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URBAN FOOD POLICIES AND METROPOLITAN SPACES: THE CASE OF MILAN

I. INTRODUCTION

In the global context of increasing urbanization, a number of scientific studies are focusing on the issue of urban food policies and hence on the interaction between urban and peri-urban areas (Atkinson 2013). Until the first half of the twentieth century, connections between western cities and local agriculture were more evident and rural spaces were considered to be a constituent part of urban areas. With the industrialization and globalization of agriculture they were treated as separate spaces (Calori and Magarini 2015). In the last few decades, many cities throughout the world have begun to specifically address this question and today the issue of food is becoming part of their political agenda.

In recent years the Municipality of Milan has developed a strategy consistent with the agro-urban paradigm, which integrates actions for urban agriculture, the local food supply and the valorization of the urban landscape (Yacamán 2017). The present article aims to understand this process from a geographical perspective by highlighting some critical points. Furthermore, this study is part of a large, multi-year research initiative focused on urban countryside (Donadieu 2013). This project is founded on a unified idea of rural and urban areas as complementary elements in territorial processes (Magnaghi 2010) and on the idea that peri-urban spaces could be strategic in rebuilding synergies between urban areas and countryside (Ferraesi 2009).

After Expo 2015, entitled “*Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life*”, the Municipality of Milan began to attempt to change the city’s global image by combining the conventional vertical development of postmodern landmarks with a new “horizontal” narrative based on the relationship between urban and peri-urban areas. The current mayor of Milan was the Chief Executive Officer of Expo 2015 and nowadays his political agenda is strictly bound to the concept of the City of Food (Susi Botto and Di Vita, 2016).

At the core of this strategy is Milan’s land use pattern: 50% of the metropolitan area is occupied by agricultural activities, especially in the southern part of the city. However, the agricultural potential derives not only from the quantity of land allocated to agriculture, but also from the strategy of local authorities who have developed a complex system to protect nature, with special attention paid to agriculture and rural areas. For this reason, the close link between agricultural production, natural processes and anthropogenic dynamics in an urban context presents interesting opportunities for research in Milan, especially with reference to peri-urban protected areas. They represent a potential driver for development that satisfies the needs of human communities while preserving natural and

cultural values. From this point of view, the southern and western portions of the metropolitan area offer an interesting field of research because a large portion of the metropolitan spaces are occupied by different protected areas.

In this context, this paper has two main objectives. The first is to investigate how, in the post-Expo 2015 period, change is taking place in the policies related to the production and distribution of food in the city of Milan, which are moving from a spontaneous to a more structured stage through the development of the Milan Urban Food Policy (MUFP). A second objective is to discuss a number of scale-related issues that have emerged from the implementation of the MUFP, including the potential dialectical tension between the urban and the metropolitan scales.

This article specifically focuses on an analysis of the interaction between the MUFP and the peri-urban protected areas, which are considered not only as contextual administrative elements, but also as active and fundamental players in the development processes of these hybrid spaces (urban, rural and natural). For this reason, it is essential to adopt an approach to the issue of protected areas that is consistent with this new paradigm (Phillips, 2003), by proposing an integrated vision of parks as active protagonists of territorial processes (Depraz, 2008) and considering these actors not only in their conservation practices, but also in their ability to manage hybrid and dynamic spaces (Zimmerer, 2000). From this point of view, the objectives of the protected areas and the needs of local populations are interpreted as elements of a system that integrates environmental regeneration and socio-economic development (Peano, 2013).

II. METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative methodology aimed at understanding the effects of the MUFP beyond the narrative developed by institutional documents. For this purpose, 35 in-depth interviews with farmers, institutional actors and tourists were conducted to investigate the relationship between agriculture, urban development and the emergence of a local food network.

The current study is the result of long-term projects on urban-rural relationships around Milan in the Department of *Beni culturali e ambientali* at the University of Milan, and Urban Food Policies and the spatial analysis of food systems at the University of Turin (the *Atlante del Cibo* research group). The previous stages of the research were published in the books “*Cascine attorno a Milano*” (Bini, Pirovano, 2008) and “*Paesaggi, territori, culture: viaggio nei luoghi e nelle memorie del Parco del Ticino*” (Scaramellini, 2010), and in other articles (Mastropietro, Rainisio, 2011; Mastropietro, 2012; Zanolin, 2015; Calori et al., 2017; Dansero et al., 2017).

This ongoing research began after the 2015 World Expo and is mainly focused on understanding how local authorities have assumed control of the emergent Local Agri-Food System through the Milan Urban Food Policy (MUFP) Guidelines. At

this stage the research is based on an analysis of the policies implemented by the municipality as compared to other local authorities in Italy, and on specific in-depth interviews of local institutional actors (e.g. the Milan Food Policy Office). The initial results of this portion of the research were published in the paper “Urban Food Planning in Italian Cities” (Calori et al., 2017).

III. THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

The role of the urban-rural interface as space for food production is part of an international interdisciplinary debate. It ranges from specific insights on urban and peri-urban agriculture (Mougeot, 2005; Simon, 2008; Aubry and Kebir, 2013; Opitz et al., 2016) to wider discussions on planning the urban and peri-urban rural landscape (Hidding et al., 2000; De Zeeuw et al., 2009; Cohen, 2012; La Rosa et al., 2014; Rega, 2014;). Also, it includes concepts such as “continuous productive urban landscape” (Viljoen and Bohn, 2014) and agrarian urbanism (or agroubanism) (Vidal and Fleury, 2009; Gottero, 2019).

The multifunctionality of peri-urban agriculture plays a central part in this debate (Van Leeuwen et al., 2010; Zasada, 2011). Its role as green infrastructure, linking food production with ecosystem, social, leisure and landscape services (Rega, 2019) is often highlighted. In the last two decades, the debate on urban food systems (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999), urban food planning (Morgan, 2009) and urban food policies (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015) has emerged as a new theoretical framework for thinking and planning peri-urban agriculture and urban-rural linkages. First developed in North American and British cities (Blay-Palmer, 2009; Morgan and Sonnino, 2010; Calori and Magarini, 2015), urban food policies (UFP) can be defined as voluntary policies aimed at changing urban food systems (Moragues et al., 2013) and influencing the way food is produced, distributed, purchased, consumed and disposed of by urban dwellers.

One of the main purposes of UFP is to go beyond the conceptual and practical separation between urban food consumers and rural food producers by considering them as part of the same “community food system” (Feenstra, 1997) at the scale of the city-region food system (Dansero et al., 2017). This aim is often translated into the objective of a partial relocalization of food provision flows, through support to local food production and provision initiatives, which in most cases are grounded on policies fostering urban and peri-urban agriculture (Morgan, 2015).

A review of the most relevant UFP (Pettenati, 2019) shows how they consider professional urban (and peri-urban) agriculture (UA) from two main perspectives. The first focuses on the connection between the creation of a local food production economy and the sustainability and justice of the local food system, while the second relates to spatial planning and the role that UA can play in contrasting urban sprawl and helping with the sustainable management of green spaces around the city.

Concentrating on the latter, UFP distinguish themselves from previous sectoral UA and spatial planning policies because of the awareness of the need to develop a new approach to planning and management for urban and peri-urban agriculture that addresses the whole food system and in which UA and productive urban and peri-urban landscapes are crucial elements connected to all the others. Urban and peri-urban agricultural land is thus considered as key infrastructure (Bristol City Council, 2013) in local food supply chains, together with logistics facilities, markets, and the like.

From this perspective, the protection of nature and landscape in peri-urban areas is not viewed as opposing food production, but as a crucial regional/urban food policy tool aimed at developing resilient and sustainable food systems and rural regions linked to cities (Olsson et al., 2016; Europarc Federation, 2018). So far though, existing UFP do not stress the role of agricultural parks and protected areas, with the exception of cities where they already exist, as in the case of Milan (*Comune di Milano*, 2015), which will be explored further below.

The second perspective is related to scale. Thinking, planning and managing food systems at the regional (peri-urban) scale means imagining and practicing new scales of action and policy (Dansero et al. 2017), where the center-peripheral relationships between urban and rural areas can be subverted.

A new politically-produced scale that is useful for thinking about, planning and managing such relationships is the *city-region food system* that “encompass the complex network of actors, processes and relationships [having] to do with food production, processing, marketing, and consumption that exist in a given surrounding peri-urban and rural hinterland; a regional landscape across which flows of people, goods and ecosystem services are managed” (FAO, 2017). Such a concept is based on the relational dimension of food systems, with particular attention to their governance and to a multi-dimensional approach aimed at improving the local sustainability of the food system starting from the integrated consideration of ecological and socio-economic aspects (Tecco et al., 2017).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The urban scale

The Municipality of Milan’s strategy for rural areas has shifted in the last several decades from a dualistic vision in which they were considered to be mostly residual spaces, to a new rural-urban integration narrative. Interest in rural heritage within the boundaries of the city started in the 1970s when the municipality developed a plan for the rehabilitation of traditional farmsteads (*Comune di Milano*, 1977). In the following decade, speculation on peri-urban areas reached its peak, causing citizens to react, which lead to the establishment of the South Milan Agricultural Park (SMAP) in 1990. This event can be seen as a kind of starting point in a new phase of cooperation between rural and urban

spaces. However, it took twenty years before this idea was translated into policies and projects. In the meantime, a few groups of citizens developed small-scale projects introducing local food production as a strategy for more responsible consumption; some of the initiatives became part of the comprehensive policy promoted by the local government. Around the year 2010, some projects based on this view started to receive attention. Although the dossier that won the competition for Expo 2015 in 2008 mostly overlooked the issue of rural heritage in the city, the 2010 Expo Masterplan was largely based on this new narrative. In 2011, the first Milan Agricultural District (DAM) was founded and in the same year a left-wing coalition won the local elections campaigning on this very issue: the new mayor's political program included specific commitments to supporting local-based agriculture and the integration of rural and urban spaces.

On this basis, in 2015 the new administration approved the MUFP Guidelines (*Comune di Milano* 2015) with the purpose of comprehensively addressing all aspects of food that are normally under the jurisdiction of separate administrative bodies. This document explicitly envisages the integration of rural and urban planning (Priority 2, Principle 5), as well as the strategic focus on local-based agriculture (Priority 2, Principle 2).

In particular, the MUFP Guidelines highlight five priorities for municipal action. While all are interconnected, three focus more directly on the food system in its different stages: food consumption (1. "Providing healthy food for everyone"), production and distribution (2. "Promoting the sustainability of the food system"), and waste management (4. "Fighting against waste"). The last two priorities refer more directly to the educational sector (3. "Understanding food" and 5. "Supporting and promoting scientific research in the agri-food sector"). Due to its cross-cutting nature, the MUFP is not managed by a specific department and does not have a dedicated budget. Therefore, the MUFP Office established in 2017 takes action in three areas: re-orientation of ongoing activities, incentives, and co-funded projects (in particular with funds from private foundations and from the European Union). Thus far, the first priority, healthy food, has mainly been addressed through the re-orientation of ordinary actions (e.g. fruit distribution at school), and incentives have mostly been aimed at the reduction of food waste (e.g. tax reductions for institutions active in food donation), while co-funded projects have concentrated on the issue of sustainable food production (e.g. the RDP project "*Mater Alimenta Urbes*").

This third area is particularly important for the purpose of this research as it mobilizes new financial resources to implement the MUFP strategies and because it is more directly connected to the rural-urban issue. Two actions specifically demonstrate the effort made in the development of a local food system: the creation of a start-ups incubator for urban agriculture and the development of a local supply chain for school cafeterias.

The first action was developed through the "*Openagri. New Skills for New Jobs in Peri-urban Agriculture*" initiative, a €6 million project co-funded by the European Regional Development

Fund, in the Urban Innovative Actions program. Different actors have been involved on an urban scale, including institutions (the Municipality of Milan, universities, the Milan Chamber of Commerce), non-profit organizations (e.g. the Sunugal Association) and companies (e.g. the *Avanzi* consulting company). The 3-year project aims at the regeneration of a traditional farm (*Cascina Nosedo*) located within the administrative boundaries of the city, in order to create a focal point for the development of innovative enterprises acting in agriculture.

From this perspective, urban agriculture becomes the pillar of social and urban regeneration: on the social side, new activities in this field represent an opportunity for new jobs, especially for the marginalized sectors of the urban population; on the architectural side, these activities redefine a space that had lost its role with urban expansion, developments that are both innovative and in continuity with the history of the place. The project proposes a new model for rural-urban relationships that overcomes the conventional "sprawl system" that has degraded peri-urban areas by proposing a cooperative strategy based on a win-win dynamic between rural and urban spaces.

The second action is more complex and aims at the development of rural-urban linkages for local public procurement for school cafeterias. Two actors are at the core of this action: the DAM and the "*Milano Ristorazione*" food service company, whose capital is 99% owned by the municipality. This strategy started in 2016 when the DAM members were asked to supply the rice needed in local school cafeterias (180 tons/year for a total value of €300,000). Now the municipality is extending this model to other products (particularly horticultural) to enhance the local base of the food service system and stimulate a transition from cereal monoculture to diversified peri-urban agricultural production. In order to guide the local farmers through this difficult change, the MUFP Office has supported the DAM in the presentation of an RDP project ("*Mater Alimenta Urbes*") with two different lines: "Integrated supply chain projects" (Action 16.10.01) and "Integrated Area Projects" (Action 16.10.02). In this case, integration between rural and urban actors is explicitly pursued and constitutes the core of the MUFP strategy.

An emblematic, although unique, example of a synergic action between urban food policies and local agricultural and environmental protection is the case of "*Cascina Campazzo*", an urban farm threatened with eviction by a real-estate developer (2005-2011), which was preserved by the government administration through the creation of an urban agricultural park in 2014 and eventually became the DAM headquarters.

The metropolitan scale

The development of the MUFP led to an examination at the geographical scale where food-related policies are implemented, as well as at the level of governance where they are developed. The size of the metropolitan area was immediately called into question because most of the actors/producers who were able to contribute to the creation of the UFP operate in the context

of the Metropolitan City of Milan (MCM), despite the fact that the authority supporting this action is only the Municipality of Milan. Since the MUFP documents were produced by the City of Milan and approved by the city council in 2015, the close relationship between the city, food and the metropolitan area has become evident. The “Guidelines for an Urban Food Policy” (2015) highlight how the Milan Metropolitan Area “has more than 3,600 farms, cultivating about 67,000 hectares of agricultural land, with 60 organic farms (13 of which are in Milan) farming a total of 1,440 cultivated hectares, as well as 19 certified products (5 PDO, 1 IGP, 13 Traditional Products and 1 Slow Food Presidium)”. In this context, the system of governance for the development of a UFP is a critical point. The role of the Municipality of Milan as an institutional actor functioning as a leader should be balanced with the existence of players emerging from institutional and non-institutional contexts. Considering the institutional framework of the MCM, other agencies also have competencies in policy areas related to the topic of this paper. The main entity is the *Città Metropolitana di Milano*, an agency skilled in managing the territory in the metropolitan area. As yet, the MCM has not positioned itself with regard to the development of a UFP. In the MCM territory, there is also a park system with a very important role in the development of the UFP. In fact, Milan is surrounded by a sort of green belt made up of several parks, each of which is related to a specific public body with competencies in territorial planning. The main park to the west is Ticino Valley Regional Park, to the east the Adda Parks (divided into Adda North and Adda South), and to the south the SMAP. The first two are regional parks that preserve the Ticino and Adda River territories, while the SMAP could be considered an outstanding element in the Lombardy landscape, as it is aimed at protecting territories with a specific agricultural vocation. The three parks exert their role of environmental protection on areas in several municipalities where a large number of agricultural businesses are located. In recent years, the parks have operated not only by virtue of their institutional role in territorial planning, but also by developing projects to foster local development, farming in particular. One relevant example is the creation of the area brand for local agricultural productions (See figure n. 1). There are also non-institutional actors that are active in the UFP. Among these, one of the most important is the previously mentioned DAM. Established in 2011, the DAM brings together 34 farms operating within the municipal boundaries of Milan. They formed a special consortium (a cooperative) to foment agricultural activities and support companies in the industry, provided they are located within the borders of the Municipality of Milan. The DAM, in addition to aggregating a large number of producers active in the Milan area, has inspired the development of new forms of coordination at the metropolitan scale. The DAM does not have an institutional role, but rather is an operational actor, working bottom-up both in the promotion of businesses and in starting-up territorial projects in the areas of district competencies.

In addition to the DAM, at the same time three other agricultural districts were established: the “*Valle Olona*” Agricultural District,

the “*Distretto Neururale delle tre acque di Milano*”, and the “*Risereane*” Rural District. Each operates in a specific area and is specialized according to the unique qualities of each territory. The rural districts, albeit private agencies, have taken on a leadership role in the local processes and in negotiating with the public administration.

Starting with the experience of the rural districts, in 2013 the Lombardy Region proposed the official “Agreement for Local Development” (AQST Framework Agreement), which was then renamed “*Milano Metropoli Rurale*”. The aim of the AQST is to foster the rural matrices of the Milan Metropolitan Area by promoting the economy and the quality of the environmental and territorial context, with a special emphasis on sustainability. The AQST brings together the four agricultural districts of the Milan Metropolitan Area, plus two irrigation consortia, as well as the Municipality of Milan, the Metropolitan City of Milan and the regional government. The AQST constitutes a hybrid tool available for both public and private actors. Within this framework, the actors involved have produced a number of projects related to territorial planning and actions for promoting and developing businesses. Projects have been started in the areas of irrigation systems, environmental rehabilitation, architectural heritage, and sustainable tourism, with 102 planned actions worth a total of 144 million euros, of which 22 have already been allocated.

As the new municipal administration took office in 2016, the approval of the MUFP demonstrates how the government has reflected on the issue of governance and on the scale of implementation of the policies. Regarding governance, the Municipality of Milan’s goal is to overcome a vertical organization of processes, where practices are hierarchical and organized by institutional levels. The aim of the municipality is to favor an innovative model of governance strictly based on the variety of actors and processes already in place in the area, such as those mentioned above. In this context, the municipality recognizes that it is almost impossible to establish a rigid institutional hierarchy relying only on the action of the municipality, and therefore, has proposed its role as a facilitator of processes, rather than as the leader of an organization.

The next target declared by the municipality is the creation of a Metropolitan Food Council, which, inspired by international examples, should bring together institutional actors, economic operators and stakeholders in the metropolitan area, thus establishing a group able to work at the area-wide level. The Metropolitan Food Council should stand on the legacy of the AQST and give structure to a form of innovative governance in which public, private and institutional actors can effectively cooperate.

Rural-urban integration, environmental protection and urban food policies

The main aim of this research was to reflect on the transformation of the relations between urban and peri-urban

spaces in Milan and its metropolitan area. Using the MUFP as a framework, the evolution of the relationship between a city that increasingly resembles a suburb and rural spaces that have largely been urbanized (Mininni 2012) was examined. In a context of increasing hybridization of relations between the city and the peri-urban countryside, how to define innovative forms of territoriality that most likely derive from the creation of new systems of relations between the actors and the territory (Dematteis 2001) was studied. These territorialities introduce new forms of organization into rural and urban areas and are processes characterized by the need to connect the city and the countryside through the creation of local and territorial systems (Dematteis and Governa, 2005). In this context, whether and how policies based on food and agriculture can have a territorial effect in Milan as in many other cities in Europe was investigated (Calori and Sanvito 2013).

Along this line, the peri-urban context of Milan is of specific interest because many forms of land and landscape planning inspired by an integrated vision of human and natural issues (Giacomini and Romani) have been experimented with for several decades now (although not always in a fully effective way). Since the beginning of the 1990s, especially in the southern part of the metropolitan area, strategies have been carried out to combine nature and landscape protection with the enhancement of the primary sector, and with actions to improve the social use of natural and rural areas (Ferraresi 1993). In short, this is an attempt to overcome a residual idea of peripheral spaces by giving them a strategic role from productive and social points of view, enhancing agriculture and rurality as opportunities to encourage practices aimed at inhabiting the territory and planning the landscape (Mininni 2013).

Of special interest is the link between protected areas and rural-urban integration in the framework designed by the MUFP. In the documents cited, environmental protection appears to be a foundational element, although the place for parks in this process is less evident. Even though the conservation of biodiversity is mentioned in all of these documents, no reference can be found of the specific role of protected areas. In practical activities, there is no opposition whatsoever between the MUFP and the protected areas, despite the fact that the two strategies seem to respond to different spatial patterns. The UFP is based on a strategy of integration between rural and urban spaces. However, although much has been done to adopt a more flexible vision of environmental protection, natural parks are still associated more with a dualistic vision of the relationship between the city and nature.

The tension between these two different spatial patterns was confirmed in interviews with peri-urban farmers. In the SMAP, farmers appear to be more focused on a rural-urban integration strategy (Bini, Pirovano, 2008), while in the Ticino Valley Regional Park, environmental concerns were explicitly mentioned by a number of farmers, and agriculture was often presented as an alternative to the dominant urban-centered spatial structure. The MUFP can be a fundamental opportunity to give new strength to a long-term strategy that started with the Agricultural

Park experimentation. By giving centrality to local food policies in a city that is in other ways projected towards globalization, the municipality restores value to the relations between the center and the periphery, based on local values. Therefore, the MUFP becomes an opportunity to broaden the city's horizon, revamping processes begun in the recent past that unfortunately have not yet reached full maturity.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper demonstrated that in the case of the Milan UFP, the interaction between the urban and the metropolitan dimensions presents a number of potentialities and challenges, and the reconciliation between the two scales is a crucial point for the future of the MUFP. The analysis focused on the two different scales to understand if and how the MUFP can be considered a part of a wide territorial project started in the 1990s with the foundation of the SMAP. In fact, the original idea of the park was to promote agriculture as a strategic asset for the reconstruction of a territory degraded by urban sprawl. Now this strategy forms the background for the actions implemented by the MUFP and is a powerful tool to merge urban needs and peri-urban social and environmental values. Hence, it is an instrument through which to implement a long-term territorial project to bridge the gap between the urban and the peri-urban areas, which is characterized by the presence of relevant values in terms of landscape, natural environment and agriculture.

Expo 2015 represented a turning point for food-related policies in Milan: the construction of the UFP is actually the sign of a transition to a more structured relationship between production, distribution chains and consumption, with effects on both the urban and the metropolitan scales. The Municipality of Milan is attempting to give value to the Expo's cultural and scientific legacy by proposing the city as the focal point of a global and multi-scalar urban food network (Susi Botto and Di Vita, 2016). This is relevant because through the MUFP the municipality is trying to create territorial added value (Dematteis and Governa, 2005) by mobilizing cultural, social and environmental values to strengthen local agriculture and create local-based food supply chains. This objective should also be considered and integrated into the mission of the SMAP and other metropolitan protected areas.

Unfortunately, currently the metropolitan parks and the MUFP act independently without any real cooperation, thus risking partially untapped potential for the Milan Metropolitan Area. Several factors are fundamental to this issue: first, since 2015 a political reform has transformed the Province of Milan into a Metropolitan City, which has radically changed land management procedures. However, this new body that is also in charge of the SMAP lacks the minimum political and financial resources to be effective (2018 was still a period of transition); second, the UFP is involving local farmers in the metropolitan protected areas without coordinating these activities with the parks themselves, which can be considered external entities, unable to act because

of their (temporary?) political and economic precariousness. The dialectics between the urban and metropolitan scales have a strong potential for strengthening the linkages between urban and peri-urban areas, but in the absence of an effective institution at the metropolitan scale, replicating a hierarchical relationship between the actors involved also presents a risk. Another critical point arises from the fact that the MUFP is built on a strong partnership between the public and the private sectors: it constitutes a strategic action in the mayor's political project, but is largely based on private funds. This fact is in line with the socio-economical dynamics of the city, but in the long run exposes the structure of the MUFP to the risk of being trapped in private interests that are not necessarily consistent with those of the people of the city and of the metropolitan area. In conclusion, the case of Milan represents a laboratory in which it is possible to observe the controversial aspects of governance dynamics. The weakness of the Milan Metropolitan Area are interpreted by the municipality as an opportunity to try new relationships between the core and the periphery and between public and private actors. The case of Milan could in the coming years be an example for other cities regarding the implementation of a food policy on a large scale. This will be the case if the framework executed so far evolves into long term policy, overcoming the risks and the weaknesses that threaten its success, including lack of institutionalization within the municipality, absence of an operative political framework on a metropolitan scale, and dependence on private funds coming from a small number of actors.

Traducido por Theresa StJohns