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GOOD PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOOD POLICIES

Case
Study

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Abstract

The paper, based on the coordinates of the problems triggered by the negative externalities chain generated by the poor food supply and production system at the level of the urban collectivities, carries out an analysis focused on the identification of the tools, mechanisms, and good practices needed to ensure the sustainability of the local policies on public nutrition. The experiences in the field show that the progress is remarkable in the case of collaborative administrations aimed at enhancing the cooperation and partnership relations, based on common interests, on both internal and international collaboration level, such as The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (2015). From this perspective, the paper presents a case study, a significant experience of improving the food supply system of Bucharest population, through local public nutrition policy and the public action set implemented by Bucharest local authorities with the support of State public bodies and the representatives of civil society, materialized in the establishment of peasant markets as flea markets on the territory of Bucharest.

INTRODUCTION

Since its initiation in 1970 ⁽¹⁾ by the World Federation of Twin Towns (FMOI) ⁽²⁾, the decentralized cooperation has been understood as an alternative to the failure of the traditional cooperation (central cooperation embraced by the government), opening the path for a durable cooperation platform between entities and, in the alternative, for the transfer of *good practices* to ensure the sustainability of local policies.

The decentralized cooperation is governed by a series of official texts of certain international and national bodies at EU level, as the incidental legal framework contains many levels as defined by the Council of Europe ⁽³⁾, the European Union and the national one.

The decentralized cooperation offers the possibility of direct participation of communities and peoples in international action ⁽⁴⁾, recognizing, for the local public authorities, the right of cooperation for development as an international policy instrument, which has traditionally been seen as an exclusive preserve of national governments.

In this context of internationalization, at EU level, local authorities play an increasingly important role, with a multitude of local entities characterized by distinct roles, attributions and competences within decentralized cooperation, including: *local and regional public authorities authorities, as well as other public entities enjoying relative autonomy [...]; associations and local groups such as cooperatives [...]; NGOs, civil associations and other types of associations [...]; savings houses, credit and mutual funds; academic structures and defense of human rights; SMEs, etc.* (Abraham, L.D., 2008).

If in the past the decentralized cooperation was characterized by donor-acceptor asymmetric relationships (form of support for development and fight against poverty), relations are now horizontal, of *equality and reciprocity* between partners, allowing exchanges of experience and knowledge and reciprocal support.

The direct relationships established between the authorities allow, with a view to the coordinated implementation of public actions, the cooptation within a wide range of mechanisms (associations, clusters, forums, work networks, etc.) and other categories of actors (universities, NGOs, public institutions etc.) but the legal responsibility lies with local authorities (Manda, CC, Nicolescu, CE, 2014).

This type of cooperation is no longer just a reflection of the participation of the local authorities at international level, but is appreciated by municipalities as a cross-cutting objective of their local policies.

It is also the case of Bucharest, an urban community active in the partnership with other

administrative-territorial units in the international sphere, as evidenced by the 31 agreements signed by Bucharest between 1993 and 2015 (Minca, ML, 2015) and the participation as a full rights member in a significant number of international organizations, such as: *The World Association of Major Metropolises (METROPOLIS)* – since 1991, *The World e-Governments Organization of Cities and Local Governments (WeGO)* – since 2012; *Città de Bio* – since 2014; *Major Cities of Europe – the ITC Users Group* – since 2014 etc.

From a larger number of active agreements we mention the Cooperation Agreement with Vienna, the Cooperation Agreement with Rome, the Twinning Agreement with Beijing, the Twinning and Cooperation Agreement with Ankara, the Cooperation Agreement with Istanbul and the Memorandum with Seoul. (*Idem*, 2015).

SUSTAINABLE URBAN POLICIES FOR PUBLIC FOOD PROVISION

The local authorities are particularly interested in the major scientific advances in the direction of ensuring a healthy and carcinogenic-free diet for the people, which will lead to the conversion of the current food model based on long-distance and fossil fuel transport of the food as it derives from gigantic control – over 80% - of global food trade in the hands of only five international multinational companies (Toharia, M., 2015).

The phenomenon of urbanization accounted for more than half of the world's population (*Idem*, 2015), with cities becoming more and more involved in their actions in favor of public health, the environment, the quality of life and the sustainable economy.

The existence or absence of a sustainable supply (food production and distribution) system with food used by local authorities has a direct impact on diminishing or favoring the emergence of serious socio-economic and environmental problems such as hunger, malnutrition, pollution, etc. Moreover, the poor quality of food and diet patterns is one of the main causes of the increase in the incidence of serious illnesses.

Urban food supply generally encounters a number of *barriers*, including: *lack of infrastructure* to supply, *social heterogeneity* (increased inequalities in population incomes, minimum monthly consumption basket higher than the minimum wage in the economy, etc.), *waste of food, pollution* and so on.

The cumulus of obstacles triggers a *domino effect*, leading to the phenomenon of exclusion of a significant part of the urban population, segmentation of markets and polarized product differences (in terms of quantity, quality, and price).

Aware of the negative externalities generated by poor food systems and trying to identify *common sustainable food policies*, at Expo Milan 2015, under the global theme “Feeding the Earth, Energy for Life”, 113 cities from all over the world (including Bucharest) signed on October 15, 2015, “The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact”, which emphasizes the central role of cities in food policy development (European Parliament, 2016).

The Pact, signed under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the UN, involves a firm commitment from the authorities of the signatory cities „to develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimise waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting and mitigating impacts of climate change” (The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2016).

This pact has further encouraged local authorities to identify and implement public actions and regulatory mechanisms to increase people's access to food such as, for example, the harmonization of urban development with the development of small local food producers, with particular emphasis on the joint venture of the food supply system with agro-food production. These actions have led to covering certain market niches, mainly developing trade in handicraft and organic products.

Depending on the instruments used, local food supply policies fall into the following categories: *regulatory policies* (use of public spaces involving partnerships with traders and producers), *competitive regulatory policies* (between traders), *offset policies* (free or subsidized distribution for combating hunger and malnutrition), and *emergency policies*, thus recognizing the importance of analyzing the link between the public intervention and the civil society (partnerships with private agencies, interinstitutional coordination with NGOs, etc.), their degree of decentralization and the coverage of the follow-up programs (Maluf, RS , 1999).

THE PEASANT MARKETS (AS FLEA MARKETS) IN BUCHAREST: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

This paper presents as a case study the positive impact of the Cooperation Agreement between the Bucharest and Rome Municipality on the sustainable development of the *public food policy* implemented by the Bucharest authorities and subsequently, the improvement of the *consumption model* of the population in Bucharest.

At the same time, the research highlights the challenges, the adopted measures and the lessons learned by the Bucharest municipality that

administers the interests of the largest urban territorial community in Romania.

The city of Bucharest has a triple status: the largest *Urban Agglomeration* of the country (it has structural relations with its neighbors, holds the 1st rank in the national network of localities, it covers 10% of the total population of Romania in the center of the Agglomeration), an *European Metropolis*, the *European Capital* (first urban center in Romania, important role in the Central and S-E European Region).

Decentralized cooperation, either in *direct* or *indirect* form ⁽⁴⁾, facilitates Bucharest's assurance of the sustainability of its public interventions, *mobilizing a number of different social actors and the economies of their own territories* (Proyecto Local, 2010).

Like other local authorities the authorities of Bucharest, the institutionalized cooperation is understood as an *extension of local development strategies in the territories of these communities* (Proyecto Local, 2010), providing *added value* to both the local authorities and the civil society organizations.

In accordance with art. 36 par. 2) lit. e), par. 7 lit. a) and art. 45 par. (2) lit. f) of Law no. 215/2001 of the local public administration, republished, with the subsequent modifications and completions, the General Council of Bucharest decides under the law the cooperation or association with Romanian or foreign legal persons, non-governmental organizations and other social partners in order to finance and operate joint actions, works, services or projects of local interest.

As it is said in the General Mayor's report from 2013, *the territorial planning and the formulation, implementation and monitoring of some politics and strategic documents represent essential instruments in the development process of the Municipality of Bucharest and its territory of support and influence* (The Report of The General Mayor of Bucharest, 2013), which have attracted the preoccupation and interest of its management within the partnerships with other administrative-territorial units from the international sphere.

One of the successful partnerships with an impact on the development strategy of the Bucharest community is the *Cooperation Agreement with Rome* (2007).

The Cooperation Protocol establishes in Article 2 that the two municipalities will promote the exchange of information and knowledge in areas such as: *general public administration, urban transport, local economic policy, culture, education, sports, health, environmental protection* etc.

The development of this partnership led to the accession of the municipality of Bucharest in 2014 to the Association of Municipalities for the Development and Promotion of Organic Products,

“Citta del Bio”, by the Decision of the General Council of the City of Bucharest (HCGMB) no. 9 / 01.30.2014. The “Citta del Bio” Association is a network of cities and other European territorial authorities that promote the “organic-culture”, a healthy living environment in a pollution-free environment. The local initiative wanted to strengthen Romania's status in 2013 (at the Biofach Fair), as the “Country of the Year” for the consumption and production of bio-ecological food products and has been part of the EU's ongoing concern for preserving and protecting the environment, promoting organic farming and education in the spirit of healthy and natural consumption and nutrition.

At the initiative of the “Citta del Bio” Association, a meeting of the Bucharest delegation with representatives of the City Hall of Rome took place in 2014 to develop and strengthen the partnerships between the two municipalities, identifying common sustainable food and agriculture policies and that contribute to the consolidation of Bucharest's city as an *Organic city*.

There has been a series of experiences sharing, in which the municipality of Rome has presented how it promotes, on a large scale, the organic food products in school catering, the way in which flea markets operate, as well as types of services developed on issues of nutritional education.

The cooperation and accumulation of experience in the field of agriculture and food between the two municipalities led to the establishment of the “peasant markets” by Bucharest local authorities as marketplaces on the territory of Bucharest through the HCGMB no. 229 / 04.09.2014, modified by HCGMB no. 149 / 30.07.2015.

Thus, a 3-year collaboration agreement was signed (appendix to HCGMB No. 229 / 04.09.2014) between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Bucharest Municipality, the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority and the National Federation of Trade Unions Agriculture, Food, Tobacco, Related Fields and Services “AGROSTAR”, for the establishment of peasant markets.

The purpose of setting up the peasant markets in Bucharest has the following dimensions: *ensuring the organizational framework to create facilities for agricultural producers for the direct sale to consumers of agro-food products from their own production; ensuring an adequate supply of agro-food products, both qualitatively and quantitatively, at fair prices, guaranteeing the traceability and security of agricultural products; promotion of Romanian agro-food products; generating a civilized and direct link between the farmer and the consumer.*

The initiative was appreciated by the decision makers as opportune given that, despite the rapid growth of the many forms of commerce in the

municipality of Bucharest, the retail trade could not overcome the obstacles to meet the basic needs of the residents of this city.

Thus, the person who practices this type of trade either due to *the number of similar agents* or due to some *inappropriate commercial practices* must make a known and perceived *compromise* in the daily consumption basket of the inhabitants of Bucharest: to pass on to consumers the costs of their poor efficiency, in other words, to increase the *producer price*.

Putting trade in the form of “peasant markets” will minimize the deficiencies currently observed and reflected either in *consumer overtax* or in the *absence of shopping alternatives*.

According to HCGMB no. 229 / 04.09.2014, the meaning given to *peasant markets* is the set of mobile / temporary premises, where there are activities of exhibition and marketing of food of animal and non-animal origin obtained from agricultural producers, be them natural or legal persons veterinary and food safety registered, which are packaged and / or pre-packaged and / or which contain identification of the manufacturer.

Specifically, the peasant market is a sales structure, located according to the local needs and requests of the citizens of the municipality, which are organized on certain days of the week, with a limited time schedule, only during the day and at the locations established by the Bucharest City Hall.

The peasant market is reserved exclusively to individual agricultural producers and / or organized in any associative form, constituted according to the law (producers). Manufacturers benefit from all the facilities offered by the peasant market without paying any fee or tariff for using water, electricity, stands and other auxiliaries (scales, advertising materials, etc.)

The functioning of the peasant market is governed by the principles of non-discrimination and free access.

The Romanian agro-food products that can be marketed in the peasant markets are: *fresh and preserved vegetables; potatoes, grapes, melons; orchard and forest fruit (fresh and preserved), animal products, including honey.*

There is a large number of areas in Bucharest where it is difficult and sometimes impossible to install permanent-quality equipment (due to limited space and access routes), of the type of classical markets existing in this city. The solution is the mobile units.

This type of trade offers a number of *advantages* over other types of solutions, such as: low investment compared to the high capacity of the population; low cost of labor (simple handling of the mobile unit); the possibility of reaching a large commercial scale by covering a large segment of the population; reducing consumer costs; simple

installation procedure that does not permanently damage the areas where mobile units are located; the opportunity offered to consumers to purchase the weekly basket in one place; improving the food consumption model of the population, especially from the periphery, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in the sense of increasing consumption *per person*.

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of the sub-state actors into direct interlocutors of the international cooperation in the decentralized cooperation facilitated the synergy of the actions of all the actors (central, local, institutional, civil society, private, etc.) to solve the problems, needs and proposals emanating from the local collectivities themselves.

Among the cooperation forms concluded by municipalities, cooperation and collaboration agreements / protocols are the most flexible and light form of partnership, the tools and mechanisms used in these cooperation are becoming more and more innovative.

Despite political, social and economic barriers, direct bilateral cooperation is often used, being more transparent, less bureaucratic, involves greater decisional autonomy as well as rapid transfer of best practices to identify common policies to address local problems.

An urban problem that attracted the strong commitment of the authorities of more than 100 cities at international level by signing the "Milan Urban Food Policy Pact" in 2015 is the existence of a poor food supply system (production and distribution) and, subsequently, of a precarious eating pattern among the urban population.

One of the signatories of this historical document is also the municipality of Bucharest, whose local authorities are becoming more and more engaged in the effort to ensure healthy and natural consumption and nutrition to its citizens.

Exemplary implementing experiences gained in partnerships with other territorial communities such as the city of Rome, Bucharest has taken a number of important steps to develop initiatives to ensure the sustainability of its policy on public nutrition and the strengthening of Organic status.

Accession to the "Citta del Bio" Association has accelerated this process, and today Bucharest has an innovative regulatory and promotional framework for its agro-food supply system: HCGMB no. 229 / 04.09.2014 regarding the establishment, organization and functioning of "Peasant Markets" as flea markets.

Like other cities, making this initiative operational is also being carried out with the support of the "AGROSTAR" National Federation of Trade Unions in Agriculture, Food, Tobacco, Domains

and Services, which plays an important role in helping producers to market their products.

The implementation of this retail system in the form of organizing peasant markets as flea markets under the coordination of the City Hall of Bucharest is an important initiative which will certainly bring *positive effects on the food supply system*, the most affordable prices and the possibility of shopping without frequent travel to the most important shopping centers.

Within this action plan, the locations of the peasant markets are established by the City Hall of Bucharest with the support of Agrostar, based on direct surveys and studies.

Thus, the largest number of consumers will be reached and niches will be filled in where horticultural trade is deficient, contributing to the establishment of new relations between urban and rural territories.

Therefore, a large commercial scale is achieved, which will lead to a decrease in operating costs, such a public intervention operating as a *price regulation instrument*. Gradually, we will be witnessing the improvement of the living conditions of the citizens, especially those with low incomes, a priority objective of the Bucharest authorities for which every effort must be made, especially from the perspective of moving from a *big city policy* to a policy of the *future metropolitan city of Bucharest*, in the context of the institutionalization of the *Bucharest-Ilfov metropolitan area*.

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Notes

- (1) The first actions of decentralized cooperation materialized in the twinning agreements between different owns, after World War II. The priority cooperation axes targeted friendship, peace, cultural exchanges etc.
- (2) Which is transformed in year 1988 in the *World Federation of United Towns and Cities*.
- (3) At present, by means of the Congress of Local and Regional Powers.
- (4) Manifest of the seventh WFTT Congress.
- (5) Depending on the degree of responsibility of the local public authorities in elaborating and planning public decentralized cooperation actions, the decentralized cooperation modalities are of two types: *direct* or *indirect*. In case of direct cooperation, the implementation of actions can be directly executed by the authorities or delegated to another actor, and in case of indirect cooperation, the responsibility belonging to actors outside the institutional environment of the local authorities.