

Title: How the 'City Network' legitimises its own efforts on urban agriculture

Author: Jan Eelco Jansma

Institution: Wageningen University & Research Centre, BU of Applied Plant Research (PPO)

Email: janeelco.jansma@wur.nl

Co-author: Esther Veen

Institution: Wageningen University & Research Centre, BU of Applied Plant Research (PPO)

Email: esther.veen@wur.nl

Abstract:

Urban agriculture was recently rediscovered in the Netherlands. Although of great value, most initiatives are small, fragmented and lack coherence. A national policy is absent and only few cities have policies on urban agriculture. Biggest challenge is urban agriculture's multifunctionality; as it does not fit within one specific policy terrain, it ends up in none.

To stimulate more coherence, Wageningen UR set up a 'city network urban agriculture'. Civil servants from thirteen Dutch cities participate in the network. In meetings, members share experiences, gain knowledge and talk to farmers and citizens. Most members are 'pioneers' within their municipalities. They work on the issue alone, and receive no or limited support; some of them visit the meetings outside their working hours. The meetings made clear that many of its members are struggling with similar issues and questions. The network therefore launched an action agenda, consisting of five challenges that need addressing in order to make urban agriculture evolve from a set of scattered initiatives into a serious perspective for Dutch cities.

This city network thus links individual civil servants from various Dutch cities around a common theme. However, the innovativeness lies most of all in the fact that by forming a network, the civil servants legitimize their own (time) investment in urban agriculture. The network shows that although its members may be alone within their municipalities, they are not at a national scale. Moreover, the network was at first financed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation, legitimizing its existence and people's investment. The action agenda was another legitimizing force, showing that the network was committed to getting urban agriculture firmly on the agenda. The network thus functioned as a way to legitimize its members own role within it, overcoming urban agriculture's multifunctionality.

Paper proposed in track: 3

Keywords: urban agriculture, legitimization, network