

Creating new urban food environments through partnerships



Citizen Food Assembly in Montpellier, September 2023 © N. Bricas, CIRAD

Influencing people's eating habits requires more than just education, raising awareness, and informing consumers. We must also influence their food environments: location of food stores, health regulations, prices, advertising, and so on. This requires easy access, both physically and financially, to safe, healthy, and nutritious food from equitable and sustainable food systems. This requires the involvement of stakeholders from every sector of the system.

In recent years, cities have become key players in food policy creation. They aim to confront the health and nutritional challenges of their populations whilst promoting job creation and sustainable production and consumption in food systems. Through multi-stakeholder governance and the participation of residents, they are able to influence their food environments.



Projects involved

- Agroecological and food policies of Montpellier 
- Foodscapes: the effects of food landscapes on the eating habits of Montpellier residents 
- AfriFOODlinks: an action-research project aiming to transform urban food systems in Africa. 
- WECCO: A partnership with the Council of Rufisque (Senegal) on school meal policies.
- TerrAsol: Solidarity in Food Territories. Solidarity between residents of Montpellier and its food-producing regions.

Results

- An interdisciplinary research project (Foodscapes) led by CIRAD and INRAE, based in the Montpellier Metropolitan Area, aimed to identify food landscapes and their effects on behaviour. It led to the development of a city-wide food policy.
- For 10 years, CIRAD has lent its support to Montpellier's "My Different Canteen" project, a scheme with 25 initiatives: promoting organic and local products, meat-free meals, waste reduction, etc.
- With CIRAD's support, knowledge gained from the scheme in Montpellier has been shared with various networks and projects: Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, AfriFOODlinks, and WECCO.
- AfriFOODlinks is carrying out 25 pilot initiatives on food environments in 15 African cities.
- Montpellier is piloting a food democracy scheme, with a Citizen Food Committee managing a common food fund and an agreement for points of sale.



Recommendations to policy makers

- With three-quarters of the global population experiencing moderate and severe food insecurity living in cities, food policies must further take on board urban issues and consider cities as key players in these policies.
- Addressing the health and nutrition challenges faced by city dwellers must necessarily involve transforming their food environments to improve access to healthy and nutritious food, rather than simply the use of awareness campaigns.
- From the outset, action on food environments must involve all stakeholders, including "informal" players and, if possible, residents, to ensure long-term relevance, replicability and sustainability.
- It is essential to supporting urban groups involved in the transformation of food systems in order to influence national and international food policy.

Find out more



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