

Urban resilience and right to food at times of Covid-19

Four tips for the Metropolitan City of Turin

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Questo paper è stato scritto nel corso di Giugno 2020 per il corso di Food Law erogato dall'Università di Torino e afferente al Corso di Laurea Magistrale in European Legal Studies. La modalità di valutazione del corso prevedeva la redazione di un totale di 15 brevi paper uno per ogni lezione; ognuna di queste ha sottolineato come numerosissime branche del diritto, da quello Privato a quello Amministrativo, da quello del Lavoro o a quello d'Impresa, permeino il diritto al cibo, spesso volte non offrendogli una specifica tutela, ma anzi contribuendo a minacciarlo. Questo paper invece costituisce il lavoro conclusivo del corso, la cui consegna era "Right to food at times of Covid-19". Dato il mio vivo interesse per l'innovazione urbana e per le politiche pubbliche, ho pensato che questo paper potesse essere una buona occasione per misurarmi con le mie, ancora piuttosto immature, potenzialità di 'policy advisor'. Considerando che spesso ciò può avvenire anche prendendo ispirazione da buone pratiche già adottate in qualsivoglia realtà urbana, ne ho citate alcune tra cui quella della Piana del Cibo che è stata per me fonte di immenso orgoglio ed un fortissimo esempio di collaborazione e di buona politica.

“Tutte le novità portateci dai Piemontesi in settant’anni si riducono insomma a due: la luce elettrica e le sigarette. La luce elettrica se la sono ripresa. Le sigarette? Si possa soffocare chi le ha fumate una sola volta. A noi è sempre bastata la pipa.”

Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara*

Cities will play an increasingly important and strategic role in the next few years. It is not surprising, in fact, that, thanks in part to regional and urban policies for the allocation of funds by the European Union, a strong urban sovereignty, unconnected with national sovereignty, is developing. During the initial phase of Covid-19 pandemic, the urban scenario was perhaps the one in which citizens were forced, more than elsewhere, to change their lifestyles because of the lock-down, but there’s the belief that some of those restrictions and rules imposed by the government were an excellent test, on the one hand for the transition to more sustainable urban systems and on the other hand for local governments to pay more attention to serious and already existing problems such as poverty and lack of access to food. The aim of this short and informal contribution is to analyse and propose, with an eye to the City of Turin, how cities have responded, and could in the future respond, to all those food problems that the Coronavirus has contributed to worsen.

FAO has recently published a report defining the role of cities in addressing the Covid-19 emergency¹. The most relevant measures include mapping the most vulnerable communities and their access to nutritious food, monitoring unfair competition practices in food sales and the importance of reopening even smaller food stores (not just supermarkets). This report has been very useful in drafting this paper.

New poor, food insecurity and distribution

or... the social issue

Two days ago Coldiretti reported that Covid has created one million more poor people in Italy², including those who have lost their jobs, shopkeepers and artisans forced to close down, workers in the black economy, but also that 39% of Italians are involved in solidarity initiatives through donations, food packs and the farmers' initiative "Spesa Sospesa". As pointed out recently in a Webinar³ by Alessia Toldo⁴, however, it would be wrong to define this as a new crisis, because in reality it was 'only' the worsening of an already existing one. The city of Turin has responded to this problem through a strong mobilization of volunteers who have undertaken voluntary activities and also thanks to experts in the sector such as Toldo herself and Professor Egidio Dansero who have kept the debate and research in the sector alive thanks to the Atlante del Cibo initiative. The examples given are explanatory of the fact that for the moment the problem has been addressed mainly by volunteers and not at an

administrative level by the city council. What is here suggested to the administration of the Metropolitan City of Turin is to collaborate closely with these social realities.

The first step could be to map the crucial areas of the city where the requests are more concentrated. It would be necessary to set up hubs for food (re)distribution, maybe near the local markets and allow, therefore, the occupation of civic gardens by volunteers not only during working days, but also during weekends and during the summer period. Especially in neighborhoods mainly inhabited by foreigners, an “InfoPoint” could be placed next to the distribution banks, to allow those who have certain food needs, due to their religious beliefs for example, at least to express preferences and to the volunteers to collect important data for the subsequent distributions and for making specific requests to donors.

The collaboration between Eco dalle Città, Food Pride and Atlante del Cibo led to the creation of a maps of all the different realities that offer food in Turin concerning food surpluses, charitable canteens and food banks, but in spite of this the problem of the lack of coordination of the same has resulted in a partial inefficiency.

A change in urban mobility and the praise for slowness

or... the environmental issue

The Italian Government has launched the initiative of the Green Mobility Vouchers for buying bikes or other electric vehicles just for personal mobility. We have to be aware that this initiative can change the rhythm of (Italian) cities and of shopping too. The rise of smart working – that should be obviously balanced with normal working in order not to spend too much time at home and maintain a physical contact with society, and a transition to greener mobility will both create slower urban systems. Citizens can profit of this precious slowness to make more responsible shopping, such as going to a public market instead of the supermarket. Local administrations should care about favoring those subjects of the food chain that have suffered more than others from the lockdown, namely the farmers. With regards to the Lancet Report⁶ and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact⁷ (2015), to build sustainable diets and to respect the Right to Food for all means recognizing the need for healthier and seasonal products. Thanks to this potential greener mobility, Municipalities should push citizens to give more importance to the social function of public markets and local producers. To have more time for food shopping and to buy more fresh products means sustaining local economies and small farmers, eating consciously and preventing waste.

This leads to believe that building green cities and guaranteeing sustainable food should also be among the objectives of urban planners when drawing up the city's urban development plan. And in this context the precise objectives set by the SDGs can act as a catalyst. A “city of urban markets and food as a common” favors public transport or bicycle/foot transport of citizens and therefore expands the limited traffic zones (LTZs) and pedestrian islands accordingly.

Access by cars to central or high traffic areas (such as a market square in the early morning hours) should be guaranteed for logistical purposes only and not to such an extent as to discourage the transition to the so-called cycle-logistics.

Multistakeholderism and the proposal for a Local Authority for the protection of the right to food

or... the governance issue

As we have already mentioned, until now the right to food has only been addressed by social actors and volunteers. Cities need to create spaces for dialogue where these different actors can communicate not only with the administration but also with private parties involved in food distribution and prevention of food loss in order to build a comprehensive and common food policy. The metropolitan city of Milan, aware of these urgent issues and in addition to its international commitments for urban development strategies⁹ has drafted its own Milan Food Policy.

Another interesting project is Piana del Cibo¹⁰, born in the plain of Lucca, Tuscany from a coordinated initiative of some local municipalities¹¹. The initiative provided for the establishment of different platforms for dialogue but not only between public-private and administrative social partners. It has created a real panel of experts on the one hand (the Food Council) and also the Mayors Assembly for the drafting of the inter-municipal food plan. Although it is a different context, the City of Turin can take inspiration from this initiative. Actually, the idea of creating a Food Council and a Food Commission in the Savoy city had already been taken

into consideration a few years ago and recently retracted by the City Councillor¹². However, it is necessary that Turin take advantage of this moment of partial stalemate to make the project a concrete reality.

The active role of municipalities in building food education ...or the educational issue

According to the recent Ministerial Decree of 10 March¹³, which will enter into force this July, Italy has updated some of the so-called Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM) for public procurement in the collective catering sector, which dated back to 2011. As this area also involves school canteens, it is vital that once the CAM are implemented, children in schools in Turin become aware of the reasons for the changes in their school meals. In fact, it is necessary to follow the path of Milan, whose municipality, in concert with schools and farms, is promoting partnerships between these actors ¹⁴ . Another possible action in this area could involve not only schools, but also universities and public buildings, as well as hospitals. In fact, CAM also applies to packaged products contained in vending machines, which are often low in nutrients and rich in calories. For example, fresh fruit vending machines, delivery platforms, office water containers, etc. could be used to reduce the consumption of sweetened and carbonated drinks and pre-packaged food. Another important innovation is for example that in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools it will be necessary to use washable tableware and glasses instead of single-use ones and that at least 50% by weight of fruit, vegetables and legumes will have to be organically grown.

Final Remarks

Despite its shortness and informal language, this short advisory paper wanted to propose certain policies that local administrations could adopt in order to better tackle the worsened food-related problems during the pandemic. Obviously, this attempt and the lack of technical knowledge in the field couldn't support detailed suggestions. Just after the intervention of Alessia Toldo to the webinar "Covid and food system", I thought that certain emergencies should be dealt with a generous degree of practicality, even if at the expense of their formality. In fact, it must be said that the cases mentioned in the paper only underline the close correlation between law and politics and that the former must be supported by strong popular convictions in order to work. Where certain activities do not fall directly within the administrative duties, for whatever reason – if only for the fear of slowing them furtherly - it is at least desirable that the PAs can recognize, support and provide spaces for dialogue to the most active citizens. This approach is by no means new in the Turin context where, thanks to the presence of eminent scholars such as Stefano Rodotà and Ugo Mattei, the city has recently adopted a Regulation for Urban Commons ¹⁵. The latter formalizes the "pact of collaboration" as an administrative instrument of public-public partnership so that citizens are the first curators of the place where they live, sometimes through EU funded projects¹⁶. The hope is that this "cure" may one day extend to food, but especially to individuals who have problems related to it.

¹ Urban food systems and COVID-19: The role of cities and local governments in responding to the emergency, 09 April 2020

² <https://www.coldiretti.it/economia/un-milione-di-poveri-in-piu-nel-2020-per-leffetto-covid>

³ <https://atlantedelcibo.it/2020/05/07/webinar-rete-politiche-locali-del-cibo-food-waste-covid-19/>

⁴ Alessia Toldo is Associate professor of Methodologies for social inclusion and participation at the Politecnico of Turin and of Political Geography at the University of Turin

⁵ https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1Xf5Voy3RKydXobxO_stMdhZPZ2m47TR&usp=sharing

⁶ <https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/eat-lancet-commission-summary-report/>

⁷ <http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/>

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/projects/en/projects/cyclelogistics>

⁹ Milan is in fact the leader of the international Milan Food Policy Act "an international pact signed by 210 cities" and it's a party of the C40 organization for climate change in urban areas and of ICLEI organization for sustainable development at the urban level.

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/f2TtpYAFDy0>

¹¹ Municipalities of Lucca, Capannori, Altopascio, Porcari e Villa Basilica.

¹² <http://www.comune.torino.it/cittagora/primo-piano/consiglio-del-cibo-e-food-commission-torino-promuove-la-cultura-del-cibo.html>

¹³ DM n. 65 del 10 marzo 2020,

(https://www.minambiente.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/GPP/2020/guri_dm_65_del_2020_ristorazione_002.pdf)

¹⁴ This initiative is one of the concrete actions related to the third objective of the Milan Food Policy. (<http://www.foodpolicymilano.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FoodPolicyMilano.pdf>)

¹⁵ Regolamento per il governo dei bei comuni urbani nella Città di Torino n. 391

¹⁶ Co-City project by UIA (Urban Innovative Actions)