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Editorial

Farming Cities toward Urban Food Policies



Prof. Giuseppe Cinà, MsS (left) is an associate professor of Urban Planning in the Department of Regional and urban studies and planning, Politecnico di Torino, Italy. He has been responsible for a number of research programmes funded by national, regional, and local institutions as well as private entities whose results have been presented at national and international symposia and seminars. He is a Member of the Ph.D. board of Urban and regional development, Politecnico di Torino.

Prof. Egidio Dansero (middle) is a full professor of Political and Economic Geography at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Turin, Italy. He is President of the 1st Degree Course in International sciences, development and cooperation; Director of the 1st level Master in Management of Development (University of Turin – ITC ILO); Director of the Interdepartmental Research Centre OMERO of Urban and Event Studies; Delegate of the Rector of the University of Turin for International Development Cooperation and for Environmental sustainability; and Coordinator of UniToGO (Green Office of the University of Turin).

Dr. Franco Fassio (right) is an adjunct assistant professor in the University of Gastronomic Sciences, National Counsellor of the Slow Food Association, Italy. He specializes in the development of research projects promoting a holistic view of food, the use of eco-design tools and the design of gastronomic systems (Systemic Food Design).

The research papers presented in this issue provide a selection of the articles that were presented at the 7th Aesop Sustainable Food Planning Conference (Torino, October 7-9, 2015; www.aesoptorino2015.it). The Conference was organised by Polytechnic University of Turin, University of Turin, and University of Gastronomic Sciences, and was aimed at exploring new frontiers of education and research, drawing inspiration from policies and practices already implemented or still in development.

One of the main goals of the Association of Europe-

an Schools of Planning (AESOP) (www.aesop-planning.eu) is to acquire “a leading role and entering its expertise into ongoing debates and initiatives regarding planning education and planning qualifications of future professionals”. In this frame, the AESOP thematic group Sustainable Food Planning (SFP) finds its rationale by recognizing that consolidating a sustainable food system is one of the most compelling challenges of the 21st Century. In fact, for its multifunctional character, food is an ideal medium through which to design sustainable places, be they urban, rural or peri-urban. Currently, food



planning is an activity based on bringing people together from a wide range of backgrounds, including planners, policymakers, politicians, designers, health professionals, environmentalists, farmers, food business people, gastronomists, and civil society activists among many others. To this end, the title of the Turin conference, Localizing urban food strategies – Farming cities and performing rurality, was related to education and research fields, as well as to policies and practices at national, regional and local levels.

The word localizing was aimed at connecting scales of discourse and action in order to promote and compare urban food strategies in different places, understanding the contribution of different public entities and local stakeholders in building a glocal discourse for food planning, and, finally, proposing local insight in which the different disciplines and knowledge are reconnected by reconsidering food systems. On the one hand, farming cities refers to the development of innovative roles for agricultural production in and around the city, approaching in a holistic mode the way in which agricultural issues are dealt (or should be dealt) within contemporary urban policies. On the other hand, performing rurality considers urban food strategies as a tool to define a cooperative relationship between the urban and the rural, reversing, in terms of equality, the traditional ideological subordination of the countryside to the city.

In general terms, the Conference was focused on the following goals:

- to highlight the struggle for food safety and the environmental protection both in the Global North and South;
- to develop a proper insight into how current training and research programmes meet the new challenges of food planning;
- to deepen the key perspectives which food planning must deal with, including governance, agriculture, disciplinary innovation, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability;
- to consolidate the network of planning practitioners, policymakers, scholars and experts dealing with SFP.

The six papers presented in this issue have been se-

lected by a group of experts who are members of the scientific committee. We received 118 abstract proposals from which the scientific committee selected 84: 65 of them were presented as talks at the Conference and 24 were presented at the poster session. The present selection includes articles about governance and private entrepreneurship; relevant experiences and practices; training and jobs; and flows and networks for food planning. Positioning themselves within the broader sphere of sustainable food governance, the papers aim at reflecting upon the role of food policies in addressing social, cultural and economic dynamics. Today, a common language is gradually emerging for discussing sustainable food planning: food systems need to combine different orders of worth or quality conventions, and they need to be arranged as forms of distributed intelligence, where units are laterally accountable according to different principles of evaluation.

For this reason, the relationship between rural areas, cities, nature and agriculture is being redefined. New relationships between residents of the city and the rural land are emerging, creating new geometries of responsibilities and roles. A new system of actors and projects with relevant experiences and practices related to food policies are becoming more and more diffused. These are usually local experiences, concerning both the small- and the medium-scale, related to specific conditions and problems, characterized by top-down and bottom-up approaches. Thus, it is useful to reflect more closely on them and to evaluate their relevance as best practices exportable to other contexts.

This is a useful approach to analyse the current context and the papers "OrtiAlti as urban regeneration devices: An action-research study on rooftop farming in Turin", "The role of interdisciplinarity in evaluating the sustainability of urban rooftop agriculture" and "Cultivating changes: Urban agriculture as a tool for socio-spatial transformation", which suggest new development prospects in this field. However, the unsustainable character of the predominant food system becomes apparent when we look at the lack of policy-making activity in the food planning field. As a matter of fact, the main criticisms and responses to the globalized agro-industrial model have been developed over time



from bottom-up movements. Nonetheless, there is a progressive awareness concerning the crucial role that food plays in urban development and the heavy externalities produced by the agro-industrial system. These conditions oblige local governments to assume new responsibilities in the fields of city planning and food policies. As a consequence, the transformation of the role of city governments in the debate about food issues gives momentum to the planning of sustainable and resilient food systems. On the opposite side, the reshaping of the role of public bodies corresponds with the rise of new stakeholders pushing for legitimation in the making of public choices and new practices.

Public bodies and new stakeholders, and the relevance of their inter-connections, are at the core of the paper "Urban gardens and institutional fences: The case of communal gardens in Turin", which helps to reflect, from the perspective of food governance, on the multi-sectorial, multi-level and multi-actor characteristics of food system. Another topic of the conference was about training and jobs. From this section, the paper "A productive permaculture campus in the desert: Visions for Qatar University" is presented. It describes how sustainable food planning issues struggle to find their place in regular teaching activities. In fact, despite the significant progress made in theory and practice, it is difficult to spread those achievements through educational programmes and it is a challenge to find any higher educational programmes that position this topic at their core. In light of this, it is worth reflecting upon the various ways in which education and training programmes prepare future professionals in the

field of sustainable food planning.

Finally, the paper "Sowing landscapes: Social and ecological aspects of food production in peri-urban spatial planning initiatives. The case of an agricultural park within the Madrid region" reflects on the flow of matter, energy, and knowledge. Cities are growing machines that consume growing quantities of resources. They are spatial units of collective consumption that, for their reproduction and maintenance, draw matter and energy from nature, which are then transformed, consumed and expelled. Food is at the centre of this process, crossing flows and networks that contribute in defining the wealth of society and the quality of urban space. Conclusively, food is at the centre of a number of urban processes, and influences all of them. The papers presented here shed new light on these phenomena, helping to better understand how much the relationship between city and food is changing and how we can contribute to address this change.

We are glad to contribute this editorial to Volume 5 Issue 1 of the "Future of Food: Journal on Food, Agriculture and Society", on the theme of "Farming Cities toward Urban Food Policies". The selected research papers presented in this volume will provide innovative insights of the thematic area with research-based experiences in regional and global perspectives. Furthermore, this edition is enriched with report and analysis section and book review section bring the description and an evaluation of actual publication on the thematic area.