Editorial

DESIGNING EDIBLE LANDSCAPES

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The Millennium Development Goals and Agenda 21 objectives have generated international research initiatives in the emerging field of urban agriculture (UA); these efforts in productive growing and food production in the urban domain are gaining pre-eminence. UA was first coined in the 80s by agro-economists who recognized informal gardening practices in southern cities (Ba et all), but it no longer is uniquely associated to the South. UA includes a broad rage of activities: the cultivation of plants, medicinal and aromatic herbs, fruit trees, and the raising of animals, poultry and fish to support the household economy, the site's ecology, as well as social and cultural activities. Thus, UA cuts across multiple disciplines - such as development, urban geography, food security, city planning, landscape architecture, urban design, housing, farming and agronomy - all of which are touched upon by the academic and professional contributors in this special issue of Open House International.

In 2005, following the UN Habitat JAM, UA was identified for the first time as a main area for action. Subsequently, it was recognised as a key descriptor for the UN-HABITAT World Urban Forum III held in Vancouver in June 2006, where several of this special issue's contributors presented their work. Since then, interest in UA has grown immensely, especially given it elicits local responses and strategies to two of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century: sustainability of cities and climate change.

Studies on the provisioning of cities have highlighted the significance of UA in supplying local markets, in contributing positively to the local economies, in improving the environmental well-being of its citizens, and in enhancing the quality of the food consumed. In the context of developing countries, one of the most dramatic economic data is related to the proportion of income city dwellers spend on food. The following table points out the urge to identify more cost-effective sources of food and suggests that, as a household supplement, UA can counteract the worst effect of poverty (Redwood, 2009: 6).

City	Income spent on food (%)
Bangkok (Thailand)	60
La Florida (Chile)	50
Nairobi (Kenya)	40-60
Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)	85
Kinshasa (Congo)	60
Bamako (Mali)	32-64
Urban USA	9-15

Table 1. Percentage of income spent on food by low-income residents in selected cities
Source: Akinbamijo et al (2002)

Urban and peri-urban food production provides nourishment for cities as culturally and geographically varied as Havana, Cuba, with a daily average yield of 150 to 300g of herbs and vegetables per person; Shanghai, China, where UA supplies the city with 60% of its vegetables and 90% of its eggs; and Brazzaville, Congo, where a quarter of the city's households yield 80% of the leafy vegetables consumed by the urban population (Mougeot, 2005: 6). This phenomenon is not limited to the cities of the south. The Ile-de-France, one of France's most vibrant regions with Paris at its centre, is home to close to 12 million inhabitants out of the country's total 63 million. This region measures just 2% of the total area of the country, hence, given its dense concentration of population and elevated level of urbanization, one could reasonably assume that the agricultural activities of such a region might be marginal. Yet, it may come as a surprise to many that, on the contrary they are thriving: 45% of the Ile-de-France's land is under agricultural use.[1] Nationally, in terms of quantity of production, the Ile-de-France ranked 1st in the production of watercress, 2nd in the production of decorative flowers like gladioli, tulips, lily of the valley, 3rd for salads, carnations, and roses' production, and 13th in the production of wheat much sought after by local bakers (Les chambres d'agriculture d'Ile-de-France).

Although modern cities are often perceived as centers of food consumption and rural areas as production areas, an increasing interest in growing and consuming local food is spreading, especially in the context of the current (2008-2009) economic crisis. A symbolic example is United States' First Lady Michelle Obama's decision in March 2009 to grow an organic vegetable garden on the South Lawn of the White House - the first since Eleanor Roosevelt's victory garden in World War II (Burros, 2009: A1). Albeit highlighted by the social and economic effects of economic and demo-

[1] 253,000 Ha (or 67% of agricultural lands) are reserved for cereal cultivation.

graphic fluctuations, it is our firm belief that UA is not a passing fad. This special issue of OHI entitled: Designing Edible Landscapes, explores different ways in which UA has been and continues to be present in the fabric and social life of cities. However, to formalize and legitimise this presence (to give UA its due place in the city-life) landscapes must be understood in a comprehensive manner, as well as be designed with a vision for the future. This special issue is driven by the conviction that Edible Landscapes can be included as strategic, sustainable, and multifunctional components of statutory municipal plans, urban design schemes, neighbourhood development projects, urban upgrading initiatives, and the design of housing.

The process of creating or Designing Edible Landscapes is not particular to either North or South. While, on the surface, this series of articles deal with climatically, geo-politically and culturally diverse places like Beijing, China; Kampala, Uganda; Rosario, Argentina; Montreal, Canada, they all explore similar design challenges and opportunities that the UA practitioners face in urban and peri-urban environments, particularly with reference to the context, the scale and the communities in which, by which and for which it is implemented. Therefore, UA starts to evolve from a particular urban project into a general process with multifunctional impacts and prospects. The course of design is shaped by the involvement of different actors, the implementation of adapted strategies and consideration of the specificities of local environments in which and for which it was/is developed. Through this process, design ceases to be a mere traditional endeavor, or stylistic exercise; instead, it morphs into a democratic process engaging its citizens and enriching their civic experiences.

Case studies selected for Designing Edible Landscapes vary tremendously in scale, ranging from the level of a megalopolis such as Beijing - which covers several thousands square kilometres (Zhang et all) - to modular artefacts such as recycled plastic containers developed and assembled to cultivate food (Bhatt et all). Yet, in spite of their diversity, the examples of UA activities illustrated in this special issue are complementary and include the following: (i) design projects developed in the framework of curricula in Architecture Schools with a strong educational component (Nasr et all); (ii) empirical participatory designs that include many of its end users (Dubbeling et all and Wolfe et all); (iii) innovative partnerships forged intentionally to make UA operational (Bhatt et all); (iv) efforts striving to engage both the formal (Ba et all; Reid; Viljoen et all and Zhang et all) and the marginal or informal sectors (Dubbeling et all; Honig and Redwood).

Eleven articles dealing with theoretical aspects of UA and empirical characteristics of projects are included in this special issue and are organised around five themes: (1) UA, land tenure and urban settlement policies (Redwood and Zhang et all); (2) UA as an agent for urban design and urban upgrading (Wolfe et all and Dubbeling et all); (3) Productive landscape design explorations (Viljoen et all, Nasr et all and Honig) ; (4) Designing for urban food security (Bhatt et all and Reid); and (5) Cultural tradition of edible landscapes, from local to global (Mellin and Ba et all).

These articles point to the current challenge of UA: surpassing the demonstration level or informal practice. Similar to other public infrastructures, Designing Edible Landscapes should be formally anchored in the urban fabric. Overcoming resistance at the municipal or institutional level, i.e. in the planning, land use and the development agenda of the cities, must therefore be a necessary step to integrate successful Edible Landscapes. Implementing these projects would require: adjustment and adaptation of the designer's perception and conception, territorial negotiations among several entities in the legislative sphere, debate within the political realm, and consultation within the community; Designing Edible Landscapes aspires to bring understanding of and help advance this complex, yet necessary process.

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