



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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Rural-Urban Governance Arrangements and Planning Instruments

Community for Food and Agro-biodiversity

Lucca, Italy

1. Overview

The Community for Food and Agro-biodiversity was established in December 2017 in the mountainous area of Garfagnana, in the Province of Lucca, in the wake of the national law n. 194/2015. This law regulates the protection and valorisation of biodiversity in agriculture and food. The Community for Food represents a multi-actor, cross-sectoral network governance arrangement. It is intended to coordinate existing public and private initiatives, as well as promote new projects for the conservation and valorisation of local agro-biodiversity.

The relatively isolated territory of Garfagnana, enclosed between two mountain ranges (Apuan Alps and the Appennine), has given rise to high biodiversity and to a strong sense of community identity. On this basis, the Community for Food has been established as the natural “next step” to further the work that local actors – the Union of Municipalities and Custodian Farmers in the first place – started decades ago.

2. Main Challenges

Agro-biodiversity conservation: Germplasm Bank and Custodian Farmers

A rich variety of rare and local varieties of crops, livestock and micro-organisms to be protected constitutes the agro-biodiversity heritage of Garfagnana and is a main challenge for the local community, given the economic opportunities potentially presented by a valuable valorisation of such resources. For this purpose, Regional Law n. 64, 2004, concerning the protection and conservation of agro-biodiversity¹, has set the groundwork for the creation of the network of Custodian Farmers and the foundation of the Germplasm Bank for *ex-situ* conservation of local species.

¹ Previous legislation on germplasm conservation dates back to 1997 in Tuscany.

Currently, the local gene bank collection includes 28 herbaceous varieties, 185 traditional fruit varieties and 50 vines. Thirty-eight Custodian Farmers are in operation² in this area of the Province of Lucca.

National Law n. 194/2015 establishes, in addition to the previously mentioned Germplasm Banks and Food Communities, the National Registry of agro-biodiversity, the National Network of agro-biodiversity, and routes/itineraries for promoting and valorising biodiversity of agricultural and food interest.

The creation of the Community for Food is a key element for supporting ecosystem services, through the maintenance and dissemination of historical and cultural values of agricultural biodiversity, local knowledge, and traditions. In addition, it represents an opportunity to set up new farm enterprises that are more aware of the necessity to develop multifunctional, more resilient farming models. Reconnecting with local consumption is also crucial for this production model to go beyond its "niche" dimension. Agro-biodiversity products are still largely perceived – if known – as either expensive or for tourists.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Insights related to the broad area of “network governance”

The Law n. 194/2015, art. 13, establishes “food communities”, defined as “agreements among local farmers, custodian farmers, ethical purchasing groups (GAS), schools, universities, research centres, organisations for agro-biodiversity conservation, canteens of schools and hospitals, catering industries, restaurants, retailers, food processing SMEs, public bodies”. Although the Community for Food and Agro-biodiversity of Garfagnana has been set up by the Union of Municipalities, this decided to opt for constituting two groups of actors: 1) subscribers of the Chart of the Community³, those directly involved in the Community’s activities such as Custodian Farmers, the food chain’s operators and civil society organisations working on food and agro-biodiversity; 2) subscribers of the “Pact for the Land”, those who share the Chart principles and support the Community through their activities, such as public bodies and institutions, farmers unions and other national organisations. The Community is also supported by the Rural Development Program of the Tuscany Region (measure 10.2).

As regards to governance, defining the boundaries of the Food Community is still an open question. One option would be that the Community for Food be limited to the area of Garfagnana following a rationale of strong connection to the territory. An alternative option would be to consider broader community connections and bonds in terms of values and beliefs, in synergy with the closest urban contexts (e.g. Lucca, Pisa, Livorno).

² Source: Laboratorio di Studi Rurali Sismondi (2017). Manuale di progettazione di comunità del cibo e della biodiversità di interesse agricolo e alimentare.

³ Subscribers of the Chart of the Community were 54 on December 2017, when the Food Community has been setup.

3.2. Insights related to mechanisms of cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation

The general aims of a Food Community are to promote studies on agro-biodiversity and to raise awareness of the role that agro-biodiversity might play as pivotal element of traditional local culture. In addition, a Food community aims at also encouraging networks of small producers, processors and retailers within *ad hoc* short food supply chains, with the intention to valorise such local products.

The Community puts forth actions – and actors, with relative instruments and competences – encompassing tourism, culture, education and training, food services. Specific objectives depend on local resources available and are agreed upon by the members of the Community. For the years 2018-2020, the Community for Food and Agro-biodiversity aims at:

1. enhancing knowledge on local agro-biodiversity through its network;
2. reinforcing the network for the conservation and valorisation of local agro-biodiversity;
3. providing marketing opportunities for local agro-biodiverse products.

3.3. Insights related to the role of (actual, potential) social, organizational, institutional innovations

The importance of agro-biodiversity encompasses socio-cultural, economic and environmental elements. A deeply rooted connection between agriculture, food and culture permeates the territory of Garfagnana, where the constitution of the Community for Food has been anticipated – and facilitated – by a long-term presence of relations among a broad range of local actors. Local communities' attachment to traditions and local gastronomy within this area also underpins the central role assigned to the protection of agro-biodiversity.

The role of social innovation, interpreted as the ability to facilitate stakeholders' interaction at different levels, is crucial to understand the development of a "new locality" space, inspired by the Food Community. ICT could provide a fundamental contribution in order to make the system more efficient and effective (procurement logistics, cooperation methods, transfer of technical knowledge and problem solving, dissemination of services, etc.). In addition, ICT could be used to address the issue of traceability of local typical products. This could potentially strengthen the confidence in the network of producers and protect both producers and consumers from the misuse of geographical names.

4. Effectiveness Indicators

Communities for Food is a rather recent and innovative governance arrangement. As such, a comprehensive assessment of their effectiveness and implications is not yet available.

However, several positive indicators encourage its operation in the area of Garfagnana. The growth of tourism, in the first place, which is mainly rural and nature tourism. Excursionists, rural tourists and more responsible tourists in general are willing to engage with local productions, to consume and buy local products, to get a sense of the place but also with the

aim of supporting the local economy. A second interconnected element is the reputation of this territory, which is based on nature and authenticity. Thirdly, financial resources linked to specific territorial policies (Rural Development Plan, Leader program, Inner Areas) have specific incentives for new locality models able to improve the quality of life in small towns.

5. Illustration and further information

The recent establishment of the Community for Food and Agro-biodiversity has been facilitated by external advisors, who guided the promoters in their initial steps and indicated a set of actions to be taken in order to move onwards. Indications – which possibly apply to any project of the Community for Food – are made available in this guide (in Italian):

Laboratorio di Studi Rurali Sismondi (2017). Manuale di progettazione di comunità del cibo e della biodiversità di interesse agricolo e alimentare, available online at <http://germoplasma.arsia.toscana.it/Download/Manuale%20Comunita%20Cibo.pdf>

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