

MAY 6-8, 2019

HERRENHAUSEN CONFERENCE
HERRENHAUSEN PALACE, HANOVER

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

“Urban Agricultural Heritage – and the Shaping of Future Cities”

Organizers: Institute of Landscape Architecture of RWTH Aachen University, Urban Research and Action Group of the University of Havana, Japanese Institute of Landscape Architecture, Research and International Documentation for Landscape of Polytechnic University of Milan, Volkswagen Foundation

In future, urban agriculture is expected to play a more and more important role in the development of cities worldwide. Since the cultivation, processing and distribution of food in urban areas is providing considerable benefits on the environmental, social and economic level, urban agriculture can significantly contribute to the formation of a more sustainable and healthy future. However, we have to keep in mind that urban agriculture is no new invention; it has a deep historical background. But what is the significance of urban agricultural heritage for future developments? What can we learn from it? And why is it important for future food production in and around cities? The international conference aimed at exploring the role of urban agricultural heritage in shaping future cities. It was initiated and organized by FRANK LOHRBERG from the Institute of Landscape Architecture of RWTH Aachen University, JORGE PEÑA DÍAZ from the Urban Research and Action Group of the University of Havana, MAKOTO YOKOHARI from the Japanese Institute of Landscape Architecture, **Lionella Scazzosi** from Research and International Documentation for Landscape of Polytechnic University of Milan, and the Volkswagen Foundation. From a wide range of different perspectives, experts from academia, international organizations and civil society discussed the conference theme in an interdisciplinary approach and with the aim to determine the future role of urban agricultural heritage. In addition, 22 international early career researchers and young professionals working on related projects were invited to participate in the conference with short “lightning talks” and a poster session in which they presented the findings of their research work. In-

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sights into urban agriculture and its heritage from a practical perspective were provided on the second conference day by parallel lunch excursions to asparagus, strawberry and egg farms as well as to the botanical garden with its tropical fruits. Overall, around 200 participants attended the conference.

Combining history and future of urban agriculture

After the welcome addresses by WILHELM KRULL, Secretary General of Volkswagen Foundation, and FRANK LOHRBERG, Professor of Landscape Architecture at RWTH Aachen University, the first session of the conference was introduced by LIONELLA SCAZZOSI, Professor for Landscape Policies at the Polytechnic University of Milan, who emphasized the need of connecting the history and the future of urban agriculture. She pointed out that we have to look deeper into our past, not only into the history of built environment, but also of rural environment and agriculture. MAKOTO YOKOHARI, Professor at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at the University of Tokyo, spoke about the historical presence of small-scale urban and rural land use within Japanese cities. He convincingly highlighted the advantages of this planning concept in relation to more resilient future urban developments, for example in terms of food security and microclimate control. The concept could be applied not only in Asian but also in Western cities. SAÚL ALCÁNTARA ONOFRE, Architect at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Azcapotzalco / Mexico, explained how the highly productive agricultural patterns of the historical Mexican *Chinampa* system led to the formation of cities in the 14th century. Moreover, with this example he pointed out that urban agricultural heritage is part of a culture's identity. In his talk, TIM SOENS, Professor of Medieval and Environmental History at the University of Antwerp, reflected on the influence of urban agricultural heritage on contemporary urban agricultural development and on the differences between urban and rural agriculture. Following this he opened a lively discussion by raising a series of questions: *"Why do households start producing food?"*, *"What is the difference between urban and rural food production?"*, *"How socially inclusive are the agro-towns in regard to food production?"*

Case studies of maintained urban agricultural heritage sites in Bamberg and Istanbul

During the second session chaired by DONA PICKARD, Sociologist at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the relation between cultural heritage and the urban agriculture of today was illustrated by means of two case studies. Bamberg's Market Gardeners' District was the first example, demonstrated by DIANA BÜTTNER, Project Manager at the World Heritage Office of the City of Bamberg. The family-based urban horticulture in the medieval world heritage city of Bamberg served as a case study of

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how the cultivation concept of an urban agricultural heritage site can be adapted in an ideal way to become a successful project of contemporary inner-city food production. It is more than reactivating an old system, but an example of transforming a historic system to the new requirements which urban agriculture is facing today. The second case study, presented by ALEKSANDAR SHOPOV, environmental historian of the Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, referred to the traditional vegetable gardens in front of the Theodosian walls in Istanbul. Comparable to the gardening tradition in Bamberg, for a long time, these highly productive commercial vegetable gardens, called *Bostans*, have been an important element of Istanbul's urban landscape, culture and economy. The *Bostans* can be seen as an excellent example of the type of sustainable urban development Istanbul urgently needs today. But in contrast to Bamberg, the continued existence of the *Bostans* is severely endangered, most of them having already been destroyed and replaced by new development projects. The commentator of this session, PAY DRECHSEL, Principal Researcher and Research Division Leader at the International Water Management Institute in Colombo / Sri Lanka, took a skeptical position, for example by questioning the economic viability of the two examples. However, during the discussion which followed, the overall positive impression concerning the strong relevance of the two case studies could be confirmed.

Urban agricultural food supply in history

The third session, chaired by AXEL TIMPE, Research and Teaching Associate at the Chair of Landscape Architecture at RWTH Aachen, focused on food production and distribution in the city. In his presentation, ANSGAR SCHANBACHER, Postdoc and Scientific Coordinator at the University of Göttingen, explained the role of urban agriculture in the early modern period of central Europe. Food crises, for example during wars or after bad harvests, were a major driver of the emergence of urban agricultural production in the period between 1500 and 1800. Ansgar Schanbacher described how urban gardening became a means for citizens to gain self-sufficiency in difficult times and also reflected on how citizens dealt with it in better times. The second lecture of this session was presented by TIM SOENS and was also about history in regard to finding alternative means of urban agricultural food provisioning for the future. Based on various examples from the 13th century until today, he demonstrated the success as well as the decline of urban agriculture under different market conditions, different political systems and different social situations. As commentator of the session, HAN FENG, Chair of Department of Landscape Architecture of Tongji University in China, posed the question as to what is the core value of urban farming. Other essential questions regarding the role and definition of urban agriculture in historical context were also debated in the discussion with the audience which followed.

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From heritage to future – selected individual approaches

This session contained four presentations that addressed different aspects of heritage in regard to urban agriculture. The session was chaired by JORGE PEÑA DÍAZ, Senior Lecturer at the Technological University of Havana, and commented on by HAGEN EYINK, Head of the Division for Small Towns in Rural Areas and Urban Green Spaces at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community. PAOLA BRANDUINI, Research Fellow at the Polytechnic University of Milan talked about the various activities in Milan in regard to turning its remaining agricultural heritage into lively spaces in which cultural and new urban agricultural activities are taking place. Thereon PAY DRECHSEL introduced the problem of waste in our rapidly growing cities. For a sustainable development, a recycling of the waste flows and closed loop processes would be necessary. In addition, historic forms of agriculture could lead the way to cope with the challenges of wastewater and its treatment. The subsequent presentation by JIANMING CAI, Professor at the Institute of Geographical Sciences and Natural Resources Research at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was all about urban agricultural heritage redevelopment. With the example of the Beijing Jinxi-rice heritage redevelopment project, he demonstrated the convincing new approach of the Chinese government to promoting urban agriculture as a way to mitigate urban problems China is currently facing. This session's last presentation was held by MARGARET PASQUINI, Director of the Obonuco Research Center of the Colombian Corporation for Agricultural Research, on the topic of African indigenous vegetables as biocultural heritage. She argued that indigenous vegetables have a strong potential for being integrated in urban and peri-urban agriculture in order to develop more sustainable food systems. All four presentations were lively discussed between the panel members as well as with the audience. It was questioned, for example, whether the Jingxi-rice project would rather have a peri-urban entertainment function or whether it might have a more holistic approach which also contains the aim to provide food. And regarding closed loop wastewater treatment, it became clear that currently this would be very difficult to implement: It would first be necessary to initiate a change in behavior among the population.

How do you feed a city?

The conference's keynote lecture was held by CAROLYN STEEL, architect, lecturer and writer from London. In a vivid and exciting presentation, she took the audience on a roller coaster ride through the ups and downs of the history of food distribution within cities. She explained how city and landscape were connected in the past and why this relation no longer exists. Today, unfortunately, the unecological way we

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produce and distribute our food and the wasteful way we deal with it are main drivers of climate change. As to a more sustainable future, she asks “*What is our idea of a good life?*” Her message is very clear: We have to “*reinvest true value in food*”, for example by introducing urban agriculture on a broad level into our cities and by maximizing the urban-rural interface. Looking back to the urban agricultural heritage of our ancestors, there is a lot to learn about establishing a more balanced, more healthy and more sustainable society.

Heritage as a tool to implement urban agriculture

The fifth session of the conference was chaired by KERSTIN MANZ, World Heritage Consultant in Paris, and commented on by CAROLA NEUGEBAUER, Associate Professor for Securing Cultural Heritage at RWTH Aachen University. The first lecture was presented by PARVIZ KOOHAFKAN, President of the World Agricultural Heritage Foundation. Based to a great extent on his long-term experience at Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), he provided an impressive amount of striking information, strategies and recommendations on the topic of sustainable urban agriculture. He presented the Initiative on Dynamic Conservation of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), in which he considers agricultural heritage as a foundation for future agricultural practices. The last lecture of this session was held by CHRISTER GUSTAFSSON, Professor in Conservation at Uppsala University, Sweden. During his talk, he focused on the question of how heritage-based solutions in the field of urban agriculture can be promoted and implemented. Furthermore, he reflected on the need to develop innovative models for an adaptive reuse of cultural heritage, for example with participatory approaches which could have the additional benefit of creating social cohesion.

Future perspectives for urban agricultural heritage

The concluding session was set up as a panel discussion with the goal to reflect on the conference’s input and in order to elaborate a list of the action points expected to be significant for urban agricultural heritage in the future. Chaired by FRANK LOHRBERG, the panel consisted of HAN FENG, LIONELLA SCAZZOSI, HAGEN EYINK, JORGE PEÑA DÍAZ and MAKOTO YOKOHARI. The audience was integrated into the discussion as well. “*We need to pull the ball backwards to get strength to go forward*” commented Han Feng. Urban agricultural heritage is to be seen as a basis for the formation of future strategies. “*We need more transdisciplinary perspectives*” said Jorge Peña Díaz, since the action range of urban agriculture connects to many disciplines, for example to environmental planners by providing green infrastructure to cities, as well as to food scientists on the levels of food security and its sustainable distribution. In general,

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the discussants pointed out that it was time for a deeper research in the field of urban agricultural heritage, and that this first conference should be the starting point for the formation of a new interdisciplinary branch which connects the various disciplines involved and takes a significant part in the development of a more sustainable future.

ALEXANDER KADER, Associate Professor, German University of Technology in Oman

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