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EDITORIAL

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Among the basic essentials for life — air, water, shelter and food — planners have traditionally addressed them all with the conspicuous exception of food. This was the 'puzzling omission' that provoked the American Planning Association (APA) to produce its seminal *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning* in 2007, a belated attempt to make amends for the fact that the planning community, academics and professionals alike, had signally failed to engage with the food system (APA, 2007).

Urban planners might justify this 'puzzling omission' by claiming that the food system is largely a *rural* issue and therefore beyond the scope of the urban planning agenda. But there are two reasons as to why this argument fails to provide a convincing explanation.

Firstly, the multifunctional character of the food system means that it has profound effects on a host of other sectors — including public health, social justice, energy, water, land, transport and economic development — and these are all sectors in which planners are deemed to have a legitimate interest.

Secondly, the notion that food production is an exclusively rural activity fails to appreciate the significance of *urban agriculture*, an activity that never disappeared in the hungry cities of the global south and one which is re-appearing in the more sustainable cities of the global north, where urban designers are re-imagining 'the city as a farm' (Viljoen, 2005).

Whatever the reasons for it, this 'puzzling omission' is now a matter of historical interest only because, for the foreseeable future, food planning looks set to become an important and legitimate part of the planning agenda in developed and developing countries alike. Planners now find themselves addressing food policy for one very simple reason: their political masters have been forced to treat food policy more seriously because of the *new food equation* (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). The new food equation

refers to a number of new and highly complex developments, the most important of which are the following:

1. *The food price surge of 2007–08*, when global wheat prices nearly doubled and rice prices nearly tripled, forcing hitherto secure social classes into food insecurity, a condition which already afflicts some 2 billion people;
2. *Food security has become a national security issue* after the food price surge triggered food riots in more than sixty countries around the world, forcing the G8 leaders to convene their first ever food summit in 2009;
3. *Climate change effects*, in the form of water and heat stress, damaged eco-systems and rising sea-levels for example, are expected to be worse in the poorest countries, the very countries that have done least to cause the problem of global warming;
4. *Land conflicts are escalating* as rich but food-stressed countries (like Saudi Arabia and South Korea) seek to buy up fertile land in Africa and Asia to ensure their own food security, fuelling charges of a new colonialism;
5. *Rapid urbanisation* means that cities are becoming more conscious about how they feed themselves because, given their sensitivity to food shortages, they are the most politically combustible areas in every country (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010).

The advent of the new food equation, together with the inspiring precedent of the APA, persuaded the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) to establish a new thematic group — the *Sustainable Food Planning Group* — to discuss the implications of food planning for theory, policy and practice. The inaugural conference of the *Sustainable Food Planning Group* was held in October 2009, in the Dutch city of Almere, where Wageningen University was the local host.

One of the key issues debated at the Almere conference — an issue that is likely to be a hardy perennial of the food planning debate everywhere — concerned a very basic question, namely: who are the food planners? One answer was that food planners are professionals who are striving to integrate food policy into the mainstream planning agenda. However, this definition failed to command widespread support at Almere, where the vast majority of participants preferred a broader, more inclusive definition of food planners as anyone who is working in, or engaged with, the food system with the aim of rendering it more sustainable with respect to its social, economic and ecological effects.

The 'food planning community', in other words, is a profoundly diverse and multi-dimensional community, composed as it is of every profession which has a food-related interest, as well as NGOs that focus on social justice, public health, food security and ecological causes, all of whom are striving to make food policy-making a more open and democratic process (Lang *et al.*, 2009).

Once confined to a narrow range of producer interests — like agri-business, farmers and the state — food policy is slowly but surely being prised open by food planners in the broadest sense of the term. Although people come to food planning from a bewildering array of backgrounds, straddling professional associations, consumer protection groups and citizen-based organizations, it appears that public health, social justice and ecological integrity are the principal concerns of the new food planners. Food policy, in other words, naturally segues into these wider causes because food has a unique status in our lives: far from being just another 'industry', like autos, steel or software, the agri-food sector is

unique because we ingest its products. For this reason the agri-food sector is critically important to human health and well being and this is why it is *intrinsically* significant to human functioning rather than merely instrumentally significant (Sen, 1999).

It is one thing to recognise the significance of food to health and well being, especially in crowded urban planning agendas, but it is another thing to give it political effect. To overcome this problem, smart food planners in cities as diverse as Toronto, Amsterdam and Kampala have woven a food policy dimension into existing urban plans (for health, education, transport and climate change for example) to illustrate how it can help city governments to fashion more sustainable communities. Among other things, this strategy requires urban planners to reach out to, and build alliances with, like-minded people in the city, not just in local government but in local civil society too.

Such alliances could help the food planning movement to connect to some of the most important campaigns underway in cities today, not least the World Health Organization's *Healthy Cities* programme, which addresses a set of core themes every five years. The overarching goal of Phase V of the programme (2009–2013) is health equity in all local policies and this is being addressed through three core themes: (i) caring and supportive environments (ii) healthy living and (iii) healthy urban design. As a global movement promoted in all six WHO regions, *Healthy Cities* provides an ideal opportunity to get city governments all over the world to include a food policy dimension in their urban plans, especially if they want to secure the imprimatur of 'healthy city' status.

Though they may not be aware of it, urban planners are arguably the key players in the campaign for healthy cities because modern diseases like obesity will be solved not by the medical profession, which is largely geared to treating illness rather than promoting health. On the contrary, long term solutions to diseases like obesity are more likely to be found in health-promoting *planning* measures — such more sustainable urban environments where people feel safe to walk, run and cycle; public spaces where healthy food is readily accessible and affordable by everyone, especially in poor neighbourhoods; and where citizens are actively involved in shaping their built environment. In short, the healthy city agenda creates two important opportunities: (i) it gives urban planners the chance to play a more innovative role in nurturing sustainable cities and (ii) it creates political space for the broader food planning community to put food on the policy agendas of *every* department in the municipal government, a message that has been addressed to urban leaders in developing countries for more than a decade (FAO, 2000).

Weaving food into local planning policy is well underway in North America and Europe, so much so that food planning in its broadest sense is arguably one of the most important social movements of the early twenty-first century in the global north. The multifunctional character of food means that it connects with, and lends itself to, a wide range of community campaigns: indeed, such is the *convening power* of food that Rob Hopkins, the founder of the Transition Towns movement, advises new campaigners to focus their efforts on local food issues if they want to garner interest and mobilise support.

Another sign of the popular resonance of food planning is the growth of Food Policy Councils in North America, where there are now more than 100 in various cities and counties. The APA documented the spread of food planning in the US in a special issue of its monthly magazine, *Planning*, which was devoted to 'The Food Factor' (APA, 2009). To give a flavour of the food planning movement at a local level it is worth highlighting the following three examples:

- Baltimore: in the first update to its comprehensive master plan in 45 years, city planners discovered that residents were concerned about poor access to healthy, affordable food, triggering a process that eventually led the city to adopt the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, which explicitly states the need for a food system that supports public health, quality of life and environmental stewardship. Food outlet locations have become an important part of the urban planning agenda;
- King County, Washington: the comprehensive plan update adopted in King County in 2008 is thought to be one of the few plans in the US that systematically addresses food system issues. Though not a traditional planning theme, the plan says that food is as important to health and well being as air and water and therefore a food dimension has been woven into the other planning policies;
- Marin County, California: in 2007 Marin County adopted an innovative countywide plan for sustainability, one of the key elements of which was agriculture and food, which addresses not only the preservation of agricultural lands and resources, but many other facets of the food system, such as sustainable farming practices and community food security (Hodgson, 2009).

To these food planning pioneers in the US we might add New York and San Francisco: the former is trying to make healthy food accessible to its poorest neighbourhoods and to the whole city through its school lunch programme; while the latter has announced a sustainable food strategy for the city (and its regional hinterland) that is perhaps the most ambitious of its kind anywhere in North America (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010).

In Europe, too, the food planning movement is beginning to register its presence. While small municipalities have been the real pioneers in getting high quality food into schools and hospitals for example, the larger city authorities have recently produced urban food strategies under the banners of public health, social justice or sustainability. Two of the most prominent examples are London, which launched a sustainable food strategy in 2006, and Amsterdam, where the food strategy has multiple objectives, one of which is to help the city to re-connect to its regional hinterland for both economic and ecological reasons.

However, the greatest food planning challenges are to be found in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where least progress has been made in combating the problem of chronic hunger (IFPRI, 2009). Significantly, the locus of the problem is changing fast: with the burgeoning of African cities, we are now witnessing the urbanization of poverty and hunger to such a degree that cities will increasingly be in the forefront of the food planning challenge. Paradoxically, urban planners in Africa have been part of the problem of food insecurity because, until recently, they saw it as their professional duty to rid the city of urban agriculture. The rationale for ridding the city of urban farmers and street food vendors varied from country to country, but it was often animated by a combination of sound concerns about public health and less than sound notions of urban modernity. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of the food planning community in certain cities, especially Dar es Salaam and Kampala, urban planners are now trying to integrate local food production into the fabric of the city, helping the African city to foster rather than frustrate urban food security.

The growth of the food planning movement in developed and developing countries has undoubtedly helped to humanise and localise the food system, not least by stressing such quality control mechanisms as provenance, traceability and trust, all of which have been

debased by the 'placeless landscapes' of the agri-business sector (Morgan *et al.*, 2006). But however laudable it may seem, localisation creates two big political problems for the food planning community.

The first concerns the *localism* of the movement. If local focus is one of the strengths of the food planning community, it is also one of its weaknesses because, in terms of the politics of power, highly localised campaigns cannot leverage political support at national level as their influence is too fragmented and thus too diffuse to register. To overcome this problem, local food planning movements would need to orchestrate themselves in such a way as to secure the twin benefits of a federal organization — that is to say, being *small* enough to control locally yet being part of something *big* enough to make a difference beyond the locality (Morgan *et al.*, 2006).

The second concerns the elision of local food with sustainable food, a problem that some critics have labelled 'the local trap' (Born & Purcell, 2006). In highly localized narratives, the reasoning tends to run as follows: locally produced food is the most ecologically sustainable because it has lower food miles and the latter are assumed to be an index of a product's carbon footprint. The truth of the matter, however, is that product lifecycle analysis is the only rigorous way to measure the carbon footprint of a product, and transport is just one factor in the total carbon count. If carbon is the metric of sustainability, then local food may not be as 'sustainable' as food imported from afar. Being a more capacious concept than some green activists would have us believe, however, sustainability cannot be reduced to a carbon metric because it has social and economic as well as environmental dimensions. Indeed, the social justice dimension of sustainability suggests that our greatest moral obligation today is to the poor and hungry of the world, which is why globally-sourced fairly traded produce should be treated as a legitimate component of a sustainable food system. What this means is that the food planning movement needs to embrace a *cosmopolitan* conception of sustainability in which locally-produced seasonal food and fairly traded global food are given parity of esteem, otherwise this new social movement could degenerate into a parochial form of green localism (Morgan, 2010).

Many of the above arguments were debated at the *Feeding the City* conference which was held in Cardiff University in 2008, where some of the papers in this special issue were originally presented. As the conference convenor, I was keen to get a cosmopolitan perspective on the emerging food planning phenomenon, which is exactly what the contributors to this volume have achieved, with papers exploring recent developments in North America, Europe, Latin America and Africa.

Kami Pothukuchi opens this special issue with a panoramic paper on the food planning movement in the US, exploring among other things the APA's historic food policy guide. One of the notable features of her analysis is how American food planners have sought to overcome the limitations of localism noted above through the creation of a national network, the Community Food Security Coalition, which gives the local food movement some national heft. Kami Pothukuchi is ideally placed to provide this overview of the food planning movement in the US because, along with Jerry Kaufman, she was one of the academic pioneers of the movement.[1]

With Han Wiskerke's paper the focus shifts to the European food planning experience. In another panoramic overview he shows how the local food planning movement emerged as part of a critical reaction to the noxious effects of the industrial food system. Part of this reaction has been led by more health conscious public procurement policies and by new urban food strategies in pioneering cities like Utrecht and Amsterdam. One of the most

instructive points to emerge from this analysis is that each urban food strategy has its own unique, path-dependent history as evidenced by the fact that in Utrecht the food strategy emerged from a bottom-up process in civil society, while in Amsterdam it was much more of a top-down initiative from the office of the deputy mayor.

It is difficult to think of a city anywhere in the world that has done more for urban food security than the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte; so much so that some food policy experts have dubbed it 'the city that ended hunger'. And no one has done more to critically explore these achievements than Cecilia Rocha, who was born and bred in Belo and who now directs the Center for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson University. In a joint paper, Cecilia Rocha and Lara Lessa show that Belo Horizonte had been implementing urban food security policies for a decade by the time that London launched its first food strategy in 2006. Of the many inspiring lessons of the Belo experience one lesson stands out above all others, which is that *politics matters*. Although it could draw on supportive federal policies, especially the *Fome Zero* framework, the political commitment of the city government was the most important ingredient in the recipe for urban food security in this case.

If Belo is the food policy pioneer in Brazil, the same can be said of Toronto in Canada. Indeed, Toronto's influence actually extends beyond the Canadian border because many of the recently formed Food Policy Councils in the US have been inspired by the example of the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC), which was created in 1990. In her engaging analysis, Alison Blay-Palmer shows that the TFPC was itself inspired by the example of the London Food Commission, a dynamic food policy agency which was at that time headed by Tim Lang, a talented food campaigner who later became the first food policy professor in the UK. What emerges from her analysis is that the success of the TFPC owes a lot to talented food policy activists like Wayne Roberts, the current director, who are experts at building food policy alliances with organizations in and beyond the city government. Although she acknowledges the very real achievements of the TFPC, Blay-Palmer reaches the unequivocal conclusion that it cannot be expected to achieve much more when its financial and human resources are so slender. A 'can-do' ethos, in other words, is not enough.

Ben Reynolds offers an NGO perspective on the challenge of food planning issues in London and he does so from the perspective of Sustain, one of the most respected food policy campaign groups in the UK. As a world city London has some of the finest restaurants in the world, but it also has some glaring health inequalities, which was one of the reasons why Ken Livingstone, the London mayor at the time, launched the first ever food strategy for the city in 2006. The case of the London food strategy raises issues that bedevil cities all over the world. For example, how do we secure political continuity for a strategy when the mayor that launched it is removed from office? And how does a city government exert influence over a food system that is largely in the hands of multinational companies? Ben Reynolds takes a largely optimistic view of the London food strategy, highlighting the many positive initiatives that are underway in the capital. However, time alone will tell whether the new mayor, Boris Johnson, is seriously committed to delivering a strategy designed by his predecessor.

The final paper by Roberta Sonnino departs from the case study approach common to most of the other papers in this volume. It aims to take a wider perspective on the challenge of food planning by exploring urban food strategies in developed and developing countries of the world, with a particular focus on *public* food provisioning. At least two important messages can be distilled from this reflective and wide-ranging analysis concerning urban

food strategy and urban food research. On the strategy front, she argues that cities, which are now in the forefront of the food planning movement, need to develop better knowledge exchange mechanisms to explore joint solutions to common problems and to disseminate good practice. On the research front, she argues that researchers need to engage in more action-based research in collaboration with the worlds of policy and practice to explore the role that cities can play in promoting more sustainable food systems.

Taken together, the six papers in this volume help us to better understand the dynamics of the food planning movement, arguably one of the most important social movements in the world today notwithstanding its bewildering diversity. Feeding the city in a sustainable fashion — that is to say, in way that is economically efficient, socially just and ecologically sound — is one of the quintessential challenges of the twenty-first century and it will not be met without a greater political commitment to urban food planning and a bolder vision for the city.

One of the most compelling books to have appeared on the city in recent years is *Hungry City*, in which Carolyn Steel uses food as a prism through which to explore (and change) the world in and beyond the city. One of its key conclusions is that we have failed to see the potential of food planning because food is 'too big to see'. However, when viewed laterally, she says 'it emerges as something with phenomenal power to transform not just landscapes, but political structures, public spaces, social relationships, cities' (Steel, 2008:307). The greatest obstacles to seeing in bigger, bolder and more creative ways are the '*mind-forg'd manacles*' of which William Blake spoke when he lamented how conventional thinking and unimaginative thought shackled the human mind.[2]

Over 100 years before *Hungry City*, another visionary book appeared called *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, which argued among other things that 'the combination of town and country is not only healthful, but economic' (Howard, 1946:61) because the co-location of producers and consumers of food would yield multiple benefits for both and do much to repair the debilitating urban-rural divide. Though separated by more than a century, each of these inspiring books champions a bold vision of food planning in a context where society and nature can interact and co-evolve in a truly ecological fashion, a vision that is indispensable to a food planning movement that aspires to be locally-embedded *and* globally-attuned.

Notes

1. It was most fitting that Professor Jerry Kaufman gave the opening keynote address at the inaugural conference of the Sustainable Food Planning Group in Almere in 2009, where he explored the growth of the food planning movement in the US and drew some useful lessons for food planners in Europe.
2. It was more than a coincidence that the vehicle for Blake's evocative expression was a poem called *London*, which was written in 1792 as a critique of the wretched human conditions in the city. The celebrated expression appears in the second verse: 'In every cry of every Man/In every Infant's cry of fear/In every voice, in every ban/The mind-forg'd manacles I hear'.

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