

Embedding food systems beyond planning: experiences in teaching, research and outreach

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“There is no escape from the food system.”

Tim Lang, keynote speech at Mayors Summit/Signing Ceremony for the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 15 October 2016

Many planners now commonly regard food as a system that requires analyses, policies, interventions, and management just as water, mobility, waste management and other complex systems do. The recent emergence of food systems as an organizing concept can be due to a range of causes. One can highlight particularly the principle that food systems can be planned like other systems – including in the context of cities and regions.

Thus, while it is not yet as established an area of focus as transportation and land use planning, for example, one can make the claim today that food systems planning has found a place at the planning table. This emergence can be traced to the persistent work within planning pedagogy and research by a number of scholars, first in North America, then in Europe and beyond. Building on the efforts of these individuals, the role of professional and pedagogical associations like the American Planning Association and the Association of European Schools of Planning helped disseminate the food systems approach and ultimately provide legitimacy for it.

By now, the food systems approach has been adopted by numerous scholars across the planning academe. Examples of food-systems teaching, writing, research and outreach by planning professors abound. Some courses explicitly focusing on food systems planning are now offered as a regular part of curricula; in other cases,

food-system topics are integrated into courses dealing with more established planning issues, for instance as modules within health planning courses.

By reflecting on our decade-long involvement in this area combined with a series of interviews, this paper seeks to show that the food systems approach (including food systems planning principles) is now entrenched into the research and teaching of some scholars beyond planning schools. Planning scholars and those outside the planning discipline can enrich each other's research methods and areas of inquiry through a cross fertilization of both their research and teaching in food systems.

To this end, examples of such scholars and their work will be introduced. These include: Andre Viljoen (Architecture); Katrin Bohn (Architecture); Matthew Potteiger (Landscape Architecture); Jason Gilliland (Geography and Public Health); Alison Blay-Palmer (Geography and Environmental Studies); Mustafa Koç (Sociology).

Looking beyond specific individuals, the paper will focus on the experience of an academic institution, Ryerson University in Toronto, where we aver that a food systems approach now underlays teaching, research and outreach in many different departments, faculties, and centers. The influence of food systems planning has thus managed to become relevant beyond its origin in the departments that concentrate on the planning of urban and regional systems. At Ryerson University, a food systems approach is incorporated in the School of Planning, which will be illustrated briefly to show where this has found a place in the school so far. However, the focus in this talk is on experiences *beyond* the planning school. We will start with an analysis of the presence of a food-system focus in some teaching outside that school, including the integration of food systems planning into courses in building science, sociology, nutrition and food studies, political science, and even electrical engineering.

We will then focus on our own teaching experiences over the past decade. First, one author will share the ways in which the understanding of food systems has shaped some Architectural Design courses. Indeed, designing the built environment as part of a larger food systems strategy is increasingly acknowledged for its role in achieving the broader goals of both sustainable and healthy cities. Four experiences will be shared: advising students who focused on food-related thesis topics; introducing food-system issues within multi-topic architectural design studios; intensely food-focused

semester-length advanced design studios (both in Toronto and graduate-level summer abroad design studio/seminars in Brazil) where the choice of a site and theme was centered on food-related challenges; and an entire course on Designing the Productive City that combines lectures and design components.

Next, the other author will share the way planning dimensions were integrated into teaching two courses (one on Urban Agriculture and the other on Urban Food Security) within a Food Security Certificate. In this case, food is the sole focus of the teaching, but the students come from a great diversity of backgrounds and planning is not central to the teaching. However, food systems planning has made its way into these courses in a few ways that will be discussed here.

While this talk focuses on pedagogical aspects, it also discusses research experiences among Ryerson faculty that incorporate or parallel food systems planning. In this regard, the role of the Centre for Studies in Food Security in facilitating multidisciplinary collaboration and exchanges around food-system issues will be identified.

Finally, several outreach experiences connected with Ryerson University will be outlined. In this regard, the emergence of Ryerson as a facilitator/hub for food systems-related work is particularly relevant, transcending specific contributions by individual scholars based at the university. Three very different examples will be analyzed succinctly, focusing on the ways in which they related to food system foundations: the ongoing Carrot City initiative that includes exhibits, publications and lectures about the design aspects of urban agriculture; the international Urban Agriculture Summit at Ryerson in 2012; and a new Municipal Food Training effort involving four cities, coordinated through Ryerson.

We will conclude with lessons that can be drawn from these multiple types of experiences based at one university. We argue that the trend towards the embedding of food systems approaches may be reaching a tipping point, as it starts to serve as a paradigm for understanding and acting upon the wicked problem of supplying food sustainably to the world in general and to its expanding cities in particular. This is illustrated by the new signing by over 100 cities from across the globe of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, which is explicitly anchored in work on City-Region Food

Systems. While planning pedagogy and the planning profession have played a key role in enabling this process to occur, there are indications that the food systems approach may be transcending its roots within planning, as it is getting embedded in many disciplines and many contexts.

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