



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

ROBUST receives funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727988.*



September 2018

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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

“Orti in Condotta” - school vegetable garden

Province of Lucca, Italy

1. Brief Description

Orti in Condotta (“school vegetable garden”) is a nationwide project launched in 2004 by Slow Food and involves a wide network of schools and 500 school orchards throughout Italy. It has been implemented in the municipality of Capannori and later in Lucca, as well as other cities. Alongside teachers and pupils, parents and grandparents are active participants within the project. Together, they represent what Slow Food defines as a “learning community”¹. Within such a community, knowledge, traditions and culture of food are passed from one generation to another, along with knowledge on environmental protection and care for the territory. *Orti in Condotta* is the main available tool for food, taste and environmental education in schools. Classes and seminars address parents and grandparents as well as teachers, the latter trained by Slow Food directly².

The project started in Capannori in 2013 and in Lucca in 2016. In the case under review, *Orti in Condotta* represents a further building block of a comprehensive strategy towards a more sustainable food system. A crucial initiative for the project setup has been “100 thousand vegetable gardens in Tuscany³”, which aims to extend the areas allocated for self-production and to raise awareness on the value of food. Twenty-one primary and secondary schools are currently involved in the program in Lucca (Source: Comune di Lucca, 2018).

A detailed survey was carried out to understand whether and how *Orti in Condotta* has influenced citizens’ perceptions and practices of sustainable consumption (see section no. 4 for a more detailed overview).

¹ *Comunità dell’apprendimento*.

² A short video explaining Orti in Condotta in Capannori is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=pG6HbctA3hQ>

³ Such initiative ensured the Municipality of Lucca the resources needed for the purchase of materials to start the school gardens.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

- > **The main challenge for Orti in Condotta – for Slow Food – is to change citizen consumption practices and make them co-producers, as well as to raise awareness about consumption practices that directly affect farmers and the surrounding environment.**

Orti in Condotta educates the whole community by starting with children/school pupils. They are involved in learning about local, typical, organic and biodynamic production, as well as about the taste, variety and seasonality of food. Vegetable gardens are tools through which children become responsible for the environment. It is worth pointing out that children have played a crucial role for transferring knowledge and awareness on such themes to their families.

- > **To what extent does *Orti in Condotta* influence and encourage changes of behaviour of the actors involved in the project activities?**

A survey was carried out in the municipality of Capannori to gain better knowledge of public awareness and the willingness of the local community to engage in sustainable consumption practices. Several aspects have been considered: knowledge of the project *Orti in Condotta* by the families of the students involved; the prevalence of the vegetable garden tradition in the community; knowledge of some typical local products and traditional varieties; and the purchasing and consumption practices of local residents for fruits and vegetables.

Research questions for the WP3/living lab

- > **What are consumers' motivations for/meanings attached to eating local and/or eating traditional food products? To what extent does the project influence such motivations/meanings?**
- > **How to support awareness building on the importance of consuming local food (organic, traditional, etc.)? How to go beyond project activities and integrate education policies for a new approach to food consumption education?**
- > **How can the municipalities' initiatives be integrated into a suitable urban food policy? How can the school canteen committees, and other governance arrangements, effectively support participation and the sustainability of the initiatives?**
- > **To what extent does the project help reconnect urban and rural via urban farming practices?**

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

With regard to notions of space underpinning the project, both concepts such as relational space and relative space apply to this case. The network of learning communities, spanning throughout Italy and involving hundreds of schools, organisations and institutions, might be interpreted as relational space, whereby as many nodes as communities interact via social and cultural relations. At the same time, the concept of relative space also applies to each single learning community. In the Province of Lucca, for instance, the practices carried out take place at the rural-urban interface and contribute to blur the boundaries between rural and urban.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

No relevant connections were immediately highlighted between this example and the themes linked to Smart Development. If a strategy for the re-localisation of food consumption is to be considered part of Smart development, the project *Orti in Condotta* assumes the role of increasing knowledge and awareness of future generations on the consumption of local food.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

Orti in Condotta represents one activity among the many already ongoing and planned within a strategy for a more sustainable food system in the Province of Lucca⁴.

The project builds on previous initiatives, for instance the “100,000 vegetable gardens in Tuscany” project (Tuscany Region project), which provided the financing to purchase of some gardening facilities. Beneficial relations occur also the other way, with *Orti in Condotta* providing an input for forthcoming initiatives and projects.

The local network of *Orti in Condotta* in the Province of Lucca involves schools in the first place, with pupils, students, teachers, parents and gran-parents, and extends further, to local producers and the community. The project receives also support from municipalities and Slow Food. An innovative element that *Orti in Condotta* might have contributed to create can be found in the capacity of activation and awareness raising addressing a segment of population – pupils and their families – otherwise difficult to target. Such actors constitute, at the same time, key actors within the community of learning, in terms of the reach that education activities provide for the broader citizenry. An additional aspect is related to the activation of new relationships with civil society organisations, which results in broader cooperation on cross-cutting topics such as civil rights, waste management, and spatial planning.

The vegetable garden represents the place and instrument in which all of the actors involved converge and interact. It is a tool for education and practical experience; for facilitating cooperation among diverse public and private actors; for transmitting knowledge, values and principles, and creating respect for the environment and the territory in the first place.

⁴ Circularifood; Agenda for food quality (Camaiore); initiatives of food recovery (ConServe); projects in school canteens.

Commenting on the project *Orti in Condotta* in the city of Lucca, Carlo Petrini (founder of Slow Food) refers to the importance of “putting hands back in the soil” as “it reconnects us to our origins and identity [...] Food education stems from awareness that food is grown in the soil and is necessary to protect the soil, water and the environment in order to keep growing our food” [...] “the rationale is to build up a food policy from these good practices”⁵.

Multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral aims are pursued by *Orti in Condotta*, with some specific objectives being:

- to introduce a multidisciplinary teaching method whereby the vegetable garden becomes a tool for food and environmental education activities;
- to turn young consumers into young co-producers;
- to teach “a grammar of taste”, increasing perception abilities and allowing students to read reality through their senses;
- to raise awareness about nutrition being a cultural matter, beyond mere nutrition;
- to understand and communicate knowledge on the territory, its products and recipes via events involving crafters, producers, chefs and the agro-food sector;
- to provide principles of organic horticulture (Source: Comune di Lucca, 2015).

4. Data Sources and Indicators

The survey in Capannori (2015)

The survey addressed 1319 residents of the municipality of Capannori, selected among the parents of the school pupils involved in the project *Orti in Condotta*. The aim of the survey was to gain knowledge on how well known the project is among those interviewed, as well as to understand whether and how it influences people’s perception and awareness of sustainable consumption practices.

It emerged that the majority of respondents know the project, even if they are not directly involved into it (only 5.2% do not) (Figure 1). Most respondents appreciate *Orti in Condotta*, because it helps them reconnect with the environment and agriculture, establish relationships with others, take care of one’s own health and nutrition, and offers the opportunity for manual labour.

⁵ Source: video interview (in Italian) 05.05.2018 available at http://www.comune.lucca.it/Orti_in_condotta

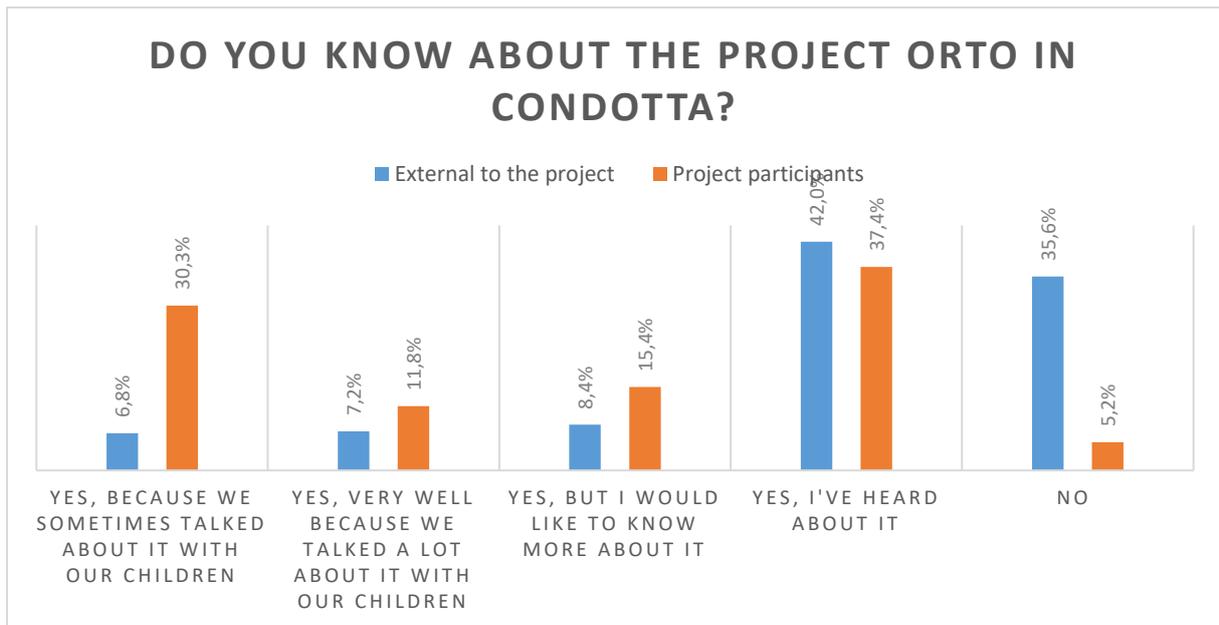


Figure 1 - Survey results: knowledge of the project Orti in Condotta among survey respondents. Source: authors' own elaboration.

The project appears as having an influence on consumers' habits, as they declare to have become more attentive, especially to the seasonality of food (Figure 2).

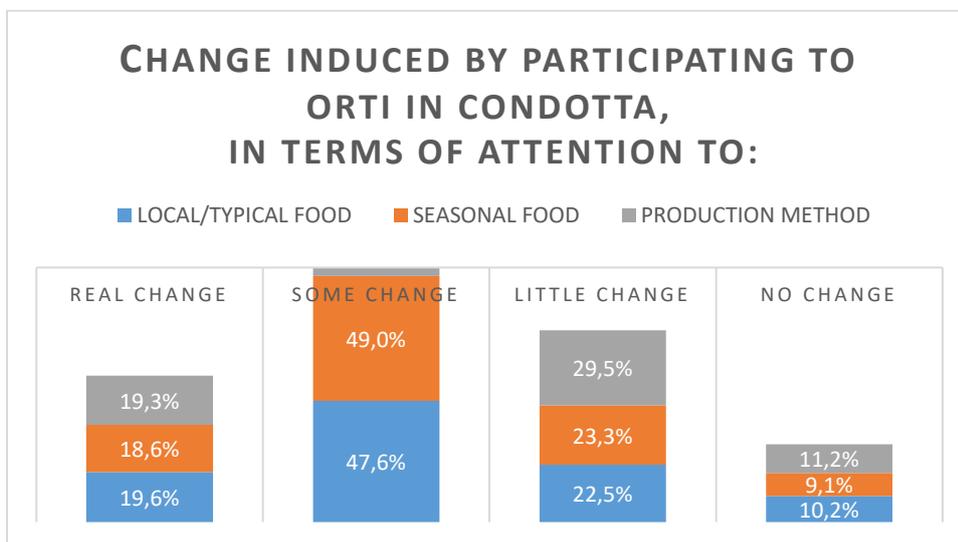


Figure 2 - Survey results: changes in habits induced by the project Orti in Condotta. Source: authors' own elaboration.

Most respondents declare growing their own vegetable garden (Figure 3) and certainty about food quality is the main reason to grow a vegetable garden, whereas it represents a source of income only for a small number of respondents (Figure 4).

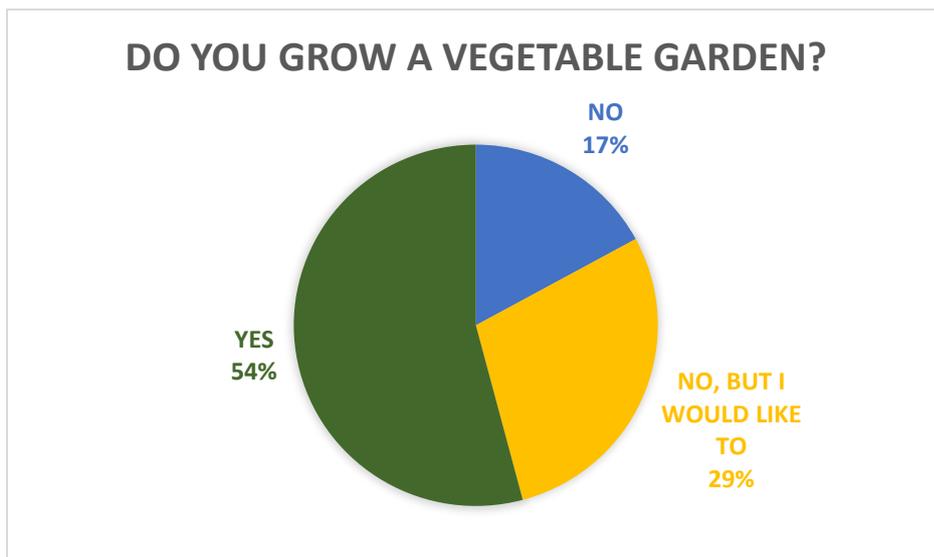


Figure 3 - Survey results: the vegetable garden practice. Source: authors' own elaboration.

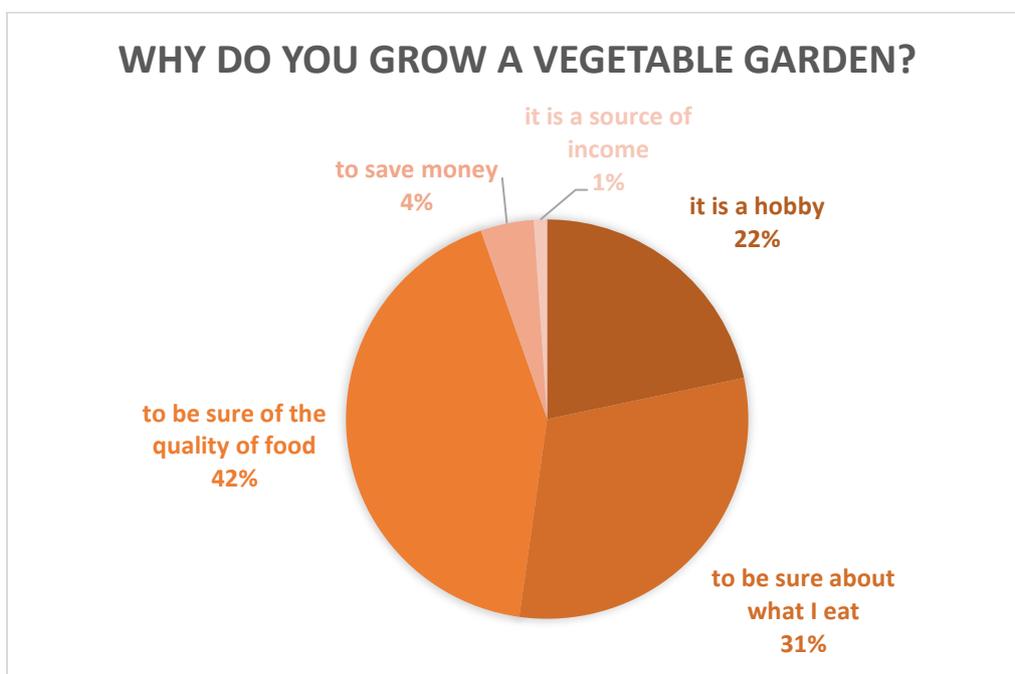


Figure 4 - Survey results: reasons for growing a vegetable garden. Source: authors' own elaboration.

It is worth noting that for more than half of those who do not have a garden, time constraints are the main obstacle, followed by lack of a proper space (>30%) and lack of competences (>20%).

Regarding supply chains, big retailers remain the main distribution channel for fruits and vegetables. However, informal channels – like markets and various forms of direct purchase – have a role in the purchasing practices of those interviewed.

Responses differ as to whether respondents have knowledge of local typical products, depending mostly on the product, availability and visibility on the market, and ease of cultivation. Figure 5 - Survey results: reasons for growing/consuming typical products. Source: authors' own elaboration. shows the main reasons for consuming typical local products.

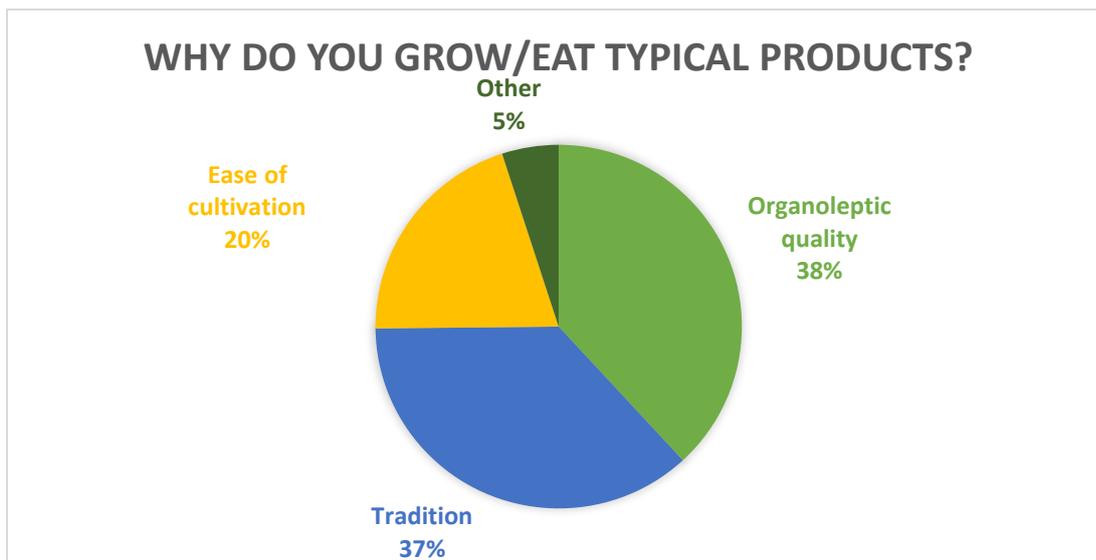


Figure 5 - Survey results: reasons for growing/consuming typical products. Source: authors' own elaboration.

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Example 1

Data / Indicator	Source
Name of data source / indicator	Citation, website link, organization
Interviews and results of the survey carried out in Capannori (2015)	Available on request

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

What emerges overall is there is fertile ground for creating alternative channels for purchasing and consuming food and, above all, a general demand for knowledge and education. There is also a demand for new spaces and land with consequent implications and opportunities for the spheres of education and planning.

6. References

Comune di Lucca. (2015). Scheda di progetto *Orti in Condotta*. Available online at [http://www.comune.lucca.it/Orti in condotta](http://www.comune.lucca.it/Orti_in_condotta)

AA.VV. (2014). Capannori, esperienze per costruire una comunità dell'apprendimento.

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Capannori. *Orti in Condotta* 2014. Video (in Italian) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=pG6HbctA3hQ>

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