

SUPURBfood - Towards sustainable modes of urban and peri-urban food provisioning

SUPURBfood, a collaborative, international research project ran from 2012-2015, and had two key areas of scientific focus. Firstly, it sought to examine how short food supply chains (SFSCs) can be associated with urban development, and secondly the project highlighted the concept of the city-region as the spatial and political arena of study. In addition, SUPURBfood was further distinguished by integrating local government and business representatives as research partners, including from several cities in the global south where urban agriculture is well-established.

The starting point for SUPURBfood was an acknowledgement that extensive research has associated efforts to develop and maintain SFSCs with positive outcomes in rural settings. For example, farmers' markets have provided opportunities for producers within a prescribed range to benefit from direct contact with consumers and to retain retail margins which can be re-invested in the rural economy. Similarly, the specific qualities of foods certified by geographic origin labels (PDO/PGI/TSO) offer producers a product premium and signify authenticity to consumers. However, urban food chains can also provide a range of social, commercial and environmental benefits in cities including water storage, mitigating air pollution, providing ecological habitats and spaces

for leisure, proximity to consumer markets and opportunities to close waste cycles.

The importance of the idea of a city-region within SUPURBfood relates to the modernist tendency to separate the functions of urban and rural space: the countryside is where food production and environmental services should happen, while urban planning continues to be directed towards the development of economic and social functions such as commerce, housing and municipal services. SUPURBfood, however, identified the need to see cities as nested within their peri-urban and rural hinterlands, rather than separated from them. In this way, the development of SFSCs can be reconfigured as a two-way flow to and from the city, as well as drivers for sustainable urban planning.

Research process

The seven participating city-regions in SUPURBfood were: Bristol, Ghent, Riga, Rome, Rotterdam, Vigo and Zurich. SUPURBfood followed a systematic and iterative research process, the main stages of which are set out below.

1. The first task was for members of each research team to develop an understanding of the contexts which frame the way in which SFSCs, food and water waste cycles and the multiple functions associated with urban agriculture are practiced, supported (or hindered) in different levels of policy-making. This stage of research also identified examples of good practice in each city. The main process of data collection was a combination of interviews, workshops with key actors and the scrutiny of interim analyses by practitioners.
2. European practitioners were brought together across the partnership and with practitioners from cities in the global south (including Sri Lanka, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and Ghana) where, in many cities, urban agriculture is established as a way to improve household food security, public nutrition, waste management and as a strategic municipal land use.
3. Detailed analyses of how to shorten food chains, close waste cycles and optimise multiple benefits from urban agricultural land use were carried out in the European cities, in collaboration with practitioners who hosted



field trips, focus groups and carried out detailed scrutiny of emerging findings.

4. Policy and practice recommendations were devised and presented at the annual international conference of ICLEI, the local government sustainability network.

Project outputs

A substantial range of reports, including analyses of city-regional dynamics and policy frameworks, case study descriptions, methodological reflections and policy and practice recommendations are freely available via the project website: www.supurbfood.eu. In particular:

- Researchers will be interested in the methodological justification of the city-regional concept and the framework used for integrating findings from different case study contexts;
- Policy makers can explore the effect of different hierarchies of policies on different aspects of food-chain related land use, environmental services and social innovations;
- Food businesses can glean new ideas for how to finance, organise and communicate with dynamic and well-informed consumers, while operating within a rapidly changing regulatory/policy arena.

Key findings

The systematic, iterative and multi-disciplinary research within SUPURBfood led to a range of conclusions and recommendations. These should be explored in detail within project documentation. The key findings include:

City authorities have a key responsibility in building more sustainable urban food systems.

Development of resilient urban food systems requires the use of existing and new policy and planning instruments such as land use planning, design and development of infrastructure and logistics (i.e. for waste management, food storage and marketing) and public food procurement.

The closing of urban nutrient, energy and (food) waste streams, the creation of short food supply chains and the synergies between multifunctional properties of food production and other sectoral policies should be simultaneously taken into account. Only

then can an urban food system be built that is more than just a collection of individual projects.

The city-region level is the most relevant scale at which to develop and implement an integrated and comprehensive solution for a future-proof urban food system, and to best foster sustainable urban-rural linkages, improved ecosystem services.

Uptake and implementation of innovations in urban food systems requires active involvement of SMEs. Development of various types of commercial to social enterprises offers new opportunities for job and revenue creation for different actors in the food chain. Most SMEs also have a clear social aim to change the food.

SMEs should further explore business opportunities in short food supply chains, multifunctional land use and agriculture and resource recycling in urban and peri-urban areas. They can learn from other experiences through peer-to-peer exchange.

SMEs also need to adopt diversified and new business strategies for innovation. Successfully applied in combination, these strategies make urban food enterprises and projects economically competitive under conditions where “agribusiness as usual” would not be profitable or sustainable.

Governmental entities need to adopt policies that help facilitate growth, development, and support for this sector. With active support from city administrators, SMEs can more effectively improve their innovations and secure the benefits of their initiatives.

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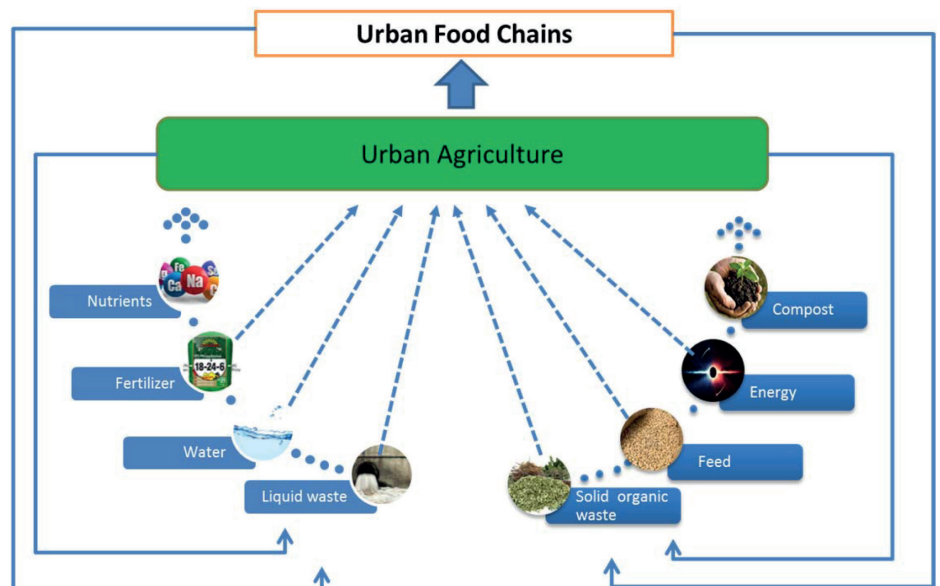


Diagram from Supurbfood Deliverable 4.4 Closing of Nutrient, Water and Urban Waste Cycles in Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture WP4 Final Report, September 2015, page 27

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