Research article

Territorial food governance in the making: towards the Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region

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Abstract. Transition towards sustainable food systems demands a change to integrated or territorial policy approaches and boundary-spanning governance arrangements. Territorial approaches provide an effective framework to address food systems transformation at a scale where it can be tackled with the active participation of all stakeholders. The paper brings the territorial governance approach to the food governance debate and introduces the concept of participatory multi-stakeholder food platforms as arrangements to implement territorial food governance. The paper investigates the implementation of territorial food governance in Tuscany (Italy) at local level and explores the emerging attempt to scaling-up local food governance by developing a regional participatory multi-stakeholder food platform: the Regional Food Roundtable of Tuscany.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Transition towards sustainable food systems demands a change to integrated or territorial policy approaches and boundary-spanning governance arrangements.
- Territorial food governance has the advantage of being place-based, people-centred, multi-actor and multi-sectoral.
- Territorial food governance requires participatory multi-stakeholder arrangements capable of engaging the various food systems actors in policy and decision making.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since today's global industrial food systems are generating negative outcomes along the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability, there is growing recognition that re-scaling at territorial level is required to enable more sustainable and just food systems (Stein and Santini, 2021). As stressed by Lamine *et al.* (2019), territorial approaches to tackle food systems transitions have increasingly been experimented by local actors in many contexts, favoured by academics and promoted by major national and international institutions. Furthermore, many observers regard the local level as the appropriate sphere for political and planning action, to tackle the problems or dysfunctions of the modern globalized food system (Doenberg *et al.*, 2019).

In addition, food systems are recognised as complex socio-ecological systems (Galli *et al.*, 2020; De Schutter, 2020). Approaching food governance from a system perspective makes clear that traditional government mechanisms built around different fragmented and sectorial policies and organisational structures are inadequate, suggesting the need for new approaches. In fact, it is more and more evident that better engagement with the various food systems actors is needed to work more effectively across sectors, administrative jurisdictions, public and private domains and diverse normative frameworks (Herens *et al.,* 2022; Breeman *et al.*, 2015; Termeer *et al.*, 2018). Transition towards sustainable food systems demands a change to integrated or territorial policy approaches and boundary-spanning governance arrangements.

In this paper, we bring the territorial governance approach to the food governance debate. The territorial approach consists of applying processes of networked, collective organisation where multi-level coordination takes place at territorial level among enterprises, local institutions and other stakeholders (Torres-Salcido and Sanz-Cañada, 2018). As stressed during the Food System Summit 2021[1], "territorial approaches provide an effective framework to address the different aspects of food systems transformation at a scale where its social, environmental, economic, and health-related dimensions can be tackled with the active participation of all stakeholders. [...]. Territorial governance has the advantage of being place-based, people-centred, multi-actor and multi-sectoral".

The implementation of the territorial food govern-

ance approach requires collaborative arrangements, namely participatory multistakeholder food platforms, capable of integrating all food system actors in food systems governance (Herens *et al.,* 2022) and promoting food democracy (De Schutter *et al.*, 2020).

The paper aims at contributing to the academic debate on food governance by focusing on the role of multistakeholder food platforms as participatory arrangements for implementing territorial food governance. The paper emphasises the need for further theoretical exploration on the scaling-up of local food governance and highlights the relevance of the regional level. It then investigates the implementation of territorial food governance in Tuscany (Italy). The paper firstly explores local experiences as urban food policies and food policy councils, food and agrobiodiversity communities and food districts. Secondly, it investigates the new emerging attempt to scaling-up local food governance by developing a regional participatory multi-stakeholder food platform: the Regional Food Roundtable of Tuscany. Relying on the results emerging from both the theoretical and the empirical explorations the paper finally develops policy recommendations.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Territorial food governance

Territorial governance is defined as "an organisational mode of territorial collective action, based on openness and transparency of the process itself, on cooperation/coordination among actors (horizontally and vertically), and in a framework of a more or less explicit subsidiarity" (Davoudi *et al.,* 2008: 35). It implies horizontal coordination among actors at the same level, but also multi-level and multi-actor processes of interaction and coordination taking place among stakeholders, enterprises and institutions operating at different territorial scales and participatory mechanisms (Van Well and Schmitt, 2016; Van Well *et al.*, 2018; Torres-Salcido Sanz-Cañada, 2018; Davoudi *et al.,* 2008).

The term "territorial food governance" is hereby referred to as the combination of the concepts of territorial governance and food governance. The latter refers to the processes and actor constellations that shape decision-making and activities related to the production, distribution, and consumption of food (van Bers *et al.*, 2019). Territorial food governance can be then defined as both formal and informal processes, actors, institutions, rules, and norms that shape decision-making and activities affecting food systems (van Bers *et al.*, 2016; Herens *et al.*, 2022). Such processes are oriented towards:

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[1] Solution Cluster 4.3.1 Promoting Integrated Food Systems Policies, Planning, and Governance, available at: https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/potential-solutions-local-regional-and-global-action-deliver-sdgs

- Coordinating the actions of actors and institutions (vertical and horizontal coordination);
- Integrating policy sectors;
- Mobilising stakeholder participation;
- Adapting to changing contexts;
- Defining the appropriate territory for effective territorial governance (Esparcia and Abbasi, 2020; Van Well and Schmitt, 2016; Van Well *et al.,* 2018; Davoudi and Cowie, 2016; Davoudi *et al.,* 2008).

Vertical coordination implies the division of responsibilities and rights between jurisdictional levels (from supranational to local), and the formal and informal relationships among them, including institutional, financial, and informational aspects (Tefft *et al.*, 2020). From a territorial perspective, vertical governance can be seen as the political translation of the subsidiarity principle, which ensures that decisions are made at the territorial level which is as close to citizens as strategically and practically possible (Davoudi and Cowie, 2016). Horizontal governance refers to the coordination of different actors at the same level, including interactions amongst different departments with different responsibilities (e.g., agriculture, food distribution and distribution, public canteens), between governments at the same level (e.g., regions, municipalities). It also encompasses the interactions between public government bodies and all food systems' stakeholders. In mobilising stakeholder participation, Davoudi *et al.* (2008) distinguish between a form of participation that narrowly involve organised interests (entrepreneurial associations, firms, trade unions, etc.), and a wider form of participation, including also citizens, movements and all other forms of organised and unorganised civil society. The former is oriented towards the development of public/private partnerships, while the latter the construction of participatory and deliberative democracy arenas and building forms of active citizenship. Territorial governance also focuses on policy sector integration, which can occur through policy packaging and cross-sector synergy (Van Well and Schmitt, 2016).

Furthermore, a territorial approach to food governance requires both the adaptability to changing contexts and the identification of an appropriate territory for effective governance, in accordance with Lever *et al.*'s (2019: 104) argument that "there is no one path to better food system governance and reform" and Prové *et al.* (2019: 172), who suggest there are "numerous contingent contextual factors (e.g., historical events, social, political, and economic conditions, or particularly influential stakeholders) that strongly influence the governance process".

2.2. *Participatory multistakeholder food platforms as arrangements for implementing territorial food governance*

Territorial food governance requires collaborative (Siddiki, 2015; Clark, 2019), networked (Lever *et al.*, 2019; Ovaska *et al.*, 2021), or multistakeholder governance arrangements (Haarich, 2018; Alliance of Bioversity *et al.*, 2021) capable of engaging with the various food systems actors in policy- and decision-making.

Multistakeholder engagement can be broadly defined as an approach of building synergies and partnerships with key actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), governments, private sector, and the broader community, all crucial to addressing food system problems. Its potential in food policy-making and food systems governance has been explored in different domains of food system literature (Herens *et al.*, 2022) at global (Breeman *et al.*, 2015), national, and local level (Owili *et al.*, 2021; Alliance of Bioversity *et al.*, 2021; Medina-García *et al.*, 2022; Sonnino, 2023; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019).

Multistakeholder engagement entails both the form that the coalition might take (e.g., alliance, partnership, initiative, platforms, roundtable, forum), and the process by which stakeholders are involved in policy-making and, more broadly, in food governance. Multistakeholder engagement involves fostering active collaboration among stakeholders to co-create new knowledge, connect values, and collectively learn their way to new practices. Despite the different words used to describe multistakeholder engagement, a common feature of all these processes is that they bring stakeholders together to share perspectives on food systems challenges, develop innovative solutions, and influence food-related policy and planning (Halliday *et al.*, 2019).

Since there is no single accepted definition of multistakeholder mechanisms, in this paper we rely on the Alliance of Bioversity (2021) to introduce "participatory multistakeholder food platforms" as an overarching concept, defining more or less formal governance arrangements. These are meant to bring together a wide range of food system actors, with different food-related agendas and values, to work across traditional sectors and scales to integrate cross-cutting themes and find a common approach towards sustainable food systems. Through dialogue and knowledge sharing, actors with diverse expertise and interests learn together about the nature of the problems, potential solutions, and the context whereby these solutions are to be implemented, to define strategies and take actions (Thorpe *et al.,* 2022; Herens *et al.*, 2022; Breeman *et al.*, 2015).

Multistakeholder food platforms are advocated in this paper as participatory, to stress the relevance of two

key dimensions: pluralism and inclusiveness. Pluralism refers to the recognition of multiple legitimate ways of knowing, defining, valuing, and representing food and the food systems (Visseren-Hamakers *et al.,* 2021). Inclusiveness refers to "enabling a wide range of right holders, knowledge holders, and stakeholders to participate in decision-making to capture diverse values, enhance capacity, and promote accountability, legitimacy, and just outcomes" (Visseren-Hamakers *et al.*, 2021: 22).

Aware of the risk of hyper-multistakolderism (Wilkes, 2022) or apolitical tendencies (Moragues-Faus, 2019) grounded in the neoliberal approach to multistakeholder engagement – where process dynamics tend to be defined by conflict and competition, in settings characterised by power imbalances among participants and exclusion or underrepresentation of vulnerable groups (Andrée *et al.*, 2019; Cheyns and Riisgaard, 2014; Huttunen and Kaljonen, 2022) – we call for pluralist and inclusive multistakeholder mechanisms oriented to achieve a just governance empowering local communities and leading to social justice (Huttunen and Kaljonen, 2022).

2.3. Scaling-up local food governance

In the absence of adequate integrated food policies and food governance arrangements at supranational, national and regional (subnational, NUTS2 in EU classification) level, local governments have recently become prominent actors in food system governance (FAO *et al.*, 2023; Tefft *et al.*, 2020; Bornemann and Weiland, 2019; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Sibbing *et al.*, 2021). Especially urban areas have witnessed processes of institutional innovation and cities have developed new governance arrangements creating "spaces of deliberation" that bring together civil society, private actors and local governments in food policy making (Moragues-Faus, 2019). Urban food strategies/policies and food policy councils are the two main local governance instruments used in implementing change in rescaling food governance at the local level (Sonnino and Spayde, 2014).

In parallel to an abundant body of work dedicated to urban food governance, in rural studies the literature on localised agri-food systems (LAFS or SYAL in French literature) (Sanz-Cañada and Muchnik, 2016; Sanz-Cañada, Sánchez-Hernández and López-García, 2023), rural, agricultural and food districts (Rossi and Brunori, 2006; Toccaceli, 2012, 2015; Toccaceli and Pacciani, 2024) and on the EU LEADER (Bock, 2019; Esparcia and Abbasi, 2020), has stressed the relevance of territorial food governance as a driver for the development of localised/territorial food systems.

Notwithstanding, the literature on local food governance presents some shortcomings. First, it is dominated by urban governance research that is inclined to "cityism", by prioritising strategies, policies and initiatives enacted by specific cities over and above a more comprehensive and systemic rural-urban perspective (Sonnino, 2023). Furthermore, in food governance literature, rural and urban governance are considered separately, as if they constituted independent systems (Ovaska *et al.*, 2021). An upscaled regional perspective might help to overcome the shortcomings of food governance citysm and urban vs rural food governance dichotomy at local level.

Furthermore, regional food system framework is achieving recognition among food advocates, planners, supply chain players, and policymakers (FAO *et al.*, 2023; Lever *et al.*, 2022; Ruhf, 2015; Hinrichs, 2013; Kneafsey, 2010; Donkers, 2013). As stressed by FAO *et al.* (2023) "a regional perspective of agrifood systems governance can become an opportunity for initiating the process of establishing multilevel agrifood systems governance mechanisms" (p. 139). Very recently regional governments are developing integrated food policy as: the Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia and the Catalan Food Council in Spain, and in Belgium the food strategies of the Regions Flanders and Wallonia Food Strategy. Notwithstanding, the academic debate on food governance is focused on the global/national vs local polarisation with a lack of literature on the regional level. We thus underly the need of further theoretical exploration on the scaling-up of local food governance.

3. METHODOLOGY

Our empirical investigation of territorial food governance is based on the Tuscany case. In Italy, the State has delegated many powers to regional administrations in the fields of agriculture, rural development, and health. Tuscany region, in Central Italy, represents an interesting case, being one of the most innovative regions in these domains. For instance, a system of delegation of responsibilities to the provinces and municipalities' unions is in place in the region, leading to the development of a complex vertical governance model. At the same time, the regional government has been experimenting with innovative models of horizontal and territorial governance, regulated through regional laws that have often anticipated national laws. This is the case, for example, of the Rural Districts and the Food and Agrobiodiversity Communities, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The paper analyses the results of the project "Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region" (hereafter FRTR project), run from September until May 2022, which was co-financed by the Tuscany Regional Law on Public Participation.

The paper adopts a mixed methodology, based on a comparative systematic analysis of the forms of local territorial food governance present in Tuscany and the participant observation of participatory process leading to the setting the Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region. The methodology adopted has allowed a triangulation between the results emerged from the analysis of the authors direct experiences (collective auto-ethnography) and the documents produced during the process.

The analysis of the local experiences is based on the mapping of local initiatives conducted during the FRTR project by developing an *ad hoc* template filled in by the participants, and just in very few cases followed up by very short interviews focused only on specific aspects of the template aiming at gathering missing information. We collected a dataset of 15 cases/experiences. The analysis of local food governance (experiences) is also based on existing academic and grey literature, and on the authors' longstanding experience in participatory-action-research for supporting the development of these initiatives in Tuscany. The analysis is also based on the results emerging from the first dialogue meeting of the FRTR project, that aimed at involving local stakeholders to identify the strengths and weaknesses of local food governance in Tuscany. To investigate the local experiences we have identified a set of conceptual categories, as illustrated in Table 1: initiators of the process which led to set up the local food governance arrangement; geographic scale; institutional-political scale (municipal or higher institutional level); geographic typology (rural, peri-urban, rural); type of actors involved in the governance system; areas of intervention (e.g., school meals, food production, protection of biodiversity, food poverty); functions performed (e.g., coordination animation, policy making); institutional competencies; organisational structure and financial resources. The same criteria guided the selection of the three case studies presented in sections 4.1-4.3.

The analysis of the setting-up of the regional Roundtable is inspired to collective auto-ethnography (Ellingson and Ellis, 2008), a qualitative research method based on observant participation, in which the researchers study a social reality not only through observation, but also by participating in its activities (Rossi and Berti, 2022). While auto-ethnography involves individual self-reflection, collective auto-ethnography is based on the collaboration between two or more researchers, involving the inter-subjective analysis of experiences (Levkoe and Sheedy, 2019). Critics argue that autoethnography can be highly subjective, as it relies heavily on the researcher's personal experiences and direct participation to the events that are analysed. This subjectivity may introduce bias into the analysis, making it challenging to generalise findings or establish minimum degrees of objectivity. The analytical work developed in collective auto-ethnography generated by the collaboration between researchers might help to minimise the risk of excessive subjectivity and bias that is always present in autoethnography. As auto-ethnography is grounded on observant participation, the analysis of the process of setting-up a regional multistakeholder food platform is based on the work we carried out as members of the Scientific Committee of the Roundtable of Local Food Policies lead by ANCI-Toscana[2], and as coordinator (main author) and facilitators (other authors) of the participatory project "Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region" (FRTR project). The qualitative dataset adopted for the analysis resulted from the activities consisting of: direct experiences of the authors during participatory meetings, notes and reports drafted at the end of each meeting (which were recorded) and the final report of the project.

4. EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL FOOD GOVERNANCE IN TUSCANY

In Tuscany, a mosaic of different typologies of local food governance mechanisms is in place. These address many different issues related to agriculture, rural development, and the urban food environment, as attempts to better manage food systems at local scale. This mosaic results from a stratification of initiatives differently shaped at local level, developed over time to respond to different needs, areas of interest or policy goals. Such diverse governance mechanisms – in some cases informal arrangements, in others institutionalised through regional or national laws – can be grouped under three main typologies: (i) Urban food strategies/policies and food policy councils; (ii) Food communities; and (iii) Food districts.

Each of the three forms of local governance presents different characteristics in terms of the conceptual categories highlighted in Table 1.

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[2] ANCI (Associazione Nazionale dei Comuni Italiani) is the national confederation of local authorities (i.e., municipalities).

Table 1. Local territorial food governance case studies in Tuscany.

	Intermunicipal Food Policy of "Piana del Cibo"	Garfagnana Food and Agrobiodiversity Community	Rural and organic district of Val di Cecina
Initiator	Municipalities of Capannori, Lucca and Province of Lucca, with the signature of the MUFPP in 2018, but with a high level of involvement of civil society organizations and citizens	Initiative developed thanks to a pilot project implemented by the Union of Municipalities of Garfagnana, financed by the Region of Tuscany on the Rural Development Plan, with the involvement of a group of small local farmers.	The Farmers' Confederation and the Volterra Savings Bank were among the promoters of the rural districts, together with the Municipalities of Volterra and Cecina. The rural district itself promoted the organic district together with association of the Tuscan coordination of organic producers.
Geographic scale	Five municipalities across urban and rural areas, within the Plain of Lucca	Some municipalities in Garfagnana, an historic mountainous area in the Province of Lucca.	Fifteen municipalities covering the area of the Cecina valley.
Institutional-political scale	Municipal and inter-municipal	Municipal and the Mountain Union of Municipalities (higher institutional level)	Municipal and the Upper Cecina Valley Mountain Union of municipalities (higher institutional level)
Geographic typology	Urban-rural	Rural (hills and mountains)	Rural
Type of actors involved	Besides representatives from the five City Boards: civil society organisations (of different nature); teachers and school canteens' representatives; farmers and farmers' organisations; NGOs; research institutions; citizens; other public authorities.	More than fifty participants, including custodian farmers (committed to the protection of agrobiodiversity) and agritourism, local cultural associations, consumers, local purchasing groups, restaurants, cooperatives and processors, and local municipalities.	More than thirty participants, including organisations of farmers and firms (mostly representing tourism and handcraft activities), the Chamber of commerce of Pisa, the most relevant cooperative of farmers in the area and the association of organic farmers.
Areas of intervention	Access to food; (local) sustainable food production and consumption; food waste; education and food habits.	Biodiversity and environmental sustainability, promoting economic sustainability through the development of short food chains and strengthening links with local tourism.	Local sustainable development and promoting of organic production and consumption.
Functions	Coordination and sharing of food policy functions (on the institutional side); advocacy, communication, coordination, consultation, engagement (the participatory side). [See below: organisational structure].	Animation, promotion, coordination among local actors, both producers, public institutions, citizens and local associations.	Animation, promotion, coordination among local actors also to design the territorial economic project and achieve national and regional financial funds.
Institutional competences	Competences of municipalities	None	None.
Organizational Structure	The governance of the IFP is organised, on one side, as a 'gestione associata' (lit. joint management) of food policy functions shared among the five municipalities which have ratified a joint management convention, on one side; on the other, as ad hoc participatory governance model encompassing different entities (Agorà, Food Policy Council, Food policy office).	The Community is constituted as a Social Promotion Association. The governance structure comprises the following bodies: Assembly; Board of Directors; President.	The rural-organic district of Cecina has identified its Reference subject in the Val di Cecina Rural District Association Val di Cecina Rural District Association based at the Volterra Savings Bank Foundation in Volterra. The bodies of the association are those established by general law on association: assembly of the associated, Board of Directors and the President who is the legal representative.
Financial resources	Funding from the Regional Authority for Participation in the starting phase of the initiative (CIRCULARIFOOD participatory project). First budget (2019-2023): 20.000 EUR + human resources allocated to the food policy office at the Municipality of Capannori.	There are no regular funding lines; the Tuscany Region issued in 2021 a call for contributions for setting up and supporting activities, max EUR 12,000 per Community. The Community finances its activities by participating in calls and projects.	No specific financial line is provided. The district does not respond to the call of the Tuscany Region for supporting integrated regional project. Val di Cecina district aims to respond to the next national call "contract of district" having collected projects of investment for more than 25 million euros of investment.

4.1. Urban food strategies and food policy councils (FPCs)

Over the past two decades, an emphasis on the local (urban) scale has prompted numerous cities and towns to take action by implementing food policies, programs, and collaborative governance arrangements around food issues. Urban food strategies are official plans or road maps that help local governments to integrate a full spectrum of urban food system issues within a single policy framework (Mansfield and Mendes, 2013). They have emerged for engaging different stakeholders in the reorganisation of local food governance (Lever *et al.*, 2019). These strategies can be used to address specific food-related issues, e.g., obesity, food waste, food poverty, among others (Moragues-Faus and Battersby, 2021), or to design governance arrangements that span the entire food system (Halliday and Barling, 2018). More specifically, Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are cross-sector strategic alliances that serve as arenas for collaboration across sectors and community groups. They operate for identifying issues, coordinating programmes and evaluating, influencing and engaging with government policy and programmes (Calancie *et al.*, 2017).

In Italy, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) has created momentum around urban food policies and led to a spread of such initiatives. Among these, it is worth mentioning the cases, both developed in Tuscany, of the Intermunicipal Food Policy of Lucca, of the Livorno Food Strategy and the Food Agenda of Camaiore.

The Intermunicipal Food Policy (IFP) of the *Piana del Cibo* is a governance arrangement through which five municipalities decided to reach out and share their responsibilities on food-related issues (Arcuri *et al.*, 2022). The process which led to the establishment of the food policy started with the MUFPP signature by the Mayors of Capannori and Lucca and the following participatory project called CIRCULARIFOOD, which involved the neighbouring municipalities of Altopascio, Porcari and Villa Basilica. The governance of this food policy encompasses two main components: one is the participatory structure designed *ad hoc*, which ensures a strong community base, as many initiatives and projects on food have been undertaken in the last decades in the Plain of Lucca, by a wide variety of actors. This structure encompasses a set of new entities: the *Agorà* is the open assembly organised in five thematic tables (or as a plenary) and is meant to provide a public arena for raising everyone's voice on food-related issues. Needs, ideas, and proposals coming from this participatory entity would then be mediated by the Food Policy Council, made up of representatives from the *Agorà* and experts desig-

nated by each municipality. The Food Policy Office has been compared to "a sort of transmission belt" (Arcuri *et al.*, 2022: 293), operating in between participatory and decision-making entities, to elaborate proposals and solutions for local needs. The Assembly of Mayors, on the other side, represents the political entity. The IFP has also an institutional component, or "institutional home" (Halliday and Barling, 2018), epitomised in the Joint Management Convention (*convenzione per la gestione associata*) ratified by the five municipalities to share food policy functions, signalling a strong commitment and political will (Arcuri *et al.*, 2022). Throughout the whole process, a crucial role has been recognised to the informal steering committee made up of a group of dedicated individuals, from different sectors, which performed important functions, such as "framing problems and solutions, building networks and trust, gaining political support, and aligning available resources and goals" (Arcuri *et al.*, 2022: 295). These roles of facilitation and coordination passed on to the Food Policy Office based at the Municipality of Capannori, that included members of the steering committee.

The functions envisaged for the IFP are consistent with those identified by Harper (2009) in her analysis of FPCs, namely: (i) serving as forums for discussion on food-related issues; (ii) promoting coordination between sectors, adopting a food system approach; (iii) informing and influencing policy-making, through research, advice and advocacy; and (iv) implementing or supporting programs and services in response to local needs. However, the extent to which each of these functions were enacted depended on the specific goals pursued, needs identified, and contextual factors, not least the pandemic outbreak in early 2020, which has deeply influenced the first years of activity of the IFP. After a slowdown in the activities, the Piana del Cibo is undergoing a sort of restructuring of the governance structure and reorganising participation around key objectives[3].

4.2. Food communities

The concept of food community refers to a "group of small-scale producers and others united by the production of a particular food and closely linked to a geographic area" (Amo, 2023). It has been promoted by Slow Food through a specific international network, launched in 2004 during the first global "Terra Madre" meeting.

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[3] Comune di Capannori, comunicato stampa 8 ottobre 2023, available at: https://www.comune.capannori.lu.it/news/dettaglio/domenica-8-otto-bre-il-1-festival-del-cibo-ad-artemisia-apre-la-manifestazione-aspettan-do-slow-beans/

The main objectives of food communities are both to raise citizens' awareness, by promoting short food supply chains and information and communication initiatives, and to support farmers and breeders operating as "guardians" of genetic resources, especially those threatened with extinction. For instance, the Slow Food Chestnut Community of Alta Versilia was established in March 2022 in Seravezza, a very small village in the Province of Lucca, to promote the local production of chestnut flour, value and preserve the mountain landscape, and raise awareness on this matter through cultural projects and events for schools and grown-ups (Arcuri and Tomasi, 2022).

In 2015, a national law[4] has defined "Food and Biodiversity Communities of Agricultural and Food Interest" as territorial realities, established to promote the protection of native biodiversity and agricultural traditions, to raise awareness, support agricultural and food production and promote behaviours to protect agricultural and food biodiversity by signing local agreements. They are conceived as local spaces resulting from agreements between local farmers, custodian farmers and livestock farmers, solidarity purchasing groups, school and university institutes, research centres, associations for the protection of the quality of biodiversity of agricultural and food interest, school canteens, hospitals, catering establishments, commercial establishments, small and medium-sized agricultural and food processing businesses and public bodies (art. 13, authors' own translation).

However, despite being assigned complex functions, no predefined institutional forms are foreseen for food communities, nor specific funding lines. Conceived as free agreements between actors, and promoted by regional authorities, food communities' geographical and institutional scale is not predefined, nor is the type of actors they must encompass. According to the Law, the agreement underpinning a food community may have different objects, in particular: (a) the study, recovery and transmission of knowledge on genetic resources; (b) the setting up of short supply chain; (c) the study and transmission of organic farming practices and other low environmental impact farming systems (d) the study, recovery and transmission of traditional knowledge; (e) the creation of didactic, social, urban and collective gardens, the redevelopment of abandoned or degraded areas and unused farmland.

At the beginning of 2023, also thanks to a dedicated funding scheme by the Tuscany Region, nine food communities were established. These are very diverse in terms of size (in one case, several provinces are involved, in others just a few small municipalities), type of territory (peri-urban areas vs. marginal mountain territories), initiators and promoters (public vs. private vs. civil society), the number and type of actors involved, the scope and typology of activities implemented.

It is worth highlighting the case of the Agrobiodiversity Community of Garfagnana[5], established in 2017, which holds importance as first of its kind in Tuscany and the second in all of Italy. In terms of governance arrangement, the Garfagnana Food and Agro-biodiversity Community is a social promotion association (A.P.S.) As reported in the association's website the Agrobiodiversity Community of Garfagnana involves 54 local actors at the time of writing, 31 of which are "Custodian Farmers". Overall, 46% of the members are farmers, 9% are CSOs and 44% are on the consumption side, namely: solidarity purchasing groups, restaurants and grocery shops. Its main goal is the recovery, conservation and enhancement of agrobiodiversity, while improving the territorial sustainability and its people's wellbeing. Local agro-biodiversity is considered by the food community as the material and intangible heritage of agricultural breeds and varieties, uses and traditions, knowledge and flavours owned by the territory and the people of Garfagnana. Central to biodiversity conservation is the local Germplasm Bank, where genetic resources are protected *ex situ,* and stored for conservation *in situ* by the Custodian Farmers. A crucial feature of the food community relates to the ethical and cultural movement meant to improve the quality of life in the area, to encourage a solidarity economy, and advocate for respect for the ecosystems and nature, the history and the vocation of the place.

The food community adopted a set of strategic and operational tools. The Community Chart regulates the organizational structure and defines principles and rules that the members should follow. The Pact for Food and Agrobiodiversity and the Strategic Plan were also created, supporting the identification and implementation of the community actions and available financial resources. Among the initiatives carried out, it is worth mentioning activities for landrace qualification and market remuneration, the enhancement of local supply chains, focusing on public food procurement and restaurants, and communication activities for promoting the territory.

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[4] L. 194/2015 "Disposizioni per la tutela e la valorizzazione della biodiversità di interesse agricolo e alimentare".

[5] Garfagnana is a mountainous area located in North of Tuscany, in the province of Lucca. More detail on this area and the *Comunità del Cibo e dell'Agrobiodiversità* there established available at: https://comunitadelcibo.it/

4.3. Food districts

The concept of "rural district" emerged in rural development and governance debates, carrying the idea that a better territorial governance in rural areas is the way to enhance development strategies grounded on local resources and cross-sectoral activities. The "rural district" originated from the seminal experience of the rural district of Maremma in 1996, in turn influenced by the principles stated in the first Cork Declaration. Since then, the scientific debate and the legislative framework have evolved (Toccaceli, 2012, 2015), and many experiences of rural districts have been developed in Tuscany.

In Italy, in 2001, a national law[6] defined rural districts as "local production systems characterised by a homogeneous historical and territorial identity due to the integration among agriculture and other local activities and to the production of very specific goods and services, coherent with natural and territorial traditions and vocations". The updated national law 205/2017 reframed rural districts within the "food districts" perspective, expanding their scope to promote territorial development, cohesion, and social inclusion, encourage the integration of activities characterised by territorial proximity, ensure food safety, reduce the environmental impact of agriculture and food waste, and safeguard the territory and the rural landscape through agricultural and agribusiness activities. The law introduced different types of food districts, including those placed in urban and peri-urban areas, short food supply chains, organic districts and bio-districts. The Italian Ministry of Agriculture established a National Register of Food Districts, including, as of March 2023, ten rural districts and five organic districts located in Tuscany.

Tuscany regional law 17/2017 on rural districts set the rules for developing an effective territorial governance, including the adoption of a specific organisational model. The rural district must be established through an agreement between public and private actors operating in an integrated way in the local production system. A specific case concerns the organic district, regulated by regional law 51/2019, requiring that at least three organic farm and one third of the municipalities in the district area sign a formal agreement. The partnership can involve different types of local stakeholders, with municipalities always required in the governance of the district, even without explicit roles assigned by the law. The organisational structure of a district is divided into two bodies: the referent subject, with an organisational role, and the assembly, involving all the partners adher-

ing to the district, with a decision-making and control role. Private and public partners identify the referent subject, who is legally in charge of the district and has the responsibility of developing and implementing the territorial economic plan of the district.

The main activity of the rural district is to foster and strengthen the dialogue between public and private actors and put in place development strategies coherent with regional and national rural and agri-food policies. The organic district makes a step further in the direction of sustainable agriculture and management of natural resources. In addition, while rural districts are mainly focused on the production side of the food system, organic districts are focused on food consumption and involve local consumers' organisations (Passaro and Randelli, 2022). Since creating and implementing a shared project in a participative way is the main object of the districts, animation, promotion, and coordination among local actors are functional activities. In Tuscany a specific financial support has been provided through the Regional Development Plan 2014-2022, the funding scheme for integrated district projects.

A significant example of rural districts is the one established in Val di Cecina in 2019, with the aim of strengthening territorial identity and promoting a new sustainable development strategy through a renewed territorial governance with many municipalities playing a crucial role. Considering that 33% of the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) is organic with an additional 21% of UAA in conversion (as per legal requirement), the rural district became a 'rural and organic' district. The district areas of intervention include sustainable agriculture, food education, short food supply-chains, food policies, climate change and territorial governance. Among the main projects there are: strengthening the short local supply chains and developing direct and online marketing; the promotion of consumption of local food products in the schools of the Municipality of Cecina; the support to the consortium of the "Pomarancino lamb" to overcome the problem of lack of slaughterhouses; and an innovative project on high quality and healthy bread.

5. THE FOOD ROUNDTABLE OF TUSCANY REGION

The setting-up of the Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region (hereafter Roundtable) is an ongoing process that can be divided into three phases: a preparatory phase (2019-2021) a design phase (September 2021 - May 2022), followed up by the post-design phase (June 2022 - ongoing).

In 2017-2019 in Tuscany there was a flourishing of urban food strategies and FPCs initiatives (namely:

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[6] D. Lgs. 228/2001, art.13.

Livorno Food Strategy, IFP of the *Piana del Cibo* and Food Agenda in Camaiore). These attracted the attention of other cities in Tuscany (and beyond), showing interest in urban food governance innovations. In parallel, in November 2017, the Food and Agrobiodiversity Community of Garfagnana was established, generating great interest by other local governments. ANCI-Toscana captured the general interest and necessity of learning about these institutional innovations and providing support in policymaking and, in late 2019, eventually established the Roundtable of Local Food Policies within its organisation. The main scope of the Roundtable was to support the development of a regional network of local food governance initiatives. Furthermore, championing the idea of a Regional Food Plan, ANCI-Toscana started a dialogue with, and gained the support of, Tuscany Region's Vice-President and Alderman of Agriculture. In the following period, the Vice-President committed to the support of the Roundtable and engaged the administrative body of the Region, namely the Department of Agriculture and an administration manager was delegated to represent the Region in the Roundtable. In addition, a Scientific Committee was created involving Universities and research centres. The Scientific Committee developed a Position Paper which served as a preliminary document for the development of the Food Plan of Tuscany.

The initial enthusiasm generated by taking on board Regional authorities and the growing interest around the Roundtable from cities and other food system stakeholders led to the FRTR project, run from September until May 2022. The project was promoted by ANCI-Toscana and led by the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, in collaboration with the other universities in the Scientific Committee.

The FRTR project, co-financed by the Tuscany Regional Law on Public Participation, aimed at involving local governments, food system stakeholders, food movements, CSOs, citizens, farmers' organisations, representatives of food districts and food communities, to move forward the Roundtable of Local Food Policies created within ANCI-Toscana. The necessary progress required:

- consolidating and expanding the network, connecting local food governance actors among them and with Tuscany Region;
- designing the governance model of the Food Roundtable, by identifying objectives, functions, composition and mode of working;
- mapping, investigating and promoting a discussion around food governance mechanisms at local level;
- further developing the Position Paper through the involvement of local actors, discussing relevant

themes around which local food policies could be developed.

The expected outcome of the project was to set up the Roundtable as an independent organisation (external to ANCI-Toscana), involving stakeholders and local communities. ANCI-Toscana led the first phase of the project of social mobilisation, which was oriented to outreach to local actors and get them involved in the project. All the municipalities in the Region were invited to participate, along with all other potential stakeholders, from CSOs, farmers and other agriculture organisations, to citizens, researchers, food movements (e.g., Slow Food, GAS/CSAs), and school representatives[7].

The project's implementation worked along two main directions: on the one side, four participatory dialogues were held online, due to Covid-19 restrictions; on the other, existing experiences of local food governance were mapped.

The main objective of the first dialogue meeting was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of local food governance in Tuscany. The second meeting focused on discussing key intervention areas around which food governance developed. The aim was to contribute to advancing the Position Paper and identify the action areas for the Roundtable. The design of the Roundtable was the focus of the third meeting. On that occasion, participants were divided in three groups and defined areas of intervention, functions, composition, and mode of working of the Roundtable. The FRTR project ended with the fourth meeting, whereby the results were presented with all participants. These results were included in the Final Report by the coordination group, and shared via email with all the participants to the FRTR project.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Challenges and opportunities of local territorial food governance

Local experiences of food governance – urban food policies and food policy councils, food and agrobiodiversity communities and food districts – are all anchored to the development of participatory multistakeholder food platforms, formalised through either voluntary agreements and private legal instruments, or institutionalised by regional and local government tools as public deliberations, resolutions or others. These local platforms are capable of integrating different food system stake-

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[7] Invitation procedures entailed "snowball sampling" in order to reach as wide participation as possible.

holders, confirming that one main feature of territorial food governance is actor mobilisation and participation (Davoudi *et al.,* 2008). In terms of their differences, food communities and FPCs aim to involve citizens and represent an inclusive or participatory form of multistakeholder engagement, while food districts, especially rural districts, are platforms built around organised economic interests and local institutions. The bio-districts are generally more inclusive, involving solidarity purchasing groups and citizens (Passaro and Randelli, 2022). In local territorial governance, multistakeholder integration entails participatory food democracy processes, as in the cases of the three urban food strategies developed in Tuscany. All the three were indeed supported through funding by the Regional Authority for Participation (Arcuri *et al.*, 2022; Berti and Rossi, 2022).

Another relevant difference is the geographical location, that has a great impact on the area of interests and policy intervention. All the platforms observed try to promote policy integration but, on the one hand, urban food strategies are usually "food citizen-demand driven", focusing mainly on intervention areas such as school meals, diets and nutrition, social justice, access to food and food waste. The fact that urban food strategies are promoted by municipalities has a role in the definition of the areas of intervention, which tend to align with their institutional responsibilities. On the other side, food communities and food districts are "rural and farmers-agricultural driven" forms of local territorial food governance, focused on food production, management of natural resources, rural tourism, and territorial development of rural economies and communities. Furthermore, urban food strategies involve institutional competencies and direct policy making, while local food communities and food districts are forms of governance exerting only indirect influence on policy making. The latter are involved in coordinating local actors to develop shared values and visions that can potentially influence the policy framing (Candel and Biesbroek, 2016).

The forms of territorial food governance observed share a common objective: coordinating the efforts of actors and institutions through horizontal coordination. This primarily occurs with the establishment of local participatory multistakeholder food platforms that generate space for collective action and collaboration, coordination and integration among the private, public and societal spheres. Secondly, as highlighted by the case of the IFP *Piana del Cibo*, they have the potential to promote horizontal cooperation amongst governmental entities. This same case is an example of adoption of one of the different forms of inter-municipal cooperation available in the Italian institutional setting, namely

the "joint management of services and (administrative) functions", based on formal agreements among local authorities (Puntillo, 2017). In the *Piana del Cibo*, it was adopted to institutionalise shared political will and effort towards an inter-municipal food plan. In terms of vertical coordination, while food communities and food district are ruled by national laws that devolves their recognition to the Regions, urban food governance is neither regulated by the law nor provided with funding.

One major challenge of local food governance in Tuscany is fragmentation. Existing local food governance mechanisms highlight the polycentric nature and the multilevel nature of territorial food governance. However, while the multilevel nature of territorial governance refers to both vertical and horizontal coordination, its polycentric nature signifies the existence of multiple centres of decision making, each operating with some degrees of autonomy (Carlisleand and Gruby, 2019). Taking a broader perspective, territorial food governance appears as a polycentric mosaic of independent local governance centres, operating without any form of collaboration and raising concerns about coherence and coordination. Therefore, the challenge facing local territorial food governance in Tuscany lies in creating new integrative approaches to overcome fragmentation and inconsistency.

6.2. Scaling-up local food governance: identifying the characteristic of a participatory multistakeholder food platform at Regional level

In this section we reflect on the results of the participatory multistakeholder engagement process promoted by the FRTR project. The scope of the analysis is to ideally identify the characteristics and functions of a participatory multistakeholder food platform at Regional level. The analysis results from information gathered from direct participation of the authors to the process and from all the documents produced during the project. The analysis especially relies on the Final Report of the FRTR project, which describes the design of the Roundtable in terms of who should be involved, what are the functions and what is the organisational architecture to implement the Roundtable activities.

The Roundtable has been conceptualised in the design process by the participants to the FTRT project, as a participatory platform involving three different types of actors of the food system: (i) political actors, including public institutions, but also CSOs, farmers and other sectors organisations, businesses and citizens; (ii) scientific actors, represented by researchers from various disciplines, affiliated to the three Tuscan universities

Figure 1. The functions of the Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region.
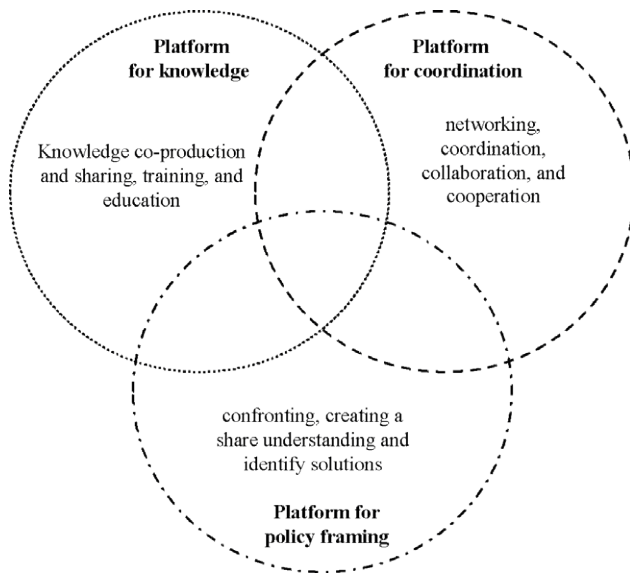
and other research institutions; (iii) public administration actors, including public officers working in different departments of local and regional administrations.

As shown in Figure 1, participants have identified three main functions for the Roundtable: (i) knowledge sharing, training, and education; (ii) promoting coordination and cooperation among actors at different scales and from different sectors; and (iii) facilitating a dialogue among stakeholders, political bodies and administrative authorities oriented to policy framing.

According to the participants, the Roundtable should serve as a platform of knowledge to promote learning and capacity building, co-creation of knowledge and to foster communication, in order to facilitate a better understanding of how the Tuscany food system works and how it can be strengthened and to make it more sustainable. The participants stressed the potential role of the Roundtable in developing shared language, meaning for the key concepts, including food, and a vision for sustainable development. The Roundtable should also serve as a best practice-sharing platform, to help food system actors identify the practices that work best for them and spread across the network. A more direct involvement of universities was called for, both in food system transformation and in supporting food policy making and governance. Another area of intervention for the Roundtable is education and training which, in the participants' view, should involve all the actors of the Tuscan food system, from farm to fork. Much attention went to the importance of food-related education, which lies in the opportunity to empower people so they

make better informed food choices, and includes the knowledge, skills, and behaviour to plan, manage, select, prepare, and eat a sustainable, healthy, and just diet. An additional remark made on education and training related to policy makers and local administrators. Finally, communication and dissemination were identified as central functions in the process of knowledge co-creation and implementation.

It was raised that the Roundtable should serve as a platform for horizontal and vertical coordination through networking, collaboration, and cooperation between different actors, sectors and levels of the food systems. This remark is consistent with the need to address a fragmented landscape of territorial food governance, also raised in the literature (Herens *et al.,* 2022; Lever *et al.,* 2019), with the Roundtable providing an ideal 'space' for horizontal coordination. For instance, the platform could provide a space for dialogue on issues concerning food among different actors, who could connect and develop new or strengthened collaborations for sustainable food systems. Integration and aggregation emerged as key concepts on more than one occasion during the participatory project. The former was meant to connect different actors of the food system and favour the development of integrated supply chain projects. It should also address the integration of (sectorial) policy makers and civil servants. Aggregation concerns the capacity of developing inter-municipal forms of collaboration and cooperation. The same was foreseen for vertical coordination, to which the Roundtable could contribute by creating a space for interaction among public institutions at different scales and the different forms of local food governance and Regional authorities.

Finally, the Roundtable was envisaged as an open forum where all actors of the food system of Tuscany come together to exchange on food issues, to create a shared understanding and to identify solutions to be translated into policy recommendations. More specifically, the Roundtable has been thought as a space to engage local institutions, stakeholders and citizens in a dialogue among them and with the Region for supporting local food governance and for the development of a Regional Food Plan.

The overall emphasis on overcoming fragmentation, creating opportunities for coordination and networking among different kinds of actors – in terms of roles, power, geography and levels of governance – raises awareness on, and necessity of, preventing the risk of "multistakeholderism" raised by Wilkes (2022). The participatory definition of the Roundtable has rather pointed towards setting up a pluralist and inclusive multistakeholder mechanism to empower local communities (Hut-

tunen and Kaljonen, 2022), especially considering the varied and unique experiences characterising the Tuscany landscape of local food governance (Brunori and Rossi, 2007). Furthermore, as an overarching governance mechanism connecting and integrating actors and experiences from both urban and rural areas, the Roundtable experience shows potential in terms of overcoming a focus on either the urban or rural dimension, and thereby promoting a more holistic approach (FAO *et al.*, 2023)

As stressed in the conceptual framework, the multistakeholder engagement entails both the form that the platform might take and the process by which stakeholders are involved in food governance. After the end of the FRTR project, the process of setting-up the regional Roundtable has considerably slowed down. Scaling-up multistakeholder platforms from the local to the regional scale can present several challenges due to its inherent complexity. Among the many difficulties that can be encountered in the scaling-up process, two issues emerge. The first is resource constraints. Establishing and sustaining a multistakeholder platform on a regional scale in the long run requires significant resources in terms of time, money, and human capital. For this reason setting-up participatory forms of food governance requires both political and financial commitment from public institutions. Another difficulty is continuity. Sustaining stakeholder engagement over the long term poses a challenge. Scaling-up multistakeholder platforms requires continuous commitment from both stakeholders and authorities. Maintaining momentum in stakeholder engagement might be difficult when the effort of participation is not paid off with results in terms of political outcomes.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of a territorial food governance approach requires a shift from a government do-it-alone mode, based on hierarchical and monocentric command and control strategies, in "siloed" sectoral policies and administrative systems, towards a participatory and integrated approach, connecting across discrete policy domains, scales, and actors. Participatory multistakeholder food platforms involving various actors in collective food governance are emerging as innovative mechanisms implementing territorial food governance approaches.

In this paper, we explored territorial food governance both at local and at regional level. We analysed three different types of local territorial food governance mechanisms: food communities, urban food policies,

and food districts. We investigate also the process to the Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region, strictly entangled with advocacy for a Regional Food Plan by several actors involved in such process.

Two main points emerge from the analysis that are relevant for delivering policy recommendations. First, the current landscape of local food governance shows high fragmentation, disconnection and signs of the traditional urban vs rural dichotomy. The relevance and foreseen functions of a regional Roundtable lie in the potential capacity to foster effective interaction among urban-, agricultural- and rural-centred initiatives. Such capacity could help overcome the limitations of massive spread and fragmentation of initiatives of local territorial food governance. Indeed, small-scale and bottom-up, inclusive and local grassroot initiatives might enable effective participation of various types of actors and dialogue with and between local authorities, but such initiatives often lack the knowledge, skills and resources to operate effectively and achieve tangible results. An upscaled regional engagement in food governance might help overcome these shortcomings. A regional participatory multistakeholder food platform might work as a mechanism of meta-governance, a space for cross-fertilisation, knowledge exchange, mutual learning, and coordination among different local governance arrangements. In this regard, the Regional Tuscan Food Roundtable envisaged in the design phase of the participatory FRTR project performed such functions at a more appropriate scale. We therefore identify possible avenues of theoretical and empirical research to explore the mechanisms of meta-governance of food systems.

Second, food communities and food districts are embedded in a vertical multilevel mechanism; on the contrary, urban food policies and FPCs lack a well-defined institutional home. The issue at stake is therefore the need for a national framework law for the establishment and recognition of urban food policies and FPCs, which could be also delegated to the Regions, by virtue of the subsidiarity principle. Such a framework law could be a tool for promoting and engaging cities in territorial food governance at urban/municipal level. A further step towards a multilevel territorial food governance is the development of a National Food Policy, grounded on an inter-ministerial platform, and replicated at regional level. Indeed, the regional level is particularly important in Italy due to the major decentralising reforms passed between 1996 and 2001, which devolved responsibilities on agriculture, health, urban planning to the Regions. Currently, very few examples exist of national food systems strategies or policies that are holistic and work as multistakeholder platforms (FAO *et al.*, 2023;

Tefft *et al.*, 2020), even less at regional level. Such considerations make the initiative and process towards the Food Roundtable of Tuscany Region even more important, not just for Tuscany itself, but also because, as it has happened many times, the initiative by one Regional government could stimulate others to do the same and eventually lead to a National Food Policy. Currently existing advocacy activities to develop a Regional Food Plan go in the same direction. Indeed, as stressed by FAO *et al.* (2023), the few institutional innovations occurring at regional level represent nascent interjurisdictional governance entry points that provide insights for the development of a conducive policy framework for territorial (multilevel) governance. Such political interest is not yet reflected in research, which focuses attention on the national/global vs local polarisation.

This paper contributes to the academic debate around territorial food governance at regional level and highlights the need for scaling-up local food governance by developing regional participatory multi-stakeholder food platforms. However, the results of this research can be consolidated through future research, in order to contribute more to the understanding of the opportunities and hindering factors for the development of a participatory multistakeholder platform at regional level – e.g. the food regional Roundtable in the Tuscany case, and also from theoretical point of view. Future research should follow two directions. Firstly, to investigate through in-depth interviews and other partecipatory tools how the different stakeholders in the Tuscan case understand the functioning of a Regional platform and what are its potentialities and the factors that could hinder its practical implementation. Secondly, to start a comparative analysis with other experiences in Italy and in other European countries, also characterised by different systems of vertical distribution of powers and institutional governance.

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