

**THE ROLE OF COOPERATION AMONGST CITIES, UNIVERSITIES, RESEARCH BODIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON URBAN FOOD POLICIES IN AFRICA AS INNOVATIVE ACTIONS IN THE CADRE OF THE MILAN URBAN FOOD POLICY PACT**

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**Abstract**

Within the framework of the international debate focusing on experiences emerging from cities in the global North, this paper aims to explore urban food policies under the lens of a global South perspective, paying particular attention to African cities and taking into account the common elements they present -compared with other urban contexts and territories- but also the specificities and uniqueness of them with respect to the process of urbanization and the linkages existing amongst cities and food.

Urban food policies are powerful institutional actions, able to build more sustainable food systems of contemporary cities. These innovative policies are designed with a systemic and cross-sectoral approach, capable of acting at the intersection of different issues and fields such as water, waste, planning, health, transport, education, environment, trade, but also food and nutrition security, self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.

We will describe an overview of initiatives developed in African cities, in view of the values stemming from the New Urban Agenda and the recommended actions by the recent Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, as an inspiring and propelling opportunity for new forms of territorial partnerships which could promote new types of cooperation amongst cities, universities, research bodies and civil society organizations from global North and South.

Our research follows also the broader Italian development agenda. Under this light we will describe the mobilization of a number of institutional actors towards enhancing collaboration with the African context, drawing a geography of priorities, places and initiatives that are being activated in this field.

The paper will identify a series of cross-cutting issues (such as land tenure, climate change, urban agriculture, rural-urban migration, waste management) to create a set of interpretative geographies, comparing cases across different African perspectives (for instance, environmental and socio-cultural) to identify common grounds and regional features.

## **1. Introduction. The city between international cooperation and Urban Food Policies**

The relationship between urban and rural areas is one of those elements affecting the long-running processes for a balanced development of urban and regional communities. Among the drivers of this relationship, food is undoubtedly the most symbolic element, where production areas are placed mainly in the rural areas and the areas of consumption in the urban contexts, involving a complex network of actors, places, flows and resources that altogether make a food system.

Throughout the world, this context is fueling a widespread debate, which has been steadily gaining momentum over the past 15 years, based on the principles of “food sovereignty” and “right to food”. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly those acting in the Global South, have played a central role in the development of this debate.

The article focuses on new food policies which are emerging worldwide at the urban scale. These are innovative and voluntary actions, as they are not regulated through the competences of local governments. However, just because they are relatively independent processes, they are fully legitimated to provide local responses to issues arising from cities themselves.

Urban Food Policies also represent a new space for decentralized cooperation between cities around the world. A new urban leadership which, strengthened by locally developed initiatives, also moves ahead with an international drive, aligning several amongst the most promising institutional, research and civil society actors, organized around new political objectives for sustainability. On this basis, in the wake of the Expo 2015 in Milan, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) has emerged, which is of global relevance to these very policies.

The article’s considerations will begin by approaching the theme of Urban Food Policies as a tool for food and nutrition security within the relationship between city and rural areas and as an institutional outcome of the principles of food sovereignty and the right to food. The boundaries of relevant experiences developed in Italy and the African continent will be outlined, describing selected policies from different geographic and cultural contexts, as a contribution to a broader perspective of the African spectrum.

We will then describe the essential features of decentralized cooperation and development projects on these issues that are underway, to conclude with the prospects that unfold in the transition from decentralized cooperation to Urban Food Policies.

## **2. Urban Food Policies**

### **2.1 From Food Security to Food Sovereignty and the Right to Food**

Achieving food security is one of the global challenges the international community has to tackle for a better present and future of humanity. Food security aims to ensuring to “all people, at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (World Food Summit, 1996).

For decades, food security has been considered as a matter of no much concern among the developed countries, it was an issue mainly for countries in the global South. Since 2008, however, as the food price crisis deepened, food security rose high on the agenda of major international summits. From the G8 summit convened in the city of L’Aquila (2009) to the G20 in France (2011), up to the G8 at Camp David (2012), food security became the subject of initiatives, strategies and action plans to limit the harmful effects of the "five years that shocked agriculture"(De Castro 2012).

Following the 2008 food crisis and the emergence of new global issues the idea of food sovereignty started to affirm within the international debate, initially introduced in contrast to the concept of food security, to later supplement it, in a critical way (Jarosz 2014; Patel 2009). From the geographical point of view, national agri-food policies have sought to reconnect production and consumption by shortening commercial networks so as to reduce price volatility. On the other hand, the administrative decentralization policies of the 1990s have produced new local public entities looking to affirm their own strategy, even in the food sector (Bini et al. 2017).

Besides food sovereignty, the other pillar of the shift in the international debate around food security has been the recognition of food as a basic human right. Analytical representations often show food in the center of the food system with the different elements radially arranged. However, if at the center of the food system, instead of food, the "Right to Food" and the citizen are placed and surrounded by the local policies contributing to the different dimensions, then in this context, the vision is changed completely. Typically, the element that contributes to building a local food policy geared towards the Right to Food is the approval of a Food Charter which recognizes the right to food of citizens through value remarks.

A Charter helps to read back, under the lens of the right to food, local public services and the existing administrative activities, which allow cities to fulfill their duty to respect and fully enforce the status of "citizen". From the operational point of view, a Food Charter guides every future food policy to enforce the right of food for its citizens (Bottiglieri 2015).

The first *Special Rapporteur of the Right to food* at the High Commission of the United Nations affirmed "the importance of local food security and local nutrition programs" (Ziegler 2004), mentioning a number of local measures necessary to achieve this purpose, such as: education on nutritional needs, school feeding programmes (canteens for all), breastfeeding, access to family gardens, nutritional surveillance of vulnerable groups. Along the same vein, its successor (De Schutter 2014) has identified the key to change at the local level, the urban and civic level in particular, stating that it is essential that cities assess their food dependencies, identify weaknesses, criticalities and strengths and, where possible, develop a range of measures to procure their own food".

## **2.2. The institutionalization of right to food and food sovereignty: risks and opportunities.**

In the last twenty years, significant changes occurred in the institutional approaches to food security. Thanks to the emerge of the concepts of "food sovereignty" and "right to food" the political and cultural approach to food security has been advancing incorporating new elements like sustainability, equity and rights-based framework. The institutionalization of right to food and food sovereignty has taken different shapes. In particular, in the last years we have been observing an increasing number of countries giving a constitutional recognition to the right to food e food sovereignty (FAO 2011, Claeys et al. 2014).

Despite these advancements, the right to food and food sovereignty are still a relatively young approach to addressing change in food systems (Claeys et al. 2014, p. 10) and their institutionalization have not been necessarily producing significant changes in public policies as expected. Anyway, their formal recognition allowed to bring into the institutional area an alternative discourse on food security. At the same time, some scholars stressed that the 'human right to food' embodies both counter-hegemonic and hegemonic discourses. On the one hand, the recognition of food as fundamental right allows to politicize the 'problem' of hunger, "casting a critical light on the global restructuring of production and subjecting the market to the primacy of human rights" (Atasoy 2009, p. 13) . On the other hand, the 'right to food' discourse as negotiated in the form of laws, guidelines, policy framework have the risk to embed the principles into the neoliberal framework.

Regarding the issues of recognition of food sovereignty and right to food principles in the law and policy making process and their implementation through adequate public policies, two questions come to our attention. Firstly, at what extent and how, in particular for food sovereignty, its institutionalization should happen? Secondly, in the last years civil society organizations, farmers

and social movement have been advocating food sovereignty policies asking for support to smallholder farmers, boosting local and peasant-based food production for food security, rural development and alternative farming practices. These policies are aimed to support small producer who are still the vast majority of hungry people in the world (FAO 2015). At the same time, albeit smallholder farmers remains one of the most important actor of the transition, the multiple crisis affecting our food systems show the importance to adopt a broader policy framework across multiple sectors and governance levels (IPES 2016). For example being able to better incorporate the urban dimension into the food sovereignty paradigm (Yap, Fernandez-Wulff, Zucchermaglio 2017). The question is: what is the policy framework for implementing food sovereignty and right to food policy at local, national and international level? And how these level influencing each other?

Finally, it is important to consider the risk of institutionalization and formal recognition of these two principles, right to food and food sovereignty, without making a genuine shift adopting the new paradigm these principles imply. In this sense, “institutionalization” can risk to divert in “neutralization” of the transformative potential of right to food and food sovereignty. According to Claeys et al., in order to mitigate the risk of “neutralization” is important on one hand, engaging a series of social actors, creating and seizing opportunities for social change; on the other hand not to see institutionalization as an objective in and of itself (Claeys et al. 2014, p. 16). it is important continuously questioning if the institutionalization of both the right to food and food sovereignty are “the most efficient avenues for advancing these alternative regimes or whether change is best made through law, policy, institutional coordination or judicial mechanisms. And further whether it is possible and if so, how, to have a combined approach” (Claeys at all 2014, p. 15).

### **2.3 Urban Food Policies as a new space for cooperation between cities and territories**

Food systems are often designed to feed cities through a complex network throughout the food cycle phases consisting of production, transformation, logistics, distribution, consumption and waste management. All these elements interacting with food imply that the food system can be qualified in its whole as an urban infrastructure (Calori, Magarini 2015) at the same level as other sectors such as the social services, transport, healthcare, and waste management; these are sectors on which established policies at the local level already exist. Food generally does not fall within these areas of action, although food systems allow to intercept various urban competencies to be governed in a systematic and integrated way (Moragues, Morgan 2015).

Urban Food Policies can be put in place through the promotion of agreements between institutions, the civil society and the private sector by backing up a strong public-private partnership strategy within a single development platform (Morgan 2009). Very often, the initiative is taken over by the city's Mayor, who by nature is the community leader and not just the elected administrative manager of the city government. Similar experiences have been taken up in Europe, North America and Latin America through the Food Councils, open to represent all the actors involved in the food system: urban administrations, producers' representatives, researchers, the private sector and the civil society. A wide variety of actors is a crucial element in analyzing how to deal with the high complexity of food-based systems and outlining new food policies that can act effectively for good governance (Blay-Palmer 2012).

### **3. Urban food policies in Africa**

#### **3.1 International networks**

The international debate on these issues has been developing with ever greater intensity over the last 15 years through facilitating networks by the United Nations (WHO, FAO, UNDP) and a large, globally active, technical-scientific community.

The first seeds of this movement were already evident in the Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, but it has been since the 2000s that from many parts of the world has emerged the need to act with actual urban policy actions (Blay-Palmer 2009). In 2001 FAO initiated the multidisciplinary initiative "Food for Cities" (FAO 2011). In 2013, the Bonn Declaration was the first convergence of mayors on the need for urban food policies. In the following year, the "Global Call for Action on City Region Food Systems" of Medellin (2014) highlighted the convergence of a key group of technical and institutional players (Forster 2015).

The most recent and important step in this ever-evolving, polycentric debate is represented by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), an international pact signed in October 2015 between cities around the world, precisely on food security issues and food planning, as was well articulated by the Action Plan annexed to it. The Pact currently counts 134 cities worldwide representing a network of urban governments and international organizations that have shared the will to carry on through institutional processes in cities and international advocacy. The MUFPP convey the idea of the richness, plurality and complexity of policies, projects and pathways affecting every city in the world, both in the global South and North, on the subject of local food policies. This know-how is

the best assumption and the basis for building decentralized cooperation paths on urban food policies.

This renewed sharing of values and practices within the MUFPP has the merit of rediscovering both the value of cities in helping to define local responses to global issues, and the contribution to the implementation of the New Agenda for Sustainable Development through the dialogue amongst cities.

The Goals for the fight against hunger (Goal 2) and that for building sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) are just amongst the most obvious ones. However, through Urban Food Policies within the relationship between city and rural contexts, it is possible to touch upon all the 17 Goals.

### **3.2 African cities and Urban Food Policies**

Urban Food Policy initiatives have emerged, before elsewhere, in the Global North, particularly in English-speaking contexts such as the cities of Vancouver, Toronto, New York, and Bristol where two major themes have urged urban administrations to act: to make food systems more sustainable and address urban obesity and food accessibility (Blay-Palmer 2012). From these initiatives, many others cases around the world have come to light, predominantly in Europe, able to take action on the de-intermediation from producers to consumers (Calori 2009), enriching the debate and array of experiences and acting on a multitude of themes relevant to all food systems such as waste, food accessibility, urban agriculture, and civic participation.

Malmo, Vancouver, Milan, Melbourne, Belo Horizonte, Shanghai and many other cities have put amongst the goals of their food policies the reduction of waste and the valorization of organic waste through the development of public-private partnerships. Many policies focus on food accessibility; London, Toronto, San Francisco, and New York have acted on the accessibility to healthy food. Many cities have launched urban farming initiatives and programs to support production in urban and peri-urban areas. Examples of such experiences are found in Vancouver, Toronto, Paris, Nairobi, Barcelona, Shanghai, and Dakar.

In this context, the theme of urban food policies that was primarily developed in the cities of the global North, is gradually involving an increasing number of cities in the global South. As noted by Kevin Morgan, in fact, “the most damaging effects of the new food equation are being wrought in the cities of the Global South, where the noxious interplay of poverty, hunger and climate change is most apparent”(Morgan 2015, p. 1380).

By looking at African cities through the lens of the food system, a wide-ranging scene of themes and issues is unfolded on which cities have started reflecting and working on. Of all, those emerging are urban agriculture programs developed in many cities throughout the continent (FAO 2012) to ensure an acceptable level of food security, adapt and combat climate change, efforts to ensure access to land, the management of migration from rural areas to cities, access to water for food and urban agriculture, and urban planning initiatives.

In Africa, despite the high urban growth rates and high levels of urban food insecurity, there is little analysis of food systems in their entirety able to restore the complexity of the elements that act within a city (Battersby, 2013). These gaps in knowledge are identified at the processes in secondary cities, the role of local governments, the impact of inadequate transport systems, food distribution, the impact of supermarkets in cities and the impact of food imports (Smit 2016).

In view of these shortcomings, several partial responses are emerging across the continent that could be linked to decentralized cooperation mechanisms between cities.

African cities can find solutions within the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact on the issues affecting the continent's urbanization process. The MUFPP therefore represents the international framework within which to develop further local applications that meet the needs of each regional context. The FAO, in the context of the agreement, is facilitating the Pact's dissemination and contributing to speed up its implementation in Africa through decentralized cooperation mechanisms (FAO 2016).

The 20 African signatory cities of the Pact are spread throughout the continent, including cities from English-speaking, French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries. In order to stimulate the dissemination and exchange of good practices, the first edition of the Milan Pact Award was launched in 2016. There were 4 African cities (out of 33 in total) that were candidates for sharing their good practices: Nairobi (urban agriculture legislation), Dakar (horticulture and healthy school meals), Lusaka (women's empowerment), Arusha (horticulture for a sustainable diet).

In September 2016, a forum was held in Dakar, Senegal, amongst the signatory cities of francophone African countries, with the objective to foster the development of a sub-regional network between these cities, with the attendance of representatives of the cities of Dakar, Abidjan, Brazzaville, Douala, N'Djamena, Niamey and Nouakchott. The debate within the forum brought forth issues concerning the African region which currently do not appear sufficiently considered in the MUFPP guidelines, in particular the economic fragility of African cities and the attention to support local production are two themes on which to develop further initiatives. During the Dakar



Forum, cities have produced a statement defining the actions of the Pact on which they intend to work on jointly. More specifically, they aim at enhancing participation for all actors in the food system (log. fram. MUFPP 2), identify improved technologies for food storage and infrastructure for the peri-urban transport (log. fram. MUFPP 28). These cities also aim to raise awareness of their citizens towards more sustainable diets, develop policies and practices to improve food distribution and food storage.

Among the cities which have adopted a food policy with a systemic approach, Johannesburg appears to be particularly interesting. On the one hand, this logistics and socio-economic hub serving the entire southern Africa, offers economic opportunities. At the same time, however, there are 1.9 million people considered as poor, on a population of 8 million inhabitants at the metropolitan level. The city in 2013 committed to increasing the level of food security through the expansion of easy-to-access food distribution systems, using economic incentives and peri-urban agriculture programs. As part of a multilevel governance, urban and intersectoral actions have been integrated with those carried out by its own province, Gauteng, through training courses for farmers (Malan 2015).

The city of Dakar (2.4 million inhabitants) is working with micro-gardens, an urban horticulture practice for self-consumption and marketing of produce to local markets. Thanks to the support of decentralized cooperation, technical expertise and simplified hydroponics have been provided for the production of quality vegetables to approximately 7,000 people who cultivate 134 production centers, supported by 12 training centers. The local administration has included these practices in urban planning policies (Ba, Ba 2007).

Although the city of Maputo has grown rapidly, most of its green areas remain intact and protected under urban legislation. Since 1980, the Maputo City Council has established a peri-urban green belt for horticulture, equipping the area with irrigation systems. This area is being cultivated by 13,000 farmers who have land use rights and can therefore use the land in micro-credit operations within a union of 200 agricultural cooperatives, helping to improve the purchasing power of families and hence, their food security (McNordic 2016).

Access to land is a major issue for urban food policies. Horticulture can be promoted within a legislative framework which should be guaranteed by municipal governments in urban expansion plans, allowing access to credit needed for investments in the food system. Kigali has allocated 40% of its surface to urban development, protecting the remaining 15,000 hectares for agriculture on the most fertile soils. To limit hydrogeological disruption, Antananarivo has allocated free land areas to

vegetable cultivation which now involve a 43% of the urban surface, acting as a buffer zone to protect the city from flooding (FAO 2012).

Water access is one of the most important issues to ensure food security for urban citizens. This depends on the presence of wastewater treatment systems (World Bank 2012). Several cities such as Ouagadougou, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Lilongwe, Maputo, Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg have acted on this issue by deploying urban masterplans for access to water and wastewater disposal, keeping separated water capture infrastructures from those intended for disposal.

The experiences described above represent some of the initiatives that African cities are working on. The MUFPP may serve as a framework within which a cooperation mechanism between cities can be activated. Acting in an integrated and systemic approach will help to rebalance the territorial dynamics between cities and their hinterlands, crushed by strong demographic growth and climate change effects across the continent.

#### **4. Decentralized cooperation in Local Food Policies**

The "decentralized" standpoint, from the geographic point of view, qualifies cooperation between municipalities or regions of countries distant from each other but close enough in terms of issues, processes and policies, allowing local authorities worldwide to be able to self-determine, with mutual support, their own local governance with the aim of promoting local autonomy and improving the living conditions of local populations (Carrino 2005).

Local authorities in the global North are working to support local authorities in developing countries to implement local policies that can meet all of their people's needs (Bottiglieri 2012). In this type of activity, actions aim to improve not only the local system of the developing country but also that of the country promoting the initiative (Mezzasalma 2008). European local authorities are enabled to engage in decentralized cooperation because such activities are set out in a regulatory framework consisting of European and national legislation. In this sense, the European Commission has developed and supported experiences and provided funding through the Directorate-General EuropeAid.

These considerations show the field of action for decentralized cooperation activities that individual cities may undertake and promote in the area of local food policies.

Up to now, numerous projects have been developed and actions promoted by different local authorities around the world, with a focus on Africa as a preferred region for this institutional drive, with various programs and projects made available on resources from local authorities and through projects funded by European funds for international cooperation. The links built amongst the cities of the global North and South could facilitate an active exchange between cities. Already, several Italian signatory cities of the MUFPP have established relations of exchange and twinning with African cities: Milan with Dakar in 1979 (Senegal) and Algiers in 2015 (Algeria); Turin with Maputo in 2015 (Mozambique), Praia in 2003 (Cape Verde), Tunis in 2015 (Tunisia) and Ouagadougou in 2003 (Burkina Faso).

A possible field of action is certainly that of local food services: school catering, catering in the care sector, food and nutrition education in schools, granting public space for sale and trade in food, assigning public spaces for the creation of urban food gardens, activities promoting local food excellence through the organization of fairs and cultural events.

As a matter of fact, connecting processes, informal dialogue or structured collaboration and exchange on specific issues and projects are already underway. It is no coincidence that cities wishing to set up an urban food strategy are in discussions with those having already embarked on a similar process. In this respect, some of the long-established initiatives should be mentioned, such as the exchange of knowledge and collaboration between the cities of Milan and Dakar on urban gardens, Turin and Louga on street food, Rome and Kigali on horticulture. Other initiatives may involve the food movements, such as the Slow Food, which are active at the interlocal and transnational level. However, all these initiatives have not been embedded so far into a wider framing setting for urban food policies. In opposition to this trend, the MUFPP signatory cities were presented by FAO a city-city cooperation mechanism that recalls the structure and approach of the decentralized cooperation as described thus far.

Urban food policies can be configured as a new and exciting field of decentralized cooperation and territorial partnership. As discussed previously, Italian cities have started to move towards explicit, grounded and structured urban food policies. For this reason, and for the differences in terms of stages in the process of urbanization and related challenges, decentralized cooperation relations between Italian cities (and those of the global North in general) and African cities can be characterized by less asymmetry than in traditional fields of intervention, where, however mutually enriching the exchange may be, the weight, in terms of urban history and accumulated experience, as well as the economic power and social conditions, is undoubtedly felt.

The recent initiatives (the MUFPP, New Urban Agenda) are expanding the number and type of actors involved in the international debate, from technical experts to politicians, enabling new players to the understanding of both problems and possible solutions. This new political space for debate could be the ground from which to draw further strength and drive for existing decentralized cooperation tools, encouraging the sharing of experiences and relationships between cities around the world. Such relations could also bolster new forms of diplomacy towards economic growth that various European countries are promoting, by activating the entire web of national mechanisms that further extend the number of stakeholders in the field: city-to-city cooperation mechanisms, city twinnings, partnerships for international projects with bilateral, triangular and multilateral partners constitute a new space where other actors can participate with conscious, balanced and proactive contributions.

Moreover, the realm of practices composing the framework of urban food policies is highly internationalized, with transnational and inter-local relations. In this regard, municipalities can act as a platform for these practices by connecting the global North and South with the extraordinary wealth of experiences and actors. The very same non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the global South are becoming increasingly important actors in promoting food sovereignty in their home countries. The meeting point between the NGOs and policy-makers also represent a sharing of experiences accumulated in two different areas, the first being predominately in rural areas and the second at the urban and national scale. If the development of cities is also dependent on a positive relationship between urban and rural areas, these two families of actors can help shape the strategies and policies at the metropolitan scale, which can enhance in turn territorial cohesion and sustainable city development.

## **5. Conclusions**

Urban Food Policies require establishing forms of cooperation between actors in the food system and among cities and territories: local authorities, CSOs, universities and research bodies are playing a crucial role in the definition of the theoretical framework (food sovereignty and right to food), in the development of best practices (Local Food Networks) and in the elaboration of innovative food policies.

The institutionalization of concepts such as “food sovereignty” and “right to food” creates many opportunities, especially in terms of advocacy and legal action, but also raises concerns regarding

the risk of “diluting” these concepts in a neoliberal framework. Therefore, this process requires special care in order to preserve the transformative potential of these principles.

This remark confirms the importance of cooperation and bottom-up mobilization for allowing transformative and lasting effect of the institutionalization of the right to food: the involvement of local food and food-related actors through empowerment and territorial advocacy action is crucial in order to make the law work for the change. Participation starts outside the institution and needs to be oriented toward social changes.

Finally, Urban Food Policies also require project- and policy-oriented analytical and mapping efforts (in strict and broad terms) of territorial food systems, adopting a territorial approach that looks at metropolitan and regional areas or better, at territorial food systems. Considering Urban Food Policies as a co-operation framework makes it possible to strengthen food sovereignty actions at the local level, and make it work as a powerful force of resistance and an alternative to globalizing agro-food networks.

Many decentralized cooperation actions are already moving in the direction of strengthening local production organizations, consolidation of supply chains, and basic associative capabilities. Urban Food Policies can provide a better framework of coherence and meaning.

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