



Italian Network for Local Food Policies

Practices and projects, territories, new economies, culture and society in transition toward sustainable food systems

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Manifesto

Who we are

The Italian Network for Local Food Policies (from now on being referred to as the “Network”) is being promoted by a group of academic, scientific and independent researchers, from different Italian cities engaged in multiple ways in research activities related to “local food policies”.

Fundamental Principles

The Network recognizes the central role that food-related practices can play in transition processes toward sustainable and resilient cities. Promoting a sustainable food system at local level means to provide for healthier food, more lively urban spaces, fair pay for everyone all along the supply chain, while building local economies based on a new relationship between cities and rural areas, and among farmers and consumers.

The Network for Local Food Policies

The international debate generally refers to “urban food policies”, “urban food planning”, “urban food strategies”, and other terms. These expressions stem from processes which, depending on different governance contexts and dynamics, have developed different ways of managing food-related issues.

During the founding meeting of the Network, held at CREA¹ in Rome on January 15, 2018, around forty participants debated on choosing the Network’s name. They shared the need to identify an expression in Italian, given the willingness to interact with different actors operating in the national context (public administrators, economic actors, organizations, practitioners, activists, food-related movements and other actors of the civil society). Moreover, the use of a term in Italian aims to underline the specificity of different local contexts and the fact that the Network, through its activities and the internal and external dialogue that is promoting, aims to contributing in building up a framework for an “Italian way” toward local food policies.

¹ Consiglio per la Ricerca in Agricoltura e l’analisi dell’Economia Agraria (Council for Research in Agriculture and the Analysis of Agricultural Economics)

We opt to work on *policies* and not *policy*, because we do share and underline the need to integrate in a systemic perspective a multiplicity of skills, topics and actions, which fit well under the singular form of ‘policy’. At the same time, we believe that ‘policies’ reflect better the heterogeneous nature of ongoing actions and processes, which sometimes can be contrasting one another. We see diversity and comparison as enriching values to the debate, and we recognize the need to explore different pathways and keep together different needs and interests. Given the complexity of local food systems, with the concept of “public food policies”, the Network also takes into account policies’ unexpected effects, the changing quantities of resources and interests they bring together, and new entries of actors involved through the implementation of different policies.

We opt for the term *policies*, understood in a broad sense, formal and informal, top-down and bottom-up, considering these as an array of available options. Policies implemented or promoted by a variety of actors - public, private and the “service sector” (the borders of which are becoming increasingly blurry) - and at different scales, thinking that each actor has its own potential space for action, from individual consumers to local governments. Policies are understood as processes toward change, whose common acceptance depends on the level of openness and involvement capacity of the process itself.

Local policies instead of *urban* policies, to emphasize, on a cultural and “geopolitical” level, not only the role of cities, but to include the relations existing in the urban-rural continuum, taking a territorial approach towards urban policies. This is also to avoid perpetuating, through language, representations and semantics that implicitly reproduce the urban-rural dichotomy. However, this does not imply that we do not consider the central role of cities and that of the current urbanization process taking place all over the world.

Local policies, where local refers to both geographic contexts and space for social action. A context with blurred borders, taken as an intermediate level (to be developed and legitimized) among single actors’ policies (individuals, groups and local communities) and supra-local policies (stemming from regional and national levels, as well as from the European and the global one).

Local policies also in the sense of *territorial* policies, taken in a broader and inclusive approach with respect to territorial planning. While planning holds a pivotal role in territorial policies, its role can increase in a perspective of local food policies. Indeed, the debate revolves around a number of topics, some of which with particular geographic-spatial references. Local is therefore understood as an exploration and construction of relatively independent possibilities to ‘regulate’ the food system. This “local” area is not a given area, neither is defined by political-administrative jurisdictions. It is rather produced through local food policy processes which cut across functional spaces, cultural territories, areas of political and collective action around food.

Regarding the latter, we opt for local **food** policies as a whole, not only those strictly focused on nutrition. We believe that “food” embraces the transversal meaning of nutritional, cultural, social, environmental and economic aspects. Reference is also made to the English term “food systems”, which relates to all those elements (environment, society, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities linked to the production, transformation, distribution, consumption of food and food waste processing, as well as to the socio-economic and environmental impacts of these actions. Moreover, we are interested in underlying the importance of the ethno-anthropological dimension of “taste” as a means of food distinction.

Goals

Current food systems are producing a series of issues: obesity, malnutrition, and other forms of nutritional poverty; food waste; soil consumption; pressure coming from intensive agricultural patterns and related consequences in terms of ecosystem services; loss in food cultural heritage; trivialization, simplification and loss of landscape and foodscape's functions, etc.

Because of this, we propose to focus research efforts towards the transformation of the food system and the territory, through an approach that aims to link research and action in a critical manner, reflecting on our roles and responsibilities.

The goal of the Network, which is not an easy one when discussing food and food systems, is to bring together different research approaches and academic and professional backgrounds characterizing this group of researchers and experts. Planners, geographers, agronomists, economists, nutritionists, legal experts, sociologists, have nowadays the possibility to talk around the same table about a topic that touches upon various aspects of today's society: challenges related to agriculture sustainability, relationships within food supply chains, the structure of urban and peri-urban agricultural areas, connections between urban and rural areas, the interpretation of new models of food consumption, the management of natural resources intended for food production, nutritional issues, waste management and prevention of food losses and waste, food cultures, models of distribution, the relationship between short supply chains and large-scale retailing, balancing between locally-produced and remotely-grown food, etc.

From an operational point of view, the Network intends to monitor, in terms of coherence and sustainability, the performance of overall policies, programs and strategies as well as single initiatives in the food system of Italian cities involved in the Network. By setting up a framework for evaluation which includes objectives, targets and indicators, and throughout the collaboration between the participants of the Network, the objective is to provide suggestions in terms of policy-making to guide choices toward sustainable food systems.

In this context, the Network aims to develop outcomes coherent with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations. As the SDGs strive to respond to some of the biggest challenges of our time, Food Policies can work in synergy for the achievement of sustainable development goals, also concurring to reaching objectives on different scales, from urban to global. This also reinforces their legitimacy in the domain of public policies.

The Network aims to promote, where there is lack of, and to enhance, in already existing activities, development of new *curricula* and educational programs focused on food systems (for example in Universities, research centres, in collaboration with businesses and local institutions, etc.).

In our vision, a Local Food Policy has a pivotal role around which a multitude of policies evolve. Such policies traditionally pertained to sectors operating independently from one another. A Local Food Policy also requires economic, environmental and social sustainability. Among other, the rising human pressure on natural resources, issues deriving from food supply chains characterized by distortions in the distribution of added value, the profitability of farms and workers' conditions in all sectors of the supply chain, impose ways of thinking that go beyond a "simple" lineup of those elements composing the food system.

Our shared offer

The Network aims to act as a platform for interaction amongst its participants, where various elements can be conveyed rapidly:

- research initiatives involving the food system experts of this Network;
- organization of meetings, conferences and national/international seminars, workshops, round-tables, etc.;
- stimuli to develop joint research projects;
- organization of working groups to address specific research objectives;
- provide notification of conferences and important food-related events;
- sharing of documents, articles, publications on specific topics;
- offer a dialogue/interaction between the Italian Network and other international networks in the field of local food policies;
- exchange of information and points of view on food policies carried out by individual (or groups of) participants in collaboration with local initiatives.

Vision

Nowadays we are facing an increased disconnection between food production and consumption, in geographical, political, economic, social, symbolic and cognitive terms. Local Food Policies strive to respond to these challenges by integrating disciplinary sectors which have remained traditionally independent one from another. The Network aims to connect ideas, points of view and research which feed lively and in a timely manner the debate around the themes intertwining agriculture, society, territories, economies and supply chains. Therefore, it aims to play a role of a sharing and exchange platform, a space for open and democratic debate, conscious of the fact that the transition path toward sustainable food systems passes through solutions that integrate the multiplicity of disciplinary fields that the food systems, by their multidimensional nature, require.

Florence, January 15, 2019

The Assembly of the Second Meeting of the Italian Network of Local Food Policies