# ATLANTE DEL CIBO DELLA LAGUNA DI VENEZIA: TOWARDS A FOOD POLICY FOR THE VENICE LAGOON (1126)

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**Abstract.** Food systems and food-related policies are gaining unprecedented recognition in planning, advocating for more integrated practices: food is both a system subject to contemporary global transformations, and a territorial and urban flow capable of transforming the environment, economy, and society. Moreover, there is a renewed interest in food-related bottom-up practices, which imposes to take into account issues related to collective forms of knowledge production, exchange and extraction.

This contribution reflects on the process of designing the Food Atlas of the Venice Lagoon as an attempt to give voice to the multiplicity of stakeholders and to non-human agents of the Venice Lagoon. The Atlas calls attention to the existing network of bottom-up practices while stressing the urgency for an effective food policy for the Venice Lagoon, to test transdisciplinary, integrated methodologies that intersect local – human and non-human – actors and collectively produce food policies in the muds of practice.

**Keywords:** Venice Lagoon, Food Policy, Living Lab, Food Atlas.

## 1. Introduction

Food is acquiring increasing relevance in spatial governance tools, because of a widespread understanding of the food system as a territorial and urban flow able to transform the environment, economy, and society. Evidence of this recognition can be found in the multiplication of European programs to reorient agricultural production models, free market rules and trade agreements, the design of logistics and mobility infrastructures as well as commercial platforms. Those programs often set goals related to land consumption and water, energy and waste flows management.

Observing the three pillars of the new urban question, outlined by Bernardo Secchi (2010) – environmental threat, social injustice, and accessibility crisis – when looked at through the lens of food, they reveal specific criticalities and challenges for the city and the territory: pollution of natural resources, ecosystem fragility, loss of biodiversity; food injustice, power imbalances along the supply chain, health risks; energy crisis, scale of

distribution, conditioning of logistics (Figure 1).

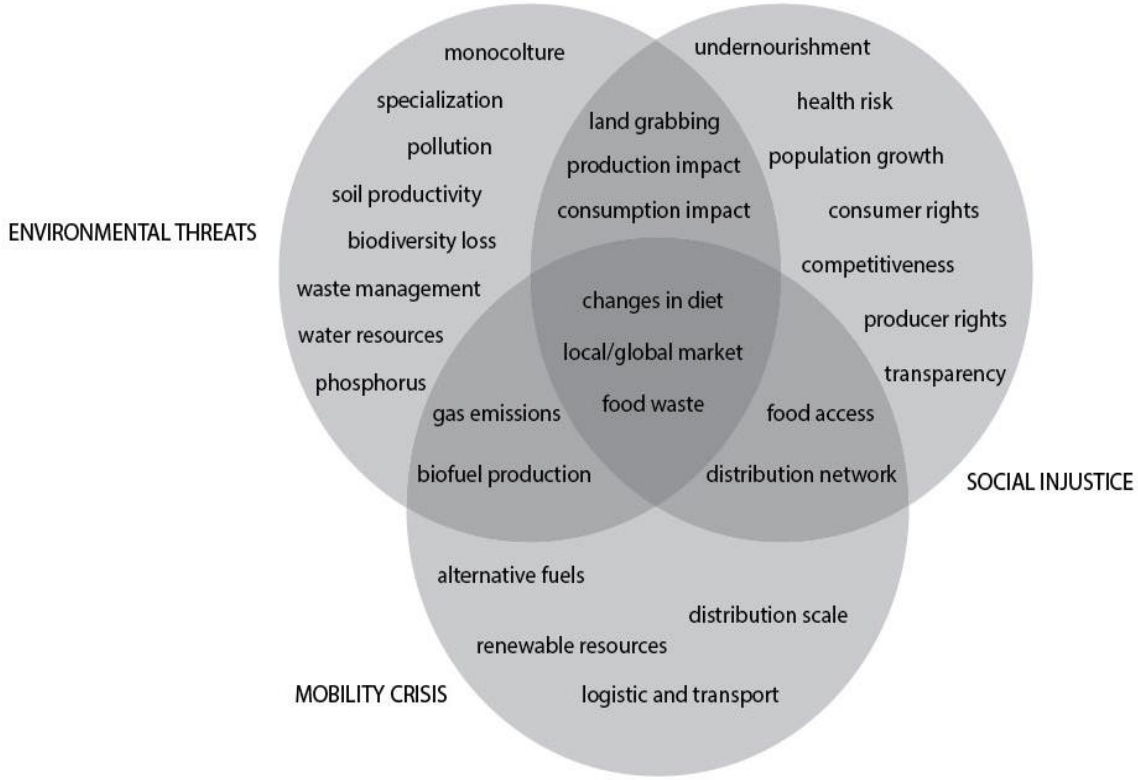


Figure 1. Food related issues, at the intersection of environmental threats, social injustice, and mobility crisis, the three aspects of Secchi's New Urban Question theory
Source: M. De Marchi (2018).

Food forces us to look at urgent challenges and local needs (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000), such as public health, social equity and the process of transition taking place in contemporary territories. To tackle those urgent challenges literature focuses on *food systems* – i.e. 'the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management, as well as all the associated regulatory institutions' (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000, p. 113). Recently, City Region Food System have emerged as the territorial scale able to

> 'encompass the complex network of actors, processes and relationships to do geographical region that includes a more or less concentrated urban centre and its surrounding peri-urban and rural hinterland; a regional landscape across which flows of people, goods and ecosystem services are managed' (FAO, 2017).

Scholars tend to converge in interpreting city region food systems as the appropriate scale, able to include all the phases, spaces, infrastructure and socio-economic territorial relations inside the complex system of the supply chain (Blay-Palmer *et al.*, 2018).

Despite the vagueness of city region food system in addressing what *food's spaces* are highlighted by some scholars (Tecco *et al.*, 2017), food systems, as they consist in a set of practices and processes, can reveal unprecedented geographies of place and flows, useful for deciphering the territory whose logic of operation we increasingly struggle to understand. In this sense *Local Territorial Food System* (ibid.) are an interpretative tool and spatial dimension able to analytically represent the local food system as a network of agents able to mobilise: (i) local resources that are commonly recognized (e.g. soil fertility, specialised productions, local identities and international recognition connected to high quality eno-gastronomy); (ii) energies and potential projects existing in different territorial contexts that can be activated and lead to a (at least partial) local regulation of the local food system.

Food is thus a driver for looking at complexity, a transcalar tool that manages to hold together everyday practices, space and global processes. And planning for the local food systems inevitably implies a trans-sectoral and trans-versal perspective that is needed to design integrated projects, in which, environment, economy, community and innovation merge (Fanfani *et al.*, 2015). Exploring and planning for the food systems, can thus produce integrated and innovative tools and strategies that act in a complex context unveiling unexpected alliances and potentials.

To explore this potentials, we propose to look at an extremely peculiar territorial context, that of the Venetian lagoon (fig. 2), which also has a relevant historical legacy in terms of food resource production and management, since for centuries the city was able to rely on its lagoon to achieve a very high level of food autonomy (Pitteri, 2015). At the same time, Venice and its lagoon suffer anthropogenic and environmental pressures that threaten the whole socio-ecosystemic balance of the territory: climate and environmental crisis; production, commercial and tourism pressures; social fragilities (De Marchi, 2020b; Vianello, 2020).

Figure 2. The Venice Lagoon. The dry land is in white, the light grey lines represent the land mobility network, the darker lines the surface water network, in light grey the water surfaces and in dark grey the network of waterways

The lagoon of Venice is a potentially self-sufficient territory, rich in food culture and variety, with a still strong food-related economy whose food security does not seem to be in danger; however, the city is threatened by global issues such as climate change, migration flows, and the availability of fresh water and energy resources, all variables that can impact its food system. It has even strong dysfunctions within its food system in terms of social and spatial justice and in terms of economic and territorial resilience. It underestimates, in some cases, its own potential in terms of economic and social innovation that in the future could, if properly developed, ensure and improve not only food security, but also the optimal use of resources, the balance of power among system actors, the protection of landscapes and the environment, and gastronomic cultural identity.

Almost thirty years after being proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site (1987), the city of Venice signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (2015). A recognition and a commitment that, however, failed to develop a serious reflection on a different future

for Venice and its Lagoon.

Today, if we dwell on the food system of this complex *aquapelago* (Hayward, 2012) we can hardly trace the supply chains that in the past made it almost completely food-self-sufficient. Indeed, the Lagoon seems to find itself at the centre of two opposing and complementary forces: on one hand, the high demand for food from mass tourism is putting a strain on the competitiveness of the island's small producers. On the other, the few inhabitants remaining in the historical centre no longer seem to be the main consumer to be catered for. In this context, cultural initiatives about the foodscape of the Venetian Lagoon have multiplied in recent years, even becoming very fashionable, but perhaps not very effective in terms of awareness-raising and policy-making.

However, those initiatives claim for the recognition of food as a transversal tool that allows us to reconnect 'to the tidal and seasonal time of the lagoon, to re-attune to the specific ecology of a constantly changing place' (Perdibon, 2023, p. 60). In this sense, they represent an innovative *milieu* of bottom-up practices trying to re-engage the Venice Lagoon Food System with its political representatives and human and non-human inhabitants of the lagoon.

Such an operation of restoring old linkages as much as creating new ones within the Venice Lagoon food system comes on top of a context already undermined by a conflictual relation between the civil society, the experts and the public administration and a generalised disbelief toward the effectiveness of citizen participation (Foster and Iaione, 2016).

In this challenging panorama we question how to collectively develop transdisciplinary integrated methodologies to intersect local – human and non-human – actors and collectively produce food policies while dealing with a complex context and its contradictions.

In search for new tools and instruments, we – a multidisciplinary team from IUAV University and Ca' Foscari University involved in the EU funded project Cities2030 – are developing the "Atlante del Cibo della Laguna di Venezia", i.e. the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas, by using several participatory methods and dealing with contingent resources. This contribution discusses the potential role of active citizens in the transition of food systems (par. 02); presents the result of the first student and community workshop held in summer 2022 in the Venice Lagoon (par. 03); and drives critical reflections upon the workshop results and our actions in consideration of open critical issues that relate to participatory processes and the role of experts in the lagoon. Conclusion (par. 04) will outline partial results and highlight the critical elements of practising in the muds of the Venice lagoon as well as working perspectives for the design of the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas.

## 2. Bottom-up(s): Participatory planning and proactive forms of citizenship toward sustainable food systems.

The strong – yet not naive – connection between the concept of *local* and food policies and planning practices (Born and Purcell, 2006) sustained the establishment of a bioregional approach in which place-based processes aimed at developing (bio)economies could evolve together with a wide set of sustainable goals, including community self-reliance and resilience design (Norgaard, 1994; Thayer, 2012; Magnaghi, 2014). According to Fanfani et al. '[i]n such a prospect food production recovery or enhancement practices often represent the 'generative' factor in triggering and supporting bottom-up processes of agri-urban spaces protection, stewardship and improvement.' (2015, p. 146).

This relation between food and bottom-up processes is a biunivocal one.

On the one hand, if we assume that food is a territorial and urban flow able to discuss multiple contemporary challenges (De Marchi, 2020a), *the food issue* represents an evocative tool to organise broader socio-environmental claims and bottom-up practices addressing the regeneration of fragile and vulnerable territories.

On the other hand, we can interpret bottom-up practices as self-organised and co-produced initiatives addressing sustainable and equitable transformations that can trigger empowerment and self-sufficiency among the involved communities. They drive accumulation of individual and collective knowledge used to face continuous struggles and develop endurance in vulnerable contexts (Allen et al. 2017) and they are potentially able to challenge power and economic relationships from which social and environmental vulnerability can emerge (Catalanotti, Prisco and Visconti, 2020). In this sense, socio-environmental claims carry a very specific local knowledge related – for what regard us – to food systems and territories that help in readdressing local policies and might trigger political responsiveness lacking in the Venice Lagoon.

Not just focusing on food policies, there is nowadays a shared recognition of the role that bottom-up processes and socio-environmental claims can play in the design of policies and territorial and urban plans and projects, which has recently brought to the definition of more effective design and policy instruments at the intersection of the formal and the informal (Pacchi, 2020).

As Campagnari and Ranzini (2022) note, the growing horizontality of social and – in some cases – political relations among actors (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) led to the emergence of reticular and project-oriented governance systems as a way to design and implement public policies. This system has been reinforced by a renewed interest of the (civil) society toward the spaces we inhabit (Bang, 2005; Manzini, 2018).

Such emerging forms of dialogue between bottom-up initiatives and local administrations can be also described as collaboration and co-production policies to define and share the management of public/communal goods and/or the co-production of services (Allegretti *et al.*, 2021). They relate to a set of recent, experimental and innovative policies born with the aim of including a wider range of citizens in decision-making processes at the local level, i.e. participatory processes and practices.

Food-related bottom-up practices, as any other participatory processes, are not without their challenges and criticalities. The process of transition from the bottom-up niches to the mainstream urban and territorial policies has been deeply examined to highlight challenges and threats that lay both in the (i) institutionalisation mechanisms of bottom-up initiatives and in the (ii) objectives of citizen participation.

The former is a process of production of norms, protocols and procedures (De Leonardis, 2001; Salet, 2018) incipient in every social situation that endures in time (Gualini, 2001) and that allows the reproduction of those situations. Main risks for socio-environmental claims lay in the loss of transformative stances (Catalanotti, Prisco and Visconti, 2020; Pacchi, 2020).

The latter refers to a multiplicity of possible critics related to the uses and misuses of participation as a tool for conflict resolution, both in terms of *who* can participate – only those who can afford it and that feel empowered enough (Mitlin and Thompson, 1995; Cornwall, 2003) –, and in terms of *why* governments can promote participation to legitimate choices, often being ineffective and, thus, enlarging the lack of trust between public institutions and citizens (Petrescu and Petcou, 2013; Foster and Iaione, 2016). While the main risk lies in the potential manipulation of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Petrescu and Petcou, 2013; Coppola, 2023), several critical elements related to the uses of participatory processes should be highlighted.

In particular, Coppola (2023) highlights that participation can challenge existing orders by incorporating previously marginalised knowledge coming from socio-environmental claims into decision-making processes and thus disrupting the dominant discourses and epistemic orders. It can also (i) aim to shift power dynamics by giving voice to marginalised groups and weakening the influence of more powerful actors, or (ii) re-legitimize political institutions and establish partnerships between the political class and civil society.

However, Coppola (ibidem) specifically refers to an extractivist approach toward the ways in which we use participation and involve bottom-up practices and agents in order to grasp their local knowledge to *produce innovation through a laboratorial approach* without producing any change in power relations and epistemic orders. The diffusion of so-called lab-like forms (such as urban living labs) generally oriented towards addressing emerging issues, such as environmental and climate-related problems, is based on the

idea that deep and accelerated innovations are needed to tackle these issues. These participation techniques allow to extract specialised knowledge essentially for free, leveraging the desire for distinction, recognition, and protagonism among urban populations who possess this knowledge. In this case, the rationale for participation is innovation, and these practices are legitimised not so much for explicitly seeking to disrupt the epistemic order of a given policy, but rather because such participation allows for innovation.

These forms of participation raise different questions and issues when promoted and appropriated by public actors, researchers and practitioners, such as the risk of a "solutionist" approach to inherently political problems or excessive emphasis on the process as a guarantee of desirable outcomes.

Concluding this brief excursus about the relation between food policies and bottom up practices, with a specific attention to challenges and risks related to the inclusion of local communities and innovative processes, we can now sink into the swampy lowlands of practice – the first steps of producing the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas. The aim is to understand how to design an integrated instrument to intersect local actors (researchers, economic actors, government, civil society and the non-humans) to collectively produce a food policy for the Venice Lagoon toward more inclusive, sustainable and resilient futures.

## 3. The Venice lagoon food atlas: A participatory and experimental living lab approach toward food policies

Despite the mentioned concerns, living lab methodology is commonly considered a tool to foster innovation (Bergvall-Kareborn and Stahlbrost, 2009; Almirall, Lee and Wareham, 2012; Concilio, De Bonis and Trapani, 2012), also through the involvement of active citizens. Moving from this hypothesis, several projects funded by the European Union are working to set up living labs[2], also in regard to food policies. In fact, within the Food2030 strategy – the EU programme addressing Urban Food System (UFS) transformation in the period 2014-2020 – several projects were financed not only to foster a sustainable transition of existing food systems, but also to develop UFS policies and to produce innovation, often by using a multistakeholder approach represented by Living Labs[3].

Within this panorama, there is the project 'Cities2030 Co-creating Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems towards Food2030', funded by the European Union Horizon2020 programme. Iuav University is partner of Cities 2030 and, together with Ca'

[2] For an overview on Living Labs in Europe, see: https://enoll.org/.

[3] See, for example, the Fusilli Project: https://fusilli-project.eu/.

Foscari University, is engaged in the activation of living and policy labs in the Venice Lagoon.

Cities2030's main objective is to develop new food policies capable of reorienting existing systems towards more sustainable, resilient and fair models. The project promotes the involvement of all stakeholder groups and actors engaged in the food system arena, through the installation of urban Policy (PL) and Living Lab (LL) (Almirall et al., 2012; Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2009) at the scale of the city region food system (CRFS Labs). According to the methodology agreed upon by the project partners, during the funding period (2021-2024), partners have to address the construction of urban policies and pilot projects able to trigger innovation processes in the city-region food system(s).

Exploration, co-creation, implementation and evaluation are central concepts that guide the planning of local objectives and actions. In addition to that, the production of actionable and transferable solutions are also expected.

As partner of Cities2030, Iuav University proposed the Venice Lagoon as a case study and a testing bed for the project. Reasons for this proposal lay in the complex physical and political environment of the Venice Lagoon. As mentioned above, the City of Venice signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in 2015, but such a formal act was never followed by a programmatic agenda, even though several sectoral initiatives have been launched by the public administrations part of the Venice Lagoon[4]. Moreover, the unique and non-repeatable situation that iconically represents, concentrates and accelerates contemporary socio-environmental challenges, as well as the high demand for fresh food products induced by overtourism and the vulnerable wetland ecosystem, call for an innovative approach to drive change which, according to the CRFS methodology, proposed by Cities2030, is the setting up of a Living and Policy lab.

To activate the Living Lab, the first needed activity is to explore the food system of the lagoon. To do so, a multidisciplinary team of researchers from the Iuav University and Ca' Foscari University launched the project of the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas, as a process of collaborative mapping of the local food system able to collect and promote innovation[5].

In Italy, several Food Atlases have been developed in recent years to map local food systems. Those initiatives are often developed within the Italian Local Food Policies Network, a group of almost 500 academics, researchers, administrators and activists involved, for research or professional purposes, in the planning of sustainable territorial

[4] The Venice Lagoon has a very complex administrative organisation; it includes 1 metropolitan city (The Metropolitan City of Venice), of which 9 municipalities overlook the lagoon, and 1 more municipality that belongs to the Padua province.

[5] See, for example, the case of Turin (https://atlantedelcibo.it/) and Matera (http://www.atlantedelcibomatera.it/intro).

food systems. The Atlases are proposed as a fundamental tool for representation of the pretexts, contexts and effects of the local food policies within the National Observatory of the Food Atlases, initiated by the Network.

Food Atlases are commonly open and interactive tools that can collect data and information on the food system, but also highlight innovative bottom-up experiences and promote new local food policies. In line with this perspective, the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas aims to be a governance tool that not only collects data about the local food system but also produces innovation by fostering interaction among local citizens and institutions, to support the city in reorienting more resiliently and justly its food system.

The Venice Lagoon Food Atlas wishes to engage multiple forms of knowledge to act on spatial transformations and policy design. It aims at bridging multiple disciplines (social sciences, economics, spatial planning, environmental sciences, biology etc.) and situated knowledge to explore potential innovations. Its ambition is to connect the actors of the food arena, producing a participatory platform based on collective knowledge and practices. The Atlas, as part of the living lab that is being set up, recognizes the existence of niches of innovation and forms of experiential knowledge not collected and deposited within traditionals scientific research; it also aims at uncovering micro-stories that challenge traditional forms of participatory planning to include emerging and marginalised communities.

The process of making the Atlas consists of several activities that range from public seminars and workshops to pedagogical experiments that involve university students to intercept existing local networks of citizen scientists operating in the Venice lagoon, not only in the food system but in and on the entire ecosystem. In parallel with mapping activities, we use the methodologies of oral history, moving around the islands of this *aquapelago* (Hayward, 2012) to collect the voices of those who live in the Venetian territory and who work there with land, with water, with other animals. We include vegetable growers, fishermen, beekeepers, for example, but also cooks, researchers who deal with these issues, responsible consumers involved in Solidarity Purchasing Groups, and other, human and non-human, hybrid combinations of these activities.

### 3.1. Cibo E Laguna. Towards An Atlas: A Pedagogical Experiment And A Community Workshop

To launch the process of making the Atlas and engaging the inhabitants of the lagoon, in June 2022, we organised a workshop for university students on food issues, in collaboration with the M9 Museo del Novecento in Mestre,

The workshop ‘Cibo e Laguna. Towards an Atlas’ aimed at both investigating the complex food system of the Venice Lagoon – defining places, spaces, actors and flows’ circularity

– and prompting the active participation of actors in the food arena during moments of collective discussion and fieldwork.

The workshop was organised by Marta De Marchi (Iuav), Amina Chouairi (Iuav), Chiara Spadaro (Ca' Foscari) and Cristina Catalanotti (Iuav) with prof. Maria Chiara Tosi (Iuav), prof. Francesco Vallerani (Ca' Foscari) and prof. Shaul Bassi (Ca' Foscari)

Figure 3. Exploration of the Northern Lagoon, 28 June - Participants with Anna Sarzetto in Valle Falconera

Source photo by A. Chouairi.

The main questions that drove the quest where: What is an atlas? What is a food atlas? What elements and forms should the Food Atlas of the Venice Lagoon take?

To answer them, participants were invited to investigate characteristics, topics, categories, subdivisions, descriptive mappings while acknowledging and assimilating virtuous examples of atlases. The goal was to start drafting and building up the complex reasoning behind a territorial food atlas of the Venice Lagoon.

To engage the microcosm of practices and local human and non-human actors, we invited participants to explore food microstories in the Venice Lagoon area. Participants were asked to discover and narrate origins, cultivation processes, infrastructures,

environments, interactions of products and producers, consumers, restaurants and hotels, supply chains, food tourisms, institutions, municipalities and consortia etc. within the Venice Lagoon. The goal was to map and describe parts of the food territory and its dynamics through a palimpsest of lectures, seminars, on site exploration and exchange with local actors.

This, in consideration of the differences and the variety of situations in the Venice Lagoon. Thus, the explorative surveys (28-29 June) were organised in order to understand the different dynamics in the Northern lagoon and in the Southern Lagoon (Figure 3).

Figure 4. Exploration of the Northern Lagoon, 28 June - on board with chef Marco Bravetti 'Tocia! Cucina e Comunità'

Source: photo by C. Spadaro.

After introducing the concept of Food Atlas and presenting several examples, students and tutors moved to the exploration of the Northern Lagoon (28 June), travelling across

the small islands where agricultural and fishing practices deal with changing temperatures, water levels, salinity (Figure 4).[6] We engaged in discussions with local organic food producers (I&S Farm, Sant'Erasmo) and citizens associations experimenting with sustainable and resilient agricultural practices as well as alternative products such as essential oils and fermented products (AtlantiDee, Sant'Erasmo) (fig. 5). The third stopover was to Valle Falconera, a small island privately owned and recently restored as an agricultural productive land, a fishing valley and a slow-tourism facility. Together we sailed through the northern lagoon with Marco Bravetti, chef and founder of 'Tocia! Cucina e Comunità', a local association and interdisciplinary research platform.[7] He prepared several dishes that interpreted the lagoon environment and its history; according to Tocia! concept, the meal is a relational journey with the territory that involves listening, observing, and discovering raw materials with one's own body and the stories of those who cultivate, harvest, and transform them. Eating represents a collective learning practice and circular exchange of knowledge in which you enter by sitting at the table (Spadaro, 2023).

Figure 5. Exploration of the Northern Lagoon, 28 June - with Savino Cimarosto in

[6] Lecture "On Food Atlases" with Alessia Toldo (Politecnico di Torino), Mariavaleria Mininni (University of Basilicata) and Ida Presta (University of Basilicata).

[7] *Tocia* in venetian dialect is the imperative form of the verb *tocìare*, *intingere* in italian and to soak in english. In venetian dialect, this term is commonly used to refer to the eating practice of soaking a piece of bread in the sauce left on a plate, collecting it.

Sant'Erasmo
Source: photo by A. Chouairi.

The second exploratory survey (29 June) was conducted in the Southern Lagoon, focusing on fish production and trading (fig. 6). Among several visits, a meeting was held with representatives from the fish wholesale market of Chioggia, one of the most relevant hubs for the fish supply chain in Italy, where contemporary issues related to fishing – such as the presence of fish, the presence of new alien species, tools and fishing methods, global supply chains – coexist with ancient practices and traditions such as the silent auction.[8]

Figure 6. Exploration of the Southern Lagoon, 29 June - with Daniel Tiozzo, Matteo Grego, Aldino Padoan, Daniele Tiozzo, Marco Spinadin, and Elio Dall'acqua
Source: photo by A. Chouairi.

Also, on 30 June 2022 a roundtable to meet representatives of institutions involved in sectoral food-related projects was organised to intercept the public administrations (City of Venice and the Metropolitan City of Venice that formally are still two separate entities) and the president of the Venice professional association of farmers (Coldiretti Venezia).

First results of the explorations and meetings were furtherly discussed with Lili Carr (Feral Atlas Collective), an architect with a background in the natural sciences, previously

[8] To the Museum of Adriatic Zoology G. Olivi, managed by the University of Padova and to the bivalve breeding facility Crame

involved in the Feral Atlas project.[9] The aim of this encounter was to collectively reflect about non-traditional Atlases as well as to investigate how food (atlases) and microstories are related to global dynamics and can, thus, be used to describe contemporary challenges.

In addition to lectures from relevant scholars, on-site explorations and meetings with institutional stakeholders, a public programme of lectures open to all citizens (and also tourists) was organised. The lectures were set in the open-air cloister of Iuav's main building, in the city centre, with the aim of bringing the themes of the workshop reserved for students into a broad, open and active discussion with the inhabitants. A second objective was to delve into some study topics on lagoon dynamics, starting for instance from some recently published books, or from the narrations of the work of some Venetians involved in different ways in the protection of the lagoon landscape – from food, geographical, cultural or socio-economic perspective.

Thus, during the public programme conversations, we talked about fishing with researchers Alberto Barausse (University of Padua) and Camilla Bertolini (Ca' Foscari University) and with the venetian photographer Paolo della Corte; about the countryside, starting from the book "I piaceri della villa", by Francesco Vallerani (Ca' Foscari University); of the possibilities of narrating lagoon life through drawings, with venetian illustrators Luigi Divari and Simone Carraro (fig. 7); of seeds, with cheffe Chiara Pavan (Venissa restaurant, in Mazzorbo) and farmer Andrea Giubilato. A chorus of voices that showed an even different approach to the study of the lagoon landscape, and offered new insights into its food planning.

The intimate nature of these dialogues facilitated an exchange between those present, activating positive discussions. On the other hand, these meetings were less attended than expected, and mainly by young students. It will therefore be necessary to rethink some aspects of the public conversations – e.g. the time (the meetings were held at 6.30 p.m.), or the advertising of them –, in order to be able to repeat them with greater participation but preserving the possibility to discuss together.

[9] See: https://feralatlas.org/

Figure 7. Participants with venetian illustrators Luigi Divari and Simone Carraro
Source: photo by A. Chouairi.

### 3.2. Outputs of the workshop. Reflections in action.

During the Summer School we questioned what an Atlas is, what a Food Atlas is and what a Food Atlas for the Venice Lagoon is. In order to answer those questions students and researchers worked in the field to build a resonant food map (Spadaro, 2023) using many different tools and instruments.[10]

After thirteen days, students and researchers identified several elements – products as wine, producers as bees, processes as horticulture and packaging, etc., – entangled in the food supply chains able to describe the city-region food system also in terms of cycles, resources and values. To summarise results of the work done within the summer school, we highlighted challenges and threats, starting objects or products, values, benefits, entanglements, water, objectives and invited contributors and events (Figure 8).

[10] In fact, the Summer School aimed at a disciplinary origin as heterogeneous as possible, also in order to promote final hybrid materials (maps, drawings, sketches, photographs and collages, videos, interviews, sound recordings, etc.), supporting the drafting of the Atlas.

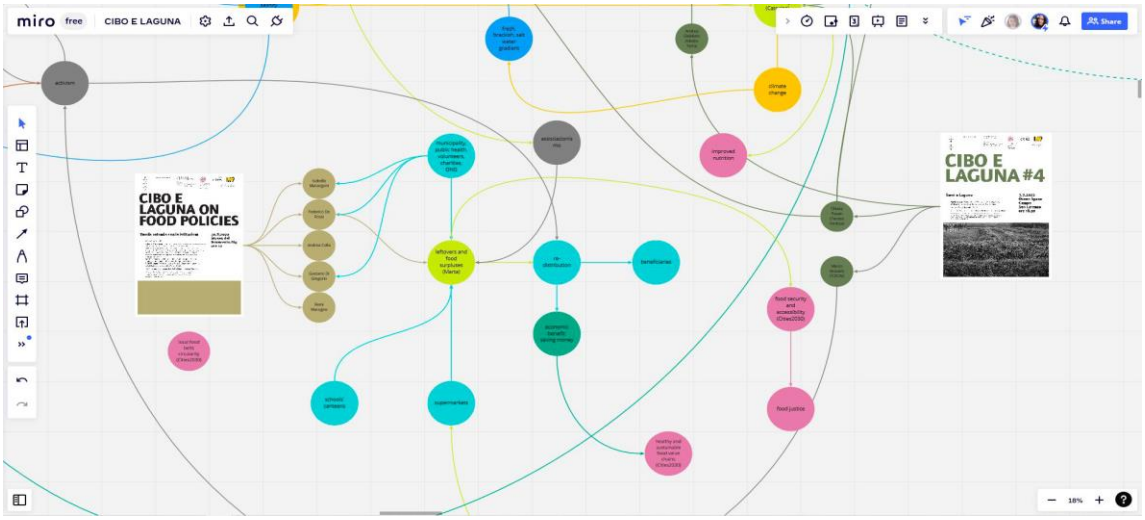


Figure 8. A graphic summary of the workshop outputs, highlighting: challenges and threats (yellow); starting objects or products (light green); values (grey); benefits (dark green); entanglements (light blue); water (dark blue); objectives (pink); invited contributors and events (public program and rountables).

Throughout the workshop, we started tracing names and competences of a growing community of people – cultural institutions and citizen associations, artists, researchers, producers, prosumers, technicians and political representatives – interested in the food issue and actively involved in the debate about food. They develop practices and projects that focus on food both as an objective (to produce and access more healthy, environmentally sustainable and just food) and as a tool (to develop more sustainable and resilient systems able to tackle poverty and climate change).

Thanks to such a composite picture, we reinforced the understanding of the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas as a shared platform able to describe not only contexts in which food is produced, processed, consumed and distributed, but also material and non-material flows in which it is embedded and that food itself influences.

> ‘The meal on your plate is more than just nourishment: it is an emissary from another world – a place we still call ‘countryside’, yet one that rarely resembles the bucolic paradise of our imagination. […] Whether or not we realise it, our bodies, homes, cities and landscapes are all shaped by food.’ (Steel, 2019, p. 1077).

Thus, the preliminary investigations of the Venice Lagoon food system highlights that food is an interpretative lens able to describe unprecedented geographies as well as material and non material flows; to reconnect with food also in terms of planning policies could help in designing policies and plans able to pay attention and develop

collective knowledge to several contemporary challenges related, e.g., to soil, water, health, climate change, biodiversity, social justice.

The flows and the objects identified by the participants, in fact, serve as microstories to detect conflicts and tensions whose value is related to local and global, environmental, social and economic dynamics. In this sense, food helps us in mapping vertical and horizontal power relations between social groups, humans and non-humans, as it happens for the wine production in the Venice lagoon or for the EPS boxes used to store fish[11].

Interestingly enough, most of the objects and products identified during the workshop are related to flows; in this sense, one of the main achievements of the workshop was to overcome the linear approach to the food system that can, sometimes, be determined by the study of supply chains (from production to consumption).

The workshop results highlighted three sets of keywords that might drive the design of the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas: Boat-market-table to reveal the physical implications and spatial scales of food flows; Salt-water-soil to understand how variations in their presence or absence shape the lagoon food landscape; Seasonality-movement-resources to frame the strict interdependence among changing climate factors, connections and products' availability. Any further attempt to work on an integrated model of planning through food should also take into account issues related to some categories that were not directly taken into account during the workshop: Waste and surplus; Care and social justice; Traditions and rituals.

If the aim was to answer what a Venice Lagoon Food Atlas could be, the summer school setted a starting point in the design of a platform for discussion that looks at the food objective and as a mean to plan for sustainable and resilient territories, in a governance process that is able to look at the multiplicity of the lagoon's human and more-than-human inhabitants.

The Atlas poses itself as the platform to collectively develop a new language, moving from on-going experiments and existing agents that are already addressing the food issue in the territory through the voice of careful producers, artists, cultural institutions, researchers.
The works produced during this initial phase were able to describe some of the objects and products part of the Venice Lagoon Food System, as well as the intricate entanglement of values, resources, challenges and possibilities.

[11] Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) is a lightweight synthetic material used in packing and packaging. EPS boxes are waterproof and ensure product protection by keeping it cold and in hygienic conditions.

### 3.3. The involvement of bottom-up practices and cultural institutions. Reflections upon actions.

With regard to the multiplicity of actors involved in the workshop, during the site visits and the public program, we intercepted a panorama of small scale entrepreneurs, researchers, cultural institutions, artists, and bottom-up practices aimed at restoring, improving and protecting the fragile balance of the lagunar ecosystem. They represent a pro-active milieu of humans involved in the Venice Lagoon food-system undertaking a dialogue with other economic actors and public institutions.

Notably this dialogue tends to bypass the local scale to engage with global actors; this is made possible by the peculiar condition of Venice, which allows local practices to enter global networks normally inaccessible in a small town with less than 50.000 residents (as Venice historical city).

Throughout the public program and several communicative actions (e.g. the Instagram page of the workshop, @towardsanatlas), we also welcomed interested citizens who joined students and researchers in open seminars.

We also intercepted – and started a dialogue with – bigger economic actors and representatives from the local administration of the city of Venice and the Metropolitan City of Venice.

With both groups, we used those meetings not just to map and understand the food system but to test their interest in building a longer term conversation about a Venice Lagoon food policy. In other words, the workshop represented an engagement tool addressing the activation of the Living Lab and the production of a co-designed local food policy in the long term.

This operation was fertile in producing a conversation with the bottom-up: the interactions with local innovative and experimental practices, cultural institutions and researchers kept going on in the following months and has resulted in the organisation of additional public encounters, students activities and a new summer school which will be held in summer 2023. On the other side, the relationship with public institutions and larger scale economic actors is still uncertain, this due both to the complex administrative geography of the lagoon and to the necessity to engage at a political level with the Metropolitan City of Venice.

With regard to the participatory approach, some additional consideration can be done in order to address possible challenges highlighted within the literature (paragraph 02).

We said that food-related bottom-up practices can address the regeneration of fragile territories and empower communities, challenging power and economic relationships and that there is a recognition of the role of bottom-up processes and socio-environmental claims in policy and planning, leading to the emergence of collaborative

governance systems and to the experimentation of several participatory techniques aimed at including a larger variety of stakeholders within design processes. Yet, this approach comes with several challenges associated with participation: (i) institutionalisation mechanisms of bottom-up initiatives; (ii) potential manipulation of participation done by government and local administrations; (iii) the possibility of undertaking a solutionist approach, where participatory processes focus solely on finding technical solutions to complex political problems; (iv) the incorporation of local knowledge into decision-making processes without actually disrupting power dynamics or challenging dominant discourses that until now have resulted in multiple crisis.

We did not directly take into account the first two points, but we have largely included the last two in the preliminary phases of designing the Atlas. On one hand, as it results from the previous descriptions and consideration, we constantly keep in mind the necessity of undertaking a political debate, even though – at this stage – it seems a hard-to-achieve objective. On the other hand we have constantly interpreted the Atlas as a platform for discussion, more than a fixed, material object, which could serve the communities and that could be informed, appropriated and transformed by all those who were involved in its production. While those considerations appear now still programmatic, it is also true that they informed both the organisation of the workshop and the production of its outputs: in fact, the Atlas promotes a transdisciplinary approach and recognizes situated knowledge and, thus, the summer school included students coming from diverse disciplines and backgrounds. Researches were collected by using an online and open source workspace and visual platform, and were composed by hybrid materials (maps, drawings, sketches, photographs and collages, videos, interviews, sound recordings, etc.), supporting the first compilation of the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas.

In addition to that, the laboratorial attitude is demanded by the fact that the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas is part of the activities of the Cities2030 project, yet we constantly kept in mind that our aim was not only to grasp knowledge from the participants – in an extractive way – but to initiate a dialogue with the actors of the local food system, and integrate different knowledge and experiences. The main conceptual shift, driven from the workshop, is the recognition of an existing community of practices and practitioners involved in the Venice Lagoon Food System composed also by us: this understanding somehow disrupts the boundaries between experts (we are all experts) and citizens, to recognize a community of inhabitants of the Venice Lagoon that involves students, permanent and temporary residents with diverse expertises, scholars, non-human actors.

## 4. Conclusions - reflection upon actions and working perspectives

The collective construction of the Venice Lagoon Food Atlas is a process that has only

just begun, and is a continuing activity of the living lab proposed by Iuav for the Cities2030 project. The main objective of the working group is to consolidate the relationships and networks activated in the lagoon and to continue developing and publicise the Atlas beyond the period funded by the European Community.

In this first phase, therefore, the main results obtained are:

- the identification of certain characteristics that this Atlas should have: not only an archive of technical-scientific information, but also a place to store old and new situated knowledge, collected by, with and for the inhabitants of the lagoon;
- the recognition of an innovative role for a food atlas: not only a collection of information and data, but a tool for dialogue between different parts of society and the food arena, as well as a key for the empowerment of situated communities in the light of a possible development of a local food policy;
- the progressive awareness, among inhabitants and institutions but also among young people and students, that dealing with food does not only concern cultural and heritage aspects, but also makes it possible to become aware of the dysfunctions linked to the way we produce and feed ourselves and the effects that the current food system has on the society and the environment.

The Atlas, understood therefore as a tool facilitating confrontation between the parties participating in the food system arena, can extend its meaning and become a place or platform for enhancing and promoting forms of social innovation and exchange between actors and agents. In this sense, the Atlas is more than a container of knowledge; it becomes a concrete lever to activate the Living Lab and constitute a fulcrum around which the many activities, actions, ideas and experimentations currently at play in the Venice lagoon are organised, confronted and known.

The effort to search for and recognise innovative forms in the lagoon landscape, however, runs the risk of excluding mainstream models which, even with their criticalities, constitute the most widespread and consolidated condition of the current food system. It is therefore necessary to control a research approach that is too oriented towards the 'small and unique', but above all it is necessary to make the two scales (innovation niches and mainstream models) dialogue so that each can benefit from the comparison with the other, in a mutual growth that can enrich entrepreneurial, as well as environmental, biodiversity.

The ambition of this working group is that the situated communities can progressively take ownership of the Atlas tool, continuing to implement it and bring it to life, recognising it as a mirror of the territory within which each is represented.

To achieve this further objective, a number of activities are planned for the coming months: to continue public activities at local events and neighbourhood fairs, in order to

reach more people and make the Atlas known; to continue the campaign of collecting voices, experiences, ideas and projects to enrich the knowledge base built up so far; to dialogue with other ongoing Food Atlas experiences to exchange methodologies, approaches and strategies and strengthen this tool.

Also in dialogue with "Lagoon Atlas", a geoportal with much geographical information on the Lagoon[12], this new Atlas will draw an unprecedented food geography of the ways in which the Venice Lagoon ecosystem is involved in food production, distribution, marketing, consumption, waste and recycling. A map to make us more responsible, and active, towards its protection and future history.

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[12] See https://www.atlantedellalaguna.it/.

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