

F O O D T O P I A

Towards a Regional Food Vision

'a document to inspire'
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Introduction

Food is the most powerful human agent shaping our planet and us. Its influence is to be found everywhere in our cities, rural landscapes, work patterns, social lives, politics, economics and ecological footprints. It is curious, therefore, that until very recently, food was not considered a planning issue.

This 'puzzling omission', as it was described by the American Planning Association in 2007, is increasingly recognised as a vital missing component in urban and regional development. 'Food planning' is an emergent specialist discipline in its own right, and several cities, notably Toronto, New York, London and Amsterdam, have recently developed urban food strategies. Yet, despite such initiatives, food remains at the periphery of mainstream political thought, and the practice of thinking and planning through food is still in its infancy.

Food's capacity to shape our world is in reality far greater than has yet been recognised. It goes beyond planning, politics, or indeed any other social or physical boundary, to encompass every aspect of our lives on earth. Food represents an enormous untapped resource that, if we but choose, we can use to rethink and reshape the very structures of our existence.

Harnessing food's power in this way is the ambition of the Regional Food Vision. This document sets describes how the Groningen-Assen Region can rethink itself through food to create new social and physical networks, new dimensions to existing plans and policies, and new synergies between individuals and organisations, in order to shape a vibrant, equitable and sustainable future.

Why a Regional Food Vision?

The Groningen-Assen Region is a rich agricultural territory whose two principal cities, Groningen and Assen, are both small-scale and compact, with 188,000 and 65,000 residents respectively. Historically, both cities were tightly bound to their rural hinterland through food, with farming a major employer in the district. Today, those connections have been lost. Although flourishing in many respects, the Region faces many challenges in the form of unemployment and rural depopulation. In the context of global recession, the Region must seek new ways of ensuring its own economic vibrancy. It also recognises the urgent need to respond to the global threats of peak oil and climate change. To this end, the Region aims to become carbon-neutral.

Many of the challenges facing the Groningen-Assen Region can be addressed through food. The Region's physical, social and political attributes are perfectly suited to creating a way of life that combines the strengths of city and country, restoring old connections and creating new ones in order to achieve a new balance between rural and urban life.

By establishing food as a policy priority, Groningen-Assen will bring new opportunities to rural and urban areas, create new jobs, and establish a new sense of meaning and cohesion for the Region as a whole.





Food's Journey

In creating a Regional Food Vision, the Groningen-Assen Region is not simply concerned with increasing local food security, but with the complex range of social and physical issues associated with food's journey. Food for cities is produced on land and sea, taken to market, bought and sold, cooked, eaten, and disposed of again, eventually returning to the land or sea whence it came. Food's journey is the ceaseless cycle that shapes urban civilization: a vital flow that can be harnessed for good or ill. It therefore forms the conceptual structure for the RFV.

Every stage of food's journey plays its part in shaping the Groningen-Assen Region. For instance, the way in which food is produced impacts directly on the rural landscape, and the way it is transported affects the use of roads, railways and canals, with implications for the region's traffic flows, air quality, ecological footprint and so on. But some of food's influences are less obvious. For example, children who share regular meals at table with their parents have been shown to have healthier diets on average as well as better conversational skills than their snacking peers.

The Regional Food Vision will address each stage of food's journey in order to achieve a healthier balance between urban and rural lifestyles, local and global markets, work and leisure pursuits. All are key to creating wellbeing without destroying the natural environment, and all are linked, ultimately, to food. Below is a description of some of the ways in which this can be done.

City and Land

Strengthening the relationship between city and country is central to the Regional Food Vision. A rich and varied agricultural district containing two smallish, compact cities, the Region's geography resembles those of historic city-states such as in ancient Greece or medieval Italy. In the past, such urban-rural configurations were viewed as ideal, since feeding the city was of primary importance, and the task could most easily be accomplished if city and country were physically and politically bound together.

Industrialisation and globalisation destroyed such close links, creating conditions in which the feeding of cities from far-distant hinterlands appeared not only sensible, but desirable. Today, in an era of climate change, peak oil and unstable global markets, such an approach is no longer valid. As we enter the neo-geographical age, a new model is required, in which city and country are once more joined together through the medium of food.

Historic food systems manifested many of these attributes by necessity, but what would such a system look like today? The question is vast in scope, but so are the rewards of answering it, because within it lies the opportunity to create a new dwelling model for the twenty-first century. This is the guiding principle of the Regional Food Vision.



Shifting Groningen's Food Culture

Food culture is the sum of habits, traditions, beliefs, knowledge and practice that together shape the food system. It is the mechanism by which food shapes society – and is thus the means by which food can be harnessed as a social and physical tool. Intimately woven into the fabric of life, food culture is essentially a value system based upon food's practical and conceptual meanings.

The quality of any particular food culture – its flavour, as it were – depends upon the value which that society places upon food. The more highly food is valued, the greater its capacity to influence places and people in positive ways. Thousands of Mumbai housewives, for example, cook hot lunches for their husbands, which are packed into stacked metal containers – 'tiffin-boxes' – and collected by an army of cycle couriers, who deliver up to 200,000 meals a day.

While nobody would suggest that Groningen housewives stay at home to cook for their husbands, the Mumbai case shows how powerfully food can connect people, provide employment, animate public space, and demonstrate love. Indian society is of course very different from Dutch, but the essence of what we all need as humans remains the same, and much of it can be addressed through food.

Shifting the Region's food culture towards a higher social value for food is therefore a priority of the Regional Food Vision. This will involve increasing people's engagement with food, providing opportunities for them to learn about it, to grow and cook their own, to appreciate, enjoy and share it.

Good food does not have to be complicated or expensive. As the founder of the Slow Food Movement Carlo Petrini pointed out, *cucina povera* – the simple, seasonal food of Italian peasants – is some of the best in the world. Of course, *cucina povera* is precisely the sort of food that industrialisation has largely stamped out. But understanding the value of healthy, sustainable, and ethically produced food is the first step toward creating a better food culture.

Creating Food Networks

Food networks are the power-lines of food culture. The more fine-grained and intertwined they are, the more social nutrient they can carry. Industrial food systems have been designed as far as possible to eliminate human contact from the food chain. In so doing, they have removed the innumerable social benefits to be gained from more personalised, fine-grained food systems.

Numerous studies have shown that humans have an innate need to feel joined to one another: a sense of connectedness is essential to our wellbeing. In the past, food networks performed a key role in connecting people, as they still do in modern cities like Mumbai. Every stage of food's journey in the past was labour intensive and social. Key moments in the agricultural year brought city and country together: poor city workers often helped with harvest for their annual holiday. Such practices, which died out just a generation ago, brought enormous health and social benefits, and their worth is once again being recognised. Community Supported Agriculture is just one example of how they are being revived.

By shifting its food culture towards a higher value of food, the Groningen-Assen Region will create many opportunities further to revive the human contact and involvement in food. This in turn will create new jobs for small farmers, food producers, artisanal craftsmen, entrepreneurs, cooks, delivery companies, caterers, forestry and wildlife specialists, tourism and green-sector workers. Through food, the Groningen-Assen Region will create a new local economic and social reality, creating new perspectives for rural areas and arresting their decline in the Northern Netherlands.

Making New Synergies

Food is a necessity. It follows that the RFV is not an 'add on' to the Region's administrative burden, but rather an opportunity to find new synergies between existing people, businesses and practices and link them together.

Food's potential to create such synergies is virtually inexhaustible. By eating well, growing food, cooking and sharing it, taking care over food waste, people can spend time closer to nature, be physically active, feel useful, cooperate with one another, show and receive love. Rethinking food's journey through the Groningen-Assen Region is the key to creating a healthier, happier, more sustainable society. Below are some specific examples of how this can be achieved at every stage of food's journey.



The Land

Food production is the first stage of food's journey. By changing the way its food is produced, the Groningen-Assen Region aims to strengthen the bonds between city and country, people and nature, creating a stronger, more resilient and more specialised regional food system. This in turn will provide rural employment, stimulate recreation and tourism, and strengthen the regional 'brand'. The RFV aims to put the 'culture' back into agriculture.

The physical characteristics of the Groningen-Assen Region provide many opportunities to create positive synergies through food. The small size and compactness of both cities means that the countryside always feels close at hand, while the countryside's natural variety creates distinctive local landscapes that can be enhanced and preserved through specialist, small and medium scale food production. Employment in countryside will be created through greater diversity of food-related activities, such as artisanal food processing, care farms, waste management and related green jobs, such as wildlife and water conservation.

Food growing in the cities will also be encouraged through a variety of measures. The disused sugar factory in Groningen has potential to become an internationally recognised multi-functional resource for research and education in urban and peri-urban food growing.

Aims:

- Create a healthier, more varied, regional food economy
- Raise awareness of the Groningen-Assen Region as a 'good food' region.
- Create, nurture and restore characteristic rural landscapes through appropriate food production.
- Increase the amount of food produced in the city and its fringes.
- Create new employment opportunities in local food production.

Possible Projects:

- Brand Groningen-Assen as a Good Food Region
- Agricultural training and apprenticeships
- Creating spaces to grow food, including raised beds for older people, Urban growing clubs, Community Supported Agriculture etc.
- Redevelopment of the former Sugar Factory terrain
- Productive Green Roofs

Instruments:

- Network meetings and conferences
- Food expertise in coming urban or regional planning processes (countryside renewal Woldstreek or planning of new urban neighbourhood)
- Collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce for specific linking & networking events (entrepreneur focused)
- Micro credit
- Planning legislation to release urban and peri-urban land for food growing
- Grants to encourage Green Roof construction

To work out:

- Where is Groningen-Assen's food currently produced?
- What percentage and what types of food are locally produced?
- What food is the hinterland already producing in quantity and quality?
- Where does that produce currently end up?
- What percentage is already specifically marketed for the region?
- What do local producers need in order to help them flourish?
- How could planning legislation be changed in order to encourage local food growing?
- What untapped resources are there for spaces to grow food close to the city?

Transport

The transport of food was a primary instrument that shaped the pre-industrial city, and both Assen and Groningen retain much of the physical infrastructure that once carried food into town. The potential is there to explore ways of re-using some of this infrastructure, notably the canal networks. Rail is also preferred to road as a means of transporting food, and the new regional tramway could be used partly in this way.



Aims:

- Increase the density and effectiveness of local food distribution networks
- Explore and encourage energy-efficient methods of food transport

Possible Projects:

- Create and support existing local food distribution networks (eg De Zaaister).
- Create new local food hubs to assist producers and distributors.
- Strengthen and create links between producers and restaurateurs.
- Work with supermarkets to engage more with local producers.
- Encourage public sector institutions such as schools and hospitals to source more food locally.
- Urban fleet of electric (or bicycle) food-delivery carts.

Instruments:

- Limit future supermarket expansion
- Home delivery services
- Pergolas
- Transition Towns
- City Agriculture
- Tax breaks for sustainable transport firms?

To work out:

- How does food currently enter the city?
- What percentage of food is carried by road, rail, air and canal?
- What is the carbon footprint of Groningen-Assen's current food system?
- How can waterways and railways be used more for food transport?
- What percentage of the food supply is currently controlled by supermarkets?

Market

The buying and selling of food has enormous potential to animate urban space. Food markets were historically the social and physical core of the city, where city and country met, and where city-dwellers got a sense of the shifting agricultural seasons. Although markets are no longer the only places where people can buy fresh food, they retain many of these characteristics. For these reasons, markets are prime locations for increasing public engagement with, and awareness of, food – for shifting the food culture, a primary aim of the RFV.

Although Groningen's food markets are well used, in general they are decline. Because they are seen as part of the conventional food system by alternative food producers and consumers, the latter do not link themselves with it. The revival and reshaping of the market therefore represents a key opportunity for the RFV.



Aims:

- Revive and expand existing food markets and broaden their customer base.
- Rebrand food markets as key public spaces in the city.
- Improve people's access to good food
- Encourage people to become 'co-producers'

Possible Projects:

- Local and regional food festivals (Noorderzon).
- Specialist local stalls, with a logo backed by the region
- Week of Taste.
- Local food co-ops (eg Park Slope, New York City).
- Provide assistance for elderly residents, to help carry their shopping home.

Instruments:

- Reformulate market policy
- Awareness raising stall holders
- Collaboration with Ministry of LNV/WUR in creating local alliances with farmers.
- New markets on district-scale
- Incorporate market in sustainability policy

To work out:

- Where do people currently buy their food?
- What percentage of food is bought in markets, small shops and supermarkets?
- Where does fresh produce currently come from?
- What percentage of items are locally sourced?
- How are local and seasonal foods communicated to consumers?
- What are the barriers to people buying local, seasonal food?
- How has Groningen's current food market policy to be changed?

Kitchen

Cooks are hugely important people in the food chain, for it is they who think about food, stimulate demand for good products, frequent markets and shops, plan meals ahead, and determine how much is wasted. As creators and co-producers, cooks are custodians of food culture. Groningen aims to become a city of good cooks – there is no more effective way of ensuring that the RFV will flourish.

Aims:

- Stimulate, encourage and increase cookery skills across the board.
- Strengthen local food and cookery knowledge and traditions.
- Celebrate existing food knowledge and pass on to the next generation

Possible Projects:

- Cookery workshops for all ages.
- Education for sustainable cooks
- Apprenticeship schemes in cookery, butchery etc.
- Knowledge swaps – where 'grannies teach kids'.
- Project to collect and celebrate local food traditions (book? Exhibition?).
- Community kitchens, for instance in old people's homes.

Instruments:

- Accoord van Groningen (to be adapted on the food-issue).
- Natuur- en Duurzaamheidseducatie (id.).
- Follow-up on Groningen Capital of Taste 2011.

To work out:

- What percentage of people in Groningen-Assen regularly cook from scratch?
- What are the barriers to people cooking from scratch?
- What are people's attitudes towards cooking and its importance?
- What food knowledge and traditions exist in Groningen-Assen?
- What do people need to help them to cook more and better?

Table

The one stage of food's journey with which everyone is familiar, the meal is both a reflection of food culture and a powerful phenomenon shaping society. How, where and with whom meals are consumed is therefore a core concern of the RFV. Food habits are formed early in life, so a primary aim of the RFV is to introduce good food to young children, both at school and at home. Appreciation of good food is the key to raising the social value of food, which in turn stimulates demand, creating opportunities for local producers and suppliers.

Aims:

- Shift Groningen-Assen's food culture towards a higher value for food.
- Educate children and adults in taste.
- Increase appreciation of and access to good food.
- Encourage people to eat better, healthier and more ethically produced food.
- Increase the number of family meals eaten at table.

Possible Projects:

- Build school kitchens and introduce school lunches.
- Taste classes for school children (as in France).
- Cafés serving local produce.
- Children growing their own vegetables in school gardens.
- An annual public Good Food Feast in the town square

Instruments:

- Public 'Heerlijk Groningen' campaign.
- Food and cookery classes in the school curriculum.
- Public education in the health benefits of eating well, dangers of obesity etc.
- Public procurement of local and organic food.
- Regional guidelines for 'best practice' in public eating places.
- Choice editing' for consumers, eg in public building canteens.
- Guidelines for information on restaurant menus?

To work out:

- Where are meals in Groningen currently eaten?
- What percentage of meals are eaten outside the home?
- Who eats in restaurants, and why?
- What are children's attitudes to meals?
- How are meal habits shifting from generation to generation?

Waste

Food waste represents the greatest untapped potential in the entire food cycle. It is endemic to industrial food systems, and created at every stage of food's journey from production to consumption. Every sort of waste, from unharvested crops, supermarket outsourcing, unsold food and domestic waste, is directly linked to the low social value of food and the artificial cheapness of food which comes at externalising its costs. Waste reduction across the board is therefore a fundamental goal of the GRFV and will result directly from the re-valuing of food that is at its core.



Aims:

- Reduce Groningen's food waste at all stages of food's journey.
- Close the ecological urban loop.

Possible Projects:

- Educational programme to increase awareness of waste issues.
- Compost/recycle all waste from supermarkets.
- Municipal bio-digester (eg Vagron).
- Neighbourhood composting sites (eg 'Growing Power', USA).
- Encourage farmers to build waste digesters.
- Dedicated pig farms linked to commercial food production?
- Work with supermarkets to relax visual and size standards.
- Food distribution charities for unsold food.

Instruments:

- Internalise true costs of food.
- Legislate to increase domestic and institutional recycling.
- Identify principle causes of waste and seek incentives to reduce them.
- Tax incentives to encourage waste reduction and recycle water.
- Ban of wasteful foods – eg bottled water – in municipal buildings.
- Research into alternative packaging.

To work out:

- How much food does Groningen-Assen currently waste?
- At which stages of food's journey is most food wasted?
- What types of foods are wasted, and why?
- What is best practice in cities and regions elsewhere?
- What barriers are in place preventing a less wasteful food system?
- What changes in legislation could best reduce those barriers?

Sitopia

The six stages of food's journey described above cannot be considered independently, but instead form a continuum that can only be understood as a whole. In totality, they represent sitopia, or 'food place': the cumulative effects of food cultures and systems on our social and physical environment. In order to work with food in its totality, RFV will effectively create a 'sitopia matrix': a multi-functional instrument through which the complexities of food and its effects can be understood. The RFV will thus operate at many different scales, working at individual, local, regional, national and international levels to create a newly synthetic approach to urban and regional development.

Aims:

- Rethink the Groningen-Assen Region through food to create sitopia.
- Galvanise local and regional popular support for a new food vision.
- Publicise and share the vision nationally and internationally.

Possible Projects:

- Local food website (H)eerlijk Groningen.
- Develop the Groningen Sugar Factory into an international centre for research and education in food and cities.

Instruments:

- Develop and implement the RFV as an incremental long-term policy.
- Set specific targets for the RFV and monitor them against progress.
- Research programmes targeting specific questions within the RFV.
- Collaboration between the municipality, the commercial sector, and academia.

To work out:

- What would the Groningen-Assen Region look like if it were sitopia?
- What links does the GRFV have to existing municipal and regional strategies?
- What can Groningen-Assen learn from other cities, regions and food systems?
- What can be learnt from the successes and failures of existing food strategies such as those of London, New York and Amsterdam?
- How can the GRFV benefit from existing research into food and its social and physical effects?

ADDENDUM I Food, Cities and Sitopia

Using food as a design tool

We are witnessing a fundamental shift in the core relationship of human society: that between city and country. Cities have always relied on the countryside for their sustenance, but in the past, so few people lived in them (just three per cent in 1800) that their ecological impact was limited. Today, more than half the global population lives in cities, and their number is expected to double by 2050. If the future is urban, we urgently need to redefine what that means.

Of all the resources needed to sustain a city, none is more vital than food. Before industrialisation, this was obvious. The physical difficulties of producing and transporting enough food made it the dominant priority of every urban authority. No city was built without first considering where its food was to come from, and most were sited on rivers, in order to benefit from plentiful fresh water, easy waste disposal, and cheap transport. Markets were at the core of urban life, since they were generally the only places where fresh food could be bought, and were often the only public space available. Situated right in the heart of the city, they were multi-functional places where people gathered to trade, chat or haggle, to take part in public protests, celebrations or seasonal festivals.



Grain, then as now, was the staple food of every city, and all aspects of the grain supply, from its harvest, storage, distribution, milling and baking, were carefully controlled. Fresh foods, such as meat and fish, were consumed seasonally, with the excess preserved for winter by salting, drying or pickling. Fruit and vegetables were luxury foods, grown locally for those who could afford them, usually in the city fringes. No food was ever wasted: leftover scraps were fed to pigs and chickens, and human and animal waste was collected and spread as fertiliser. The sights and smells of food at every stage of its cycle from green to ripe, raw to cooked, fresh to rotten, were ever-present in the pre-industrial city.

Today, all that has changed. The arrival of railways emancipated cities from geography, making it possible to build them any size, shape, and place. As cities sprawled, food systems industrialised in order to feed them, and the two began to evolve independently. While architects and planners dreamt of cities free of the chaos, mess and smell of food, food companies strove for ever-greater 'efficiencies' in the pursuit of profit. Food production was increasingly located, not close to cities, but in places where natural resources and cheap labour could be most readily exploited.

Our very concept of a city, inherited from a distant, predominantly rural past, assumes that the means of supporting urbanity can be endlessly extracted from the natural world. But this is not the case. Food and agriculture today account for one third of global greenhouse gas emissions. Nineteen million hectares of rainforest are lost each year to agriculture, while a similar quantity of existing arable land is lost to salinisation and erosion. Seventy percent of the world's freshwater is used for farming, yet rivers and aquifers worldwide are running dry. Each calorie of food we consume in the West takes an average of ten to produce, yet up to half the food produced is wasted. A billion people worldwide live in hunger, while a further billion are overweight or obese. Factor all the externalities, and it becomes clear that 'cheap food' is an oxymoron – one we can no longer afford.

Industrialisation created the illusion that cities were independent, immaculate and unstoppable. Now that the illusion is wearing off, we need a new dwelling model that recognises the dominant role that cities play in the global ecology. But how are we to arrive at such a model? Food is the key. Food is the one thing without which we can't survive. What better basis, then, around which to order our lives? Together, we can harness food as a social and physical tool, both to interpret the world and to shape it better.

We can create 'sitopia', or 'food-place' (from the Greek *sitos*, food, and *topos*, place). We already live in a sitopia of sorts, since the cities, landscapes, and ecosystems we inhabit were all shaped by food. The problem is, our blindness to food's influence has created a bad sitopia; one so bad, that it threatens to destroy us—if we don't change it. So we must create a good sitopia, one that restores balance to our lives, to society, and to our relationship with the natural world.



Many of the problems we face today can be linked to a lack of respect for food. To create a good sitopia, then, we must restore to food its proper value. Food is the most important shared element in all our lives. It follows that it belongs, not at the periphery of society, but at its heart.

The current food debate often focuses on questions of method, such as whether we should farm industrially or organically, use high-tech or traditional practices, and so on. Food is often discussed as if it were an abstract problem, somehow removed from other aspects of our lives. This is the mindset we need to change. Instead of getting stuck in false polarities, we must decide what sort of places and communities we want to create, then ask what food practices and systems best match our aspirations.

Openness to such questions is the key to sitopia. Even if we can't say for sure what a 'good life' might be, we can at least describe some of its attributes. Most of us, for instance, would agree that a good life is one in which people are generally happy, healthy, industrious and loving; in which societies are tolerant, equable, peaceable, and sustainable, and the surroundings are diverse, bountiful, and beautiful.

We know such an ideal place can't exist; that would be utopia. However, we can still create elements of such a place, using food as our tool. Sitopia is not an ideal, but rather a way of thinking that can itself create many different connections, relationships and places. Sitopia is contingent, partial, practical. It can be big or small, shared or personal. It can take many shapes and forms. It can be created by anybody, any time, anywhere.

The essential task of sitopia is to put food first. This is not a clarion call to gourmandism. On the contrary, it is a call to recognise food's power to shape our lives, and to use that power positively. Our most urgent task today is to create a dwelling model that is appealing to people, equable and sustainable. It is a task full of paradoxes: how to reconcile city and country, man and nature, prosperity and sustainability. All this can be done through food.

As Ebenezer Howard pointed out in his *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* in 1902, urban and rural lifestyles have their good and bad points. The trick is to find ways of combining them that maximise the benefits and minimise the disadvantages of both.

There are many ways this can be done. The quickest and easiest is simply to change the way we eat. For example, we can choose to 'eat the view' eat food that is produced, transported and sold in ways that nurture the kinds of landscapes and social networks we desire.

We can become what the founder of the Slow Food Movement Carlo Petrini calls 'co-producers': people who consciously shape the world through their food choices.

Producing food differently can also help rebalance our relationship with nature. We have a profound need for contact with the natural world, yet our cities, lifestyles and rural landscapes have all evolved to exclude it. Indeed, the exclusion of nature is one of the implicit aims of industrial farming. By contrast, traditional mixed-use farming methods, offer many opportunities to combine food production with nature conservation, creating ways of life more in harmony with natural cycles and seasons. Community Supported Agriculture, care farms, community gardens and organic box schemes all testify to the benefits of small and medium-scale, socially integrated food systems

Food can also help unlock the apparent paradox of 'prosperity without growth'. Numerous studies have shown that, once our basic needs are satisfied, our wellbeing does not significantly increase with the accumulation of further material goods. Instead, happiness lies in activities that involve sharing, nurturing, developing skills and caring for one another. In the 1950s, the humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow explained these as a human 'hierarchy of needs'. Physiological and security needs (food, water, sleep shelter etc) were at the base, and psychological needs (love, esteem, self-actualisation) at the top. A happy person – and a successful society – is one in which all these needs are met.



Food has a part to play in every stage of Maslow's hierarchy. It is essential to our bodily function, sense of security and social bonds. It requires skill to grow and prepare, bringing satisfaction and esteem to those who grow and cook it, pleasure and love to those who share it. Food, in short, is a uniquely diverse medium through which many of our social and personal needs can be met, at little or no cost to the environment. Valued properly, food is the key to sustainable wellbeing.

Of course food is not the only thing in life. Yet it remains hugely potent in shaping our social and physical worlds. Whatever form human dwelling takes in future, the urban-rural relationship will be at its core, and whoever controls food will have the power to shape our bodies, homes, cities, landscapes and societies. How we choose to farm, shop, cook, eat and waste is up to us, but our choices, multiplied many times over, will shape our common future. By making those choices well, we have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

ADDENDUM II Groningen City and Region

Physical Context

The geology of the Groningen-Assen region is extremely varied, with five characteristic types of landscape around the city of Groningen alone. These are the sandy ridge of the Hondsrug on which the city is located, the brook valleys of the Hunze and the Drentsche Aa, the Drenthe plateau, the peat landscape of Zuidelijk Westerkwartier and the clay regions with the terps (man-made dwelling mounds). These regions have in turn created a variety of distinctive rural landscapes that sustain a range of agricultural activities, from diary farming and market gardening to industrial potato production. In certain areas, notably in the wooded Groningen Westerkwartier, the small-scale landscape was not re-parcelled by land re-allotment during the 1970s, and several farmers have worked to preserve aspects of the natural landscape.

The cities of Groningen and Assen are both small-scale, compact and green. Both are served by extensive canal networks and intersected by numerous natural waterways and green spaces. In the city of Groningen's ecological strategy, these features are described as a 'blue-green network' that plays a key role in the life of the city.

Both cities contain many spaces originally created by food, such as the Marktstraat in Assen and the Grote Markt and Vismarkt in Groningen. Regular food markets are held in both cities, and that held in the Groningen Vismarkt attracts customers from as far afield as Germany.

The site of the disused sugar factory in Groningen also has enormous scope as a potential food-related development site, and could serve as an incubator site to inspire and bring people to the region.

Social context:

A compact city with a large university, Groningen is a 'City of Talent', with a highly educated, motivated population. Individuality, innovation and trendsetting are fundamental to the city's outlook. Assen is the fastest growing city in the North, with a lot of economic activity in government and service industries and the biggest Dutch taxpayer – Royal Dutch Oil Company – within its borders. Assen is also a green city, with many natural spaces in the city and its immediate surroundings. Although the Region as a whole is flourishing, it faces challenges in the form of unemployment and rural depopulation.

Policy Context:

Groningen is strong, social and sustainable, and the city's plans and policies reflect this. The city aims to be energy-neutral by 2025: an aim that involves making the most of potential sources of sustainable energy, including renewable sources, biomass fermentation, sewage, etc.

Groningen treats its natural surroundings with great care. The city does not expand at the cost of the landscape, but rather intensifies and invests in it. Recognising that the unique qualities of the city periphery often arose as a consequence of centuries-old farming practices, the city aims to support the continuance of such practices, as the best way of preserving these qualities and protecting the countryside from urban sprawl and price speculation.

Assen is like Groningen social en sustainable. Assen aims to be CO2-neutral in 2020. It is developing new CO2-neutral working and living areas. The city is green and invests in its green capital. The coming years Assen will develop the natural quality of the Drentse Aa area.

A 2008 project to develop regional agricultural production, "Local products ... uut Grunn", was one such initiative. Such projects have helped Groningen achieve the title 'Capital of Taste' (Hoofdstad van de Smaak) in 2011. This nomination gives the city and its region impetus to raise its profile in relation to food, incorporating a number of existing policies and initiatives into an integrated whole: the Regional Food Vision (RFV).





About the Author:

Carolyn Steel (DIP Arch RIBA)

Since qualifying from Cambridge University in 1984, Carolyn has combined practice with teaching, writing and research. She joined the practice in 1989, since when she has completed several buildings for the Central School of Speech and Drama. Her academic work has focused on the everyday lives of cities, and her lecture series Food and the City is an established part of the architectural degree at Cambridge University. She has run successful design units at Cambridge, London Metropolitan University, and at the London School of Economics, where she was inaugural studio director of the Cities Programme. Since 2010 Carolyn is a visiting research fellow and lecturer at Wageningen University, to explore themes around Food and the City.

She has presented on BBC TV's 'One Foot in the Past', has written for Blueprint Magazine is a regular columnist for Building Design. Her book Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives, published by Chatto and Windus in 2008, won the Royal Society of Literature Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction and was recently featured on a special edition of Radio 4's The Food Programme. At the end of 2010 there will also be a Dutch translation available for her book.

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