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MOVING TOWARDS A GREEN TOMORROW: URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS AND THE “NEW GREEN CITY”

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Abstract

This article will present empirical results from an ethnographic research project looking into the transformation of the Pergolenviertel allotment garden site in Hamburg, Germany. Due to a new housing policy coming into action in 2011, the site was to be closed down and the land used for a new large scale housing project. A group of the affected plot holders however protested against the intended plan by starting a local initiative and filing a law suit against the plan. As a result, the original development plan was changed to allow for approx. 150 of the original 330 urban allotment gardens to remain on the housing development site, together with the new buildings. This was a decision that planners from the district planning department called a pioneering moment for Hamburg's urban development. Based on interviews with key stakeholders, the article will retrace the transformation process and ask how in the process different, often conflicting visions of the future land use were articulated and negotiated, and whether the compromise can be considered as a pathway towards a new, green city of tomorrow.

Keywords: Urban allotment gardens, urban planning, green activism, future, case study research

1. Introduction

Allotment gardens in urban areas are not a new phenomenon, but date all the way back to the industrial city of the late 19th century (Keshavarz and Bell 2016) and have remained a relatively stable element of the urban fabric all the way up into the 21st century. Today however allotment gardens are undergoing major changes that are connected to a shifting attitude towards allotment garden sites as urban green commons in need of modernization and restructuring. An attitude, that is controversial and debated in allotment garden circles and beyond.

Locating itself within this shifting field, this article explores the planned transformation of an approx. 90 year old case study allotment garden site in Hamburg, Germany, which was due to be closed down and re-used as a housing site. A new land-use plan had designated the area as a new housing development area based on a narrated “timescape of futurity” (Bellacasa 2014: 21) that prioritized new housing over the present day garden use. The plot holders were renting the gardens from the municipality of Hamburg and had no formal ownership rights. And yet, they felt a strong attachment and emotional ownership towards the land, and a group formed to fight against the planned re-development by politicizing the plans and emphasizing the role of the land as a green common of high ecological importance for the city of Hamburg. How, in this process of contestation and transformation, was the future of the allotment garden land narrated and negotiated? This is the research question structuring the article.

It will start, in section 2, by discussing the role of urban allotment gardens and nature in contemporary European cities and connect it to changes in environmental planning. Section 3 will describe the methodological approach and methods used, and section 4 and 5 will present and discuss empirical findings. Finally, section 6 and 7 will conclude on what we can learn from the case study regarding the green cities of tomorrow.

2. Urban Allotment Gardens and nature in the contemporary city

In the past few years European cities have experienced a wave of new community gardens springing up, on rooftops, vacant brownfields, forgotten neighbourhood spaces, that have been subjected to a range of academic research. Studies have looked into the social and cultural capital that community gardens help generate (Eizenberg 2013, Firth et al. 2011), the economic role of urban gardens as providing food support (Moran and Fernandez 2014, Seguí, Maćkiewicz and Rosol 2017), the political dimensions and connection to changing governing structures (Certoma 2011, Sonderman 2017, Rosol 2017), gardeners’ motives (Appel et al. 2011) and effects on psychological and physical health of the gardeners (Bauer and Martens 2010). Coldin and Barthels (2013) described the various positive impacts of allotment gardens on the ecological system of cities, and DeSilvey (2003) and Lawson (2004) did a historic review of allotment gardens in Scotland and the United States and their contemporary situation within its urban context.

Despite numerous studies showing the multiple benefits urban gardens have for humans, social groups, neighbourhoods and urban ecosystems, the relationship between allotment gardens and the planning departments remains strained, as both DeSilvey (2003) and Lawson (2004) point out. Spilková and Vágner (2017) show how in Prague the rate of allotment gardens has rapidly been diminishing since 1989, a development that has been taking place across Europe for several years. The geographers Crouch and Warden discuss this in their monograph “The Allotment Garden” and recommend gardeners to “watch out for what the council is doing” (1997: xvi), for instance by participating in planning committees. Possibly the often unclear nature of allotment gardens can play into this development: being neither a space for passive leisure activity, nor a private, individualized green space, nor a public green common. It is often located on visible land, for instance next to train tracks, but at the same time is not accessible due to fences and gates (Crouch and Ward 1997).

These ambivalent characteristics of allotments, together with a heterogeneous user group might explain why the public opinion about allotment gardens varies strongly: from allotment gardeners being one of the last protectors for having control over one’s own time and against the increasing colonization of the private sphere (Zimmer 2016) to allotment gardeners as being completely removed what is going on in the world and only interested in their own spatial needs (Jessen 2016).

This ambivalence of perceptions is noticeable regarding urban green spaces in general. Nature and green spaces have always been a central part of urban development and city planning. However traditionally they were seen as separate units, where “[t]he natural world, the countryside and rural life have been most commonly conceptualized as a backcloth or setting for the city” (Healey 2007: 169). Mentally separating nature from the urban habitat, planners aimed to keep the separation alive, for instance by controlling urban sprawls and designating greenbelt land.

The garden city movement at the early 20th century overcame this division and brought together city life and nature in a unified spatial entity. In his 1902 published book “Garden City of Tomorrow”, the writer Ebenezer Howard combined social and planning visions and proposed the creation of newly constructed self-governing communities, with a maximum resident number of 32.000 people. He saw this as being the best solution to stopping the rapid urban growth taking place at the time. According to Hall (2014), essential to Howards’ planning idea was communal land ownership, self-reliance of the cities in terms of jobs and facilities, and for it to be built on small entrepreneurships - from architects to artists, gardeners, manufactures, merchants etc. Even though some new European towns were built modelled on the garden city idea, it never became a dominant planning ideal. And yet the garden city movement helped to spread the understanding of urban residents’ needs and desires to spend time in urban green spaces.

Now, over 100 years after the garden city movement was introduced, nature is again at the forefront of city planning, though in different, often conflicting roles. On the one hand, according to Healey (2007), there is a growing understanding amongst spatial planners for the interconnectedness between localized activities and planetary ecological, hydrological, climatological and biospheric conditions that calls for sustainable urban planning and protection of urban natural resources on local, national and global scales. This growing understanding is due to the rise of what she calls “New Environmentalism”, that was much influenced by the famous Club of Rome “Limits to Growth” publication of the 1970s and the Brundtland Report of the 1980s, that gave rise to a new perception of nature. From one that, according to Healey (ibid.) could and should be commanded and controlled by humans, towards a more systemic understanding of interdependent ecosystems, species and habitats that needed to be maintained rather than controlled.

At the same time, cities are currently operating within a strict neoliberal framework that tries to ensure the continuous flow of financial investments, and which engages in “neoliberalising

nature” (Castree 2008: 131) through the privatization of natural resources and the reduction of invaluable and complex ecosystems to commodities of pricing (Heynen and Robbins 2005).

This often results in urban green commons such as allotment garden sites that have been owned by local or regional municipalities being sold to private companies and redeveloped. What lies at hand one could argue is a conflict of interest between new environmental-protectionist policies and an economically driven built development.

Conflicts of interest surrounding land use are of course not new, as city planning has always been, according to the planning theorist Forester (2009: 186) about “deal[ing] creatively and pragmatically with differences – differences in priorities, interests, and values, in worldviews and perspectives, in class position, political standing, cultural identity, and more”.

However, what happens when differences grow and professional expertise no longer represents values and interests of all kinds of different communities and stakeholders – which according to Gallent and Ciaffi (2014) is a vital requirement of urban planning? Is this not the dilemma of municipalities today? With this in mind, the positivist view on planning as navigating differences (Forester 2009) and enabling multiparty collaborations (Healey 2007) seems to reach its limits. Here the work of anthropologists Simone Abram and Gisa Weszkalnys (2013) provide new, important insights into the nature of planning. Viewing planning and plans as a “form of promissory note” (ibid: 3), that draws the future into the present, they argue that planning today operate within “changing horizons of expectations and the shifting grounds of government” (ibid: 3). According to Abram and Weszkalnys, a new world of intergovernmentality, shifting relations between multinational organisations, local municipalities and the state all have changed the world of planning, from one that is predictable and stable – where the plan actually refers to a future to be delivered – to a much more hazardous, unstable and fragile kind. Hence, they (ibid: 15) point towards the increasing number of planning failures, time delays, or complete break down of plans, which goes to show that “the relationship between spatial plans and the realities imagined in them is always fragile and multivalent.”

3. Methodology: Ethnographic case study research

The results presented in this paper are based on an empirical study following the grounded theory paradigm by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1968), that encourages to gather a wide range of different mainly qualitative data, and to repeat and interconnect phases of data collection, analysis and theory generation.

The data collection for this article centers on a selected, spatially well bounded and defined case study, which aims to put the complex relationships that influenced its transformation “under a magnifying glass so that closely interwoven strands can be teased apart” (Poteete, Jansen and Ostrom 2010: 35)” thereby “getting a rich picture and gaining analytical insights about it” (Thomas and Myers 2015: 15).

For the actual research, an ethnographic “doing” was applied, which in this context means that I, the researcher, would frequently collect data material while actively being present in the research field, e.g. during association meetings. Next to field observations and field conversation, the main source of data were semi-structured interviews (between 1 – 2 hours in length) with eight involved stakeholders from different fields: activist plot holders, the central allotment garden representative, leading bureaucrats from the municipal spatial planning departments and external planning consultants. The interviews were then transcribed and with specific research questions in mind, the material was analysed and coded.

In addition to these primary material sources, also secondary sources such as planning and policy documents, protest leaflets and websites were consulted. In order to get an insight into the way the field produced knowledge artefacts and the manner in which it presented it, as well as getting additional contextual information.

Using a triangulation of methods and taking on an ethnographic research approach, the research traced the process of transformation from different angles and tried to understand the interconnections between different elements.

4. Case study: Pergolenviertel Allotment Gardens in Hamburg, Germany

The case study site consists of two large land areas, that are divided by a public foot path and that were represented by two associations: the association “Heimat” (German for Home), and “Barmbeker Schweiz”(German for Barmbeker Switzerland). They are located approx. five kilometers North-East from the City center of Hamburg, in the district of Barmbek. Due to good public transport connections, the inner city of Hamburg is reached within a 15 minute ride with public transport. Barmbek used to have a reputation as being a solid working class district – many social housing projects of the 1920s were realized there – but has become more affluent in recent years, with young families moving to the lively and well connected district, and into the old, well maintained housing stock.

The “Barmbeker Schweiz” and “Heimat” – which will be referred to, for simplifying reasons, as the Pergolenviertel gardens – are located on land the size of 21 ha, which is divided into 330 individual garden plots, some of which are so called live-in gardens, meaning that the renters permanently live on the plot of land.

Even though the garden site has existed for approx. 80 – 90 years, it never had the status of a permanent allotment garden site, but in planning terms was considered a “temporary site”, meaning that public authorities could formally re-use and redevelop the land for other purposes. Several such plans were made in the past decades – one interviewee even mentioned hearing from another plot holder about the seemingly absurd plans for a funicular to be built on the mainly flat land – but all of the plans had failed to be put into concrete action.

In 2011 however, a new housing policy was introduced in Hamburg, and with it, the allotment garden site was designated the housing site for the “Pergolenviertel”, consisting of 10 building sites and sold to different property developers (see B-Plan Pergolenviertel: Begründung zum Bebauungsplan Winterhude 42 / Barmbek Nord 42 / Alsterdord 42).

On the official project website www.forum-pergolenviertel.de, where all the planning documents can be downloaded, under the caption “the district” concrete figures are given: Of the 27 ha large piece of land, 6 ha are designated for 150 allotment gardens, 8 ha are designated for the 10 new buildings (ranging from 3 to 8 storeys in height). In total, 1400 new apartments are to be built, while 60 % percent of these are to be publicly subsidized and rent controlled. However, the rent control is limited to a 10 year period, after which the rent control caps are removed.

The original housing plan never intended to keep any of the original garden plots, though it did designate three land areas as gardening spaces – these are highlighted in Image 1. The spatial layout of these gardening spaces does not adhere to the original plot structure, but was planned top-down, with no intention of keeping any of the plots. The interviewee from

the central allotment garden association compared this top-down planning land dividing measure with cookies being cut out from dough (Anonymous 2017c), and one of the involved garden activist complained about the “land waste” (Anonymous 2017a) that this new land division created.

The fact that 150 plots were rewritten into the plans was the result of a resistance process from a core group of gardeners. How this unfolded, the next section will describe.



Image 1: The landscape plan of the Pergolenviertel project

Source: Bebauungsplan Winterhude 42 / Barmbek-Nord 42 / Alsterdorf 42 „Pergolenviertel“ Landschaftsplanerischer Fachbeitrag; Own added graphics.



Image 2: One gardener's print out of the landscape plan, trying to make sense of the new layout with the help of added notes and drawings.

Source: Own photograph.

5. Retracing the transformation process of the Allotment Gardens

*“We had no idea where all of this would lead to in the beginning.
What was said was: well the gardens cannot stay.”*

(Anonymous 2017d, External Planning Consultant)

Before going into the details, I want to address the problem with using the word “transformation” to study the dynamic of allotment gardens. For, the word “transformation” implies a linearity of intention, action and progress that connects to the logic and interests of the planners. But this linear, future oriented understanding fails to give equal emphasis to the intentions and actions of the garden activists, who aimed to stop the development plans. Being aware of this problem, I would like to stress that in this article’s understanding of the word “transformation” both actions and intentions are included, the desire to develop as well as the desire to prevent development.

The following stages that structure the narration of the transformation process were constructed based on codings from the interview material: the stage of the imaginative and argumentative action, the stage of the planning action and finally the stage of the materializing action.

Stage 1: Imaginative and argumentative Action

“Basically the seeds for what happened were planted a very long time ago. In 1967, the city of Hamburg was growing rapidly, just as it is doing today, and the population forecast said that soon 2 million residents would live in Hamburg. To combat that expected growth, the 10.000 Plan was introduced in 1967, which basically said that 10.000 new dwellings were to be built as quickly as possible, on every possible vacant plot of land.”
(Anonymous 2017c)

The quote comes from the chairman of the central association for allotment gardeners in Hamburg, who in the interview connected the situation of allotment gardens in Hamburg today with imaginations, figures and a concrete policy from half a century ago.

50 years later, the narration is similar, but the figures are different: in 2011, the Hamburger Senate – the political city leadership consisting of 11 senators and 1 mayor - introduced a new housing policy, that formulated the aim of increasing the numbers of newly built dwellings to a binding 6000 new dwellings per year (see Bezirksamt Hamburg-Nord 2012b). Dividing this number amongst its seven districts, Hamburg Nord – the administrative district of Barmbek and with 293.000 residents the second largest district in Hamburg – was

requested to hand out building permits for 900 new dwellings in the year 2012. Stressing the urgency, the policy came with a tight time plan: decisions regarding building permits were to be made by the district planners within 1-3 months, at latest after six months (ibid.). This policy placed pressure on the district planning units to identify new construction land and encourage development to take place on the designated land within a short amount of time. It articulated a strong urgency that requests and legitimizes a faster process of giving building permits to developers due to the narrative that housing is urgently needed. This argumentation paved the way for the rezoning of the Pergolenviertel and the consecutive development plans, that started with the housing policy coming into action after October 2011. At this time, none of the plot holders were aware that the land they were growing their plants and vegetables on, was mentally already being re-developed. Without their knowing, the imaginative and argumentative seeds of action had been planted.

Stage 2: Contractual action

The housing policy and its numbers created a seemingly objective reality, one where housing needs are urgent and need to be addressed. These numbers led to concrete actions, in the form of new spatial plans of different scales. On the official website of the spatial planning department of Hamburg Nord, the construction plan of the Pergolenviertel lists a total of 18 subplans (relating to issues such as climate, transportation, noise, water, trees) related to the development project, that cut across different departmental units. The work on these “subplans” – the so-called framework planning – was initiated in 2011, and was made possible due to the 1997 land use plan, that had already then classified the land of the Pergolenviertel allotment gardens as future housing land. The important planning instrument of the construction plan – important insofar as it must be politically agreed upon by the Senate and is legally binding, meaning no building can take place on designated green areas – was passed in July 2015.

Between the start of the framework planning and the passing of the construction plan, an external consulting company was employed to organize an accompanying participation process for local civic stakeholders. Intended for two years, it ended up lasting five years. One garden activist referred to the participation process as *“enabling us to participate in how we should be kicked off from the land”* (Anonymous 2017b).

Approval of the construction plan can be seen as a key moment in the transformation process – after it had been passed by the senate, the land owner could start to sell off the land to developers and the formal process lead changed hands from the district spatial planning department to the department responsible for unbuilt and green spaces. Now that the land was divided into individual plots for future construction and legitimized through its placement on the construction plan, the promised transformation of the Pergolenviertel land seemed inevitable and in near reach, and steps for a smooth transition in the form of an accompanying participation process had been taken.

“When we found out about the plan, we were completely and utterly shocked. Nobody had told us about the plan to build on the land and destroy all the gardens, the plans had been made behind our backs and we were deliberately left unknowing.” (Anonymous 2017a)

One of the garden activists describes his reaction when he found out about the building plans, leaving undisclosed how or when exactly he found out. This imprecision regarding the “finding out” of the plans was a recurring theme in my conversations with the gardeners, and points towards no official statement being communicated at that point from the planning department.

A core group of 15-20 people decided to protest against the plans by forming a group called “Eden-für-Jeden” (engl.: Paradise Eden for all). In the following weeks and months the group communicated its disapproval of the plans through various means: by placing logos and flyers on nearby public paths (see image 3 and 4), running a website where protest information was uploaded, organizing a demonstration in the district and attending official participation meetings to publicly state their arguments against the project. The main action however was to start an initiative and in August 2012 the group handed in the necessary 6792 signatures to request that the residents of Hamburg Nord were asked to vote whether the allotment gardens should remain or be redeveloped. With the necessary signatures collected, the local district needed to control and confirm the validity of the signatures before the election was made possible. However, the Senate wanted to ensure no election take place, as this could have meant the end of the Pergolenviertel plan. It did so through the means of evocation, whereby the matter is placed from the district level into the politically higher standing body of the senate – as a seldom used way for the Senate to “trump” the local administrative districts, if it strongly disagrees with an important issue. The evocation meant that the planning would have gone towards the higher ministry of urban development and housing in Hamburg and not remain on district level. However, this was not the case – as

the senate did not disagree with the district planning itself, it simply wanted to stop a district election from happening. Because the formal procedures were not followed, the initiative group filed a repeal against the evocation at the administrative court, which however was denied. *“They out-tricked us legally”*, one of the activist gardeners summed up the experience (Anonymous 2017a).



Image 3 and 4: Protest logos and flyers were hung up along the public foot path leading through the garden site.

Source: Own photographs.



Following the court decision, the gardeners were met with another unexpected decision: the court had ruled a few days after the yearly allotment garden contract-dissolving deadline. The national allotment garden law in Germany requests that the dissolving of contracts between the land owners and the plot holders must happen in the fall season, in order to give the gardeners enough time to plan their move accordingly. If the deadline has passed, the contract is valid for another year, thereby ensuring the protection of the gardeners and their seasonal gardening activities.

However, due to large pressure coming from the senate, for the first time in German allotment garden history, a special agreement was made with the central allotment garden association, whose leader agreed to dissolve the contract despite the yearly deadline having passed. For the gardeners this sudden announcement came unexpected and gave them only approx. two months to clear their plot. The following quote illustrates the sudden pressure this translated to for the gardeners:

“I tried to save whatever I could save. The lawnmower I brought to friends, the bush cutter I gave to people from the association (...) the chairs I had I could put into the garden of a friend, we dug out and moved some of my plants into R’s garden (...) my cellar needed to be cleared out (...) It was a logistical question, to relocate all this stuff somewhere else, and at the same time dealing with this huge shock, knowing soon they will come with chain saws and cut down my apple trees.” (Anonymous 2017b)

The planning action had been followed by contractual action, and this meant not only the logistical challenge of clearing a plot of land within a short amount of time, but also accepting the loss of what the plot holders considered their ecological property.

Stage 3: Materialising Action

“We went through different phases. The phase of the horror, the phase of fighting, of grieving, of accepting. I would say now we are in the phase where we are looking ahead.” (Anonymous 2017b)

As part of the agreement between the landowners and the central association of allotment gardeners regarding the contract suspension, additional agreements on compensation measures were made. Those plot owners losing their land according to the allotment garden law needed to be offered a replacement garden. In addition to this, the gardeners received financially compensation for the lost ecological and building structures. One central result of the negotiations was the agreement that on the designated green spaces in the middle of the land (see Image 1), the allotment garden plots could remain. Even though their size was to be reduced (from 600 - 500 m² to 300 - 250m²), the division of the plot was to be made in such a way, that the original layout structure more or less remained. This process was more labour and cost intensive for the responsible district department, but was of central importance for the gardeners, as it enabled the existing ecosystem of the 150 plots to remain largely intact.

From spring 2016 onwards, the stage of the materializing action took place, which meant that the affected plot holders had to clear their plots from all ecological and material structures (plants, bushes, sheds etc.), which was followed by construction and landscaping companies preparing the remaining allotment garden land by creating new path ways, water and electrical infrastructure, and planting hedges around the new plot divisions.

A special agreement was also made regarding existing trees on the land, as the activist group considered the plans to cut them down a drastic intervention into the biosphere and

negotiated for the trees to remain. Following a viewing of all trees and negotiation between the leading activist (who has a background as a biologist), an external tree consultant and the district green space attorney, several trees were placed under protection in the form of a vegetation plan.

During this phase of materializing action, the remaining plots could be accessed, which enabled the plot holders to oversee the construction work and take care of the land by negotiating with the workers. One gardener e.g. told the story of how she saved a wild rose bush on her plot of land from being bulldozed by convincing the construction workers to drive their construction vehicles onto her plot of land from a different access point.

The phase of materialized action, when the plan regarding the restructuring of the green land was being implemented, brought different stakeholders together in a new way, that enabled them to cooperate. As the legal decision regarding the building plan had been decided, and the initiative efforts terminated effectively, as part of the agreement between activists and the district officials the remaining allotment garden land was to be prepared according to the gardeners' needs. Hence a compromise was negotiated, where the existing ecological structure was largely kept intact, and for those losing their garden, a financial compensation was ensured.

6. Narrated Futurity in the context of contested plans

"I as a person can chose to move somewhere else, but the city of Hamburg cannot" (Anonymous 2017b)

In the planning action phase, time-related arguments – both in favour but also against the plan – were narrated by different stakeholders. The planners from the spatial and green space department would during the interview with me stress the housing problem in Hamburg and address the futurity of the Pergolenviertel through the lense of the housing crisis. The Pergolenviertel project is thereby articulated as a promise that will ease the pressure on the present day housing market by providing new attractive housing in green surroundings. The promise of new material order is given emphasis by being materialized in visualisations – an architectural model, a top-down spatial plan illustrating where the housing blocks and green spaces will be located, photographic visualization with children playing in front of red brick buildings. In interviews with planners from the district departments, a selection of the

planning material was brought along and laid out in front of me, in the middle of the table. Not only during the interview with me, also through repeated presentations at closed and also open planning forums, and by being manifested in the official planning documents, did the plans act as a powerful and visual signifier for the promised future.

This differs from the sense of futurity that the activists created and engaged with – here the desired futurity, which they fought for, consisted of maintaining the existing ecological and material form. Rather than making a promise for a new order to be established in the future, the aim was to extend the present order into the future. To promote this vision of futurity, the activists emphasized the richness of the existing ecosystem and species on site: pictures of birds, of old large trees and capturing messages such as “I can no longer live here”, were put on their website. The name of the activist group in itself already transports the message of needing to extend the present order into the future, for Eden is the paradise from which in Christian mythology god expelled Adam and Eve. Having found a new Eden on earth, this Eden does not need any new developments, it simply is a timeless paradise, that needs protection rather than development. The sense of paradise and personal attachment would repeatedly come up during interviews. One of the activist gardeners remembered growing up in postwar Hamburg and how he tried to avoid being in public spaces alone due to his experiences of being beaten up by gangs of young boys roaming the streets. This was not the case on the garden site, where his grandmother rented a garden and which he remembers as being one of the few outdoor spaces he felt safe and protected.

However, in the vision of futurity brought forward by the initiative, the personal attachment was never articulated. Instead, technoscientific climatic arguments were formulated and the role of the site as helping to regulate the climate emphasized.

The planned project was viewed as bringing danger – not only to the species located on site, but to the entire city. *“I as a person can choose to move somewhere else, but the city of Hamburg cannot”* (Anonymous 2017b), one interviewee stressed the urgency and vision of an endangered future city that is becoming the victim of ruthless planning and emphasized the effects of this development by referring to personal observations of reducing air quality: *“When I used to ride my bicycle down the Saarlandstrasse, under those large beech trees and bushes, I could suddenly breathe again (...) that is now gone.. (...) And those are the effects that are already happening, not in some distant future, with the next generation, but now, today, while I live.”* (Anonymous 2017b).

The quote illustrates how the common held assumption, that possible ecological consequences of urban development are only to be experienced in a distant future are

proving to be wrong and it moves the timeline between built development and its ecological costs closer together.

7. Conclusion: The Pergolenviertel case as the way towards a future green city

This article had the aim of retracing the transformation process of the case study garden site in Hamburg by identifying key moments and visions of futurity that played into the process, thereby giving the often forgotten dimension of time in planning contexts a stronger emphasis. It started off by de-constructing the modernistic vision of planning as a definitive promise for a new social and material order delivered in the future. Future in this understanding is empty and completely open to new ideas. The case study then illustrated the ambivalence and insecurity of urban planning today in how to deal with urban green commons, the thin line between a promised plan and a failure to deliver so due to conflicting interest, and planning as multiparty negotiation but also of asymmetric power relations.

What then can we learn from the Pergolenviertel case study regarding the green city of tomorrow?

Firstly, it illustrates how allotment gardens in growing cities, especially if they are located centrally, are under increasing pressure. With a rising pressure on the rental market, and calls to increase available housing stock, they are competing with a concrete need and demand of a built nature. And yet, the Pergolenviertel case study shows how rather than placing both – green versus built use – in opposition to each other in a way that requires an either-or-decision, it is possible to aim for a compromise. This third way was not initially intended, but resulted from the strong protest and an actual law suit against the plans brought forward by a group of gardeners, making their opposition of the redevelopment publicly clear. This shows how important civic participation in the form of legal action against development plans can be, as it can lead to previously unplanned negotiations.

It also shows the strong attachment formed between the users and their plots of land, and how important the creative engagement with ecological spaces that allow for a sense of attachment and ownership is – today, but most likely also tomorrow. It also illustrates the need for planners and political actors alike to understand and value the ecological life already

present in many allotment gardens— rather than seeing it as a plot of land to be cleared and, like an empty canvas, re-filled with new design and new structures.

Cities of tomorrow will have to think of ways to integrate different spatial needs with each other. Rather than thinking along the line of either/or, a new thinking along the lines of “both” and “as well as” is likely to be needed. To integrate different uses with an eye on a future that is already in the making and the potential impacts of present actions and planning decisions - that will be the challenge of the years to come.

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