment sector. Why?

### **No honorary office in allotments?**

"They simply organise themselves, so what do they do for the community?" is a prejudice often heard. However, volunteer gardeners are doing much more than just securing the administration of their clubs and allotments. Volunteers in allotment clubs are not only reliable partners for the civil service and politicians, but they also ensure that, by means of good lobbying, allotments - which are often not considered in public discussion concerning the use of urban spaces - are maintaining their secure place in the green infrastructure of cities and municipalities.

### **Allotments for social sustainability**

Volunteers don't only work towards good relationships within their clubs, but also they also shape the social climate in the adjoining neighbourhoods through a range of projects: environmental education for children and teenagers, neighbourhood meetings, playgrounds and recreation areas to strengthen social cohesion in the neighbourhood by integrating different groups. So allotments are the real institutions that combine ecological and social sustainability in urban areas.

All this only works thanks to the prosocial action of the many volunteers in the clubs - our heroes.

Heroes are said to be selfless, so thanks are unnecessary. So **Thank you, dear gardening friends!** This is exactly what volunteers need: thanks and appreciation for what they have

done. Because respect for achievements for the common good, official thanks and personal recognition not only spur on those already active, they also inspire the heroes of the future.

*Thomas Wagner, Federal Association of German Gardening Friends*

And this thank you and appreciation is not only expressed to the allotment gardeners in Germany for all their voluntary engagement but to all the allotment gardeners unified in the International Office.

*Malou Weirich, Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux*