

THE ROLE OF URBAN FOOD INITIATIVES IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN CITIES

SHOWCASING THREE URBAN FOOD INITIATIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA



Urban food initiatives, such as urban food gardens, have been shown to provide various benefits besides their contribution to food security, including a range of economic and ecological benefits. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the benefits of urban food initiatives can extend beyond this, by playing a potentially important role in social transformation in cities. We found this to be the case in three local food initiatives located in the Western Cape of South Africa, namely The Company's Garden and Oranjezicht City Farm in Cape Town, and Babylonstoren Farm in the Cape Winelands District.

Did you know?

Food is a critically important urban issue that affects the local economy, the environment, public health, and the quality of neighbourhoods, and has the potential to positively address socio-ecological challenges in cities.

The Western Cape, since colonial times, has been a food and fruit-growing area. At the same time, historical social segregation policies and patterns of exclusion have shaped the social, economic, spatial and agricultural history of the province. In a post-Apartheid era, and despite strategies to facilitate social integration, especially in urban environments, South African cities, including Cape Town, are still challenged by the legacy of social segregation and inequality. This signals the need for innovative mechanisms that strive to build and restore societal cohesion.

The three urban food initiatives mentioned above are local, small-scale ventures that evolved in the absence of formal urban policy requirements. These urban food initiatives are managed so as to create and offer wide ranging and multiple benefits and by doing so, addressing a number of urban and peri-urban sustainability challenges including: food security, promoting social cohesion in socially fragmented urban societies, supporting knowledge sharing and education and creating opportunities for recreational benefits. They offer benefits beyond



food security and use food growing as a basis to provide an expanded range of benefits to society. The three urban food initiatives considered here were designed to encourage social transformation by incorporating change into how they define their identities and key competencies and in how they network and build capacity while providing benefits. They offer a space for people to integrate and socialise with various other people – people of varying age, gender, race and economic backgrounds. Through the provision of various food products, these initiatives act as a catalyst to build social cohesion across communities, bring people together, create networks and social capital, develop skills and livelihood opportunities for the unemployed, and educate residents about food, nutrition and well-being. The food-based initiatives discussed here provide valuable lessons about the potential of social transformation and the creation of opportunities for localised and potentially expanded urban resilience. Although such initiatives cannot be expected to solve all urban problems, they should be considered by city governments as partial solutions to be implemented among a suite of intervention options.

The benefits of urban food initiatives

- They mobilise people and create opportunities for social connectedness and the formation of social capital, such as trust, exchanges for mutual benefit and taking collective action on matters of shared concern, especially in historically segregated cities.
- They draw large numbers of visitors, volunteers and scholars who enjoy diverse benefits and so contribute to food education and learning.
- These initiatives are vibrant and continually seek novel and diverse ways to engage and develop communities and to support urban livelihoods, learning and social cohesion.
- Each initiative shows commitment to enhance the quality of life of local residents and are driven by the ideological commitment, values and culture of societal upliftment.
- They provide spaces where new skills and actionable knowledge can be shared and co-developed.
- They support improved resilience of urban and peri-urban social-ecological systems by maintaining diversity in species (i.e. food/crop cultivars), innovation and knowledge and by maintaining connectivity with each other, and through shared training and connections with other city food initiatives and gardens.
- They contribute to the addition and maintenance of open spaces, such as farms, and large gardens in urban and peri-urban settings and create opportunities for people to increase their physical activity and contribute to enhanced mental health through garden therapy.
- They provide safe and secure spaces for residents to interact, they promote enjoyment of public open space and a sense of well-being and allow for the opportunity to reconnect with nature in an urban setting.

The Company's Garden is the oldest garden in South Africa and was first planted in the 1650s. The purpose of the Company's Garden is not only to provide a source of food, but also to serve as a point of peace within a busy urban metropolis, an aesthetic and leisure resource, a place of botanical interest, and a food educational resource.



Babylonstoren is a private historic Cape Dutch farm, dating back to 1692. The purpose of the Babylonstoren gardens is to showcase a selection of edible plant varieties and to create opportunities for sharing.

The Oranjezicht City Farm (OZCF), established in 2012, is a neighbourhood organic gardening project which forms part of the South African Food and Farming Trust. 'Building community' is a fundamental motivation for the OZCF and encouraging people to change the way they think about food and the community.

