

# SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN AN ACTIVE PROTECTION OF PERIURBAN AGRARIAN SPACES: STATE OF THE QUESTION

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## I. INTRODUCTION: UNCERTAINTIES TO SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGE FOR AN ACTIVE PROTECTION OF PERIURBAN AGRARIAN SPACES

As its name suggests, periurban agrarian spaces are places close to urbanized areas (Roda Noya, 2009) where the traditional conflicts affecting to rural agricultural environment are exacerbated. The voracity of contemporary metropolitan model (Magnaghi, 2011) generates large stresses on places that until recently posed an essential part of the cities. Urban growth (residential, commercial and industrial), non-stop construction of infrastructures, and degradation of contact points between urban and infrastructural spaces and its environment (Davis, 2006; Fernández Durán, 2006), involve a parallel growth of periurban status of agrarian spaces while at odds with the right of existence of suburban agricultural areas and persons who had created it, cared of it, and want to care of it in the future. In this context, new ways to promote sustainability are needed.

Three main questions are raised here in order to understand the excuses posed by the administration and some other powerful people to justify the degradation of periurban agrarian spaces. The selection of experiences to be described in this article is based in the following answers to those questions and uncertainties.

### **First: On the alleged marginalization of periurban agricultures**

The alleged (and induced) marginalization of agricultures, certain groups among agricultural entrepreneurs and peasantry (Van der Ploeg, 2010), has been used to place this essential part of our biocultural memory (Toledo and Barreda-Basols, 2008) at a distinct disadvantage over other typical uses of the contemporary metropolis. The non-business nature of most of the periurban agricultures (resulting of lot size or been used to satisfy diet necessities) implies a higher disregard of this land use, due to it is not linked to the financial speculations

dominating the world economy (Naredo, 2009). However, on account of the displacement of industrial agricultures to distant areas, the property fragmentation and the cities' necessities/demands, many experiences had been generated for years contradicting the marginalization of those agricultures and peoples, especially in periurban spaces (Jarosz, 2008).

In peripheral nations the so-called structural adjustments imposed by neoliberal policies generates a non-preceded degradation of cities (Davis, 2006) and also an enormous development of the survival capacity based on urban and periurban agricultures (Latouche, 2007). In fact, the 70% of urban population in Africa and the 60% in Asia are related to this second condition (Bryld, 2003) producing among the 15 and the 20 % of the world food in 2000 (FAO, 2007). On the other hand, in the mainstream countries is taking place an increasing number of processes called *civic agriculture* (DeLind, 2002) and *Alternative Agrifood Initiatives* (Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, and Waner, 2003; Jarosz, 2008) in Anglo-Saxon literature. The relocalization of products using short supply chains and considering the multiple functions of agriculture as common good (Renting, Marsden y Banks, 2003; Donadieu, 2008) can be underlined, as well as its consideration as an environmental and cultural heritage.

### **Second: on the alleged lack of planning and management instruments**

To reply both to the alleged lack of planning and management instruments and the existing difficulty for its application we propose the second key issue that would lead to a correct approach in planning and project periurban agrarian spaces. In that sense, it has to be said that an increasing number of research activities in planning, environmental science, agronomy, ecology, sociology or anthropology have developed innovative instruments that are available to be used by any public or private institution, as already happens in some cases (Delinda, 2002; Donadieu, 2008; Dewaelheyns and Gulinck, 2008; Fanfani, 2009).

### **Third: on the alleged lack of successful and lasting experiences**

The urban, territorial and sectoral planning, as spatial reference of public policies (and powerful private interests), had been echo of tendencies to marginalize agricultures and had become a necessary collaborator in damages produced both in our cities (Fernández Durán, 2006; Fariña Tojo, 2011) and in the particular case of periurban agrarian spaces; so much that had been reached a point in where the vast majority of urban and periurban agricultures are still considered illegal in peripheral countries (Bryld, 2003).

Nevertheless, is false to say there is not enough experience to adequately address the complexity of the periurban agrarian spaces through the planning and management in complex contexts highly stressed by the speculation. This could be just contradicted by displaying the lasting success of certain public policies in the different places and conditions to be described below.

## **II. EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN PERIURBAN AGRARIAN SPACES**

Based on the need to reassess the periurban agricultures, a change of direction in the imposed contemporary metropolitan model is presented in this report, considering the oppor-

tunities provided through social participation understood as the involvement of citizens in matters affecting the government of its territory in a broad sense (Carmona Gallego, 2004).

This historical demand of social movements in general and environmentalist movements in particular (Riechmann and Fernández Buey, 1994, Martínez Alier, 1995) are heavily based on the increasing *awareness of place* (Delinda, 2002, Desmarais, 2008; Magnaghi, 2011) that has a great influence in social participation increase. This process is being endorsed both in numerous studies and projects (social and institutional) to be referred throughout this text, and in institutional documents including European Landscape Convention, a paradigm of participation that considers the critical importance of landscapes in periurban areas because of its daily nature. In the case of periurban agriculture, there is an opinion of the Economic and Social Committee (2004) giving a particular interest in issues related to the participation of both persons engaged in agriculture and other stakeholders.

This research aims to demonstrate the existence of roads to sustainability through a detailed description of numerous current alternatives with particular reference to a common condition: the social participation. In order to demonstrate the existing interest and possibilities, a systematic description of citizen experiences will be referenced, including also cases of agreements between government and citizens as well as planning processes that are assuming the preservation and revitalization of periurban agricultural spaces resisting to territorial trends linked to neoliberal policies.

Characteristics of these three typologies are mixed in some cases because this is about processes including several actors and different spatial and temporal scales. The selection includes a representative group mixing those characteristics as well as another group able to explain each typology.

### **Citizens experiences**

These are experiences of citizen's claims and usually autonomous and direct actions in agrarian spaces. It does not mean that experiences are indifferent to local government; in fact, collaborations and confrontations between public authorities and citizens are present in most cases.

We have considered in this category the following groups: *Environmentalists and cultural movements; residents associations, neighbourhood associations and rural associations; and groups of production, consumption and self-consumption.*

### **Pacts experiences between government and citizens.**

While not yet common in Spain, there are many experiences in the rest of Europe and North America in which public authorities, economic actors and citizen groups agree to work for a territory, being periurban agrarian spaces some of them. The French Contrat de pais and the network Terres en Villes are probably two of the main examples.

### **Planning experiences**

Although planning has been set as one of the current responsible for periurban agrarian spaces degradation, it has to be noted the existence of exceptions that prove the possibility to plan those spaces with success, including social participation as an important tool.

We have considered in this category the following planning examples: *Agricultural parks, such as Park Agrari del Baix Llobregat and Parco Agricolo Sud Milano; green belts like the Londo Green Belt; protected natural areas like the Dutch Green Heart; and other cases, such as the US and Canadian Agrarian Districts, and the Purchase Development Rights and Transfer of Development Rights*

## CONCLUSIONS

Sustainability should influence urban areas where most of the world's population lives today (Davis, 2006). In this sense, it is essential a return to the centrality of land to allow a reconstruction of the city limits. This reconstruction may be favored by new relationships with their respective bioregions that are already triggering processes of territorialization (Magnaghi, 2011). Some of the described experiences in this paper may help to this purpose, provided authorities concern about the quality of life.

This process will be more traumatic and slower in those cities that have destroyed much of its heritage: i.e., consuming surrounding agrarian space that traditionally fed citizens but has been the preferred place of rampant metropolitan expansion in recent decades. However, it is still important the preexisting centrality identity in many of these spaces, which together with the development of awareness of place linked to neighborhood or local context, could facilitate the development of other ways to recover these nuclei and the surrounding agrarian areas. Moreover, on this point the role of some movements linked to agrarian issues are developing in some cases may be essential for public space restoration and redefining the city limits.

Successfully addressing these issues and ensure sustainability of periurban agrarian spaces should be clear that social participation is not only a democratic requirement, but an urgent one. Also, the weaker agents and active citizenship (Magnaghi, 2011) must play a key role in the construction of sustainable future scenarios, as indeed is already happening in many cities of the world where social participation is demanding, maintaining or activating multiple experiences.

In the case of planning experiences, whether be consolidated or not, it is necessary to develop processes of social participation, which could be linked to agreement experiences between the government and the various land agents, being successful in many different contexts.

The strategy to support the sustainability and, therefore, the resistance to neoliberal processes, passes through the involvement of as many people as possible in their local context. For this aim, the centrality of food has proved being very useful in communal and economical analysis and proposals (Desmarais, 2008), both in urban and suburban areas. But also, these processes look for creating boundaries in rural zones, defending their autonomy versus the dominant development model (Fernández Durán, 2011).

Finally, although growth of awareness of place generates encouraging city experiences that are transforming claims in project planning, social participation, as explained in this article, is not a panacea. Like many other complex issues of our time, social participation encounters many problems, among other reasons due to the weakness, plurality, and fragmentation of the agents involved (Fanfani, 2009).