

Urban Food and Public Spaces: Planning for Security and Sustainability

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The Urban Food Crisis

- Rising prices and shortages of basic commodities are having especially negative impacts of urban residents
 - It is in cities that “the most mouths to be fed are found” (Mendes, 2007)
 - Most urban residents must *purchase* their food
 - In Dar es Salaam, poorest people spend as much as 85% of their income on food

The Urban Food Crisis

- Crisis in urban food provisioning has been following quite closely the dynamics of urbanization
 - Loss of agricultural land in peri-urban areas
 - Cities have become increasingly dependent on the global industrialized food system
 - Water pollution and waste problems
 - Food deserts
 - Throughout the world, city-governments are responding to the crisis by implementing strategies that do more than just “feed the city”

Urban Food Strategies: Linking Research and Planning

- Urban food chains so far neglected by both social scientists and planners
- Attention has focused on urban agriculture
 - Its contribution to people’s health and wellbeing
 - Its contribution to ecological sustainability
 - Beijing and Dar es Salaam as examples of proactive planning approach in developing countries
 - Work on vegetable gardens as a tool to restore local distinctiveness in European cities

Urban Food Strategies: Linking Research and Planning

- Research data available on urban agriculture are not sufficient to address emerging issues about urban food provisioning and land-use planning
 - Lack of comprehensive and comparative data
 - Under what conditions urban agriculture can deliver its alleged benefits?
 - Need for studies that identify the direct and indirect beneficiaries of city farming activities
 - What are the implications of policies that support urban agriculture for the livelihoods of farmers located in peri-urban and rural areas?

Urban Food Strategies: Linking Research and Planning

- Urgent need for planners and social scientists to overcome the “unfortunate tendency” to gravitate towards two distinct poles: “urban” vs. “rural” (Redwood, 2009)
 - Emergence in Europe of new spaces “in which urban needs and new rural supplies are interacting and simultaneously shaping and re-shaping each other” (van der Ploeg et al., 2008)

Urban Food Strategies: Linking Research and Planning

- The “rural-urban divide” tendency has been responsible for three shortcomings in urban food research and policy
 - It has confined the study of “alternative food networks” to the fields of rural and regional development
 - It has misled planners and policy-makers into looking at urban food supply failure as *farm* failure, rather than as a failure in *distribution* (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999)
 - It has promoted the view of food policy as a non-urban strategy (Mendes, 2007)

Emerging Urban Strategies for Sustainable Regional Economies

- Public food and food in public spaces -- initiatives that aim to improve citizens' access to fresh and healthy food
- Enormous power of public procurement – 16% of the EU's GDP; 9-13% of the GDP in developing countries. Very few examples of its use –mostly at the city level:
 - School food reform in Rome
 - New York City and the “apple paradox”

Emerging Urban Strategies for Sustainable Regional Economies

- Development of integrated food policies and their wider implications for the design of sustainable food systems
 - City-governments are trying to achieve what global and national policies have not been able to achieve – New York, Belo Horizonte, London, Amsterdam, Toronto
 - Urgent need for mechanisms that support urban food strategies for food security and sustainability –especially in terms of scaling up and capacity-building

What Role for Social Scientists?

- Cities are providing the most innovative responses to the current food crisis
 - Public procurement
 - Development of a more integrated approach to food issues (food strategies and food policy councils)
- But planning for sustainable urban food systems requires data and information on many different aspects of a city's design– housing, transport, land use (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999; Halweil and Nierenberg, 2007)

What Role for Social Scientists?

- Researchers can play a dual role
 - *knowledge-building* – how does the urban food system work? What are its potential and limitations?
 - *Knowledge-exchange* – food security requires local solutions *and* global cooperation – establishment of global networks of policy-makers, researchers and stakeholders to disseminate best practice and support capacity-building in food insecure areas

What theoretical and practical gains for social scientists and planners?

- Urban food strategies add new layers of meaning to the concept and implications of “localness”
 - Food as a prism to understand the complex web of connections that tie cities to wider relations, places and processes (McEwan et al., 2005)
- Embedding this relational view of the local in the planning system is more than ever crucial to devise the kind of political tools and institutional arrangements needed to reconnect cities with their surrounding regions