



Framing urban gardening and agriculture: On space, scale and the public



Marion Ernwein

Department of Geography and Environment, Université de Genève, Boulevard du Pont d'Arve 40, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 June 2013

Received in revised form 23 June 2014

Keywords:

Urban gardening
Urban agriculture
Scale
Public
Community
Framing

ABSTRACT

During the past ten years, both public policies and scientific research have tended to pay increasing attention to what they refer to as “urban gardening” and “urban agriculture”. In this paper I argue that the term “urban” poorly reflects the diversity of spatial references that underpin such projects. I explore the framing process of two competing agriculture and gardening projects in Geneva, Switzerland. I first show that the social and spatial frames of the projects, i.e. the central definition of a public and of a spatiality are inextricably linked. In the second part, I argue that by ranking the spatial units that ground the spatial frames of the projects according to the specific public they are aimed at, the most powerful actor makes competitive use of scale frames. This paper thus argues for more attention to the socio-spatial framing of urban agriculture and urban gardening projects. It contributes to the debate on the politics of scale by exploring how a scalar hierarchy is performed through the strategic deployment of spatial criteria by social actors. The hierarchy appears to be contingent and context specific, with prevalent notions of locality and proximity.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

During the past ten years, both public policy and scientific research have tended to pay increasing attention to what is referred to as “urban gardening” and “urban agriculture”. In most Western countries, a growing number of administrations are trying to develop a policy of “urban agriculture”, comprised of all the practices related to the growing of food within and near cities, from inner city allotments and community gardens to periurban off-ground cultivation.

In this paper, I explore the way project leaders think about and frame the spatiality of their projects. Do they refer to the “urban” nature of their projects? How do they frame their spatial scope? I argue that the oft-unexamined use of the term “urban” poorly reflects the complexity of the representations and practices of many practitioners, as well as the power relationships that shape them. These gardening and agricultural practices may well be located in urban places, or have functional relations to them – be they through informal exchanges of things or within formalised market relations – yet the “urban” should not be regarded as a pre-existing spatial reference that all actors refer to.

All collective projects are discursively and materially framed by project holders. In the case of urban gardening, the spatial framing of projects may refer to other spatial objects than the city or more

generally the “urban”.¹ To simply designate these practices as urban therefore tends to oversimplify their spatial framing and the scope of their action, and to hide the process of negotiation inherent to the framing process of any project. The point is not to say that such projects are not urban but to point to the fact that their spatial framing can be surprisingly complex and subject to power relationships, and that the “urban” itself can be delineated differently among urban agriculture projects.

An important number of publications (see for instance Boulianne et al., 2010; Cérézuelle and Le Formal, 1990; Ferris et al., 2001; Holland, 2004) also emphasize the role of collective urban gardens as inclusive tools for community building, social integration and the re-creation of public spaces. However, community gardens do not exist outside of society. They are therefore embedded within the micro-politics of the city and their degree of inclusiveness/exclusiveness varies greatly from one project to another. I argue that it is important to know how the public of any urban agriculture or urban gardening project is framed, and how this refers to different scientific conceptions of what constitutes such a public. I wish to further foster dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone intellectual traditions regarding both urban gardening and agriculture, and notions of public and

¹ The author is well aware of the theoretical and conceptual debates (see for instance Abu-Lughod, 1991; Ascher, 1995; Chalas, 2000; Choay, 1994; Soja, 2000) regarding cities and the urban phenomenon. However the point of this paper is not to analyse such concepts and phenomena but to see if and how they are mobilised in practice.

E-mail address: marion.ernwein@unige.ch

community. Building upon Kurtz's argument that the spatial organization of community gardens and especially their degree of enclosure reveals and influences concepts of community (Kurtz, 2001), I show that the spatial framing cannot be separated from the social framing of the projects, as both are thought of together.

To explore this, I focus on Beaulieu Park, a historical park in Geneva where two urban gardening experiments coexist: one is a community garden created and managed by a municipal department, the other an experimental urban farm managed by a grassroots urban agriculture organization subsidized by the same municipality. I explore how both of these organizations construct and negotiate their own sociospatial frames, within and beyond the spaces of the gardens themselves. By comparing their goals and logics and by shedding light on the way the latter is dependent on the managers of the former for funding, I discuss how their respective claims and practices are more-than-urban. Furthermore, each secures its own social and spatial frames through a politics of scale, conceived as the performance of a scalar hierarchy, with discursive as well as material consequences.

Framing urban gardening and agriculture

Finding one's way through multiple understandings of urban gardening and urban agriculture across languages

Comparing and analyzing the claims and objectives of urban gardening and urban agriculture projects requires being clear about the conceptual debates surrounding these expressions. Unsurprisingly, the terms urban agriculture and urban gardening are not used the same way in different languages. Since the case studied here takes place in French-speaking Switzerland, a discussion of terms is unavoidable. In the French-speaking scientific literature, urban gardening ("*jardinage urbain*") is most often referred to as urban agriculture ("*agriculture urbaine*"), but the latter is not limited to the former. For instance, Salomon-Cavin (2012) justifies the use of urban agriculture as a generic term by considering that both urban gardening and agriculture are acts of cultivation, refer to the same geographical imaginaries, and are sometimes linked to the same policies. In some cases, however, authors choose only to designate professional practices under this term, similar to the use of the term 'farming' in English. Niwa for instance defines urban agriculture as a: "professional activity located in the city that produces agricultural products and has as one consequence the presence of green spaces in the city"² (Niwa, 2009, p. 105). If most authors choose not to differentiate between amateur practices and commercial practices, most of them focus only on some specific practices: metropolitan professional agriculture (Donadieu and Fleury, 1995; Jarrige et al., 2006), intra-urban agriculture (Wegmuller and Duchemin, 2010) or agriurbanism (Vidal and Fleury, 2009) for instance. Some authors however choose to work on the close relationship between urban gardening and urban agriculture (Boukharaeva and Marloie, 2010; Grandchamp Florentino, 2012; Nahmias and Le Caro, 2012), but with differing delineations of the terms.

In the English-speaking literature the delineation of the terms seems to be slightly different. Indeed, most scholarly contributions that use the term "urban agriculture" focus on initiatives in developing countries (see for instance Bryld, 2003; Demuro, 2012; Hampwaye et al., 2007; Salazar, 2012), while only a few seem to focus on Northern initiatives. When they do, they tend to present an exclusive definition of urban agriculture, understood as peri-urban or metropolitan³ production, market-oriented agriculture (see

for instance Stottlemeyer, 2012). There are, however, some notable exceptions (McClintock, 2013 for instance has a more extensive definition of urban agriculture that comprises all forms of food growing in cities). Most of the works concerned with practices of inner-city food-growing refer to them as urban gardening, though they are sometimes exactly the same as those referred to as urban agriculture in French. Expressions do not have the same scope in these two languages. For instance, in English *stricto sensu* community gardens are focused on ideas of community-building, while the expression "urban garden" simply designates a garden with an urban location, yet both expressions tend to be used as synonyms in French, and are more generally referred to as "agriculture urbaine" (Boulianne, 2001; Wegmuller and Duchemin, 2010). It is important to insist on these different scientific cultures, because they are linked to the reality on the ground and the way people involved in these practices label themselves and frame their own praxis. Dialogues between scientific cultures are rendered even more difficult in the absence of clear definitions of urban gardening due to variety in purposes, forms and functioning of all the projects labeled as such (see Holland, 2004, p. 292). However, to put it simply, urban agriculture refers to practices of cultivation in urban spaces. Nevertheless, this does not give any indication of how practitioners do or do not make sense of the "urban", nor how they define it. Could some projects be urban in location but not defined as such by those involved?

It needs stating at this point that this paper does not aim to fix what the "urban" is or what it should mean related to agriculture and gardening, but to explore whether it is used as a spatial reference for agriculture and gardening projects. In this paper it should not be regarded as a category of analysis but a category of practice (Moore, 2008), or in Pike's terms (1954) not as an etic but an emic category. That is why I do not wish to state right away what "urban" means but to explore whether it is a category that makes sense in the practitioners' minds and how – and if not, what other spatial references are used and how.

Urban gardening as political practice

The practices of so-called urban gardening range from illegal gardening of vacant space, to gardening in individual allotments and in community gardens. The history of the American and European gardening movements can be traced back to the end of the 19th century, when allotment gardens were seen by the clergy and the dominant classes as a healthy occupation that could help improve workers' health but also, from a paternalistic point of view, lure them away from pubs and render them more productive (Dubost, 1997). In periods of crisis and war too, such gardens developed, offering self-sufficiency to modest families. These allotment gardens were held by associations, sometimes by municipalities, and were proactively secured by authorities. For instance the Allotment Act in the UK forced every municipality to give an allotment to anyone who asked. In the 1960s however, just as the number of allotments was starting to decrease, a new sort of urban garden began to develop in the USA, now called "community gardens". These were grassroots political projects aimed at fighting against land deprivation and land capitalism. Notwithstanding their use to some neighborhoods, in the 1990s there started to be political contestation by developers and politicians over these spaces on the basis that they should be treated like any other plot and thus become part of the real estate market. In New York this resulted in the destruction of dozens of community gardens (Schmelzkopf, 1995). These gardens never really became mainstream even 35 years after their creation: they are still contested and contestatory spaces. In Europe, the story is slightly different, for local authorities have only recently discovered community gardens and often see them as an efficient way to create community dynamics.

² « activité professionnelle localisée dans la ville, qui produit des denrées agricoles et dont une des conséquences est la présence d'espaces végétalisés dans la ville ».

³ That is, various forms of agriculture practiced in metropolitan regions, not in inner cities, and aimed at local urban markets.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5074042>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5074042>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)