

HEALTHY WORKS. FOOD AND LAND USE PLANNING IN SAN DIEGO REGION*

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Abstract: Across the US, where 'food deserts' heavily shape access to fresh, local and healthy food, institutions, NGOs and private citizens are committed to designing and implementing measures aimed at getting a greater control over the food daily supplied to million people.

This paper will focus on the case study of the San Diego Region (CA), where the goals of 'a sustainable, secure and resilient food system' addressed by an array of instruments ranging from food policies to land use tools and municipal and zoning codes are mobilizing from the very beginning community at large: producers, brokers, consumers.

The account is twofold. On the one hand, it aims to highlight a sort of 'value chain' within the approach in linking traditionally separate issues, on the other hand, it prompts for new meanings and uses for vacant land, that can result in a strategically planned and delivered green infrastructure comprising the broadest range of open spaces and other environmental features.

1. Food concerns across the US. The institutional framework and beyond

On the backdrop of the latest general policies addressing local food issues in the US, this paper aims to explore the experience of San Diego County and San Diego City, where for over a decade now, several influential non-governmental organizations have been lobbying for framing the food issue within a comprehensive range of guidelines, policies and plans. A main focus will be devoted to the match (or mismatch) between the claim for food supplies reasonably next to communities and planning and design strategies tackling urban agriculture at large, notably within vacant and derelict urban areas.

The movement to create a healthier food and agriculture policy has been slowly and steadily gaining ground across the US, thanks to seminal work of an array of non-governmental bodies experiencing common paths towards more sustainable lifestyles. Food concerns, even related to the highest rates of overweight and obesity held by the US among the industrialized nations (over one third of US adults are obese), couple with a widespread stand for food democracy: food justice and social inclusion, along with individual freedoms and citizenship, are at stake within the march for the human rights.

Statements of principle do matter (Neff, 2014), still public opinion is far more concerned about everyday perspectives and solutions. It has been calculated that the average food item in the US travels between 1,500 and 2,500 miles from farm to fork (Mansvelt, 2011), whereas around 40% of food produced on US farms is not consumed (San Diego County, 2012). The growing consensus around 'local', rather than 'sustainable' or 'organic' food, is witnessed by more than three quarters of American consumers actively seeking out and buying products they perceive to be local (Feagan,

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2007). Likewise, in recent years, City Region Food Systems (CRFS) have emerged as the proper concept in order to try, assess and improve local food system sustainability, while taking into due account ecological and socio-economic aspects (Donald et alii, 2010).

At the federal level, big efforts have been done to provide a geography of 'food deserts' within large urban and metropolitan areas (Fig. 1)³. They often correspond to poverty pockets, the most at risk in terms of availability of fresh and wholesome foods (USDA ERS, 2015).

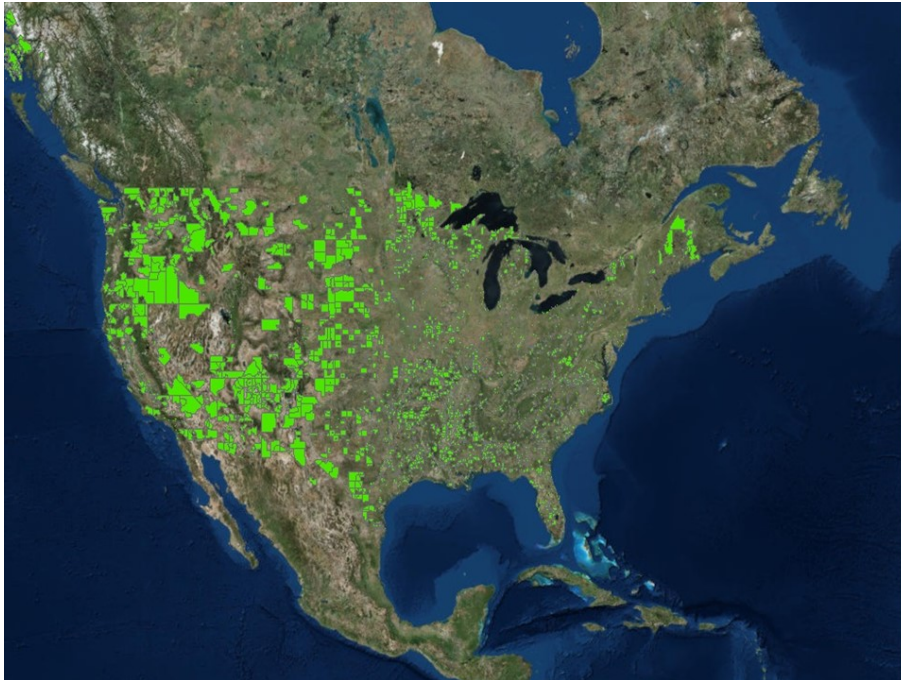


Fig. 1. The American food deserts according to the 'epidemiological approach' held by the USDA.
Source: USDA ERS, Food Access Research Atlas (2015),
available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas.aspx>.

In order to tackle these needs, the renowned American Planning Association (APA) released its Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning in 2007, stressing the linkages of local food systems with the manifold dimensions of sustainability: energy, water, land, transport and economic development (APA, 2007; Morgan, 2009). Notably, Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture (UPA) in its multifaceted forms is deemed to give new perspectives to urban revitalization strategies, particularly for fostering social inclusion in contemporary, fragmented communities, endorsing local food movements and conveying trust and loyalty among producers and consumers. According the UN, "[Urban agriculture] is an industry that produces, processes and markets food and fuel, largely in response to the daily demand of consumers within a town, city, or metropolis, on land and water dispersed throughout urban and sub-urban areas, applying intensive production methods, using and reusing natural resources and urban wastes, to yield a diversity of crops and livestock" (Smit et al., 1996). APA states that "by no means is zoning the only way to promote urban agriculture. In cities

³ A 'food desert' is a census tract with a substantial share of residents who live in low-income areas that have low levels of access to a grocery store or healthy, affordable food retail outlet. According to USDA, "tracts qualify as 'low access' if at least 500 persons or 33 percent of their population live more than a mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (for rural census tracts, the distance is more than 10 miles)". Under these criteria, "about 10 percent of the 65,000 census tracts in the United States meet the definition of a food desert. These food desert tracts contain 13.5 million people with low access to sources of healthful food. The majority of this population — 82 per cent — lives in urban areas".

that have ambitions to rapidly expand urban agricultural opportunities, it may be necessary to make land and funding available. In many cases, the demand for urban agriculture, such as community garden plots, is not nearly being met" (APA, 2010).

To sum up, the American way to address agriculture and related labor, food costs, food quality issues, stays in a set of federal, national and local level policies involving public bodies along with nongovernmental organizations such as community groups, producers' representatives, businesses and land trusts. In the last few years, an increasing number of local bodies (to date some 200) have been provided with Food Policy Councils (Fig. 2), in order to manage food matters at large (APA, 2010).

In the next sections, we will go deeper into significant experiences at regional and city level addressed by an array of instruments ranging from food policies to land use tools and zoning codes mobilizing from the very beginning the community at large.

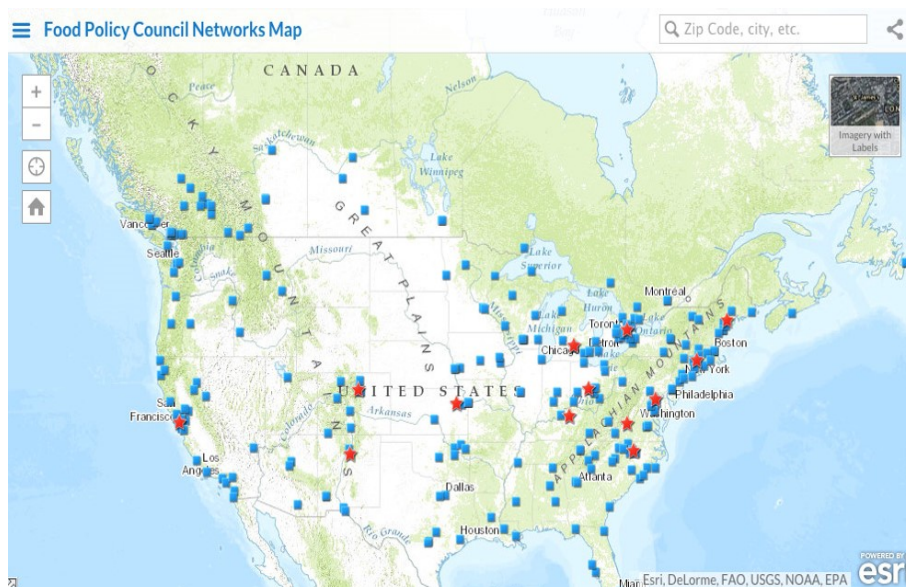


Fig. 2. Urban strategies and food policy councils.

Source: <http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-a-livable-future/projects/FPN/directory/index.html>

2. Integrating the local food system in Regional Plans. The experience of Chicago

Among the most virtuous and innovative strategies, tools and practices carried on across the country, land inventories, such as the ones conducted in Portland and Detroit, are being employed by municipal governments to support Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture (UPA) projects. In the past four years large cities including Atlanta, Boston, Minneapolis, Portland revised policies and zoning ordinances to accommodate changing land-use patterns. Non-profit organizations and municipal governments in many cities across US have also begun creating food policy councils, which often include items for strengthening UPA. As pointed out by the last American Planning Association report on these topics (APA, 2012), UPA continues to grow as a planning priority and several Counties are including its strategies in their Comprehensive Plans.

As already mentioned, the issue of local food is often defined by strategies dealing with UPA and specific connected initiatives as farmers' markets, community gardens, animal husbandry, commercial kitchens, culinary art training centers, ethnic grocery stores and restaurants, connected

peri-urban agri-farms, and so on. These activities are important, but they represent only some aspects of the larger 'Local Food System' issue. A Local Food System is more than the physical produce and includes the land the food grows on, processing, packaging, distribution, market creation, retail and waste management (Fig. 3).

The decision of including the dimension of Local Food System in a Comprehensive Regional Plan usually stems from a combination of factors. There may be support from community stakeholders, an explicit endorsement triggered either by the general interest or the prioritization of specific community issues, such as lack of access to healthy nutritious food.

Sometimes interest in local food may be generated from municipal policy makers, who may be committed to pursue local food strategies as a means to achieve other primary goals such as economic development, land preservation and community identity.

In the Chicago Region case, during the Comprehensive Plan building process, issues surrounding local nutrition, such as healthy food access and the environmental impacts of eating choices, exerted a great influence on the main strategies to be followed by the community. Based on this feedback, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency of Planning (CMAP) elevated the 'Local Food System' to one of core keys in the Chicago Comprehensive Regional Plan "Go to 2040. Invent the Future", one of the most significant regional tools in the last years in US.

The recommendations of Chicago Plan reflect the breadth of challenges and opportunities that the Region faces, but also provide specific, implementable actions to address them. Responding to the critical issues of the Region, the plan offers recommendations identifying four great themes (Livable Communities, Human Capital, Efficient Governance, Regional Mobility) that are structured through twelve axes as a whole. The 'Local Food' one, belonging to the first theme (Livable Communities) is strongly related to the other items of the general strategy and particularly to the environmental and anthropic issues (water management, ecosystem preservation, land-use and density pattern, mobility networks and transportation systems). In order to identify the benefits the community aims to achieve by including 'Local Food' in regional strategy, the Plan rationale argues on issues why it has become a priority.

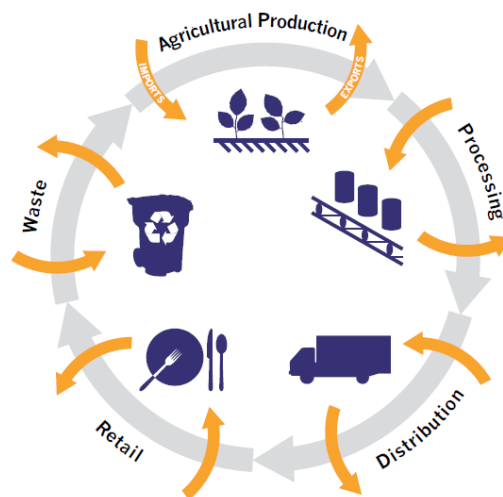


Fig. 3. Scheme of the Food System Cycle. Source: San Francisco Planning Urban Research Association (SPUR, 2013)

Chicago's Comprehensive Plan calls to strengthen the regional food systems. If local food production were increased in the seven counties of metropolitan Chicago, it could create over 5,000 jobs and generate \$6.5 billion a year in economic activity. Over the last fifteen years, regional demand for

local food has grown 260 percent, and recent surveys show that three-quarters of Americans care that their food is grown locally. By producing more of the food consumed locally, it keeps money in the region, supports local businesses, strengthens communities, and delivers delicious, fresh produce to eat.

Local food systems offer many economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits that apply to businesses, residents, and the Chicago urban region as a whole. As consumers, individuals benefit from having more opportunities to buy fresh produce to cook at home or eat at restaurants, tackling 'food deserts'. Local entrepreneurs benefit from increased business opportunities. Local communities benefit from stronger, more diverse local economies where they grow and buy their food from a local farmer, which increases farm income and jobs and circulates money within the same Region and State, rather than sending it elsewhere. In fact, fruit and vegetable production has the potential to generate three to seven times more jobs and farm income than corn and soybean production. Highly valuing Chicago rich agricultural land for its potential to feed, UPA can also exert preservation of the existing farmland, joining as well the rural character that some of residents prefer, more economically viable.

The amount of agricultural land and the size of farms in northeastern Illinois are shrinking due to urban growth and development, but the number of smaller farming operations is on the rise. A shift towards food production could help address a number of challenges that the region's agricultural system faces. Commodity crop production typically requires large acreages and expensive inputs and equipment, presenting barriers to entry for most people interested in farming. Because over 90% of food consumed in Illinois is produced elsewhere, food purchases support jobs and economies where the food is produced and processed remotely rather than in Illinois, where much of food demand could be met.

The Chicago region and surrounding counties are well-positioned to meet the demand for local food because the majority of the direct-to-consumer supply comes from metropolitan areas and collar counties. Farms across the nation earned \$1.3 billion from direct sales in 2012. By supporting and strengthening the 'Local Food System', northeastern Illinois is poised to tap into this economic potential. Challenges remain, however, and the Plan delivers a significant role for local governments for:

- providing access to land, facilities and infrastructure to give farmers, distributors, and food entrepreneurs a chance to become established;
- adopting or modifying policies and standards to encourage local food operations and to reduce the cost and uncertainty of projects;
- encouraging the market, innovation, businesses, and entrepreneurs through policies such as local food procurement targets for schools, workforce development opportunities, and hunger assistance programs;
- supporting and participating in forum to discuss and address 'Local Food System' issues, to coordinate policy initiatives, programs, events and to connect buyers and sellers.

3. The San Diego County Agenda on local food

California is long since well placed in the battle for healthy food. 'Roots of Change', a San Francisco-based non-profit organization, released the homonymous report in 2001 commissioned by the Columbia, Clarence E. Heller Charitable and W.K. Kellogg foundations (Roots of Change, 2001). Its core concept, developed in 'The New Mainstream: A Sustainable Food Agenda for California' (2005), was strategically decisive in shifting the State's goals related to food and agriculture by providing new values and principles into production and distribution practices, government policies and

business models. As a result, the 'California Food Policy Council' (CAFPC) was established as a collaborative of local food policy groups working to ensure that California's food system address relevant policy priorities, generate public support for those policies, educate policymakers on food system issues, and advocate for change in California. The CAFPC, currently collecting 26 ratified members representing local communities across the State, strives to bring transparency to food systems legislation, and to re-envision a political process that includes a more diverse range of food and farming interests to the table. The 'Declaration for Healthy Food and Agriculture' (2008), was a further step endorsed by a broad base of organizations and thousands of individuals with a long-established commitment to a healthier food and agriculture.

A major critical issue lies in translating these principles into land use regulation policies: as a matter of fact, despite State standards⁴ and retention policies carried out by several counties and cities, farmland conservation programs have been only marginally effective. Major efforts were in the direction of regulating the allowable residential density in suburban and rural areas, depending on soil fertility.

A by far wider range of perspectives is met by San Diego County that released the 'San Diego County Farming Program Plan' (2009), the Strategic Plan 'Healthy Works. San Diego Regional Healthy Food System' (2012) and the 'County General Plan' (2011). Such challenging array of tools address food regional systems in a place-based perspective, tackling land use policies.

Despite large tracts of rocky and stony soil and serious water shortage, San Diego County boasts of sound agricultural economy with more than 5 Billion dollars annual impact and praises itself on having the highest proportion of small scale growers in the State and the largest number of certified organic growers of any California County⁵. It ranks first in the US for its proportion of farmers with off-farm income, witnessing for a peculiar lifestyle that will probably be winning in the long run (Fig. 4). Yet, almost all food grown in San Diego County is exported beyond its borders, whereas about 95% of the food locally consumed comes from outside its boundaries. Furthermore, the vast majority of farming operations by volume are dedicated to only a few crops, among which avocados and citrus take up 70% of all land area dedicated to farming. Nonfood crops, such as flowers, ornamental plants, and turf, make up for two-thirds of annual agricultural value. These figures account for the larger economic return that ornamental and nursery crops, largely offsetting the high water costs, provide in comparison to other agriculture commodities.

The 'Farming Program Plan' takes over two primary goals: promote economically viable farming in Unincorporated San Diego County⁶, and encourage land use policies and programs that recognize the value of working to regional conservation efforts. A majority of the unincorporated County's land, in excess of 90 percent, is either open space or undeveloped, including several large federal, state, and regional parklands that encompass much of the eastern portion of the County.

As a matter of fact, unsustainably high water rates failing to differentiate between residential, commercial or agricultural uses are putting at risk farmland in cultivation, driving farmers out of

⁴ The California Environment Quality Act requires lead agencies to evaluate whether a proposed project may have adverse effect on the environment and, if so, if that effect can be reduced or eliminated by pursuing an alternative course of action or through mitigation. Projects subject to review under CEQA include the development of vacant land into residential, commercial or agricultural uses or the conversion of agricultural land to residential or commercial uses and potential impacts that could result from a project on environmental resources such as farmland, natural habitat, archaeological sites.

⁵ In the US, small farms are defined in terms of their gross revenues: the farms with less than 250 thousand dollars are considered small (USDA, 2007). The average size of a farm in California is equal to 126.6 hectares (313 acres), while in Europe the average size is 12.6 acres and Italy is only 7.9 hectares.

⁶ An unincorporated area is a region of land that is not governed by its own local municipal corporation, but rather is administered as part of larger administrative divisions, such as township, parish, borough, county, city, canton, state, province or country. The unincorporated land encompasses 2,600 sq. miles, that is around 57% of the surface area of San Diego County.

farming, and limiting any potential increase in the supply of local food. A major result, strongly backed by the San Diego County Farm Bureau representing farmers, growers, and producers, would be to lower water rates for agriculture to a more sustainable cost (\$900 per acre-foot) by 2015⁷. Subsequent 'Healthy Works. San Diego Regional Healthy Food System', was enforced following the newly-established San Diego Urban-Rural Roundtable collecting over 100 leaders and stakeholders from around the San Diego region to develop a set of recommendations aimed at building a healthy, fair, economically thriving, and environmentally sustainable food system. 'Healthy works' plays a major role, focusing on several objectives on a regional scale, examining the barriers and analyzing the opportunities to meet an increasing demand for high quality local food by providing daily consumers with healthy and fresh produce.

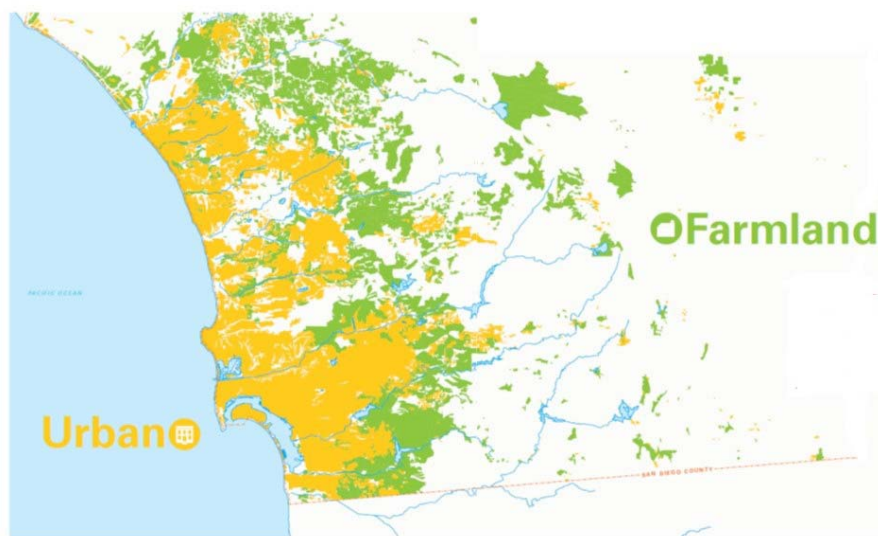


Fig. 4. Farmland in San Diego County is proximate to –even integrated with– urban land.
Source: San Diego County, Health and Human Services Agency, 2012. Healthy Works San Diego Regional Healthy Food System, Strategic Plan.

In turn, the San Diego General Plan (2011) reflects the County's commitment to a sustainable growth model that facilitates efficient development near infrastructure and services, while respecting sensitive natural resources and protection of existing community character in its extensive rural and semi-rural communities⁸. The General Plan, tackling seven state-mandated topical areas - Land Use, Mobility, Housing, Safety, Conservation, Open Space, and Noise -, is specifically in charge of unincorporated areas, providing a renewed basis for the County's diverse communities to develop Community Plans that are specific to and reflective of their unique character and environment consistent with the County's vision for its future.

Due to water scarcity, the majority of new development—approximately 80 percent—is planned in the County's western areas within the County Water Authority (CWA) boundary.

The overall philosophy of the General Plan is to promote the wise use of the land resources including encouraging urban growth to be contiguous with existing urban areas and maximizing urban infill

⁷ Established in 1913, the San Diego County Farm (part of the network of the Bureau California Farm Bureau Federation) represents San Diego agriculture through public relations, education, and public policy advocacy in order to promote the economic viability of agriculture balanced with appropriate management of natural resources.

⁸ A major concern is related to significant reduction in farmland in San Diego County from nearly 530,000 acres in 1987 to 304,000 in 2007, depending on the rising cost of water coupled with development pressure.

while also encouraging agricultural use and retaining the natural character of non-urban lands. Consequently, the so-called Community Development Model is to be implemented by three regional categories – Village, Semi-Rural and Rural Lands – that broadly reflect the different character and land use development goals, reported in the document. As a broad set of development classifications, these regional categories do not specify allowable land uses, but rather the regional structure, character, scale and intensity of development (Fig. 5). Within this frame, the Land Use Designations are defined by the land use type and the maximum allowable residential density or nonresidential building intensity.

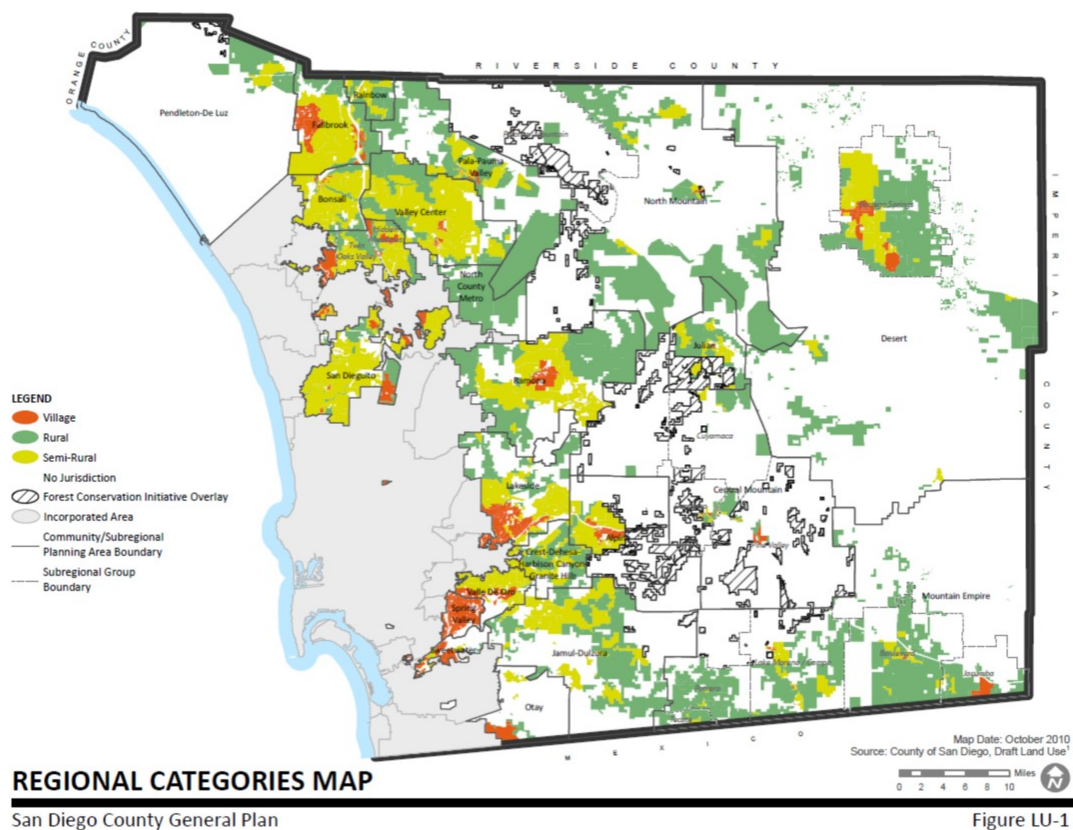


Fig. 5. Regional categories map. Chapter 3. Land use element
Available at: www.sandiegocounty.gov/pds/generalplan.html

Settlement patterns for community development in the unincorporated areas are based on a physical structure defining communities by a 'village center' surrounded by semirural or rural land. In communities inside the CWA boundary, higher density neighborhoods and a pedestrian oriented commercial center would provide a focal point for commercial and civic life. Medium density, single family neighborhoods, as well as a broad range of commercial or industrial uses, would surround the commercial core. As for semirural neighborhoods surrounded by greenbelts, agricultural uses, or other rural lands would be located outside the more urbanized portion of the communities (Fig. 6). Site design methods that reduce on-site infrastructure costs and preserve contiguous open space or agricultural operations are encouraged. The Rural Lands category is applied to large open space and very-low-density private and publicly owned lands that provide for agriculture, managed resource

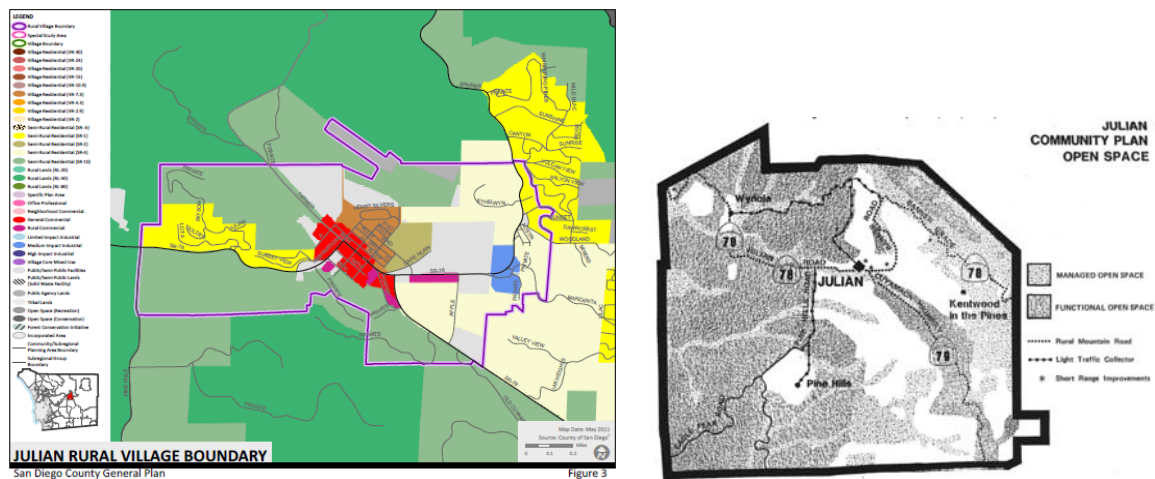
production, conservation, and recreation and thereby retain the rural character for which much of unincorporated County is known.

The County's rural character is to preserve by retaining and protecting farming and agricultural resources, while supporting long-term presence and viability of agricultural industry as an important component of the region's economy and open space linkage.

As for open spaces, they are split between managed open space and functional open space (Fig. 7). The latter comprises agricultural lands (grazing, orchards, vineyards, and other crops), scenic corridors, and areas of steep terrain). Conservation is primarily applied to large tracts of land, undeveloped and usually dedicated to open space, that are owned by a jurisdiction, public agency, or conservancy group. Allowed uses include habitat preserves, passive recreation, and reservoirs. Recreation, applied to large existing recreational areas, allows for active and passive recreational uses such as parks, athletic fields, and golf courses. Forest conservation Initiative Lands applies where land use designations are addressed by specific policies.

The County has funded a voluntary pilot program for purchasing agricultural easements, in order to promote long-term preservation of agriculture (a Purchase of Development Rights). Interest in this program on the part of farmers and land owners has been very high.

Funding is eligible in case the property actively farmed or ranched for a minimum of two years prior to applying for the program, and/or realized a density reduction as a result of the General Plan.



Figs. 6/7. San Diego County General Plan. Julian Rural Village Boundary (left) and Julian Community Plan Open Space. Available at: www.sandiegocounty.gov/pds/generalplan.html

In turn, the City of San Diego amended its zoning code (2012) by enhancing the 'zero food miles' approach. Specific goals were introduced in order to increase opportunities for urban agriculture, seen as a powerful tool for urban regeneration and social inclusion, namely for immigrants and refugee groups from Somalia, Vietnam, Cambodia, who tend to prefer food from their own culture by accommodating urban agriculture and urban farming in vacant lands (Monardo, Palazzo, 2014).

4. Natural resources, vacant land, sustainable mobility: building a healthy network

In 1974 Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard were commissioned by the Marston family a scientific report on San Diego area, whose title (*'Temporary Paradise?'*) emblematically focused on the extraordinary 'Mediterranean' climate and the environmental quality and vulnerability, suggesting

'ex ante sustainable' future visions for the city. The report was divided into two parts: an analysis of the regional landscape (Fig. 8) and a technical appendix (*An environmental planning process for San Diego*) that "recommends the organizational means, and the assignment of functions required to carry on a continuous process for planning for environmental quality in the region".

However, many recommendations did not come true: after more than 40 years it is evident that the soil consumption and the urban sprawl phenomenon has not been prevented, as well as the transit network has not been developed and coordinated with the land use design.

The huge Mission Valley and other valleys in the core urban area have been massively urbanized: shopping malls, business activities and housing enclaves have been built within the downtown and the weak ring of few tramway lines (locally known as 'Trolley').

Nowadays, impressive canyons still rhythmically crisscross all the territory and the grid of urban fabric is fragmented on the edges of the canyon layout; mobility is mainly based on private automobiles and the major valley bottoms are crossed by urban freeways.



Fig. 8. The core of San Diego urban region according to the interpretation by Lynch & Appleyard
Source: Lynch, K., Appleyard, D., 1974, *Temporary Paradise?*

The rationality of the infrastructure network, together with the comfortable freeway and ordinary road section, encourage the private mobility with limited traffic bottlenecks. Basically, car users can choose at every node whether using the main local boulevards or avenues (at a reduced speed because of the many traffic lights), or a longer path on the major axes.

Nevertheless, given the relevant potential of territory assets, the peculiar combination of geomorphology and urban imprinting allows focusing on the conception and possible implementation of an outstanding infrastructural/environmental network. This could be achieved preserving the incredibly rich canyon system, particularly in the most natural parts, utilizing their edges as ecological corridors. In many places the lush and attractive natural areas around and between the infrastructural ribbons offer intriguing opportunities for creating local green systems and leisure areas.

The canyon network is undoubtedly the most important natural resource with over 150 items engraving the Greater San Diego (Fig. 9). It provides urban residents and users with valuable open space delivering a wide range of benefits. The canyon domain harbors incredible biodiversity and its 'green infrastructure' provides valuable ecosystem services, as air cleaning and filtering, as well as

mitigating the 'heat island' effect. This asset also offers an escape to nature from an otherwise completely paved, low density urbanized pattern. Development around these areas has often left a legacy of neglect and degradation. These precious open spaces are in need of care and enhancements, including safe and enjoyable access (physical and/or visual), wetland and upland habitat restoration and opportunities of strengthening nature into the urban fabric.

The 'canyon vector' is the key for conceiving and creating a complex backbone system for embracing an integrated vision of significant layers representing an explicit green interstitial network regenerating the urban and peri-urban matrix in San Diego.

The vision of the future suggested by the city plans is a complex structure of alternative mobility (pedestrian paths and bicycle lanes) around the built areas, bringing the margins to a new life and connecting the canyon and creek network at high environmental value to the main local functions, as well as promoting the development of urban farming and connected activities.



Fig. 9. The main canyon system engraving the urban fabric in San Diego. Source: Google Earth, 2015

So, the canyon structure through the overlay with local parks, vacant land and plots, sport areas, urban farms and community gardens, neighborhood and urban facilities (schools, libraries, markets, cultural centers, etc) can reveal all its synergic potential for building innovative healthy and virtuous dimensions of sustainable lifestyles for the numerous civic communities in the city (Fig. 10).

Despite the overwhelming favor to the automobile mobility, many Californians, including San Diego citizens, are interested in walking and bicycling as a means of alternative, 'sweet mobility'. Across the US, following the best practice in developed countries, pedestrian and bike modes are gaining consensus as healthy, efficient, low cost, and available to nearly everyone. 'Sweet mobility' styles achieve the larger goals of developing and maintaining 'livable communities' making neighborhoods safer and friendlier, reducing transportation-related environmental impacts, mobile emissions and noise, preserving land for open space, peri-urban agriculture and wildlife habitat.

5. Open issues. Pursuing a holistic approach

What is the incremental value of San Diego experience - within the dynamic US context - for focusing the role of Local Food System within the policies of urban regeneration? And could it be used to foster virtuous environmental strategies in contemporary fragmented communities?

As it was argued, there is no doubt of the increasing success of UPA initiatives, considered within the general framework of the 'Healthy Food Policy', at the moment a core issue not only in developing

countries, but also in the US policies and strategies (as well as in other OECD countries) both at central and local institutional levels.

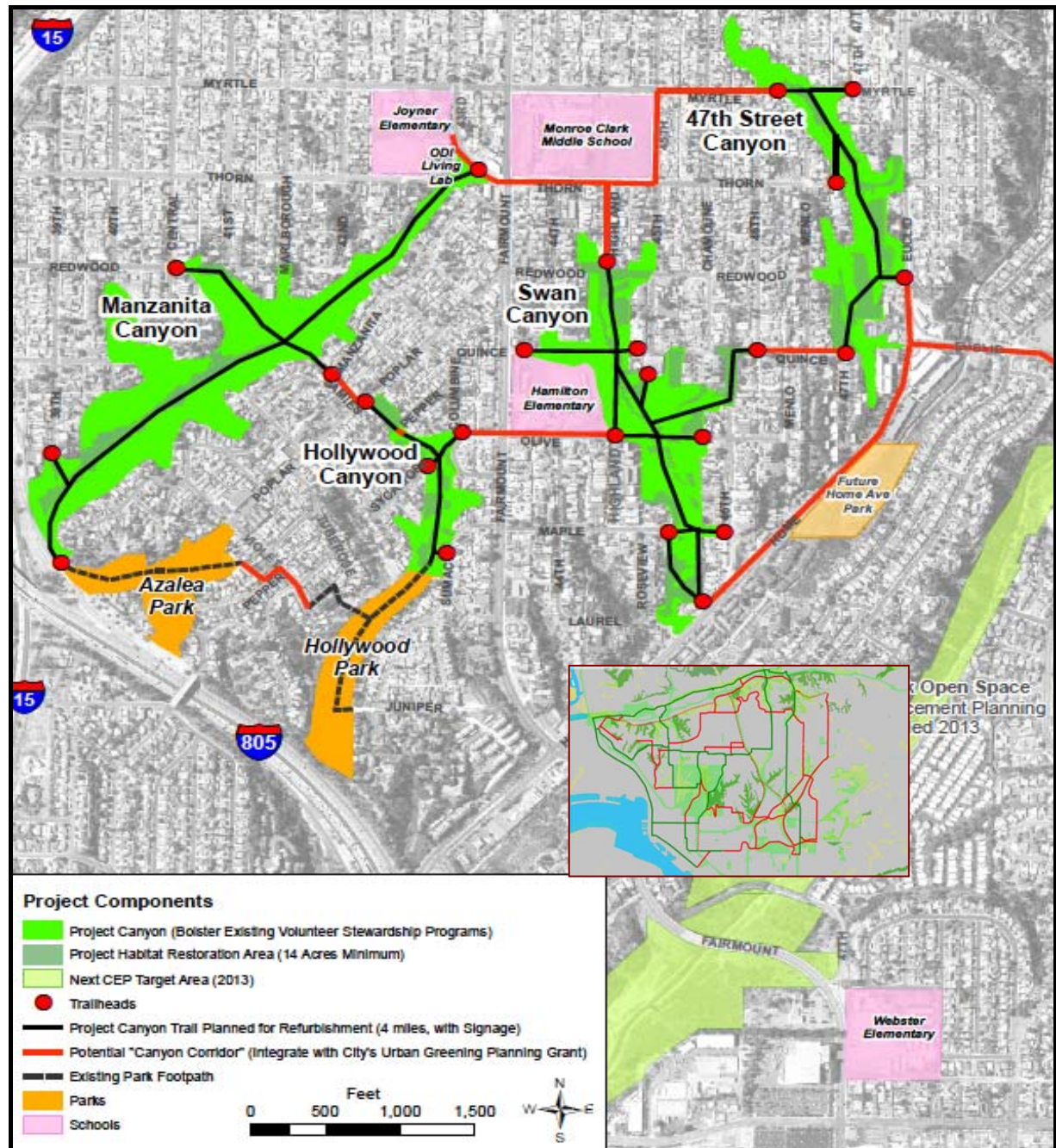


Fig. 10. Bicycle and pedestrian network as a backbone of the green system recovering the canyon asset.
 Source SANDAG, 'San Diego Regional Bicycle Plan, Riding to 2050';
 San Diego Canyonlands, 'Canyon Enhancement Planning Program'

The San Diego case is to an extent emblematic of the potential of promoting a proactive set of initiatives in terms of actors, partnerships, social value, community involvement, economic sustainability, mixed functions, and new identities. However, it would be an illusion to think that

such a 'recipe' can be imported 'sic et simpliciter' into other contexts. In fact, its relevance as best practice is obviously related to specific conditions of space, time, and civic culture.

The current impetus in the US – and particularly in California – is clearly different from the European context. US communities are operating in a post-crisis context, and a new horizon of project initiatives with a moderately confident vision for boosting local economies and pursuing 'fair redevelopment' is emerging. San Diego City General Plan (2008) was honoured by the American Planning Association (APA) in 2010 for emphasizing the vision of the 'City of Villages' and the multifaceted nature of communities. Its sensitivity towards the Food System and UPA approach was stressed in the latest amendments (2012) permitting the spontaneous creation of 'Community gardens' and 'Retail farms' to encourage a 'new deal' in terms of green, smart and socially inclusive urban and peri-urban spaces.

The quality of the County Plan, in terms of complexity, assured its relevant potential as a catalyst for regional and urban revitalization in its multifaceted interpretations, emphasizing eco-environmental, physical, cultural and symbolic dimensions without neglecting concurrent economic and social aspects.

In some respects this new generation of Plans (in California, as well as Illinois and other States) is part of a more systemic vision that emphasizes the priority of revitalization programs in urban regions.

In terms of regeneration impact of the initiative, the UPA phenomenon may be considered only the 'tip of the iceberg'. More complex 'critical mass' can be found in the potential of complex relationships emerging in the Healthy Food System domain.

The success of the initiative is mirrored through the potential to implement virtuous forms of dialogue between the fragmented identities of the Community: healthy and ethnic food implications can be a powerful vector in terms of programs and perspectives of environmental values, landscape assets, social inclusion, proactive education, and limited but socially significant economic rebounds.

Conversely, however, the ongoing experiences in San Diego (and Chicago as well with different profiles) reveal some critical issues.

Sometimes the risk of delaying or paralyzing the 'plan cycle' is evident, due to 'difficulties in dialog' between non-professional proponents (e.g. some specific non-profits or local civic associations) and the public authorities.

The plan follow-up by the public administration (Counties and Municipalities) has the typical advantages and limits of the 'common law' juridical culture: in general, the public sector represents a 'referee', limiting its action to the definition of policy frameworks and the management of rules, letting the different actors play the game.

Coming back to the main issue about the role of Local Food System strategies in regional and local planning, looking at the general dynamics within US, and in particular at the lesson of San Diego and Chicago, it is possible to underline that this approach may take on a concurrent, complementary role with intriguing potential, if – and only if – some specific conditions are respected.

Land and plots devoted to UPA should be conceived and planned as integrated activities, not in competition with 'powerful land uses', in terms of development rights. Looking towards a post-crisis horizon it is not unlikely that community gardens or urban and retail farms in the inner parts of settlements could quickly be replaced with new urban development projects as soon as the economic cycle will allow developers to pursue new profit by filling 'vacant' in-between or fringe land resources. From this point of view, a low density urban and peri-urban fabric with a relatively large amount of vacant 'interstitial' land can represent an advantage, keeping together urban agriculture patterns, open space systems and denser areas.

The spaces dedicated to UPA and its connected activities should be conceived and planned within a holistic approach, as part of the overall 'greening strategy' of settlements. Community gardens,

urban farms, farmers' markets and so on should be designed as elements of a complex open space system, included within the great natural assets of public parks, private gardens, urban and peri-urban woods, hydrographical and environmental systems of the city and its metropolitan domain.

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Sections 1 and 5 were written by both Authors. Sections 2 and 4 were written by Bruno Monardo; section 3 was written by Anna Laura Palazzo.

7. References

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