

Fighting the urban-rural mismatch by modernizing and adapting periurban agriculture to today's challenges and opportunities in the Casablanca Region

Helten F. and Ouchker J.

*Frank.Helten@t-online.de, www.uac-m.org, Technische Universität Berlin/ Germany -ZEK/ KUBUS,
Franklinstraße 28/29, 10587 Berlin, Germany,*

*jam.ouchker@gmail.com, Projet de recherche Marocco-Allemand « Agriculture Urbaine », 11, Rue
Mohammed Smiha, Stade Larbi Ben M'barek, Casablanca, www.uac-m.org*

Within its research programme on the "Megacity of Tomorrow" the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research has selected and is actually funding a research project dealing with Urban Agriculture as an integrative factor of climate optimised urban development in Casablanca. During a two years preliminary period of intensive preparation and net-working, a German-Moroccan research team has been set up which brings together academic scholars from German and Moroccan universities and research institutions as well as representatives from NGOs, local governments, industry, urban planning agencies and further administrative bodies.

The central research question to be addressed and to be answered is how and by which innovative approaches and frameworks regarding the urban-periurban-rural linkage in the Grand Casablanca Region it will be possible to cope with the multiple challenges of a quite dynamic urbanisation process which shows considerable potential to make out of Casablanca a megacity of tomorrow. However, the main driving forces which up to date shape the socio-spatial production process of Grand Casablanca are still unleashed. As a result, we witness that 'Casablanca en mouvement' is not as positive as it may appear at first sight. Casablanca's urban order appears to have been neglected since a couple of decades. Today's new efforts to restructure and modernize the city are still weak and only in the beginning of a new decade of urban modernisation. Thus it appears that urbanisation in the Casablanca region of today still suffers from the widely acknowledged and socially shared practice of:

- an ongoing informalisation of housing, working and living, accompanied by a considerable
- an acceleration of segregation of urban areas,
- an increase in urban decay, poverty and
- an ever more widening gap concerning the urban – periurban - rural linkage in terms of social and territorial segregation.

Moreover, new challenges ahead such as the consequences of climate change will play a major role in the future development of Casablanca. These challenges need to be widely acknowledged and remedial action has immediately to be taken as regards climate adapted housing, securing provision with drinking water, avoiding air pollution, coping with heat waves, and maintaining food security etc.

It has been stated by scholars all over the world that there is an urgent need to domesticate in an appropriate and sustainable way the ultra rapid process of urbanisation to be mainly observed in fast growing mega-cities like Mumbai, Istanbul, or Dhaka. Saying this we have point to the fact that the existing tools and approaches to guide this domestication (urbanisation) process have become obsolete and must be adjusted or replaced. Moreover, a new societal effort promoting a more just city approach appears to be necessary. Such an approach has to respect the needs for a sustainable environment to live in, for humane housing and living

conditions, for sufficient provision with healthy and affordable food, for adequate job opportunities and affordable mobility even for the urban poor. Otherwise the everywhere increasing process of socio-spatial segregation and deprivation will lead to new urban conflicts and riots with unpredictable and mostly negative consequences for the emerging civil society.

Selecting Casablanca as a research candidate has been caused by a couple of reasons which allow for a study in nuce of major constraints and positive factors to consider when dealing with urban development. It appears that the future development of Casablanca and the Casablanca Region can build on a considerable potential in terms of demographic development, natural resources and available spaces, infrastructure, and, not to forget, civil society issues. The number of nearly 4-5 millions of inhabitants populating Grand Casablanca will considerably increase within the decades to come. This increase will be accompanied by a further densification and urbanisation of an already today urbanised zone stretching out from Kenitra in the North and El Jadida in South-West of Casablanca. This zone is home to another 3-4 million people, representing (together with the population Grand Casablanca) 8-9 million inhabitants or around 25% of the total of Moroccans. We can evenly characterise this zone by its division into different functions and by its offering of flexible opportunities for still less foreseeable future purposes. It appears that this zone is similar to heterotopic spaces as it receives not only industry, services, administration and governments (Rabat) but also infrastructure, tourism, leisure opportunities, shopping, housing, science, and education but also sufficient space and workforce for agriculture - and, not to forget, a growing number of young people with academic training but without promising expectations for future employment.

However, the most interesting and promising asset of this region is its immense and growing market for its products and especially for its potential to feed the population of the region. Saying this, we also have point to the fact that due to recent social processes and developments like individualisation, emancipation, democratisation and liberalisation of market constraints, to be actually observed in the Casablanca region, there will be quite a chance for a new uptake and powerful economic development of the region.

Looking at these tendencies one would suggest that Greater Casablanca has the potential for a satisfactory development, as has been shown during the fifties of the last century, when Casablanca was a highly renowned example for urban modernisation and modern urbanism. However, severe constraints are showing that the positive image of Casablanca has completely changed during the last two decades. A couple of systematic studies - realised within the preparation of a new master plan for the city submitted in 2008 - revealed that the urban future of Casablanca and its population is at risk. We already mentioned strong signs of ongoing deterioration and urban decay *intra muros*, whereas the periurban area, until recently a region specialised to feed the city and to allow for leisure, is being endangered by an ever growing demand for space to set up production sites (offshoring), to erect low cost apartments, individual homes and luxurious mansions in Neo-Dubai/Emirates style or to house those people in informal or clandestine settlements who leave the city because they cannot afford any longer to live inside the city.

Thus, it appears that the socio-spatial segregation of the inner city itself is being repeated by a similar process within the periurban fringe of Grand Casablanca, where we can describe the ongoing segregation as a process of gentrification caused by the urban/global rich and as a process of ongoing informalisation mainly induced by migrants and the urban poor. As a result the population within periurban areas is not only increasing due to still high reproduction rates but also due to a migration process from the inner city to the periphery. At the same time it appears that the periurban dwellers working in the agricultural sector are no longer able to make a living as micro farmers as they did before. Droughts, high costs for seeds, water, fertiliser and compost all needed to treat and enrich the soil, are too expensive to allow for a fair competition with industrial agriculture. Moreover, there is a lack in innovating and pioneering agricultural knowledge in terms of producing biological healthy products, applying adequate production modes (adapted to water shortage, pollution etc) which

would allow for the growing and the marketing of more valuable products which are expected to be highly appreciated by an ever growing community of Casablanca people who want to nourish themselves by more healthy products. This option could provide a chance for the micro farmer to survive. Moreover, maintaining and further strengthening agriculture cannot only contribute to feed the city. It can also help to limit urbanisation, to protect fertile soils against erosion, to avoid further sealing of surfaces, to save water, to contribute to produce a green environment and a healthier micro-climate, to create new jobs and to give back to the fellah a better self-esteem and producer's pride. However, there is a considerable barrier that may hinder this development: The small periurban farmer of the Casablanca region maybe seduced by the promising perspective of increasing prices for land devoted to housing. Thus, just sell-ing his land he can expect to make a living without working. However, after a couple of years, the money will be gone and he has to look for job opportunities as seasonal worker in Casa-blanca's building sector or textile industry. As a result, the agricultural character of the peri-urban space (already disappearing) will further vanish and with him his multimodal and resil-ient functions as a site for food production, leisure, distraction, subsistence and informal liv-ing. Thus, it is quite likely that Casablanca's food system will fundamentally change within the years to come unless a new effort will be introduced to overcome the vicious cycle of speculation, selling land, abandoning agriculture, erecting low cost formal and informal build-ings as well as luxury mansions and spontaneous industrialisation on the countryside, which, in sum all lead to a process of an apparently unmanageable process of rurbanisation, from which only a few will benefit whereas for all others important resources for reproduction and leisure will be lost forever.

Alternative

Against this background, the project on urban agriculture strives for a comprehensive solution to overcome some of the problems mentioned above. According to activities and new ap-proaches to improve, e.g., the food security of the city in a more sustainable way, as to be observed not only in New York City, Chicago and Havana but also in London, Los Angeles and Vancouver, it seems that - urban and periurban Casablanca today still bear quite a poten-tial that can be activated to achieve several objectives to improve a) the urban food system, b) environmental/climate quality and c) living conditions of the urban classes and especially of the periurban poor. However, such an effort needs to consider and to evaluate by which means and approaches sustainable and modernized periurban agriculture even for micro farmers can be achieved. To examine available opportunities how to change the urbanisation process by domestication/ redirection of major trends, we decided to apply an action-research driven approach. We have set up four pilot projects dealing with urban/ periurban agriculture and aspects how this type of agriculture can be bound together in an innovative way within the flexible and highly resilient character of periurban space. The action research driven pilot project are: 1. Industry and Agriculture – highlighting the opportunities of wastewater reuse for agricultural purposes; 2. Informal Housing and Agriculture – preparing the future genera-tion of inhabitants of informal settlements to apply modern forms of sustainable agriculture for improving the quality of life; 3. Tourism and Agriculture – exploring the potential of nearby agriculture situated in attractive landscapes for leisure and recreation and pilot 4. Pro-duction of agro-ecological agricultural products as a mode to valorise the work of the farmer and to provide the population with healthy food.

In addition to these action research activities we are analysing more systematically the production mode of periurban and urban space, by applying a multilevel and multi-dimensional approach to understand the interplay and the mechanics as well as the dynamics of the overall urbanisation process taking place in Grand Casablanca.

To date, we started three pilots and the fourth one will be initialised in April 2009. The poster presented gives you some ideas about the localisation and the content of our pilot project.