



# Participatory Planning for Edible Cities in Rosario and Groningen

Marieke Koot

*Excursion to Edible City initiative in Groningen. Photo by: Henk Renting*

**The first Urban Agriculture Café of the GROW the City project was organised in the city of Groningen, a regional centre with ca. 200,000 inhabitants in the north of the Netherlands. Urban agriculture in Groningen has increased markedly in the last years and is an important policy topic. An important challenge for the municipality is how to better integrate urban agriculture into city planning and organise citizen participation as part of this. This challenge was discussed with the city of Rosario, which has a wealth of experience in urban planning for urban agriculture. Laura Lagorio from the National University of Rosario was invited as an expert, in view of her involvement in participatory urban agriculture design projects. Wout Veldstra, who is responsible for urban agriculture in the Groningen municipality, welcomed her to his city.**

## Groningen Edible City

The city of Groningen started promoting urban agriculture and community gardening as a form of citizen participation in public green areas in 2009. In follow-up, the municipal

food policy “Groningen Grows Healthy”, in 2012, created space specifically for such initiatives. Through the “Edible City” project, in which the municipality works together with the Nature and Environment Federation Groningen, it is possible for citizens’ groups to establish collective vegetable or herb gardens, or plant fruit trees in public parks, in consultation with the municipality. This can, for example, be on a derelict field in a neighbourhood or on a lawn or park between flats or houses. This form of citizen participation in “edible green” has been very successful. By now, there are already more than 50 locations in the city, of which some were visited during an excursion for the Urban Agriculture Café. With a few exceptions, though the municipality did not take the initiative, the plans from citizens and entrepreneurs are actively supported and facilitated by the municipality, e.g., with contacts, some money or in-kind support for infrastructural works and the designation of plots.

## Challenges for urban planning

While the Edible City project is successful, it also raises important questions. Plots are generally designated only for a limited period, and there is no clear designation for agricultural use within urban planning. In the Netherlands, urban planners and architects are not yet interacting sufficiently with the urban agriculture movement. As a consequence, UPA is not a topic taken into account in design processes, and is at best seen as temporary land use. How can the planning and design of public space for urban agriculture as part of city planning be improved?





*Discussions at the Urban Agriculture café. Photo by: Matty Baars*

### Planning of spaces for urban agriculture in Rosario

The municipality of Rosario, Argentina has a long tradition of promoting urban agriculture, not only as a means to contribute to food security and income generation, but also to provide recreational and educational functions and help to preserve the city's green spaces. Following the boost of UPA during the economic crisis in Argentina, the Rosario municipality developed an active policy framework for the support and regulation of urban agriculture. The incorporation of UPA in spatial planning has been an important focus, in addition to support for commercialisation at local markets and training in agro-ecological production methods. The municipality actively created a network of multifunctional spaces for urban agriculture, consisting of, among others, four Urban Gardening Parks, numerous community gardens, productive spaces along railways and roads, etc. In 2013, a total of 67 hectares of land were designated for UPA, of which 22 hectares are currently in production. Also, several projects with different types of designs of public spaces for urban agriculture were implemented by the Rosario municipality in collaboration with the National University of Rosario. For example, the project "Making the Edible Landscape" (2004-

2006) aimed to design spaces for jointly growing food for living and combining it with other goals, such as increasing social cohesion and creating sports and meeting facilities.

### Key role of citizen participation

A key success factor for Rosario's policies has been to mobilise citizen participation in the design and management of green spaces for UPA. Participatory design, and participatory planning more generally, contribute to more socially inclusive forms of governance and help to bridge the gap of distrust between citizen groups and local governments. The challenge for the participatory design of community gardens in Rosario was to link architects, urban planners, local and national governments, social movements, slum inhabitants and urban gardeners. They managed to work together in a bottom-up process of planning, design and management of spaces for UPA, for which an intense dynamic of training and community workshops was needed. Landscape architects and designers had to learn to trust and work with the community and pay attention to community needs in order to ensure a balanced participation of various groups.

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*Gardens in Molino Blanco garden park, Rosario. Photo: Making the Edible Landscape*