



Second International Conference on

AGRICULTURE IN AN URBANIZING SOCIETY

Reconnecting Agriculture and Food Chains to Societal Needs

14 - 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 | ROME | ITALY

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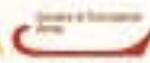
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Contents

Contents	2
Conference theme	11
Conference Chair opening speech	12
Conference Programme	13
Proceedings collected by Working group	16
WG1 - Connecting local and global food systems and reducing footprint in food provisioning and use	17
Connecting local and global food for sustainable solutions in public procurement.....	18
Resources uses objectives and the constitutional processes in SPGs	20
Sustainable food supply chains: A social-ecological analysis of the food supply in Viennese Schools.....	22
An education project to promote healthy and sustainable food consumption. Barilla's "Si.Mediterraneo" Project	24
Assessing the degree of localness of food value chains	26
The irresistible rise of craft breweries in Italy: the case of agricultural craft breweries	28
Global, Regional and Local food chains: an assessment of sustainability performance of wheat-to-bread chains across Italy and the UK	30
Promoting sustainable durum wheat production in Italy: the Barilla Sustainable Farming project.....	32
The comparative analysis of social performance of global and local berry supply chains	34
WG2 - Short food supply chains (regional products; farmers' markets; collective farmers' marketing initiatives; alternative food networks; CSA)	37
Short supply chain and shared value models in agriculture.....	38
Sustainable food systems: Community Supported Agriculture a social-ecological analysis.....	40
The mis-interconnection: when peasant farming encounters modernized consumption culture	42
East Asian 'model' of local food?: key features and implications	44
The tendencies on the Brazilian local food movements: an analysis of the Collaborative Purchasing Systems.....	46
Solidarity Purchase Groups, the aggregation model for local food distribution. First results of a direct study in Marche.....	48
An urban CSA in Ireland: model description, relationship with the agri-food industry and introductory exploration of its impact on the community	50
How to find producers and consumers interested in Community Supported Agriculture in Sweden	52
WG3 - Economic impact at the farm level	55
Comparison of UA business models – empiric study on Italian and German case studies	56
Short chain approach and family farms: from acknowledgement to capacity building. The case of Alessandria Province.....	58
Explaining direct sale as a prevailing marketing strategy: data from Tuscany farmers.....	60
An evaluation of investment in Agritourism: a case study of Puglia Region	62
Options for promoting farm cooperation in water use and its economic impact.....	64
Urban Agriculture in Metropolis Ruhr characteristic business models.....	66
Does the multifunctional agriculture contribute to the farm family income? An analysis based on FADN survey.....	68
Study of Farmers Adaptation to Urbanization and Their Capability to Develop Multifunctional Peri-urban Agriculture	70
Agriculture multifunctionality: rhetoric or tool analysis of rural development?	72
WG4 - New business models for multiple value creation	75



Conceptualising an adaptive cycle methodology for entrepreneurial ecosystems: rural reinvention in the Tamar Valley	76
Urban farms adaptation to citizens – The case of Alella wine region within Barcelona Metropolitan Region	78
Rural development and new business models: Production Chain Integrated Plans Calabria Region cases.....	80
Bridging the gap – education and farming in specialised kindergarten farms.....	82
Business models in Urban Agriculture - answering cost pressures and societal needs.....	84
New entrepreneurial skills in the peri-urban agriculture of Italy	86
Urban Agriculture – it is a business! Business models in Urban Agriculture	88
The social farmer as a shared value creator: creating new business models with the Impact Driven Business Modelling tool	90
WG5 – WG16 Entrepreneurial skills and competences with Focus on Gender aspects.....	93
Between individual and collective entrepreneurship: how to puzzle out rural entrepreneurship?	95
The LEADER Initiative in Apulia Region: a way for smarting the rural-urban relationships?	97
Relationships between Regional Agricultural Innovation Systems and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: An Empirical Analysis.....	99
Local cultures and global discourses in emerging rurality	101
Barriers and opportunities for entrepreneurial wetland farmers in Zambia	103
Feminization of farming in the Himalayas – Are women to become the new farm managers or just exhausted agricultural laborers?	105
Women Empowerment in Agricultural Extension, Victoria, Laguna, Philippines	107
WG6 - Transition approaches.....	110
Dynamics of transitions: differentiated analysis and interventions for different institutional frameworks	111
Transition: enhancing collective action over diverse stakeholder communities.....	113
Chilean Agricultural Entrepreneurs and Free Trade Agreements (FTA)	115
The social construction of space in urban agriculture	117
Importance of action labs to transform the agri-food system towards sustainability.....	119
Regional Open Innovation Roadmapping (ROIR) - Application and evaluation of a participatory approach that integrates stakeholders into the development of regional innovations.....	121
Animal welfare driven systems innovation in the pork chain	123
Transition pathways in participatory plant breeding programs: a farm-level network analysis	125
WG7 - Regional branding and local agrifood systems: strategies, governance, and impacts.....	128
The branding process as opportunity to trigger integrated strategies for rural development: the experimentation of "Paesaggi italiani - ITEM" in northeast Italy	129
Vetrina Toscana: from regional trade brand to regional umbrella brand	131
Multi-scaled, layered agri-food branding	133
A comparison between different types of Regional Branding Initiatives	135
Impact of Regional Collective Trademarks on Farms: Japanese Experiences	137
PAT (Traditional Food Products) which future?.....	139
Behind local cheese: comparing Slow Food Presidia and GIs governance systems	141
Conciliating public and private initiatives, local and international market development. The case of Ziama-Macenta Robusta Coffee in Guinea	143
Territorial impact assessment on local products from a socio-economic-cultural point of view. The Provola of Madonie case	145
The 'Piadina Romagnola' mess. A new legal case for an old question: what is a GI?.....	147
Lessons learned on GI vs territorial label: the case of Kopaonik ajvar, Serbia	149



Geographical Indications and Trademarks in Vietnam: confusion or real difference?	151
Geographical indications economic impacts: a methodology to assess "well established GIs"	153
Geographical Indication as a tool to strengthen sociotechnical quality niches. The case of Corsican Clementine	155
Can Localised Agri-Food System be a relevant policy to cope with market liberalisation? Evidence from France dairy products market	157
Consumers' buying intention and willingness to pay for PDO and PGI products in large retail chains. Results from a direct survey in Italy	159
Impact of Spanish big retailers strategies on Protected Designations of Origin of extra virgin olive ...	161
Branding products initiatives in LDCs through GIs: the case of the Kampot Pepper in Cambodia and the Hareenna Coffe in Ethiopia.....	163
Essential Packaging for Appellations of Origin	165
Questioning on collective action to qualify a GI: the case of Picinisco PDO cheese	167
The public policies in favor of Geographical Indications in Morocco: Mental models, appropriation by the actors, and impact on innovation and local dynamics.....	169
Stages of innovation for adopting differential quality in olive-oil geographical indications	171
Collective action milieus for registering coffee GIs from Colombia and Thailand.....	173
WG8 - Food systems and spatial planning. Towards a reconnection?	176
Sustainable Productive Landscape in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. Towards analysis on different scales	177
Towards fundamental new urban planning for productive cities: the quest for space.....	179
Characterizing peri-urban farming spaces. A methodology for urban planning.....	181
Szentendre Eco Island in the Agglomeration of Budapest	183
Diagnosis and Strategies for Peri-Urban Agriculture in Beirut, Lebanon	185
Is a combination of crop and livestock production profitable and supporting sustainability at regional level?	187
Justice issues in farmland protection policies on the urban fringe	189
New forms of agricultures in the sprawl as vector of "productive landscape".....	191
Land use and balance between the cities and the country, the case of Lombardia.....	193
WG9 - Land-use transformations	196
The impoverishment of agriculture in the rural-urban fringe: an analysis through administrative data	197
Urban Spatial Scenario Design Model: The impact of urban growth on Peri-urban agriculture for the Surrounding Towns of Addis Ababa	199
Land use patterns and changes in periurban areas.....	201
Adapting Peri-urban Planning to a Post-Productivist Landscape	203
From subsistence to professional farming: the change of land use and cropping pattern in Northern China	205
Food is Territory. Traditions, Landscapes and Olive Economies in Lazio and Abruzzo.....	207
Globalization of Food and Land Changes: Re-thinking Food Security Strategies in an Inter-connected World	209
"Contesting climate change policies". Actors, climate change and land-use transformations in the south-coast region of Jalisco state in western Mexico	211
Assessing the effectiveness of alternative designs of greening measures. The case of Tuscany region.....	213
Territorial-dynamics information and assessment potential in addressing rural development and planning.....	215
Changing Landscapes and Lifescapes: The Transformation of Rural Communities, Talisay Batangas, Philippines	217



Analysis of spatial patterns and driving factors of farmland loss	219
WG10 - Urban agriculture I. Urban agriculture and Urban Food Strategies: Processes, Planning, Policies and Potential to Reconnect Society and Food	222
The Urban Agriculture Circle: A Methodology to Understand the Multi-functionality of Urban Agriculture	223
The economics of urban gardening in three EU cities - examples from London, Ljubljana and Milan	225
Urban Agriculture in Bangladesh: Current Scenario and Policy Options.....	227
There is no urban food policy. Frames of food in Swiss policies	229
Feeding spatial planning. Rethinking agriculture as an integral part of the (policies of) city/region....	231
Building local food governance: the case of the Food Plan of the Pisa province.....	233
WG11 - Urban agriculture II. Grass-root initiatives and community gardens	236
New urban gardening trends in Prague: community and ecosystem services on stage.....	237
How the rural is experienced in the city: the recent regulated urban agriculture-movement in Portugal	239
There is not such a thing as "an" urban garden: motivations and politics of gardening in Barcelona.....	241
Agroecology in the city: urban gardens for an agroecological transition.....	243
Finding spaces for Urban Agriculture to combat food challenges in Dhaka City	245
The contribution of community food gardens to food sovereignty in Johannesburg, South Africa: a look at access and empowerment	247
Sustainable management of green space in the city-region of Vigo, Galicia (Spain)	249
Grassroots versus business oriented short food chain models - competitors or partners? Evidences from Rome and Zurich.....	251
Bricolage, local food and sustainable urban development	253
Urban agriculture in Pune, India: Practice, spatial context and community interaction.....	255
What can university community gardens offer an 'alternative' food system?	257
Comparative study on urban community gardening in Central Eastern Europe	259
Garden as an edible place in city landscape.....	261
Introducing composting in a community	263
WG12 - Urban agriculture III: Effects of UA. Urban agriculture: a potential tool for local and global food security, economic, social and environmental resilience, and community health and wellness	266
Europe-wide spotlights on Urban Agriculture's economic and other societal benefits	268
The Urban Agriculture, a New and Soft Solution for the Rurban Areas.....	270
Food self-provisioning between tradition and alternative - lessons from allotment gardens in Brno, Czech Republic	272
Healing garden or gardening? Data from the Perceived Restorativeness Scale	274
Sustainable urban agriculture in Quito, Ecuador.....	276
Non-market food provisioning via home gardens and communal sharing in <i>Satoyama</i> production landscapes, Japan	278
Motivations and environmental practices of urban gardeners - the cases of Ljubljana, London and Milan	280
Food Production in a highly urbanized environment: the case of Singapore	282
Turning urban waste into an economic asset for urban and peri-urban farming in Sri Lanka.....	284
Involvement in organic urban agriculture: enabling further steps towards sustainability	286
Urban gardens in the city in crisis. Insights from Sevilla (Spain)	288
Agricultural Waste Utilisation Strategies and Demand for Urban Waste Compost: Evidence from Smallholder Farmers in Ethiopia	290



WG13 - Care Farming/Social Farming in more resilient societies	293
Research-based evidence of gardening as a physical activity for health.....	294
Community resilience through urban agriculture: the role of volunteers in horticultural therapy	296
Social farming fostered by microcredit: the case of Italy	298
Social franchising and social farming, for promoting the co-production of knowledge and values: the IBF case	300
The social farmer as a shared value creator: creating new business models with the Impact Driven Business Modelling tool	302
A horticultural therapy program using hydroponics for improving work adjustment skills in students with mental retardation	304
Stagio...cando con Network Contacts. Stare bene insieme nelle diverse stagioni della vita. Can be resilience a key issue for care/social farming validation?	306
Building a typology for the Green Care services in Finland.....	308
Social farming and social innovation in the perspective of new rural policies	310
Social farming practices to promote social-ecological sustainability in rural areas	312
The right concept in the wrong place? The Interrelationship between Care Farming and Social Capital.....	314
Social Farming in Catalonia. Rural local development and social integration of people at risk of social exclusion	316
Effectiveness of social farming for people with special needs and mental health challenges: the case of the SoFAB Project in Ireland and Northern Ireland	318
The Social Farm Network for the Promotion of new Relationship Between Agriculture, Economy and Society	320
Social/care farming in the making – Hungarian experiences	322
The role of a territorial network in front of the economic pressures on the French social farming model	324
Social Farming and social protection in developing countries in the perspective of sustainable rural development	326
Analysing Social Farming Initiatives In Developing Countries: A Case Study From The Ivory Coast ...	328
Developing a social farming project in Suriname.....	330
WG14 - Rural tourism (agri-tourism) and changing urban demands	332
Consuming the rural idyll through food – analysis of the consumption of rural food-stuffs by urban populations in Portugal.....	333
New tourist experiences in the productive areas of PDO / PGI of rural Tuscany	335
Wine routes for regional tourism development in Italy. A research in Calabria and Friuli Venezia Giulia Regions.....	337
The difficult path of agri-tourism in Portugal	339
Consuming Landscape: an investigation of eco-economic development strategies in rural areas.....	341
Fincas agroturisticas de Nicaragua	343
Pedagogical rural tourism promoting the multifunctionality of agriculture: analysis of three experiences developed in Brazil.....	345
Agritourism and territorial framework in the northern Salento (Apulia region, Italy)	347
The demand for Italian Agritourism.....	349
WG15 - Local arrangements for agricultural ecosystem services: connecting urban populations to their peri-urban landscapes through the ecosystem services of agriculture...	352
Managing Ecosystem Services in the Peri-urban Landscape: An Emergent Paradox.....	353
Strategies for enhancement of ecosystem services of the periurban areas.....	355
Agroecological agriculture and water quality: Sustainable Guarapiranga Project.....	357



Method for assessing environmental services in agricultural metropolitan areas and their degree of protection. The examples of Gallecs Protected Natural area (PNA), el Baix Llobregat Agrarian Park and la Granada-Sant Pere de Riudebitlles	359
Collaborative governance of a peri-urban enclave: how a farm became nature and citizen oriented	361
Towards an agroecological transition in peri-urban agrarian systems in Madrid (Spain)	363
Critical success factors for delivering farmer-managed public goods in Dutch rural areas.....	365
WG17 - Civic agriculture for an urbanizing society: production models, consumption practices and forms of governance	368
Food Self-Provisioning in Hungary	369
Civic Agriculture Experiences in Calabria Region	371
The social construction process of food quality: the case of organic certification in Brazil.....	372
Designing Resilient Citylands through Community Participation.....	374
Self-organisation of CSA in Austria: Transdisciplinarity in Action	376
Public policy for family farming in Brazil: the role of mediators in the reconnection between farmer, food, and community.....	378
Linking governance and embeddedness: a socio-spatial approach to food networks.....	380
Towards a network around civic agriculture in the Province of Pisa	382
Urban food gardening and urban farming: an analysis from a theoretical and empirical perspective.....	384
Peasant Economics in the Twenty-First Century: building a "polis" in the wild	386
Shared and relational activities in civic agriculture: towards a non-individualistic conception of well-being.....	388
WG18 - Society Oriented Farming – working on the balance between market and societal demands.....	391
Society Oriented Farming: Involving society in farm strategies	392
Marriage of convenience between farmer organizations and milk industry, for a more resilient local milk value chain in Niamey.....	394
Society oriented and sustainable agriculture: an emerging paradigm in Québec (Canada)?.....	396
From Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition to a shared responsibility learning platform.....	398
Good Food and Beyond: Food Supply Chains Outcomes and Societal Demands in the Italian Debate.....	400
Brazilian Community-Supported Agriculture initiatives: a preliminary review.....	402
The challenges emerging from the new modes of governance around food	404
WG19 - Food Security: Meanings, Practices and Policies	407
Discourse on food and nutrition security: media analyses in Flanders, Italy and UK	408
Quality, Technology, Sovereignty. Discourses on Food Security in Italy	410
Food security challenges and responses: A comparative analysis of Latvia and Lithuania.....	412
Corporate Food Governance, Financialisation and the Reproduction of Food Security Vulnerabilities	414
The Role Of Food Assistance In High Income Countries: A Critical Literature Review	416
Urban Agriculture in Tanzania and Sustainable Urban Food and Nutritional Security	418
Outlook for the Purchase Food Program (PAA) in one the county of the northeast of Brazil	420
Food and farming meanings: reconnection between producers and consumers in a Brazilian food security policy.....	422
Geographies of urban food commons & justice	424
Counteracting food deserts. The role of street food vending in reinvigorating previously underserved urban spaces	426



Food security and multidimensional linkage between poor urban consumers and nearby agriculture: towards a new definition of food justice.....	428
Les aliments dans la rue et la securite alimentaire des populations urbaines en Afrique sub-saharienne: le cas du Tchad.....	430
Threats for latent exposure to chemical food contaminants: a dilemma of urban agriculture in Uganda.....	432
The contribution of local food systems to healthy diets and sustainable consumption: a case study from the City of Rome	434
Urban-rural linkages and their future: impacts on agriculture, diets and food security.....	436
Good food improves citizens' health	438
New culture of the territory for food security in the Mediterranean region	440
Food insecure households: Perceptions of pastoral and agropastoral communities in the Ugandan cattle corridor	442
Food security of stakeholders from upland to lowland communities, Nagcarlan Laguna, Philippines...	444
Changes in food consumption of urban and rural populations in Poland.....	446
WG20 - Revolutionary solutions for local food systems	449
Short Food Chains as Revolutionary Solution.....	451
Crisis as a challenge to create new economic and social value for rural communities: the experience of social farming promoted by Coldiretti Torino and Diaconia Valdese	453
"Garden of Knowledge" - Strategic Project to Support Low Income Families, Braga, Pt.....	455
La Nuova Arca: a new model of community life and civic agriculture.....	457
Multifunctionality in a vegetable garden.....	459
Barikamà: resistance trough food	461
The Food Council of Pisa.....	463
Il Papavero: the butterfly laboratory and the financial strength of solidarity economy	465
Urban Fruit. Fruits and orchards as local practices for new forms of public participation and urban space. The experience in Rome	467
Food education at school "Add a seat at table"	469
The evolution of urban gardens in Puglia into a revolutionary and multifunctional context	471
Innovating lands access conditions to rescue a threatened heritage: the project "Adopt a terrace in the Brenta Valley".....	473
Agroforestry for increasing production, income generation and better environment	475
Enhancing direct access to food for favela residents: how the FoodRoof supports them to grow their own healthy food	477
Bridging "Agriculture Information gap" through ICT tools and use of Mobility, Analytics and Cloud in Agriculture even in the absence of internet.....	479
WG21 - Urban forestry, Green infrastructure.....	482
The importance of Urban Trees and Information Systems (UTIS) Approach	483
The Aniene River. A Greenway between Roma and Tivoli	485
Urban green and urban agriculture: a natural alliance	487
Urban Forests in Senigallia: a project from Green Masterplan	489
WG22 - Food System Transitions: Cities and the Strategic Management of Food Practices....	492
Potentialities of practice-oriented sustainable food planning	493
Urban strategies and practices for agriculture and food: six Mediterranean case studies.....	495
The transition towards sustainable diets. How can urban systems contribute to promoting more sustainable food practices?	497
City Food Policies – five levers of action to foster the necessary paradigm shift in our food system...	499
WG23 - Conceptualising and Assessing City Region Food Systems	502



Feeding spatial planning. Rethinking agriculture as an integral part of the (policies of) city/region

Maria Felicia Della Valle, Fulvio Adobati¹

Abstract – The focus of the paper is the link between urban food strategies and policies at regional/national level. Related to the UFS, it means consider their integrative governance structure as the way that can ensure a balance between top-down and bottom-up elements. Comparing some European food strategies the aim is valuate how an holistic approach and an integrative governance can increase the sustainability of the local food system in a regional food system through spatial planning. One of the main instruments that city administrations have to support urban agriculture and changes of food system is the territorial/spatial planning/zoning. Cities can facilitate local food production by designating land for urban and peri-urban agriculture and gardening. Spatial planning can support short food supply chains and diversity of food retail by planning for areas for independent food retailers or farmers' markets. Particularly important in this process is the connection of local or city strategies to their rural hinterlands, in terms of policy development but also in terms of reconnecting the food system.

Keywords – european food strategies experencies, food community self-supply, spatial planning for urban agriculture

INTRODUCTION

Two key questions have directed our research:

1. What is the potential and actual role of spatial planning in promoting and facilitating agriculture in the urban hinterland and specially in the Rural Urban Fringe (RUF)?
2. What problems does the planning policy context pose for Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture (UPA), and how can these be overcome?

Many European and North American cities and regions have recently developed food strategies. They deal with a similar range of themes (health and wellbeing, environment sustainability, economy and community development, social and cultural aspects, food security/social justice, etc.) although they might have different drivers and different priorities depending on their local context. RUF now represents the dominant space of this local context, requiring explicit policy interventions that manage it as a place with its own needs and priorities. The zone where a city or town meets the countryside is ubiquitous, dynamic and highly diverse (Low-Choy et al., 2008). Even if farmers have traditionally been the 'custodian of the land' in rural and urban fringe areas, the agricultural spaces of the RUF appear clearly

problematic for planning system; a system that has not still evolved to reflect the modern need of commercial agriculture and which fails to support the necessary diversification of agricultural activity. The fact is that in the RUF there are numerous conflicts, primarily related to the land use.

Land use issues, specifically availability of land, access to land and usability of land, are of particular concern to urban farmers. These issues are often imposed or perpetuated by the urban planning policy context through a lack of substantial recognition of urban agriculture in planning policy, through a lack of awareness about the socio-economic and environmental role of urban agriculture in cities and their surrounding areas, through resistant attitudes or cultural norms held by players in the land use planning process, and through a lack of resources, technical and financial support for urban farmers from the government.

If we also consider that both the spatial planning and ecological approach paradigms have evolved separately, this has shaped distinctive policy responses and institutional architectures which have exposed a significant urban/built versus rural/natural environment divide (Scott, 2012). This is at its most marked and pernicious in the RUF where both frame works coincide in daily practice and decision making (Scott & Carter, 2012). The RUF can become the scene of tension between issues of development and conservation, of a need to preserve a legible heritage landscape while adapting positively to necessary change. This, in turn, hinders the delivery of effective planning, as plans and strategies are being developed in isolation from each other, creating scalar and sectorial disconnects and neglecting the interrelationships affecting the wider land use system where the RUF is a core component.

Despite to this recent planning researches and European projects on the urban fringe and food growing (PURPLE 2012, SURF 2012, SUBURBFOOD 2013) had identified the high level of interdependency of urban and rural interests, with the respective functions of fringe and inner urban areas effectively merging. This perspective represents a challenge to the convention of treating the urban and the rural as independent or opposite entities when the interests of their habitants are essentially converging in most of European Regions. Recent initiatives of edible productive landscape and food growing indicate that the concept of urban agriculture may have strong currency and resilience in the RUF, even serving as an exemplar for integrated development (Piore et al., 2011). According with this, we consider the RUF as a positive opportunity landscape to re-connect the theory and practice of spatial planning linked to the role of urban and peri-urban agriculture, challenging conventional land use theories and models.

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STUDY CASES AND METHODOLOGY

In order to reflect on how effectively the planning system supports and encourages urban and periurban agriculture integrating them in a sustainable spatial planning strategy, we have analysed three UFS (Brighton & Hove, London and Pisa). They have a specific policy and planning focus on urban-rural linkages connecting city and their hinterland through food, enhancing regional agricultural identity and creating spatial quality. Our research has found that the planning system appear effective in protecting open land through green belt or parks network system, but we have notice that existing planning regulations, as well as regional and local planning policies, often either restrict or ignore urban agriculture as a land use. By this analysis we have deduced a general lesson on the role that spatial planning can play in favour of agriculture in the RUF.

The challenge for the statutory planning framework is to recognise and integrate food production into sustainable development strategies.

The planning system needs to better encourage diversification that makes agriculture more viable. Urban fringes must be supported as contributors to the well-being of regional and sub-regional territories. Planners and the planning policy context can impose and perpetuate the identified land constraints in three main ways:

- through the institution of planning, both the institutional structure (that is, the organization of and relationships between people who plan at local and regional levels of government) and the institutional capacity (resources and will) to effect changes;
- through the policy framework that is, the products of planning: legislation, planning policy and by-laws;
- through cultural norms and attitudes of the key players in the planning process: planners, decision makers, and the public.

Related to Zoning for UPA three are roles that cities can play to promote them:

- Including UPA in the planning process as a component of land-use and food policy
- Contributing to the general process of rehabilitation of dismissed or abandoned areas
- Creating urban and peri-urban agriculture zoning and permitting processes.

CONCLUSIONS

In this perspective, we conclude suggesting some tools that can support planning policy system:

- Promote the multifunctionality in the planning process of peri-urban zones, as the basic concept which supports the sustainable development of numerous interactions in these zones. How?

The contribution of local/regional planning practices in this area would be in the planning commitments that provide flexible instruments favouring multifunctional agricultural use of agriculture and

conservation of the attractive and functional rural landscape in a ring around the city, instead of creating rigid spatial planning solutions;

- Empower the network of local bodies involved in agriculture in peri-urban areas, which can gather all municipalities targeted with inter-urban spreading, with the aim of protecting and successfully exploiting agricultural, forested and natural peri-urban areas;
- Encourages bottom-up initiatives and further development of strategies and legal framework which will contribute to preserving agriculture, as well as to green spaces which provide beneficial goods for the urban community taking into account their importance for food system.

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