Community Involvement in Urban Planning and Policy Development to Strengthen City Region Food Systems

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Street food vendor in Indonesia. Photo by Dennie Ramon

Urban agriculture (UA) and city region food systems (CRFS) are fast gaining the attention of planners and policy makers across the Global South and North, because of persistent food insecurity and rapid urbanisation. UA includes a diverse set of practices and offers a multitude of benefits ranging from increased food security, social territorial cohesion, greening of spaces, and other opportunities at local, regional and national levels. At all of these levels, cities are hubs of economic opportunity. The CRFS integrates flows of products, services, people and capital across urban and rural regions. The urban food system – from producers to distributors, processors, retail, wholesale and informal markets, restaurants, institutional food service and waste management – represents a majority of workers in many towns and cities. Socio-economic inclusion and equity can only occur with a clear commitment to generate decent work opportunities for all urban and rural dwellers through active labour market policies. Today UA, as a key component of CRFS, is recognised as a legitimate land use in cities in the Global North and Global South, and many cities and regions are exploring CRFS and implementing food and agriculture related activities (see various earlier UA Magazines, especially 29 and 30).

Although a number of different urban planning and policy initiatives to include and support UA have emerged in communities across the Global South and North, the work is far from complete. Food is still not part of mainstream urban or regional planning, and in the rare instances where urban plans and policies do address food they fail to integrate social movements and civil society initiatives that promote food sovereignty and food justice or daily food shopping practices (see articles p16 and p51). Innovations supported by local and regional government authorities that aim to strengthen rural-urban linkages, protect the environment and respond to climate change, under catchy labels like "smart innovation" or "green economy", may even undermine the interests and rights of communities struggling for their right to livelihoods, land, housing, water and food.

Policy and planning discourse on CRFS is largely dominated by bureaucratic, technical or academic approaches, giving short shrift to the efforts and perspectives of civil society. In fact, local and regional government authorities are struggling to engage meaningfully with community initiatives focused on food. The extent to which community stakeholders are purposefully participating in shaping urban food plans and policies for UA and urban food systems remains unclear. In short, despite their interests – and perhaps even good intentions – local and regional government planners and policy makers have a long way to go in order to create the proverbial and actual space to plan for food in cities *in partnership* with community residents, civic groups and community advocates.

This magazine explores the issue of community engagement in shaping urban and periurban agriculture and food

policies and plans. Key questions explored in this edition are how communities are engaging in urban food policymaking and planning and how local governments are responding to community demands for food policies and plans. This is illustrated by various case studies across the globe.

Urban and territorial planning for city region food systems

The profession of urban planning aims to create more resilient places where people can live full and healthy lives. Although planning theory and urban development practice does typically address a wide number of issues, including land use, housing, green (but not productive) spaces, transportation, it scarcely addresses food. While UA and urban food systems continue to receive attention worldwide, urban planning practice and theory continue to lag behind.

Considerable progress has been made in the Global South since the early days of this magazine (see UA Magazine 4). Several cities have developed a city strategic agenda on UA as a general basis for local policies and programmes (see article p29). In some cities and regions, food has also been integrated into formal urban planning processes, such as in Toronto, Seattle, Rosario and Belo Horizonte where progress has been made in the domain of public health and poverty eradication (Viljoen et al., 2016).

Integrated territorial planning and development has the potential to play a key role in UA and CRFS across cities and regions. Effective planning in this role – which includes visioning, assessment, development of solutions, implementation and monitoring – can 1) strengthen urban-rural linkages in food systems; 2) connect urban markets with agricultural and other economic activities in periurban and rural areas to generate regional economic growth, decent jobs and livelihood opportunities; 3) reduce regional disparities; 4) promote economic equality; and 5) address climate change mitigation and adaptation (see UA Magazine 29). Planning processes, from neighbourhoods on up to national levels, offer opportunities to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), notably SDG 11 (promoting inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities). Urban and territorial planning for food systems is a cross-sectoral process: it involves multiple government departments as well as participatory processes, including community and other stakeholders. The process also considers the entire food system including food production, processing, distribution (wholesale and retail), acquisition, cooking and eating, as well as management of food-related waste. In the USA, for example, most formal food policies are still addressing a single sector of the food system, such as food production *or* food acquisition. Community engagement processes must engage stakeholders *across* the multiple sectors of the food system. Finally, such planning considers both informal and formal sectors of the food system, recognising that informal and non-market-based transactions are at the heart of food systems, especially in developing countries.

As illustrated by the articles in this issue, cities that have innovative UA and food systems plans tend to have at least one of the following characteristics:

- community actors with a track record of community-based practices *prior* to the establishment of planning (and policy) processes;
- a planning process involving multi-sectoral partners including the public, not-for-profit and private sectors from idea to development to implementation (see article p29);
- local governments with a dedicated staff assigned to UA/the food planning process;
- a political champion in local government who understands the link of UA to other functions of government (e.g., youth development, job training), care and social therapy, health and nutrition, poverty reduction, etc.;
- realisation of the long-term commitment required for community-based planning to fully engage the community.

Massachusetts Avenue Project in Buffalo, New York, USA, is a civil society organization using advocacy, education, training, and community-based efforts to create a more equitable food system. Photo by Samina Raja and Jennifer Whittaker

A number of the characteristics of municipalities that are innovative and have such policies point to the important role of community engagement, yet there is still limited recognition of and discussion on the role of community engagement in planning processes (Raja et al., 2014). To improve the landscape of UA policies and plans so that they are systemic and responsive to community concerns, a new kind of community engagement must be imagined. It is essential to have a "systemic institutional design for collaborative planning" (Healey, 2006) that facilitates a continuous flow between formal planning processes and community residents, as is well illustrated by planning in the city of Belo Horizonte (see box).

Certain key factors underlie the unique achievements of Belo Horizonte in its 20 years of municipal food supply and distribution:

- A strong and successful collaborative planning approach;
- A sustained political will throughout the last twenty years (and before);
- Political awareness;
- Pushing the boundaries between a non-permanent and a permanent food supply system, and shifting from the informal to the formal;
- Continuous assessment as a self-learning tool.

Belo Horizonte has included the above factors since the beginning, and it continues today under the municipal food

Belo Horizonte: integrating food into municipal planning

Belo Horizonte, is planned Brazilian city from late XIX century that differentiated urban and peri-urban zoning, as well as a productive rural belt. However, the city expanded swiftly from 25.000 inhabitants in 1897, to close to 2.5 millions today, eating up arable land and bringing a dramatic impact on food production and informal distribution channels. To address these challenges and regulate market food price, in the 1990s, the city created a powerful planning and policies device under the umbrella of what is known now as the Municipal Secretary for Supply, Food Security and Nutrition (SMASAN) in charge of the Belo Horizonte Food Security Programme.

The program begun formally in 1993 and address multiple food security challenges still active today:

- *Integrating supply chains in the entire food system;*
- *Linking local producers directly to consumers to reduce prices and increase food sovereignty;*
- *Using government purchasing to stimulate local, diversified agricultural production and job creation;*
- *Educating the population about food security and good nutrition and*
- *Regulating markets on selected produce to guarantee the right to healthy, high quality food to all citizens.*

At the same time, in the 1990s, the city had under discussion it first Municipal Master Plan, approved in 1996, beneath strong popular participation as well as two Municipal Councils, one on Food and another on Urban Planning. This new groundbreaking Master Plan set up a Food Supply and Distribution sub-chapter ensuring for the next decades a food spatial frame.

In a nutshell Belo Horizonte food supply and distribution system covers several spatial levels: It main distribution asset is the Municipal Distribution Food Centre which manages food reception from producers and distribution all over the municipality; Also allocated on municipal level is the Food Bank, this one receiving and donating food; Under district level we will gather Food-stores and Popular Restaurants covering city centre and some outskirts and low-income neighbourhoods settlements; At the neighbourhood level we find the street open-air food markets, historically rooted on the planned city and later spread according to people needs.

Since it formal beginning, the food supply and distribution system has remarkable increased, nowadays it is active in 116 different locations spread out over the city: 33 are permanent assets e.g. popular restaurants, markets and other covered spaces, while 83 are non-permanent e.g. numerous open-air food markets.

It may be assumed that in 20 years of food-collaborative planning the city was able to mainstream food in its planning system and policies, an astonishing example that should be replicate by other cities. (Delgado, 2016).

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Organic Market in Belo Horizonte. Photo by Norma Gonçalves

council (under the Zero Hunger Programme). The innovative approach, put into practice in Belo Horizonte, testifies to what Healey (2006) called the "flow between planning and practices" (Delgado, 2016).

Policy opportunities

Currently, various policy opportunities at the global level merit critical attention from UA advocates and practitioners. City governments increasingly recognise both their responsibility and opportunities for building more sustainable urban, and city-region, food systems. This is made evident with the signing of the *Milan Urban Food Policy Pact* (UFPP), which encourages participatory decision-making with civil society and small-scale food producers. However, the pact can only gain full legitimacy and transform food systems when the role of communities and civil society is fully recognised, extended, and utilised meaningfully in the policy process. Better understanding and identification of how civil society movements and initiatives are already defining and shaping their food systems is crucial to the success of policies.

Another global driver for innovation in urban planning is the impending passage of the *New Urban Agenda (NUA*, see box). The current draft of the *NUA* has both strengths and weaknesses. On the plus side, the draft mentions both food and territorial approaches to planning. However, although the *NUA* draft makes an extraordinary number of commitments, it does not fully address agriculture, and in particular small-scale agriculture. Importantly, the draft also lacks a systemic view of food systems as an essential infrastructure for urban settlements. Attention to city region food systems is vital to the implementation of the *Agenda 2030* and the *NUA*. Key issues to consider are (under- and over-) nutrition and healthy food access; the food sector as a driver of urban economy; linkages to the environment and disaster risk reduction; the informal food sector and its key role in fresh food accessibility; social inclusion; access to food for internally displaced people and refugees; urban-rural linkages; security of land tenure and multilevel governance related to food and urban planning.

City food systems are also important sources of formal and informal *employment* for both men and women, and while more evidence is needed it is clear that food systems provide significant income in cities and beyond. Linking up informal and formal food chains and encouraging healthy food, and vitality and affordability of food in the informal sector, is a key goal for achieving food security and nutrition, together with economic growth, in urban areas. It is important not to hinder informal systems, but rather to integrate them within formal systems. This may require, on occasion, loosening of regulations or modification of bylaws and ordinances to support informal sectors (see article p13).

Engaging diverse communities

Cities contain many different "communities" (Bailkey et al., 2007), poorer and richer neighbourhoods, recent immigrants or refugees. Community members hold varying opinions, political claims, and influence. Communities may emerge around shared interests (such as common beliefs, goals, training), shared circumstance (such as identity, race, ethnicity, physical ability), and shared spatial space (such as neighbourhoods, camps, institutions). Community members may or may not recognise these commonalities. Effective community-based planning for UA or urban food systems requires processes that fully recognise and engage these layered and multiple communities.

Because development and implementation of UA and urban food systems with purposeful community engagement plans takes a long time (in the USA: about 10 years), a community engagement process that articulates the role of community from idea to implementation is essential. This is especially important because community stakeholders have limited resources for long-term processes, and their roles must be clear from the outset. Moreover, concerns about racial and economic disparities motivate community action in food systems, yet formal public policies and plans fall short of addressing these disparities.

Planning and policy for UA and urban food systems should address the concerns of the community rather than operate from a pre-determined agenda. For example, USA formal food policies tend to be driven by public health concerns, even when communities may be concerned about issues such as poverty (illustrated by the preoccupation in USA policy with removing the so-called "food deserts" rather than addressing underlying problems in the food system, see article p18). It is imperative that public policies address the economic, social-justice, or ecological concerns that drive

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the New Urban Agenda

On 15 October 2015, 115 cities from around the world signed a pact to create a governance framework for local food systems. The Milan UFPP *covers multiple thematic areas including governance, social and economic equity, sustainable diets and nutrition, food production, supply and distribution, and food waste and loss.*
(http://www.foodpolicymilano.org/en)

The New Urban Agenda

The New Urban Agenda (NUA), *which is to be adopted at Habitat III, the third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador, will establish goals and guidelines for sustainable urban development for member countries. Thus the* NUA *intends to move forward the targets formulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted in* Agenda 2030. *Territorial approaches for city region food systems and urban-rural linkages are included in* Agenda 2030 *as a separate sustainable development target with a new urban agenda.*
(https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda)

Street food vendor in Indonesia. Photo by Dennie Ramon

food insecurity in urban settings.
Access to appropriate food and nutrition is a fundamental right. Community processes for urban (agricultural) planning will continually have to engage new stakeholders, including cross-border migration of populations – such as political and/or climate refugees from agrarian communities into urban communities. Among the vulnerable urban dwellers, over 60 per cent of refugees now live not in refugee camps, but in towns and cities (UA Magazine 21, Bradford and Van Veenhuizen, 2016). Refugees and internally displaced persons encounter many of the same challenges as the local urban poor in accessing the services and opportunities to meet their basic food needs (see article p38). Additionally, the challenges experienced by refugees and other migrants may be amplified because of limited legal rights in their new communities. Populations coming from agrarian backgrounds are a potential resource for strengthening UA in cities. Efforts to build policy and planning to shape UA must recognise these power disparities within cities.

The Urban Life Quality Index (IQVU) is a tool designed and used in Belo Horizonte in the early 90s. The first set of data was made public in 1996 and the last one in 2012. In a nutshell, IQVU consists of a set of indicators, organised by sectors or dimensions that gives a spatial image of the access to services by each one of the 80 planning areas that together cover the whole city. Once collected, the data corresponding to each one of the dimensions are "spatialized" and, when summed up, allow one to see which zones are better served and which need higher priority for improvement. This planning tool has been extremely important to channelling resources from participatory budgeting, one of the planning instruments developed by Belo Horizonte in the mid-90s. Access to food was selected as one of the nine IQVU dimensions that compose the historical IQVU set. This dimension is a score for the area of hyper- and supermarkets, as well as local food markets for every 1000 inhabitants. The other dimensions are culture, education, housing, infrastructures, environment, health, urban services, and urban safety.

(Delgado, 2016)

Community planning tools
Given the dynamics outlined above, new and innovative tools for community engagement are required to prepare purposeful urban food policies and plans, which need to be adaptive and accommodative, and include participation of various stakeholders. These tools should be designed to shift the locus of power and knowledge to community residents, or these communities should design their own methodologies (see article p49). Typologies and planning and design tools are being developed and defined, and include the use of participatory GIS, open-access data sets like the citizen-led, open access dataset for regional food systems in Buffalo (www.oneregionforward.org/data-tools/mappingmetrics) or the one described in the article on page 43, or various social and economic tools, such as exhibitions, local design workshops, food councils, community food forums, etc. Other important tools are those that measure how UA and urban food systems impact cities' quality of life (an example is the IQVU: Urban Life Quality Index, discussed in the box). Measuring its positive impact can provide evidence that food can be the key to resilient cities – thus making politicians and technicians

eager to consider food as an essential piece of city planning. Community and civil society best practices form crucial building blocks for supporting local food systems and realising the right to food, but they are too often still constrained and frustrated by inconsistent local policy frameworks and lack of political support. In recent decades, food sovereignty has proven to be the unifying concept for diverse struggles and initiatives for food system change around the world, though it was mainly developed and applied with reference to rural contexts and the concept still needs to be extended to urban settings. Similarly, in North America, the idea of food injustice is largely viewed as an urban idea, and must be extended to periurban and rural areas.

The importance of partnerships and multi-actor planning and involvement of communities is often recognised. However, the role of various actors (e.g., governmental and academic institutions, planners and civil society) should also be explicit in order to establish a multilevel system of governance. A collaborative governance mechanism is essential to defining the right institutional framework at local levels in order for food to be integrated and made operational in relation to sustainable urbanisation. Urban producers are often poorly organised. In addition to the facilitation of platforms where different actors, entrepreneurs, civil society and government can meet, it is necessary to support existing informal networks and groupings of different types of urban producers, and pro-actively involve them in urban planning and development processes.

Many cities have created, and actively support, platforms (food councils) and specific agencies for UA, and are implementing related policies and programmes. RUAF facilitates such platforms with its Multi-Stakeholder Action Planning and Policy formulation (see p29), and is supporting CRFS. As well, a food policy council (or similar mechanisms, depending on context) is an emerging model in participatory food system governance. Although there is a clear difference between consultative and deliberative councils, political recognition and support is in itself important.

Conclusion

Urban agriculture and urban food systems are an important vehicle for the development of, or the transition to, productive and sustainable cities. Since urban food systems vary widely, from purely subsistence to commercial food systems, there is a need for a multi-actor and transitional approach that caters to the development needs of multiple communities.

The municipality needs to facilitate and enable its residents to explore new ways of co-creating city region food systems including UA (see articles on p16, p41 and p46). Given the challenging urban conditions, support for urban food systems and UA requires a firm focus on offering scope and room, and building the problem-solving capacities of the main actors: producers, consumers and entrepreneurs in food value chains. Similarly, the urban space must also allow for residents to fully engage in policymaking and planning processes all the way from problem analysis, and analysis of specific requirements of various market segments, to identification and testing of alternative solutions, and building of strategic alliances. Such an approach requires that municipalities support grassroots initiatives, provide public financing, and facilitate active networking across the food system, especially among growers and entrepreneurs in the food system.

Community-based urban planning policy for UA and urban food systems has the potential to reconnect farmers with urban dwellers, and to bridge the gap between industrial agriculture and increasingly demanding urban consumers. Thoughtful planning for UA and food systems can not only meet urban consumer demand but also open ways for residents to engage in urban food systems as co-producers and co-creators of urban agriculture practices (in terms of finance, labour, market insights, etc.), and as co-creators of urban plans and policies.

However, many challenges remain, as noted in past UA Magazines and in a forthcoming book by the FAO (see the next article). The efforts of only a handful of cities to address food through planning have been institutionalised or formalised. General policies and strategies on UA, when adopted, are rarely translated into concrete regulations, action plans, budgetary investments, or design at the local level. Attention to food is often the result of a crisis rather than a proactive effort. And – because planning reflects existing power relations, resource mobilisation and distribution in cities (Viljoen et al, 2016) – attention to particular (and often conflicting) interests is often the result of the prevalent political landscape.

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