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## ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE OR ADJUSTMENT FOR PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT THE URBAN GREEN SPACES? THE CASE OF COMMUNAL AND COMMUNITY GARDENS IN TURIN

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*Abstract: Urban gardens take on different forms and meanings, which vary depending on the socio-economic context where they located/used and how it evolves over time. This makes a garden comparable to a micro-social ecosystem, different from other gardens and ever changing. Starting from the analysis of two gardens in Turin, the article investigates the plurality of meanings and representations related to the "urban garden" and offers insights about the relative processes of governance and integration with the many features of the current urban agriculture. Despite being all areas with a limited extension, the complex nature of the relationship between gardener and the assigned plot and within peers and with the citizenship, makes it clear that the attempt to govern/manage the phenomenon by the local government / promoting associations, often represents a real challenge in terms of adaptability and response/adjustment to a phenomenon in constant evolution and fully inserted in the processes of the urban transition, characterized both by internal and conservative resistance and pressures asking for change and innovation from the outside.*

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### 1. Introduction

In its broad definition, different studies converge in framing urban agriculture through some common categories: a) diversity of involved spaces (urban or peri-urban, legal or illegal); b) diversity of the involved actors involved (citizens, administrators, associations, professional farmers, ...); c) diversity of activities and practices.

In the same way there are common categories to frame urban gardens; although with some fixed elements (arable areas, service elements, irrigation systems, fences) they can assume forms, meanings and functions very different among them, often even far.

By assuming the perspective of human ecology, the specificity of each garden can be considered as an ecosystem in its own. This depends on the interaction among these elements, including the environmental and socio-economic component, on the conditions which discipline the use and management of resources at the level of individual and collective spaces, on the exchange flows with the surrounding environment.

This perspective allows us to look beyond the rhetoric that often trivializes the complexities surrounding the functioning of these micro-systems. The creation of an urban garden by itself does not guarantee functions of socialization. At the same time in the garden, the assignees did not always assume rights of "property" on the use of land according as "they were growing their own backyard."

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This point of view, in continuity with the work of Moore (2008) and Pike (1954) allows us to look at the urban garden not as a category of analysis but rather "as a category of practices". As a consequence, urban gardens have to be analysed with different temporal and spatial dimensions

Urban gardens become a dynamic process, in which they have settled practices and behaviours result of certain socio-economic contingencies, often trapped (in the case of the public allotments' management, in too static regulations).

In the garden different functions can coexist synchronously or they may overlap or come in succession, with all the consequences that a change in functionality assumes for the biological community inside and out of the ecosystem (Guitart et al., 2012).

It also seems interesting to observe the garden's cycles. The garden from the ecological point of view can be considered a closed system inside the modern city, a system that instead is incomplete since it depends on large areas for the energy, food, fibers, water and other materials, so much as to be called by the ecologist Odum (1983) "the parasite of the rural environment".

However, if we consider the garden as a social space taken away from the city, it can be observed how its resilience is also determined by the degree of openness that gardeners are able to get and dosed with the outside. The creation of formal and informal networks of exchanges settle the garden in the district and transmit to the gardener a greater sense of belonging to the territory, which is reflected into an increased attention to the broader urban context (D'Abundo et al., 2008; Glover et al., 2005).

Urban garden as a dynamic ecosystem is a proxy of the transition state that a metropolitan context is experiencing. It can also become a strategic laboratory where experiment and test new forms of governance, which will hopefully become future prototypes of sustainability for the metropolitan area. How institutions are aware of and are able to pursue this challenge considering the different stakeholders? How have they been able to adapt or adjust?

## **2. Aims and method**

The aim of the study is to investigate how over time the different roles and meanings attributed to urban gardens in the context of the metropolitan area of Turin influenced their process of governance.

The institutions faced on one side a strong push and demand for innovation from the citizens who would like to have a garden but with new features and the other side they faced a force of the same intensity, but opposite that was trying to maintain unchanged the status quo from those that owns a urban garden since many years.

Insights from the paper arise from the analysis of the experience of urban garden in the context of the city of Turin and its suburbs since the early seventies and more specifically from the analysis of two case studies, the regulated urban gardens della Bela Rosin in the Mirafiori district of Turin and the communal urban gardens in Grugliasco, a municipality in the first belt of Turin.

The analysis of the context was performed by the reconstruction of the official records and interviews with witnesses, participants to the evolution of the phenomenon. The analysis of the case studies, beyond the participation of some persons who work directly in the management / governance of these two experiences, has involved more than 40 gardeners, that in the period from June to September 2014, were interviewed with a semi structured questionnaire.

The gardeners were interviewed within the space of their assigned garden, usually during the work in the plot. The sample of respondents' gardeners was made of men and women, people of different age groups, old and new gardeners.

### 3. Urban garden in Turin: yesterday and today

In Turin, urban gardens find their origins in the 70'. They are small areas of spontaneous occupation, which are located near water courses.

The phenomenon is concomitant to the population increase and it is the result of the wave of migration that characterizes the city in the years of the economic miracle. Between the years 50 and 60, the overall balance of migration of the city counts 433,000 inhabitants; Turin in 1975 reached its maximum population of 1,203,000 inhabitants (Mela, 2011). Among immigrants, prevail those from rural settings and among them those from Southern Italy (Bagnasco, 1986).

For the immigrant metalworker, the garden owns a productive function of income support, a form of occupation of the time outside the assembly line, "an antidote to escape from the binary factory-apartment", which allows coming back to land, to the origins. From the perspective of Turin, the spontaneous gardens, commonly referred to as "the garden of the poor", are the manifesto of the situation of marginalization of immigrants.

Until the 80 'the phenomenon grows without being defined any attempt at regulation by the City of Turin and the surrounding municipalities of his first belt (Collegno, Grugliasco, Venaria, Nichelino ..). It has estimated that the phenomenon only in the area of the city of Turin has come to count 2,000,000 abusive plots , around which gravitated 20,000 families<sup>5</sup>.

The first act of discipline allocation and management of urban gardens comes in 1986 with the Municipal Regulation n. 164 (approved by resolution of the City Council on July 23, 1986 - mecc. 86 00125/46 - Executive from 21 August 1986).

This measure was followed by the adoption of more specific measures by the different districts of the City of Turin and regulations from the peri-urban municipalities, always with the aim of ruling the illegal side of the phenomenon by setting up a system for the allocation of gardens to applicant citizens.

This attitude from the institutions is almost unchanged for the duration of the nineties and early 2000. Only after 2010 and with the manifestation of the effects of the economic crisis, the Civic Administration sees in the urban and peri-urban horticulture a mean to:

- enhance the value of areas that are taken away from the degradation and the marginalization and give them the status of "areas for agricultural use," against the consumption of land and for environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of urban places;
- support the sociality and citizen participation and its possibility to aggregate, promoting social cohesion and the social presidium;
- teach and disseminate cultivation techniques;
- support the organic food production and traditional local varieties;
- promote educational activities for young or those who wish to approach this type of activity (prevention and environmental education);
- promote supportive health care processes of physical and psychological therapy.

Urban gardens, as one of the possible forms of urban agriculture takes on a new significance within the urban green management measures included in the Territorial Plan for Provincial Coordination Plan (P.T.C.P.)<sup>6</sup>, as evidenced by the project TOCC<sup>7</sup>, Turin city to be cultivated proposed by the municipality in 2012.

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<sup>5</sup> Resolution of the City Council of the City of Turin of March 25, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> This document call for the promotion of peri-urban area, as the contact area between the rural and urban world, through actions for the protection and development of an agriculture, not only devoted to food production of food, but also as a mean for the overall improvement of the urban quality and soil conservation.

TOCC not only represents an ambitious plan of analysis, census, upgrading and management of urban and peri-urban green areas, but it aims also at changing the way of management of these spaces.

The challenge is to strengthen the relationship between the city and the gardeners, by contracting out, through a series of public announcements, entire agricultural areas / green and manufactured to collective bodies (associations, citizens' committees, cooperatives) that are able to create a link between people and the institutions following a bottom-up approach.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture and horticulture can become a valuable support for the solution of food and ecological problems, which can also contribute, particularly in the metropolitan area of Turin, to reduce the cost of managing urban green areas and to introduce alternative forms of management.

The new regulation for urban gardens management of 2013<sup>8</sup> has been included as a part of the larger project TOCC. The main innovations compared to the previous version of 1986 include the possibility for citizens to use regulated gardens in a different way (collective and family gardens) and the use of green areas (up to 2500 m) by associations and cooperatives to implement horticulture and education activities.

Close to the institutional "pro-garden" movement in the context of the city of Turin and its outskirts there was the development of several informal gardens. Not only the demand for allocation of public gardens by new categories of people was rising, but a number of spontaneous experiences of individual and collective management<sup>9</sup>, undivided surfaces given in concession to private managed by committees of citizens, associations flourished.

Where there are already urban gardens, additional services such as education, a library room, areas for aggregation are provided. The purposes are distinct from those that characterized the gardens colonization of 60-70 years that could be called "second generation gardens". Here, the gardener is a young person in the age group of 20-40 years (young families, students), who look for in the work of cultivating a means of socialization, "of doing the community" and approach the garden as the intermediary for a healthier life.

There is a growing interest in how to make a garden, districts and associations organize courses in gardening, be it the garden on the ground, on the roof or on the balcony.

#### **4. The cases study**

##### **4.1 *The regulated gardens of the district Mirafiori Sud in Turin***

The regulated gardens of Strada Castello di Mirafiori belong to the area of competence and management of the District 10 of the city of Turin. The entire zone, near the river Sangone, was transformed in gardens since the early industrial development of the area of Mirafiori becoming part of a historical process / social / economic result of the great migrations from the South of Italy during the '60s. The reclamation of this area was part of a larger project to upgrade the urban and environmental area between the stream Sangone and the Mirafiori South district, promoted in the year 2004-2005. The area was the birthplace of the first regulated gardens from 2007.

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution of the City Council of the City of Turin of March 5, 2012, [http://www.comune.torino.it/consiglio/documenti1/atti/testi/2012\\_00758.pdf](http://www.comune.torino.it/consiglio/documenti1/atti/testi/2012_00758.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Rules for the allocation and management of Urban Gardens, approved by resolution of the City Council on March 25, 2013 (mech. 2013 00113/002), executive from 8 April 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Among these the design of the Bunker in 2013.



After the reclamation work, there were obtained 102 regulated parcels from the pre existing 230 - illegal. Every garden has an area of 100 m<sup>2</sup>, an internal structure for the maintenance of the tools for cultivation and a water supply, according to the rules of the District 10. Since 2010, this area became part of "Miraorti" a process of research/action and of participatory planning in support of the urban government, aim at the creation of the Agricultural Park of Sangone.

A number of initiatives of animation have been promoted with the aim of raising awareness among gardeners in sustainable practices and encourage them to take care of common areas through aggregation practices open to the district such as the realization of collective composters, recreational events and convivial activities with schools, creation of purchasing groups for plants and fertilizers; physical improvement of the fences and common areas through the planting of 200 linear meters of mixed hedges.

The direct knowledge of issues related to the technical management and governance of the gardens led to the creation of a committee of gardeners and pushed Miraorti to propose changes to the Regulations for the management of gardens in the District 10. In May of 2012 the district has approved a new regulation, improving several anomalies that does not allow a proper use of the area. The process has also proposed changes to the old regulation of the Gardens of the City of Turin of 1986, which were accepted in the new regulation of 2013. These changes have favoured the inclusion in the regulation of measures that favour the functional and social mixité in the garden, in the single plot and in the garden. Urban garden has not only to be used by retired workers, but it has to be more open to citizens of the district with different uses to meet the different needs and express fully the multifunctionality of the garden.

#### **4.2 The communal gardens of Grugliasco**

In 1984 the Municipality of Grugliasco, decided to tackle the problem of illegal occupation land for agricultural purposes (mainly concentrated in the area of Gerbido), setting up a special area dedicated to the creation of gardens to be given in temporary concession to its citizens. Citizens, which initially are the same owners of the abusive gardens; in exchange for a parcel "official" they leave that they first occupied.

The area is localized first in Via Leonardo da Vinci, then it will be moved to Strada del Gerbido. It is made of 347 parcels of 63 m<sup>2</sup> (9m x 7m) each.

Today, the management of such areas is ruled determined by a resolution of the city council n.20 of 19/03/2012. Each plot is provided with an external enclosure, running water and a shed for tools.

The area was equipped with a structure - "house of gardeners" - useful for common assemblies, common management and recreational moments among gardeners and families.

Each assignment has a duration of five years, renewable one time. Each gardener is responsible for his lot and all the related operation and maintenance activities. The gardener can cultivate his plot only with the cooperation of the family (made up of people just living together). Only more recently (in this case from 2012), from a final destination mainly oriented to welfare and socialization for elderly pensioners, the regulation issued by the City Council in 2014<sup>10</sup>, has been opened to younger people in order to "stimulate a collective consciousness in developing a new image of Grugliasco, able to recover a positive relationship with the environment and to engage citizens in the construction of a modern city, less alienating, more humane."



The 80% of the lots is for pensioners, 20% for other categories of citizens.

The Regulation also sets as a necessary condition for the allocation of the plot, the membership to the Association of all grantees. In addition to the association, as a body of management, there is a municipal committee of management made up of six members, including two councillors, the commissioner of reference, an official of the municipal sector, a Representative of gardeners, a representative of the municipal police. The functions of the Commission mainly concern the management of the list for the allocation of the new or empty gardens and everything related to the technical, administrative and relationship with the gardeners (including disputes). There is also the assembly of grantees and a board of directors (elected by the gardeners themselves) with the task of promoting issues and proposals for a better management of the gardens and report any irregularities to the committee of management. Since March 2014, the management of all the garden and the relationships with and among the beneficiaries, has been outsourced to the Company Le Serre, who made a special information desk for users following the implementation of the resolution of the City Council.

In 2015, thanks to the completion of the expansion, were created 120 additional lots, of which 10 are reserved for the unemployed under the current regulation.

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<sup>10</sup> Resolution C.C n. 72 of 22/12/2014.

## 5. A first insights from the analysis of the case studies in scale 1: 1

The analysis of two case studies show how the relative public administrations are trying to adapt/adjust the system of management and governance of urban gardens, facing a reality (internal but especially external) that has changed dramatically over time. In particular, the latest evolution of the cultural framework that has characterized the issues of environment and agriculture in the context of Turin, has made necessary to change the regulatory framework at the municipal and the metropolitan city level to actively involve groups of population that until now cannot access to urban gardens and with ever more insistence are requiring to do so.

The two case studies under analysis are therefore in the wider framework of Turin two mature experiences, constantly changing over time, but more recently they undergone a radical change. A change, that was already in progress and that the regulatory process has sought to incorporate, in some cases forced into practices, with a more or less effective results.

The two cases, in fact, though quite close from a spatial point of view (at a distance of 10 km from each other), both in the southwest of Turin metropolitan area belong to two different municipalities that have chosen to position themselves differently towards change.

The experience of the gardens of Bela Rosin at Mirafiori, as well as the larger program for regulated gardens in regulated Turin, showed a greater degree of openness towards the new demands that are emerging around the garden.

The regulation allows to citizen of any age to apply for a garden, either alone or associated and establish a percentage in each district to gardens with features other than those exclusively productive (educational, pedagogical, therapeutic).

The regulation maintains a degree of openness to a partial adaptation with respect to future developments, "This Regulation is subject to changes which may be adopted subsequently by the Civic Administration on the basis of experience gained during the period of initial application, and according to standards and suggestions. Any innovations must be fully accepted by beneficiaries. "

It has also been left open the question of renewal of the allocation, which is not an automatic renewal, but it is not excluded. The case of the Gardens regulated at Mirafiori, also shows an higher degree to openness toward the presence of third parties such as associations, cooperatives that promote the associations' between the gardeners and have an intermediary role with the administration. The change to be accepted more easily was accompanied by building a transition phase based on relationships of trust built between the gardeners and the project Miraorti. The autonomy of the association of gardeners and the feeling of common space, however, is still fragile. The management of the common areas is still problematic with regard to the degradation of the areas used as landfills, unused common areas, lack of maintenance, use of inappropriate materials in the gardens, low sensitivity ecological sustainability in gardens, lack of functions and actions of control leading to irregularities in the conduct and abandoned plots where no steps were taken to a new assignment, despite the long waiting list.

If instead we look at the gardens of Grugliasco, the feeling is much more ordered. All the plots are allocated, the maintenance is good, and the common spaces are used. The change, however, has been included in the regulation and practices in a more timid way, providing fewer degrees of freedom for the gardeners and a minor multifunctional use of the gardens. They have created new plots, but only 10 will be allocated to the unemployed. Access is restricted to persons at least of 45 years old and with certain income criteria. It was preserved and guaranteed assignment to pensioners. Changes have been made regarding the degree of renewal of beneficiaries and the duration of assignments, but at the same time there remain a number of exceptions that preserve the status quo (or that is often bypassed with assignments handled within the family, so changing formally the assignee, but the substance remains the same). The level of socialization is strong, but

exclusive and limited to older gardeners (in the sense of ownership and length of the assignment) and there are barriers to entry to the opening relational against the new grantees. This aspect is also reflected in what is the representativeness of the Committee of the gardeners.

The outsourcing of service to the company Le Serre, is a change in the entity that manages the service, but it is not represent a decentralization of managing functions.

The compulsory participation of the association of gardeners, otherwise they need to pay a greater amount for the assignment, is perceived more as an top-down imposition and not as an attempt to create a botton-up participation of gardeners. In Grugliasco, moreover, given the lower level of decentralization than in Turin, where are the districts that manage the service, it is much felt the theme of cronyism. The garden can be a significant pool of votes in a reality of 38,000 inhabitants and it is definitely easier to make political promises to gardeners still keeping their parcel, than to those who request it.

## 6. Conclusions

The two case studies demonstrate the extent of the challenges for the administrations in trying to govern the delicate boundary between the pursuit of the common good through the use of a public space and the use of a parcel as a private good, especially for those gardeners who live the garden with a strong sense of ownership and embeddedness and that still belong to the generation of the first spontaneous settlers. The two case studies show two attempts to submit different answer, one more oriented towards a process of adaptive governance, though still incomplete as that of Mirafiori, and the other more oriented adjustment as evidenced by the case of Grugliasco. In terms of innovation, this highlights a trade-off between the level of change obtained / granted freedom and the status of order- rigidity maintained which has implications on the level of ecosystem resilience garden

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