

NEWS

PROJECT

OpenAgri - New Skills
for new Jobs in Peri-
urban Agriculture

📍 Milan, Italy

TOPIC

Jobs and skills in the
local economy

EDIT 13 SEPTEMBER 2019
BY MIGUEL SOUSA, UIA
EXPERT

Promised land, the future of urban consumption - takeaways

See on UIA
website



The Municipality of Milan organised in June a two day event to discuss the future skills, new technologies, narratives and policies with which cities are imagining new relations between production, consumption and sustainability of their agri-food systems. For that, five cities in the process of implementing 5 Urban Innovative Actions projects, Milan (OpenAgri), Madrid (Mares), Maribor (Urban Soil for Food), Pozzuoli (MAC) and Lille (Tast'in Fives) were invited to share the first results of their projects.

Even though food (and its production) is not an explicit topic in UIA, it represents a clear cross-cutting dimension that the five projects are addressing, all with a strong focus on process's sustainability but also its capacity to shape new economies and skills.

Our current food systems are unsustainable and vulnerable by global pressures. Environmental challenges (e.g. climate change, loss of biodiversity, scarcity and degradation of natural resources), combined with increasing social inequalities amplified by poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and urbanisation, are putting serious pressure on cities and their peri-urban interfaces. It is estimated that by 2050, not only will food demand increase, but also over 70% of people will be living in cities. Therefore, future proofing our food systems will require a rethinking of the role of cities as agents of positive change.

In a format of round table, the five projects shared the challenges and learnings of their projects, offering this way to the audience applicable Takeaways that could inspire other urban practitioners.



Takeaway 1 – Cities as change makers –the five cities made evidence of the potential to act as ecosystems of innovation facilitating experimentation and multi-stakeholder engagement, to establish long-term evidence-based strategies that will ultimately ensure safe, healthy, sustainable and nutritious food to their inhabitants and surrounding communities. The five projects are playing a key role in assembling, connecting and supporting food system actors and citizens to build and deliver transformative solutions with real societal impact based on sound science, research and innovation.

Takeaway 2 – Innovation a key ingredient –Innovation turns on talent thus policy should focus on developing, attracting, and retaining talent. This assumption is in line with the Open Badges activity of [OpenAgri](#) that represent a digital way to showcase professional competencies or with the incubator kitchen inside the Food Mares, which allows projects advised by [MARES](#) to test their gastronomic offer in the market, complying with sanitary and hygienic regulations before they invest in their projects as well the social kitchen inside the Halle Gourmande from [Tast'in Fives](#) project. All confirmed that attracting talent and spurring innovation improves quality of place—adding to amenities and ensuring that communities are open to, and inclusive of, talent across the lines of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and sexual orientation. Also, it was made clear that that innovation policy should be defined broadly and not just focus on supporting research and development, patents, or even high-tech startups.

Takeaway 3 – Policymakers as frontrunners –the five projects are implementing innovative and disruptive activities creating new and sound evidence for policy makers in relation to urban food systems in support of policy development. This are being supported by non-traditional policy approaches, with a strong political support and vision, new skills and internal organizational models. Cities are acting as frontrunners towards a new economic paradigm. Although from different angles and with very different local contexts, they all try to build solid ecosystems for growing economic sectors, such as the food sector, to prosper (helping them to anticipate major technological disruptions) while investing on local people and their skills to ensure that they will contribute to and benefit from the new growth. The activities of projects like [Urban Soil for Food](#) are part of the strategy for the transition to circular economy in the Municipality of Maribor, that was adopted by the city council in June 2018. The same happens with the management and exploitation of agriculture land in [Pozzuoli \(MAC\)](#) or with the integration of OpenAgri activities on the Milan wider strategy on Circular Economy.

Takeaway 4 – Community engagement –The five cities, together with rich and diverse groups of local stakeholders are now in the last year of their three years implementation phase. All are implementing activities to promote the reconnection of citizens with food fostering behavioural change towards healthy sustainable diets and nutrition, responsible production and consumption.

The five projects works with open communities of farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, social innovators and others, building new collaborations and networks, allowing the cities to understand innovation, innovators to understand cities, citizens being effectively engaged as users, content providers, service producers and deliverers. These communities enable innovation, social and commercial activities, and showcase the benefits that may be reaped by localities through growing smarter and in a more sustainable manner.

Takeaway 5 – Impact assessment & Sustainability –from the reflections emerged from the round table, Impact assessment & Sustainability, is still an open challenge that projects must face in their last year. The need to develop a model that can combine social objectives with economic sustainability, closely linked to the territory and the need to create a complex system of activities and services that can be sustainable from an economic and financial perspective when Urban Innovative Actions funding comes to an end is still work in progress for the forthcoming months.

The five projects were unanimously convinced that the journey so far has been an incredibly rich learning experience. As mentioned by Mrs. Claudia Capecchi representing Tast'in Fives project, *"Innovating needs margin of action. UIA label give us a magic pass for liberty. Innovating is taking risks. UIA pay for that. Innovating is experiment. UIA is suited to adapt « test & adjust » ongoing processes. Innovating is doing together. UIA provides the agile tools for collaboration between partners. Innovating is showcasing results. UIA pays attention to capitalization and promotion of successes... and failures"*.

The two-day event was an opportunity to draw lessons that will further improve the delivery of the UIA projects, that will be valuable for the five urban authorities in other policy-fields and future projects, and, even more importantly, lessons that can be extremely interesting also for other cities dealing with similar challenges.

Enjoy the video interviews and the photo galleries of the event on the OpenAgri facebook page [Day 1](#) and [Day 2](#)!

Author: Miguel de Sousa, UIA Expert

Food

See on UIA website

