



**22 NOVEMBER 2010**

***Urban farming and urban landscapes: what is at stake?***

*By Pierre Donadieu*

In the traditional and historical conception of the modern city, farming activities are excluded from the city. But, the term urban agriculture has been spread in city planners' vocabulary for 20 years at least – especially in the big cities of the developing countries. The aim was to acknowledge that it is vital for the city dweller's diet to be fulfilled by nearby agricultural and garden productions, especially during crisis periods (economical, social, or environmental crisis) and that it was necessary for them to have dedicated places, but also breeders and commercial networks in order to organize these productions.

During the end of the 20th century, the urban concentration has spread in most of the countries – both developed or not – which has quicken intensive farming practices. In European urban regions, and after some major food security crises (such as the mad-cow disease and the intoxication of rivers due to pesticides, fertilizers, and liquid manure), public associations have challenged the quality of the farming products, on the public health basis. In order to face this new demand of healthy food products, some non-governmental organizations (such as slow food in Italy, and the community-supported agriculture in France) have suggested new ways of farming production, involving geographical proximity between breeders and consumers (local distribution network), and giving warranties (through labels) on food safety (with organic and dynamic farmings).

At the same time, the global principles of sustainable development have become part of the governmental judicial and ruling injunctions. From now on, the implementation of energy conservation implies, not only to apply environmental architectural standards of high quality (HQE), but also to restrain urban spreading in order to limit energy consumption through automobile traffic and croplands consumption. Besides, the implementation of ecological (micro-climates, biodiversity) and landscape principles (parks and gardens) in the city has lead to the definition of green and aquatic public network policies (pedestrian zones, belts, networks, city centres) in order to organize the circulation of human and non-human beings in urban areas: the Grenelle Environment Acts in France, for instance.

In this context, farming activities and farmers have been reintroduced (being admitted or recognized) in or with the city. Nonetheless, urban farming has to bear some characteristics which make it compatible with the needs and demands of the city dwellers:

It must be harmless for the human and non-human livings (plant and animal life, both savage and domestic). It fulfills the food needs in unrefined (fresh, most of the time) and refined products, but also the ecologic services (bio-diversification through networks of hedges and watercourses for example), the environmental services (the recycling of green waste through composting), the symbolic services (rural architectural heritage), the leisures (pedestrian, cycling, and equestrian ones), and aesthetic services (the multi-sensory qualities of places and of their atmospheres, of landscapes and their scenography).

It is linked to the nearby city thanks to agro-ecological corridors, and local commercial networks, through the recycling of sewage and rain water, and of organic matters, and of renewable energy (windmills, photovoltaic panels).

Thus, a bearable utopia of agri-urban landscapes was born in Europe like in the Agropolis München Project and the one of the Freiham farming park in 2009. This idea has appeared shyly (but without marked landscapes utopias) in the southern parks of Milan and of Baix Llobregat in Barcelona for ten years or so.

The tangible landscapes which result from that, are divided into two separate processes : these processes are opposed but also which can be juxtaposed in a given area (the districts). On the one hand, there is the production of residential country areas where the agro-industry gradually lets more and more room to urban farming and gardening, to agricultural or forested parks, to community gardens, and to hobby farming activities with the prevailing vocation concerning leisure and local supplying. On the other hand, one can notice the persistence of deterritorialized agro-industries (such as intensive cereal growing) opened towards

worldwide markets, but which do not exclude to diversify their activities with the production of urban services (educational farms, urban leisures, agritourism, etc.). One can also add some so-called nature services such as the plantations aiming at fixing carbon and wood production, or biological reserves which have been given the status of sanctuary.

Thus, the production of urban agriculture landscapes becomes part of the values belonging to the sustainable development as superior possibilities of choice for future generations – in the sense of capabilities as developed by economist Amartya Sen (the Idea of justice, London, 2009).

These landscapes have to be interpreted, or read, as cultural and societal constructions, as new images of cities contributing to their reputation and creativity (viticultural or market cities, for instance). But also as places to live offering the presence of multiple human activities ,which have to be compatible with, the inhabitants as much as with the visitors.

What is at stake with agri-urban landscaping, with the purpose of the well-being of human and non-human lives, can be of four different origins:

- **land:** give network facilities, preserving and acquiring, thanks to public land agencies, the needed spaces to their agro-urban-ecological multifunctionality;
  - **economico-political:** encouraging the creation of services: ecological and environmental ones, and touristic and leisure services – through agricultural and public enterprises (cities' green services);
  - **socio-political:** to guaranty the users' access to a part of the private farming area, with financial compensations (maintenance, reception) for the farmers, coming from the public services;
  - **landscape:** to create and to administer the formal and functional organization of spaces, in a way that the farming and gardening places become appropriated as unique cultural products of the concerned territories, and be aesthetically qualified as such. (See chronicle n°47.)
-