

The Garden Home

THE POTENTIAL OF ALLOTMENTS FOR REDENSIFYING THE INNER CITY

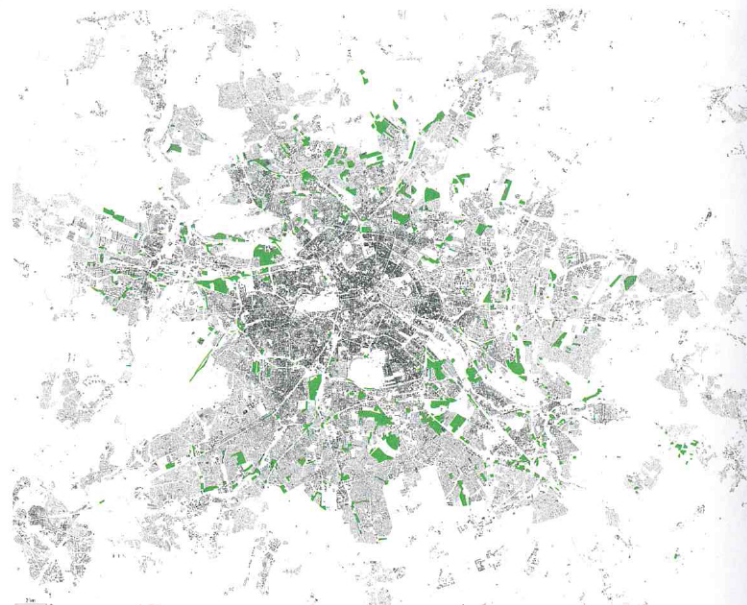
Imke Woelk

Berlin currently has 918 allotment sites featuring nearly 73,000 garden plots. The allotments occupy an overall area of approximately 3,000 hectares, nearly 3 percent of the city's surface; three-quarters of the sites belong to the State of Berlin. No other metropolis of Berlin's size has a comparable number of gardens being utilized privately in the area directly surrounding its inner city. These allotments amount to a cultural, social, and ecological resource that has evolved over many years. It is important that their green identity be preserved, and that as an ecological component of the city they continue contributing to the stabilization of the urban climate.

However, in view of the housing shortage and the fact that socially disadvantaged classes are being forced out of the city centers, these enclaves provide, in addition to their function as places of leisure and recreation, the opportunity to create innovative new inner-city quarters with a village-like character and space for approximately 50,000 new households—simply by firming up and adapting the legal parameters. According to the Federal Allotment Law it is currently illegal to reside permanently on an allotment. The proposal is not to change the existing structure of the allotment plots and the buildings on the allotment sites, but instead to make permanent habitation permitted, and to support this with minor spatial and infrastructural additions. By transferring collective residential functions to centrally located, shared communal buildings, space and resources can be strategically distributed. It's even conceivable to incorporate public and commercial facilities into the allotment sites—a starting point for this could be the exchange or sale of homegrown foods.

Three different laws and ordinances regulate construction on allotment sites in Berlin: the Federal Allotment Law (*Bundeskleingartengesetz*, abbreviated as *BKLeingG*), the Berlin Building Code (*Berliner Bauordnung*, abbreviated as *BauOBl*), and the “Administrative Regulations on Permanent Allotments and State-Owned Properties” (*Verwaltungsvorschriften über Dauerkleingärten auf landeseigenen Grundstücken*, abbreviated as *VVKleing*). Of these three, only one would need to be changed: Section 3, Subsection 2 of the Federal Allotment Law, which states that the infrastructure and facilities of an allotment building are “not suitable for permanent residence.” Simply by changing Section 3, permanent living space could be created for one to three people per allotment or building. (Vienna, for example, began permitting permanent residence in certain allotments in 1992; since over 10,000 allotments have been transformed to housing.)¹

All of the other regulations are concerned with the size of the built structures, or their shape, setback, permissible forms and so forth. For example, new residential units wouldn't be allowed to exceed the specified floor area of 24 square meters, including a canopied outdoor seating area (*BKLeingG*, Section 3, Subsection 2). Plots may be no larger than 400 square meters (*BKLeingG*, Section 3, Subsection 1). No minimum size, however, is specified for the allotment plots, and hence it would be possible to divide them up to create a higher building density.



Map of existing allotment sites, Berlin and its environs

The regulations on setbacks between the buildings, as described in the Berlin Building Code, also wouldn't need to be changed. The code stipulates a setback distance of 3 meters between each allotment building and an 8-meter zone free of built structures between the allotment sections (Berlin Building Code, Section 6a, Subsection 1). Currently, the allotment buildings don't require building permit (Berlin Building Code, Section 62, Subsection 1), and the proposal would be to maintain this status to simplify the planning process.

Berlin's “Administrative Regulations on Permanent Allotments and State-Owned Properties” (abbreviated as the *VVKleing*), and the sample temporary lease contract outlined in these regulations, stipulate in detail what constructions are permitted on the allotment plots. These regulations wouldn't need to be amended either. Thus, only one-story buildings without cellars would be allowed. The height for flat roofs and single-pitch roofs is limited to 2.6 meters, while pitched roofs are allowed up to 3.5 meters of ridge height and 2.25 meters of eaves height (*VVKleing*, sample temporary lease contract, Section 11, Subsection 1). The administrative regulations permit the construction of an enclosure for equipment of 1.5 square meters, which could be used as a technical facilities room to house electricity storage batteries, for example. In addition, the construction of a greenhouse with a maximum size of 12 square meters is permitted (*VVKleing*, sample temporary lease contract, Section 11, Subsection 2).

The allotment gardens are already supplied with electricity, fresh water, and telecommunications from the municipal grid (*VVKleing*, sample temporary lease contract, Section 5). If the allotment plots are not connected to the public wastewater disposal system, the sewage can be treated with a modern sewage collection system in the individual gardens, or a small sewage treatment plant can be built for the whole allotment site. Furthermore, the installation of photovoltaic systems on the roof for electricity generation and solar water heating systems for producing warm water is legally authorized (*VVKleing*, sample temporary lease contract, Section 11, Subsection 2). One way to finance the infrastructure measures could be to adjust the rent of residents living in their allotment gardens permanently. The Federal Allotment Law Section 5, Subsection 1 limits the rent to a “maximum of four times the rent customary in commercial fruit and vegetable production, based on the total area of the allotment site.” The annual rent for state-owned allotment gardens in Berlin is currently 0.36 euros per square meter at the highest. For an allotment plot of 400 square meters, this totals out to just 144 euros per year—leaving plenty of latitude for reaching a fair and socially equitable solution.

All images by Imke Woelk and partners, unless otherwise indicated

¹ The relevant changes to the Vienna Allotment Law were as follows: Section 2, Subsection 1: “Allotments are green spaces primarily used as gardens that function as individual retreats or housing. ...” Additionally, Section 2, Subsection 15: “Allotment residential homes are built structures in allotments zoned as ‘parklands – recreation areas – allotment zones for permanent residence.” Law available online at <https://www.wien.gv.at/recht/landesrecht-wien/landesgesetzblatt/jahrgang/1992/pdf/lg1992027.pdf>.



Allotment Colony Lehrter Strasse,
Berlin-Tiergarten
Plots: 43
Total area: 11,484 sq m



Oeynhausens Allotments,
Forckenbeckstrasse, Berlin-Wilmersdorf
Plots: 438
Total area: 131,372 sq m



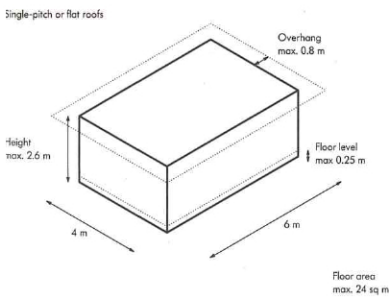
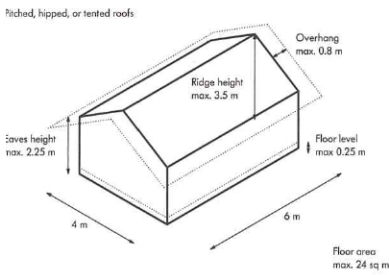
Allotment site near S-Bahn station Westkreuz,
Berlin-Charlottenburg
Plots: 81
Total area: 27,070 sq m



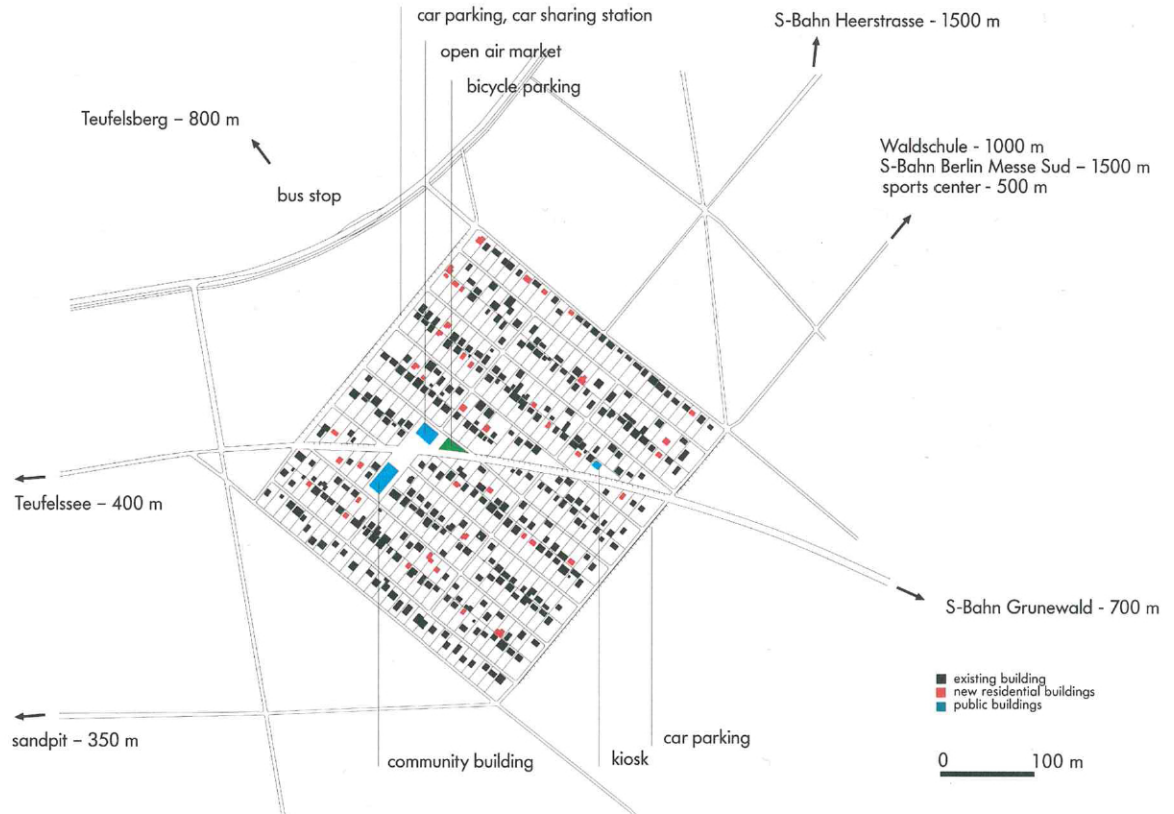
26 allotment sites near Priesterweg, Schöneberger
Südgelände, Berlin-Schöneberg
Plots: 2676
Total area: 739,204 sq m



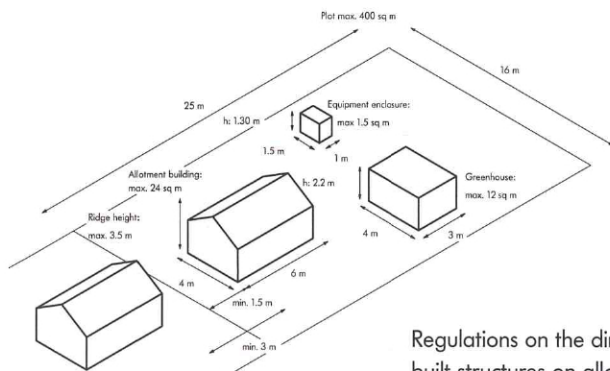
Wilhelm Naulin allotment
colony, Berlin-Grunewald
Plots: 378
Sizes of plots: between
250 and 400 sq m
Total area: 124,000 sq m



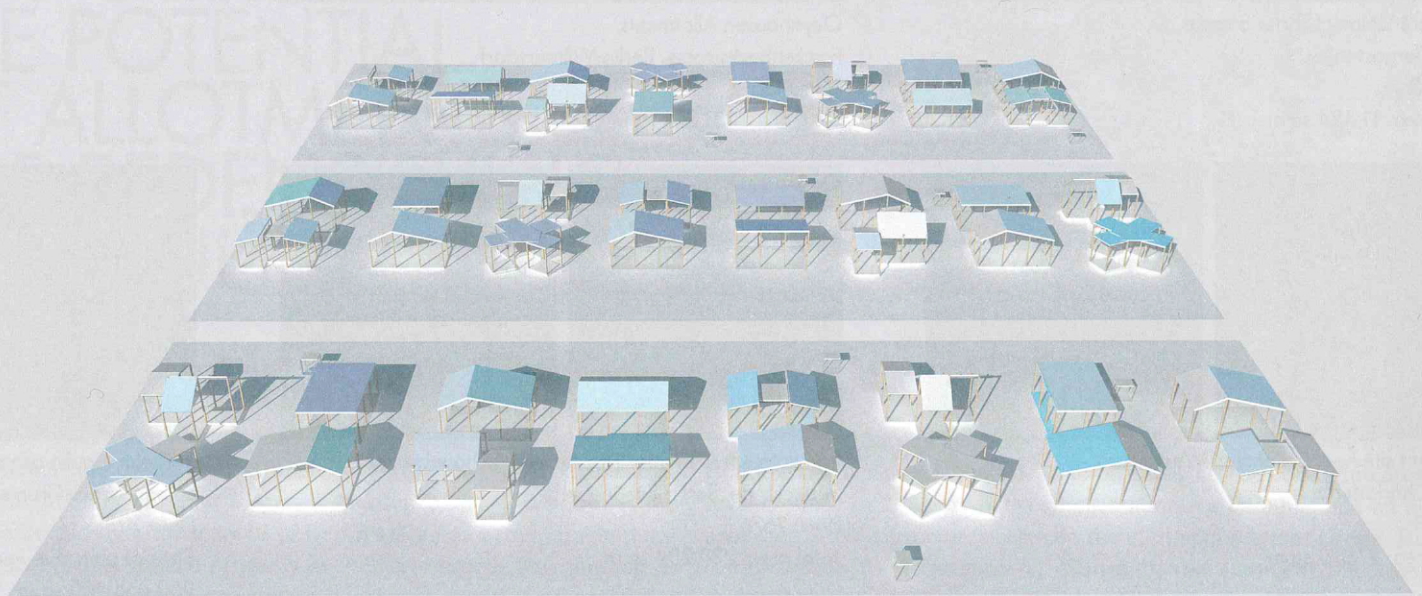
Roof forms and permitted
height of allotment buildings



Site plan, showing integration of pioneer developments for permanent use



Regulations on the dimensions of
built structures on allotment plots



Density study



Typologies in existing colonies, 2016

Journal for Architecture
and Urbanism
English Version



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"I would say a political program is more important than new rules or replacing rules with other rules."

- REM KOOLHAAS