



# The Food Council of Pisa

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**Abstract – The need for a transition to more sustainable food systems has made the definition of more integrated and advanced forms of management of food-related issues increasingly urgent, especially in the urban contexts. As for many other cities around the world, also in the territory of Pisa (Tuscany, Italy), since 2010 a process aimed at developing an integrated food strategy has been promoted (the Food Plan of the province of Pisa).**

**In the context of new reflexivity and mobilization created by the process for the definition and implementation of the Plan, in 2013 a group of citizens, researchers and professionals established the Food Council of Pisa, an organization aimed at stimulating a reflection on the food-related issues at urban level and at promoting an integrated approach to their management. The Council started to operate identifying some specific areas of action, establishing relationships with the various initiatives carried out by local civil society, and trying to interact with public administrations.**

**Keywords – Food Policy Councils, Urban Food Strategies, Food governance.**

## INTRODUCTION

The acknowledged need for a transition to more sustainable food systems has made the definition of more integrated and advanced forms of management of food-related issues increasingly urgent, especially in the urban contexts. As for many other cities around the world, also the territory of Pisa (Tuscany, Italy) since 2010 has been interested by a process aimed at developing an integrated food strategy (the *Food Plan of the province of Pisa*).

The development of the initiative was supported by an agreement between the University of Pisa and the Provincial Administration. Through a participatory process it led to the design and partial implementation of its institutional framework. This firstly included two policy documents - the *Charter* and the *Strategy* -, which set out the fundamental principles, the goals and the steps to be followed at operational level. The project then led to the definition of two important institutional tools of co-decision and interaction - the *Programme Agreement* and the *Local Alliance for Food* -, amongst, respectively, public and private actors.

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In the context of new reflexivity and mobilization created by this process, in 2013 a group of citizens, researchers and professionals established the Food Council of Pisa, an organization aimed at stimulating a reflection on the food-related issues at urban level and at promoting an integrated approach to their management. It relates to the model of the Food Policy Councils (FPCs), innovative forms of collaboration between citizens, public and businesses that many cities, looking for innovative processes of planning around food issues, have established.

The FPCs provide innovative opportunities for discussion, giving voice to people generally underrepresented by institutions; assess and try to orient local food policies; initiate and support specific projects and programmes. Their primary purpose is to identify and propose innovative solutions aimed at improving local food systems, making them more socially and environmentally sustainable and able to contribute to local economic development.

This paper aims at analysing the development of the experience of the Food Council of Pisa, highlighting its potentials, also in relation to the wider pathway towards the Food Plan.

## TRAINING PATHWAY AND CONSOLIDATION

This Food Council of Pisa (FCP) is an agora that tries to structure and implement the action of the Alliance within more defined spatial and governance contexts.

It originated from the initiative of people who, for personal or professional sensitivity, were interested in promoting a public debate about the food and its multiple implications in the life of the city. The development of cooperation with the team of action-research engaged in the Food Plan in the Pisa province was crucial to the starting of its activity, since the spring 2013.

It is currently formed by citizens engaged in: nutrition; sustainable gastronomy; promotion of practices of self-production (e.g. urban gardens) and of direct food provisioning (e.g. short chains); disease prevention; education and research; caring, social welfare and social inclusion; reduction of food waste.

It began its training collaborating with a Territorial Council of Participation of the City (CTP5), a suburban articulation of the Municipal Administration. Over the months, it started to operate on the whole urban territory, and independently from the institutional paths.

In September 2014 the promoter group has formalized the establishment of the Association "Food Council of Pisa", whose motto is "feeding the city and nourishing democracy" (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Logo of the Council of Food of Pisa

After a first phase of reflection on the formalization of the group and of its mechanisms of governance, the founders have focused their attention on the identification of the areas of action, on its visibility and communication of its mission, and on the development of relationships and collaboration in the city, especially seeking connections with the various urban initiatives of active citizenship.

#### ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AND ONGOING

The area of jurisdiction of CTP5 is a large portion of the city, that hosts most of the stakeholders involved around food practices (e.g. big retailers, canteens, NGOs and civil society organizations, education and research institutions) and in which more than a third of the municipal population lives.

Since 2014, the FCP began to take concrete action in fields of particular relevance for the city life (urban allotments, use of green spaces, food-health relationship, sustainable consumption), according to the interests of the members and to the opportunities arisen.

In the early months of the year the CFP activity focused on the drafting of a new regulation for the allocation of urban gardens, gathering requests from different stakeholders and exploring best practices developed in other contexts. The work done did not find favour with the Municipal Administration, but stimulated a public debate on the issue.

Afterwards, the FCP participated, providing support and presence of experts, to a series of meetings organized by the University in view of Expo 2015, and to seminars for school and university students, organized on issues related to food sovereignty by the collective of teachers.

Thanks to the relationships that through these initiatives the Association had established with a network of activists and professionals, it could participate in the organization of "Pisa Città in Fiore", a public event aimed at promoting a reflection on the state of the art, opportunities and prospects of the urban landscape design and management.

At the same time, the FCP obtained to take part in the participatory process launched by the Municipal Administration for the design of the Cisanello Park, an area of about 10 acres within the city. Its contribution, that has been added to that of other 14 associations participating in the process, was aimed at stimulating a debate on the importance of consid-

ering the food among the issues addressed in the project.

In the plans for the future of the CTP there is the promotion of a public moments of debate on the issue of the sustainability of the food habits. This initiative sees the FCP to coordinate a network of actors, including a chef, farmers, traders, groups of consumers, researchers, professionals and associations. The various activities envisaged and the related planning are aimed at promoting a discussion on the un-sustainability of the dominant food patterns, with particular regard to the high consumption of meat. To that end, through different forms, they will draw attention to the various implications of the food choices that intervene: the environmental costs, the health negative effects, the economic and ethical issues.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The range of initiatives in which the FCP was involved in these first two years of life has made the members aware of the importance, in a context rich in associations and initiatives developed from below, of interacting and collaborating with other pathways activated in the area, to enroll new members and to build alliances. A wide variety of backgrounds, skills and languages is crucial to the life and activity of the FCP, to its capacity to animate an ever lively discussion and to reach people who have different sensitivity, needs, problems and experience. The growth of the network of relationships is also important to take new opportunities and so to further expand its activity. At the same time, it is evident that the pathway undertaken is far from simple and has a long time horizon. This is particularly true with regard to the relationships with the public administration, which has so far seemed poorly aware of the opportunity of implementing an integrated and multi-actor urban strategy for food.

This experience has made it possible to explore the pathway of structuring of a Food Council, as a locally embedded and grassroots initiative, to which the attention to the needs and opportunities that come from the territory and the distribution of responsibilities and activities are strategic. The pathway so far developed can represent a first platform, for the development at the organizational level that is needed in the case of an expansion of the area of reference; for the promotion of further initiatives; for the implementation of the wider integrated strategy of the Food Plan. In particular, it can facilitate: the sharing of common principles and objectives and the identification of priorities in other areas; the understanding of training needs and the implementation of innovative learning paths; the identification of the most suitable forms of management and of communication of activities; the fine-tuning of the relationships with the public actors.

All these represent opportunities of learning, which can significantly contribute, more in general, to the definition of innovative models of food governance.