



ITALIAN NETWORK ON LOCAL FOOD POLICIES

4° ANNUAL MEETING

Food and Covid-19: practices,
processes and policies of change
towards sustainability

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

All of us were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. So was the food system, which experienced significant consequences. Particularly dramatic was the challenge of access to food for a growing share of the population. While this fourth meeting of the Italian Network on Local Food Policies could not desist from examining this crisis, it was also built on the premises that **COVID-19 did not cause the crisis of the food system, but rather revealed a pre-existent one**. Talking about the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic therefore also entailed a broader set of reflections on global and local food systems, starting from the processes, practices and policies which tried to innovate and solve the contradictions of such crisis and, in this context, define the role of a new food governance.

The national meeting was organized online and divided in four parts. The first part was an interactive discussion among all the participants who were divided into eight working groups. This was an opportunity for **sharing experiences and develop a conversation between institutions, civil society, and academia**. The discussion focused on local innovative policies and practices (20 cases overall) developed to face the COVID-19 crisis in Italy and enhance the resilience, social justice, sustainability and transformative potentials of the food system. The discussion allowed for common key themes to emerge such as: the importance of logistics and digital tools to improve production - consumption connections and the collection of food surpluses (despite the challenge of the digital divide); the difficulties faced by the public administration in understanding and call attention to the potential of local innovative practices, especially when these occurred on a small-scale; the numerous initiatives of collection of food surpluses and their redistribution to the population in need; the important role of actors such as universities in raising awareness about the food system and developing new models of public procurement; the relevance of creating multi-actors discussion tables and partnerships at local and regional level.

Based on such discussion around local initiatives, participants were invited to think of the **future research and action directions of the network**, in accordance with the following thematic areas: governance and policies, sustainable diets and nutrition, social and economic equity, agri-food production, food chains and distribution, food waste and losses, and food poverty. In terms of research directions, participants underlined, among other, the need for further collection of experiences and mapping of local initiatives as well as of governance tools and food policies, in order to disseminate knowledge about the ways in which local actors overcome recurring challenges; develop investigations on local food consumption patterns; analyse the working conditions of workers of the food chains; and, with

regards to food poverty, the need for finding ways to translate into practical and operational procedures the interconnections between different sectorial realms. In terms of future actions of the network, participants pointed to the need to engage more with food actors at local level to facilitate their empowerment; bringing the theme of food policies to the attention of policy makers and in the political agendas; communicate about good practices to a diverse audience; and networking with national and international research networks open to collaborations.

The afternoon session of the meeting focused on the **future organization of the network**. The intension was to promote an open discussion and to gather the visions, expectations and recommendations of participants with regards to the composition and future goals and activities of the network. Gathering such thoughts and suggestions was also functional to the preparation of a specific webinar to be held in June 2021, which will aim at further defining the organizational structure and activities of the network. The session started with a presentation of the activities conducted by the network during the last year, focusing on the different steps that allowed it to become a platform for open dialogue, knowledge sharing, support and promotion of action-research. It also highlighted the activities conducted by the network since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including a survey on the impacts of COVID-19 on local food systems, one on changing food habits, a review of important reports and articles, and running webinars.

The discussion with the participants allowed to talk over key questions such as the legal structure of the network, which, it was decided, will remain informal while also developing new ways to search for funding opportunities. In terms of governance, thematic working groups will be developed to allows more in-depth exchanges and conversations between scholars and civil society. Developing a journal, an observatory of best practices both in Italy and internationally to foster a comparative perspective, further mapping of local activities will also become important working objectives. The positioning of the network was also examined and discussed in terms of a work of mediation between governance and local actors, especially to bring the themes of local food policies to the attention of policy makers. The network also increasingly aims at creating linkages with educational projects in schools and beyond, with local associations for example; highlighting the importance of rural and inland areas; conducting action-research; and organizing public meetings and discussion opportunities on the themes of food policies together with the public administration.

The final session of the meeting focused on the **working themes of the network**, namely mapping practices, mapping policies, policy evaluation, and the different realms of action-research. The discussion included an evaluation of mapping tools and methods, raising a debate on what, who and for whom to map. In terms of policy evaluation, participants examined the possibility to look at participatory processes

and comparing the different strategies and trajectories that can bring to the formulation and implementation of local food policies. Defining indicators to evaluate them and have some common points of references was also raised as an important aspect of such possible evaluation processes. Finally, in terms of action-research, the network will work on developing guidelines on how to foster the development of a food policy and how to produce policy recommendations. Moreover, it will continue to enhance the creation of discussion opportunities with local civil society, while keeping a reflexive standpoint (and fostering it among researchers) as to how to participate actively in these processes while developing a non-extractive, participatory and sensible approach.

Full report (in Italian only) available at this link:
https://www.politichelocalicibo.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/RPLC-REPORT_IV_INCONTRO_NAZIONALE.pdf

Considering that the event was held remotely online due to restrictions from COVID-19, the appointment on January 28 was accompanied by a series of **thematic webinars**:

1. April 15, 5.30 pm: "[The 'Farm to Fork' strategy: between redistribution and multi-spatiality](#)", organized by CoACT University of Trento - Food Practices in Movement.
2. April 29, 9.30 am: "[From local food policies to the regional food policy of Tuscany?](#)", Organized by the Institute of Management - Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna and University of Pisa, in collaboration with ANCI Toscana.
3. May 25, 5.30-7.30 pm: "[The United Nations Food Summit. What future for the Governance of the Food System?](#)".

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