

Prof Kevin Morgan

Dean of Engagement, Professor of Governance and Development,
School of Planning and Geography, University of Cardiff

Nourishing the City: The Rise of the Urban Food Question

Summary

This seminar looks at the rise of cities around the world as new players in the debates around food policy, including food security and health and wellbeing. In Prof Morgan's view, the rise of cities is one of the most important changes that has been taking place across the world in the last 10-20 years. This talk attempts to explain why this is happening and gives some examples of what leading cities across the globe are doing within and through their food systems. The seminar concludes by considering what this means here in the UK in terms of how we promote healthier cities through more sustainable food systems.

Introduction

Starting on a personal note Prof Morgan explained that work on food was never a planned part of his research agenda. He got into this field, by accident, 12 years ago when he became involved in a small project looking at school food and where the food that ended up on a child's plate came from. This work was a 'labour of love'. There was no funding but Prof Morgan and colleagues did it because they thought it was intrinsically important and interesting.

This simple project meant a great deal. It speaks about the way universities work today. It is difficult sometimes as an academic to justify what you are doing if you are not publishing or bringing in research income. The overwhelming reaction from the University was to find the subject of school food either comical or risible. Over time, the team moved from school food, to public provisioning in schools, to hospitals, care homes and prisons. In other words, the way in which food is provided for in the public realm. He then moved from this public plate focus to the role of cities. Their work only began to be recognised and validated by the University when they began to bring in funds and receive international recognition from the UN and others. Prof Morgan tells this story to encourage younger colleagues to have faith in their own decisions and confidence in working on topics, labours of love, which are intrinsically important to them.

Today, the role of the cities in food systems is now one of the most important topics in the debate on sustainability. In the rest of his talk, Prof Morgan attempts to justify that argument starting with the question: How has food moved from the margins to the mainstream of our political agenda? Particularly the urban political agenda, where there are still too many cities in Europe that don't understand and appreciate the full significance of food. We are then taken on a 'Cooke's tour' around the world to see what key cities are doing. This is followed by a look at the rise of the urban food movement in the UK and urban food politics. The talk ends by considering new

forms of urban governance which Prof Morgan suggested are very important even though they are still slightly below the radar of mainstream politicians.

From the margins to the mainstream

In the time when food still had a Cinderella status, and was seen as comical in academic circles, it is worth noting that it wasn't even on the radar of urban planners. It was a forgotten, ignored and invisible domain. Planners had focused on all the essentials of human life including air, water, land and shelter with the conspicuous exception of food. However, this is not the case today. Food is still not sufficiently on the planning agenda but it is no longer a stranger. Leading cities are showing that the way to sustainability is partly through the food system.

A number of reasons have led to food now being at the top of political security agendas around the world. The US government now classifies food as a national security issue. This is because the food price spike of 2007-8 triggered riots all over the world. Not just in low-income countries but in middle-income countries as well. This food price spike heralded the end of the era of cheap food and we are all going to have to get used to higher prices for our food.

The other drivers for this move of food from the margins to the mainstream are familiar to us:

- The food supply chain accounts for 31% of greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union
- The burgeoning problems of obesity/hunger
- Food is becoming a planning prism for land, water, energy, transport and ecosystem services (the services that Mother Nature gives us for free)
- Place, provenance and... pleasure (important not to forget this)
- The rapid pace of urbanisation

So, although it is clear that the issue of hunger supersedes all others and has the greatest claim on our ethical sensibilities; food cannot be reduced to a narrow nutritional issue. Food is about all these other things as well: health, culture, social justice.

A world tour

Food planning is now one of the fastest-growing areas in the planning community around the world particularly in the American Planning Association who were ahead of the rest of the world. There are now 270 Food Policy Councils in North America. Most are grass roots, civil society-based organisations. Taking a brief look at some of the work that is going on across the world:

New York: This is a city that has taken its public health mandate more seriously than any other city. It has included regulating its food system as part of this public health remit. New York City now has a plan for food that looks at the whole system from production to post-consumption. New York is thinking of food in systematic

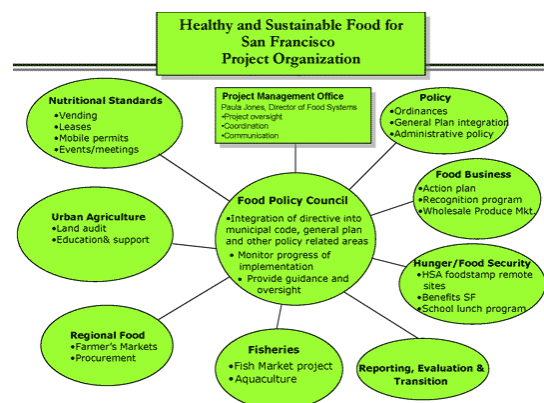
terms not just as individual projects. This is an attempt to get beyond small-scale projects, which rarely outlive their funding, and think of food as a system.



Seattle: This city is also one of the pioneers in thinking about urban food planning in North America. They are not just addressing things like vending machines in schools (although this is very important) they are also thinking about expanding community gardens, helping people reconnect with nature through growing, eating and cooking together. They also see their urban food policy as a way of combating racism and promoting social justice in the city. This is the wider meaning of sustainability.

San Francisco: Is doing the same with a fully integrated strategy that links the social, the economic and the ecological.

Toronto: This city has probably the most famous Food Planning Council in North America and, in Prof Morgan's view, is the most innovative of all. What Toronto shows is that food can help every department of government. In a city council for example, there is not a single portfolio that does not have a role to play in a sustainable food system. Food can help every department to fulfil its obligations.



Africa: in the past urban planners throughout Africa have been part of the problem of hunger and not part of the solution. Urban food growers, farmers and vendors (75% of whom are women) have been harassed by planners. They have been removed from the streets as they are seen to pose a threat to traffic congestion, public health and so on. Urban agriculture was seen as having no role to play in a modern thriving city. The irony is that the most sustainable cities in the global north are now reintroducing urban agriculture to

their city fabric and public spaces. However, some urban planners in Africa, for example in Kampala (Uganda) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), are now beginning to address the problems of urban food growing such as access to clean water, safe places and land rights. This is the way to make urban agriculture in Africa benign, sustainable and socially just, including allowing women to play an important role in development.

Latin America: The Latin American debate is dominated by Belo Horizonte (Brazil). This city has gone further than any other in addressing the problems of urban hunger. Belo Horizonte targets all stages of the food supply chain and the most vulnerable citizens (for example the poorest, children, pregnant women, nursing mothers). Brazil as a whole has strong national policies around food so Belo Horizonte is a strong city in a strong food security country.

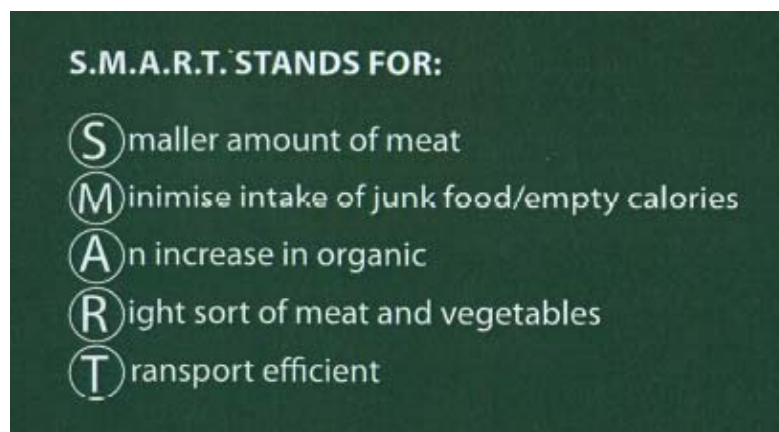
Europe: A number of major European cities have pioneered sustainable urban food plans including:

- **Rome** – led the school food revolution with its quality food for all
- **London** – launched a healthy food plan as part of a sustainable world city strategy
- **Amsterdam** – issued an urban food strategy for human health, ecological integrity and to reconnect the city with its countryside

But all these cities have since regressed. They were unable to sustain sustainability. This is a great political challenge to all our organisations. In Amsterdam, for example, the Food Strategy was the plan of the Deputy Mayor, so when she lost office the food plan fell with her. This is an important lesson for us all: we have to build the values of sustainability in to our civil societies so that politicians will not dare to change the policy when they come in and out of office. We have to embed sustainability if we want to sustain it.

Work is also taking place in smaller cities for example in Malmo in Sweden and in Bristol (UK).

Malmo: This small city in southern Sweden is doing something truly radical. It aims to go 100% organic in all its schools and kindergartens by 2020 and to do this in a cost-neutral way. It plans to do this by using the following SMART Policy.



By working at both ends of the food supply chain, they are building a new business model for school food. Starting by minimising waste, they then plough back the savings into slightly more expensive ingredients. In addition, they have embarked on radical menu re-design involving less meat. Malmo is leading by example and the council are putting the policies in to action in their own civic functions and procurement activities before exhorting anyone else to do this.

Bristol: Prof Morgan has chaired the Bristol Food Policy Council since it formed three years ago. One of the most important things they did was to produce an urban food audit which painted a new picture of the city through the prism of its food system. This has had a big effect on that system and generated debates at all levels of society. They learnt something from New York and developed the Bristol Food Plan which focuses not on individual projects but on the food system as a whole. Bristol is the first UK city to win the European green capital award and is going to use this accolade to fly the flag for sustainable food.

Rome: The team in Cardiff were greatly influenced by Rome, where they saw one of the best school food systems anywhere in the world. A key element was limited choice.

- 67.5% of the food is organic
- 44% of the food comes from 'bio-dedicated' food chains
- 26% of the food is local
- 14% of the food is fair trade
- 2% of the food comes from social co-operatives

However, since the election of a right wing mayor in 2009, this system has unravelled and is currently collapsing. This again illustrates the need to build a coalition not just in politics but also in civil society to sustain the gains and the small victories.

New York City – the reaction to the public health mandate

We are living in an era where sugar is about to become the new tobacco. Over the next five years we can expect to see a major battle around sugar. It is very difficult to avoid added sugar in our food and this is particularly the case in the USA. New York City, across a series of mayors, has been attempting to address its public health mandate in a variety of ways. The city had a particular campaign against sugary drinks known as the 'soda cap' where the mayor attempted to put a cap on the size of 16oz soda drinks.

After a long battle this soda cap was eventually deemed illegal by the US Supreme Court. The mayor was also defeated and the popular vote went against him. He was defeated because he tried to impose this cap through the back door rather than engaging the hearts and minds of the city. But he was also up against the big food and drinks companies who, under the front of the 'Centre for Consumer Freedom', took out a full page advert in the New York Times depicting the mayor as a nanny. These are the same people who tried to persuade us that tobacco was actually good for us.

The new politics of food-based civil society groups and new forms of governance

Looking around the world we can see a new social movement emerging in cities centred in and around food. There are different aspects to this with some people interested in fair trade, others focusing on organic or local food and others simply interested in 'good food' however that is defined. But together this is one of the fastest growing movements in the world today.

These civil society groups are beginning to change tactics and rather than just fighting governments they are now forming partnerships with governments to try and define together healthier food policies. Groups in the UK such as [Sustain](#) and the [Soil Association](#) are doing great work. But these groups and others are under pressure in this age of austerity.

There are also new forms of governance emerging such as the [Food Policy Council](#) in Bristol and similar earlier work in Brighton, London and Manchester for example. Brighton has an interesting model in that it has developed a well-functioning trading arm which increases its resilience and sustainability and allows it to employ 18 full-time food officers. So food partnerships are developing across the UK. Prof Morgan's hope is that we will see one in Glasgow, building on the progress around sustainable food that has been made in the city in recent years.

Prof Morgan finished the seminar with some reflections on the recently launched [Sustainable Food Cities Network](#). The network does three things:

- It helps cities learn from good practice elsewhere
- It raises the profile of cities as proper actors in the food policy debates in the UK
- It strengthens the voice of cities in food policy debates in the UK

This is particularly important in the UK at the moment where we are seeing a situation where large food and drink companies are effectively writing national food and health policy. In Prof Morgan's view this is nothing short of a scandal.

In conclusion, Prof Morgan stated that in his view the real innovative, robust thinking in public health in the UK today is coming from Scotland and Wales and from leading urban food pioneers across the UK such as Brighton, Bristol and Manchester. Urban food policy shows what can be achieved at a city level and what the UK might achieve if this was scaled up. The urban food pioneers are giving people a taste of tomorrow by showing people what is possible at a local level.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

Summary prepared by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.