

Urban Agriculture in Reykjavik Iceland

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1. Introduction

This paper represents the Icelandic contribution to Working Group 2, which reviews policies and governance models on Urban Agriculture (UA).

In the paper the policies and governance for UA in Reykjavik will be described and relevant background information provided for clarification. The focus of the paper will be on the municipal planning process since it has been chosen by the city to establish policy on UA in Reykjavik. It should be noted that the planning process is currently ongoing, but the plan that includes the policy on UA should be approved early in the year 2013. The paper therefore describes the context for policymaking with regard to UA and the intended implementation.

2. Governance and land use planning in Iceland

There are two governmental levels in Iceland; the national, and the local that currently includes 75 local governments. Local governments are granted rights and responsibilities by the Parliament (Althingi, 2011). The biggest responsibilities of the local governments are basic social services; primary education and land use planning. Increasingly, public participation and local democracy are intertwined with all these issues.

Local governments in Iceland became responsible for land use planning within their jurisdiction following a legislation passed in 1997, but it had earlier been the responsibility of the national government. One of the leading aims of the planning legislation was then defined as sustainable development (Althingi, 1997) and with a new planning legislation passed in 2010 that was further reinforced (Althingi, 2010). According to the legislation all local governments must have a valid municipal plan in place. The municipal plan should express the local authority's policy regarding land use, community development, urban form, transportation- and infrastructure systems as well as environmental issues in the municipality (Althingi, 2010). The municipal plan is therefore considered one of the strongest instruments the local government has, to guide future development of its community. According to the legislation the municipal plan should be revised every four years.

The principle of having the public involved in land use planning decisions goes back several decades¹ and in Iceland public participation in planning has been required by law for decades, but its effectiveness has been increasing in practice. This was reflected in the current planning legislation passed in 2010, since one of its aims is to ensure that the public is consulted in the making of development plans. Moreover, a new step for the public's access to the process was

¹ See Aronstein's classic 1969 article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", Journal of the American Institute of Planners Volume 35, Issue 4, 1969.

introduced, as authorities now have to consult the public already at the “plan for the plan”-stage, that is, when issues for the plan are initially being identified. Active public participation requires knowledge exchange between parties and transparency in the decision-making process, therefore the early participation and exchange of ideas becomes crucial.

3. The city of Reykjavik

The city of Reykjavik is the capital of the country and its largest municipality with about 119 thousand inhabitants or 37% of the entire nation. Moreover, 63% of the total population lives within the Greater Reykjavik area (Reykjavik and five adjacent municipalities) (Statistics Iceland, 2012).

Urbanization happened fast in Iceland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bringing people from rural Iceland to the villages and the capital. Since the urban development of Reykjavik, happened mainly after the introduction of the private car, the city is spread out with big lots and open spaces, giving some opportunities for urban agriculture. However over the past three decades the city's planners have increasingly been advocating increased density.

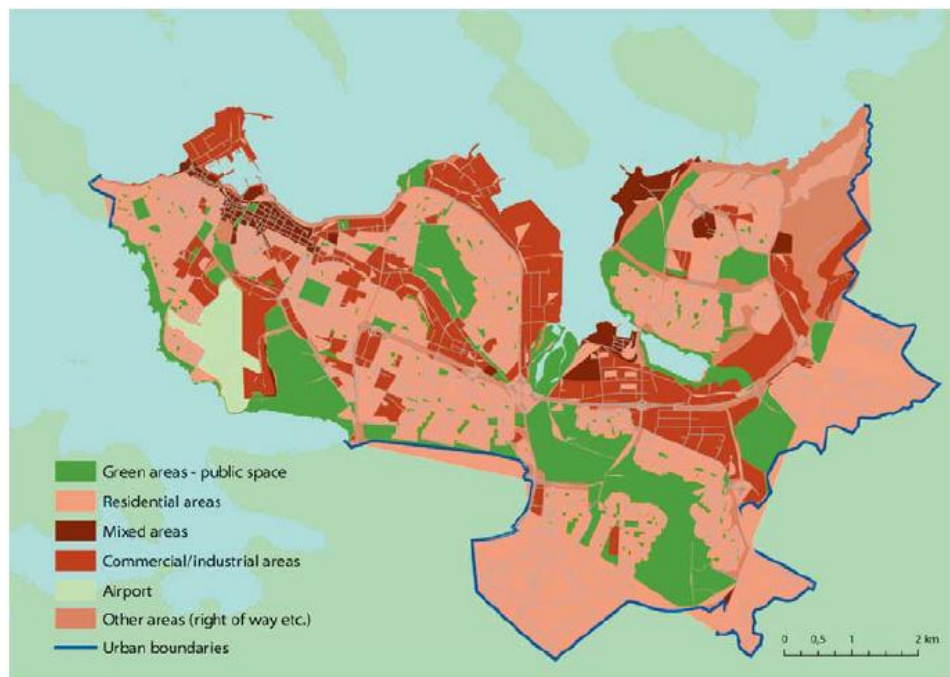


Fig. 1. Land use within the urban boundaries of Reykjavik where green areas/public spaces make up for 36% of the area (Reykjavík, 2010).

Early residents of Reykjavík brought with them the tradition of food growing and around year 1900 the city established its first allotment gardens (Líndal, 1987). In 1948, “school gardens” for school aged children were founded, to improve both their eating habits and outdoor recreation (Morgunblaðið, 1948). Vegetable growing for own consumption was very common in Reykjavik until late 20th century and traditional farms could even be found within the city boundaries until the late 1960s (Eggert Þór Bernharðsson, 1998).

In the early years of the 21st century, interest in allotment gardens diminished drastically, but after the financial crash of 2008 interest in vegetable growing has risen again amongst the city's residents. The school gardens were converted to regular allotments in 2011 but these are total 600 slots of 20m² in eight out of ten neighborhoods within the city. Additionally the city rents out about 100 allotments directly to the Horticultural Society of Iceland that then re-rents those to its members. Finally, the city rents out 200 allotments gardens, each of 100m² outside of the city boundaries (Reykjavik, 2012).

Municipalities in Iceland have the right to pass regulations on livestock husbandry that then are approved by the Minister for the Environment. The city of Reykjavik allows people to keep dogs, cats, rabbits as pets and horses area allowed in designated places within the city boundaries. Poultry is however not allowed within the urban boundaries.

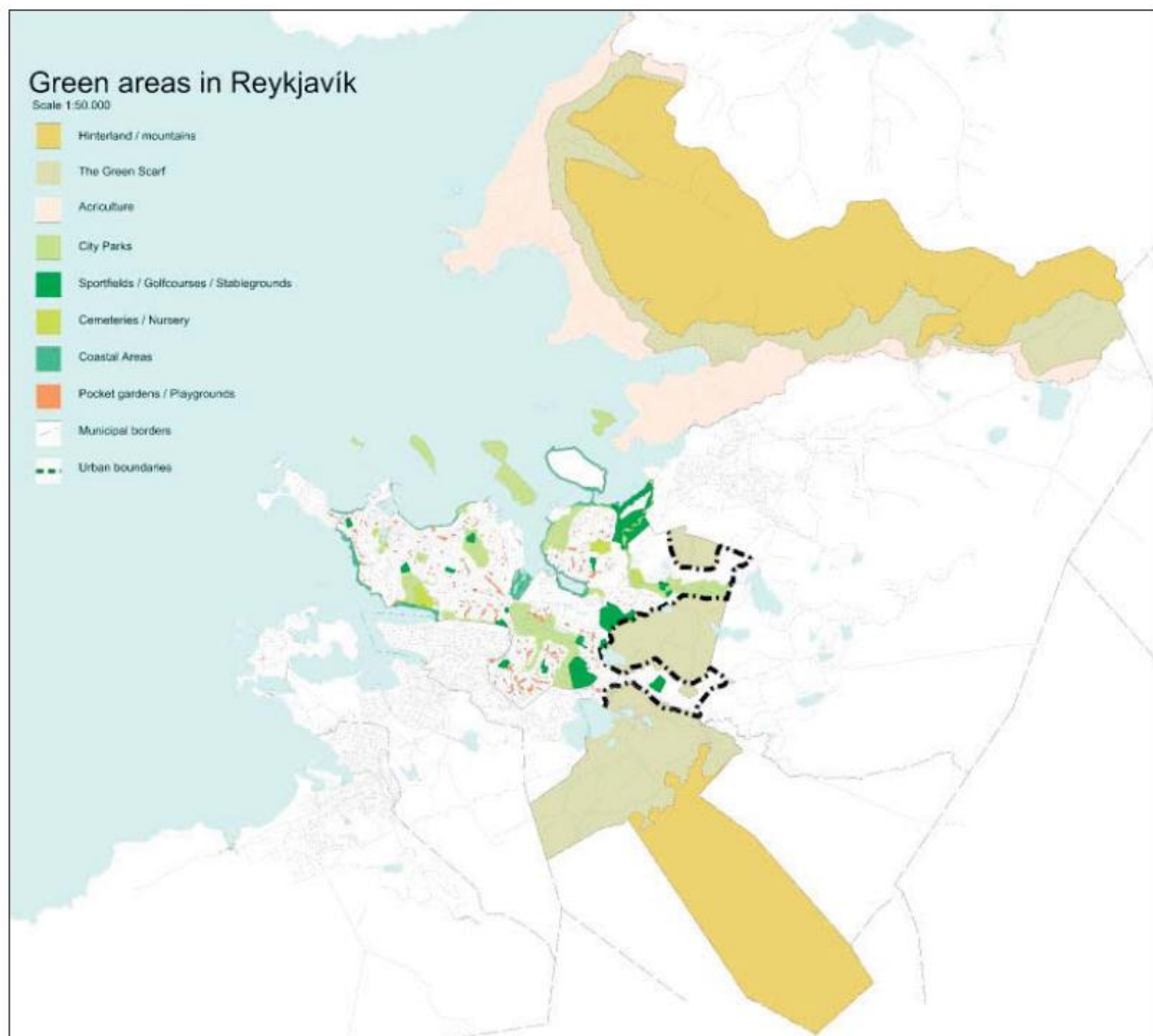


Fig. 2. Map of the total land that belongs to the municipality of Reykjavik, showing green areas, urban boundaries as well as traditional agricultural areas (Reykjavík, 2010).

Some commercial agriculture exists within the land of Reykjavik, outside the urban area. This is mainly industrial agriculture, including big hog and poultry production facilities. However, some vegetable and hothouse farms exist as well in the periphery.

Farmers markets are not common in Reykjavik. But in the recent years, two or three businesses have opened that emphasize direct sales from farmers to consumers.

3.1 Governance and land use planning in Reykjavik

The city is governed by the City Council but it elects standing committees to develop policies regarding the major responsibilities of the city, one of those being the Planning committee. That committee is responsible for developing plans for the city in accordance with the national planning legislation. This includes developing strategies for the entire city as well as neighborhood plans and site plans. Public participation is mandatory part of the planning process and it is very common in Reykjavik that citizens send in their comments on planning proposals. In some cases plans are altered if the comments and criticism is substantial and well supported. In most cases the Planning committee along with the planning staff initiates policies on planning issues. However, landowners and citizens have a chance to suggest planning ideas to the city through; direct meetings with the committee members, public meetings or through “Better Reykjavik” a web-page where citizens can contribute their ideas to politicians and other fellow citizens on different issues of city life and management (initially a nonprofit endeavor but now run in cooperation with the city) (Citizens Foundation, 2012).

In addition to the political committees the City Council also elects representatives to ten Neighborhood committees (based on appointments from all political parties of the City council). The Neighborhood committees are consulted for planning proposals within their neighborhoods.



Fig.3. The ten neighborhoods of Reykjavik, including density numbers (Reykjavík, 2010).

3.2 Urban Agriculture policy as part of proposed Municipal Plan

The Planning committee of Reykjavik decided in the spring of 2012 to make UA a formal activity of the city by integrating it into the Municipal plan. The motivation for the idea comes from a few sources: First, a few applications have been submitted to the city for keeping poultry for egg production, but according to current Municipal plan and current ordinance on animal husbandry this is not permitted within the urban area of the city, although there has been a political interest in responding to those requests. Secondly, during public planning meeting in the city's neighborhoods voices have been raised that ask for farmers markets, more areas for horse keeping and permits to keep poultry (Reykjavik Planning and Building Department, proceedings from public meetings, 2012). Thirdly, several suggestions have come forth on the citizens' web-site "Better Reykjavik" for permitting poultry rearing for egg production. The Planning committee reacted to those suggestions by stating that UA including poultry rearing would be included in the next Municipal plan (Reykjavik Planning Committee, 2012). Fourthly, the city conducted an e-based referendum in March-April 2012, where citizens could vote for the most important projects to be carried out in their neighborhoods. Among the projects chosen was increased access to allotments (Reykjavik, 2012).

The planning staff of Reykjavik along with a consultant² has developed a draft for UA policy to be part of the next Municipal plan, currently (Oct.2012) under a review by other department and political committees of the city.

In the preparation for the draft policy several groups were consulted; among those all the Neighborhood committees, the Horticultural Society of Iceland, the Association of Icelandic chicken breeders, Slow food Reykjavik, the Association of Organic consumers and the Association of homeowners. Most of the groups consulted were eager about having UA formalized in the municipal plan yet few of the Neighborhood committees raised concerns over potential nuisance from domestic animals within the city.

In the policy paper UA is defined as food production within the city from plant cultivation or animal husbandry as well as non-industrial processing and distribution of such production. (Mukherji & Morales, 2010). The city plan must therefore include considerations on; plant cultivation, animal husbandry, small food processing industries, distribution and selling of the product, be that either in grocery stores, farmers markets or to restaurants.

The proposed policy for UA is based on following goals:

- Land and resources should be efficiently used
- Environmental quality and public health should be improved
- Citizens should have access to fresh and healthy foods
- Those interested in producing their own food should have the opportunity to do so, provided that conditions permit.

The policy itself is then proposed in seven strategic statements:

- As many as possible of the city's inhabitants will have access to fresh and healthy food.

² The consultant is the author of this piece.

- Conditions will be created to promote vegetable cultivation within the city limits.
- As many as possible of the city's inhabitants will be able to grow vegetables for their own consumption.
- Allotment gardens will be established in all ten neighborhoods.
- Where conditions allow, citizens may keep poultry for egg production for their own consumption.
- Facilities for the farmers market will be set up in all ten neighborhoods to increase citizens' access to fresh foods.
- The city officials will maintain good cooperation with individuals and organizations interested in healthy food production within the city.

With regard to the implementation of the policy, following steps are suggested:

Allotment gardens:

- In each neighborhood there will be facilities for the common vegetable gardens and/or allotments. Location of the gardens will be determined in neighborhood and site plans.
- The city will initiate cooperation with the local energy company for use of (surplus/waste) warm water to warm up soil to improve conditions for vegetable growing.
- The city will initiate cooperation with the local waste management company to set up recycling centers for organic waste for composting in connection with the allotment gardens in all neighborhoods.

Animal husbandry:

- Specific statutes and regulations will apply to animal husbandry as before. It is proposed that keeping of poultry will be allowed on strict terms. The city health officials will prepare ordinance on urban poultry where clear rules will be set, including terms of care, housing and fencing.

Farmers Markets:

- All neighborhoods should have a farmers market. Location for the markets, indoor and/or outdoor will be determined in neighborhood and site plans.

Construction associated with UA:

- In preparation for a neighborhood greenhouse or common garden sheds, the planning department should be consulted. Same goes for greenhouses, sheds and chicken coops on private lots.

Moreover, it is emphasized that the policy on UA should be well presented during the planning process so that the public can have their say in the policy development. If approved for as part of the general plan the implementation will happen through neighborhood plans where neighborhood committees and the residents will have the final say on whether and what kind of UA should be allowed in the given neighborhood.

3.3 Urban Agriculture and intersection with other policies

The Municipal plan for the city includes policies on land use, community development, urban form, transportation- and infrastructure systems and environmental issues within the municipality. Having the policy on UA as part of the Municipal plan therefore ensures that is in harmony with the above mentioned policies. There are several connections between the policy on UA and the city's current Local Agenda 21/environmental policy such as that the soil of the city be free of pollution and that green areas of the city be used for outdoor educational activities with emphasis on working with nature (Reykjavik, 2006).

Since year 2000, the Reykjavik Botanical Garden has a special section where vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants are cultivated. The Botanical Garden hosts public educational workshops on growing and preservation of these plants for the general public.

3.4 The planning process ahead - Key governance actors

The policy on UA as presented in the planning proposal is a top down approach. It is being presented at the top of the city government. By accepting the policy the city government will give the residents the opportunity to practice UA within the city. However, there is also a bottom up part of the equation since it will only be implemented through neighborhood plans or site plans. Therefore, the form of UA may vary between different neighborhoods. Neighborhood plans and site plans can then be revised as often as the Planning committee decides.

The current majority of city government is supporting the UA policy proposal, but the key actors in promoting the policy are the majority's representatives at the Planning committee. It should however be noted that all members of the Planning committee were supportive of the UA policy when introduced to them this fall.

Currently the draft policy on UA is being reviewed by different political committees in the city, and following that it will be put forward for public review along with other policies included in the proposed Municipal plan. The Planning committee and the City council will then finally approve the new Municipal plan early next year. Whether the UA policy will get amended in the process depends on how well it will be received by the public, but that should become apparent in the coming months.

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