

FOODGAP CHRONICLES



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Circularity, food loss, and waste

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On the 18 February, CIHEAM Bari organized the 3rd FOODGaP online webinar, addressed to cities and practitioners to peer learning, knowledge exchange and nurture a broader Mediterranean community and a regional dialogue on food. The focus of the event was centered on circularity, food loss and food waste as entry point to provide insights on how cities can accelerate the transition from a linear to a circular economy through sustainable public procurement policies, food waste reduction, redistribution and recycling and advocacy to increase resource efficiency, social inclusion, nutritional diets and collaboration. Within food systems, circularity represents a paradigm shift that begins with the prevention of food loss and waste at every stage of the supply chain – from primary production to final consumption – Where surplus is avoidable, and allows a redistribution for human consumption, ensuring that edible food remains within the social economy rather than becoming waste. Instead, when organic residues are inevitable, the objective is not disposal but valorization, e.g. through composting.

Circularity represents also a topic within food governance mechanisms (LOCATELLI). All the speakers confirmed that citizen'agency is not the only lever to reduce or better avoid food waste. Structural and regulatory adjustments to support behavioural changes in purchasing and consumption patterns as well as governance mechanisms, linking citizen-driven organizations, NGOs and the policy sector can not only prevent waste but also ensure the right to food and food equity. Cities, no matter their size, can maximize synergies across sectors where circularity can integrate social inclusion activities of a social restaurant.

At EU level, a network of cities are working on adopting circular solutions with a view of rethinking the food system, generating innovation and strengthening urban economy

Chronicles from the 3rd online workshop - FOODGaP Capacity Building Programme

The 3rd FOODGaP online workshop offered more than a discussion on food loss and waste. It offered concrete experiences of circular food governance in action!



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Policies for sustainable and healthy urban food systems: from understanding to action- Prof. Matteo Vittuari



Matteo Vittuari. University of Bologna- Workshop speaker.

MATTEO VITTUARI is Professor of Agricultural Economics and Policy in the Department of Agricultural and Food Science at the University of Bologna (Italy) and Dean of the School of Agricultural and Food Sciences at ADA University (Azerbaijan). His research focuses on food-system sustainability, with particular attention to food-waste reduction, healthy diets, impact assessment, and policy analysis. His main methodological interests include behavioral-economics approaches to behavior change and life-cycle thinking for sustainability assessment.

Food is not just a mere agricultural or commercial product, but an element that permeates the life of cities and communities, influencing the economy, culture, environment, and well-being. Today, more than half the world's population lives in cities where about **70%** of the global food production is consumed, yet **30%** of it is wasted. At the same time, nearly **40%** of people cannot afford a healthy diet. Furthermore, food systems are responsible for almost **40%** of global greenhouse gas emissions. It is clear that cities are at the heart of the problem, but could be also of the solution through the implementation of effective urban food policies.

In this context, **Prof. Vittuari** mentioned the case study developed with the Emilia Romagna Region (Italy) addressed to food waste reduction in school canteens, through the lenses of public procurement, better meal planning and portion sizes' management. The case study built on a participatory living lab involving schools, teachers, families, cooks, school staff, and actors in the supply chain. The main question was: what if leveraging behavioural changes through small adjustment? The theory of nudging provided the answer: reversing the serving order in schools' canteens demonstrated how children's choices can be unconsciously modified and how small adjustments in everyday routines can produce meaningful changes in the environment and people's health. However, changing behavior also requires ability (skills required, such as meal planning, food preparation, knowing how to store leftovers, etc.) and opportunities (external factors e.g, enough time to cook or access to proper storages). It is not just a matter of behaviour but also structural approaches driven by public regulations can have influence. In a second case presented by prof. Vittuari, emerged that in Tunisia, to overcome bread wastes in Public university food canteens, caused by government subsidies, through tailored behavioral interventions (e.g. awareness raising; portion size reduction)

This is what is happening within the Food Is Never Waste Coalition, focus is aimed at building on the capacity of local stakeholders to mainstream food waste prevention practices, reduction and management, and contribute to scaling-up such practices globally.



“The goal of the UFP is to develop a “roadmap” that helps the city integrate a full spectrum of issues related to urban food systems within a single policy framework that includes all stages, from food production to waste management”

Cuccagna Food Hub: neighborhood-scale food recovery and redistribution- Andrea Calori

The **Cuccagna Food Hub** is an initiative established two years ago that forms part of a broader evolutionary process rooted in the **Covid-19 pandemic**. During that period, Milan – like many other European cities – experienced a rapid shift from a public health crisis to a profound social and food emergency. However, the foundations of this experience predate the pandemic. With the introduction of the **Milan food policy in 2015**, the municipality launched an integrated system of long-term actions at multilevel in collaboration with private and social actors. What began as a localized emergency response—delivering food parcels to over 6,000 families— with the **collaboration of Red Cross and a wide range of social actors**, it has evolved into a more structural model that linked food poverty with the theme of recovery of surpluses. This experience paved the way for nine specialized projects across Milan, ranging from solidarity shops and food stores to community kitchens. The framework is supported by national legislation, particularly the **Gadda Law**, which facilitates the donation of surplus food for social purposes with tax breaks. Within this ecosystem, food hubs act as operational and relational facilitators, helping municipalities build bottom-up local grassroots alliances based on available capacity and continuous institutional dialogue. Thanks to the support of **Prince William's Foundation**, existing hubs were consolidated and new ones were established, as the case of **Cuccagna Food Hub**. The Cuccagna Food Hub, located in the heart of the city, today, it operates through a broad grassroots partnership that brings together organizations not all directly focused on food. These include **Emergency**, which **provides social and health assistance alongside logistical support**; **RECUP**, which **recovers fresh fruit and vegetables from street and wholesale markets**; **ESTà**, which designed the initiative, conducts **analysis**, and **monitor families' levels of satisfaction**; **Gabbiano**, which **works on employment placement for disadvantaged individuals**; and **ACRA**, active in **development education and international cooperation**.

Together, this network has created a **neighborhood-level mechanism for recovering and distributing surplus fresh and canned food**. Access for families is managed through a pre-selection process coordinated by Emergency, which already supports around 150 families through social and health services. Food is provided free of charge, with the explicit **aim of destigmatizing food poverty and assistance**. Volunteers from across the partnership reinforce this approach by promoting **freedom of choice** and offering nutrition education.

Looking ahead, the initiative plans to establish a **community kitchen** to transform surplus food into processed products and to **strengthen job placement pathways for beneficiaries**. The broader objective is to support families in moving beyond food poverty toward addressing wider forms of material and immaterial deprivation.



Andrea Calori, Està. Workshop speaker

ANDREA CALORI - President of ESTà - Economia e Sostenibilità, since the early 1990s has collaborated with local, national, and international institutions (EU, Council of Europe, FAO, UNDP, OECD, etc.), foundations, NGOs, and social networks on local development and sustainable food systems, and has worked on international cooperation projects in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. From 2000 to 2010, he taught territorial policies and local development at the Polytechnic University of Milan. He is one of the co-founders of the Italian Network of Solidarity Economies (2002) and the Italian Network on Local Food Policies (2019). From 2010 to 2015, president of Urgenci, the global association of community-supported agriculture networks, and a member of the Civil Society Mechanism of the FAO's World Committee on Food Security.

“To destigmatize food redistribution, it is essential to place it (also) in “privileged” places in the city: places of architectural and landscape beauty, rich in relationships and culturally vibrant.”



Circular Future: A circular economy model for Municipality of Caprarica di Lecce- Paolo Greco

The “circular economic model” presented by **Paolo Greco** was designed from the desire to build a **food policy** that starts from a small community. **The Municipality of Caprarica di Lecce** is, indeed, a small community particularly focused on entrepreneurial agricultural activity. To address the significant volume of organic waste generated, a **composting plant** financed by Puglia Region was built. The resulting **compost is used as a natural fertiliser** for vegetable production, thereby reducing reliance on external chemical input. The actual purpose is to contribute to a further activity aimed at supplying raw materials to a **social restaurant**. The initiative goes beyond simply redistributing low-cost products close to their expiration date and no longer suitable for sale in supermarket or reducing food waste. It does not only guarantee access to food, but it **creates a welcoming and dignified social environment** where people can share meals together. Around **40 people** regularly participate in these social lunches, which **foster a tangible sense of community and belonging**.

However, the composting plant has received additional funding from **Fondazione CON IL SUD** to increase its operational capacity and overall productivity. The main actors involved in the project are **Comunità Futura**, which manages both the social restaurant and the composting plant, and the **Consorzio Maieutica**, which is responsible for waste management and treatment. Such an initiative, ensures comprehensive management of the organic fraction of municipal waste, contributing to waste reduction and limiting the exploitation of virgin resources through the use of locally produced compost. The system is further strengthened by the use of renewable energy—primarily photovoltaic power—and water reuse mechanisms. Therefore, besides easing the environmental pressure, the project generates economic value for implementing a self-sufficient production cycle that by reinvesting organic waste into local agricultural production, the municipality significantly reduces procurement costs while strengthening local supply chains.

This creates a virtuous cycle that connects waste management, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, moving beyond the logic of disposal to embrace the regeneration of resources.

FUTURE IS HERE, IT'S NOW, IT'S TOGETHER, IT'S CIRCULAR



Paolo Greco, former mayor of Caprarica

Paolo Greco is an Italian lawyer. Legal Consultants for major Italian and international companies operating in Libya and North Africa. He served as Of Counsel to Amereller Legal Consultants and ITER Advisory Team. He was Mayor of Caprarica di Lecce from 2016 to 2025, overseeing significant public works and local development initiatives. He also served as Vice President of the National Association of Olive Oil Cities and later as Provincial Councillor for Transport and Agriculture.

Less reliance on the exploitation of virgin resources and greater emphasis on building a virtuous cycle based on environmentally sustainable practices and social equity



Circular Cities Declaration: European cities in network: circular solutions to rethink the food system- Erica Locatelli

Erica Locatelli- ICLEI - Workshop DSpeaker

Erica Locatelli is an impact-oriented sustainability professional focusing on circular economy solutions and stakeholder engagement. As a circular economy expert at ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, Erica supports cities and regions in driving a circular transition by reducing resources and energy use, waste, and emissions.

“Circularity means rethinking the economy to reduce waste and resource use. Break apart the relation between resource consumption and economic growth.”



Linear model of production and consumption accounts for 50% of global greenhouse gas emissions and 90% of biodiversity loss. Given that cities are responsible for **70% of global emissions and 50% of global waste**, they are viewed as key levers for change in sectors such as waste management, energy, and water. From the EU-funded project **City Loops**, focused on circular economy solutions, it was created an inclusive network supported by a wide range of organizations in Europe that work in the field. **The Circular City Declaration (CCD)**, instead, offer the framework that support cities to transition from linear to a circular economy. The main objective is to express and strengthen the cities' shared commitment through a **common vision of “circular cities.”** This means ensuring that cities endorse the concept of circularity and recognize their pivotal role in driving transition at the local level. The network also collaborates with European initiatives such as the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (**CCRI**), which runs a twinning programme and the **European Investment Bank**, which provides mentoring support to help cities design circular strategies, identify priority projects, and secure financing. Indeed, signatories should follow **10 commitments**, which are: the definition of an integrated circular strategy; integration of circularity into urban planning; local stakeholders engagement, promotion of sustainable production and consumption models; circularization of priority flows (such as construction and food), prevention of food waste and recycle surpluses, access European funding or innovative tools to support the transition, measure and monitor progress, promote innovation and mutual learning, and dissemination of the culture of circularity. To support cities in their transition and encourage their active engagement, the network provides **regular newsletters, thematic webinars, and a dedicated web platform where each city showcases its projects' progresses.** With the same objective, cities can also participate, on a voluntary base, to the **biennial reporting.** Indeed, by signing the Declaration, local governments are provided with **political momentum** to formalize circular strategies and **inspiration** through good practices exchange and expert-led capacity building. It also provides opportunities to **increase visibility** at major **international events** and on the **media.** It encourages the **exchange of contacts** while providing **preferential access** to funding, consultancy, and to EU-funded projects. Currently comprising **92 cities**—mainly from Spain in the Mediterranean area—the network prioritizes food waste prevention and, when unavoidable, its valorization for human consumption or organic recovery. Concrete examples of food waste prevention and valorization when For instance, **Matosinhos, Portugal**, implements the "Dose Certa" project to optimize portion sizes and train staff in the food service sector. In **Bruges, Belgium**, the "De Voedselploeg" platform redistributes supermarket food surpluses to social organizations, addressing both food loss and social poverty. Other cities focus on valorization, such as **Copenhagen, Denmark**, which converts collected food waste into biogas for the national grid, and **Braga, Portugal**, which transforms bio-waste from large producers into organic fertilizer while providing free composters to its citizens.

Conclusion

The 3rd FOODGaP online workshop underscored that a sustainable future for urban food systems requires a systemic, circular transition, with local authorities acting as the primary architects. This circularity is not merely technical; it is deeply intertwined with social justice, proactive prevention, and a shift in public attitudes. Ultimately, the workshop proved that international cooperation is the essential catalyst for this change. By bridging local leadership with global expertise, cities can finally translate high-level commitments into concrete, circular realities. The concluding Q&A session, led by Francesca Volpe was centered on two fundamental questions: **Should we mitigate the symptoms of food loss and waste (FLW) or dismantle their root causes?** Erica Locattelli stressed that the answer to the question depends on what circularity means. For ICLEI, the priority is to prevent food waste. Use as few resources as possible and prevent food waste as much as possible. **Andrea Calori**, on the other hand, states that institutions can't do everything alone and that there must be **co-planning with socio-economic stakeholders** when it comes to implementing local food policies. The second question was: **what type of knowledge exchange should be recommended to improve collaboration between different policymakers.** **Andrea** affirms that the problem is often the **lack of useful data**. Given the multidisciplinary nature of food poverty, therefore, from a co-design perspective, we should build locally exchangeable and shareable information. **Erica** adds that **the exchange can also be qualitative**. It's important to exchange best practices, identified challenges, and how they have solved these problems.

CIHEAM Bari Team

