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Exploring the diversity of Actors in Urban Agriculture

Giulia Giacchè, Olivier Ejderyan, Joelle Salomon Cavin, Sylvie Lardon, Cyril Mumenthaler

At the outset, we must acknowledge that the Urban Agriculture in Europe and across the world is largely characterized by bottom-up initiatives, most of them informal and non-institutionalized. For this reason, these initiatives are not always visible, nor are their activities documented and understood. Although Urban Agriculture is beginning to be recognized at the institutional level, there is still a lack of public policy focusing directly on it. Thus, a major challenge is taking into account the diversity of actors involved, understanding the ongoing practices in which they are involved, and forecasting their possible evolution. In order to do this effectively, we require a specific kind of knowledge and customized tools for understanding the diversity of actors involved in Urban Agriculture and the initiatives they bring into being.

How Do We Understand Diversity?

To understand both the diversity throughout Europe and the complexity of Urban Agriculture initiatives, we interpret them along a 'continuum'. We utilize this heuristic device to point out the actors involved and the public policies supporting their initiatives, in order to give a better understanding to researchers and policymakers in the field of Urban Agriculture.

The 'Continuum' Framework

The continuum framework has been used and discussed by several authors and by different disciplines in order to stress the idea that there are no sharp ruptures to be found in the degree or quan-

tity of rural-urban differences (Redfield 1941; Bryant et al. 1982; Saraceno 1994, Champion and Graeme 2004; Gant et al. 2011). We use this framework to overcome the dichotomous thinking that has dominated to date and to recognize the gradual and nuanced nature of continuum characteristics concerning actors (from non-professional to professional farmers) and space (from urban to rural). In order to point out the diversity of Urban Agriculture and the gradual and dynamic changes (across occupational roles and space) we conceptualize the continuum by focusing on actors (from 'non-professional' to 'professional farmers') and on space (from the intra- to periurban areas).

Concerning the actors, we move beyond these dichotomous categories by showing that the actors involved are all 'subjects who perform an action'—such as producing, consuming, or promoting, financing, and managing the Urban Agriculture initiatives. Furthermore, we demonstrate that there are various types of actors and different forms of cooperation or hybridization occurring between them that co-evolve over time.

Concerning spaces, we move beyond the overly simplistic duality of urban/rural by reconsidering spatial points in terms of their proximity to the city centre. We can think about this element of the continuum both from a spatial (distance to city centre or based on zoning) and functional point of view considering the flow of services and products to the urban centres.

The Urban Agriculture Types along the Continuum

We present (Figure 2.1.1) eight cases located in Spain, Italy, and Switzerland, which belong to the categories of urban food gardening and urban farming as described in Chapter 1.2. We considered these countries and these case studies to show the degree of diversity that characterizes the Urban Agriculture. As in Chapter 2.2, we do not argue that these case studies are definitive. Rather, they are indicative analyses that allow us to capture the breadth and diversity of actors and initiatives involved in Urban Agriculture.

Hort del Xino, ConnectHORT, Hort Sant Pau del Camp, and Can Masdeu are located in Barcelona and belong to the urban food gardening category, but they differ among themselves in relation to the level of institutionalization, type of actors involved, and their motivations.

Hort del Xino is a community garden that focuses on educational and recreational activities. It is an illegal occupation of a private space. Fifteen to twenty people, mostly young people between twenty and forty years old, compose the group that takes care of the space. They occupied the space as a political response to the lack of social and green spaces within the city. They used an empty area to create a natural space for acquiring horticultural experience. To respond to this problem, the municipality of Barcelona launched the initiative Pla Buits in 2012 to revitalize abandoned urban spaces, entrusting them to a designated association of a four year term on the basis of a proposal for a therapy use of the

space for public interest activities.

The ConnectHORT is one of these approved projects. The association that proposed the project aims to experiment in permaculture. Its predominant role is in social integration and education. Every week they host children from two local schools and an association that hosts children with disabilities. They also organize events and artistic initiatives in the space.

The Hort Sant Pau del Camp is an allotment garden promoted under the auspices of a programme run by the Municipality of Barcelona's Department of Environment, which was launched in 1997 to improve the quality of the urban environment through the promotion of organic cultivation. The programme is oriented toward retired people to enhance the social fabric and guarantee educational activities in open, public spaces. Nine people cultivate the area, and they focus on production for self-consumption.

Can Masdeu is an 'urban squatter farm' located in the Collserola valley, 6.6 kilometres from the city centre. In 2001, eight people began occupying the Can Masdeu historic building owned by the Sant Pau Hospital. They started to take care of the area around the hospital to create a community that could engage in a lifestyle less dependent on the market. The community of squatters created an allotment garden with thirty-five plots assigned to retired people living in the surrounding neighbourhood and a community garden managed by them. They focus on production for consumption and they are able to produce 80 per cent of their food needs in the spring and summertime. While these cases all involve city dwellers, they differ in terms of



2.1.1
The Case Studies
along the Continuum

the kinds of people involved, the ownership of the land, their main objectives, and the sites where they are located. The Hort Sant Pau del Camp and ConnectHORT are promoted within a public policy or planning context and are financed by different sectors and for different purposes. The first is one of the thirteen gardens that comprise the network of Huertos Urbanos de Barcelona (managed by the Environment Department of Barcelona City Council), and the second is a form of collaboration between civil society (constituted as a designated association) and a public authority that provides the use of an urban space. The other two projects (Hort del Xino and Can Masdeu) are a part of different networks based on spontaneous, bottom-up initiatives started by civil society actors. Crucially, they see their activities as autonomous and do not want them institutionalized. None of these initiatives, however, can ensure a long-term involvement on the part of the key actors. The first group of gardens are available only for a limited period of four to five years, when those spaces are likely to be redeveloped. The second group is not guaranteed either because they technically constitute illegal occupations of public land despite their activities and role in education and social care. The two Italian case studies, Bosco di San Francesco (Saint Francis Forest) and Forabosco, are hybrid forms of collaboration between non-professional and professional farmers managed by foundations.

They are located in the Umbria Region in the municipalities of Assisi and Perugia. Bosco di San Francesco is a cultural site owned and managed by the Italian Environmental Foundation (FAI). The site covers sixty-four hectares composed of natural and rural landscapes, including five hectares of olive groves and a synergistic garden. The olive groves was designed by Michelangelo Pistoletto and it is one of the major works of land art. The FAI manages the agricultural area. They pay a farmer to do ground works and they produce an olive oil that is sold in the shops of various Italian sites managed by the FAI. The restoration of Forest and the implanation of the olive groves has been possible thanks to public (Umbria Region, Ministry of Economic Development, UE - Por-Fers 2007/2013-Axe2) and private funding. The UE Programme is related to environmental interventions to enhance the Natura 2000 Sites Network. Moreover, in the Bosco di San Francesco, a social cooperative promotes and realizes—with its own resources and thanks to the financial support of Assisi Nature Council—a synergic vegetable garden with a double purpose: educational (for tourists), and therapeutic (for people with mental health problems who are involved in the project as gardeners).The other Italian case is the Forabosco, a social enterprise that uses horticulture as a form of

**Case studies**

	Owner of land	Agreement	Funding	Supporting
Hort del Xino	Private	No	Private,	
ConnectHORT	Public	Yes	Private,	Municipality of Barcelona
Hort Sant Pau del Camp	Public	Yes	Private, Environmental	Department of Environmental Service City of Barcelona
Can Masdeu	Private	No	Private,	
Bosco di San Francesco	Private/ Foundation	Yes	Private, Environmental	Health Services
Forabosco	Public	Yes	CA	Health Services
Bude Farm	Public	Yes	Department of agriculture and the service of nature and landscape	Department of agriculture and the service of nature and landscape
Verpilleres Farm	Private	Yes	Department of agriculture and the service of Agriculture	

therapy. It is managed by a foundation that receives financial support from the department of health care and agriculture of the Umbria Region.

Both Italian cases are promoted and managed by a foundation related to different sectors, and in both examples the local health authority provides people to work for horticultural therapy. The financial resources are mostly private, but in the case of Bosco di San Francesco several public resources have been drawn upon—including EU funding related to the environmental sector, and to the agricultural sector in the case of Forabosco. Finally, the two Swiss cases—Budé Farm and Farm and Mill Verpillères—are located in the Geneva urban agglomeration and belong to the category of urban farming.

Budé Farm is a small farm situated in the centre of Geneva’s agglomeration and managed by a farmer. A high school and other buildings surround this farm. The land belongs to the state of Geneva and is situated in a public park. The cultivated surface is only about 0.5 hectare, so the major part of the farm income, about 90 per cent, is obtained through the sale of local agricultural products directly on the farm. This intra-urban profile is particularly remarkable, because it gives the farm a very specific function: linking the city and the ‘countryside’. It is an example of close cohabitation between a residential neighbourhood

and farming, challenging the simple polarity of urban/rural.

The Farm and Mill Verpillères in the periurban part of Geneva (10 kilometres from the city centre) is organized as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project. The farm is situated on an agricultural area close to a housing area. The farmer is a tenant farmer and production is very diversified. Along with three other farmers, the farm invested in a stone mill with the support of the City of Geneva. They process organic grains and into valuable flour.

The case studies are indicative, though not necessarily representative, of European agricultural diversity. They serve to analyse the dynamics and the complexity of dealing with Urban Agriculture. They document that Urban Agriculture is a social process involving various actors, underpinned by various policies, and brought to fruition in various initiatives in the intra- and periurban areas. Left of the central axis of the figure, dominated by the involvement of non-professional farmers (individuals, associations, foundations, community), bottom-up initiatives emanating from civil society are the norm. Civil society is the key initiator. For instance, private individuals mostly initiate community gardens, and foundations or associations use Urban Agriculture as a tool for achieving different—e.g., educational, therapeutic—purposes. At the same time

2.1.2

Land ownership, form of agreement and source of funding and supporting



Michael Fox
South Dublin Allotments
Association activist,
Dublin, Ireland

“If someone appears with a shed on the site ... automatically everyone comes over to help in putting it together. And if someone comes with something heavy they are immediately offered help. That’s how much community spirit helps. That is the huge potential of allotments the sense of bringing people together. Out there, there are no boundaries or barriers. It is a great social mixing place.”

me, local authorities support several initiatives (e.g., Hort Sant Pau del Camp and Connect-HORT) by providing land, water, and technical support. The aim of these projects or initiatives is more social, educational, recreational, therapeutic, health care—than economic. Looking at the level to which urban farming involves the farmers—located on the right of the axis—forms of organization and policy domain vary in accordance with location. Currently, agricultural policies finance only the initiatives and projects that are located in the periurban or rural areas, but several spheres of public policy—such as environmental, education, and health—provide budgets or support for Urban Agriculture projects or initiatives, especially if they are located within the city or its surroundings.

Towards a Common Public Policy to Enhance Urban Agriculture?

From a policy point of view, it is important to understand not only the objects—e.g., community gardens, therapeutic gardens—but also the actors to which policies are addressed. From a planning perspective, it is important to define where the projects and initiatives are located. The continuum—with these two axes related to actors and spaces and the information on land ownership, form of contract, and type of funding or support activated—is a useful framework to help researchers analyse the initiatives or to help policymakers figure out a strategic vision. We contend that this is a useful heuristic device to help researchers to interpret:

1. the panoply of ongoing or emergent initiatives and projects focusing on actors, programmes, or incentive initiatives and forms of organization;
2. the possible transformations of actors, spaces (an initiative can shift from intra- to periurban areas or vice versa, or it can be reproduced in different areas), and forms of organization or collaboration between actors.

Furthermore, in relation to policymakers, it is a tool to simultaneously display the various initiatives (showing actors, localization, and the origins of funding) for identifying and considering possible synergies and strategies to enhance Urban Agriculture. The projects and initiatives shown through the continuum framework could be used as inspiration to generate collaborations and synergies looking at the actors, ongoing programmes, and sources of funding. The hybridity of the emerging forms of organization and collaboration between actors and sectors shows the importance of involving different sets of actors, sectors, and spaces. Co-creation between civil society and public bodies could be encouraged in order to define strategies and policies to enhance and support Urban Agriculture initiatives in a range of contexts.

This framework could be a starting point to advance reflection in common public policy regarding Urban Agriculture, because it makes clear the different sets of actors, programmes and sectors that are interested in enhancing and supporting Urban Agriculture.

