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# Edible landscaping as an environmental policy tool for urban cities under crisis: Cases studies from Greece

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nomi, in termini di legittimazione, e contemporaneamente interdipendenti.

La complessità di tale operazione è direttamente proporzionale alla complessità della tematica, ovvero maggiori sono le alternative di soluzione che si possono prefigurare più inclusiva deve essere l'architettura di governance.

Tra le risorse essenziali utili a garantire il perseguimento effettivo degli obiettivi di intervento prefigurati risiede quella identificata come "capacità" dell'architettura di governance, generalmente riferita agli Enti a contatto diretto con i cittadini (street level bureaucrats), ma che in realtà interessa sempre più i livelli superiori che tendono a uniformare il modello di gestione, non utilizzando le conoscenze locali utili ad arricchire la forma e la sostanza dei programmi pensati a livello superiore e le connesse buone pratiche precedentemente sperimentate.

Le insufficienze di analisi a livello superiore si ripercuotono su tutto il sistema; pertanto, al fine di indirizzare una pluralità di entità autonome, collocate a differenti livelli, è essenziale una adeguata identificazione del "centro" del sistema, per generare una interazione sia "informata", in grado di unire analisi scientifica e costruzione delle coalizioni, che "compatibile" al tempo e al luogo.

In conclusione emerge che, per definire comuni tematiche e condivise modalità di gestione in grado di perseguire adeguati risultati attesi, è importante non perdere di vista le reali problematiche che esulano dalla standardizzazione di alcuni modelli di governance, connesse alle "differenti" realtà fisiche e socio-economiche che caratterizzano i luoghi e che necessitano di "diversificati" gradienti di progettualità e "differenziate" modalità di attuazione.

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## Edible landscaping as an environmental policy tool for urban cities under crisis: Cases studies from Greece

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### Introduction

Agriculture in cities has always existed although it is typically considered a rural activity. In fact, many cities have evolved from agrarian roots, settling on the agricultural lands that are most productive. However, urban farming has dramatically diminished in scale and legal status during the past 100 years. With Industrialization of the food system coupled with efficient long distance transportation has allowed cities to import most of their food and decreased their reliance on local farms. Recently there has been an emergence of a new type of urban agriculture found within the city limits. Today, up to 15% of our food originates from within metropolitan areas<sup>1</sup>. Urban agriculture is becoming a household word for many municipalities and most often brings to mind community gardens or edible landscapes. It can provide healthy, local food that contributes to food security and helps to maintain additional green space in the cities. This involves farmers finding space in the city - backyards, vacant lots, parking lots, rooftops, parks, abandoned industrial areas, private or public spaces to grow food for wholesale and retail sales to urban consumers. Such spaces do not just produce food using innovative techniques. They also function as aesthetically pleasing outdoor spaces, outdoor classrooms, conversation starters, and ecosystem service providers. When addressing urban agriculture there are some key considerations for municipalities that intend to be creative. It is worth exploring how urban agriculture can be fostered in municipalities and how it can align with local food system and sustainability strategies. Potential alignments include: Providing a local food source for cities, increasing access to fresh, healthy food, contributing to the vitality of the local economy, providing green jobs and fostering innovation, expanding the awareness and understanding of the food system, decreasing GHG emissions by using alternative distribution methods and decreasing the distance food travels. A first step is to conduct a land inventory to identify viable land for food production and to identify sites suitable for urban agriculture. Consider allowing agriculture in most or all zones, including residential. Explore the suitability of urban farming in public parks. Explore temporary

or long-term leases for farming on city-owned land. Consider tax incentives for land holders to lease land for urban agriculture projects, including community gardens and urban farms. Work with urban farmers to collaboratively develop a code of best practices and regulations/guidelines that establish a standard of good farming integrated in the city planning processes, including its function and promotion as a climate change adaptation strategy. Sustainable urban agriculture is an essential tool that addresses a city's problems in innovative ways. Environmental stewardship is enhanced through urban agriculture's efforts to green cities. The city's residents can benefit from cleaner air, lower summer temperatures and recycled waste water and trash<sup>2</sup>.

Two case studies in Greece: Agros In Tritsi Park, Athens and Bio-agros in Alexandroupoli  
Two case studies from Greece are selected to show the potentials of urban agriculture when municipalities support initiatives to raise awareness of citizens about healthy soils and food.

Agros in Tritsi Park was inaugurated in 16th May 2009 and is located in Ilion Municipality within the biggest metropolitan park in Athens. It is a social center and community garden that occupies an area of 500m<sup>2</sup> that grows traditional seeds, has a collective kitchen, and carries out workshops, documentary screening and events related to food sovereignty and agro ecology, a symbolic site due to its biodiversity and history. This initiative has become an important source of training in permaculture and in how to produce food in the city of Athens<sup>3</sup>.

Bio-agros in Alexandroupoli is a recent project in northern Greece that was inaugurated in 11th May 2013. It covers an area of 27.000m<sup>2</sup> in the outskirts of the city of Alexandroupoli. It is an important initiative of the Municipality since it distributes public land to 270 families living in the area. Each family is given an allotment of 50-100m<sup>2</sup> to produce vegetables for personal use whereas a certain percentage of the food production is given for free distribution to poor citizens. The vision of this project is to cultivate public land in order to facilitate sustainable food production, to provide knowledge to the society, to create a platform for sharing experiences and to improve the access to healthy and sufficient food. The underlying values of this initiative are the promotion of a sustainable and peaceful society in the 21st century which is aware about food problems and produces the required food by itself<sup>3</sup>.



Figure 1– Agros In Tritsi Park, Athens and Bio-agros in Alexandroupoli

The most important and direct product these projects provide are the education services that they give to the society. They transfer knowledge and empower the citizens to grow food by their own. Besides the skills, the education also contributes to the awareness of the citizens about healthy soils and healthy food. Such an attitude helps them to live healthier but can also help to stimulate changes in city's landscape policies and governance.

#### Conclusion

There is a lack of basic information about urban agricultural activity in Mediterranean cities, the number of people who participate in urban agricultural activities or the amount of food grown in the city's farms and gardens. It becomes an urgent necessity to survey and document existing urban agricultural activity in selected case studies, establish a shared framework and tools to allow users to track urban agricultural activities citywide, and evaluate their social, health, economic, and ecological benefits, as well as to develop policy recommendations that will help make urban agriculture a more permanent part of Mediterranean city's landscape and governance<sup>4</sup>.

Currently, there are already around 20 urban agriculture initiatives in Greece that produce food in public spaces, community gardens, vacant lots, and schoolyards. Some of these initiatives focus on education

by providing courses and workshops about urban gardening, some enhance healthy food consumption with locally produced food, and some others are commercial oriented through innovative production. Different stakeholders consisting of citizens, organizations, businesses and the municipalities collaborate with each other. Greek Municipalities have an increasing interest in promoting urban agriculture, creating platforms that host projects of productive landscapes, and establishing strategies which promote urban agriculture activities in the cities. All these phenomena show the potential to stimulate further expansion of urban agriculture in Greek cities.

#### Notes

- 1 Bohn, K., Viljoen, A. (2005), "More space with less space: an urban design strategy", in *Continuous productive Urban landscapes. Designing urban agriculture for sustainable cities*. Architectural press: 10-16. Oxford
- 2 McClintock, N. (2010), "Why farm the city? Theorizing urban agriculture through a lens of metabolic rift", *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3: 191-207
- 3 Anthopolou, Th. (2012), "Urban Agriculture. Social dimensions and sustainable cities. Two case studies", Final report, Research Program, Pantion University
- 4 Jouve, A.-M, Padilla, M. (2007), "Les agricultures périurbaines méditerranéennes à l'épreuve de la multifonctionnalité: comment fournir aux villes une nourriture et des paysages de qualité?", *Cahiers Agricultures (16)* 4: 311-317

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