

# City Food Policies - five levers of action to foster the necessary paradigm shift in our food system

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**Abstract** – Many cities are re-evaluating food practices as means to improve urban planning and management. Not only food appears as a guiding thread able to connect several main competences, usually siloed, related to urban environment, economic development, education, solidarity, culture and leisure, health, or governance, but it can also give consistency to a synergic osmosis between cities and surrounding territories.

The analysis of 12 case studies shows how innovative players have been able to detect the capacity of food-related projects to create social bonds and provide environmental and local economy benefits. The overview on the various strategies shows that no paths are mandatory but all may concur to a deep cultural change that could be more efficiently channelled and fostered through a series of measures related to new territorial and/or institutional tools, urban planning and last but not least, public food service.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords** – city food policies, sustainable food systems, food urban planning.

## INTRODUCTION

Food is not usually considered among the competences of cities (Pothukuchi et al., 2000). Mainly produced out of the cities, authorities consider that citizens are mostly able to exercise their free will in choosing their own food habits. Negative externalities related to environment or health are not perceived as a whole and thus are underestimated or ignored. Food is not seen as a modern factor of innovation able to foster and shape the future of urban settlements but as a trivial commodity to be provided by an efficient global supply system. Finally food issues are too often diluted between the different aspects related to health, nutrition, environment, production, public food services or local economy, all being treated separately. But decision makers are caught up by the early intuitions of pioneers and are urgently asked to put on agenda the question of city food policies, working together with people communities and associations, as well as researchers and companies, in a creative social space to design and experience new solutions bringing significant improvement to sustainable food systems (Schiff, 2013). As consumer society is under attack, healthy, clean and low processed food appears as one of the

few goods to remain fully legitimated by a daily consumption, because it is a vital need for everyone. Today, a flourishing context of innovative practices related to agriculture diversification, rural tourism, and local food supply to promote food quality is echoed in the growing number of urban agriculture projects thus creating unexpected bridges to help mutual recognition and direct links between food producers and consumers, indistinctly in urban and rural communities. This phenomenon around urban/rural food issues is reminiscent with the intent to shape the city to influence food practice (production, shopping, cooking and managing waste) and thus to help transitioning the whole food system (Cohen and Ilieva, 2015).

This paper aims to investigate how pioneers (or positive deviants according to Pascale et al. 2010) could detect the potential of food-related new practices to strengthen social cohesion, on top of other benefits related to urban environment, economic development, education, solidarity, culture and leisure, health, politics and governance. The objective is to build up a composite picture that outline a comprehensive panorama of the various characteristics of urban and territorial sustainable food systems to confront it, in future steps, with propositions previously designed to enable practices' change in 3 levels of governance and institutional structures, urban communities and food public procurement (Krausz et al. 2013, Lacourt and Mariani, 2015).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

12 different cases histories have been selected in Europe and North America to provide a coherent frame of analysis. Bibliographic research as well as interviews with open questions have been made and results have been presented in short papers organized in 3 sections: a general description of the city, a list of the main steps implemented for urban transition and a focus on public food service. The 12 cases have been classified in 5 categories of levers of action, according to the main determinant found during the inquiry, even if such classification is not strict as all cases could fall into more than 1 category.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lever 1: Food Policy Councils help to develop a systemic vision. The adventure of these multi actor-task forces started in Tennessee more than 30 years

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ago and since then, they have demonstrated all over North America their consistent capacity for bringing people together across sectors, disciplines, and even political stripes to work together on food issues (Harper et al, 2009). Toronto and Bristol's cases highlight how instrumental Food Policy Councils are useful in working with communities, policymakers, developing a new food culture and creating a basis to identify opportunities, efficiently channel all existing voluntary actions and therefore allowing a more rational use of funding.

Lever 2: food connects social and health concerns. New York City case is a brilliant example of an inclusive cultural change based on the concept of Food and Nutrition Security, which has framed sustainable food into an essential and transversal element in the life of all citizens within a holistic approach. The budgetary restraint imposes to find solutions to fund these programs. Following the example of NYC, cities may 1- develop metrics to measure externalities in order to offset expenditures and budget's shifts, 2- support alternative food system to positively contribute to local economy and redistribute part of the expenses over the local area.

Lever 3: the leverage of public food service - useful for cities to test and exemplify any kind of action about sustainable food systems. Copenhagen has foreseen its potential role to invest more in human resources and know-how and also to educate and raise awareness on the importance of food among the population. Paris and Rome are good examples of cities aware of public procurement potential to enable them to reorganize the food supply chain, although with radically different strategies including production and distribution (inside and outside the city).

Lever 4: urban planning against urban sprawling - using urban assets to preserve agriculture and water resources in surrounding territories. The 30 year old territorial project developed in Rennes, Nuremberg and Saragossa is emblematic to show how much food issues can drive cities to develop a responsible and coherent urban planning policy that preserves functional agricultural territories connected together and also vital resources such as biodiversity and water. Cities may develop pragmatic actions to support local food producers, mainly by stimulating the demand among urban population, using a commercial approach (Nuremberg) or an educative approach (Saragossa).

Lever 5: being smart, developing a local economy based on local food productions, including urban and peri-urban agriculture and alternative food systems. The question of food policy raises the necessity to frame the area of action in order to target efficiently the right issues. Brussels has experimented the impediments produced by the strict application of

theoretical definitions that were initially used to map out the proposed field of action and finally chose a more pragmatic and experimental approach, targeting innovation and employment. Territorial food marketing can also be developed to enable the promotion of local agriculture with the objective to increase food self-sufficiency (Geneva) and to earn international reputation looking to become a capital of high quality food, open to different cultures, to attract tourism for instance (Turin).

According to this study, successful innovations may create dynamics that reshape the cities and thus enable change of practice. They stand on increasing awareness of the overall negative environmental and social impacts of capillary ordinary food consumption patterns and also on the restoring of food value able to turn old fashioned-nearly-forgotten modes in ultimate and attractive new social practices. More research is still needed to investigate how to develop useful governance tools through the deeper analysis of these new social practices (Shove et al., 2012), also to give consistency to a synergic osmosis between cities and adjacent territories.

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