In recent years, urban agriculture in Lisbon has become more widespread and has received unprecedented media coverage. News articles have appeared on the expansion of agriculture within the city and its suburban areas and on the urban poor who grow vegetables in response to the current crisis. In this way, society has been contributing to the city’s resilience.

However, despite a few initiatives in the late 1990s, municipal authorities were initially slow to grasp the real importance of this activity. There was little or no planning of urban agriculture and the existing legal framework still does not provide any protection to those practicing it. Only in the last couple of years have these matters been finally addressed by the municipal government. This paper describes the recent developments in urban agriculture in Lisbon and the contribution of municipal intervention for enhancing the city’s resilience.

General features of urban agriculture in Lisbon
An extensive overview of urban agriculture in Lisbon has been given by Madaleno (2001). Urban agriculture is a legacy from a distant past. Vegetable patches (hortas urbanas) remain a part of the city’s character, to the extent that its inhabitants still bear the affectionate nickname of “little lettuces” (alfacinhas). Historically, Portuguese town-planning included spaces for small-scale agriculture within the city (Rossá 1998), and despite the relentless urban sprawl of the last decades, hortas urbanas are still part of the city-scape. Much of the land farmed (legally or illegally) within the city belongs to the municipality, a circumstance that heightens the local authorities’ responsibilities. They should therefore implement UN guidelines regarding urban agriculture, such as UN Habitat (in which urban agriculture is seen as part of “sustainable urban development”) and FAO, whose focus is on “food security”1. Moreover, as a member of the European Network of Healthy Cities, Lisbon should take into account WHO’s charters that call for the promotion of urban agriculture as a means to increase the amount and distribution of locally grown food, especially fresh vegetables, which provide several health benefits2.

Designing resilience: the Green Plan
Portuguese urban planning laws require each municipality to draw up its “municipal ecological infrastructure” (Estrutura Ecológica Municipal), in order to “protect its values and natural, cultural, agrarian and woodland resources”3. On October 2007, the Municipal Assembly of Lisbon ruled that the land use defined in the existing comprehensive plan (Plano Director Municipal)4 must incorporate the Green Plan (Plano Verde de Lisboa) as the “municipal ecological infrastructure”. This decision opened up new possibilities for the development of urban agriculture in the city, as the Green Plan, designed by the renowned Portuguese landscape architect Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles, defines a city-wide strategy for interweaving green spaces with the built environment, including the consolidation of areas already occupied by urban agriculture as well as its expansion to other suitable lands. The idea is to form so-called “green corridors” crossing the city that link various land uses, such as hortas urbanas, urban parks, gardens, bicycle lanes and footpaths.

Building resilience: Urban Agriculture Strategy
After approval of the Green Plan, the Lisbon municipality created a working commission for urban agriculture (Grupo de Trabalho de Agricultura Urbana). One of the results of their work was the Urban Agriculture Strategy (Política do Pelouro de Ambiente, Espaços Verdes e Plano Verde para a Agricultura Urbana). This document maps the areas currently dedicated to urban agriculture that are to be integrated in the comprehensive plan. It also underlines how important urban agriculture sites are to the city, namely because of the city’s dependence on imported fresh vegetables, the rising prices in the international food markets, and the added income urban agriculture provides for many families. Another factor mentioned in the Urban Agriculture Strategy
is the importance of urban agriculture in dealing with possible food shortages. This relates to concern about the city’s resilience. You never know what can happen tomorrow - disruptive events, from natural disasters to war, can occur suddenly and forcefully. For example, Lisbon is located in a seismic region and has experienced frequent earthquakes, including one in 1755 that was among the worst in human history.

The Urban Agriculture Strategy recommends that the major part of urban agriculture takes place in agricultural parks (Parques Agrícolas). These will consist of organised structures that can be used by the farmers, but are also open to visitors.

The letting of the hortas in agricultural parks will be based on a proposed municipal regulation (Regulamento Geral de Agricultura Urbana), which will establish a contract between the municipality and the users that clearly states the rights and duties of each party, namely concerning the utilisation of the collective space. The users of the agricultural plots will be responsible for their maintenance and will have to adhere to specified rules. The municipality will be responsible for surveillance and assurance of proper use.

The agricultural parks will have “social” and “community” plots (Hortas Sociais ou Comunitárias). These hortas will be, or already are, situated near poorer neighbourhoods and access will be open to all those willing to cultivate a plot. Access will be based on certain criteria that will give priority to those who are more threatened by the current economic context (unemployed, elderly or low-income people). Most of the production will be oriented towards self-consumption, however, the possibility of commercial production is also being considered. In this way urban producers could earn a supplementary income or even a living, by supplying the local markets.

However, in these parks there will also be space for “recreational” plots, which are expected to have a positive impact on leisure and facilitate more contact with nature, and hortas with “educational” purposes (Hortas Pedagógicas), whose aim will be to involve schools and local networks in urban agriculture.

The last category being envisaged by the municipality is very sensitive as it comprises the hortas in municipal lands that are currently being used without any contract or license (Hortas Dispersas). These are scattered all over the city, including in areas contiguous with freeways. This “informal sector”, at least in the short term, will be tolerated and offered some assistance.

Conclusion

The increase in urban agriculture in Lisbon has been part of a spontaneous response to a widespread sense of crisis, attesting to the resilience of the people of this city. However, the citizens involved have much to gain from municipal intervention, which can provide and operate the communal infrastructures so important for agriculture. The municipality is also in an ideal position to design and apply a comprehensive strategy for its territory and to protect the rights of the urban farmers. In short, municipal intervention is instrumental for urban agriculture, which, as a vital source of food in times of crisis, is in turn instrumental for the city’s resilience.

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Note
1) Habitat Agenda and Rome Declaration
2) Urban and Peri-Urban Food and Nutrition Action Plan
4) The Plano Director Municipal is a land use plan covering the area of the municipality.
5) Regulation still to be approved by the Lisbon Municipal Council and Assembly.
6) It is important to mention that the “green corridors” that have been planned include areas, mostly on municipal land, that are already occupied by urban agriculture as well as others that are not.

References
http://sub.resilientcities.org/content/