

EDIBLE CITIES are the future

CAMILLA WEEN

Biophilia is a term coined by Harvard biologist and conservationist E.O. Wilson to describe how humans are hard-wired to need connection with nature. The concept of a biophilic city is one that has abundant nature and biodiversity, where the residents can have close contact with nature and witness things growing.

Feeding over 9 billion people by 2050 may be difficult, particularly if the developed world carries on relying on ever more intensive farming. Agricultural practice is going to have to focus on efficient production, which livestock farming is not, and it is inevitable that people will need to reduce their meat consumption. Many environmentalists believe that small-scale organic farms are capable of feeding the world and that this form of farming is more profitable and will deliver better ecology and food security. This type of small-scale farming can take place within the city.

Cities can actually become part of the food revolution and ensure food resilience by growing fruits, vegetable and herbs within their boundaries. Small patches of land, street corners, parks, communal gardens and even containers on balconies and roofs can all produce fruit and vegetables. When the Soviet Union collapsed and Cuba lost its main trading partner in 1989, Havana, was plunged into a food shortage. Almost overnight the people started planting their own crops, in any vacant corner or plot. It is estimated that up to 90% of the Havana's fresh produce now comes from local urban farms and gardens within the city. Sophisticated organic urban farms, 'organopónicos' are run independently, by the community, entirely on organic principles and the produce is sold locally, so it comes fresh and with an extremely low carbon footprint.



Havana Urban Farm / Organopónico

The urban farming concept is now spreading to cities across the globe. In the USA they are appearing in cities kicking back at the food economy, which is dominated by intensive farming and giant supermarkets. Food security is also driving this; most cities only have a week's worth of food. Across Africa urban farms are being set up, partly to provide poverty alleviation through job creation, but also to tackle head on poor diet, by providing plenty of fresh produce right in the heart of the city – they are becoming biophilic cities.

Singapore has taken a more hi-tech approach to urban farming. It has developed a commercial vertical farm to make local fresh produce more available to its millions of citizens. Sky Green Farms currently produces three types of vegetables and although the produce costs a little more than imported it is selling out as local people vote for 'fresh'. The vegetables are grown in 9-meter tall vertical aluminum towers. Singapore has set a target of

10% of vegetables to be grown locally in the near future.



Vertical city farming in Singapore

Allotments and community gardens and city farms are springing up on leftover land in many cities. These green oases are bringing together dislocated communities and minority groups and it is also recognised that they have special therapeutic benefits for people suffering anxiety and stress. There is no reason why cities should not produce a significant proportion of their food within the city and it will bring down the carbon footprint of the food, help to reduce the city's heat island effect and will improve air quality. Edible cities are the future!

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