

The urban-rural dynamics

towards an integrated territorial governance

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Renewal of urban - rural relationships: the key role of food

Pim Vermeulen (Amsterdam) 20 minute speech

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

I am from Amsterdam and my name is Pim Vermeulen. I am a senior planning officer of the city of Amsterdam and I am very grateful for the opportunity to present our project, the Amsterdam Food Strategy, to you - many thanks!

Why did we develop a food strategy? I will first zoom in on some local and regional problems and then explore their relationship to issues and policies in the wider European context.

What you see on this map is Amsterdam amidst its surrounding agricultural landscapes. These landscapes are very important for the people in Amsterdam. We want to preserve their historic qualities. But we are not in authority over them. These areas and the farmers who live there fall under the authority of neighbouring communities. That is one problem we have.

A related problem is one that we share with all major cities in the world. It is quite likely you had some kind of breakfast this morning. We all have to eat. But this daily business of eating has a lot of consequences. Much of our food is imported from elsewhere, often from very remote parts of the world. All of it has to be transported into the city. We hardly consume regional products that are grown by our neighbouring farmers. Food thus has considerable environmental impacts that also affect the health of our citizens.

The diagram here illustrates this.

As regards *environmental* aspects – the Amsterdam ecological footprint shows that almost 40% of the environmental impact is due to food in one way or another. Dairy products count for 9%, meat for 6% and other foods for 24%, transport not included.

As regards emissions, however:

According to a recent study of the FAO (Food and agriculture Organization of the UN) meat production, including storage and transport, is responsible for 18 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions. If people can be persuaded to change their eating habits: consume less meat and more carbon-friendly greens, that would considerably reduce those figures.

Clearly this is an incentive for Amsterdam to try and reduce the impact of the Food sector and to work on more sustainable food chains.

And what about **health** aspects? The sheet shows you some figures:

- 70 % of our health problems are food-related; and
- 45 % of the people in Amsterdam are overweight; 14 % of those are serious cases, often children and young people.

In the case of the children I probably need to tell you that in Amsterdam we lack the instrument of school meals. If children come to school without any breakfast they may not eat properly all day and live on unhealthy, industrially-produced, fattening canteen foods. These photographs of the contents of random school satchels illustrate that nowadays children regularly do not bring any lunch to school.

See: No lunch in the school sacks!

¶ So, considering these problems in the various sections of public and private life and ways to solve them, the core idea behind the Amsterdam Food Strategy took shape: **WHY NOT CONNECT THEM?**

We can stimulate urban consumers to buy and eat more natural and local food and we can stimulate the farmers to produce this for the urban market. At the same time we can try and increase consumer awareness about the origin and quality of our daily food. This is the core idea of our project on food, the Amsterdam Food Strategy.

Our focus is upon the following objectives:

- To provide naturally-grown preferably local food for everybody while minimizing environmental impacts
- To promote healthy eating habits, especially among children & young people.
- To achieve a balance between the demand of urban consumers and the supply of food products from the surrounding countryside.

The basis of our approach is the Sustainable Food Chain

Let me explain – since it's probably difficult to read.

This Food Chain consists of all steps, from food production, processing, and distribution to selling, eating and waste disposal. These various dimensions are marked in white frames in the column on the left side.

In yellow, on the top line, you see the range of actors and the key policy themes.

This Table is used as a tool to map out the Amsterdam Food System and to ensure that all issues are covered.

The Amsterdam project has its origin in the PPP: People, Planet, Profit approach. People is about all the actors, Environment is about the impacts and Profit is about the food economy which clearly is also very important. Our region has a long tradition of food-processing that is still alive to-day.

¶ Now let me tell you how we set about organizing the project and the steps we took to get it off the ground

The Amsterdam Food Project started at the bottom, at grassroots level. Since it is mainly about **connecting** the different actors and stakeholders in the field, we personally approached each of them and invited them to come up with ideas, actions and projects. This resulted in a range of interesting alliances.

Let me give you two examples;

- Students from Food Retail Training Institutes cooked meals with children from primary schools and taught them how to use the vegetables they grew themselves in their own school working gardens.
- Local community groups organised local food markets in close collaboration with the city boroughs, organizations like SlowFood and farmers from the surrounding National Landscapes. They also stimulated school visits to neighbouring farms.

Our approach generated lots of similar initiatives and many very interesting ideas. But clearly setting the agenda becomes increasingly complex. It is completely different from the normal top-down procedures. We communicate with hundreds of people and find ways to join forces and define common interests – also across the divides of municipal departments.

To seek priorities we rely on our current policy themes. These are:

- Our **Green Metropolis Plan** to preserve and develop the green areas in and around Amsterdam
- Improving health as laid down in **policy reports on Public Health** and sports/physical exercise;
- Sustainable production and consumption, which is one of the pillars of our **Environmental Policy Plan**.

We fully realize, of course, that we cannot do this by ourselves. So, as I told you before, we preferably work with alliances between public and private actors such as schools and institutions, farmer associations, movements for the promotion of traditional and organic foods, and commercial firms. Explicitly we also want to create ample space for private initiatives.

NOW let me give you some examples of the targets we set ourselves:

- The availability of naturally produced and preferably local food in:
 - all school canteens,
 - municipal canteens, hospitals and care institutions.
 - the tourist industry
 - local day markets.
- Preserving agriculture in the immediate surroundings of the city for the long term.
- Kitchen amenities in new schools.
- Every primary school to have access to a nearby school working garden.
- Simpler regulations for retail and day markets for natural and local food.

- Reduction of food miles, lower emissions as a result of cleaner transport
- School curricula to include life style and eating habits.

To close off the Amsterdam part of my talk I cannot resist showing you a picture of our school working gardens. We are proud of them. Since the 1920s Amsterdam children in the age of 11 or 12 are given their own plot in the school garden. They grow their own vegetables and flowers for one season. This is funded by the municipality. So in comparison with some other capitals, young children in Amsterdam are made more actively aware of the origin of carrots, lettuce, potatoes, sweetcorn and goat milk at an early age.

¶ But this is Brussels – so let us now consider briefly how our project matches with various European agendas.

First, there is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which aims to

- strengthen the economic position of farmers and to
- promote new economic activities and diversification of agriculture.

Second, the Gothenburg Agenda, which

- addresses threats to human health and
- aims to combat climate change,
- to ensure sustainable transport, and to
- manage natural resources so as to stop biodiversity decline;
- prioritizes social inclusion of different ethnic and low income groups.

Third, the Lisbon Strategy, which aims at

- economic & social renewal and growth of jobs,
- marketing the cities and
- free and fair trade.

Fourth and most recent is the Leipzig Charter agreed upon between the major cities of Europe. This Charter states that

- cities should be on the front line for growth, high-quality jobs & innovation; and

- cities should be committed to linking territorial & urban developments.

The Amsterdam Agenda on Food matches remarkably well with these aims. In our vision, working on these targets from the perspective of food opens a whole new world of opportunities. And we are looking for - and have already found - cooperation in all this with other European cities and regions – particularly in the context of PURPLE, the Peri-URban PPlatform Europe.

Next year, in autumn 2008, our Alderman intends to host an International Meeting on Metropolitan food and agricultural strategies. This meeting will be organized in collaboration with - among others - New York, London and Copenhagen (and Alimenterra).

Themes to be addressed in this meeting include:

- First How to build infrastructures that maximise the availability and use of natural and local products in cities.
- Second How to create educational vehicles for children and other consumers to increase awareness of health and its relationship to natural and farmed environments; and
- Third Working out the specific role of metropolitan areas in developing sustainable food systems,

The City Board will take a definitive decision on this meeting in September this year.

Let me conclude by saying that you will all be invited and that I hope this brief talk has sharpened your appetite for more. ..

Thank you very much.

