

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Farming in the city: proposals of urban agriculture in Torino and Vancouver

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Is farming possible in contemporary cities? Despite representing two very different and distant uses of the territory, urban and agricultural spaces coexisted throughout history, creating a symbiotic system that had a significant role in providing food for the population until World War II. Yet in the last half of the 20th century agriculture slowly started to disappear from the western cities' landscape. Physically it was pushed to the periphery of cities and to left over spaces such. Culturally agriculture was dismissed by most planners, architects and politicians as a legacy of the past and of rural traditions.

However the last few years have seen a renewed interest in the subject of urban agriculture that contradicts the decline that it seemed doomed to: urban agriculture is an increasingly popular and experimental activity that is starting to be considered by municipalities and institutions as a possible strategy to reduce the ecological footprint of cities.

Many studies have pointed out that urban agriculture leads to a series of positive outcomes from an ecological, social and economic point of view. Farming in cities is beneficial in many ways: it encourages productive use of in-between and neglected space; it is flexible and can adapt to a variety of areas and situations; it engages people, allowing an active and participatory use of open space. A grassroots activity such as urban agriculture is therefore starting to link with institutional policies and municipal regulations. In this respect planners and architects will have a crucial role in facilitating and connecting these two movements, combining the spontaneous and sometimes illegal forms in which it is currently practised with the policies and bylaws that regulate the operation of a city. Planners will have to propose design solutions that will allow agriculture to be properly integrated into the urban fabric - aesthetically and functionally - within the stratified and complex urban environment.

The research work was conducted partly in Torino and partly in Vancouver, in collaboration with the Greenskins Lab of the University of British Columbia. The first step was an analysis of the different forms in which agriculture can be declined in the city, in an attempt to transcend the view that associates urban agriculture with community gardens or municipal allotments. Urban agriculture was catalogued in 11 different typologies, that represent a toolbox useful for planners and architects dealing with the issue. The next step in the research was to apply these typologies in two case studies: North Vancouver, a municipality within the Greater Vancouver Metropolitan District and Barriera di Milano, a neighbourhood of Torino.



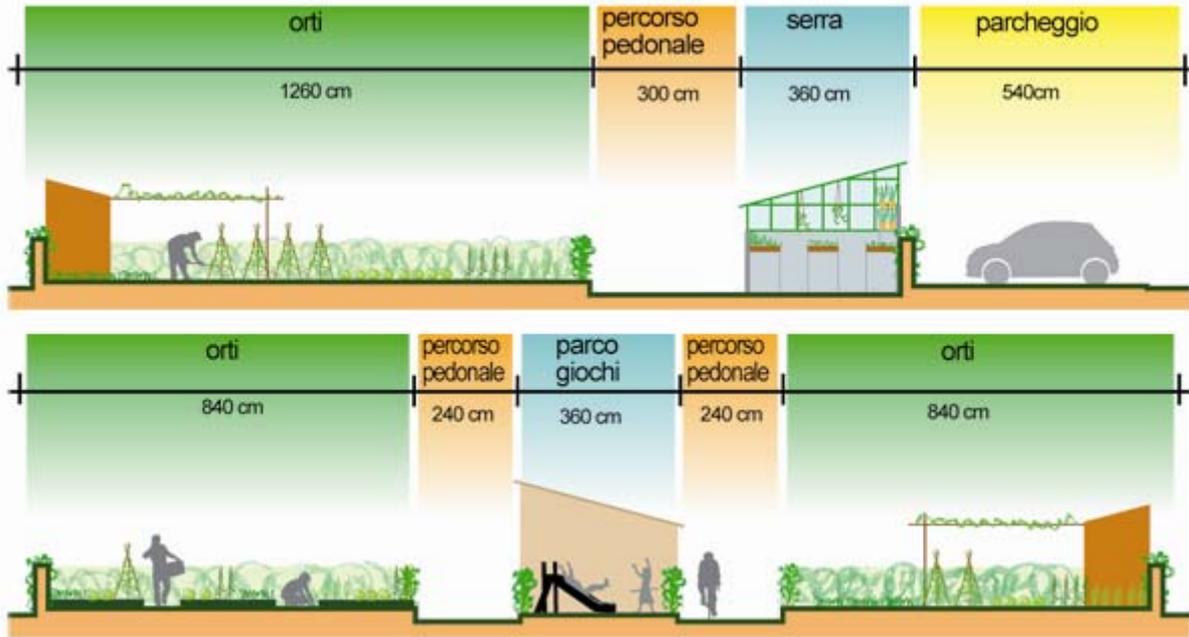
Typologies of urban agriculture analysed

The design process in *North Vancouver* can be compared to a form of urban acupuncture: small interventions that do not radically change the urban fabric, but on a whole can make a difference in the life of the city. The master plan focused on a series of linear public parkways that were created following the first city plan of 1907, but are nowadays underutilized green spaces. These areas could become highly productive urban farms, in an attempt to reduce the city's need of food imports, challenge the current planning of green spaces and question the traditional relationship between city and countryside.



View of the proposed urban farm in North Vancouver

In *Barriera di Milano* the project focused on a large infrastructural plan that in the near future will transform a dismissed rail line in a subway line, leaving a free area of about 90 hectares. This space bears the potential of becoming a linear park centred on food production, thanks to the good sunlight exposure and the low level of car traffic. The proposal gives spaces to agriculture in its different forms, such as community gardens, school gardens, demonstration gardens and urban orchards, connecting them with pedestrian pathways and bicycle paths. In this way an agricultural landscape is created within a densely populated area of the city.



View and section of the proposal for Barriera di Milano

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