

CASE STUDY

ANCI LAZIO (IT)- BARRANQUILLA (COL)

IURC - LA



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Thematic Network(s): Ecological Transition & Green deal

Thematic Cluster(s): Sustainable Agriculture – food systems – urban gardens

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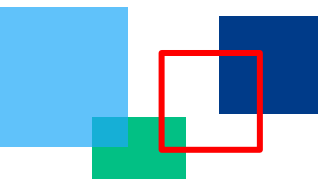
Urban and peri-urban agriculture to improve food security and participatory management of brownfield sites, contributing to reverse the growing threats of poverty and vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the first edition of IUC and continuing with IURC Latin America (IURC LA), the cities of Rome (Anci Lazio region) and Barranquilla have exchanged best practices on urban and peri-urban agriculture to improve food security and participatory management of brownfield sites, contributing to reverse the growing threats of poverty and vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this partnership, Barranquilla and Rome developed a pilot project to test the idea of urban agriculture in Barranquilla, leading to the co-creation of a proposal approved by the European Commission in late 2021 with a 2,6-million-euro grant (“GenerACTOR” project). At IURC LA, both cities expanded their current work, including the cities of Cali (Colombia) and Málaga (Spain) in their collaboration process.

The region of Lazio (Italy) through the Association of Municipalities (ANCI-Lazio), working closely with the city of Rome, has gained relevant experience in the management of urban gardens. In particular, Rome, with a population of 2.9 million inhabitants and a surface area of 1,287.36 km² (almost the same surface area as the region of London with 1,572 km² and 9 million inhabitants), is the largest agricultural municipality in Europe: more than 65% of the territory is formed by green areas, of which half is destined for agricultural activities.

Meanwhile, the city of Barranquilla, with a population of 1.3 million and a surface area of just 154 km², faces a different dynamic: the implementation of urban agriculture is not widespread as the space within the city is limited. However, city leaders, placing a strong bet on ecological transition and the Green Deal, were convinced that urban gardens had a strong role to play recovering public land in vulnerable neighbourhoods, foster social cohesion and provide local solutions to tackle a spike in poverty and food insecurity as an immediate result of the COVID pandemic. As the pandemic progressed, it became clear to Barranquilla that a partnership with Rome on this issue could have tangible dividends for its population, as the local government embarked on an ambitious effort to include urban gardening in its list of priorities for the first time.



Managing urban gardens can involve a variety of tasks, such as identifying suitable sites for gardening, providing resources like soil and compost, educating gardeners on best practices, and ensuring the safety and maintenance of the gardens. It can also involve working with local communities to encourage participation and promote the benefits of urban gardening. By gaining experience in managing urban gardens, Anci Lazio region along with the city of Rome, are not only providing opportunities for people to grow their own food and connect with nature, but also contributing to the sustainability of urban environments. Urban gardens can help to reduce the carbon footprint of food production and distribution, as well as promoting biodiversity and improving air quality.



Technical sessions and field visits with urban garden's stakeholders during study visits in Rome

MAIN CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Despite the significant number of green areas and agricultural activity in Rome as well as in Barranquilla, food insecurity can remain a challenge for some residents, particularly those living in areas with limited access to fresh and healthy food. Urban gardens can provide residents with access to fresh produce, as well as opportunities for community building and education. However, there are several challenges to improving the management of urban gardens in Rome, and in urban areas more broadly. In 2020, the peak of 140,000 people who requested food aid was reached in Rome, but it is still very complex to fully map the phenomenon. Correspondingly in Barranquilla, a DANE survey applied in June 2020 revealed that 46% of households in Barranquilla reduced their food intake to two or fewer meals a day. Some common challenges include:

1. **Land availability:** In urban areas, suitable land for community gardens can be limited and may require negotiations with landowners or local authorities to secure access.
2. **Soil quality and contamination:** Urban soil may be contaminated with pollutants or toxins, which can impact the quality and safety of produce grown in community gardens. Testing and remediation may be necessary before establishing a garden.
3. **Water availability and management:** Urban gardens require access to water for irrigation, which can be limited in some areas. Water management and conservation practices may be necessary to ensure adequate supply.
4. **Security and safety:** Community gardens may be subject to theft, vandalism, or other security concerns, which can impact the safety and sustainability of the garden.
5. **Community engagement and participation:** The success of a community garden relies on the engagement and participation of residents. Educating and encouraging community involvement can be challenging, particularly in areas with diverse populations or where there may be language barriers.

To overcome these challenges, the cities of Barranquilla and Rome exchanged knowledge and solutions, as part of IURC activities, through study visits, technical sessions and networking events. The cities agreed that **effective management and coordination among stakeholders**, including local authorities, community groups, and residents, is essential. Barranquilla and Rome have also benefited from the contributions of parallel initiatives such as URBACT, within the RU:RBAN project.

The partnership has led to experimentation activities that are key for urban resilience: Capacity building,



Field trip to an urban garden in Rome. June 2022

Training, and Governance. Value-added elements include increased urban greening, shorter supply chains, building community cohesion, and creating productive opportunities for youth, women, the elderly and the disabled.

In Barranquilla, urban community gardens are being planned as a tool for social inclusion and poverty reduction. These social spaces provide opportunities for vulnerable communities to access fresh and nutritious food, improve food security, and generate income through the sale of produce. They also serve as spaces for community engagement, education, and empowerment. In Rome, urban community gardens have been embraced as a means to enhance liveability and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, these gardens contribute to the preservation of green areas within the urban fabric, help mitigate the urban heat island effect, and support biodiversity. They also provide recreational spaces for residents and contribute to a sense of community and connection with nature.

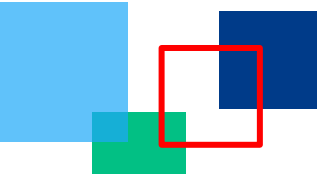
Additional strategies for improving garden management may include developing clear guidelines and policies like a specific regulation for urban garden use and maintenance, providing resources and training for gardeners, and leveraging technology and social media to promote community engagement and participation.



Field trip to an urban garden in Rome, June 2022

“The experience of urban gardens in Barranquilla and Rome highlights the importance of integrating nature and green spaces into urban planning and fostering community participation in sustainable initiatives.”

- **Claudio Bordi**, Head of European Unit of Risorse per Roma



RESULTS AND IMPACT



According to ISTAT data, in Italy in the last five years the urban gardens made available by local authorities in cities have recorded a growth of over 18%, exceeding 2.1 million square meters of urban space occupied. Rome is the municipality with the greenest hectares in Europe. It preserves a heritage not only of historical and architectural value but also for the extension and variety of its green areas which represents 67% of the municipal territory (85 thousand hectares out of the 129).

The dialogue with other cooperation programmes facilitated the development of the GenerACTOR project (co-funded by European Cooperation Fund), aimed at the creation of 4 urban gardens in

Barranquilla (in the planning stage), benefiting 30,000 inhabitants and committing more than 27,400 square meters of green areas. The gardens are expected to produce food in addition to promote circular economy initiatives such as composting, recycling, bee pollination and renewable energy. Overall, the cooperation between the cities has allowed them to strengthen their capacities and knowledge on urban gardens, how to work collaboratively with the different municipal areas and to understand the importance of social inclusion. The pilot in Barranquilla had also set the basis for scaling up the programme, expanding it into more businesses, academic institutions, and governmental agencies.



KEY FIGURES

4
Community
Gardens

30.000
potential beneficiaries
in Barranquilla

27,400 sqm
for urban agriculture

“The partnership between Barranquilla and Rome shows that urban gardens can play a significant role in promoting sustainable urban development and improving the quality of life in cities. Both cities have recognized the importance of urban community gardens and are making efforts to implement initiatives to leverage their benefits.”

- **Andrea Vignoli**, Project manager EU Project Department.

LESSONS LEARNED

Don't work alone: Working through partnerships can spur innovation and make cities more willing to try something new. In the case of Barranquilla, learning about Rome's experience at a critical moment, allowed the municipality to test urban gardening as a multi-pronged strategy to tackle problems that the city already faced.

Long-term planning is key: It is paramount that projects that are born out of city-to-city partnerships can fully be integrated into local development plans to boost their sustainability and future financing.

Embrace positive externalities: In Barranquilla, this partnership has brought together different actors and dependencies from the local administration: the parks program, the social development office, the city's environmental authority, among others. Indirectly, the partnership has triggered coordination from within and jumpstarted new processes of collaboration at the local level.

Set an Example through action: The partnership highlights the importance of developing pilot projects to complement the exchange of knowledge. Giving cities the opportunity to try new ideas –no matter how small—can inspire local leaders to “dream big” and carry out more ambitious initiatives in the short-run.

Involve communities from the start: giving residents a key role in the early stages of a project can reap tangible benefits, as the case of Rome shows. Barranquilla has opted to adopt a similar approach as a result.

Share what you are doing: Sharing this experience in international events, as well as by involving other cities (such as Malaga and Cali) can create goodwill among participants and possibilities to expand the scope of current initiatives. Barranquilla today works with experts in urban agriculture from Cali, who are currently training gardeners under the GenerACTOR project. Likewise, Malaga is now placing a heavier bet on the recovery of green, urban public spaces.

THE IURC PROGRAMME

The International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in IURC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international counterparts, building a greener, more prosperous future.

The IURC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.

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Links to related outputs:

Rome Urban Gardens: <https://www.iurc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Ficha-Anci-Lazio.pdf>

Urban agriculture webinar: <https://www.iurc.eu/event/webinar-urban-agriculture/>

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