

# Carta di Milano

**Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli,  
Laboratorio Expo**

## **Patto della Scienza: Urban equity**

a cura di S. Vicari, D. Diamantini, E. Colleoni, N. Borrelli

**Contributo n° 23**

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## **Executive summary**

The scientific community has an intellectual duty to question itself on issues of radical importance and the responsibility to identify what is the problem, opening up space for an exchange of ideas and knowledge on the important theme “Feeding the planet”. Several issues are at stake. Firstly, the need to increase the availability of quality food for a growing population, confronting the dynamics of access and distribution of food resources have at a global level and developing production systems that are at the same time both efficient and fair. Secondly, the issue of environmental sustainability: it is crucial to identify solutions that will ensure energy for all, by also questioning the impact that our food preferences have on the environment. Sustainability is concerned with lifestyles, with the territories, with traditions and the multifaceted and ever changing nature of food cultures.

In this socio-economic context, the goal is to identify areas of intervention in which it is urgent to address the challenge of social sustainability: protection of collective goods, redistribution of wealth, new mechanisms of participation; and to support, in a dimension that opposes the dynamics of strongly unequal contemporary growth through social innovation and new forms of urban governance.

From these pressing issues, the researchers involved in the project LabExpo, have identified twelve main questions that need to be addressed in order to move toward a more sustainable planet. These questions are very diverse, ranging from food security to governance practices, and address the many facets of sustainability in contemporary societies.

The main questions are the following:

*Food security*

The latest estimates by the United Nations report that 805 million people are chronically undernourished, thus highlighting food insecurity as a widely spread phenomenon caused by complex issues strictly intertwined with another compromising availability, access, utilization and/or stability of food resources. In order to tackle such issues, single actions taken by stakeholders operating independently are not sufficient, nor effective. Instead, coordination is central to create an environment conducive to the implementation of tailored measures ensuring food security. In this regard, social participation, inclusion of vulnerable groups, and the adoption of an integrated approach taking count of technical, political and social aspects, are paramount. Particularly, agriculture is a game changer in addressing food insecurity and hunger worldwide. Public and private partners at all levels should thus act in concert in order to implement *ad hoc* initiatives both at policy and field level to raise agricultural productivity, promote farm and non-farm activities, strengthen value chains and access to market, reduce vulnerability to environmental crisis and close the gender gap.

#### *Safe and nutritious food for all*

Even when access to food resources is ensured, food security is at risk if those resources are neither nutritious nor safe. Undeniably, all over the world a large portion of the population is dealing with healthy issues related to malnutrition and foodborne diseases. As food safety is strictly dependent on how food is processed, stored and consumed, clearly emerges the necessity of raising awareness, simplifying rules, improving skills and infrastructures, adapting food safety monitoring and management systems in order to guarantee healthy nutritional status worldwide.

Healthy nutritional status is furthermore guarantee by balanced energy and nutrients intake resulting from good care and feeding practices, food preparation, and diversity of the diet. This, combined with the physical activities, determines the nutritional status of individuals. Due to the complex framework,

a systemic approach, as nutrition sensitive agriculture and food system programs, are a sustainable- environmentally and socially - and gender-sensitive answer to re-establish a human healthy nutritional status in synergy with the environment worldwide.

### *The way to future food production*

Since the 1960s world population has grown from three billion to more than seven billion. Such a growth came along with a significant increase in food demand requiring the intensification of production processes that gradually led to the depletion and deterioration of finite natural resources. Fertile soils, water, biodiversity and energy have long been mismanaged, which compromised the sustainability of modern production systems and threatened global food security. The need to rethink, design and implement more environmentally sustainable and socially just production systems is thus getting urgent. In this framework, the agroecologic approach appears promising, as it is based on more biodiverse and resilient production systems less dependent on external inputs. Similarly, a more efficient use of water resources, the implementation of innovative and smart solutions for valuing alternative energy sources and reducing agricultural inputs, the definition of strategies to reduce food waste and the inclusion of consumers in designing sustainable production and consumption patterns are increasingly relevant.

### *Aesthetics of Food and Cultures of the Senses*

Likes and dislikes of food are social constructions shaped through the cultural elaboration of the sensorial experience. Taste is a form of social action through which societies discriminate between friends, enemies and guests, building ethnic, class and gender differences. Their transmission from one generation to the other leads to the awareness of who we are and the memory of what we have been: by mean of them, identities and belongings are defined. The issue of taste is a political one: the homologation and privation processes linked to tasting experience, act as deculturation and dependence patterns. Furthermore,

the impoverishment of tastes is not only due to a simplification of flavors, but also to the loss of symbolic dimension, to the inability of creating meaningful relationships, whether “around the table” as much as by the retailers and the producers as well.

### *Food and Belonging: bodies, territories and agri-cultures*

Patterns of food production and consumption are approached by anthropology as tools of identity construction at the collective as well as at the individual level. Following large-scale industrialization of agriculture and agro-business, food cultures have radically changed in southern and northern countries: a disjuncture has imposed more and more between the farmers or those who produce food, the consumers and their territories, as well as between cultures and ‘agri/cultures’. In this scenario, emergent and innovative patterns of production, distribution and consumption, are redefining the symbolic and collective dimension of food (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale and Des in Italy, Amap in France, seeds banks, rural networks of food security). At the same time a growing number of individuals have become aware of the over determined nature of their alimentary choices and have voiced critical concerns towards the assimilation of aliments void of identitary character, and have embraced a new-found interest in the idea of food as a means to assert identity.

### *Food Heritage*

It is in the category of Intangible Cultural Heritage whose definition is increasingly contested and not adopted by all UNESCO state members that food practices officially enter into the dynamics of heritage institutionalization. Central to the issue of food heritage are the anthropological critics to the notions of *tradition* and *authenticity* as well as the attention given to the process of transmission in the definition of a cultural heritage. Indeed, the challenge posed by the cultural heritage is that of moving from the original etymology of the legal term, which is conceived as private heritage often selectively transmitted from the family through father, towards a notion of cultural heritage



which is shared, recognised, consciously and democratically participated in by everybody.

### *Collective goods*

Common resources have an important redistributive function, being a vehicle for direct and equitable access to important means across all socio-economic strata. They also work as a sort of 'social glue', which can contribute to a group's sense of belonging, cohesiveness and cultural resilience. Collective goods are common-pool resources that are de facto used by specific groups in time and space, namely by collectivities at different levels: local, national, regional, global. Collective goods can comprise a variegated list of tangible and intangible items, around which potential conflicts may arise because the protection of access of one collectivity may stand in contrast – and reduce – the access of another one. Protecting collective goods is crucial for the scope of feeding the planet, yet the challenges to face are many and complex, including large-scale abuses, unclear or unfair definitions of property rights as well as the lack of shared consciousness.

### *Social sustainability*

Inequality is expected to play a major role in the post-2015 development agenda. Situations that create and perpetuate social disadvantage play a major role for access to food and for malnutrition, too. In line with the Human Development Paradigm, social sustainability can be interpreted as the set of circumstances in which large asymmetries of human freedoms and opportunities within and across generations are being avoided. Currently, asymmetries in the world can be traced back to different factors, such as increasing wealth concentrations, inequality of opportunities, or lack of agency and participation. In tackling food insecurity – and in a broader sense social disadvantage – a main challenge is to actively promote shared responsibility: top-down interventions and bottom-up movements involving different actors and complementary actions are both necessary in order to feed the planet.

Responsible consumption and production localize global problems; and changes in institutions, policies and practices can globalize local concerns.

### *Access to energy*

Access to modern energy services, intended as access to electricity and to clean cooking facilities, is a fundamental condition for sustainable development, given its key role in the provision of clean water, sanitation, healthcare, reliable and efficient lighting, heating, food security, mechanical power, transport and telecommunication services. A large share of the global population still lacks access to electricity (1.3 billion) and relies on traditional methods and fuels to cook and heat (2.3 billion), with serious danger for health. Reaching the target of universal access to modern energy, while ensuring environmental sustainability and economic development is a great challenge that involves everybody, at all levels: international organizations, governments, firms, civil society and individuals.

### *Socio-economic development*

Socio-economic development has become an issue because continuous economic growth has come to a halt and there are serious threats of decline and stagnation in many western cities. In general, cities face major difficulties in creating economic opportunities in a framework of high competition, shrinking markets and reduced resources. The contributions collected from experts all over the world point to new forms of production in the postindustrial city, in particular a collaborative mode of production based on the sharing of knowledge and skills, which has begun to emerge in several industries. In envisioning the possibilities of economic development, it is important to take into account the debate about the role of these new forms in the future of urban economies. What is certain is that they are emerging thanks to resources and conditions which are peculiar to cities.

### *Governance*

The urban governance processes are progressively losing democratic dimensions and egalitarian substance because of the asymmetric influence of powerful élites, particularly economic ones. The weakening of representative democracy is causing the disaffection of the ordinary citizen from politics institutions. Politics has become a private affair whereby decisions are made through exchanges of favours between the elected and the lobbies. Alongside these tendencies, number of events, processes and phenomena have emerged that, despite not being prevalent, allow for some countertendencies to be registered, showing seeds of change at different levels in the system of urban governance. Some of these phenomena are connected with new technologies and with the role these can have in facilitating inclusive governance Other phenomena are manifested in politics itself, participatory budgets for instance; others concern the role of non-profit organizations or civic society enterprises that promote activities and services that are not provided by the state; others still are connected to urban social movements.

### *Social cohesion*

The issue of social cohesion concerns the need for the city to overcome disruptive features of our “liquid modernity”, such as fragmentation and individualization, and, more importantly, increasing inequalities, social polarization, marginalization and exclusion. In the face of these disintegrative processes, we discuss emerging practices of social innovation that aim to respond to unmet social needs through the re-organization of socio-spatial relations, the activation and empowerment of individuals and communities, highlighting their potential to resist and counter these exclusionary and socially corrosive trends.

## **In search of the human city**

Feeding the planet means feeding the cities, since the majority of world population today lives in urban areas; as more and more people move from rural areas to urban centers at a sustained rate, this will become even more evident in the future. As a result of these global urbanization trends, feeding cities has become a major challenge. In order to enable sustainable development of the city, health and well-being, cultural diversity and cultural identities, access to nutrition and food security for its inhabitants, we must undertake a complete reconsideration of the entire food system, from the growing and farming of food to its consumption and the subsequent disposal of waste. Cities, particularly in advanced economies, are engaged in food strategies that confront the wide variety of their developmental paths and the different ways in which the economy and society interact. Detroit and New York are the most prominent examples of food policy and the promotion of urban agriculture (Morgan 2009).

The importance of cities, however, goes well beyond the increasing number of people living in them. Cities play a key role in socio-economic development: 67% of the European GDP is generated in the metropolitan regions (i.e. large urban areas with more than 250,000 inhabitants) where 59% of the population lives. At present, cities are engaged in the remaking of political and economic space; it is within major cities and city regions that major transformations have occurred as dynamic reactions to the most recent economic and financial crises and attempts to revive socio-economic development have been devised and implemented. Spatial and social changes reflect the shifting away from manufacturing and real estate as drivers of urban growth to the new, emerging focus on knowledge, innovation, creativity and art in fostering socio-economic development in urban areas (Scott 2008; Storper 2013). As places of production and consumption, cities can be engines of innovation and mines of

opportunities, particularly when mechanisms of integration are at work in sustaining a harmonious development of society and economy.

The idea of “feeding the planet” challenges us to ensure that we build the city along an integrative path, resulting in what we have called “the human city”, a city that can be easily viewed with the “eyes of humanity”, as suggested recently by Amartya K. Sen in his essay on global justice. In contrast, contemporary development trends are increasingly pushing cities away from a path of socially just and sustainable development that could offer a decent life to all city-dwellers; even in cities with a vital economy, we are witnessing a dramatic decoupling of economic growth from social development, resulting in all sorts of problems.

Our goal in what follows is to highlight the main obstacles that prevent the “human city” from flourishing and to identify seeds of change that represent a potential, if not already a definite trend, for transformation in the direction of the human city. Three issues are particularly pressing: a) socio-economic development, b) democratic governance, c) social cohesion.

Socio-economic development has become an issue because continuous economic growth has come to a halt and there are serious threats of decline and stagnation in many cities. In general, cities face major difficulties in creating economic opportunities in a framework of high competition, shrinking markets and reduced resources. The contributions collected from experts all over the world point to new forms of production in the postindustrial city, in particular a collaborative mode of production based on the sharing of knowledge and skills, which has begun to emerge in several industries. In envisioning the possibilities of economic development, it is important to take into account the debate about the role of these new forms in the future of urban economies. What is certain is that they are emerging thanks to resources and conditions which are peculiar to cities.

The issue of democratic governance concerns the need for the city to identify new forms of political participation able to translate citizens' needs into policies and actions. Capacity building, learning and capabilities, accountability and transparency are all issues at stake when discussing forms of democratic and inclusive governance. On the one hand, there is a broad consensus as to the need to open up public decision-making processes and make them more inclusive; ICT technologies are seen as a strategic opportunity to enable such inclusive processes. On the other hand, many processes point to a weakening of democratic foundations and to an evolution toward post-democratic, oligarchic regimes.

The issue of social cohesion concerns the need for the city to overcome disruptive features of our "liquid modernity", such as fragmentation and individualization, and, more importantly, increasing inequalities, social polarization, marginalization and exclusion. In the face of these disintegrative processes, we discuss emerging practices of social innovation that aim to respond to unmet social needs through the re-organization of socio-spatial relations, the activation and empowerment of individuals and communities, highlighting their potential to resist and counter these exclusionary and socially corrosive trends.

### **Social cohesion**

Contemporary societies are affected by increasingly disruptive dynamics whose effects are particularly prominent in cities; these dynamics are set in motion by a very diverse and complex set of economic, political and social factors that in different ways undermine the integration of individuals and groups in society and the collective making and functioning of the city.

Social cohesion concerns society as a whole, at multiple spatial scales, beyond issues of inequality, exclusion and inclusion, and across public, market and voluntary sectors. It has, however, a crucial local dimension: local actors are playing an increasingly important role in determining the mix of formal and

informal services provided by public and private actors, which are integrated in different ways at the local level. It is therefore in cities, where multiple and often conflicting disintegrative dynamics take place, that regional and municipal administrations are called upon to assume increasing responsibility for local development and social cohesion. Having assumed state functions, cities become arenas where decisions on societal issues of crucial importance for social cohesion are taken through more or less democratic decision-making processes (see governance section). On the other hand, cities are also places where innovative solutions to the problems of social cohesion may materialize.

At present, social cohesion is a burning issue because of the failure (or problems in the functioning) of the labor market, the family and social networks, and the state to serve as effective integrative mechanisms.

As far as the labour market is concerned, processes of de-industrialization and de-localisation of production have left cities with high levels of unemployment as a longstanding feature; the experience of unemployment entails a process of social disaffiliation, including low morale and damage to personal confidence and self-esteem, which weakens the individual's sense of community belonging (Ambrosini, Coletto & Guglielmi 2014). Apart from the process of exclusion from work, within the labour market there has been a reduction of wages and a worsening of employment conditions as a result of the competition among cities to attract and retain investment; temporary work contracts, low wages and inferior conditions have become particularly common amongst younger people, female workers and immigrants. This increasingly large set of precarious workers is spatially dispersed in the city and highly diversified; the consequent inability to find effective representation in the public sphere serves to lock them down at the margins of society.

At the same time, the upper level of the social structure has been expanding thanks to the growth of specialized and high-income jobs, mainly brought about by the financialization of urban economies. These two combined processes

have created unprecedented levels of inequality in the contemporary city (Piketty 2014). Polarization and inequality are reflected spatially in terms of segregation; the rise of segregation is revealed by the increasing emergence of areas of deprivation and exclusion alongside privileged areas where public and private investment is concentrated, so that the city has lost its unity and is fragmented into separated “worlds” of very different life experiences and trajectories.

As far as public institutions are concerned, social inequality and different forms of social exclusion have traditionally been contrasted by the provision of public services, such as healthcare and education under universalistic principles. In the present economic crisis, there are much fewer public resources for the welfare system, particularly in relation to increasing demand for social protection. Existing standardized access and provision has proven far from adequate in meeting the growing needs of increasingly diverse social groups whose labor market position and individual demands have become more heterogeneous. Welfare systems today are particularly unable to provide for the fundamental need of housing, while the economic trends outlined above have increased this need, not only for the growing quota of poor families but also for low and middle income groups who face difficulties in paying increasingly high rents and mortgages (Andreotti, Mingione & Polizzi 2012).

Finally, traditional institutions of integration such as family and community have lost their capacity to include individuals into stable and meaningful networks of relationships and well defined identities. The family has traditionally functioned as a protective buffer for the individual due to its capacity to pull together, through the family network, material and immaterial resources in support of its members. As a result of social and demographic trends such as aging, a decreasing number of marriages and births, increase in divorces, decrease in family size, the rise of single-person households, etc., this capacity has been substantially reduced (Saraceno 1998). Furthermore, the increasing flexibility of lives becomes the general trait of modernity, as people more easily and more



often change places, jobs, spouses, values, excluding themselves from traditional networks of support (Bauman 2000). Additionally, local communities are constantly changed by patterns of physical mobility by which individuals lose their sense of belonging to larger collective identities. As social relationships are increasingly characterized by uncertainty, individuals experience increasing isolation, exclusion and disaffiliation from their social context.

*What are the social practices that both enable innovation and increase social cohesion in the city?*

Urban social cohesion has been strengthened by social innovation practices which have emerged as part of the effort to counteract these exclusionary tendencies. Social innovation can be defined as the satisfaction of human needs (unmet by either the market or the state) through the transformation of social relations. For instance, innovative housing practices such as co-housing and self-building represent a response to the crisis of the welfare system (Vranken 2004). Semprebon and Vicari have studied a case of self-building in a small-medium sized town in the metropolitan area of Milan; the self-builders belonged to low-income families of Italian or immigrant origins with no access to the private rental market or the social housing sector; in this case, the sharing of the construction work among participants gave them access to housing. Self-building proved an effective answer to the material need for a dwelling at a below-the-market level. By finding innovative solutions to the problem of housing in large cities through the creation of new social ties, such innovative practices respond to material needs and to the dynamics of social isolation and fragmentation.

Often these innovative practices are able to transform the governance systems that guide and regulate the allocation of resources by establishing new governance structures, such as allocation systems. For instance, urban

agriculture addresses urban food provision and food rights, individual and communal health, urban and peri-urban environmental quality and socio-environmental justice, regardless of the social background of the participants (Tornaghi 2014). Urban agriculture practices have not only been granting access to urban land for the recreational and food production needs of immigrants and other food-insecure populations, but have been systematically challenging the concentration of land, and other inequities embedded in the dominant agriculture and food systems, such as environmental impact, health hazards and the exploitation of workers (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2009).

The emergence (and consolidation during the 2000s) of the so-called Gruppo di Acquisto Solidale (GAS, which could be translated as Solidarity Purchasing Group, or SPG) is a remarkable example of how new practices of consumption can also serve as powerful tools for social cohesion. SPGs are “local networks of people who organize consumption decisions following specific solidarity criteria with respect to the environment (e.g., buying environmentally friendly products, i.e., seasonal, organic, locally manufactured, etc.), to producers (by creating primarily social bonds, they often reduce the profit maximization imperative that guides mainstream capitalism), and to SPG members themselves (by collectively sharing the burden of order and delivery of the products, providing mutual assistance in case of need, tutoring the newcomers, etc.). The main concern is to collectively organize consumption activities by following shared solidarity rules primarily regarding environmental and social justice concerns” (Graziano & Forno 2012, p. 123).

These groups emphasize “solidarity,” promoting greater social and environmental sustainability, by trying to re-embed economics into social relations at the local level and stressing the need to reorganize economic life on the basis of human and social needs (Graziano & Forno, 2012). In doing so, they allow low-income families to access high-quality food while helping to build a new set of relationships among neighbors and with local producers.

Social innovation transforms the social relations in space through the reproduction of place-bound and spatially exchanged identities and culture (Miciukiewicz Moulaert Novy Musterd & Hillier 2012). The increasing diffusion of spaces of making or local laboratories for goods repair speaks of the transformative potential of social relations through the joy of making and the rebuilding and sharing of artisan know-how (Gauntlett, 2011; Sennett 2008). The artisan shared laboratory is a social space that primarily builds social ties among people which allow the sharing of knowledge and skills (Sennett 2008); as such it is also a space where people, by developing the ability to create objects, gain autonomy and recognition.

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