

## **THE MILAN URBAN FOOD POLICY PACT: THE POTENTIAL OF FOOD AND THE KEY ROLE OF CITIES IN LOCALIZING SDGS**

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### **Abstract**

Food security for all is a non-negotiable goal to ensure human survival in a healthy planet. Advancing in this field requires a transition towards more integrated policies encompassing the complexity of the food paradigm and its multifunctionality in a global context. Cities are now recognized as key food-actors and have reacted with place-based solutions to the failures of national and global food-related policies. Recent developments, like the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), consolidate the role of cities as key players of the global food system and create a space for collaboration in which cities act with local solutions to address global issues through a translocal approach that is redefining the concept of decentralised cooperation. Furthermore the MUFPP offers a vision of food security as a key policy component able to underpin fair, inclusive and sustainable human development. Cities for long time have been responsible for the ecological decline of urban living conditions and yet they are hub of socio-ecological innovations from social kitchens to advanced business food models and integrated urban planning. This paper addresses some key questions related to the additional value that the MUFPP provides to cities and to the global agenda and what lever it can move to stimulate a change.

### **Keywords**

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, Urban Food Policy, Sustainable Development Goals

### **Urban Food Strategies to cope with unsustainable food systems**

To start answering these questions we need first to recall how cities got to the present point. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the debate around food security unfolded around the *productionist* paradigm, focusing on growth and stability in the global food systems. This paradigm, being at the core of public policy and development interventions was competence of national and global agendas (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013). This approach certainly contributed to reduce famine and improve economic access to food (FAO, IFAD & WFP 2013) but did not succeed in responding to food security and sustainability objectives. A first pitfall can be identified in the failure to consider the importance of context-specific manifestations of global food system dynamics and of micro perspective (i.e. household-level) related to food and nutrition (Sonnino, 2014). Secondly, in a time

when the majority of world population is expected to live in cities (United Nations 2015), with growing inequalities in urban contexts, it is necessary to shift the focus of food security, giving to it a strong urban dimension. The urgency of this situation was commonly acknowledged and immediately raised new concerns of access to food (physical and financial) in urban settings and led cities to focus interventions on the governance of their food systems. Yet cities' interventions were characterized by silos approach and concentrated in specific areas like agricultural policy, economic policy or social policy without any cooperation between the sectors. This dynamic resulted in a large number of disconnected interventions, addressing a limited portion of the issue that did not bring the expected outcomes. As consequence these isolated actions failed to recognize that contemporary food systems are challenged by interconnected phenomena like rapid urbanization, growing inequalities, climate change impacts, depauperation of finite resources and more recently by an increasing mix of food cultures and habits brought by globalization and migration. Today scholars, analysts, policy-makers and civil society organizations are calling for a revision of policies related to food and nutrition. They advocate for a more inclusive approach encompassing these interrelated sustainable and evolutionary concerns. Lang (2009) encourages introducing health, environment and social behaviours into the new food paradigm. Morgan & Sonnino (2010) presented the *new food equation* and suggested to rethink food related policies looking at food's multifunctionality by demonstrating how the prevailing perception of a world of food surplus shifted to one of food deficit and social unrest because of the spike of fuel, food and energy prices of 2007-2008. A vision supported also by Hodbod and Eakin (2015) that argued today's failure in meeting food security objectives is due to lack of recognition of *systemic* and *dynamic* nature of food and agriculture. To complete this picture the project CIMULACT (2016) raised the attention on the food system evolution, which is now occurring due to both voluntary and forced migration. Yet they all agree that governance of food system is key to address present challenges and that embracing the complexity related to food security is central in designing responsive policy initiatives. To this extent in fact using the lens of food to analyse problems allows to develop a systemic perspective, as food permits a degree of transversality that spans across multiple domains, just to name few: food security (access to healthy, safe, just and fair food, avoiding food deserts), urban wellbeing and welfare ( healthy diet to prevent malnutrition, obesity and food related diseases, solidarity initiative), urban planning (urban gardens, green roofs), environment (protection of soils, biodiversity, reduction of waste, reduction of food loss, enhancement of urban-rural relation, protection of water sources, reduction of impacts on air), economic development (promotion of local and regional products consumption, innovative short supply chains, enhancement of eno-gastronomic attractiveness). This perspective then easily reverberates in the

identification and elaboration of integrated solutions like the promotion of farmers markets in food desert areas that not only provide access to seasonal and local food with high nutritional values, but also increase urban-rural synergistic relations while improving farmers' incomes. The progressive growing consciousness in cities of the central role that food can play to address urban development issues (in many cases powered by reformist food movements) boosted the adoption of urban food policies in the void left from national states on food and nutrition (Renting et al 2003, Sonnino 2013, Cohen and Ilieva 2015).

In this regard, in recent years urban food policies emerged as the public policy area that aims to regulate how food is produced, processed, distributed and purchased, with direct impact on the operation of food and agriculture system. Food policies have mostly emerged in those contexts experimenting pioneering governance mechanism as policy co-creation and inclusion of civil society in policy-making (FAO 2011a; Vilijoen and Wiskerke 2012). They can well take the form of strategies when they provide a systemic vision for future cities development.

Vancouver has a comprehensive strategy that builds on food system initiatives and grassroots community development from farm to fork with a circular economy approach. Baltimore has successfully build a food policy initiative creating an intergovernmental collaboration to improve access to food and health outcomes, an initiative able to raise over 2 million dollars for concrete actions. In Europe both small- medium size cities have adopted food policies towards a transition of their food systems and of citizens habits like Gent, Bruges and Milan.

Nonetheless, the new urban dimension of food security is common in industrialized and developing countries alike. The pressure of a growing urban population, of malnutrition and of food insecurity in a degrading environment is felt all over the world and outstanding initiatives are spurring. Quito promoted organic urban agriculture at households level and a net of 17 markets where urban gardeners are able to sell their surplus and increase their livelihood; Mexico City established a net of "Popular Restaurants" in partnership with civil society organization and the private sector that offer nutritionally balanced meals to disadvantaged people for less than 1 USD/meal; Dakar favoured the self-production of organic vegetables through a net of purchasing centres for micro-gardens; Medellin adopted a food security policy aimed at ensuring adequate access to food and nutrition levels to disadvantaged groups of its population, starting from schools and reaching out to the elderly people.

It is possible to find commonalities between the mentioned public interventions. Many of the observed food initiatives bring a new narrative, characterized by: a) systemic approach as a perspective that encompasses socio-economic and ecological complexity while addressing the whole food value chain in connection with the whole food cycle (Lang and Barling, 2012), b) These

strategies/ policies / actions adopt a participatory approach to governance liaising food system actors with their local government and their local context, c) furthermore these relations are characterized by a new social and solidarity dimension and a growing synergistic interrelation among urban and rural areas that Sonnino (2014) identifies as a new localism, d) The authors recall a fourth point and it is an interest for local authorities to detect, scale-up and scale-out outstanding local innovative food initiatives. These elements concur in identifying an innovative approach of urban food policies that has the potential to respond to present challenges in their local context. Yet no city is an island in a remote space. Today cities are more and more interconnected not only by commercial ties but also for example by the common fight against global pollution, climate impacts and the dual phenomena of malnutrition and obesity. There is growing awareness that no city alone can reverse these global trends and that common actions are required.

### **The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact: A translocal approach to respond to the sustainability and equity challenges in growing urban centres**

It is not common to see mayors taking a leading role in addressing global challenges. Nevertheless cities and urban communities are emerging as the appropriate scale of interventions. This consideration is corroborated by the increasing influence in the regional and global debate of cities' networks like Eurocities, C40, ICLEI and Healthy Cities. These networks have the capacity to convene local governments and enhance their role in a multilevel governance structure. The role of Eurocities in the EU Urban Agenda initiative is an example. Another one can be found in the process leading to the adoption of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (the Pact). In February 2014 during C40 – Climate Leadership Group Summit in Johannesburg, the meeting of the 69 large world cities committed to the fight against climate, former mayor of Milan Mr. Giuliano Pisapia, launched the idea of a pact on urban food policies. The intent was to address two of the most severe emergencies of this 21<sup>st</sup> century: food security and sustainable development. Moreover the moment was appropriate and the initiative could take advantage of the light of EXPO 2015 on Milan and of EXPO's theme: "feeding the Planet, Energy for Life". The proposal received a warm welcome from partner's urban areas and over 40 cities from the 5 continents, initiated working together and exchanging views to define the content of a pact done by cities for cities. Assisted by a group of prominent food experts and under the guidance of an Advisory Board formed by many leading international organizations, the cities delivered a document composed of 37 recommended actions organized around 6 areas (Governance, Sustainable Diets and Nutrition, Social and Economic Equity, Food Production, Food Supply and Distribution and Food Waste) as a framework for the

implementation or enhancement of food policies. The 15 of October 2015 the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact was officially signed by 113 cities. Ban Ki-Moon, former Secretary General of the United Nation that symbolically received a copy of the Pact the 16th of October 2015, immediately recognized the Pact powerful message and in his speech underlined the key role of mayors and urban communities to globally address food security. Today 135 cities, representing circa 500 million world citizens, joined the idea and are working towards more sustainable, just, fair, healthy, safe, inclusive and culturally diverse food systems.

The Pact potential relies in the capacity to take local actions to a new height of a global level of impact. In fact, cities were lacking a space to connect and share or as Sonnino pointed out during the 2016 MUFPP annual gathering “a site for doing, performing, experimenting, practicing and sharing food things differently”. This enable a socio-spatial interconnectedness and provides atranslocality perspective on sustainable issues with the potential to generate fruitful insights. To note that 69 over 179 SDGs targets directly relate to food, in this regard the Pact can become a partnering tool to localize SDGs.

The Pact is grounded on four pillars a) encourages mayors and food stakeholders to coordinate and actively participate the local food debate, activities and in shaping food policies, b) builds a body of knowledge of these experiences for food policy replication in different contexts c) creates a platform for exchange and collaboration fostering city cooperation and decentralized cooperation for practices transmission and to boost capacity building, d) advocates for the recognition of cities role and cities solutions in the global debate for advancing on food and nutrition, sustainability, waste reduction, social and economic equity. In concrete terms an annual gathering ensures the meeting and exchange among mayors, the Milan Pact Awards reward outstanding food practices with the highest replicability potential and fund the transfer of it to a different context, the food-networks alliance catalyse actions and push the agenda at global, regional and local levels. In addition a number of regional and national initiatives spurred as direct consequence of the Pact: examples are C40 food network, Eurocities food working group, Nordic Cities EAT initiative, the Dutch food deal, the territorial food system network in France and the African network of Francophone signatory cities. These networks and the ones forming the food-networks alliance have the strategic role to convey signatory and other interested cites to operationalize the Pact.

With this architecture all cities can find space for interaction and inspirations. More experienced cities can find a positive global competing and collaborative environment to advance in their practices, less advanced cities can enhance or rethink their food policies initiative, cities with little or no experience can find solutions and support to address pressing local issues.

To conclude, the Pact is revamping city cooperation and decentralized cooperation by establishing a

platform for formal and informal knowledge exchange in which north-north, south-south, north-south or triangular cooperation mechanisms can thrive. These exchanges represent a voluntary framework that creates a translocal approach to progress on the way of sustainable urban food system while contributing to the global sustainable development agenda.

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### **Lista degli acronimi**

Inserire acronimi e nomi completi in ordine alfabetico in una tabella a due colonne senza bordi come nell'esempio:

MUFPP	Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
CUCS	Coordinamento Università per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo