Introduction

Urban agriculture (UA) is probably as old as our cities, but never received much attention from scientists until recently. It is estimated that, today, some 800 million people are engaged in urban agriculture worldwide. Of these, 200 million are market producers. Nowadays, UA is very much in the limelight of research from many different angles, looking at themes as urban food security and poverty eradication; urban health; urban planning; and integrated city development. What began as isolated surveys by individual social scientists in the early 90s of the 20th century gradually evolved towards institutional projects led by multidisciplinary teams. As a result, there is much more information available now and local authorities have become more aware of the growth and potential of agriculture in and around cities. At this point of time, UA is still a fast-evolving field, in which concept development is still occurring at a high pace.

UA is different from, and complementary to, rural agriculture in local food systems. One of its main characteristics is its integration into the local urban economic and ecological system. However, unless this dimension is enhanced and made operational, the concept will remain little useful on the scientific, technology and policy fronts.

UA is growing out of its ability to assist with, resolve or cope with diverse development challenges. Its strength resides in the fact that it often finds its origin in community spirit and existing strong social cohesion. Much remains to be examined, though, for the up- and downstream effects of UA in the local economy are largely unknown and could be considerable.

The expression "urban agriculture" (UA) has now been adopted by UN agencies. It is important to distinguish between agriculture "in the urban zone" and "periurban" agriculture, though the precise definitions of these zones vary widely. A number of definitions circulate, in which there is a different emphasis on the following characteristics: types of economic activities, food/non-food categories of products and subcategories, intra-urban and periurban character of location, types of areas where it is practised, types of production systems, product destination and production scale.

The competition of UA with other land uses has been put forward as typical for UA leading to one possible definition: UA is that form of agriculture carried out within or on the outskirts of a city where non-agricultural use of local resources is a real option.

Thus, we can define UA as an industry located within (intraurban) or on the fringe (periurban) of a town, a city or a metropolis, which grows or raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re-)using largely human and material resources, products and services found in and around that urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to that area (Mougeot 2000).

Scope and Focus

The Work Package Urban and Periurban Agriculture of the InterDev project describes experiences in the field of urban agriculture and integrated urban plan-
ning. In view of the multidisciplinary character of much of the information available it is difficult to limit a focus to any sub-field in particular. The starting point is the description of experiences or the publication of information that is needed to support the evidence given by the description of the experiences.

The Urban and Periurban Agriculture theme intends to explicitly address strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints to urban agriculture and integrated urban development in its analysis of cases. More in particular, it will endeavour to examine to what extent often-heard criticisms are well founded:

- More interest for UA might fuel rural-urban migration. Evidence exists that most migrants to larger cities come from smaller cities.
- Public support to UA could reduce public investments in rural agriculture. It would appear that UA needs intersectoral co-ordination of current financial flows much more than major new funding.
- UA hampers urban development. Different UA systems do combine with a range of non-agricultural land uses.
- UA threatens public health: contamination risks are caused by crop and husbandry inputs, products and by-products. These risks must be addressed. They arise from practices carries out at wrong places or in the wrong way. Especially risks of zoonoses are under-researched.
- Possible negative environmental impacts: visual untidiness, soil erosion, destruction of vegetation, depletion of water bodies, and pollution of resources. Palliating the lack of supportive services capable plays an important role in overcoming such negatives.

**Sustainable cities**

Large cities, not villages and towns, will become our main habitat. The challenge is whether cities can transform themselves into self-regulating, sustainable systems, as continuing to draw upon ever rarer and ever further distant natural resources is not an option. There can be no sustainable world without sustainable cities. Promotion of UA to reduce the 'ecological footprint' of cities is a serious option, thus combining environmental goals into an overall urban policy.

Addressing this issue started in Rio with Agenda 21 and continued at the 1996 UN City Summit in Istanbul. Nowadays, the city's impact stretches far beyond its physical boundaries. With the increasing number of mouths to feed, and the increasing cost of transportation, urban agriculture has an important role to play in contributing to future social, economical and environmental sustainability of cities. Waste management plays a crucial role in this. UA can play an important role in reducing the amount of waste, re-using what can be re-used, and recycling the remainder. UA can make a crucial contribution to optimal water management in cities as green surfaces allow water to drain through the soil.

**Prospects**

In spite of opposition by some city authorities, often having to do with a negative impact of UA for the image of the modern city, UA is alive and kicking in many countries. Now, policies are needed that focus on encouraging the productivity of open urban spaces, integrating the various components necessary to make urban agriculture healthy and sustainable and comparing best practices where necessary.

In an analysis of factors restricting further development of UA and sustainable city development, van den Berg & De Zeeuw (1998) identified a number of factors that InterDev UA proposes to specifically address in its analysis of cases:

- Restrictive urban policy, laws and regulations;
- uncertainty about property rights;
- lack of supportive services;
- unfeasible implementation of environmental technologies;
- lack of organisation and representation of urban farmers.

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