

Building Food Secure Neighbourhoods in Rosario

Since its inception, the UAP has successfully undertaken activities aimed at consolidation of urban agriculture as a legitimate urban land use and strategy for social and local economic development through:

- a) organisation and implementation of urban agriculture projects related to production, processing (in agro-industries) and marketing;
- b) optimising use of vacant land areas for agro-ecological farming;
- c) facilitating and formalising access to land for UA of both occupied and potentially useable plots;
- d) designing use of different public spaces (roadsides, flood areas, public squares) for urban agriculture.

Following this latter objective, the action-oriented research project Making the Edible Landscape started in September 2004 (see box). Its main goal is to build collective strategies to facilitate the transition of traditional state-funded housing projects to “productive neighbourhoods” that aim to integrate UA in urban design, upgrading and development, thus providing households with food-production and income-generating opportunities apart from housing and basic services. Participatory and community-based design of spaces for organic production and related activities are currently under way. In 2001, the 91 irregular settlements of Rosario housed 22,006 families (110,212 inhabitants) or 12.1% of the total population. This number increased with 10.4% as compared to 1992. At the same time and over the last four years, a steady increase in both

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Participatory design public square La Lagunita

unemployment and the number of people living in poverty has taken its toll on the population.

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL ACTION-ORIENTED RESEARCH

The Service for Public Housing of the Municipality (SPV in Spanish), is implementing the Rosario Habitat Programme (1) in which neighbourhood upgrading and new residential construction are combined with—and complemented by—training of the target population to undertake productive activities. Collaboration between the SPV, the UAP and the National University of Rosario for the Making the Edible Landscape project is based on the assumption that this joint work can lead to important synergies. Under this scenario, the university provides knowledge and experience in research and design, the UAP its vast experience in agricultural and participatory work, and the SPV human and practical resources and knowledge related to upgrading and development. The areas selected for this project were the Molino Blanco and La Lagunita settlements. Situated at the southern fringe of the city limit, Molino Blanco is a neighbourhood of 798 families (3,500 people), of whom almost 30% will be relocated to a new settlement as their houses were built on flooding areas or over planned roads. The settlement will then be regularised, giving not only titles to residents, but also providing them with the basic municipal services such as potable water, sewage, drainage, gas, electricity, paved roads, and footpaths. The majority of the population aged 14 and over does not have a steady job, only

The Urban Agriculture Programme (UAP) was launched by the Municipality of Rosario in 2002, amidst an unprecedented nationwide socio-economic crisis. This initiative marked an important step in further development of municipal policies and programmes towards supporting and strengthening this alternative production system.

19.8% of those older than 24 have completed primary school and only 3% have finished high school.

La Lagunita (Lagoon in Spanish) is located in the west of Rosario. It owes its name to the fact that the area becomes flooded after heavy rain, mostly during the rainy season. The area was first occupied over twenty years ago by families coming from the Chaco province, who basically settled on private land. Over the years the original families brought their relatives from the provinces resulting in a very close-knit community. After 2001, a second wave of settlers (about 50 families) occupied state-owned land inside the settlement. A participatory upgrading programme coordinated by SPV is underway. The Making the Edible Landscape project focuses on the participatory design and implementation of the following types of spaces:

GARDEN-PARKS

The garden parks integrate different activities and users, minimising construction and maintenance costs and providing ecological services important to urban systems. The most innovative feature for the city is the incorporation of a productive dimension into the park design, which is based on previous urban agriculture experience. Urban landscape design blends with productive use while securing urban farmers user rights to the land. Educative and leisure activities are also planned.

PRODUCTIVE SQUARES

These are neighbourhood squares designed for recreational, productive and

possibly commercial activities. Their structure and functioning will respond to the community needs for playgrounds, social meeting places, urban greening and production.

PRODUCTIVE STREETS

These streets will allow for farming on available roadsides. The design will also consider spaces for food selling and bartering and growing of food trees and aromatic herbs. This will enhance the streets' potential as a space for social interaction, without obstructing the normal traffic and pedestrian flow.

DEMONSTRATION GARDENS

Training is a key element for urban agriculture. A demonstration garden set up inside the neighbourhood will give visibility to urban agriculture and provide free access to a space specially designed for people to learn how to grow food. This will hopefully improve use of other productive spaces in the neighbourhood, as mentioned above, and make the project more sustainable.

All these new land uses will be developed on land that is currently in poor condition. Therefore attention is also paid to soil improvement techniques. Projects include promotion of production, processing and marketing. The participatory approach taken (for design, decision making, implementation and functioning) embedded in the project will contribute to greater participation and appropriation of the results by the population. In order to achieve this, scheduling of activities needs to take into account municipal plans and deadlines as well as community availability and processes.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

In the Molino Blanco neighbourhood two productive streets, a demonstration garden and a garden park are being designed in the flooding area where urban agriculture is already currently practised.

The participatory design of Rosario's first productive square was completed in La Lagunita settlement. The five participatory workshops held in La Lagunita allowed key stakeholders to reach a consensus on the components, size and spatial organisation of the square. Additionally, new housing units and basic infrastructure will be built in the community.

The most innovative result of the project will be the incorporation of productive features within the physical and functional structure of poor neighbourhoods. The project will hopefully —depending on the completion of the scheduled work—positively affect the willingness of government officials to support these kinds of processes in future housing projects and urban upgrading programmes.

Notes

1) The Rosario Habitat programme started in 2002 and is co-financed by the Inter-American Development Bank and the Municipality of Rosario.