

## **Nature and the City; the politics of Community Gardening and Urban Farming**

The closing workshop took place on June 7th 2011. On this day, coordinator dr. Bas van Heur hosted an interesting programme in which all five participating students presented their research projects. Also present were Peter Kupperts (Cradle 2 Cradle network Province of Limburg), José Morales Belmar (Province of Limburg) and Transition Towns Maastricht. Maarten Roels kicked off the day with a talk on agro-ecology and elaborated on an exciting case in Brussels where his organisation 'Les Début des Haricots' initiated a so-called 'Groupement d'Achat Solidaire à l'Agriculture Paysanne' (GASAP), a system for community supported agriculture that now successfully functions without funding and links 14 autonomous groups of inhabitants of Brussels to local farmers. The purpose is to give these citizens access to fresh local food in exchange for a monthly membership-fee. The current individual member count is 3000; a sustainable success story indeed!

After this talk all five students were challenged to present their research in a limited time of 10 minutes.

### **Limited outreach and public relation practices of alternative food initiatives.**

Katharina Kolmans compared two alternative food initiatives: Landbouwbelaag in Maastricht and the Regionalmarke Eifel. Landbouwbelaag, a small volunteer-run initiative in a squatted factory. Every week biological dinners are organised and produce from the garden is sold at cost price. Regionalmarke Eifel is a mark for products from the Eifel region, sold at the producers farm or in small shop-in-shops in the Eifel. Katharina concluded that both, for various reasons, have a limited visibility, as is more often the case with alternative food initiatives. On the other hand, both have a limited scope by default; Landbouwbelaag has only space for so much people in their weekly restaurant and Regionalmarke Eifel wants to keep their products in the high price range because they want to keep the brand exclusive.

Katharina concludes that instead of making these small alternative food initiatives more visible, the rise of more of these small initiatives should be encouraged to rise so more consumers can be reached by a multitude of initiatives.

### **Community supported agriculture: linking rural producers and urban consumers.**

Janna Kloppe conducted an interesting research into community supported agriculture (CSA) in Germany, focussing on two farms that get circa 50% of their income from CSA. Janna's findings were very positive. Both for the farmers and the members this system has a lot of advantages such as transparency, better contact between producer and consumer, a more honest price for the produce, better access to fresh products, ... The downside of the concept is that a small farm can only take on so much members, which means that for instance one farm can only 'feed' 200 individuals, which leads us to think how much farms, or how much land is needed to feed a whole city.

### **Fairtrade Town: A sustainable and inclusive network on a global scale?**

Nora Grosse presented her research on Fairtrade Towns; cities all around the world that have committed themselves to Fairtrade. Nora looked into Dutch city Groningen as a case study. This

lead to a two sided conclusion; On the one hand the Fairtrade Towns have a positive side: schools, offices, horeca and supermarkets offer more and more Fairtrade products thus raising more than average awareness on Fairtrade. On the other hand: whereas the city council is extremely active in this project, the local population doesn't seem to be too much involved, despite 'Fairtrade events' etc. organized by the council. This raises the question on how the local community could be more actively involved in the project. Also, Fairtrade Towns also touch upon the local versus global issue; whereas the tendency seems to be that more and more people are 'going local' for their food, Fairtrade Towns go global.

### **Community gardens in London as a model for other cities?**

Two of the five students dived into the world of community gardening. They both picked a specific case for their research. Aisha Berg travelled to London to research the various flourishing community gardening initiatives that have popped-up in big numbers in London lately. Though it all seemed a very positive story at first, Aisha found that without exception, all gardens experience great difficulty finding funding. They are not council funded and all are in a constant struggle to collect enough money to keep the garden running. Also, due to lack of space, the aspect of gardening in most cases is limited to 'getting your hands dirty'; not many gardeners have enough space to grow their own vegetables, let alone that the gardens can sell the produce to generate some extra funding. Aisha stretched that therefore the social aspect as well as the 'green' space that the community gardens provides rather than the economical aspect is what makes these gardens into the success that they are.

### **Nomadic green, innovative urban agriculture: combining culture and the market.**

Svenja Ksoll looked into the Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin, a 'mobile garden' that sprouted in 2009 on a wasteland in Kreuzberg. Prinzessinnengarten was initiated by two 'non-gardeners'; a film maker and a historian. The place where their garden is located had been vacant for over 50 years and the initiators obtained a rental contract that needs to be renewed every year. The entire garden is mobile, everything is grown in crates, flourbags and tetrapacks, which enables the gardeners to pick up the garden at any moment if necessary and land at a new spot, which they sometimes do. This way, even contaminated ground is no obstacle for this mobile garden. Other than in London, the Prinzessinnengarten has enough harvest to sell this or use it in their own mobile restaurant. However, after two years of hard work, the managers of the garden still get no income from the garden. But, as Svenja pointed out, this is not uncommon for any two-year old initiative. Despite the fact that the gardens mentioned in both researches are not economically sustainable and get no funding from the council, in London as well as in Berlin the community gardens are seen as such a positive thing that the local government will go out of their way to maintain the gardens.

In the coming weeks, the papers of all five students will be finished and if possible can be viewed on this page.

Both Katharina Kolmans and Janna Kloppe will contribute to the food case study of the [Sustainable Summer School](#).