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Figure 1. The weekly market in via Osoppo, Milan. Source: Luca Lazzarini.

THE ROLE OF FOOD PLANS AND STRATEGIES IN SHAPING CREATIVE FOOD SPACES IN ITALY

Luca Lazzarini

Marco Mareggi

The article aims at improving the understanding of the contribution of food plans in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. The research presents the results of a survey of all the food plans developed until today in Italy. The methodology is based on a documentary analysis according to which an analytical framework was built to investigate geographies, visions, and objectives of the plans; the governance mechanisms, policies, and actions to achieve these objectives; the actors involved in the decision-making process; and the relations with statutory planning policies. A specific focus is oriented to investigate if and how the plans interpret food as a resource able to produce positive impacts on the economic and environmental sustainability of the food system. Although food plans have triggered a process of cultural and institutional enhancement allowing to coordinate and integrate different policies, the research has shown that most of them have not found effective applications and created good performance results.

food planning / food plan / food strategy / sustainability / local authority

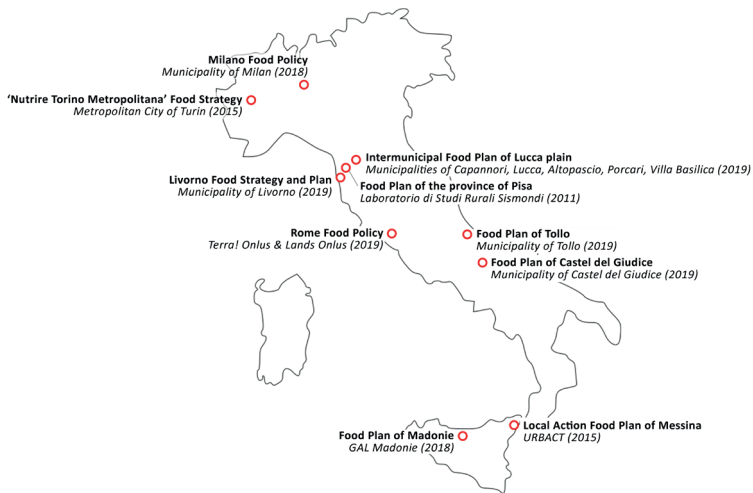


Figure 2. Food plans in Italy with promoters and dates. Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Feeding people with healthy, sustainably produced, and ethically sound food has become a global challenge. Central to the debate on food systems is the contribution of local governments in promoting policies and actions for improving the sustainability of the relationship between food and territory (Dansero et al. 2017). Despite the increasing awareness that a multiscale reflection able to grasp vertical and horizontal interactions between territorial systems appears crucial to successfully incorporate food into sustainable urban development, according to many authors the local scale remains the key in responding effectively to food systems' vulnerabilities (Mount 2012; Pothukuchi & Kaufman 1999). Moreover, in recent decades, the commitment of local institutions towards sustainable food systems has gradually increased and, although discounting a number of structural and operational weaknesses (Lazzarini 2020), it has achieved some significant results (Morgan 2009; Marsden & Franklin 2015).

In this context, in August 2019, for responding to the growing demands for support expressed by local institutions in the field of sustainable food systems' planning, FAO (2019a) released its Framework for the Urban Food Agenda, a document that defines the organisation's commitment to support local institutions for responding to the growing challenges disclosed by the interaction between food cycles and urbanisation processes.¹ The interest of the document lies in disseminating

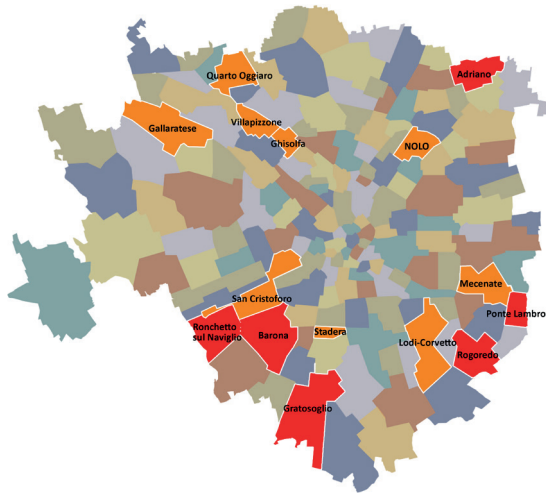


Figure 3. Neighbourhoods identified as food deserts (red) and food mirages (orange) in Milan. Source: Re-elaboration by the authors from Comune di Milano & Fondazione Cariplo (2018).

the results of a twenty-year long period of experimentations in the field of food policies. The majority of experiences of local food planning and design, although emerging in different geographical and institutional contexts, have faced the same social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities and have produced a specific response, whose distinctive elements are outlined in the document.

An equally important role is played by the *Farm to Fork Strategy*. For a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, promoted by the European Commission (2020) as part of the European Green Deal. The strategy develops a legislative framework to promote the transition towards sustainable food systems by 2023, a need that has become urgent after the diffusion of the Covid-19 global pandemic. According to the strategy, this transition implies “a collective approach involving public authorities at all levels of governance (including cities, rural, and coastal communities), private sector actors across the food chain, non-governmental organisations, social partners, academics, and citizens” (Ibid., p. 20).

Starting from these assumptions, this contribution investigates a specific type of food policies, the food plans, a strategic food planning document that presents guidelines and concrete actions necessary to guarantee sustainable nutrition for all citizens. The aim is to understand the contribution of food plans in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. The choice to analyse these tools relates

to the specific attention that food policies have encountered in the field of urban planning over the past decade (APA 2007; Morgan 2009; Cinà 2016).

The analysis takes the Italian domestic context into consideration, on the basis of the willingness to measure the impacts on food planning triggered by the EXPO “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” held in Milan in 2015. In fact, among the over 250 cities that have currently signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact,² which collects the EXPO legacy and systematises local administrators’ commitment to develop sustainable food systems, 26 are Italian local authorities. This demonstrates a certain vibrancy of local governments in Italy to set up policies, programmes, actions oriented to tackle the food sector (Marino & Mazzocchi 2019).

Concerning the methodology, the research employed a documentary analysis of all the food plans developed until today in Italy through an analytical framework aimed at investigating geographies, visions, and objectives of the plans; the governance mechanisms, policies, and actions to achieve these objectives; the actors involved in the decision-making process; the relations with statutory planning policies (see section 2). Specific attention is paid to the exploration of the environmental and economic implications of the food plans, which, as demonstrated in section 3, reports no significant contributions and innovations. This anticipates the final critical remarks related to food plans as a form of policy and not as a new planning tool (see section 4).

A SURVEY ON FOOD PLANS IN ITALY

The first element emerging from the analysis lies in the catalytic role of the Milan 2015 EXPO with respect to the emergence of food plans in Italy. Ten plans are analysed in the survey (Fig. 2). All of them have been elaborated during the past five years, except one, the food plan of the Province of Pisa, that was developed in 2011. A food strategy—*Nutrire Torino Metropolitana* (2015)—and two policy documents—the Food Policies of Milan (2018) and Rome (2019)—have also been included in the survey because, although exemplifying a different policy formation and involving a different range of actors, they represent important experiences of food planning, in many ways comparable to the other investigated cases (Marino and Mazzocchi 2019).

Promoters of the food plans refer mainly to two typologies of organisations: public administrations and public-private partnerships. The first group comprises local authorities and, sometimes, provincial and metropolitan institutions, often sup-

ported by other public-private organisations (business associations, universities and research centres, civil society groups). The second category includes public-private interest groups, but also ad hoc committees (as in the case of Rome) which activate and support the planning process. In some cases, public-private partnerships originate alongside specific policy programmes and tools, such as the Local Action Group (LAG) (for example, the LAG of Madonie, in Sicily). In others (Livorno), food plans are conveyed by specific regulations, such as the regional law 46/2013 of Tuscany Region about participatory and deliberative democracy.

The geographical distribution of food plans is fairly balanced between Northern, Central and Southern Italy. Rather different territorial contexts are involved, including metropolitan areas (Milan, Turin and Rome), medium-sized cities (Livorno and Messina), small municipalities located in inland Apennine areas (Castel del Giudice and Tollo), and, finally, provincial and inter-municipal areas (Province of Pisa, the Lucca plain in Tuscany and the Madonie in Sicily).

Five objectives are recurrent in the analysed Food Plans. The first is the reduction and/or elimination of food waste, which is an objective stated in the food plans of Livorno, Castel del Giudice, Pisa, Milan, and Rome. In Livorno, the issue of food waste implies achieving ethical goals, such as social justice, to be guaranteed also with the recovery and donation of surplus food as a social aid measure. In Castel del Giudice and Rome this goal is expressed within a vision of circular economy. Access to food is instead a goal in the documents of Lucca, Pisa and Milan. Initiatives are thus promoted to break down the barriers that prevent the qualitative and quantitative access to food, sometimes trying to reach the more vulnerable sections of population (in Pisa), and often looking at how access occurs on a daily basis in different places where food is purchased and consumed (Lucca). Only in Milan, this issue is framed in relation to the spatial distribution of socio-economic indicators of population and the identification of very critical areas in terms of access to food resources (e.g. the Gratosoglio, Ponte Lambro, and Adriano districts), defined as *food deserts* (Fig. 3).

A further objective is food education, shared by the documents of Livorno, Rome, Milan, Turin, and Lucca. Compared to the existing national programmes taking place only in primary schools (and applied successfully in many areas of Italy, for example in Emilia-Romagna), these food plans recall the need to establish pedagogical nutrition programmes in all education levels (Turin), jointly developed together with schools, families, trade associations (Lucca), and public procurement companies (Milan). Another objective presented in the documents of Lucca, Tollo, Castel del Giudice, Madonie, and Rome concerns the development of short supply chains and the strengthening of urban-rural relations within the food systems.



Figure 4. food gardens in via Goito, Livorno. Source: Luisanna Carleo

Specific actions relate the organisation of forms of cooperation and agreements between urban consumers and rural producers (Castel del Giudice, Madonie), the provision of a higher amount of local food in retails, restaurants, school and company canteens (Lucca), and the strengthening of the presence of farmers within local markets (Rome, Milan, Fig. 1). A final objective concerns the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems (Livorno, Castel del Giudice, Madonie, and Lucca) for promoting a type of agriculture that protects environment and landscape and generates ecosystem services. In some cases, agricultural production is sustained for reducing—or eliminating completely, as in Castel del Giudice—the use of pesticides (Livorno).

One element of interest concerns the link among food plans and statutory planning tools. The survey highlights that none of the food plans weaves a direct relationship with local plans. Only seven out of ten food plans identify objectives and possible interventions to be introduced in planning policies. Here, three aspects need to be highlighted. First of all, the conservation of agricultural land for reorienting planning policies is supported in Livorno and Pisa. In the first case, the food-planning linkage is strong because in the food plan's operational part and strategic axis "Strengthening the sustainable short supply chain as a tool for local development"



Figure 5. Agrarian landscape in Madonie. Source: Andrea D'Amore

there is the intention to block urban sprawl, sustain agricultural land-uses through local tax levers, encourage the purchase and rental of farmland, and discourage land abandonment. In Pisa, this is achieved by implementing territorial planning policies oriented to originate relations with other policy areas (e.g. rural, commercial, infrastructure policies). In addition, the survey highlights a number of requests for planning new areas to be used for urban agriculture (Fig. 4), on public or private land, also as a resource to offer economic support to low-income families and promote social integration (Messina).

Lastly, the Turin food strategy intends to influence the drafting of the new metropolitan territorial plan, towards critically revising the land regime and attempting to overcome territorial inequalities.

An important component of most of the investigated food plans lies in the creation of governance mechanisms to ensure inclusive learning, participation, and coordination of social and institutional actors, but also to monitor and implement the plan itself. In this context, the Food Council is the most recurrent form of governance, also due to many successful international examples (Aa.Vv. 2019). Here, the interesting aspect lies in the different weight attributed by the food plan to this instrument. For example, in Messina, the Food Council is conceived as an instrument of governance and food democracy, capable of organising and orienting the

agri-food sector, enhancing its contribution to integrate various socio-economic actors towards a shared interest. In Livorno, in addition to coordinating and managing participation, it has the function of developing, implementing, and updating the food plan and supporting the local authority to develop an integrated food policy. More limited to the implementation of the food plan and to convey participation is the function of the Castel del Giudice Food Council. In the analysed plans, also other more traditional governance tools and mechanisms emerge, such as the memoranda of understanding (Turin and Milan), programme agreements (Pisa), thematic and inter-councillor's boards (Milan), mayors' assemblies (Livorno), working groups within the administration (Livorno), and local support groups (Messina). Hence, with the exception of the Food Council, all these governance mechanisms are already known and used in collaborative action of local governments.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF FOOD PLANS ON ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

The purpose of this section is to investigate if and how the food plans interpret food as a resource capable of producing positive impacts on the economic and environmental sustainability of the food system. The decision to focus on economic and environmental areas lies in the desire to study two areas in which food policies have been deeply analysed in the past decade.

On the economic level, the analysis reveals a certain diversity of responses from the food plans. A first significant group of experiences aims to create physical or digital places for the exchange and interaction between producers and consumers, the so-called food-hubs. In Turin, the traditional logistic platform has been transformed into a meeting place for the supply and demand of food, which is functional for consumers but also for small producers. In this way they can generate consortia to access also large-scale distribution centres. In the Livorno and Messina plans, the food hub is a digital space, which develops short supply chains and allows local producers to reach consumers and public canteens. Furthermore, in Tollo it facilitates the re-entry of uncultivated soils and abandoned rural buildings on the market, for new uses and cultivations. The development of new business models, the creation of new agri-food enterprises, and the consolidation of existing ones are central to a number of food plans. Especially in Messina and in the Madonie, this fosters short supply chains and the specialisation towards typical local products, sustaining biodiversity (Fig. 5).

Unlike the Messina case, however, even these new simple business models rarely provide entrepreneurial training that goes beyond the ineffectiveness of traditional start-up programmes. Another response emerges in Castel del Giudice and in

the Madonie, it lies in enhancing local production through the introduction of protocols to certify origin on voluntary basis.

Lastly, with respect to the purchase and sale of food, measures are oriented to introduce reduced taxation for organic and natural products and increase the VAT for the more processed ones (Turin), set a minimum level of organic products in public procurement, and reduce taxes for the stores that redistribute surplus food (Milan). Responses on the environmental level seem to have a very limited weight in the plans and refer to two main types of actions. In relation to agricultural production, mechanisms for protecting productive farmland from urban development (Livorno) and the transition to organic farming (Castel del Giudice) are conceived. Lastly, food education is proposed especially in schools, but also in public places such as municipal gardens, urban parks, and protected areas. In essence, the findings related to the contribution of plans to the economic and environmental sustainability of food systems report no significant innovation since most of them refer to policies and actions already put in place by local authorities.

CONCLUSIONS

The investigated food plans represent the first experiments in the field of food planning in Italy. The conducted survey revealed a certain diversity of the promoters of the plans and of its governance mechanisms. A convergence in the stated objectives is recognised, despite some differences. Most of them contribute to import good practices and apply solutions deemed effective, rather than originating innovation in the food system, shaping new relationships between public health, quality of life, and environmental protection (Morgan 2009). In spite of this, these plans reveal good results in the objective of transposing the post EXPO 2015 legacy into policy tools.

In fact, they neither invoke nor activate new planning tools, which would have been added to the many already requested by Italian legislation. Rather, they try to trigger a process of cultural and institutional enhancement that allows to coordinate and integrate different policies, with the aim of supporting the transition towards more sustainable food systems and promoting a development model capable of protecting the environment and the well-being of future generations. However, most of the contents of the food plans still seems to be expressed in general objectives rather than finding effective applications and creating significant results in performance.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The Framework for the Urban Food Agenda is the result of a multi-year research carried out by the Department for Economic and Social Development directed by Costas Stamoulis, nourished by a preliminary work elaborated by a team of researchers from the University of Cardiff coordinated by Roberta Sonnino (in which also Helen Coulson, Terry Marsden, and Kevin Morgan took part). The document identifies four so-called cross-cutting principles that give substance to the holistic vision of FAO focused on the contribution of food systems to sustainable urban development: i) urban/rural synergies, following the awareness that food-related strategies contribute to promoting balanced development policies between city and countryside, ii) inclusion and social equity, for recognising the challenges related to food access and promoting an inclusive agri-food economy, iii) resilience and sustainability, for promoting the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services, and iv) food systems' interconnections, for emphasizing the relationship between the different social, economic and environmental dimensions of food (FAO, 2019a).
- 2 The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP, 2015) is an international pact signed by 250 cities from all over the world aimed at interpreting food as a trigger for sustainable urban development. It represents the main framework for local governments and international organisations working on food policies for developing and shaping the governance of sustainable food systems.

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