

FARMING THE CITY

Urban agriculture in Amsterdam: 19 projects

This report outlines the results of a detailed investigation into the current state of urban agriculture in Amsterdam. It defines patterns, mechanisms and needs related to the development of urban farming, with a specific focus on opportunities and challenges in Amsterdam.

19 players in the urban and agricultural spheres have been interviewed by CITIES' anthropologist and agronomist Anke De Vrieze. The video interviews have been analysed in two ways: firstly, opinions, knowledge and issues raised by the interviewees have been categorised according to the following key themes:

- _Involvement and number of people.
- _Localisation and location type.
- _Type of project: food commerce, food communities and food innovation.
- _Technologies, growing techniques or type of communities.
- _Implementation problems.
- _Political support.
- _Economic support.
- _Necessities for future actions.
- _Position in the local food system.

In order to retain a direct, personal approach, the interviews have been edited and grouped, according to these themes into specific video reports.

The information generated from the initial 20 interviews was analysed and interpreted to develop structured and semi-structured questionnaires. The questionnaires' multiple-choice responses were based on appropriate problem-solving solutions derived from research and practical experience from across the urban agriculture field. Classic research methods, such as interviews and desk research, have been used alongside innovative and practical 'hands-on' approaches. These include workshops with local stakeholders and community explorations of urban farming challenges, solutions and possibilities in a range of contexts, for example the FarmCity Forum in NYC, USA, in September 2010; and the Green City Conference, Stockholm, Sweden, in January 2011.

The questionnaire has been refined into a user-friendly online form, accessible on FarmingtheCity.net, which enables all urban farmers (and potential urban farmers) to input data about their projects, ideas and suggestions. Once data is input, a report on each project is automatically generated via the database and published online. In this way, FarmingtheCity.net supports and encourages knowledge sharing, and empowers citizens in the development of city farming activities.

The projects in brief

De Groene Vaart

De Groene Vaart has transformed a tiled terrace at the women's centre Vrouw & Vaart into a gorgeous edible garden. Following a series of sessions on health, food, permaculture and empowerment at the centre, a group of women put their knowledge into practice and created the garden in the spring of 2010. Knowledge-sharing is an important part of the project, and all women are invited to visit the centre and make use of the garden, attend lectures and discussions and go on excursions related to city farming. Free weekly sessions focus on growing food, cooking and workshops.

VersVoko

A 'VersVoko' is a group of consumers – a kind of cooperative – that buys food and fresh produce directly from local farmers without going through a wholesaler. Not all produce comes from certified organic farmers, but the food sourced is as sustainable as possible. A VersVoko is being set up in Amsterdam, modelled on successful experiences across Belgium.

Stichting Postzegelparken

Stichting Postzegelparken transforms neglected neighborhood spaces into active, social, people-friendly places. The focus of the transformation is on creating places that add to the quality of life in the neighborhood: outdoor 'meeting rooms', places for playing with kids, for sitting with your laptop in the sun or for sharing a community picnic.

Wiek de Keijser

Reactivating neglected public spaces with the creation of edible greens and social meeting places is the aim of Wiek de Keijser. To date, vegetable gardens are being created on an courtyard of almost 1700m², with the produce used by growers and shared with neighbours. The project is partly educational, but not commercial: nothing is sold. The space is managed by an adjacent school – hopefully a future partner in the creation of school gardens.

Auke Bakker - Buurtmoestuyn Trompenburg

A group of twelve residents have come together to create a neighborhood garden, set around a children's playground, where organic vegetables are grown in small plots and meals are shared several times a year.

BOSKOI

Boskoi is a mobile phone application that sources and identifies where edible plants can be found in Amsterdam. The app provides a list of locations where 'wild food' and edible plants can be found across the city, and enables users to add new locations and information.

Urbaniahoeve: Social Design Lab for Urban Agriculture

Urbaniahoeve evolved from the Food Schilderswijk project which identified opportunities for urban agriculture in Schilderswijk, a neighborhood in Den Haag commissioned by Stroom Den Haag, centre for art and architecture. Urbaniahoeve aims to create an experimental phase of urban agriculture across northern European cities. The project aims to go beyond traditional views of urban agriculture as city vegetable gardens or large 'lettuce flats', developing new models for urban food production and creating a visual language that integrates 'foodscapes' into public space. Working with local participants, the project will create new green spaces and re-animate neglected places.

Doetank/Doetuinen

Doetuinen are vegetable gardens in residents' backyards looked after by schoolchildren during school hours. Children are given space of one square metre to use as a kind of school garden, but one that just happens to be located in someone's backyard. The activity will benefit both the garden owner and the kids – the project begins in spring 2011, and an initial group of residents and schoolchildren are already signed up.

De Brede Moestuin

In cooperation with a playground association in the city centre of Amsterdam, De Brede Moestuin created in 2010 a vegetable garden along the edges of the playground. Sowing and planting was done by the children and the harvest shared in a communal meal.

De Kok en de Kweker

The Cook, the Farmer, his Wife and their Neighbor is a collaborative project in the Nieuw West neighborhood of Amsterdam; initiated by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, it was designed and organized by Marjetica Potrč and Wilde Westen, a group of architects, artists, designers and cultural producers. The project consists of a community vegetable garden and a community kitchen, which are used by residents of the neighbourhood. A previously unused site at Lodewijk van Deyssestraat 61 was acquired on a temporary basis from the Far West construction company; the building that houses the community kitchen also serves as a meeting place, and the vegetable garden is located behind the kitchen.

Stichting Boerenstadswens

Boerenstadswens is a network of Amsterdam initiatives in the field of urban agriculture, sustainable food production, health, farm-education and rural development. Projects include an association of Amsterdam city farms (also called Community Supported Agriculture or CSA), Amsterdam food co-ops, kitchen garden design and Innovation Gardens West.

Onder-Tussen

Onder-Tussen is an initiative of people – from activists to local authority employees to policy makers – coming together to explore ideas for the temporary use of city spaces and development sites that are on hold due to building projects being postponed. The aim is to keep the city alive and to add value in terms of creating new spaces for active social use.

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Groenten van Amsterdam

Groenten van Amsterdam is a concept exploring completely new ways of growing vegetables and fruit in empty buildings in the city. Technology developed by PlantLab allows plants to grow without natural light. Instead, plants are exposed to a specific combination of red and blue light, which enables the growing process to take place in any type of building.

Schoffeltuintjes Transvaal

'Schoffeltuintjes' are small gardens – vegetable gardens, ornamental gardens or herb gardens – created in existing green spaces. To date, such gardens have been developed in nine spots in the Transvaal neighbourhood of Amsterdam, initiated by a collaboration between local residents and the municipality.

Thijl

Thijl is a delivery service for organic products created by a young entrepreneur. Customers order online and Thijl delivers the groceries by bike directly to their doorstep.

Urban Green

Urban Green is the first urban garden centre to focus specifically on urban dwellers willing to work with food in and around their home. Urban Green sells products and provides a practical hub for knowledge-sharing and problem solving relating to city growing: window boxes, roof gardens, hanging plants, vertical gardens and even finding a suitable location for growing.

De Hartstocht

De Hartstocht is an organic dairy farm, located on the Gein in Abcoude. The farm hosts 120 dairy cows and around 160/170 young stock.

CityPlot

Cityplot aims to heighten human awareness of nature's cycles across urban areas. The Cityplot team develops private and public gardens, advising on design, the choice of plants and the development process.

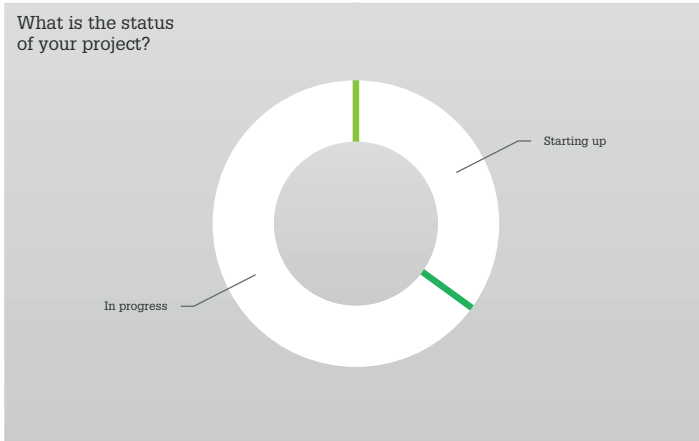
SWOMP

Free State 'SWOMP' was squatted in July 2008 by squatting group De Pijp and Groenfront! Amsterdam. With ecological garden experiment, SWOMP has demonstrated that it is possible to grow food in abandoned areas of our cities with or without the help of the public authorities.

Urban agriculture: Amsterdam's start-up

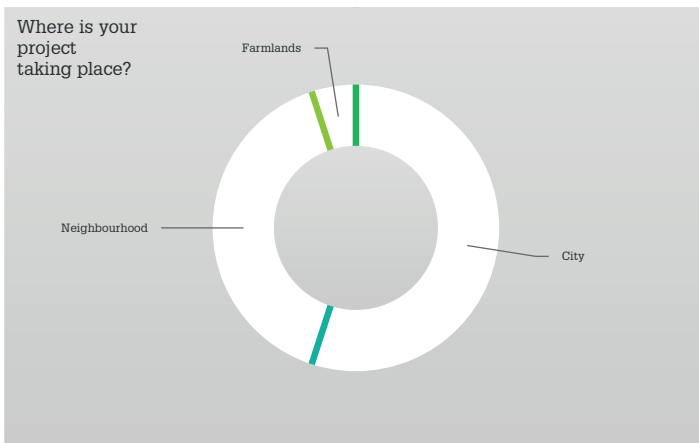
The practice of urban agriculture is a long-term tradition in Amsterdam, but most of the projects analysed are in a start-up phase. Although the city boasts many examples of gardening and food growing, many of these projects are informal, unfunded and supported by fewer than 10 workers or volunteers.

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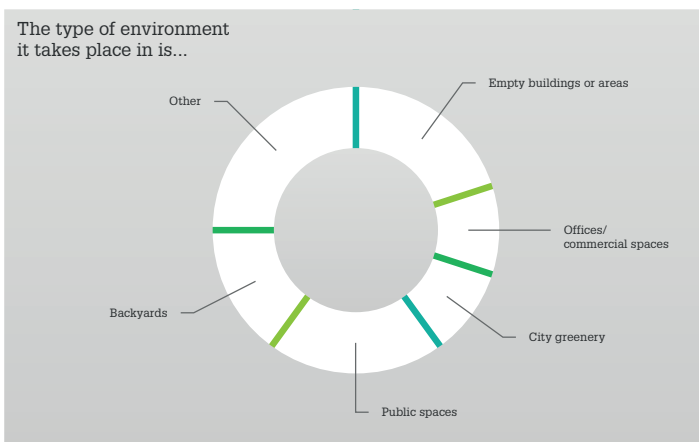


Locations

The studied projects mostly take place within the city itself however a minority also appear within outlying neighbourhoods and farmlands.

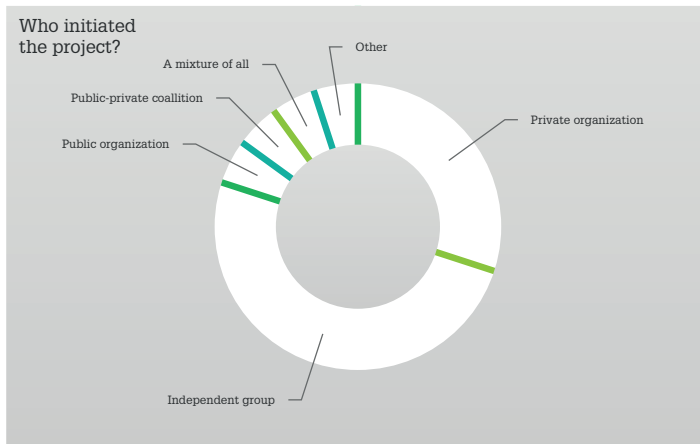


In particular the activities are located in private backyards, playgrounds, empty buildings and a wide range of urban green spaces, public and private, such as sidewalk greens, parks, development lots and city farms.



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Around half of the activities explored in the initial phase of Farming the City have been initiated by independent groups and private organisations, indicating that the city farming field holds great potential in terms of both citizen-led initiatives, and spontaneous practice.



Types of project and techniques

Almost all the projects analysed are community projects. This reflects our intention to focus on activities that are not fully positioned in an economic system, as are established companies and local producers working on an international scale. Among these community projects, we have selected several initiatives that are working to create significant innovation for city farmers, and therefore deserve to be highlighted.

BOSKOI is a free, open source mobile app that helps to explore and map edible landscapes; and GROENTEN VAN AMSTERDAM uses new technologies developed by PlantLab to grow food under LED lights in indoor environments where natural light is scarce. From the urban design point of view, the URBANIAHOEVE project deserves a special mention because of its scope: the aim is to go beyond traditional views of urban agriculture as city vegetable gardens or large 'lettuce flats', developing new models for urban food production and creating a visual language that integrates 'foodscapes' into public space. Working with local participants, URBANIAHOEVE will create new green spaces and re-animate neglected places. Project co-founder Debra Salomon is a valued advisor and member of the Farming the City research team, valuable mentor in the development of Farmingthecity.net.

We have also included a few commercially-based projects focusing on urban farming and urban gardens, design, transportation and meat production. Of these, most work with local communities, with some of the most inspiring projects directing attention towards socially disadvantaged groups, women and students. Among the projects that focus on communities, traditional farming techniques are not commonly used; surprisingly, permaculture and organic farming are the favoured approaches.

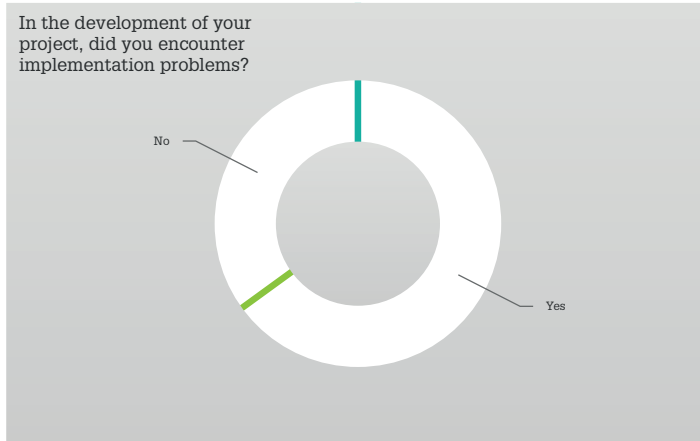
The projects and their implementation:

Challenges, needs and solutions

Implementation issues

As already discussed, most of the projects have been initiated by independent

groups of individuals. A majority of these encountered implementation problems – in particular, project promoters suffered from lack of time, lack of funding and lack of support or cooperation from the local authorities.



Problems in sharing a common vision, along with complex bureaucratic procedures, were also common obstacles to project development. In addition, it is interesting to note that although regulation and bureaucracy have been pinpointed as challenging, current municipal regulations and policy have not been perceived as overly problematic by the majority of promoters.

However, among those that expressed their problem with regulation, in-depth analysis shows that there is a lack of support for city farming initiatives with public policy; for example issues with public hygiene, the ability to adapt to building regulations, and the definition of appropriate agreements with land or building owners.

The lack of public policy support in these areas has led to a varied range of approaches being undertaken by project promoters in order to surmount barriers and to solve problems, for example:

- _Working through a more established/support organization.
- _Bringing in an expert/strategist/thought leader.
- _Adapting to a different context, flexibility in design and problem solving.
- _Looking for interested partners.
- _Restricting steps taken to the absolute minimum.
- _Diversifying activities.
- _Squatting land or premises.

This diversity provides valuable evidence of the depth of knowledge, creativity and original thought that can be revealed through in-depth case studies of urban agriculture projects. As a consequence, we decided to develop a parallel research theme within Farming the City: a more focused analysis of the regulatory frameworks and policies that impact upon the development of urban agriculture projects in Amsterdam – and how such policy and regulation might be developed for community benefit. [link].

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Our analysis took into account each project's economic sustainability and political support. If we analyse these two indicators together, it is apparent that positive political support did not influence the economic sustainability of a project.

Political support and economic sustainability

Moreover, although most of the projects are economically sustainable, the majority of project promoters expressed a need for further funding and for policy support.



CITIES has begun to address this issue by co-organising a conference about the future of the food policy in Amsterdam during February 2011. Proeftuin Amsterdam was a four-year programme of support for projects that influence food security, education and health. Urban agriculture projects have never been prioritised by Proeftuin Amsterdam public policy, which ended in January 2011. In order to address the problem of lack of fundings, national funding organisations and banks have been invited to the event in February 2011. Moreover, CITIES is also working on the definition of new business models to support innovative city farming activities, with the final goal being an important shift from 'state-supported' to 'economically self-reliant' activities. Local food systems and new approaches to local production, transportation, preparation and the consumption of food are under analysis, with many stakeholders and local players joining the project. A more detailed overview of the plan can be downloaded in the Local Food System section of Farmingthecity.net

Necessities

Following on from funding and public policy requirements, project promoters detailed their need for increased visibility – itself evidence of demand for an open public platform such as Farmingthecity.net. The next significant requirement focuses on the need of resources – especially people and volunteers – ,to develop the project.

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Evidence of this widespread need also underlines an important future direction for Farmingthecity.net.

In conclusion, through the in-depth empirical analysis of 20 urban agriculture projects in Amsterdam, CITIES' Farming the City project has created timely and relevant tools to provide evidence-based support for the development of city farming across Amsterdam – and beyond.

FarmingtheCity.net will address visibility and outreach needs, and raise urban agriculture higher up the agenda of new social groups and a wider range of professionals, practitioners, policy makers and active citizens.

The final results of this detailed process of traditional and innovative research is the development of a much-needed evidence base for urban agriculture activity, and a wealth of pro-active suggestions for progress; rooted in academic methods but focusing on current, practical city issues.

Key outcomes

Three specific analyses have been developed following data collection:

- _Urban typologies and their relation to urban agriculture: a site-specific analysis of Amsterdam
- _Urban agriculture and food production: policy and regulation in Amsterdam
- _The local food system: its potential in the development of local economies

In today's continuously changing urban environments, in which policy, infrastructure and practice are locally bounded but globally dependent, traditionally rigid research methods lack viability and appeal.

Innovative democratic processes succeed when citizens are involved and empowered in the development of 'new ways of doing things', in which decisions and desires are expressed through the creation of engaging, informal practices that lead to the creation of viable tools and processes that underpin community practice. Farming The City and farmingthecity.net are CITIES' practical contribution to this process.