

The peri-urban food system of Cape Town

Alexandra Ulrich, M.Sc. Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Stuttgart,

Prof. Dr. Astrid Ley, Department for International Urban Planning

Prof. Jan Dieterle, Department for Landscape Planning and Ecology

There is a growing debate about sustainable supply chains in the Global North, with the most popular phenomenon of urban agriculture as a developmental tool, as well as a creator of social cohesion within the urban context. However, this approach of bringing food production back in the city remains a small movement complementing the conventional food supply system.

Looking to the Global South, a majority of the urban population is unable to access food on a daily basis to meet their dietary needs. In the case of Cape Town, 80% of the inhabitants are moderately or even severely food insecure.

Like in European cities, Cape Town's food system is determined by market forces, giving private companies the power to shape urban infrastructure and the accessibility to food supply. The government seems unable to react in a proper way, making food security a matter of availability and agricultural production. This is evident in placing the Food Security Strategy in the Department of Agriculture and introducing an Urban Agricultural Policy in order to enable people to become self-sufficient. This approach is levered, looking at the food supply situation in the peri-urban area of Cape Town. The Philippi Horticultural Area, the biggest agricultural production area of the Cape region, is situated right next to the most food insecure neighbourhoods. Within an unwalkable radius, there is only one conventional supermarket. 5% of the population are using urban agriculture as an alternative livelihood strategy. Food security, therefore, is most pressingly a matter of accessibility, not availability.

What can we as planners do?

Visiting the most marginalised neighbourhoods of the peri-urban area of Cape Town, I was confronted with incredible poverty, but also with people finding innovative solutions to build up a local food supply. In my opinion, we can learn a lot from their livelihood strategies.

This research aims at uncovering the reality of food insecurity and investigating alternative strategies of food supply in the peri-urban area. Therefore, a total of six case studies will demonstrate current supply chains, with a special focus on the socio-economic networks, spatial appearance and workflows. Stressing, that food supply creates urban spaces of social interaction, fulfilling different interests. To emphasise the different dimensions of accessibility, the situations are observed in the course of the day.

One thing to mention here, is the intricacy of the formal food system with the marginalised small-scale traders, as they source their products from the same platforms. However, the different supply chains distinguish the two systems clearly. Astonishing is the professionalism of some street traders, which reveal organisational structures, social networks and work processes behind street trading. The multiplying effect of food trading as a job creator underlines its socio-economic potential.

Therefore, integrating food systems in urban planning is of high relevance.

As a basis for further discussions, a planning strategy for the peri-urban food system of Cape Town is developed.