

For several years, the Tropical Institute has been surveying intra-urban agriculture, particularly focusing on two categories. Firstly, the home gardens, and secondly the shifting but irresistibly attractive subsistence, mixed and market-oriented gardens



Cultivator in Prudente

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# Urban Agriculture Supportive Policies

## Lisbon (Portugal) and Presidente Prudente (Brazil)

### from Two Distant Cities

**T**he *home gardens*, which are usually unsponsored, statistically non-existent, but affectionately cared for by families, especially the female members. They are small biodiverse areas surrounding houses or inner and backyards within residential complexes, in which ornamental and fruit trees are combined with vegetable crops, spices, medicinal shrubs and grasses, and sometimes livestock. The *subsistence, mixed and market-oriented gardens*, mainly occupy idle plots in towns. Very often, they are illegally tended by the un- or underemployed using annual crops, as individual efforts of job creation, food provision or simply a way to enhance contact with nature, keep busy, and maintain physical and mental stability. Both types of urban agriculture have not only a social and economic function within city's boundaries, but also remarkable ecological benefits.

Even though urban agriculture has survived, either inside the city or at the outskirts, it is very often forgotten, or worse denied by formal planning, underestimated by urban management policies, and invisible to many researchers. Nevertheless, there are some

quite remarkable public programmes, intended not only to teach but also to promote food production, processing and marketing inside towns, cities and metropolitan areas throughout the world.

This is the case with two quite different cities, united only by a common language. Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, and Presidente Prudente, an urban centre in the interior of south-eastern Brazil. While the municipality of Lisbon accounts for 700,000 people, Presidente Prudente has about 170,000. Lisbon has a mild temperate Mediterranean climate, whereas Prudente has a sub-humid tropical one. Per capita income in Brazil is less than half that of Portugal. So it is not surprising that the municipal programmes to promote agriculture within their city boundaries in these two cities have no common goals.

#### PEDAGOGICAL GARDENS IN THE PORTUGUESE CAPITAL

In the municipality of Lisbon, intra-urban agriculture is a micro-scaled phenomenon but widely practised in inner yards where fruits like oranges (even

bananas and avocados) together with subsistence horticulture can be found. In the more peripheral neighbourhoods, scarce vacant plots and small farms (*quintas*) are used to grow vegetables and raise small livestock (usually consumed by the households). Some of these plots are rented from the municipality for a symbolic value, since Lisbon has one of the most expensive urban soils in Europe.

The problem is that these idle spaces are becoming scarce. Farmers are compelled to sell their farms for urban development. Modern and expensive tertiary buildings are replacing aging property, and consequently, green spaces are shrinking. As Lisbon residents were also aging at an abnormal rate, the municipality began to develop subsidised apartment blocks, much cheaper and accessible to the youngsters, at the expense of the "institutionalised" peripheral agriculture and ecological zones. On the other hand, industrial zones where cleaned and beautified (as happened with the Expo 98 area, which contributed to revitalising the eastern part of the city). However, as the birth rate has been decreasing all over the

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country for years, the schools in most of the older neighbourhoods of Lisbon are starting to become empty.

Strategies for getting children back into these neighbourhoods, such as allowing parents to choose a school near work, creating alternative tasks for teachers as well as attractive activities for pupils, were devised by the municipality together with the Ministry of Education. In the 1990s, "pedagogical farming" was promoted citywide. All newly built preparatory and primary schools were planned to have their own food garden. All the ones, providing they had some sort of adequate space, were also given the necessary equipment.

Environmental education is not only well accepted by adults, but also a way to engage them further in the business of urban agriculture. Parents contribute inputs for compost and are invited to buy organically grown produce whenever there is surplus available.

Success stories of pedagogic gardens are such that the municipality (the Green Cabinet) developed a City Farm in 1996, where ducks, rabbits, pigs and sheep are raised and can be visited. The families are invited to participate in the preparation of the farm bread, cheese, and cakes. More than 100,000 people explore Lisbon City Farm (Olivais) every year. Additionally, 2001 marked the beginning of a contest sponsored by a public bank in collaboration with the municipality, in which a prize will be extended for the best food garden from the capital city. Eleven schools have applied as have twenty-nine private growers.

These initiatives, both by the municipality and the private sector, are an initial effort to reintegrate anonymous but numerous and increasing gardeners, into urban planning and to revise the municipal regulations to facilitate multiple uses of land in Lisbon.

## THE FEED PRUDENTE PROGRAMME

Presidente Prudente is located in the highly industrialised Sao Paulo State, Southeast Brazil. Under the municipal programme, "Feed Prudente", the use of non-built-up plots for vegetable growing by low-income families is stimulated. Local authorities lack the funds to maintain these public areas. As seen in 1999, it is the retired and unemployed, particularly men, who extensively produce sweet potato, cassava and several types of legumes all year round, using organic fertilisers. Extension services provide ploughing machines, water pumps, and supply free seeds for the first crop, and make efforts to prevent cattle raising inside the city (Madaleno 2000).

The initial objectives of the programme were to support community gardening, to ameliorate the quality of nutrition in average households, to provide elders with a sort of occupational therapy, and to create jobs for the needy, thus fighting hunger and unemployment at the same time.

The programme started in 1997, aiming to reach 200 families. Two years later, it had benefited officially only 50, but, as was learnt, many other beneficiaries started with the programme (using the land, technical and financial impetus given by the municipality) after which they continued on their own. In fact, city gardeners tend to only come back for help whenever they want to increase their cultivated area, which varies between 500 to 2,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The Secretary of Agriculture further provides free legal advice over contracts with private plot owners.

The cultivator on the photo on page 38 has two plots, both situated close to his house in a peripheral neighbourhood called Garden Itapura, where he grows cassava, sweet potatoes, chicory and other horticultural crops.

Another shift from the initial plan was to give up on community work and cooper-

ative promotion, because the urban agriculture practitioners tend to act on a family unit basis.

The plan was to have about 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> of public land occupied by cassava, followed by several species of beans and corn (each with 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>), while sweet potatoes and pumpkins should cover around 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> each. By the end of 1999, 42 officially supported market gardens mixed these planned crops and eight plots were exclusively horticultural. Results from the programme were, apart from irrefutable food and profit provision, a raising of interest in organic agriculture and produce in poorer neighbourhoods, and a decline in the number of complaints about insect and rat proliferation within the city boundaries.

## CONCLUSION

Local governmental programmes have been addressing a broad range of

Composting tank in Lisbon

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problems and difficulties posed by city gardening. In Western Europe, higher per capita income permits less involvement of municipalities in food provision and job creation actions as the poor are usually able to get help from national-level social programmes. Urban agriculture in Lisbon is synonymous with leisure, environmental education, healthy food production and processing, green space and genetic reserve preservation. On the other hand, the main public goals of urban agriculture programmes in Brazil are to increase income, create employment, and improve nutrition and health in the less wealthy sectors. Consequently, the integration of agriculture into urban planning is in both cases as diverse as the cities and citizens themselves.

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