

Regards – Focus

The role of normative frameworks in municipal urban agriculture policy: three case studies from the United States[★]

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Abstract – Agriculture offers a wide array of benefits to the urban ecosystem. In the United States, urban agricultural activities are rapidly increasing, both in sheer quantity and in the form in which it is manifest. This paper explores the role of normative frameworks in urban agriculture policy at the municipal level. Case study analysis of three cities – Baltimore, Maryland; Chicago, Illinois; and Minneapolis, Minnesota – seeks first to identify whether or not a normative framework is strategically employed and second, to assess the impact of the norm, or its absence, on urban agricultural initiatives.

Keywords: food policy / urban / agriculture / sustainability

Résumé – Le rôle des cadres normatifs dans les politiques municipales pour l'agriculture urbaine : trois études de cas aux États-Unis. L'agriculture offre des avantages nombreux et divers pour les écosystèmes urbains. Aux États-Unis, on observe un développement rapide des activités agricoles urbaines, tant quantitativement que dans la diversité des formes qu'elles prennent. L'article analyse le rôle des cadres normatifs en matière de politique agricole urbaine des municipalités. Les études de cas de trois villes – Baltimore (Maryland), Chicago (Illinois) et Minneapolis (Minnesota) – visent à montrer s'il y a une mise en œuvre stratégique ou non d'un cadre normatif et à évaluer l'impact de la norme ou de son absence sur les initiatives d'agriculture urbaine.

Mots-clés : politique alimentaire / milieu urbain / agriculture / durabilité

Agriculture can benefit the urban landscape by greening the environment and contributing to social cohesion, community wellness and economic development. In the United States, cities seem to develop urban agriculture programs before determining a strategic policy orientation and aligning programmatic goals and objectives within a clear normative framework. The aim of this research is to assess whether normative framing is an important determinate in the implementation and success of urban agriculture policy and to identify the conditions in which innovative social policy is adopted and diffused.

This work was designed as the first part of an international comparative analysis. Recent interest in urban agriculture in the United States comes decades after

institutionalization of urban agriculture by local and national governments throughout Latin America. South American cities in particular, boast several successful urban agriculture policies with clearly articulated strategic goals – normative frames – that prioritize social, economic or ecological outcomes. The following analysis explores the assumption that innovative public policy, and specifically urban agriculture policy, is most efficient and impactful when designed under a single normative framework.

Urban agriculture is defined here as: the urban and peri-urban production and/or processing of agricultural products and livestock for self-consumption, barter, donation, or sale. It differs from rural agriculture in several ways. Chief among these are in scale, the type of crop or portfolio of crops under cultivation, farm management tools, the type of space used for cultivation (e.g. rooftop, terrace, warehouse) and the length of the farm-to-table value chain. Physical space, available funding, and the intended outcome generally determine the type of urban agriculture activity.

[★] Voir dans ce même numéro les autres contributions au dossier «L'agriculture dans le système alimentaire urbain : continuités et innovations».

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Many definitions of urban agriculture encompass not just the form of agricultural activity but also its intended objective(s). Introducing agriculture to an urban space, whether vacant or underutilized, can serve numerous objectives. The goals of urban agricultural activity include preservation of agricultural land, the addition of green space and neighborhood beautification. Programs may be designed for social inclusion through participatory processes, and may result in community place-making, an opportunity for connection and investment and better neighborhood security through the productive use of once unmaintained space. Programs may incorporate professional development and leadership opportunities. Most provide the opportunity to engage in food production, allowing access to fresh and affordable produce and as a result, an entry point into an awareness of the food system, food security, justice, sovereignty and an enhanced diet of nutrient rich food. Commercial enterprise can lead to poverty reduction through economic growth opportunities, specifically entrepreneurial development. Finally, urban agriculture can result in increased resiliency in the face of climate change, storm water management, waste reduction through the reuse of urban waste materials and decreased carbon footprint by shortening the produce value chain.

In the United States, municipalities often engage in urban agriculture in response to activities taking place in the community. Case study analysis of three cities – Baltimore, Maryland; Chicago, Illinois; and Minneapolis, Minnesota – seeks first to identify whether or not a normative framework is strategically employed, and second, to assess the impact of the norm, or its absence, on urban agricultural initiatives. This paper discusses the theoretical basis for research on normative frameworks in policy-making and illustrates the case study methodology prior to presenting key findings from interviews with stakeholders in each city.

Research design

Theoretical approach

Constructivism makes a strong case for harnessing ideas to generate power, a strategy made more precise by defining a normative framework for public policy. The theoretical basis for this research suggests “when a mass communication places attention on an issue... that issue will receive greater weight *via* changes in its accessibility and applicability” (Chong and Druckman, 2007). This research grew out of the observation that, as cities across the United States began to support urban agriculture, they were doing so without pronounced, straightforward normative frameworks.

Constructivism recognizes the importance of knowledge construction or socially constructed principles; framing has been defined as, “the process by which

people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 104). It can also be understood as “a learning process in which people acquire common beliefs, as in the coordination of people around a social norm” (Kinder and Herzog, 1993, cited in Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 111). The impact a frame has depends on the context in which it is presented (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 120).

The advocacy coalition framework (ACF), presented by Paul Sabatier, made considerable headway in the effort to understand causal factors of policy change (Sabatier, 1988). While highlighting the role of policy sub-systems, advocacy coalitions, relationships and variable states in policy-oriented learning, some felt it unduly neglected the role of narrative (Jones and McBeth, 2010). The narrative policy framework (NPF), which explores how policy “stories” influence processes and outcomes through social construction, may be applied in conjuncture with the ACF (Shanahan *et al.*, 2011). Though the NPF and its application to the established ACF are emerging, the relationship between normative frameworks, narrative, and policy change invite further exploration.

Sociologist John Campbell argues for more research, “Scholars have paid less attention to how ideas, that is, theories, conceptual models, norms, world views, frames, principled beliefs, and the like, rather than self-interests, affect policy making” (Campbell, 2002, p. 21). Where research on the effect of framing environmental policy exists, the crafting and validation of those frames remains understudied (Miller, 2000). There is especially little scholarship on the role of normative frameworks at the local level (Gibbs *et al.*, 2010).

Furthermore, though there is a growing body of work on best practices in sustainable environmental policy at the national and international level, today social innovation through policy is often introduced in “new state spaces” – emergent local government structures (Gibbs *et al.*, 2010). Municipal engagement in urban agriculture is a prime example of this innovation.

Methodology

Two independent, or explanatory variables were identified: (1) whether there is an implicit or explicit policy on urban agriculture, and (2) which normative frame – if any – is adopted: social, ecological or economic. The RUAF Foundation, an international non-profit dedicated to urban agriculture and food security, outlines three central orientations for policies on urban agriculture; these distinct categories informed the normative frames delineated in this research and were instrumental in crafting the interview questions.

“The social perspective, with an emphasis on subsistence-oriented urban agriculture with strong impacts on food security and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups; the economic perspective with an emphasis on poverty alleviation and local economic development through stimulation of market-oriented types of urban agriculture; the ecological perspective with an emphasis on the ecological roles of (especially multifunctional types of) urban agriculture, productive reuse of urban wastes, city greening, adaptation to climate change (by reducing energy use, enhancing storm water infiltration and capturing CO₂)” (Dubbeling *et al.*, 2010, p. 136)

To identify potential case studies, a list of cities with notable urban agriculture activity in 2013 was generated. A preliminary review of nine cities – Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; Miami, Florida; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – led to the selection of three cities that illustrate the diversity of the American urban landscape in size, the organization of their legal and political structure, and economic strength.

A matrix on basic socio-geographic indicators enabled comparison of fundamental characteristics of each municipality. The following categories were included: geographic region, legal recognition of urban planning (at the state level), size of the population in 2012 and 1990, growing or shrinking population (% change 2012/1990), economic rank, the municipal department engaged in urban agriculture, type of activity, type of policy instrument in use, whether there is municipal staff assigned for urban agriculture or for food policy, and whether or not there is a food policy council (See [Tab. 1](#)).

When determining appropriate indicators, the type of city-government (mayor-council vs. council-manager) was also considered. In the United States, most cities operate under one of five governance structures, predominately the council-manager and mayor-council (National League of Cities, 2014). Though political structure is an intriguing variable when analyzing innovation patterns, type of city government was ultimately disregarded as a characteristic for selection criteria due to data constraints in council-manager cities.

Ultimately, Baltimore, Chicago and Minneapolis were selected for the range of urban agriculture activities they showcase, the facets of urban America they represent, and the fact that their urban agriculture initiatives are situated in varying municipal departments and are the result of distinct processes for both policy development and implementation. All three are run under a mayor-council governance structure. Secondary research identified trends in messaging used to craft hypothetical normative frameworks. At the outset, in Baltimore, the emphasis seemed to be on improving access to fresh and healthy food

(social), in Chicago, on economic development and employment (economic), and finally, in Minneapolis, sustainable land use (ecological).

A purposeful, non-probability snowball sampling technique was chosen to identify participants for semi-structured interviews with policy-makers, practitioners, and advocates. These interviews compliment secondary research and are the basis for the qualitative analysis in the case studies. Potential interviewees were selected from municipal offices, within the research community, and from news feeds and reports. Interviewees expanded the network of potential participants by drawing on their individual networks. Interviews explored perceived benefits that urban agriculture brings to one’s city and the terms of municipal engagement around urban agriculture. Each respondent was asked the following key questions:

- Is there an urban agriculture policy in your city? If so, how would you describe it?
- Is the overall framework oriented to achieve social, economic or ecological gains?
- What, if any, of the following policy instruments do you use? Legal, economic, communicative and educational, and/or urban design tools?
- What are the benefits of urban agriculture in your city?
- What short-term and long-term impact do you expect the city’s engagement with urban agriculture will have?

The same key questions were asked to all stakeholders to collect varied perspectives on the definition of urban agriculture policy and associated normative frames. Interviews took place from August 2013 through March 2014; 26 interview requests were issued and a total of 16 interviews were conducted with 6 men and 10 women. 4 participants were policy-makers, 5 served as advocates, and 7 were practitioners (urban farmers)¹.

Field visits to Baltimore and Chicago enabled a number of in-person interviews. Additional interviews for both cities and all interviews related to the Minneapolis case study, the smallest sample size with only 3 participants, were conducted over the phone. With rare exception, participants are not quoted by name to respect the anonymity of those who desired it.

Case studies

Baltimore, Maryland

The Baltimore City Government includes a Sustainability Commission, represented by the Baltimore Office of Sustainability. Of the seven program areas they oversaw in 2014, food systems fell under the category

¹ While the sample size informs stakeholder perspectives on normative framing, it does not allow for a statistically significant analysis.

Tab. 1. Background data on selected case studies.

The planning status of each city noted above represents the status of the state in which it is situated. All indicators are the result of case law as reviewed by Edward J. Sullivan's "Recent Developments in Comprehensive Planning Law", published in the *Urban Lawyer* (2005–2012) by the American Bar Association. U=Unitary: "the plan is unnecessary or meaningless"; PF=Planning Factor: "gives the plan some significance as a factor"; PM=Planning Mandate: "quasi constitutional document that governs the regulatory ordinances and actions of the local government implementing the plan".

City	Baltimore, Maryland	Chicago, Illinois	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Region	Mid-Atlantic	North, Midwest	North, Midwest
Governance	Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council
Planning status	U/PF & PM	PF	PM/PF & PM
Size of pop. 2012	621,342	2,714,856	392,880
Size of pop. 1990	736,014	2,783,726	368,383
Pop. % change	Shrinking	No Sig. Change	No Sig. Change
Econ. rank of metro. area	16	71	57
City dep't leading UA initiatives	Planning	Housing & econ. dev't Sustainable dev't	Planning & econ. dev't Park & rec. Health & family services
Type of UA activity	(1) Separating land for UA (2) Training (3) Updating zoning, building & health codes (4) Liaising with banks to get loans	(1) Separating land for UA (2) Training (3) Updating zoning	(1) Updating zoning (2) Facilitating loans (3) Installing water meter technology
Type of policy tool in use	(1) Urban design (2) Education (3) Legal (4) Economic	(1) Urban design (2) Education (3) Legal	(1) Legal (2) Economic
Municipal staffing for Food/UA policy	Yes/Yes	No	Yes/No
Food Policy Council	Yes Baltimore City Food Policy Taskforce	Yes Chicago Food Policy Council	Yes Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council

of "Greening". The principle objective was "supporting more small farms and urban gardens and building on creative initiatives that can improve citizens' access to healthier, locally-grown food". The Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, an inter-governmental collaboration with the Department of Planning, Baltimore Office of Sustainability, Baltimore Development Corporation and the Baltimore City Health Department, has a stated goal to increase access and affordability to healthy food. Homegrown Baltimore, the city's urban agriculture program, falls under the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative².

Beginning in 2008, former Mayor Sheila Dixon convened a Food Policy Task Force. Now known as

the Baltimore Food Policy Advisory Committee, it is comprised of representatives from municipal departments, state offices, local academic institutions, research centers, civic organizations, farms and markets. In 2009, former Mayor Dixon launched the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, which aimed to establish Baltimore as a leader in sustainable local food systems ([Baltimore Office of Sustainability, 2009](#)). Current Mayor Stephanie Rawlins Blake formed the Food Policy Task Force, in 2010, which included hiring the city's first Food Policy Director and the creation of the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative.

The City of Baltimore articulates social, and specifically health and wellness objectives. Both the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative and the Office of Sustainability support urban agriculture activity. In addition, the Baltimore Housing Authority runs the Vacants to Value

² www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/homegrown-baltimore/.

Program, a redevelopment program for vacant and underutilized land³. A sub-program, Adopt-A-Lot, provides licenses to beautify, garden, or farm city-owned land. This program is also supported by a city initiative known as Power in Dirt⁴. On the website for the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative there is a list of municipal level food policies; at the time of this research there were two that dealt with zoning and animal husbandry⁵. While the City's messaging supports a social normative frame in Baltimore, and manifold impactful projects, there is arguably no single, comprehensive, urban agriculture policy in Baltimore.

Early Baltimore-based interviews revealed a muddled awareness of the terms of the City's involvement in urban agriculture. An interviewee from the Food Communities and Public Health Program at Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future mused, "There is not a policy per se [...] I think the city is still at a loss, not sure how they should approach urban agriculture [...] If you said, what's your policy on urban agriculture? It's not really a binary choice, its kind of a gray area" (Baltimore Researcher, September 9, 2013). Local farmers and urban agriculture program leaders expressed similar ambiguity, asking, "Would it be called that? I don't know", and noting that "There are several policies in place that relate to urban agriculture [...] Current policy is generally supportive; [it's] incomplete, but not obstructionist. There are just a lot of holes and pieces missing" (Baltimore Farmer One, August 5, 2013). One respondent replied, "Yeah. I mean, there is someone in the Office of Sustainability and her job is to promote urban agriculture in the city" (Baltimore Farmer Two, August 23, 2013).

When asked how the framework of the policy was oriented, half of the respondents recognized it as social. A representative from the Farm Alliance at Baltimore City went on to qualify, "It's probably most focused on social, then economic, and then ecological. That's the rank, but they are all intertwined" (Baltimore Civil Society Representative, November 6, 2013). The Baltimore City Food Policy Director stated that the framework for the Sustainability Plan is, "People, Planet and Prosperity", and that she could not select one orientation over another as it relates to urban agriculture (Baltimore Government Representative, November 6, 2013).

Questions on the benefits of urban agriculture in Baltimore drew more varied responses. Only one person

included production, and did so after considering a range of other services that urban agriculture provides. The representative of the Baltimore Farm Alliance first emphasized education and communal space and then noted, "Food production is another benefit, [there are] so many benefits before the food is harvested and consumed. Food access is a smaller piece [...] the actual quantity of food produced is relatively small" (Baltimore Gov't Rep., 2013). The Director of the Food Communities and Public Health Program acknowledged, "I think we're still a ways off from saying we are going to see a paradigm shift in how cities grow food" (Baltimore Researcher, 2013).

Interviews revealed only vague awareness of the terms of the city's involvement in urban agriculture. The city's messaging on food production does not resonate as a principle benefit of urban agriculture with local stakeholders. While most of respondents' commentary on urban agriculture falls within the definition of a social framework, their focus did not reflect the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative's goal to improve food production and accessibility. After interviews concluded, the Baltimore Office of Sustainability (2013) published a document entitled, *Homegrown Baltimore: grow local. Baltimore City's urban agriculture policy plan*. As mentioned above, the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative does not categorize "Homegrown Baltimore" as a municipal policy.

The Baltimore City Food Policy Director sees the absence of a specific urban agriculture policy as a successful strategy. The Director asserts that, "In order to have a more robust policy, the policy must be alluded to within several polices within government [...] The more policies that address urban agriculture, the more departments that are working on it... the more successful it will be" (Baltimore Gov't Rep., 2013)⁶. This positioning of urban agriculture under multiple departments, while not without its challenges, is intentional. While Baltimore is unique among the case studies in having municipal position devoted to food policy, the programs and regulatory tools employed to facilitate urban agriculture do not all fall under the purview of the Director's position.

Chicago, Illinois

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' Food for the Cities program moderator sent a query to their (virtual) global community with the subject,

³ www.vacantstovalue.org/Homebuyers.aspx#adopt.

⁴ www.powerindirt.com/how.html.

⁵ www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/food-policy/. In addition to the zoning code and animal regulations, the Office of Sustainability currently promotes urban agriculture "policies and regulations" within the building code and on soil safety. Moreover, the city introduced legislation to implement a tax credit for urban agriculture introduced by the State of Maryland in 2014.

⁶ The city continues its collaborative approach and now boasts 20 "production-oriented" urban farms. It has introduced a Homegrown Baltimore Employee Wellness Community Supported Agriculture program and has ongoing plans for an urban agriculture-training program, among other initiatives. In 2015, Baltimore signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, becoming a member of the inaugural steering committee in 2016.

“Policies: Chicago taking the lead at the global level?”. The question was lobed in response to a report by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs that includes a section on urban agriculture and calls for a systemic approach to implementation. The report describes the municipal government at the center of the urban agriculture movement, coordinating the involvement of civil society:

“Chicago is unique in that it has all the key ingredients needed to become a leader in addressing the problem and setting an example for other cities around the world: a committed and willing local government, particularly the mayor, who has prioritized urban food security as part of his mission; a large and strong nonprofit sector that works well with both the private and public sectors; a thriving and innovative entrepreneurial community; a plethora of academic and research institutions that can contribute to finding solutions; and a deeply-rooted history” ([Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2013](#), pp. 75-76).

In 1980, when the last farm within Chicago city limits closed, urban food production was garden based ([City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development, 2006](#)). While some of the gardens were harvested for donation, the majority of commercial activity was micro-scale and non-profit.

In 2007, the Chicago Plan Commission adopted the strategy “Chicago: Eat local, live healthy”. The report highlights job training and small business opportunities in urban agriculture ([City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development, 2006](#)). Secondly, it proposes an increase in urban food production. The final proposal is to “coordinate messaging from the City of Chicago that encourages healthy eating through the consumption of fresh, local products” ([City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development, 2006](#), p. 22).

Just three years later, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) published *Go to 2040: A comprehensive regional plan*. The plan recommends “Promot[ing] Sustainable Local Food” and distinguishes between increasing production quantity and improving access ([CMAP, 2010](#)). Three benefits of local food are outlined: quality of life, economic, and environmental, “In addition to producing food, urban agriculture increases open space and community vitality, adds value to underutilized land, increases economic activity, and can provide on-site job training” ([CMAP, 2010](#), p. 150).

Mayor Rahm Emanuel took office in 2011 and made access to fresh produce a citywide priority. Supermarkets populate the city unevenly, with some residents lacking access to a neighborhood grocery ([City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development, 2006](#)). In the Mayor’s first year of office, the former First Lady Michelle Obama supported the creation of a “grocery store task force” to expand access in underserved areas of the city. The announcement included news of a

Memorandum of Understanding between Walgreens, a Chicago-based pharmacy company, and Growing Power, one of the city’s most impactful urban agriculture organizations. Walgreens agreed to sell farm-fresh produce in select local stores ([Sweet, 2011](#)).

In September 2011, the city adopted changes to the zoning code to allow for agricultural activity. The substitute ordinance includes urban agriculture as part of a portfolio of “programs and policies” that serve to improve both food security and access to healthy food, specifically in underserved neighborhoods. The technical details that prescribe land use are preceded by an introduction emphasizing urban agriculture’s contribution to the local economy, an enhanced quality of life and neighborhood “stabilization” ([City of Chicago, 2006](#)). Mayor Emanuel celebrated the ordinance’s economic potential, stating, “This policy is about taking land that we have here in the city of Chicago that is literally sitting fallow, both as land as well as a revenue base or tax base, and turning it into a job creator and a revenue creator” ([Dirksen, 2011](#)).

By Spring 2013, the Mayor launched a second urban agriculture initiative, “Farmers for Chicago” in collaboration with Growing Power Chicago, the US Department of Agriculture and several area non-profits. The program is designed for 25 newly trained farmers and offers technical assistance and support for entrepreneurial food ventures. The workforce development program targets residents in need of professional experience, in communities with limited opportunities and without regular access to fresh produce. The city committed \$750,000 in annual investments for “transitional jobs” in urban agriculture ([Office of the Mayor, 2013](#)). In addition to farm management workshops, the city planned to open five acres of city-owned lots⁷.

The normative framework trumpeted by the mayor’s office prioritizes economic gains. However, the city is pursuing a range of initiatives without a definitively articulated urban agriculture policy. Instead, Chicago indirectly leverages policy tools and programs that support urban agriculture activities. When asked, “Does Chicago have an urban agriculture policy?” four out of six interviewees – farmers, planners, and non-profit leaders – responded in the affirmative. No one cited a specific policy and all four referenced the zoning ordinance. The Executive Director of a non-profit land

⁷“Farmers for Chicago” is ongoing, with the most recent class accepted in January 2016 into a three year program. In September 2016, the city was awarded a \$1 million U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Innovation grant for a proposal entitled “Growing for Chicago”. Grant money will fund a full time urban agriculture coordinator, recruit and train new farmers, prepare land and spur matching grants.

trust explained, “Well, they passed the ordinance last year” (Chicago Civil Society Representative One, August 29, 2013). The Executive Director of a local non-profit affirmed, “I would say it does [have an urban agriculture policy]. The zoning amendment certainly was helpful” (Chicago Civil Society Representative Two, August 28, 2013). One municipal staff member tried to clarify, “We have a plan that talks about urban agriculture as a policy. [There is] policy codified in the zoning code [...] the policy is expressed in several ways” (Chicago Government Representative One, October 17, 2013). Finally, a telling response from a city planner exemplifies a general sense of confusion: “I would [say so], although I don’t know that I could point to it because of the way the City works. They have an urban agriculture district in their zoning [...] and they are moving forward on a programmatic side to actually do things on the ground [...] They would say they have a policy, but they can’t say ‘this’ is where it is” (Chicago Government Representative Two, August 28, 2013).

The Executive Director for a statewide organization did not believe the City of Chicago has an urban agriculture policy, but suggested it is moving towards a broad sustainability policy of which urban agriculture would be one component (Chicago Civil Society Representative Three, August 29, 2013).

When specifically asked how the framework of policy was oriented, only two interviews suggested it was economic. Moreover, there was no direct relationship between the policy framework and the policy tools respondents recognized. Of the two respondents who indicated the policy orientation was economic, one suggested urban design was the most appropriate tool category and the other listed all four tools (legal, economic, communicative and educational and urban design). They did recognize that money was spent on economic hubs for urban agriculture through non-profit training.

In detailing the benefits of urban agriculture in the city, two non-profit leaders reflected the Mayor’s economic objectives, stating local urban agriculture initiatives have “entered into the realm of job training more than ever before” (Chicago Civil Society Rep. One, 2013).

“[Urban agriculture is a] catalyst for change in lower income communities. [By] taking vacant lots [and] turning them into productive space [...] economic development and job creation [result and there is a] momentum through urban agriculture not just urban farms, [but for] other businesses that come out of it [...] Ten urban farms will yield fifty jobs but if you add a food hub, restaurants, cafes [...] there will be hundreds of jobs” (Chicago Civil Society Rep. Three, 2013)

Others discussed community redevelopment and revitalization, local food production, improved health consciousness, and issues of social and racial justice.

From the perspective of a city planner, the city’s “primary angle is health” (Chicago Civil Society Rep. Two, 2013). While there is “a community development component, we’re not talking about a lot of jobs, but something that people can engage in locally” only to reinforce that, “health is the umbrella under which food fits” (Chicago Civil Society Rep. Two, 2013).

The interviews reflect a misunderstanding of (1) what constitutes a policy, (2) whether or not the City of Chicago has an urban agriculture policy and (3) the orientation of the normative framework of the policy. The extent to which the Mayor’s Office influences programming across the myriad departments involved in urban agriculture is uncertain. Though some interviews reinforced an economic normative frame, many of the organizations active in urban agriculture were independently focused on economic growth or continue to work toward other goals while acknowledging new expectations of urban agriculture.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

The city’s contemporary engagement with urban agriculture began when the Operations and Environment Committee of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board issued a resolution authorizing a community garden program in 2002 (Chamberlain, 2012). Six years later, the Mayor’s Office launched Homegrown Minneapolis in collaboration with the Minneapolis Department of Healthy and Family Support; it has been a model for many other cities around the country. Mayor R.T. Rybak created the initiative to “improve the growth, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management of healthy, locally-grown foods within the city and the surrounding region” (City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department, 2012, p. 51).

In 2009, Minneapolis instituted the “Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth” which updated the comprehensive plan for land use. It is the principal policy document on urban land use and development (City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department, 2009). Adopted in 2011, the “Urban agriculture policy plan: A land use and development plan for a healthy, sustainable local food system” is a subcomponent of the comprehensive plan. Prepared by the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department, the urban agriculture policy plan references and supports recommendations from the 2009 Homegrown report while setting a broader agenda “encouraging ecological sustainability” (City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department, 2012).

While couched in a sustainability framework – “A healthy community is a sustainable community, and planning and zoning provide us with opportunities to

create a healthier population and more sustainable environment” – the emphasis is not consistent across municipal departments ([City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department, 2012](#), p. 4). Seven recommendations from the first Homegrown Minneapolis report relate to urban agriculture; of these the principle recommendation that spurred the adoption of the urban agriculture policy plan focused on local food production. Not one of the seven recommendations included language on ecological sustainability. The urban agriculture policy plan puts forth eight unranked goals, of these, one is to “encourage ecological sustainability”. Others include a range of targets from increased local food production to innovation in design ([City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department, 2012](#)).

Following a 2012 case study on the Homegrown program by the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, the program coordinator for Homegrown Minneapolis was repositioned from the Health Department to the Minneapolis Sustainability Office ([Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, 2012](#))⁸. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) recently published an urban agriculture activity plan which aims to “further sustainability as a core value and promote the vision and goals of the MPRB Comprehensive Plan” ([Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 2013](#), p. 1). The action plan references the Homegrown program and the urban agriculture policy plan.

When asked if Minneapolis has an urban agriculture policy, a representative for Homegrown Minneapolis referenced a text amendment to the zoning code. She emphasized the interest in health (a social framework) and described the community benefits as, “a way for families to reengage and connect” (Minneapolis Government Representative, October 21, 2013). In thinking ahead to the impact urban agriculture may have on the city, she underscored sustainability, explaining that urban agriculture:

“Build[s] on local policy that was already there – the city has been working on sustainability since the seventies and

⁸ At the time of publication, Homegrown Minneapolis remains under the Minneapolis Sustainability Office. A review of the 2015 program includes a “food system snapshot” that highlights the 275 community gardens and 15 urban farms within the city, along with 265 chicken coops and 83 beekeepers. The city introduced new policies to lease city-owned lots for market gardens and urban farming along with 50 lots for community gardens. They have taken a number of additional initiatives to support urban agriculture, from mapping vacant parcels to limiting pesticide use and providing compost to a number of gardens. The program was recognized by Food Trust and as a finalist for the Environmental Initiative Food Stewardship award.

urban agriculture has added another dimension to that local capacity... [it] help[s] people look at how they can grow food and preserve it... The city just made more land available [...] it has raised the awareness about where food comes from”

The important distinction between urban agriculture activity and urban agriculture policy merits reinforcing. While the comment above describes several urban agriculture activities, the farmers interviewed offered contrasting views on whether or not Minneapolis has an urban agriculture policy. When prompted to label the policy orientation, both farmers discussed “social change”. One admitted not to know and reflected, “A lot of how it’s being packaged is social, but I think a lot of the vision behind the key policy-makers pushing it forward is economic. So I’d say economic, but packaged as social” (Minneapolis Farmer One, March 20, 2014). A second listed the steps that the city has taken towards creating a policy, introducing zoning changes and establishing the Homegrown Minneapolis Board. He was unaware of a long-term plan or development policy and characterized the city’s current position as, “devoid of risk. It’s politically safe [...] allowing something is very different than embracing something and promoting it [...] The city allowing agriculture to happen is a minor thing [...] So if it’s the beginning of a conversation, then great. If it stops at zoning, it doesn’t seem very wide-reaching” (Minneapolis Farmer Two, March 27, 2014). The farmer noted the push and pull between grassroots activity and city engagement, alluding to a pattern of reactivity that is hard to disentangle in answering the knotty question of where policy originates.

Participant interviews reflect a disconnect between the ecological frame claimed in municipal documents and the city’s actual engagement in urban agriculture. Most of the recent municipal initiatives to support urban agriculture in Minneapolis occurred under the umbrella of Homegrown Minneapolis, which is not an urban agriculture policy. The portfolio of initiatives (previously staffed by a consultant) recently spread beyond the Health Department, most significantly, to the Office of Sustainability and the Park and Recreation Board. This repositioning may signal a shift in leadership, or a reinforcement of the ecological framework even in the absence of a specific urban agriculture policy.

Conclusion

In an effort to understand the crafting of innovative municipal policy, this research explores both the process of norm generation and its successful, or failed, establishment. Previous scholarship has highlighted examples of clear frames advancing environmental issues ([Miller, 2000](#)). Though each case study validates the hypothesized normative framework – social, economic or ecological –

intended by the municipality, not one demonstrates a clearly articulated and well-known policy orientation. None of the three cities, despite supporting urban agriculture in various forms, have a definitive urban agriculture policy in which an overarching normative frame guides regulation and activity.

Through secondary research and interviews with policy-makers, practitioners, and advocates, it is clear that each city has attempted to advance a guiding narrative. However, these narratives and the normative frames they encompass are not strategically integrated into municipal policies, plans and programs that effect urban agriculture. At times, a normative framework appears to reflect existing activity; in others, a targeted municipal message has spurred specific action and investment. The construction of the frame may be both reactive and provocative.

Despite the hypothesis that a clear normative framework would be advantageous, the reality is all three cities support urban agriculture through interrelated policies and programs. Designing an urban agriculture policy requires a sophisticated understanding of its numerous spheres of influence; the multidisciplinary nature of the activity is an obstacle to the creation of a single policy orientation. Facilitating urban agriculture through a broad range of regulations and activities, rather than under a single comprehensive policy, is not evidence of a lack of understanding, though it may engender confusion among stakeholders. Indeed, in case studies where the municipal urban agriculture policy was principally focused on one normative framework, stakeholders generally did not recognize the frame, or the programs through which it was implemented. Yet, innovation continues and urban agriculture is thriving.

The case study interviews reveal a general perplexity among stakeholders about the state of policy in their cities. This uncertainty suggests a disconnect between municipal engagement and grassroots activity. Even where the municipality is investing in urban agriculture activities, the city's role is not well recognized by local stakeholders. The case studies neither affirm a direct relationship between municipal norms and on-the-ground activity, nor do they negate it.

While each of the case studies cities operate under a mayor-council system, their organizational structures differ. Urban agriculture is addressed in several municipal offices and departments, including the Office of the Mayor, Office of Sustainability, Department of Planning, Department of Public Health, the Department of Economic Development, and through positions shared across departments and agencies. There is still a great deal to learn about the impact of organizational structure on policy-making, and the relationship

between municipal organizational structure and norm generation. This is particularly intriguing when considering a complex issue like urban agriculture that relies on a multi-pronged approach to implementation.

The case studies of Baltimore, Chicago and Minneapolis demonstrate that urban agricultural activities can proliferate in an uncertain policy environment but also raise key questions. Future research is required to assess: how location affects the intensity of normative framing, the relationship between narrative and normative framing, to what extent normative framing is a determinate in policy change, and finally, how implicit vs. explicit frames impact the social innovation system, here examined through new urban agriculture initiatives.

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