

Study session in Luxembourg

The Office delegates met in Luxembourg from 27th until 30rd August 2015 for this year's study session.

The subject was: "Gardening advice considering sustainability and responsible use of resources".

Rich and interesting discussions took place and will be the basis for the coming international congress in Vienna in 2016.

The federations have received all the documents of the study session, if you want to know more.

As appendix you find the conclusions of the working groups and the study session.

**English workshop:
Gardening advice considering
sustainability and responsible use
of resources**

A) What does technical gardening
advice look like today in the individual
federations

a) Positive aspects



Programmes for training expert advisers are available, as well as modern technologies like for example: e-learning.

There are various publications by the national federations (except Norway, see below „problems“)

In order to consolidate the community there are e.g. competitions like who has the best and most beautiful garden.

In the federations there are hotlines if the allotment gardeners have questions.

The federations have websites with sufficient information material, specially prepared for the allotment gardeners, and expert advisers (e.g. about pest management, plant diseases and vermin, weeds, invasive plants, fertilisation, composting, and many more)

Also, special field trips are organised.

In some federations, rent includes training by experts, by e.g. taking part in educational courses, ecological gardening etc.

The training of expert advisers has been reformed. There is a new training system, which comes with new contents and final exams (contribution from Austria).

Holding of meetings and lectures by the expert advisers.

In the different (allotment) federations, expert advisers have been trained to be apiarists (beekeepers). There are also special beekeeping groups.

Expert advisers oversee projects like for example compost and earthworms.

In some federations the allotment sites are open for the public. Activities for children are offered as well as markets where allotment gardeners can offer their goods.

b) Problems

If new ideas or future visions are discussed, respectively modern and effective structures are being intended, there are always some people who try to prevent these processes/changes, or at least delay them. Key word from the workshop: some people have their feet on the brake.

It is not easy to find allotment gardeners who have an interest in being expert advisers.

Participants of the expert adviser trainings have too little time to attend all the classes.

It is being criticised that there are no formal lessons.

In some countries the participants have to pay fees to pay the expert advisers who are holding the expert adviser training.

Sometimes the quality of the lecturers is doubted.

There are no publications by the federation (Norway).

The organisation of expert advisers is a closed group (Austria).

Lack of representation in public.

Technically simple and little informative websites respectively forums, which for example give incomplete and even false information. Note from the workshop: shit-websites.

Prohibition to use pesticides, except bio-pesticides. This is the norm for an ecological production. For integrated pest management (plant protection), one should keep the option of using pesticides as an emergency measure.

B) Technical gardening advice of the future

Safe pesticides and their secured application

Safe use of tools/machines.

Improvement of the knowledge about the nutrition of plants and earth (management).

Under the keyword „climate change“ water has an outstanding importance. Water should be used as little as possible and collected in rain barrels.

Responsible handling of neobiont and invasive species, if they are encroaching upon allotment gardens, as well as knowledge of „new“ plant diseases and vermin.

Providing warning services and forecast models regarding plant diseases and vermin in cooperation with the official centres.

Encouragement of beneficial organisms (useful animals) in the allotment gardens.

Frequent soil analyses.

Biodiversity in the allotment gardens/ associations: improve, increase and maintain.

Fruit trees, vegetables, ornamental plants: using appropriate „right“ plants for the allotment gardens, old species too. Taking into consideration of the plants' environmental needs.

Allotment gardens have an influence on humans' mental health. Therapy gardens are also a subject.

Social aspects: Allotment garden associations are a communicative community: talk to each other.

Allotment garden sites can thereby contribute to the integration of people. Important are projects with a public relation effect, e.g. for children or people with special needs.

Another important issue is the future of composting. Contribution of the Netherlands: compost toilets, if they are safe.

Dr Gerhard Bedlan

German workshop: Opinions and results

Support for members is still an important task – some aspects:

Practical gardening tips

Practical gardening tips, such as concerning compost management, practical fruit-tree pruning, environmentally friendly fertilization and pesticide use are essential.

Soil protection

Practical information about collecting rainwater in the garden and an economical use of it is important as well as information about soil and water protection.

Climate change

Short periods with locally heavy rainfall alternately with dry and hot periods indicate climate change. New varieties and species of fauna and flora follow the "new warm routes" and settle in areas where they have never been before. And not only useful plants come, but new pests and diseases, too.

Biodiversity

One more recent important issue is biodiversity. Within a cleared landscape that is poor in species, allotments are giving old and regional species and varieties a chance of survival.

Friendly gardening

We often discuss chemical pesticide use although a wide majority of our tenants/members don't use chemical pesticides.

Our opinion: Stop these useless debates and put the focus on "friendly gardening". In the Netherlands, allotment areas in the cities are important pesticide free zones.

Teaching gardens have potential

Combine theory and practice of specialist advice: Teaching gardens with biotope areas, fruit and vegetable beds have great potential!

Specialist advice is changing

Today, new members and tenants have another understanding of support. They are less interested in chalk and talk and typical school lessons.

Today, specialist advisers are a kind of "hotline". Gardeners ask them when they have a problem which has to be solved. The specialist allotment adviser of today is more



and more a kind of manager who involves other people and organizations with green skills in his activities. Another aspect: On European state level, we should introduce more networking so that specialist advisers get more detailed information from each other.

New generation

New allotment gardeners have less gardening experience in comparison to the "old generation".

Conclusion: it will be necessary to introduce them cautiously to knowledge about allotments and the associations.

In Switzerland, "new gardeners" have to do a practical training course before they really get their garden.

More and more "new gardeners" are immigrants, for example 70% in Lyon.

Most of them have different cultural and religious backgrounds and another sense for gardening and activities. According to their descent, some of them have a lot of experience with fruit and vegetable growing, for example new gardeners from the former Soviet Union.

Opinion: Give new gardeners the possibility to lay open their social and green skills, for example on allotment meetings or festivals.

Support of social sustainability

Sustainability is an important task and much more than environmentally friendly gardening.

Allotment holders are organized in local associations and display important green and social skills.

Many allotment associations establish green partnerships with schools, kindergartens, nature-protection groups and many other organizations operating in social and ecological areas.

These additional functions of the allotments and allotment associations would simply not be possible without the experience and expertise of specialist advisers. We should lay open these treasures of what we do. (Vienna 2016)

That is real social sustainability.

Werner Heidemann

Conclusions of the study session in Luxembourg

28th & 29th august 2015

Dear colleagues and friends

It has been a very rich and positive study session, with a good participation of all the federations. We only regret the absence of our friends from Finland and Sweden. We really missed them.

Despite the language problem, the atmosphere during this meeting was very friendly and relaxed. Yet there was a lot of good work done within the workshops and even the coffee breaks, the meals and even late at night in the hotel bar on Friday evening. Our exchanges were remarkably fruitful and positive.

We owe it to the excellent introductory lectures and presentations by Dr Gerhard Bedlan, Mr Werner Heidemann and Mr François Kraus.

They enabled us to review our practices and make a complete survey of gardening advice among the members of the Office International, always taking into account the sustainability of our actions and the need to protect natural resources.

Then the discussion that followed about the future allowed the participants to put forward a great number of interesting ideas in many fields ranging from water management, the use of fertilizers, climate change and its consequences on our gardening practices, the safe use of tools... to mention only a few.

Startling questions were asked and interesting opinions were put forward.

So now we have plenty of good material to build an interesting resolution for the Vienna Congress of August 2016.

I would like to thank you all for the positive work that has been done during that study session and more particularly the 3 workshop leaders: Dr Bedlan, Werner Heidemann and Jürgen Sheldon.



I would also like to thank the Luxembourgish Federation that made it possible through the choice of this comfortable and quiet hotel, with all the modern conveniences favorable to good working conditions. This, no doubt, contributed to the success of this meeting.

To conclude this speech, I would like to remind you that the world is changing more and more rapidly. We too must follow that evolution in order not to disappear. We must not be afraid of change. It is sometimes useful to take risks.

And finally, keep in mind Werner Heidemann's last words: "Let's be optimistic".

I would like to express a last wish: I would very much like to visit the training centers, either in Germany or Austria and I encourage you to do the same. Do not hesitate to visit the neighbouring federations.

Hervé Bonnavaud