

THE URBAN FOOD STRATEGY ACCORDING TO THE NEW TERRITORIAL DIVISION IN ALBANIA

Edlira Llazo (PhD), Violeta Neza (PhD)

University "A.Moisiu", Durrës, Albania

ABSTRACT

Albanian agriculture and especially the albanian farmer are experiencing a difficult situation with the ability to compete in the market. Albanian agriculture is a very important sector of the economy but with little contribution in the economic growth, due to a misorientation in the market of the albanian production. This study aims to adress some concerns and to open a discussion linked to the urban food strategy as an instrument that would help to rivitalize lokal economy . This instrument can be usefull to the new administrative units, creating benefits for stakeholders .This paper is based on the wide literature and on the experience of the more developed countires also referring to primary data.

Keywords: agriculture, urban, consumer, food strategy

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in Albania is one of the most important sectors of economy even though today it doesn't contribute enough in the GDP. The difficult transition of this sector in the process of transformation to a free market economy has been very long. In this context, food is rising up urban agendas and stakeholders at the local level – from the public, private, and civil society sectors – are reasserting responsibility for food policy. Food plays a unique role in sustaining human life, since we all need to eat! And food is connected with a wide range of municipal and regional policy areas: from land-use planning to infrastructure and transport, environmental conservation, housing and economic development. Food, then, can be a vehicle to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, as well as for addressing justice and health issues at different geographies and scales, including cities.

We refer to the term ‘urban food strategy’ as a process consisting of how a city envisions change in its food system, and how it strives towards this change. UFS aim to place food on the urban agenda, capitalizing on efforts made by existing actors and creating synergistic effects by linking different stakeholder groups.

The discussion of this topic in countries like Albania takes a bigger importance. Albania is a country where the agricultural sector is one of the most important of the Albanian economy even though it doesn't contribute as much as it should yet. As of the new territorial reform Albania is separated in 61 civic centers and in each of them there are rural and urban centers. The creation of a strategy in between the rural and the urban is a must for a stabilized development in these new administrative units.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban planners might justify this 'puzzling omission' by claiming that the food system is largely a rural issue and therefore beyond the scope of the urban planning agenda. But there are two reasons as to why this argument fails to provide a convincing explanation. Firstly, the multifunctional character of the food system means that it has profound effects on a host of other sectors — including public health, social justice, energy, water, land, transport and economic development — and these are all sectors in which planners are deemed to have a legitimate interest (Morgan, K. 2009)

Secondly, the notion that food production is an exclusively rural activity fails to appreciate the significance of urban agriculture, an activity that never disappeared in the hungry cities of the global south and one which is re-appearing in the more sustainable cities of the global north, where urban designers are re-imagining 'the city as a farm' (Viljoen, 2005). Whatever the reasons for it, this 'puzzling omission' is now a matter of historical interest only because, for the foreseeable future, food planning looks set to become an important and legitimate part of the planning agenda in developed and developing countries alike. Planners now find themselves addressing food policy for one very simple reason: their political masters have been forced to treat food policy more seriously because of the new food equation (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). The new food equation refers to a number of new and highly complex developments, the most important of which are the following

1. The food price surge of 2007–08, when global wheat prices nearly doubled and rice prices nearly tripled, forcing hitherto secure social classes into food insecurity, a condition which already afflicts some 2 billion people;
2. Food security has become a national security issue after the food price surge triggered food riots in more than sixty countries around the world, forcing the G8 leaders to convene their first ever food summit in 2009;
3. Climate change effects, in the form of water and heat stress, damaged eco-systems and rising sea-levels for example, are expected to be worse in the poorest countries, the very countries that have done least to cause the problem of global warming;

4. Land conflicts are escalating as rich but food-stressed countries (like Saudi Arabia and South Korea) seek to buy up fertile land in Africa and Asia to ensure their own food security, fuelling charges of a new colonialism;
5. Rapid urbanization means that cities are becoming more conscious about how they feed themselves because, given their sensitivity to food shortages, they are the most politically combustible areas in every country (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010).

UFS in Europe deal with a similar range of themes, although they might have different drivers and different priorities depending on their local context. In this regard they try to integrate the vertical dimension of the food system (i.e. different stages of the food chain) with the horizontal dimension, (i.e. the different thematic fields where food can have an impact). By and large UFS deal with the following thematic fields: • Health and wellbeing (e.g. improve the health of the population as a whole, increase the welfare of society at large • Environment (reduce negative environmental impacts of the food system, e.g. reducing carbon emissions, being more energy efficient) • Economy and community development (support a vibrant local economy, green economy, e.g. by supporting local growers, retailers, markets, and employment) • Social and cultural aspects (support resilient, close-knit communities, food-friendly neighborhoods, e.g. by celebrating and promoting local food culture).

Food policy, in other words, naturally segues into these wider causes because food has a unique status in our lives: far from being just another ‘industry’, like autos, steel or software, the agri-food sector is unique because we ingest its products. For this reason the agri-food sector is critically important to human health and well being and this is why it is intrinsically significant to human functioning rather than merely instrumentally significant (Sen, 1999).

Numbers show that agriculture takes 17% of the national GDP with a growing trend of contribution of the sector in the national economy, which in the last 5 years is calculated averagely 4% per year. According to Census 2011, in Albania for the first time urban population becomes 53.5% compared to the rural that today makes 46.5% of the total population in Albania. This phenomenon is linked surely to the difficult transition that the sector of agriculture has lived through. This affects directly the rural population and as the aftermath is the inner and outer migration and the urbanization phenomenon leaving the agricultural activities for the industrial ones and services. However agriculture is still the most important in employment of the rural population as it employs almost half of the work force in Albania. Referring to statistics, earth as the main resource of this sector has a distribution like this: 24% of the general area in Albania is considered agricultural land and around 75% of the hilly lands as well as mountains where even a certain amount of the agricultural land is hilly. The agricultural land around 43% of it is concentrated in the western lowlands. Around 34% of agricultural land lays in river valleys and

23% of it in mountainous areas. However the limited amount of agricultural lands, Albania owns a favorable position in relation with trading opportunities and has also favorable climatic conditions for the development of agriculture what makes us think that agriculture must be one of the prior sectors that will help the economic development of the country.

The new administrative division has created 61 civic centers that are divided in rural and urban territory. With these new administrative units it is understood a territorial space where is an interaction between the inhabitants and institutions for economic, social, cultural and developing purposes. Functional zone is organized around an urban center that has the biggest population compared to other centers inside the zone and has opportunities in offering a big variety of public services that a local unit has to offer. In this context urban food systems may be an instrument that will make the economic, social and natural potentials move a little.

Actual Albanian food systems are in a chaotic situation. The retail is dominated by municipal markets that are badly managed where the local products are not fairly competed from the imported ones. Lack of information about the product, the way its produced, various labeling or place of origin make the consumer face unhealthy products and often uncontrolled. Local authorities don't have a food strategy and don't interfere with their politics in this field even though it is a very important activity for the local economy.

The growth of the food planning movement in developed and developing countries has undoubtedly helped to humanize and localize the food system, not least by stressing such quality control mechanisms as provenance, traceability and trust, all of which have been debased by the 'placeless landscapes' of the agri-business sector (Morgan et al., 2006). But however laudable it may seem, localization creates two big political problems for the food planning community. The first concerns the localism of the movement. If local focus is one of the strengths of the food planning community, it is also one of its weaknesses because, in terms of the politics of power, highly localized campaigns cannot leverage political support at national level as their influence is too fragmented and thus too diffuse to register. To overcome this problem, local food planning movements would need to orchestrate themselves in such a way as to secure the twin benefits of a national organization — that is to say, being small enough to control locally yet being part of something big enough to make a difference beyond the locality (Morgan et al., 2006). For this reason the agri-food sector is critically important to human health and well being and this is why it is intrinsically significant to human functioning rather than merely instrumentally significant (Sen, 1999).

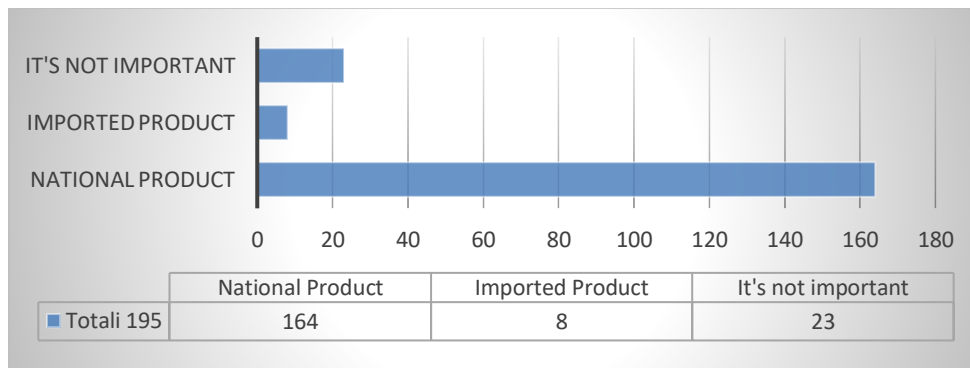
STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to open an important debate about an important concept as is urban food strategy. The study aims to observe the existent literature of this topic, to examine how these food strategies can be adapted in the Albanian context. The new territorial division creates new challenges for the development of local economies and needs the use of new developing instruments and politics. The study also wants to point out consumers concerns about food and how can urban food strategies address some of the problems that the consumers show.

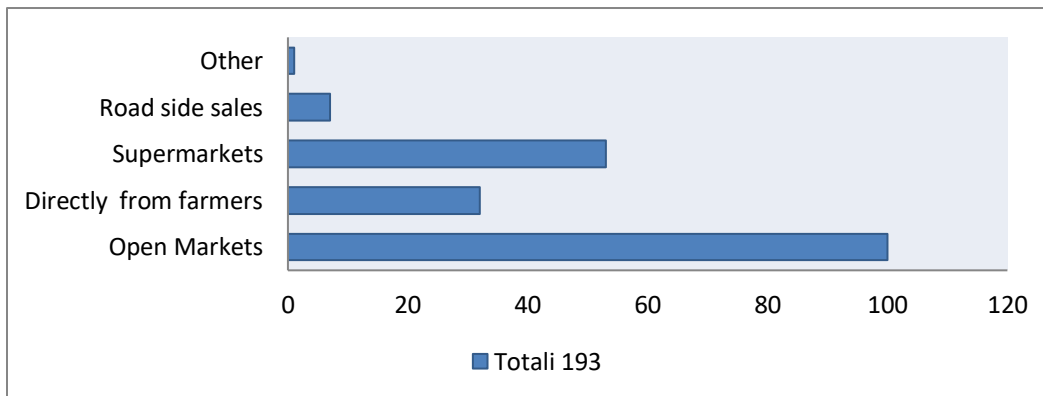
PROCEDURE

Primary data for this study was obtained through a face to face survey of 195 Albanian costumers who live in Tirana and Durrës. This is the most populated area, who live almost 1/3 of the Albanian population. We conducted the survey between 15 October and 30 November, 2016. The survey instrument contained questions related to respondents behavior, attitudes. A sample of households was selected randomly, and the interviews were made near some of the biggest agricultural markets and supermarkets where the consumers buy these kinds of products to be more sure that the respondents were the primary food shopper for the household.

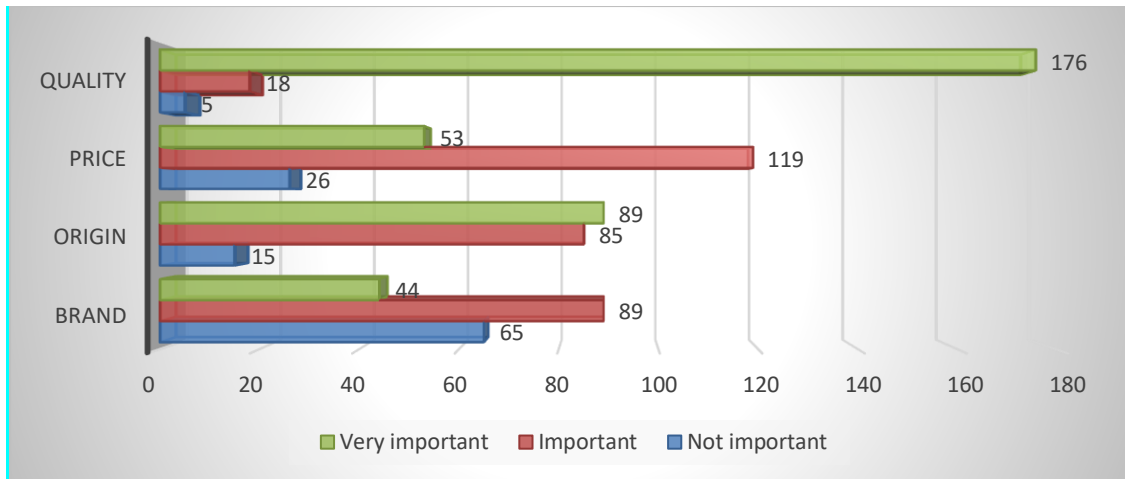
1. When you buy agricultural products, which do you prefer?



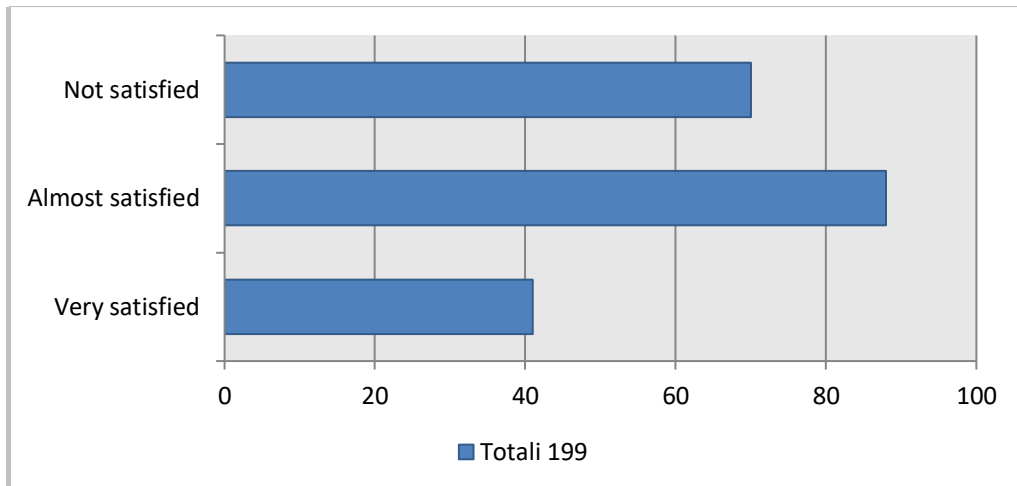
2. Where do you usually buy agricultural products?



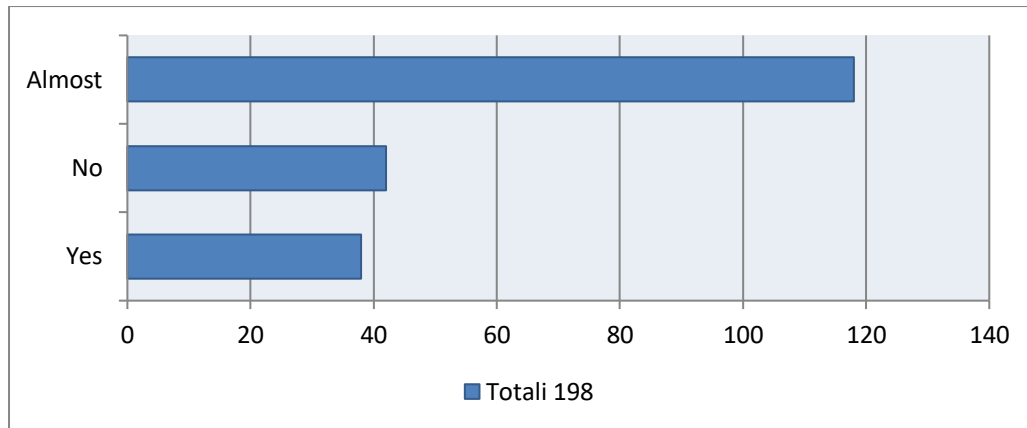
3. When you buy agricultural products, how important are to you personally these products:



4. Are you content with the agricultural products that you consume?



5. Do you feel safe health-wise about the agricultural products that you consume?



DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire point out an inappropriate situation of the distribution of the agricultural products distribution. They show a preference of the consumers for local products and in the same time a big concern over food safety of these products. These results open a debate over food systems that actually exist in Albania. Agricultural products the imported ones as well as local are distributed through some collection centers in open markets that are frequented by a big part of the urban population, in supermarkets or in other small shops. In these selling units are traded even the imported products and the information of the food origin is missing as well as they don't contain any label for other attributes like organic, local or others. On the other hand Albanian farmers face big difficulties in selling their products with fair prices, as a very small part of the price turns back to the farmer. The local product finds it really hard to compete in these existing food systems.

All said above brings a need to create urban food strategies that will help the local farmers to have a more favorable position in the distribution canal, will help in a regeneration of local economy. The last one is a necessity to create a synergy among rural and urban zones which is a must for a steady development of the new administrative units. The local administration in these units may affect the orientation of the food systems through different instruments like:

- Public Procurement: Through these the buying force can be oriented towards for example a healthier product, local product, organic product etc.
- Territorial/Spacial/Planning: Short distances between urban and rural areas in Albanian administrative units make the periurban agricultural development possible. On the other

hand this also helps various forms of short food supply chain develop by creating local farmers markets that will better link the urban consumer with the local product.

- Communal infrastructure: This is linked to the creation from the local administration of infrastructure to help the farmers with storage facilities, fairs or refrigerating centers that would create facilities for short food supply chain.

CONCLUSION

The new territorial division makes it necessary for new politics to liven the local economy. Agriculture is still one of the most important sectors to these economies as they take up urban and rural spaces. The powerful cities that are well-oriented through good politics can generate a big purchasing power and develop the local economy. New territories created from the administrative reform create opportunities for sustainable food production.

Another important aspect that came from the study is also the need of the consumers to have much more control in the decision-making process and of a big importance is the possibility to have reliable information of the food origin, way of production etc, information that would preferably come from the producer. The full information of the product lowers the risk in buying and decision-making. The chances to have a fuller information and more reliable are much better in short food supply chains where the contact with the producer is in most cases direct.

Urban food strategies should aim:

- Improvement of the position of farmers within the food chain;
- Food security and quality at affordable prices;
- Better connection at local and regional level between producers and consumers (local food systems);
- Preservation of the diversity of farm production systems and farm structures including smaller and disadvantaged farms;
- Increased support for organic production

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