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Linking Urban Farming and Urban Planning in Times of Crisis

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Photo by René van Veenhuizen

RUAF has been working on the role of urban agriculture in post-disaster and emergency settings for a number of years (see for example UA Magazine 21).

In 2015 RUAF began a collaboration with The Spontaneous City International (SPCiti) on this subject, in the context of the Syrian Refugee crisis, with a geographical focus on the region of Mafraq in Northern Jordan, where an inventory on the role of food and agriculture has been commissioned by the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNGI). Since then, RUAF and SPCiti have been building partnerships through linkages between urban agriculture and urban planning, with a focus on cities in the global south.

The Spontaneous City

SPCiti explores, guides and designs innovative urban planning processes and projects that bring together people, knowledge and disciplines in a multi-stakeholder approach. The core question for SPCiti is, “How do you create a city where ‘mutual benefit’ for many is created?” Stakeholders are guided to tackle complex urban situations together, resulting in a collective planning strategy that becomes part of a city’s (or neighbourhood’s) sustainable development. These – intensive – processes lead to concrete proposals of master plans/development strategies, promoting a better urban environment. SPCiti follows five basic principles in the design and planning of its projects: 1) Understand the existing situation within its context, 2) Give access to all stakeholders, 3) Define the benefits for each of them, 4) Create collective values and 5) Facilitate an open and transparent process of implementation.

Change in Refugee Aid

More than 60 million people (UNHCR, 2016) in the world live in camps or temporary settlements, and often refugee camps gradually convert into “shanty towns” or become permanent settlements. However, many displaced people instead seek

Avenida Tronco, Brazil

SSPciti collaborated with the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul on the Avenida Tronco project in Porto Alegre, Brazil: a newly planned thoroughfare over 5km. The impact at the level of the whole city was relevant and needed to unclog traffic jams, yet the impact at the level of all the favelas that the avenida was going to cross was a sensitive issue. A workshop, held at a location at the heart of the favelas, connected the stakeholders and catalysed the outline of a development strategy that, later on, was also presented to the mayor of Porto Alegre. The outcome of this process included several forms of cooperation and co-production among stakeholders, induced by the new accessibility and visibility provided by the road, and included a learning, information and communication centre and an “Avenida Tronco Expo” to change the citizens’ unpopular perceptions of the area.

new livelihood opportunities in and around nearby existing cities: more than 50 per cent of refugees live in urban areas. Many of these people are unregistered and the majority stay unemployed, live in poor and overcrowded areas, and depend on international and/or non-governmental organisations or may disappear into the urban fabric and depend on networks of relatives and acquaintances (Adam-Bradford and van Veenhuizen, 2015). Most countries and cities are ill-equipped to host this great amount of refugees. When the arrival of large numbers of refugees to urban areas exceeds the capacity of local urban authorities to effectively manage their integration, pressure on services and local resources soon mounts, creating tensions between the refugees and host communities. In the complexity of urban processes in primary and secondary cities and the local regions, the dynamics of

local communities—of both the host population and refugees – call for innovative strategies and systems that deal with processes of change at various scales, involving different sectors and all stakeholders. This situation is increasingly being recognised (London Conference, Supporting Syria and the Region, held 4 February 2016), despite the fact that many refugee organisations are still not prepared to work in the highly complex urban context.

Although practice is only changing slowly, various organisations are discussing and working on changing how in humanitarian aid is delivered, and are stimulating innovation, towards an integrated approach in dealing with refugee situations. Urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) in its various forms can play an important role in the disaster management cycle and assist in multifunctional policy development and practical applications; it is also applicable for the integrated design and management of refugee camps as well as in creating resilience in urban areas, and promoting integration (Adam-Bradford and van Veenhuizen, 2015). Linking UPA to water and waste management, and to urban and regional planning, are all components of this innovative change.

Involving communities in urban planning in Northern Jordan

Forced displacement driven by the protracted conflicts in Syria and Iraq is having a profound impact on urban infrastructure and the management of natural resources in and around towns. Forced displacement camps in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey affect both refugees and host communities. The Mafraq Governorate in Northern Jordan, which borders Syria, has been particularly affected by the Syrian crisis due to the high influx of refugees: currently 76,176 registered Syrian refugees are dispersed throughout the urban areas of the Mafraq Governorate, and in the Al Za'atari refugee camp reside an additional 80,112 Syrian refugees. The Mafraq Governorate is thus hosting over 156,000 registered refugees, though the total number of refugees is likely to be much higher; these official UNHCR figures do not include unregistered refugee families and refugees staying in informal tented settlements. The Syrian crisis also heavily impacts the already fragile social and agro-ecological systems in Northern Jordan, affecting vulnerable Jordanian as well as the displaced Syrian people. Continued food aid and other assistance and service provision to the refugees residing outside the camps, predominantly in urban areas, is not attainable in the current crisis response. Social stress and inter-communal conflict are increasing. The situation calls for to the urgent fostering of resilience at the local level.

VNGI coordinates LOGOREP (Resilience-based Local Government Resilience Programme for the Middle East and North Africa). This programme, implemented with Dutch cities, assists Jordan's institutions to provide a favourable (local) governance context to the refugees and host communities on the one hand and through putting international municipal expertise at the service of UNHCR and the national and local Jordanian authorities to address the challenges of managing service delivery to refugees in Al Za'atari camp and the host communities in the Al Mafraq region on the other. The project provides assistance in areas such as spatial planning, municipal service delivery,



Photo by: René van Veenhuizen

Al Za'atari camp is an accidental city (Jansen, 2009). Its horizon still reveals the official temporariness of the state of exception: across the area of about 2 by 3 km only tents and containers can be seen, arranged in a virtual grid, accommodating clans and family groupings. But given the number of people (fluctuating between 80,000 and 120,000) and their daily activities (more than 3,000 informal shops), the camp definitely reaches the critical mass of a city, nearly even merging with the adjacent village. UNHCR and several NGOs (as well as the city of Amsterdam) acknowledge the potential within the camp for growing food, or 'camp greening' through gardening linked to capacity building, and also education, although this is not yet ongoing. Other ideas include a public park, with a garden, sitting areas and space and materials for outdoor activities. Such a park would not only provide food and shade for the refugees, but could also build local capacities, livelihoods, and social cohesion at the community level.

Eight interventions have been identified:

In the Camp:

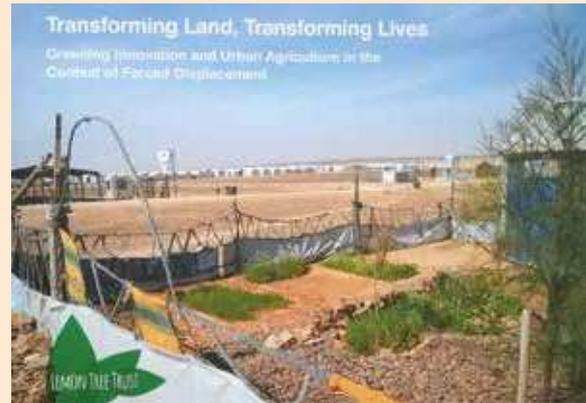
- 1) Household level: kitchen gardens
- 2) Converted wash blocks: walled community gardens
- 3) Community centres: demonstration gardens
- 4) Treated waste water used by farmers outside the camp: production and farmer field schools in selected municipalities

And in selected municipalities:

- 5) Household kitchen gardens
- 6) Community (compound) kitchen gardens and Community Centres
- 7) Small scale farmers and small holders: cooperative Development
- 8) Refugees outside municipalities in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) linked to large scale farmers

Urban agriculture in Domiz Camp in the Kurdish Region of Iraq

'Transforming Land, Transforming Lives' is the goal of the Lemon Tree Trust greening innovation and urban agriculture project in Domiz Camp. The bustling and hectic refugee camp is situated in the north of the Kurdish Region of Iraq, between the sprawling cities of Mosul and Dohuk. The camp was established in 2012 to accommodate approximately 29,800 Syrian refugees, but today is now home to over 40,000 refugees, the camp is becoming yet another accidental city (Jansen, 2009). On the 18th April 2016, the Lemon Tree Trust organised what is possibly the first garden competition in a refugee camp (please email ab3805@coventry.ac.uk if you know of any others). The competition was well attended with over 50 participants all competing for what became the prestigious 'First Place Certificate' and the 300 dollar prize money. With the event featured on the local Kurdish television it not only created awareness about the benefits of gardening in refugee camps but has stimulated a 'level of pride' and 'ownership of space' not seen before in a refugee camp. The greening of refugee camps through urban agriculture builds local resilience through environmental protection, environmental sanitation and food security: the three pillars of refugee camp resilience. The implementation of such programmes is best achieved in active partnership with the refugees themselves driving the process, not forgetting they always bring invaluable knowledge and experience covering agriculture, aquaculture, horticulture and livestock husbandry. The running of a gardening competition can quickly identify the level of expertise, potential demonstration sites, and trainers and future project leaders. As already mentioned it also helps create public awareness about the benefits of gardening and the role that refugees can have in improving their immediate environments through urban agriculture (Adam-Bradford et al., 2016). A platform to scale



up camp greening and urban agriculture activities through the communal planting of community gardens, demonstration sites, school gardens, fruit orchards and even agroforestry. Gender-sensitive programmes can be designed using 'cash-for-work' programming to fund organic waste collection, composting plants, plant nurseries, demonstration gardens, and even community extension services. Improving environmental sanitation in camps, for example, through the utilisation of organic solid wastes for compost production and greywater recycling for irrigation, also provides entry points. Introducing a 'value-chain' approach brings additional benefits to urban agriculture through food processing, storage and improved market access. While maximising the synergies between refugees and host committees also builds social cohesion and reduces the infrastructural pressures of hosting thousands of refugees.

In essence, greening refugee camps through urban agriculture is all about bringing a new 'vision', a paradigm shift from 'dependency' to 'resilience', and maximising synergies through 'design' that introduces resource recovery and reuse, while building local capacities and drawing on the expertise, experiences and the human resourcefulness of refugees themselves.

local economic development and governance. Two missions by RUAFA and SPcitI have so far been commissioned by VNGI. A first mission in 2015 suggested promoting local development by stimulating local food production, processing and marketing, and to provide assistance to the national and local authorities in improving participatory planning and service provision related to food. During the subsequent mission in July 2016, a number of interventions were identified to support the development of small-scale, integrated food and gardening activities for host and refugee communities residing in urban and rural areas, as well as in and around the refugee camp areas. These interventions in the local food system should be linked to the infrastructural framework and planning scenarios developed by VNGI and the municipality of Amsterdam, with different possible futures for the Al Za'atari camp and the region, trying to bridge the gap between short-term humani-

tarian aid and medium- to long-term sustainable development. The aim is to create connections between people, nutrients, water, products and services. This work will be further developed with VNGI. Similar work could benefit Lebanon (where VNGI is also implementing its LOGORep programme), as well as other countries and organisations.

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