



Opening-ceremony of community garden

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In Russia, agricultural activities of the urban inhabitants are taking place at significant distances from their urban homes (see Moldakov 2000). The term “urban agriculture” refers more to agricultural activities of city dwellers than to agricultural activities within the city boundaries only. The agricultural sites, usually with a house, are called dachas and are located between 6 and 60 km from the city.

Support for Urban Agriculture In St Petersburg

The importance of agricultural activities, especially the production of food for subsistence consumption for urbanites increased after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The demand for land by those without dachas became so high after 1991-92 that urban authorities started to organise small plots on open space (non-building development sites) within the urban territories. This was then followed by other urban inhabitants who started to occupy land adjacent to motorways and railroads, without permission from the authorities.

Federal law defines how local administrations use city budgets for the necessary infrastructure in these areas (like health and safety services). The organisation of the plots outside city boundaries results from negotiations and agreements between the municipal and regional (rural) administrations. The St Petersburg city and regional administrators were sensible and clever enough to organise, regulate, and formalise the access-to-land process.

These two administrative units have different motivations. City authorities have an interest in (peri-)urban agriculture mainly to solve social problems, but their interest is focused on practices outside official city boundaries. They assist in organising plots close to the city, but not within the city. The regional (rural) administration however, does not really welcome new plots and new summer

inhabitants because of the need for waste recovery and health services, extra pressure on the rural roads, and the increase in public transportation, water discharge, etc. They would like to win support from the city administration, something they do not currently receive.

In 1995, “The Gardening Office” (Department for the Development of Horticulture and Gardening in St Petersburg and the Leningrad Region) was created. The Gardening Office coordinates, together with other departments, the development of urban agri-culture, activities of state agencies, local government, private enterprises, and other organisations in St Petersburg.

Urban farmers themselves have created public organisations like the “Union of Gardeners”. Gardeners discuss their problems within their units (Community Garden or Dacha Cooperatives), whose chairpersons report to the Union of Gardeners’ meeting with “The Gardening Office”, which will further act on the problems in need of support from urban authorities and coordinate with sectoral departments.

URBAN PLANNING AND AGRICULTURE

This positive story about support of urban agriculture is, however, not fully reflected in a firm integration of agriculture in urban planning and land zoning. The emphasis of the St Petersburg/ Russian urban planners still lies with industry, tourism, services, science and education.

Urban farming currently consists of 154 community gardens within urban boundaries, and the authorities consider these to be part of the urban landscape, as one official separate zone. This is a serious step towards the integration of urban agriculture into urban planning. However there have been, and still are, no functional zones taken up in city planning, for the development of urban agriculture. City authorities believe that, with the improvement of the economic situation in Russia, the use of temporary plots of land will lose status and will decline on its own, to be replaced by further development of private and community gardens without the need of support by authorities.

City authorities do not mention, nor care about (though at least they do not ban), informal agricultural plots along the less important roads, under electricity lines, on land bordering upon railway tracks, or on other open spaces that are not needed in the short term. These places however have no agricultural future.

The open spaces (land with poor soil) on the urban outskirts are temporarily authorised for agricultural purposes to selected groups (veterans and pensioners). Other poor land around the cities is informally used, unsanctioned by the authorities.

The St Petersburg’ experience shows the important role of the The Gardening Office within the municipal administration. However, there is an important and necessary role for NGOs, like the Union of Gardeners to provide further support to the gardeners. Training programmes and extension on agricultural technologies need to be financed partly from urban administration and partly from payments based on fees collected by regional and urban branches of the Union of Gardeners from their members.

The integration of urban agriculture into urban planning and development will only be feasible when the majority of the people living in the city, consider agricultural activities not only as a means of additional income and self-maintenance, but also as a necessary element of the sustainable development of the city.

REFERENCES

- Moldakov O. 2000. The Urban Farmers of St Petersburg. *Urban Agriculture Magazine* 1 (1): 24-26.