

LOCAL FOOD POLICIES AS A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABILITY: INSIGHTS FROM AN ACTION-RESEARCH APPLICATION IN CATANIA, ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Food policy has gained growing attention in both academic research and local governance, driven by the global movement toward more sustainable food systems, which promotes a systemic and holistic approach integrating multiple scales and actors in the food system. The study advances through an in-depth review of the literature on governance within the field of local food policies, with a particular focus on innovative strategies that may guide territories toward a sustainable transition. Specially, this paper aims, on the one hand, to identify and assess the territorial resources associated with the food system domain, and, on the other, to outline a possible methodological framework for the development of a local food policy for the city of Catania, Italy. The study forms part of the research project “Emplacing Food-Narratives, Policies and Space in Italy”, which investigates the transformations of local food systems. Adopting an action-research approach, it proposes a framework to be applied to potential case study. Findings reveal significant social needs within the city of Catania, and emphasize the importance of harnessing its territorial potential to develop a food policy grounded in principles of social justice, food welfare, and place-based food systems. The mapping of initiatives within Catania reveals the absence of a formal food policy. Nevertheless, a range of related projects is underway.

Keywords: food policies, sustainability, case study, Italy

INTRODUCTION

Food policies have gained increasing attention in both academic research and local policy planning, largely driven by the growing movement toward more sustainable food systems. Food policies span multiple sectors, including economic development, education, social services, public health, and urban planning, with the goal of building a healthy, sustainable food system, ensuring food security, and enhancing public access to nutritious food. The debate on the need to rethink current food models has progressively developed around the narrative of sustainability [1], which calls for a systemic, holistic, and circular approach capable of integrating the multiple scales and actors involved in food systems [2].

Within this framework, local governments are increasingly called to design and implement food policies through the engagement and empowerment of local communities, citizens, civil society organizations, food movements, the private sector, and diverse food-system stakeholders [3]. In the absence of adequate national