

Local Food Policies

Meanings, definitions, principles, pathways, and approaches for the transformation of local food systems

September 2025

Premises

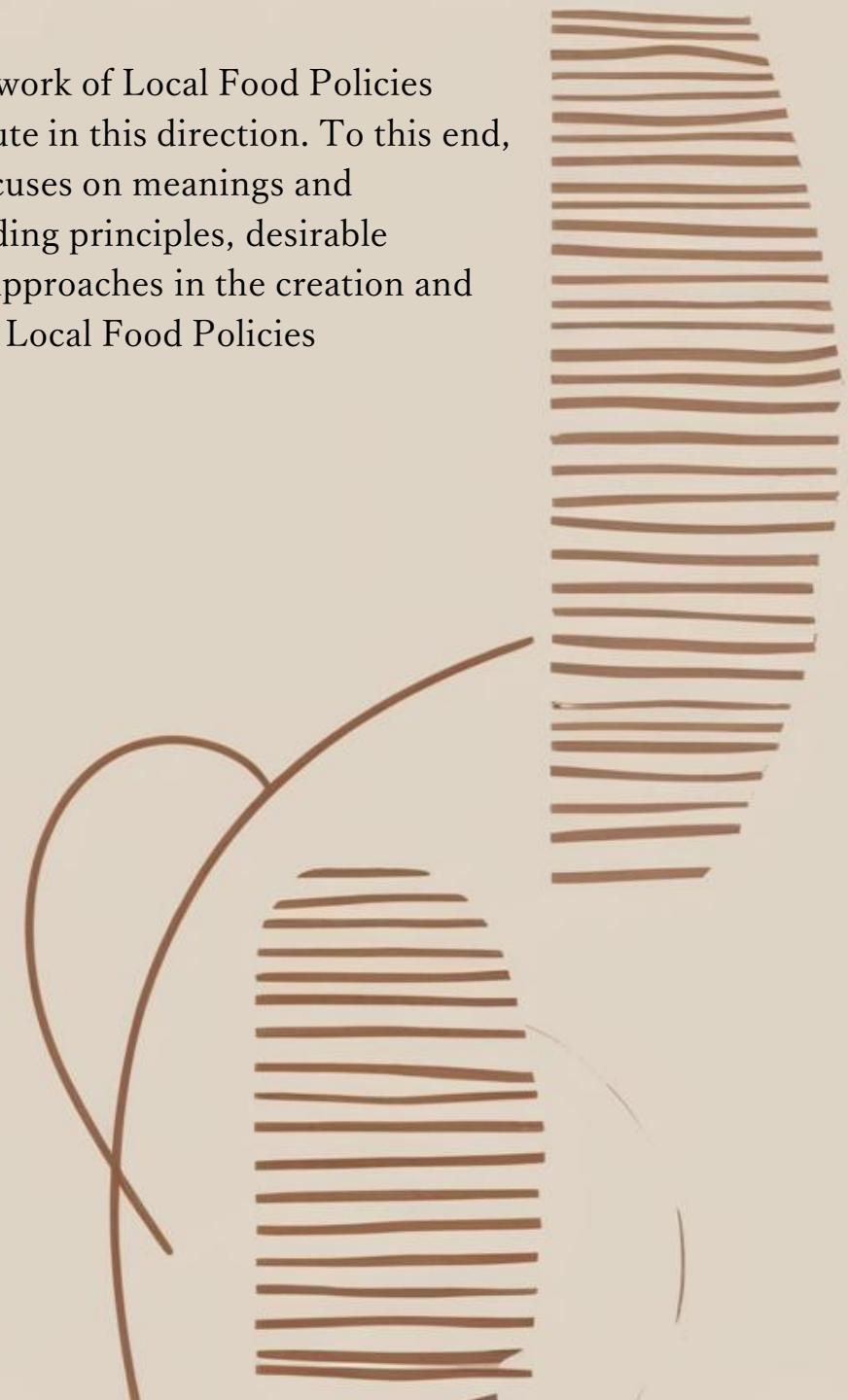
Food-related actions play a central role in the transition processes towards more environmentally sustainable, resilient, socially and economically equitable cities, and territories.

Promoting an equitable and sustainable local food system means guaranteeing **universal access** to nutritious, safe, ethically and culturally adequate food; **reconnecting production and consumption**; enhancing and diversifying **food culture and food citizenship**; managing and sustaining **resilient and environmentally friendly production-distribution systems**; ensuring a **fair distribution of economic value and rebalancing power relations** along the food chain; respecting the **dignity of labour**; considering the **rights of animals** as well as the rights of people; giving concrete expression in governance spaces to the principles of **food sovereignty and democracy**; and managing the urban-rural continuum while respecting all social and cultural specificities and environmental balances.

Local Food Policies should respond to these challenges by **profoundly innovating logics and operational approaches in the management of food-related practices and processes**: this means fostering system thinking, integrating traditionally independent sectors, reviewing evaluation criteria in order to overcome a purely economic and anthropocentric logic, focused exclusively on the present.

In a process of **re-politicising food**, Local Food Policies should create spaces and tools for participatory and democratic governance, so as to empower all actors in society. In this context, far from being a mere commodity subject to economic transactions, food becomes a common good to be managed in the multiplicity of its values.

The Italian Network of Local Food Policies aims to contribute in this direction. To this end, what follows focuses on meanings and definitions, guiding principles, desirable pathways, and approaches in the creation and management of Local Food Policies



Meanings and definitions



The Network characterises ‘Local Food Policies’ in the following way:

- Food **POLICIES** take into account the complexity of issues related to local food systems, which are also shaped by the diversity of the contexts in which these policies develop—and, within them, the variety of objectives, actions, and processes that must be brought together.
- **Policies in a broad sense** - formal and informal, top-down and bottom-up -, in a wide range of possibilities, as policies implemented or activated by a plurality of actors and at different scales (from micro-local to bioregional), in relation to national, European and international policies.
- **Policies with inherent democratic characteristics and transformative value**, spaces for dialogue and co-decision that support change-oriented processes. In this sense, they are policies that embed social empowerment objectives throughout every phase of their implementation cycle: from their initial formulation, as an expression of food sovereignty, to their execution and ongoing monitoring.
- **LOCAL** and not urban policies, to focus on relationships and the urban-rural continuum and to avoid reproducing the dichotomy between the city and the countryside.
- Local food policies that move beyond a ‘defensive’ or ‘self-sufficient’ notion of the local dimension. They acknowledge **the complexity of food systems** and that no single territory can, or should, be entirely self-sufficient. These are policies that avoid fostering individualistic behavior or territorial competition, recognizing instead that transforming food systems demands commitment and cooperation across multiple scales.

- Policies that, insofar as they are local, are also **territorial**, aimed at exploring and constructing possibilities of ‘regulation’ of the food system that are relatively autonomous at the local level. In this regard, the concept of 'local' is not fixed or predetermined by political-administrative boundaries, but is instead shaped through the very processes of constructing local food policies, emerging at the intersection of functional spaces, cultural territories, spheres of political action, and the social spaces of collective engagement around food.
- Local food policies that recognise that each city/territory/region possesses the **local competences** to uniquely grasp both the opportunities and criticalities of its context and to define local policies capable of governing the way in which food is produced, distributed and consumed, and that there are therefore no replicable solutions as such.
- Local **FOOD** policies, because the term ‘food’ better reflects the multiplicity of values - nutritional, cultural, social, environmental and economic - embedded in it. Food is to be associated with the ‘food system’, i.e. the activities related to the production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal, and all the elements that come into play (environment, society, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.), considering their social, cultural, economic and environmental implications.
- Local food policies thus play a **pivotal role**, around which a multiplicity of policies (e.g. agricultural, environmental, commercial, educational, spatial planning, health-related, etc.) revolve and intersect. As such, food policies face the challenge of **creating spaces of encounter and comparison** between a multiplicity of operational areas that traditionally act independently. This role goes well beyond merely bringing together the various elements of the food system
- By virtue of this nature, the development of local food policies involves bringing together opportunities from different spheres, using a **range of regulatory and planning tools** that address the various stages of the food system.

On this basis, we define Local Food Policies as

the set of multi-sectoral and transdisciplinary legislative processes and initiatives, defined, designed, and implemented by local governments together with civil society, research and the private sector, aimed at regulating food systems on a local scale, with objectives of environmental sustainability and social equity.

Reference principles and desirable paths



The Italian Network of Local Food Policies believes that Local Food Policies should refer to the following principles:

- Local Food Policies should become a **tool for the sustainable and inclusive transformation of local food systems**, so as to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals (e.g. Agenda 2030).
- To this end, **food must be considered in all its complexity**, for its ability to involve different spheres of individual and social living and of our relationship with the planet: health and wellbeing, management of environmental resources, the relationship with animals, land management, social justice, knowledge and culture, the economy, geopolitical relations.
- **Food must not be treated as a mere commodity** and must instead be considered, together with other basic resources for human development, a common good (*food as commons*).
- Access to healthy, ethically and culturally adequate **food must be considered as a right of all women and men** (*right to food*), whatever their economic and citizenship status.
- To ensure access for economically disadvantaged social groups, it is essential to strengthen the **chain of solidarity** by coordinating public and private efforts.

- Local Food Policies should be geared towards **radically redesigning food systems**.
- To achieve this, food systems must be freed from being solely driven by economic interests, which often lead to increasing **inequities within supply chains** and promote behaviors and practices that harm natural resources, as well as the rights of workers and consumers.
- At the same time, they should **redefine the food environments** in which consumers experience their relationship with food, taking into account the influences from the physical, cultural, social, and economic contexts in which they live.
- In this rethinking, the **key role of agriculture and farmers** in food production and in the provision of other fundamental ecosystem services (biodiversity, landscape, hydro-geological balances, soil conservation, cultural heritage and identity, etc.) must be emphasised.
- It is important to support and strengthen **food production systems that respect environmental resources, animal welfare, and human health**, recognising in particular the role of specific models of agriculture (such as organic farming) and more generally the agro-ecological model.
- The uniqueness of **peasant, small-scale, family, and local farming should be acknowledged** by removing administrative and bureaucratic barriers, allowing them to continue producing food and practicing techniques that respect the soil and natural resources.
- The **defence of workers' rights along the agri-food supply chains**, especially in the primary sector, must be strenuously pursued, considering the dignity of labour and the fair distribution of the economic value as indispensable principles for the creation of sustainable food systems.

- **Access to land and in particular to public land** must be facilitated, limiting the concentration of this primary good in the hands of a few, combating speculative forms of land ownership, and favouring access by young farmers.
- The **resilience of the food system** must be strengthened in order to be able to cope with local or global crises, whether contingent or long-lasting, and continue to guarantee food security.
- Proximity, **urban and peri-urban agriculture**, short food supply chains, and self-production should be supported, including through the promotion of social and economic innovation.
- It is important that **urban and peri-urban agriculture experiences are accessible to all** and recognized for their positive effects on health, education, social and environmental levels.
- **Social agriculture** should also be supported for its particular role in the inclusion of disadvantaged people and migrant populations, and for its recognized therapeutic and educational functions.

- In rethinking food systems and environments, it is essential to strengthen **food education and literacy**, and to promote a new food culture through targeted communication, training, and engagement activities. This will help society to appreciate the value of food, recognize what is healthy and sustainable, make informed and responsible choices, and cultivate active citizenship in food system governance.
- Particular attention should be given to the **relationship between food and health**, beginning with the diets of children and young people. This includes strengthening **school meal programs** and improving **public procurement criteria** to prioritize nutritionally balanced, minimally processed, and safely produced food.
- Equally important is ensuring that food education and training initiatives for young people focus **on building awareness of the social and environmental sustainability aspects of food and food systems**, while also investing in their future role in shaping sustainable production and consumption.
- **Training actions should address political actors and public administrations**, considering their responsibility in the management of public resources.
- Through food education and well-designed public policies, all possible measures should be promoted to **reduce food and resource waste at every stage**, from production to post-consumption.

- Local Food Policies should consider the **impact** of food production, distribution and consumption choices on **landscapes and places**, including phenomena of social exclusion, urban transformation and **foodification**.
- **Urban and peri-urban agriculture should be considered green infrastructures** per se, a public service for all the ecosystem services that these spaces are able to generate through private management and public planning (positive effects on climate, air and water quality, biodiversity conservation, landscape). Therefore, the value of these infrastructures should be recognized in planning decisions, through a gradual, constant and monitored plan for reducing land consumption and redevelopment.
- **Water resources** must be managed sustainably, maintained in a good state of quality and considered, together with land, as a crucial element for life and the production of quality food.
- From a territorial perspective, it is important to encourage **relationships between urban, rural and internal areas**, promoting links and collaborations between territories and communities, in a common relationship with food understood in its authenticity and in its value as a common good.

Responsibility and role of public administrations



- **Public administrations have an important responsibility in defining Local Food Policies.**
- Local Food Policies must profoundly innovate the logics and operational approaches that underlie the management of practices and processes related to food:
 - **reviewing the evaluation and decision criteria**, overcoming essentially economic logics, a vision exclusively centered on human interests and rights, and a perspective limited to the present;
 - entering a **system dimension**, making the different sectors involved in food issues, traditionally separate, dialogue and integrate on a strategic and operational level;
 - **monitoring them**, so as to ensure the evaluation of their impact and coherence.
- In a perspective of re-politicization of food, Local Food Policies must manage this renewal by creating spaces and tools for a **new local food governance**, participatory and democratic, in which all the involved actors can have a voice and find real opportunities for commitment.
- With this approach, Local Food Policies should be seen as **part of a broader process of transformation of food systems and related policies, at national and international scale**, in turn contributing to broader processes of transition towards more sustainable socio-economic models.
- In this regard, it would be important to recognize the role and approaches of Local Food Policies also as an **element of inspiration for territorial partnerships in international cooperation** with the countries of the Global South.

The role of the Italian Network on Local Food Policies



- In response to these challenges, the Network is committed to **fostering debate and reflection** through its own activities, while also supporting broader efforts **in research, institutional collaboration, and training**, both within the Italian context and through international cooperation and partnerships.
- To this end, the Network represents a platform **for discussion and sharing, and a place for open and democratic debate**, given that the transition towards sustainable food systems passes through solutions that integrate a multiplicity of areas of interest, competence, and action. To this end, the Network has promoted thematic and transversal discussion tables.
- As a meeting place between research, politics, administration and activism, as well as the economic world, the Network sets itself specific objectives:
 - With regard to research, it aims to foster **collaboration among diverse academic approaches**, areas of expertise, and educational and professional backgrounds, creating a space for open, barrier-free dialogue and productive integration on the complex topic of food
 - on this basis, it aspires to become a **respected and credible collective voice**, capable of contributing to cultural and academic debates.
 - It also seeks to promote an **action-research approach** rooted in real-world contexts and challenges, accompanied by a strong emphasis on reflexivity and critical evaluation of the actions undertaken.

- In its engagement with **public institutions** at various levels, the Network not only contributes to discussions on the implementation of food policies, but also seeks to **guide and support capacity-building efforts, stimulate the development of such processes, and monitor their progress** in order to share lessons learned. Additionally, it promotes the creation of a national network of cities and territories in Italy, fostering synergy and dialogue with the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and other city and regional networks.
- Drawing on the contributions of its members, who represent civil society, and more broadly on the growing activism around food issues, the **Network aims to gather insights that enhance its ability to understand the needs and social dynamics** essential for driving change. This reflects an awareness that much of the innovation in food-related discourse and practice has emerged from the awareness and mobilization capacity developed within society.
- The Network also intends to **connect and collaborate with other networks, organizations and coalitions in Italy and abroad that are working on food policies**, in order to contribute to their action and at the same time draw useful suggestions, in a relationship of mutual enrichment.
- More generally, through the multiplicity of its actions, the Network intends to contribute to the public and political debate, **carrying out an action of cultural animation and advocacy** with respect to food issues, and drawing the attention of politics to specific needs.

This document has been drafted by Adanella Rossi, Davide Marino, Giampiero Mazzocchi and Egidio Dansero, with numerous contributions from other participants in the Italian Network of Local Food Policies.

It is intended as an advancement with respect to the [Manifesto](#).

The text was shared at the VIII National Meeting of the Italian Local Food Policy Network (Turin, 30-31 January 2025) and at the subsequent Network Assembly held on 6 February 2025.