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## Exploring Meaning and Values of Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture through an Ontological Approach

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### Abstract

Urban and peri-urban agriculture has been claimed by scientists as one of the most promising strategies to improve food security and nutrition in developing countries, especially benefiting the poor. However, in spite of its promising future as a strategy to improve life quality, it has still not reached substantial levels of adoption from local users as well as from policymakers. This research pursues to contribute on the understanding of the tangibles and intangibles values (i) that agriculture has for urban and peri-urban actors, and (ii) the values that agriculture has for potential urban and peri-urban citizens. A better understanding will contribute to identifying those factors that are hindering or strengthening the adoptability of this strategy across the different involved actors and why.

This research is contextualized in Ecuador, by exploring different urban and peri-urban groups separated by (i) adopters and (ii) non-adopters, showing similar levels of social vulnerability in the cities of Guayaquil, Cuenca, and Quito. Two research approaches and mixed methods are applied. For the group of adopters, an actor-network analysis (ANT)-ontological approach- is performed in order of following those human and non-human actors through the “value chain” of the farmed products. For the group of non-adopters, a constructivist approach is used in order of building the meaning of what “they do not do, or they do not have”. The main used research methods are (i) visual methods, such as eliciting photography and the combination of storytelling with individual drawing, (ii) individual interviews, and (iii) participant observation.

From a methodological perspective, the results from the “adopters” group show that the use of ANT as a methodological approach to making visible the tangible and intangible values that agricultural products have for urban and peri-urban farmers is successful. Since it makes possible to recognise the “food”, “social networking”, “self-stem”, “empowerment”, “agency”, “health”, “nutrition”, values that the farmed products can have for human actors. In the case of the “non-adopters”, the use of “anonymous adopters” and “own” photographs, and drawings elicited people to explore the potential value and meaning of the agriculture that “they do not do or do not have”.

**Keywords:** Ontological approach, peri-urban agriculture, urban agriculture