



## Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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## Rural-Urban Governance Arrangements and Planning Instruments

### Authority for participation in Tuscany Region: "Circularifood" and "Food Agenda" participation projects

Lucca, Italy

#### 1. Overview

A regional 'Authority for the promotion of participation' is established by Tuscany Regional Law n.46, 2013 ('Regional public debate and promotion of participation in the elaboration of regional and local policies'). The aim is to "contribute to renewing democracy and its institutions by integrating action with practices, processes and instruments of participatory democracy", and thus support "a higher social cohesion, through the dissemination of the culture of participation and the enhancement of all forms of civic engagement, knowledge and skills present and widespread in society" (authors' translation).

The Authority for participation does not address explicitly urban-rural relations, per se, but in practice several projects financed in this domain relate to territorial connections and infrastructures (e.g. airport and harbour construction or restructuring).

Within this regulatory framework, two partly similar participatory projects have been activated in the Province of Lucca: "Circularifood" (involving municipalities on the Lucca plain) and the "Agenda for the quality of food" (municipalities in the Versilia coastal area).

In "**Circularifood**", five municipalities have taken the initiative to jointly address the theme of local food, through the participatory planning method, to deliver an Inter-communal Food Plan (i.e., a set of actions for improving the production, distribution and consumption of foods in view of assuring the right to food for the population). Similarly, the "**Agenda for the quality of food**" project also deals with the production and consumption of local food, aimed at devising and activating policies to support the quality of products in existing supply chains, involving the institutions and the recipients of the major production sectors (agricultural production, tourist accommodation, catering, wholesale, retail and street vendors, the third sector). Both projects are running from mid to end of 2018.

## 2. Main Challenges

The local food plan developed in **Circularifood** is challenged by economic, environmental and social concerns. Regarding the environment, it addresses the definition of targeted actions aimed at reducing food waste and incentivizing short supply chains engaged in low energy and low water production. Relevant to the social dimension, solidarity projects are being developed for vulnerable groups who do not have access to adequate food while supporting local farmers, or linking to school educational projects (educational gardens, food awareness projects for children and teenagers). Regarding the economic dimension, it incentivises short supply chains to valorise typical local products and support farm incomes. The definition of informative and collaborative tools is instrumental to the mentioned actions, together with networking of good practices already present in the five municipalities involved in the project.

As for the **Agenda for the quality of food**, the initiative stemmed from the needs expressed by the agricultural sector actors in collaboration with the municipalities of Camaiore and Massarosa, who promoted meetings with the farmers to deal with the difficulties in the agricultural sector. The crisis in the agricultural sector of Versilia fits within a more global crisis: the challenge to adopt economically sustainable production practices with reduced impact on the environment and on health; revitalise local markets and supply chains to support small local productions; and connect with public and private actors who govern the local agricultural system. Municipality, agricultural enterprises, citizens and consumers, producer organisations, public and private catering and distributors, technical suppliers: they all have the need and the opportunity to rethink, qualify and reorganize their way of working, as individuals, and in connection with each other.

## 3. Main Insights

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

Network governance concepts are at the heart of the creation of the Authority for the promotion of participation. In the past two decades, participation of citizens in decision making processes has become a relevant topic for social scientists and policy makers. Tuscany Region in this sense is a frontrunner, compared to other Italian regions.

The Tuscan regional law on participation is built around three pillars:

- > First, establishing public debate at the regional level, which is activated by major interventions (i.e. public works or matters of relevance with environmental and social impacts for the life of the regional community). This debate takes place according to precise rules, has a duration of six months, and is organized and developed under the responsibility of the Authority for Participation.
- > Secondly, supporting local participation processes, whether promoted by local authorities or by citizens. The law states that a local authority - but also a group of citizens, an association, a school or even a company - can present a project for a participatory process, focused on a specific matter using the methods and

instruments to ensure the highest level of "inclusiveness". The regional Authority evaluates the projects submitted and assigns them (duration of six months max).

- > Thirdly, reinforcing and extending participation possibilities already provided by regional policies.

In Lucca, food is a central theme for the two participatory projects activated. The way of producing and consuming food has deep connections with citizens' well-being and the environment, the use of resources, and also with the fundamental rights of humans (i.e. right to food).

In **Circularifood**, the participation process is designed to involve all the "stakeholders" in the process and contribute to the definition of the policies on food, building and sharing plans that set the key principles and values, to guide administrative action, from agricultural policies to territorial planning, from social policies to educational ones. There is potential for cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination through the lens of food (as it happens in other municipal food policy processes). The participation process is structured through different meetings which revolve around thematic areas that enhance local supply chains: limiting food waste and supporting access to food for the vulnerable groups of the population; behaviours, lifestyles and health.

The activities planned within the **Agenda for the quality of food** include two parallel processes (for two distinct sub areas: Camaiore and Massarosa) that have expressed different needs. In Camaiore, the pathway involves the main actors involved in local food production, marketing, administration and consumption and, specifically, micro food supply chains. The action will directly involve the Municipal Market as a privileged place for creation of networks. In Massarosa, the main aim is exploratory: a Listening Focus Group will be activated with selected farmers to develop a report aimed at the local administration. In the following stage, this initial double path will converge into a decisional phase, in which a Charter of Values and an Agenda for the quality of food will be defined, approved and activated.

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

The law on participation is a tool to foster the development of cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation, because, in the specific case of local food, it facilitates discussions and relationships between actors in very different sectors, with different skills and knowledge of the regulatory framework. If developed in a collaborative environment, "working agendas" can be developed to leverage opportunities and understand how to remove / overcome the constraints of the various existing regulatory tools, which were often developed based on a sectorial logic.

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

The two participatory projects described aim to define a strategic agenda for local food by re-activating and strengthening relations between rural and urban contexts. This is an institutional innovation on at least two levels: i) between different public administration sectors that deal with well-defined aspects, but could develop synergistic interactions, and ii) between public and private actors, to develop services linked to neo-rurality.

## 4. Effectiveness Indicators

Since its establishment, the regional Authority for Participation has produced annual reports with the lists of the participatory projects assigned, results obtained with regional funding, and a discussion of evident limitations and obstacles. It has also promoted an evaluation process via dedicated and public meetings in view of the reform of the 2013 law. The meetings, conceived as round tables, involved the key figures (local bodies, schools, universities, businesses, citizens' associations), who have worked in the regional territory in the planning and implementation of the various participatory actions and have been conducted by the Authority's components for the participation of the Tuscany Region.

Nonetheless, the debate on its effectiveness is currently part of the regional policy agenda. It should also be stressed that the concept of *public* debate and its modalities, such as the one offered by the regional legislation, are not (yet) clear to the general public. The request for a public debate, in fact, is often seen as a generic willingness to debate and not as a concrete possibility to influence public regulations.

## 5. Illustration and further information

AGENDA FOR QUALITY OF FOOD <http://open.toscana.it/web/agenda-per-la-qualita-del-cibo>

CIRCULARIFOOD <http://open.toscana.it/web/circularifood>

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