

Making the Edible Landscape:

Integrating productive growing in urban developments

Little or no attention is paid to landscaping while designing affordable housing and neighbourhoods. Particularly, when designing low-income settlements resources are limited, so most of the attention, and of course investments, are spent on the provision of minimum shelters and/or related infrastructure. It is only towards the completion of the project that a landscape architect might be consulted; by then, it is too late to get their meaningful input in the design process. Planting occurs in public spaces, but in these neighbourhoods there is no one responsible to tend to it, and soon after residents move in, the planting starts to wither. Obviously, local officials responsible for such initiatives see landscaping as a luxury that is appropriate only for high and middle-income residential developments.

In popular or informal sector housing, often referred to as slums and squatter settlements; we have observed a wide variety of trees and plants. Not only are they carefully chosen and planted, but are maintained and protected. This is because trees and plants have been considered the source of life; and in traditional societies, many social and religious activities are centred around them. Moreover, family activities can take place under trees, their shade can be substituted for built structures, which are expensive to construct. Not only do they support the daily lifestyle, but urban growing – UA – makes a significant economic contribution to the daily

lives of residents. Providing urban edible landscapes should involve setting new principles for urban design and planning that include food security and urban land-use considerations.

But how can productive urban growing be made an integral part of housing and neighbourhood design? The project 'Making the Edible Landscape' hopes to answer this question, by considering the role of urban agriculture as a catalyst for neighbourhood upgrading and as an important factor in new housing construction and in managing public lands. McGill University's Schools of Architecture, Planning and the Environment in Canada and the ETC Foundation in the Netherlands are collaborating with three city partners in (Colombo, Sri Lanka; Kampala, Uganda; and Rosario, Argentina), to carry out this project (see other articles in this magazine). The project is supported by IDRC, Ottawa, and the UN-HABITAT's Urban Management Programme.

The project aims to demonstrate how designers could and should consider productive planting right from the beginning of the design process. It is also our firm belief that without the involvement of the community, it would be impossible to develop good housing. Therefore, in all three cities, we are working very closely with the communities concerned. Results of the project will be shared by the city partners during the next World Urban Forum, June 2006 in Vancouver. For further information on the WUF sessions, please contact Rune Kongshaug, Project Coordinator (Email: rune.kongshaug@mcgill.ca).

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