

cultivating a wide range of vegetables for household consumption and the local market



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The scope and popular recognition of the social revolution that began in Cuba in 1959 has created a Cuban model of participation in which the people identify with, and make theirs, the claims of the government. As a result the population is very involved in carrying out projects, but is much less involved in planning processes. Community participation in planning for urban agriculture development in Cuba is directly related to this particular model of participation.

Participatory Planning

in the City of Havana, Cuba

At the end of 1989, when Cuba was facing emergency food shortages due to the profound economic crisis, the government of the city of Havana created a provincial commission to work on the development of urban agriculture. This commission was made up of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and the departments of Physical Planning, Hydraulic Resources, and Public Health (subordinates of the city govern-

- ❖ to establish the main activities for UA development;
- ❖ to define the conditions for rational agricultural use of urban spaces; and
- ❖ to create practical mechanisms for the transmission of UA development and projects to other forms of popular government in the city (municipalities and popular councils).

By agreement of the Provincial Assembly of Popular Power (1), municipal commissions were created, which were similar in composition to the provincial commission, and which were in charge of promoting and developing urban agriculture at the municipal level. The Departments of Architecture and Urban Planning, as representatives of the physical planning system in the municipality, were incorporated into these commissions. The result was a level of social and institutional participation that set the foundation for and planned the development of urban agriculture in the city of Havana.

The provincial Department of Physical Planning developed a map of the province (including

urban and peri-urban areas) that included all of the existing free areas that could be used for future urban agriculture production. Each area was quantified in terms of its suitability for agricultural activity, according to the actual Land Use Plan.

This map and the general requirements for the distribution of land, which were defined by the provincial commission, were presented to all of the Municipal Presidents of Popular Power (mayors). The requirements included the provisional character of the use of the areas, the obligation to productively utilise the space, the prohibition of building permanent constructions and of cutting down trees.

The provincial commission was put directly in charge of handing over the larger lands and facilitated the approval of the location of types of UA production that required state investment. They promoted the production and sale of irrigation systems and seeds to the farmers. The rest of the areas, mainly the smaller and medium sized ones, remained in the hands of the municipalities (municipal commissions) and

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ment). Also, social organisations with a wide popular base of representation, such as the Defence Committee of the Revolution (DCR) and the Federation of Cuban Women (FCW), were invited to participate. Their principal functions were:

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popular councils, which were advised by the provincial commission.

Other activities were also promoted in the city during the early 1990s. Depending upon the objectives, representatives from institutions involved in the activity were incorporated into the provincial commission, as the following two examples show:

- ❖ the programme for the development of “people’s aquaculture” with the Ministry of Fisheries in 1994. Basins, dams, and mini-dams for raising fresh-water fish were located, as well as areas for the construction of tanks; and
- ❖ the location of community peri-urban areas for the collective raising of pigs was completed in 1994, for which the Department of Veterinary Medicine was incorporated into the provincial commission.

The level of development of urban agriculture achieved during the early 1990s, together with other factors, led to the creation in 1994 of a structure in the city to represent the Ministry of Agriculture: the Group for the Coordination and Promotion of Urban Agriculture. A similar configuration was created in the Municipalities.

In addition, in 1995, the Provincial Agricultural Extension Commission of the City of Havana was established by the Ministry of Agriculture. The coordination of this commission fell to the Institute of Investigations on Tropical Agriculture (INIFAT) and included the various investigative institutions of the Ministry of

Agriculture throughout the province. This commission, whose principal objective was to offer technical support in urban agriculture, is the predecessor of the National Urban Agriculture Group, which directs the follow-up and control of urban agriculture at this level.

With the creation of this structure, urban agriculture became fully institutionalised. As a result, two years later (in 1996), the provincial commission was dissolved. From this point on, interactions took place directly between the organisations involved.

Ten years later, urban agriculture, expressed in many forms, is practiced in the city of Havana by more than 18,000 urban producers, occupying more than 1,000 hectares within the city. It continues to be supported by the government (national, provincial, municipal, and popular councils), and is managed, oriented, and controlled by a delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture. It has been incorporated into the Land Use Plan approved in December 2000, but on a general scale, with permanent projection in the peri-urban zone and temporary projection in the urban zone and newly developed territories.

The above planning process demonstrates gains and weaknesses in terms of community and institutional participation. Even with the advances made up to this point, community forms of participation in this development are still far from optimal. Authentic participation is considered to include: evaluation and under-

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standing of the problem, the creation of economically sustainable and culturally adapted solutions, decision-making to contribute to a more consensual definition of legal, collective, administrative, and local investment priorities, and actions in terms of the evaluation, control, and fiscalisation of activities.

Urban agriculture planning is mainly carried out by the government and its various departments and branches. The community and its organisations participate principally in carrying out the planned activities. Other entities that deal with urban environmental management have not been totally integrated. In the proposals and plans of the city, urban agriculture is still quite limited, in terms of land use, local economic development, development of the productive sector, housing, or other. The legal framework that supports urban agricultural production and animal husbandry is still insufficient. Community participation is not incorporated into its definition, nor does it receive enough recognition.

Nevertheless, as the old saying goes, “the years haven’t passed in vain.” As a result of ten years of urban agriculture and more than four decades of a completely free education system, which guarantees school attendance, the insertion of this activity into land-use planning is in process. This process attempts to consider all of the actors that are directly and indirectly involved in the development of urban agriculture and it is without doubt, though in a modest way, contributing to participatory planning.

NOTES

- (1) The Provincial Assembly of Popular Power is the principal form of government in the province. The Cuban government is divided into the following levels: national, provincial, municipal, and popular council zones.



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