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Project led by the **city of Pozzuoli**

Zoom-in N2



Table of Content

Preamble	3
Urban agriculture and urban poverty: A strange couple, but they get along.	4
The ability of proposing and designing an innovative idea for urban regeneration, the difficulties of completing it.	7
Urban project or urban regeneration? Or a bit of both?	10

Preamble

The MAC project seeks to reduce urban poverty in the neighbourhood of Monterusciello, where poverty is understood in the social and economic sense and within the physical environment. Monterusciello is a new public housing district with 20,000 residents with low-income, a high level of unemployment, and characterised by large unused spaces.

The proposal is designed to trigger a process of economic, entrepreneurial, and social development, together with the improving of the urban environment. The project will create a new agro-urban landscape which will radically transform the character of the neighbourhood: a landscape made of urban areas and agriculture land connected by a productive thread; the agriculture giving work opportunities, training and production to the city; the city benefiting of the agriculture areas as gardens, thanks to the innovative techniques which will also increase the vegetation.

Thirty hectares of Municipal open areas will be transformed into farmland, developed the innovative techniques of permaculture in order to spearhead an economic process and urban growth as a means to combat poverty. The project will have three pillars: implementation of agriculture through innovative permaculture; improvement of the urban environment; and encouragement of entrepreneurship and employment.

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Partnership:

- Comune di Pozzuoli
- Università degli Studi di Salerno - University
- Coldiretti Napoli - National Association
- Confagricoltura Napoli - National Association
- Agrocoltura - Private Company
- L'iniziativa - Associazione di promozione sociale - NGO
- Fondazione FORMIT - Research Center

Urban agriculture and urban poverty: A strange couple, but they get along.

Urban Agriculture (UA) is getting in recent years a key asset of urban planning processes both in terms of regeneration and development. Usually UA is associated to the addressing urban food insecurity problems, which are bound to become increasingly important with the trend towards the urbanization of poverty and of population in developing countries. **When researching the link between UA and Urban Poverty (UP), the key elements faced by planners and researchers focus on the problem of food insecurity.** UA and Urban Gardening (UG) is understood as a vital means of overcoming problems caused by unemployment, inequality, poverty, malnutrition and nutrition-related deteriorating diseases in countries having economies in transition or developing countries. In Europe there is no problem linked to the lack of food, on the contrary, systems are being developed, especially in the most advanced European economies, to combat waste of the same. **UA and UG accomplish completely different functions in the context of European cities. However, the availability of food does not mean that there exists, even in the European contexts, a capacity and knowledge to use it appropriately, both in terms of preparation and management.** Especially in marginalized contexts, be they rural, peri-urban or strictly urban, there is a need to make citizens aware of how to create sustainable agricultural products, inform them about low environmental impact methodologies and techniques, both in terms of use of natural resources or in the use of chemicals. Moreover, an open problem also in the European context is that inherent in knowing how to use food well, in other words knowing how to use and combine products in order to follow a healthy diet that allows reducing the impact of diseases related to overconsumption or bad consumption of the same. The topic of UA in Europe, day after day, is increasingly rooted in the debates inherent to urban transformations. UA, therefore, as a response to the demands of having ever more ecological and sustainable products, but also as a means to create social inclusion, stable employment and new forms of economy capable of inducing specializations and jobs that are branding marketing products, but also to their distribution at local scales (e.g. km 0 solutions), but also to their alternative use, not only food, but materials for construction or cosmetics or for the pharmaceutical industry. **The issues of social inclusion and the creation of new jobs are those that open up the prospect for the UA to also be a means to compact UP. The Pozzuoli MAC project falls within these contexts.** The MAC interprets the context of a strong urban marginality, also caused by the non-effective use and design of a new town in the 1980s, as an opportunity to reuse the public goods, that is the available land within this city-district as a

- medium to revive the local economy,
- reopen the dialogue with the local community,
- create new and innovative employment especially for young people living in the area.

This trade-off between the UA and the policies that combat UP creates an unusual couple, especially in the context of the European cities: This is above all the innovative design thinking of the MAC in Pozzuoli. The question is: **How do they get along?**

To answer this question, it must be understood that urban agriculture in the MAC takes on different operational characteristics. It is

- **land reclamation,**
- **landscape planning,**
- **redevelopment of public space,**
- **ecological production, through the permaculture method,**
- **community building through the soft training actions of the unemployed (especially the youth population).**

UA is in the MAC Project a catalyst for the social and economic reconstruction of a neighborhood, and the opportunity to recreate relational networks and throw the most valuable seeds, that is those that will lead to developing a sustainable urban regeneration pathway. Not easy, not short, considering the numbers and the material quantity of the problems to be solved, but with excellent elements of perspective and continuity.



The students follow lessons on organic farming

The first agricultural productions of the MAC project



Definitively, UA and UP get along in the MAC Project in Pozzuoli, but the sustainability of this relationship is depending on many factors, where central is the capability of keeping the pace with the set up working plan, that is to be coherent in keeping the pace in realizing that actions triggering a **tangible change**. This plan links the financing, coming from the EU, to the respect of a specific pathway made up of activities to be accomplished within a given time. It means that the conceptual design, which demonstrate how **UA can be a concrete driver to provide solutions to bring communities out of poverty should be tested again capabilities (administrative, relational, professional) of local managerial and socio-cultural settings**. It is worth remembering the open key challenges:

- **Finding the right balance within the MAC partnership, knowing how to mediate the needs, the knowledge and the requests of the different partners and local actors.**
- **To solve the complex, and sometimes long, bureaucratic processes, mandatory steps in the Italian planning context, linked to the formal approval of the projects and the relative public procedures.**

- **Succeeding in opening a dialogue with the local community to make the project understand, to make citizens collaborate with the MAC initiatives to make sure that there is a sense of ownership of this regenerative transformation.**

The ability of proposing and designing an innovative idea for urban regeneration, the difficulties of completing it.

Lessons learned from FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) field projects addressing UA for sustainable development have led to the proposal of a standard framework which could serve as a guideline for national UPA strategies (The Place Of Urban And Peri-Urban Agriculture (UPA) In National Food Security Programmes, 2011, FAO). This framework is based on five pillars:

- **Securing land and water resources**
- **Securing product quality and safety and environment protection**
- **Securing sustainable appropriation by actors and partners**
- **Securing market outlet**
- **Securing political and institutional anchorage and monitoring**

These five elements reported above, which are the basis of FAO's approach to guaranteeing food security in the face of the globalization phenomenon, are also reflected in the vision, in the conceptual design of the MAC Project. **These pillars are valid even in the case where the main objective, like in the MAC Project, is not food security, but the ability to create innovative economies by linking an urban community to the potential of a proximity urban agriculture that has multiple outputs, both tangible and intangibles.** Whether dealing with urban agriculture as a means of sustenance or as a means of creating new urban economies, it is to consider that:

- the enhancement and respect of essential resources such as land, water and biodiversity are essential;
- the need to produce quality products with low environmental impact;
- the sharing of productive resources and means of production, through the facilitating action of the public administration (not only in the role of organizer, but also of mediator and facilitator within a platform that sees private entrepreneurs, schools and civil society together);
- finally, a local government capable of linking the regenerative action to the demand coming from the territory (e.g. linking agricultural production to the demand for quality that comes from the tourism of the *Campi Flegrei*), for instance, identifying a proximity market that can generate a short supply chain with high added value.

In these points here above, the great trial of the MAC project can be summarized. A project that in its conceptual structuring has all the key elements to become an urban regeneration project that can become a reference point for other similar practices in Europe, but also outside the continental context.





The students of the PF2 class "Ethical production and rural marketing" carried out a theoretical-practical lesson in the laboratory on green building, in order to create biocomposites in lime and hemp.

How capable is this experience of being able to blossom and really become a best practice that can be an example for other European territorial realities?

At this moment the experimentation of the MAC project is at the halfway point of its journey, the project has given positive and negative signs, and clearly has not yet found that firm managerial, that inter-institutional dialogue, that coherent and constructive relationship with the community of reference that allow it to make the leap to become an example, a best practice. The point that promises well is that all these aspects have been opened and good foundations and instruments have been laid for bringing them to realization, such as the Agro Urban Center, the Urban Forum, but the following critical points remain too, still halfway, not completely resolved:

- to keep on being consistent and find the right ways to synergistically collaborate,
- to increase the ability to cooperate effectively in carrying out the critical activities for the opening of construction and transformation sites,
- to continue with even greater effort to make the local community of Monterusciello involved and informed.

Urban project or urban regeneration? Or a bit of both?

[The first Zoom-in of the MAC project was realized through a video](#), to make the urban and territorial context of the planned resolutions for this project fully understood. In this second Zoom-in we are centring the lens on the project process and on design pillars. A project that aims to fight UP through an urban regeneration intervention. The processes of urban regeneration have *per se* a very high complexity, but in this case, it is important to point out that this complexity is weighed down by the fact that

- **it acts on an urban scale that goes beyond that of the neighborhood,**
- **that the urban pattern of Monterusciello entails remarkable urban planning and architectural peculiarities**
- **and that the project presents components of landscape planning and use and redesign of public space not easy to face in the context of the foreseen agricultural production.**

Therefore, beyond the intangible and organizational components, for which reference has been made in the previous paragraphs, it is necessary to act on Monterusciello on a scale and with actions that are those typical of an urban project.



Public spaces available to be transformed through urban agriculture initiatives

Another element that triggers a possibly generating contradiction is that connected to **the ambitious design promoted by the project and the reality of the facts that presents us with a weak territory characterized by both material assets and intangible assets with significant problems**, such as:

- Eradication from the place of origin,
- The distance of the inhabitants from their physical and emotional territories (the place of origin, the historic centre),
- Continuous tension towards the historic centre,
- Lack of sense of belonging,
- Lack of neighbourhood effect,
- A fragmented community,
- A real estate property of little value and in decline,
- Damaged and abandoned public spaces,
- Absence of proper facilities and amenities, or rather a city without city effect,
- A decadent and surreal urban landscape in some of its features.

The task of the MAC project is arduous, complex and difficult.

Behind the UA / UP rapport lies an ambitious process of reconstructing both the civic fabric and the city fabric. Urban Agriculture in this project means a latch to move many other types of synergistic and necessary actions that will support fertile sowing brought as a unique development opportunity by this Urban Innovative Action. The permaculture methodology in this context takes on its broader meaning, that of ecological strategy, that is, the reconstruction and rediscovery of οἶκος (the house, the roots, the sense of belonging, but also a different physical space for / where to live). Putting the contemporary nature of Monterusciello into focus, at this moment we see the beginning of an

ambitious urban project, triggered by an innovative urban regeneration action (complex, multi-thematic, multi-scaled in its governance elements). **Continuing to zoom-in we would see the first effects of a work on the local community, started thanks to the UIA, especially operated towards the new generations, through excellent actions of involvement and training on key issues of sustainable development and the UA.** We do not yet see the expected results from the point of view of physical infrastructures, due to several concurrent and typical problems of weak territories (read the [MAC Journal no 4](#) to investigate these aspects), but these will surely be the subject of the next Zoom-in.



The crops planned in the public lands of Monteruscioello



The system of cycle paths that will guarantee better mobility and accessibility in the Monteruscioello area