

Food and the City: The Relevance of the Food System for Urban Development

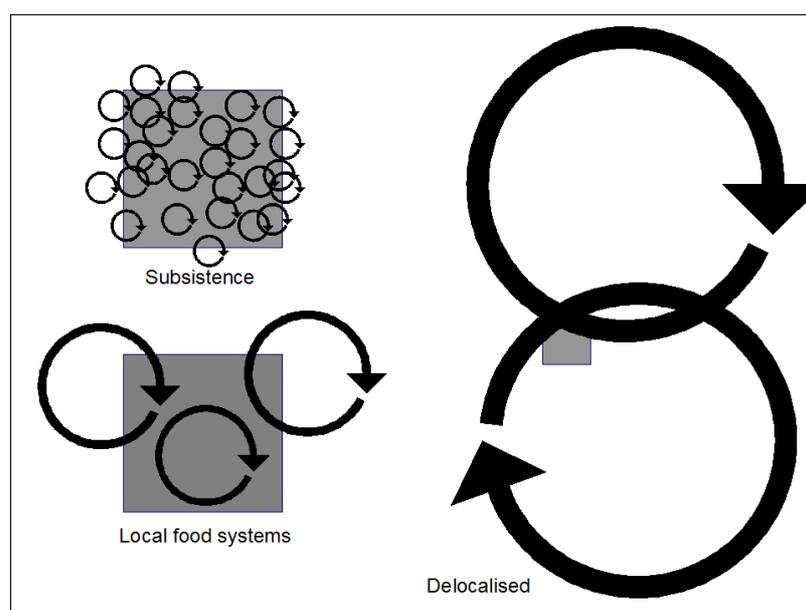
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Food is a basic means of life. Food supply is one of the fundamental infrastructures of every city. But food is far more than the provision of nutrients. Besides the nutritional value food has for example a value for trade, for pleasure and for social life. The manner of human diet is the result of a social process. A lot of fundamental and daily decisions ranging from production to consumption are shaping this process. Many are involved – most of them unaware that they are part of this process. Food has multiple meanings for cities. This assumption is the starting point for the exploration of the links between the supply of food and urban development.

Every city has its food system. Food systems are providing areas with food. They are existing on different scales, ranging from household, neighbourhood, city, region to the global food system. All these scales are interconnected. Part of these food systems are all processes associated to producing, manufacturing, distributing, retailing and consuming food in any spatial dimension. Aim of this doctoral thesis is to explore the capability and need of urban planning to be engaged in the field of urban food systems.

How are food systems and cities connected?

In the era of industrialisation and urbanisation strong connections were visible between the food system and the city. The industrial revolution and the quick growth of the cities changed totally the urban food system. A lot of people massed-together in the new industrial towns - where self supply was not possible any more – had to be supplied. The scientific and technical progress as well as new types of trade combined with social advancements solved these challenges. “Delocalisation” is one of the processes that started in that era. The food system is nowadays operating on a national and global level. On the local level the system is disconnected, there isn't any exchange besides retail and consumption. The urban food system is no closed circle any more, it is a composite of extensions of the national and global food systems.



Scales of food systems in the course of time

The decentralised, rural structure of agriculture is not determining any more. On the contrary the centralised, urban structure of the food and retail industry is predominant now. The emphasis of the food system is urban. The accumulation of consumers is the main function of urban agglomerations for the food system on a national and European level. But for the city the food system has far more functions. This doctoral thesis shows economic, cultural and social functions that are behind supplying food.

How are food systems and urban development connected?

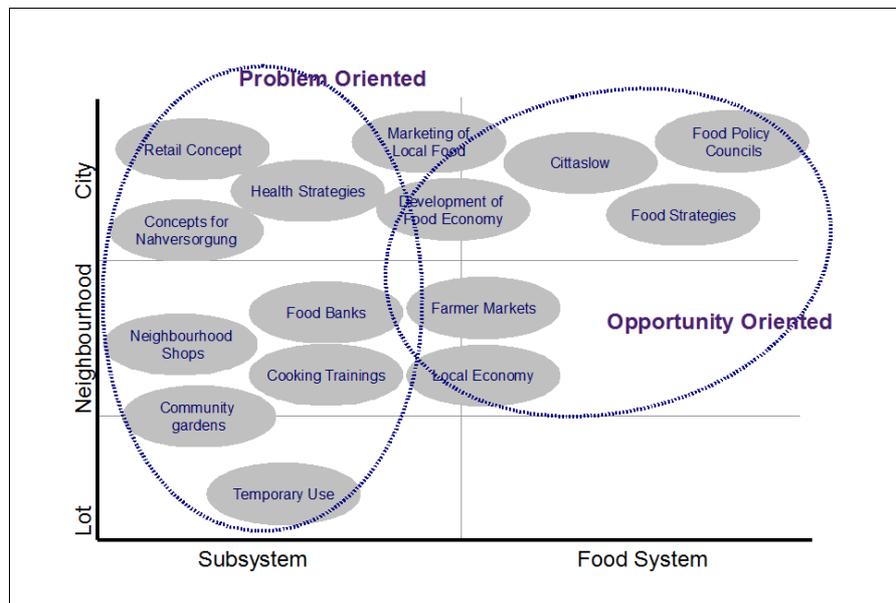
The development of cities and the development of food systems is interconnected. They mutually encouraged and constrained each other in the past and they are still doing so. Starting from this general correlation it is possible to show fields with very strong interdependencies. It is going to become apparent that the food system is an important opportunity for urban development.

The food system has a significant task especially in the development of

- high quality open space
- traffic suitable for cities
- the protection of the local and the global environment
- a vital tourism, culture and leisure sector
- a vibrant social life
- the economy
- communities and neighbourhoods
- the city in the regional context

How could urban development benefit from the food system?

To answer this questions a wide variety of projects in the food system were examined. These projects could be distinguished by their spatial and thematic characteristic.



Projects in the food system

Four projects were chosen, which all had a different characteristic and made different use of the links between the food system and urban development. These projects had the following aims:

- The comprehensive support of a regional food system as a contribution to environmental protection, to health care and to business development (Food Policy Council)
- The use of the food system as an integrative, connecting issue in the support of a social deprived area and as a reasonable use of an unused industrial site (Community Garden)
- The use of the food system as the overall concept for the economic development and redevelopment of a neighbourhood (Neighbourhood Development)
- The use of a food philosophy as a paradigm for urban development (Cittaslow)

The broad support and strengthening of the food system has the best potential for a large effect on urban development. The projects which focused on the opportunities of the food systems had more effect than the projects which focused on problem solving. The inclusion of wide variety of stakeholders is important for the success of the projects, too. The involvement of the public and the groups involved is as important as the involvement of politicians, administration and other stakeholders necessary for implementation.

Which significance has the food system for urban development?

The approach recommended in the finding of the doctoral thesis is: Discover, analyse, develop the food system and use the benefits. The Discussion allows outlining some guidelines:

- See food in its complexity.
The multi-layered relevance of food has challenging requirements on food supply. These have to be recognized. The internal connections and external interdependencies have to be acknowledged.
- Food is an urban issue.
The food system is not just an important urban supply system, it is affecting the city in its economic, environmental, cultural and social dimensions. The food system has to be recognized as an issue of urban development.
- Discover the food system.
The support and development of the food system requires not only the analysis of strengths and weaknesses but has to respect as well the connections and impacts within the system.
- Build a platform for local action.
Local food projects need a local platform of discussion and exchange. This platform has to build the basis for the involvement of wide ranges of stakeholders. Progressive thinkers, trendsetter, financiers, practitioners, supporters and consumers are needed.
- Create a mission statement for the food system.
To realize an optimised development of the food system the city has to know its own concerns and requirements. The city has an interest in a specific characteristic of its food system.
- Develop and benefit from the food system.
After creating a mission statement the city has to develop its food systems and assure its benefits for the city.
- Benefit from Localism.
The relationship between food and space is quite contradictory but much stronger than in other products or areas of life. It is valuable to use the positive image of local food systems

and to expand its advantages.

- Develop uniqueness.
The city has an interest to support the uniqueness and distinctiveness of its food system.
- Use the power of the consumer.
Influencing consumption is one of the keys for a city to benefit from its food system.

Food is an urban issue. The characteristic and the development of the food system has a fundamental impact on urban development. The food system probably isn't the main development option for every city. But it is essential everywhere. Every city that is ignoring the food system is missing opportunities for development. There are courses of action and possibilities to shape the food system at the local level. Planning can have a significant role in the launch, operation and control of these actions.

