

**Short report on main results of the Sino – Europe Forum Workshop 31 on Urban Agriculture and Food Security 7-9 of July**

The extensive and profound China-Europe exchanges during the workshop, involving 5 presentations on European experiences and 9 on Chinese experiences as well as a field excursion, the attending experts, scholars and city representatives have reached to the following conclusions:

**1. Urban agriculture & key city challenges; multi-functionality**

The participants concluded that Urban Agriculture can make substantial contributions to meeting key challenges that cities in Europe and China are facing nowadays. The development of urban agriculture is a significant way to solve a lot of current pressing social, economic and environmental problems in / around cities and it will also contribute to the realization of a harmonious social development between urban and rural areas.

In China the development of modern urban agriculture plays a key role in the efforts of the Chinese Government to reduce the vast income gap between urban citizens and the inhabitants of the rural areas and to realize the “New country side” policy. The city governments have started to play a leading role in developing new strategies to stimulate agricultural development in the peri-urban and outer areas of their metropolitan territory, with a strong emphasis on economic and enterprise development, but also taking into account the urban needs for fresh and nutritious food, opportunities for recreation, preserving the environment as well as the cultural heritage, complementing the national investments with their planning and technical capacities and other resources. Urban agriculture enhances the income of the peri-urban farmers/villagers and income/employment opportunities for the migrants working in peri-urban agriculture.

European agricultural policies are gradually shifting from subsidizing agricultural production per se, to stimulating the development of multi-functional agriculture with roles in water management, recreation, maintaining landscape and biodiversity, buffer zones, etcetera.

Various of the European cases presented during the workshop underlined also the role that urban agriculture (especially intra-urban types of agriculture, like home and rooftop gardens, community gardens, school gardens) can play in renovation of slums areas, community development, ecological education of children, releasing stress for the workers, opportunities for elderly and psychologically handicapped people to experience some joy in life, etcetera, next to improving diets and greening the city.

The international experience presented by RUAF Foundation also indicated the important role that urban agriculture can play (next to enhancing urban food security and reducing poverty) in meeting the challenge of mitigating the effects of climate change. By growing food closer to the cities we can reduce large amounts of energy (transport, cooling). Moreover, in urban agriculture we can reuse urban organic wastes and waste water, containing large amounts of nutrients, which saves on chemical fertilizers and reduces the costs of urban wastes management. Urban agriculture can also play an important role in reducing the effects of climate change by enhancing water storage and infiltration (en thus reducing run off, floods and landslides) and reducing urban heat and CO<sub>2</sub> emission (by capturing CO<sub>2</sub>, enhanced evatransporation and providing shade), if productive green open spaces are maintained in the urban landscape when the city expands (green fingers, green belts, etcetera).

## **2. Contextualise/participation of local actors in the planning**

The presentations clearly revealed the importance of embedding the development of urban agriculture in the socio-political, cultural, ecological and economic conditions of each geographical area.

There are no uniform “models” for urban agriculture that can be copied with success. One can learn from experiences elsewhere but for each sub-area of the metropolitan areas the optimal types of urban agriculture have to be identified in interaction with the local stakeholders.

There is no one “right” type of urban agriculture, but it can have various forms (home gardens, community gardens, recreational agriculture, intensive organic agriculture, intensive high tech agriculture, ..... ) and functions (economic, ecological, social, educational,...), depending the local priorities and conditions.

## **3. Metropolitan food systems**

The participants from Europe and China observed in both continents a trend towards the development of stronger metropolitan agro-economic and food systems.

In China the larger cities already started playing a leading role in the “country side planning” and the modernization of the agricultural economy of their peri-urban territories, which – seen from a European perspective- are very large.

In Europe we see that the peri-urban areas of most cities are rather limited but that they have started to establish “urban regions” in which neighbouring municipalities (including other cities and agricultural areas) seek to strengthen their cooperation and joint planning. PURPLE is a programme that was started some years ago (EC funding) to stimulate the exchange between some of these “metropolitan regions” in Europe. Exchange on strategies for the development of multi-functional “metropolitan agriculture” is one of the key areas of attention of PURPLE.

Elements of this trend towards metropolitan food systems (next to a stronger role of cities in the planning and implementation of policies and programs related to agriculture within their territory) are:

- a. A stronger emphasis on the multiple roles that urban agriculture can/should play; Involvement of different actors in the planning of new projects.
- b. Giving priority for the development of short regional food marketing chains (before thinking of distant markets); This will also reduce transport and energy costs (the ecological foot print of cities).
- c. A high interest in “regional products” and linking to local culture; Development of “local or regional brands” that reflect this; Preferential procurement of locally produced food by governmental/semi governmental institutions for their canteens and food programmes, etcetera.
- d. The development of forms of direct marketing from producers (often organic producers) to certain groups of consumers (often people concerned about the quality of the supermarkets foods, wanting organically grown food and interested to support the local farmers). In China we see mainly forms of direct selling to agri-tourists (eg. “pick your own fruits”, on farm selling of produce) in Europe also farmers markets and organic shops, box home delivery schemes, etc.

Several of the Chinese and European cases illustrate this thrive towards stronger urban-rural integration and integrated development

#### **4. Chain development**

The Chinese cases presented at the workshop showed:

- a. The quick spreading of the zonification of the peri-urban areas, selecting optimal development options for each zone
- b. The growing application of an integrated “chain development“ approach to the development of modern urban agriculture (“from field to table”) seeking to strengthen production, processing, marketing and food safety monitoring of key products in an integrated way; This approach is having positive results in terms of economic development, income and employment generation and environmental improvement, but participants indicated needs for further strengthening the approach in terms of farmer participation in the chain governance, the management and marketing capacities of the private agro-enterprises and cooperatives and further specification of the roles of government and various key actors, amongst other aspects (see also the follow up actions).

#### **5. Sustainable city development; liveable city**

Some of the European cases presented at the workshop emphasized that urban agriculture is not just about production and economic development only but also strongly links with a vision on sustainable city development in which a pleasant living environment, efficient resource use and citizen involvement/ community building are important principles. The “Garden city” (Ebener, Letchworth) concept should be revitalized and adapted to the conditions of large / dense cities, but its basic principles still apply today: Urban agriculture is not only for the peri-urban areas but is also an essential part of the built up city (green infrastructure); Green spaces and opportunities for gardening/local food growing are important for the way people experience their living environment and for their wellbeing. Community gardening can help to restore social linkages and build new communities as well as to make citizens regain awareness on how food is produced and restore their relation with nature.

## 6. Language/intercultural understanding

The workshop also clearly showed that it is very important to pay ample attention to getting to know each other's backgrounds and local conditions when exchanging experiences between different cities and countries, especially when there are important socio-political and cultural differences between the participants.

The same words may be used but with an entirely different meaning for different participants. Certain participants use concepts that for them are routine but completely unknown (and even not recognized as a concept) by other participants.

Especially in a relatively new field of work like urban agriculture, where international consensus about the meaning of certain concepts is only recently developing, this might easily lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. But in the workshop we experienced also that the resulting confusion also can be a source of learning, if space is created to discuss such issues in a open and friendly atmosphere.

Some of the factors that should be taken into account when sharing/comparing experiences in urban agriculture from Europe and China include (amongst many others !):

- The differences in the political and planning system and the differences in the role/mandate/resources of the municipal governments in agricultural development within their territory
- The limited size of the peri-urban areas of most European municipalities,
- The difference in the educational level and degree of organisation of the farmers/workers in Europe and China.
- The still limited role of private initiatives by citizens in China as compared to European cities regarding urban agriculture

## 7. Follow up actions

The participants indicated as main priorities for follow up:

1. Setting up the Urban Agriculture and Food security agenda as a central part of the China –Europe Forum.
2. To set up a **more permanent working group** on UA and Food security between China and Europe and prepare the establishment of a **Sino-Europe City to City network on metropolitan agriculture** in order to strengthen the exchange of experiences and to intensify cooperation between planners, researchers, enterprises and farmers involved in the development of modern urban agriculture.
3. To develop a project that will
  - a. stimulate the **documentation of innovative cases of (diverse types of) urban agriculture** (concise description and data, videos of practical examples) in a variety of fields, both in China and Europe, enable their sharing and use by enabling translation and publication in Internet and newsletters (including the international and Chinese versions of the Urban Agriculture Magazine)

b. set up a **data base on innovative programs and policies** of European and Chinese Cities on urban agriculture

4. To develop a project that will enable the sharing of European experiences with the development of **farmer cooperatives and develop new organisational models** that may work well in the Chinese socio-political and economic conditions

5. To organize well prepared and well focused **exchange visits** between planners, researchers, agro-enterprises & farmer cooperatives from China and Europe based on the identification of priority needs and interests of the actors in the cities that are participating in the city network.

Some key issues already identified include:

- a. Multi-stakeholder planning and development of sustainable metropolitan agri-food systems; roles of local government and other actors; processes;
- b. Organization and management of small scale agro-food processing enterprises (including marketing strategies)
- c. Cooperative organisation; farmer education; position of farmers in the value chain
- d. Innovative ways to finance multi-functional agriculture
- e. Different types of agro-tourism (family based, enterprise based, link with ecological preservation and cultural heritage)
- f. Food safety monitoring systems and good practices
- g. Production of quality seed for vegetables
- h. Technologies and approaches that enable to realise more synergy and efficient resource use by making linkages between agricultural production and other urban sectors (e.g. use of excess heat and CO<sub>2</sub> from industry in green houses, reuse of composted household wastes in urban agriculture, etcetera)
- i. Citizen/community based types of urban agriculture (home gardening, community gardening, allotments, etcetera) and related industry (e.g. shops that provide seeds/seedlings, tools, etcetera) and “care farms”.