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Food Policies - Editorial

## The scenario of Local Food Policies. Towards place-based food policies

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Several analyses of the current Food System, from those conducted by international agencies such as FAO to the more critical perspectives of actors like IPES-Food or FIAN, despite their diversity in viewpoints, seem to converge on the idea that the global food system, and consequently the local one, requires a profound transformation. This transformation should not only address food security but also align with the sustainable development goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Indicators of the global food system paint a highly critical picture of its three main pillars – environmental, social and economic sustainability. Approximately 30% of greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to food systems, while food waste affects 32% of the global food supply by weight and 24% in terms of energy content (calories), resulting in an economic impact exceeding € 2 trillion annually.

Hunger continues to affect a substantial number of people, with FAO estimating that between 691 and 783 million individuals, or 9.2% of the world's population, experienced hunger in 2022. Furthermore, a significant portion cannot afford a healthy diet, contributing to various forms of malnutrition, including obesity. According to the 2021 Global Nutrition Report, over 40% of the global population, approximately 2.2 billion people, are overweight or obese, leading to health issues such as diabetes and a lack of essential nutrients.

The escalating unsustainability of the food system is encapsulated in the latest “The State of Food and Agriculture” by the FAO. It estimates the substantial “hidden costs” of food production and consumption, advocating for the true cost accounting methodology that considers health and environmental impacts. According to this study, hidden costs amount to at least \$10 trillion per year, nearly 10% of the world's GDP. The report attributes 70% of these costs to unhealthy diets, particularly prevalent in wealthier countries consuming ultra-processed foods, fats and sugars. One-fifth of the total costs, globally, are related to greenhouse gas and nitrogen emissions, land-use changes and water use.

These challenges set the stage for local food policies, which, with their inherent territorial approach, can provide effective responses to the major issues impacting the global food system but on a local scale. The local con-

text allows for an adaptive response to global challenges, offering more effective solutions due to greater involvement of local actors and consideration of the specificities of local territorial systems. They are “place-based” policies that become valuable when conceived within a multi-scale governance framework, contributing to achieving the global goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda or other international strategies. However, this will only materialize if local policies, through “scaling up” processes, align with the prioritized issues for the transition of food systems.

Hence, in recent years, driven by social actors advocating for the necessary transformation of increasingly unsustainable local and global food systems, many cities worldwide have developed, or are in the process of developing, urban food policies. These policies are inherently multisectoral and multi-actor, integrating various segments of the economic, social and environmental systems, as well as engaging different actors in the food system. Cities, using food as a tool, address not only environmental sustainability challenges but also economic and social inequalities.

The expanding scientific literature has outlined the primary areas of intervention for local food policies in recent years. The six objectives of the Milan Pact (Governance, Sustainable Diets, Social and Economic Justice, Food Production, Food Distribution, Food Waste) have been gradually refined over time through specific themes such as urban agriculture, public procurement, public health and logistics. However, compared to the initial almost standardized objectives, a greater variability of interventions has emerged through an adaptive process, responding to both local and specific conditions, as well as exogenous and global factors like pandemics or geopolitical crises.

Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the narratives constructed and conveyed by local food policies, as highlighted by Mazzocchi *et al.* in their article. What do local food policies communicate? What are the diverse narratives, if any, and what constitutes the collective discourse? These questions, explored in the introductory article of this Special Issue, frame the theme and underscore how, through the configuration of an intersectoral policy, cities can potentially initiate a systemic transformation. However, for this to be effective, local contexts must engage in a dialogue with higher institutional levels of food policies (regions, the State, the EU through CAP Strategic Plans), leading to transcalar and multi-level governance.

In this regard, a fundamental consideration is the coherence of local policies within the broader framework of sectoral and other policies. Monticone *et al.* address

this aspect in their article, highlighting that coherence and integration of food policies are not automatically assumed and present significant challenges. This complexity arises because food-related issues are tackled at multi-governance levels and across different policy areas.

Berti *et al.* also contribute to the governance perspective, connecting territorial governance with the wider framework of food governance. If the territorial approach is implemented through collective organization processes and networking (involving businesses, local institutions and other stakeholders), the article proposes, through a case study in Tuscany, a theoretical understanding of territorial governance in food.

The issue of food insecurity and poverty is rapidly becoming central to food policies, as highlighted by Monticone *et al.* in their bibliometric analysis. This theme has also gained prominence in local food policies. It is addressed, albeit with different approaches, in both the contributions by Bernaschi *et al.* and Allegretti *et al.*

The first contribution focuses on affordable access to food, introducing a new indicator—the Food Affordability Index (FIA). This indicator helps represent territorial inequalities and identifies situations where families are far from an ideally healthy diet.

The second contribution, part of the Atlante del Cibo project in Metropolitan Turin, explores the phenomenon of food poverty. It emphasizes the urban context of Turin and provides policy recommendations for actors involved in counteracting policies, which, though fragmented, collectively build a form of urban food welfare.

The latest contribution by Torquati *et al.* narrows the focus to a local food policy implemented by a small municipality through Project Financing. This case study is particularly interesting as it explicitly illustrates the systemic nature of local food policies. In this case, three strategic objectives of food policy - school, employment and social assistance - are interrelated through a project addressing local school canteens.

Collectively, these works underscore the complexity of local food policies and their tremendous potential to contribute to a genuine transition. However, to be truly effective, tactical actions that merely serve as good practices are insufficient. A profound shift in public-level investment policies is imperative. Investments are needed in infrastructure, price control, distribution of the value chain, income policies and, perhaps most crucially, in education towards different models of food consumption.