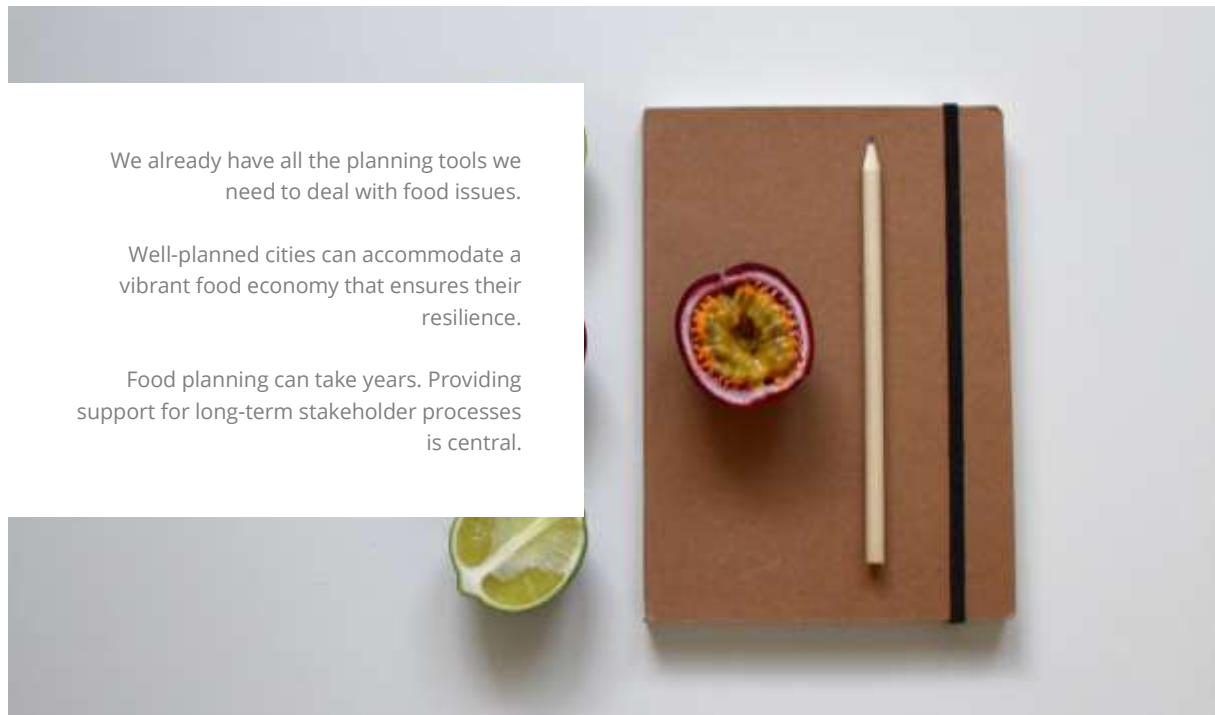


How can food fit into urban planning?

We already have all the planning tools we need to deal with food issues.

Well-planned cities can accommodate a vibrant food economy that ensures their resilience.

Food planning can take years. Providing support for long-term stakeholder processes is central.



For a long time, urban and regional planning was not much concerned with food. Since the 2000's, however, food has become a topic planners discuss about. In a book called *Integrating Food into Urban Planning*, published in 2018, Yves Cabannes and Cecilia Marochinno gathered insights from various cities around the world about what planning can do to contribute to sustainable urban food systems.

Albane GASPARD

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Urban Food Futures would like to thank [Yves Cabannes](#) for his inputs and comments.

Planning tools rediscovered

London, Toronto, Rosario... and most cities that have pioneered urban food strategies have used physical and sectorial planning as an ingredient for action and transformation of their cities. Indeed, traditional planning tools are of particular relevance to food systems. They include :

Source:

[Cabannes, Y. and Marochino, C. \(eds\). 2018. Integrating Food into Urban Planning. London, UCL Press; Rome, FAO](#)

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- **Knowledge generation:** for instance, various cities have taken the time to **map their food assets, including land or retail**. Bristol (UK) carried out an audit of productive land that looked into its potential and risks (flooding, climate change...). Land mapping in Rosario (Argentina) started a process that led to the development of a municipal land bank. In Fortaleza (Brazil), the development of a hunger map played a central role, not only to find solutions in this expanding multi-million city, but as an inspiration for the famous Brazilian Zero Hunger Policy. Producing and monitoring indicators is also an important part of planning, especially if these can be spatialized in order to evaluate policy impacts on specific neighbourhoods.
- **Land regulation:** when food strategies guide which activities should take place in the city, planning should help decide



about *where* these activities should happen. Indeed, according to Yves Cabannes, very concrete planning devices such as zoning is crucial as it materialises a vision and protects somehow food related spaces from being covered with concrete, roads or buildings. Examples include limiting unhealthy food outlets in New York (USA), protecting peri-urban agricultural land or legalising food production in the city.

Planning tools are therefore available for cities willing to address food issues. Indeed, the book editors conclude that, nowadays, *“we are technically equipped to address food security challenges in cities”*.

A new role for planners

But planning is not only about tools, it also is about **getting people together to share a common vision and agree on its spatial implications**. Planning is a process, and a participatory one. As far as food is concerned, this has very concrete implications for urban planners' day-to-day work, now and in the future:

- **First, planners should see themselves as facilitators of a process**, and not only as providers of impeccable maps, and norms and orientations, that are unfortunately not often followed, as they lack citizens and other actors' support
- **Second, they need to advocate the issue to other planners**. Indeed, food planning is a new topic, therefore, part of food planning is about explaining challenges and solutions to other actors, primarily those involved in other sectors. This takes time and that time should not be overlooked.
- **Third, they need to connect the food system with other urban systems** such as transportation or water. According to Yves Cabannes, the most successful policies are the ones that are well connected with other sectors, and, therefore, *“planning should create mechanisms to coordinate, link up, and optimise the links with other urban sectors, such as water supply and treatment, waste management, transport, health or housing development to name a few”*.

The authors remind us that **such a process can take years**. For instance, the city of Rosario (Argentina) is often mentioned for its successful food strategy, but one should not forget that developing it to a significant scale, and shifting from projects to policies took over 15 years. The key is to produce formal outcomes such as Food Charters or Food Strategies and get them approved at the city level in order to create points of no return. **Providing support for long-term stakeholder processes is therefore central**.

Urban agriculture as a catalyst for urban food planning

The many concrete examples and practices covered by the book show that food planning emerges from multiple entry points (health, poverty mitigation, answers to crisis, economic development and job creation, environmental sustainability...).



One, however, stands out as it plays a very specific role. It is urban agriculture. **Food growing and transforming food acts as a catalyst for action.** Why? Because mobilisations to preserve existing urban agriculture activities (or to create new ones) generate a critical mass of food champions and advocates able to put food chain related issues on the local planning and policy agenda. Additionally, food growing connects particularly well with other policy objectives such as social integration or health.

It is important, therefore, not to consider urban agriculture as a fad, but to truly use it as **a sparkle for wider food policies.**

The right to the city

More profoundly, **food planners need to raise awareness among the multiple urban stakeholders that food can actually be a viable part of an urban economy and a sustainable urban system.**

Such an idea was developed by XIXth century thinkers of garden cities, such as Ebenezer Howard in Letchworth (UK). According to Howard, the city is not only about industry (and, in the XXIth century, one would say, about services). **Well-planned cities can accommodate a vibrant food economy that ensures their resilience.** Another example is the city of Milan, where thoughtful planning allowed a great variety of food production within the city-region itself.

Therefore, having urban planning integrate food is the recognition that food activities are a key ingredient for sustainable cities of the future.

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