Spatial Policies and Resilient Urban-Rural Communities _

An Italian Case Study with Some Research Guidelines

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ABSTRACT **After a prolonged uncoupling of cities from their surrounding countryside, brought about by the productivist paradigm, moves toward reintegration are increasingly noticeable in local policies and practices. This also applies to the most recent European agendas for sustainable urban development, where agriculture has been officially recognised as a producer of ecosystem services and a strategic resource for the creation of green infrastructure networks in densely inhabited environments. In this way, the challenge of integrating it in spatial planning, and in its toolkit, is now on the table.**

But what does 'urban-rural' policy-making mean, in practical and organisational terms? While scholars increasingly agree that an adaptive and multi-actor governance is more effective than a classic governmental approach in the management of complex socio-ecological systems, in the particular case of those involving farming as an economic activity it becomes almost necessary. The basic reason for this is that stakeholders are bound by mutual dependence, since key resources such as rights over land, political power, technical skills, and innovation capacity are unequally distributed among them. Farmers are therefore prompted to reject a passive role in the policy-making process, which in turn requires additional social knowledge on the part of all actors, in order to accept such an advancement fully.

The case of *Parco Agricolo Sud (South Agricultural Park)* in Milan, Italy, confirms this scenario by providing an interesting 'resilience story' of local peasantry and, in parallel, a view on the transition from a classic zoning-based and state-led land protection model to a less sectoral and more participatory approach. It is an example of how the active engagement of farmers can help public policies, preserving the common good in difficult circumstances and giving rise to alternative planning approaches. This is a 'lesson from Milan', which may inspire research in contexts where open spaces around cities are threatened, and inclusion in the decision-making process is a goal that remains to be achieved.

KEYWORDS urban-rural governance; land use-policy; agricultural parks; ecosystem services; resilient spaces

1 Introduction

Agriculture has always created a dilemma for urban planning. Within it, land plays a more structural role than in any other economic sector, as a fundamental factor of production, and, yet, in modern times, spatial planning practice has dealt with it quite uncomfortably (Ciriacy-Wantrup, 1964; Amati, 2008; Paradis, Cieszewska, Tóth, & Šuklje-Erjavec, 2016). Accurate analysis of the rural fabric has been generally overlooked, and agriculture itself mistreated and excluded from regional development strategies, hence privileging urban-industrial uses, its almost 'genetic' rival (Ciriacy-Wantrup, 1964). Moreover, property developers are a strong economic constituency and often lobby the public administration for liberalising the land use policy, as in the case of Milan (Broz, 2017).

However, while a tendency to separate urban from rural still exists worldwide (Ajl, 2014), a move toward re-integration is increasingly noticeable in European public agendas and research programmes (Lohrberg, Lička, Scazzosi, & Timpe, 2016). Urban and peri-urban agriculture, in particular, is gradually upgraded from 'wasteland' to a strategic resource when sustainable development of cities is at stake, due to its potential capacity to contain sprawl and supply communities with 'ecosystem services'. This term refers to the multiple benefits provided by ecosystems to the population in terms of primary goods production, food security, natural resource regulation, public health, education, landscape and cultural heritage preservation, etc. (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

Within European policy experience, an important testbed for involving agriculture in regional development agendas has been that of the LEADER programme framework and related Local Action Groups. These and other comparable tools have proved very useful in promoting integrated development action in peri-urban rather than just rural areas, thanks particularly to equity in the representation of governmental and other societal stakeholders (OECD, 2013).

Nevertheless, a more significant recognition of cultivated areas (and especially peri-urban and intra-urban ones) as a potentially strategic element for the sustainability of spatial policies has come with the introduction of new notions in spatial and urban planning terminology, among which is that of 'green infrastructures'. This term has a very wide application, but it generally designates open spaces and the natural capital they embed when adequately planned in order to reduce fragmentation, improve biodiversity, and enhance the action of ecosystem services. The network-like arrangement of such green infrastructures, and their fundamental role in sustaining the welfare of human settlements, also explain why we call them 'infrastructures' (EC, 2013). Farmlands – especially where multifunctional farming is involved – are thus fully admissible in the category of green infrastructures. In this way, the challenge of integrating agriculture in town planning as an equally important land use has been officially recognised (Lohrberg et al., 2016).

For several reasons, however, this aim is still far from being achieved. For instance, policy habits and tools are relatively inert if compared to rapid ongoing social change in this sphere (Folke, Hahn, Olsson, & Norberg, 2005). In addition, a cultural acceptance of rural leftovers within the urban fabric is not yet to be taken for granted, since an enduring modernist ideology still portrays them as pockets of economic backwardness facing social extinction (van der Ploeg, 2008). While marginalising a rural point of view on territorial, societal, and economic development issues, this frame negatively affects any institutional attempt to foster a closer relationship between urban and farming-related functions, e.g. in developing countries (Ajl, 2014). Due to the traditional detachment of the agricultural sphere from that of spatial planning, farmers themselves are not familiar with its logic and some form of mediation may be needed in order to make participatory decision-making processes effective (Paradis et al., 2016).

The *Parco Agricolo Sud (South Agricultural Park)* case study in Milan is briefly reported at the end of this chapter, in order to help to focus on these issues. The story shows a switch from a 'greenbelt' model – barely functioning in its aim of preserving and enhancing the local urban countryside through spatial plans only – toward a heterogeneous governance mosaic in which top-down and bottom-up approaches intertwine. The overall process coincides with a resilience dynamic on the part of the rural-urban community and its ecosystem, along with cultural changes, tool innovation and a democratisation of policy-making. Local farmers have thus managed to emerge from marginality and establish a resource-exchange relationship as a fully empowered actor with both the community and local authorities.

2 Engaging Rural-Urban Stakeholders in Local Governance Frameworks

Coexistence between agricultural and urban-industrial functions is becoming more and more common all around the world. Besides making it particularly difficult to identify actual urban-rural borders (Ajl, 2014), this also contributes to the growing complexity of socio-ecological systems that now require an approach based on adaptive and multi-actor governance patterns, seen as more effective than classical top-down schemes (Folke et al., 2005).

Among others, the following elements are considered particularly important for policies addressing sustainability:

- an integration of social and ecological scientific contributions (Ostrom, 2009);
- the development of shared understanding models between governmental and scientific communities (Newell & Proust, 2012);
- the enhancement of lay knowledge, besides professional and scientific ones, and a surmounting of a sectoral approach by intersectional policies (Prové, Kemper, Loudiyi, Mumenthaler, & Nikolaidou, 2016).

In fact, while including a wider range of stakeholders in the policy-making process is strongly suggested in the case of various socio-ecological systems, it becomes almost essential when urban or peri-urban farmlands are concerned. This is largely because among other types of information required is a farming-related and often place-based knowledge, usually in the hands of farmers or other societal actors rather than public officials. In addition, the juridical recognition of ecosystem services, which agriculture can provide to the urban system, also implies an acknowledgment that such services must somehow be paid for (Lin, Philpott, & Jha, 2015).

More generally, stakeholders engaged in urban agriculture or environmental actions in these contexts are often bound by ties of mutual dependence, due to the heterogeneous distribution of resources and the consequent need to exchange them (Fig. 2.1). The government holds financial and legal power, but in most cases, cannot provide innovation, for which it largely relies on civil entities as non-profit 'pioneers' and, to a minor extent, on the market (Healey, 2012). On the other hand, civil movements often need some help from professional farmers in terms of expertise and both groups depend on some kind of support from the public sector: legitimation at first and, more specifically, land grants, planning protection schemes, and other benefits related to particular partnership schemes. Land grants can prove particularly strategic, since free plots near or within the city are often publicly owned and can easily be lent (granted) to single farmers and NGOs, in order to overcome the unaffordability of the urban land market (Lohrberg et al., 2016).

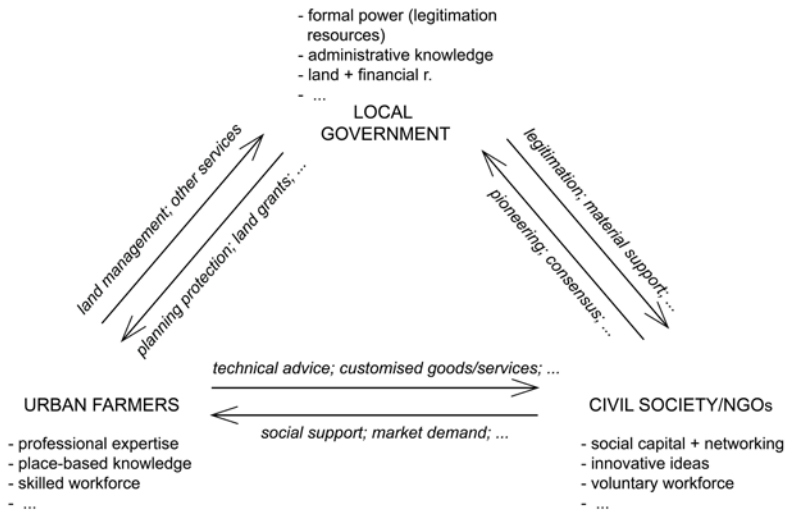

FIG. 2.1 A simplified pattern of resource-exchange between stakeholders *(Image by author)*

Besides turning it into a necessity, mutual dependence also complicates our reflection on multi-actor policy-making and its start-up dynamics in particular, which we can scarcely envisage in the form of a one-sided 'public engagement'. In fact, initiatives that recover an urban-rural relationship – as in other relatively new policy areas – are, in most cases, ascribable to bottom-up experimentation by NGOs and farmers, while governmental strategies usually follow societal dynamism rather than

inducing it (Healey, 2012). A telling example comes from the development of informal supply networks, fostered by ethical consumerism and the increasing interest for 'local' products (Forno & Ceccarini, 2006). Local stakeholders long for some form of material support by institutions, but at the same time they tend to be protective of their projects and fear incorporation into new schemes as a potential loss of authorship over them, or a devaluation of their underlying ideals (Prové et al., 2016).

Claims for self-determination are even stronger when it comes to professional farming, particularly when aimed at agroecology and sustainable methods. In this case, the will to maximise production autonomy and an almost exclusive control over particular kinds of knowledge resources jointly result in a reluctance to accept a policy-taking position within the decision-making process (van der Ploeg, 2008). This is one of the reasons why farmers increasingly strive not only for participation, but for a shared leadership with public authorities in land, landscape, and resource management.

In the light of all this, we may easily understand how important and, at the same time, how problematic it can be to tackle the urban-rural issue by means of inclusiveness and multilevel partnerships. Public support is crucial in legitimating social practices and raising their impact to a significant level for society, but at the same time it is necessarily embedded in resource exchange and "mutual adjustment" (Lindblom, 1965). In many cases, little more than enabling and sponsoring tasks are expected from the government, but the latter might nevertheless ask other stakeholders to reposition their objectives, in order to maximise the public interest of the overall programme, or adapt the programme itself to particular expectations to enforce reciprocal allegiance (Lindblom, 1965).

2.1 Social Learning and Reframing as a Prerequisite for Partnership Success

While mutual dependence encourages the formation of partnerships, partisan problem setting and possible unfamiliarity with each other's background or vocabulary (e.g. farmers with planners (Paradis et al., 2016)) tend to threaten their stability, and particularly trust and commitment as their constitutive elements (Sol, Beers, & Wals, 2013). The consequent unpredictability of policy processes has led to increased attention being paid by scholars to aspects such as social learning and reframing. That is, a change in the subjective representation of a policy problem by participants holding different perspectives and interests, which allows some form of agreement to be reached (Schön & Rein, 1994).

The relevance of social learning in facilitating the decision-making process has also been confirmed in regional development projects that try to engage farmers, as in one case in Westerkwartier, Netherlands (Sol et al., 2013). If one considers the extended marginalisation of peasant categories within 20th century economic, demographic, and

urban growth processes, which forged enduring social imaginaries and policy tools, which are still in use (van der Ploeg, 2008), it is not surprising that an overall reframing capacity should be urgently needed for 21st century agendas.

This concept will be indirectly addressed in the paragraph devoted to our Italian case study. The forthcoming section will view the coexistence of top-down and bottom-up patterns within the overall panorama of urban-rural governance, a part of which is represented by the fairly heterogeneous category known as 'agricultural parks'.

3 Belts, Parks, Infrastructures: Peri-Urban Governance Beyond Planning

Actual management models in rural-urban policies vary greatly and have varied over the course of time. According to a 'historical' perspective, one can summarily select three indicative historical 'prototypes': greenbelts, agricultural parks, and green infrastructures. The passage from one to another marks a general trend from a classic, state-led approach to a more horizontal management approach, in which a strictly rural issue is more easily tackled.

Greenbelts were first conceived in London in 1935, but were in fact revalued as a planning tool in the 1960s, in order to discipline the then-booming urban growth in European and other western cities. A sprawl-containment priority determined the clear supremacy of governmental bodies exercising their ordinary planning and control functions and the neglect of a genuine interest in agriculture itself (Amati, 2008).

Agriculture was indeed reevaluated through subsequent experiments, such as those ascribable to the nebulous category of agricultural parks, starting with the pioneer-project of *Parco Agricolo Sud* in Milan, first conceived in 1974. Farmers were not given much attention in the decision-making process, in this case, but a policy issue was nevertheless created, thus paving the way for further societal claims and possible reforms (Broz, 2017).

Rather than being a successor to greenbelts, the notion of an agricultural park is also one of the progenitors of green infrastructures, in the sense that a will to restore a symbiosis between city and countryside, to integrate agriculture with other purposes, and to boost its environmental potential is maintained. However, as well as multifunctional, accessible, and transversal to rural and urban contexts, green infrastructures are also multi-scalar and do not fit into enclosed perimeters, a difference that denotes a completely different planning approach (Amati, 2008).

In fact, its entire evolution is largely associated with multifaceted reframing dynamics, starting from a different attitude toward (peri)urban farming. The societal costs of its loss are now of public concern, while they were not until a few decades ago (Freilich & Peshoff, 1997), and

the intersecting of urban and rural practices is increasingly accepted to the point of assuming the idea of 'agricultural' parks within the city. Many farmers themselves were initially sceptical, but awareness of the benefits deriving from inclusion in an 'urban' sphere and from contact with visitors has grown in parallel with the increasing appreciation of agricultural by-products by city dwellers (Broz, 2017).

The emergence of multifunctional agriculture thus favours the advancement of its operators to active and competitive urban stakeholders and that of agriculture itself to a 'material' for the making of town plans, albeit with some significant obstacles deriving from the deeply grounded tradition of single-purpose land use zoning (Timpe, Cieszewska, Supuka, & Toth, 2016).

At the same time, the switch to an 'infrastructure' metaphor as an alternative to 'belts' or 'parks' reveals an increased confidence that policy makers have in contemporary urbanity as a ubiquitous and borderless phenomenon (Lefèbvre, 1968), which, in practice, leads to an additional demand for innovative planning tools and approaches. Other possible models thus further overshadow the comprehensive planning paradigm, in which a single policy instrument was meant to tackle a broad range of topics within a long-term horizon. Such models tend to promote cross-sectoral synergies and to entrust safeguarding not to restrictions alone, but to incentives, awareness-raising campaigns, and other strategies as well (COE, 2008).

What is more important is that the acknowledgement of both the inadequacy of merely zoning-based land preservation approaches and the recognition of functional and social (other than just spatial) values of the urban countryside are potentially opening up the plan-making arena to non-governmental stakeholders (Timpe et al., 2016).

More specifically, while urban farmers are no longer just a decided-for category, public engagement is also prescribed for apparently mere technical matters such as the creation of green infrastructures. Both scholars and policy makers increasingly admit that lifting such policy issues out of a strictly departmental perimeter and fitting them into an exchange framework (between city and agriculture, public and private actors, etc.) allows the build-up of awareness, shared interests, and consensus (Folke et al., 2005; COE, 2008), which is recognised in itself as the key pre-condition for an enduring defence of urban-rural contexts (OECD, 2013). Urban agriculture can play a similar fundamental role in bridging the gap between biodiversity policies and wider society, due to its expanding popularity (Timpe et al., 2016).

4 Top-Down or Bottom-Up? About Urban-Rural Policy Making Forms

Multi-actor frameworks are more necessary than optional in the management of peri-urban ecosystems, but this does not imply that a strong role by the government is diminished, nor that it should diminish, since public legitimation is still vital in any case. In fact, what we observe is an area characterised by adaptive governance where some kind of exchange (as previously noted) and consequent synergies between institutional, entrepreneurial, and civic stakeholders are a requisite for success. A strict dichotomy between bottom-up and top-down forms is outclassed, the actual balance between these two elements depending on several context-related factors, e.g. the involved land surface and the general objectives. For instance, an institutional engagement is far more decisive in regional-scale projects aiming at land preservation than in particular initiatives that focus only on agricultural practices (Prové et al., 2016).

Prové et al. (2016) describe four typical formats of relationships between governmental, market, and civil society actors, ranging between 'pure' top-down and bottom-up patterns:

- the local government may instigate, steer and manage an initiative altogether, and possibly capitalise volunteer workforce (1st governance typology);
- it may launch and finance the project while opting for public engagement and take other actors as equal partners (2nd);
- it may provide an enabling support to private or nongovernmental initiatives with high social or environmental value (3rd);
- finally, certain bottom-up initiatives might not require nor desire any public intervention (4th).

This model can prove very useful in analysing urban-rural governance partnerships and its reliability is generally confirmed when we look at the European panorama of policies or actions (Lohrberg et al., 2016). The same classification can possibly be employed to study some individual, particularly complex, and long-running projects in their temporal metamorphosis, as in the case of *Parco Agricolo Sud* in Milan. As we will see, the evolution of this policy has been in a step with the progressive emancipation of the local peasantry.

5 The Parco Sud Case Study in Milan

The *Parco Agricolo Sud Milano* (P.A.S.M. or informally *Parco Sud*) is a regional-scale rural and partly natural area covering the exceptionally fertile plains south of Milan and partly brushing its metropolitan core. Its surface amounts to 46,300 hectares of land and encompasses 61 municipalities, among which is the city of Milan (http://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/parco_agricolo_sud_milano/). The overall policy-making process has been decades long. The first

public and technical debates date back to 1974 and some bottom-up experimentations were carried out during the 1980s, fostered by the increasingly popular environmentalist movement with its constructive struggle against the excessive power of local real estate tycoons and their close connections with the local government (http://www.assparcosud.org/chi-siamo.html; Broz, 2017). The area (Fig. 5.1) was finally put under a protection regime in 1990 via the Lombardy Regional Law no. 24 (Regione Lombardia, 2007). It was only ten years later, however, that its general planning framework (*Piano Territoriale di Coordinamento*) was adopted (Provincia di Milano, 2000).

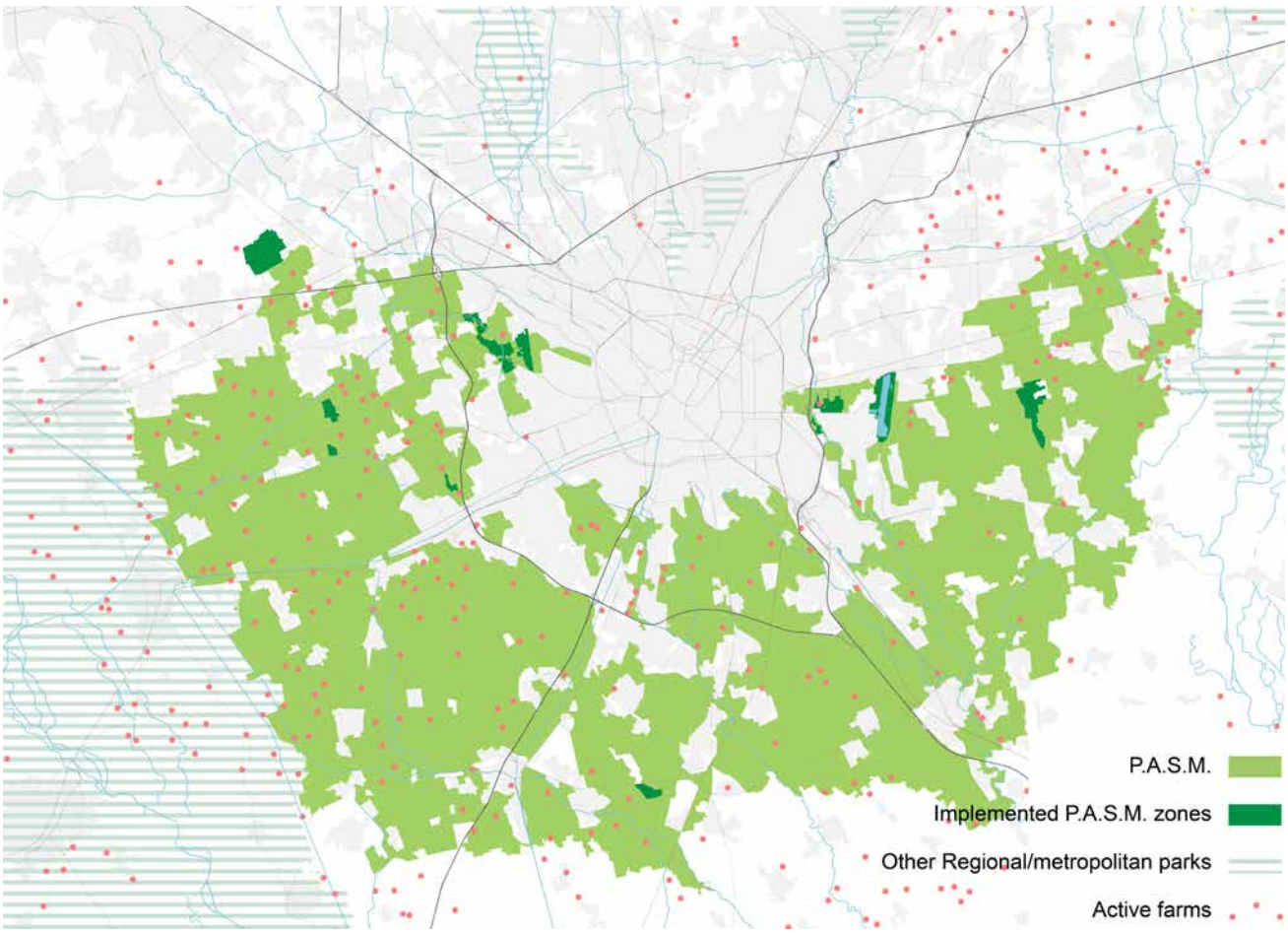

FIG. 5.1 *Parco Sud* and the metropolitan area of Milan in 1990 *(Image by author)*

The overall project ambitiously foresaw that the Province of Milan (the actual leading body) would encourage a gradual restoration of the local environment and the historical landscape by firmly regulating the behaviour of farmers, while also incentivising leisure uses by means of structural and infrastructural investments (Ferraresi & Rossi, 1993).

The idea of a greenbelt converting into a 'rural' park with agriculture as its main educational, recreational, and connective element was very innovative at that time, so that 'Parco Sud' soon became an internationally renowned case study and source of inspiration for

similar entities that were later established all around the continent (Lohrberg et al. 2016).

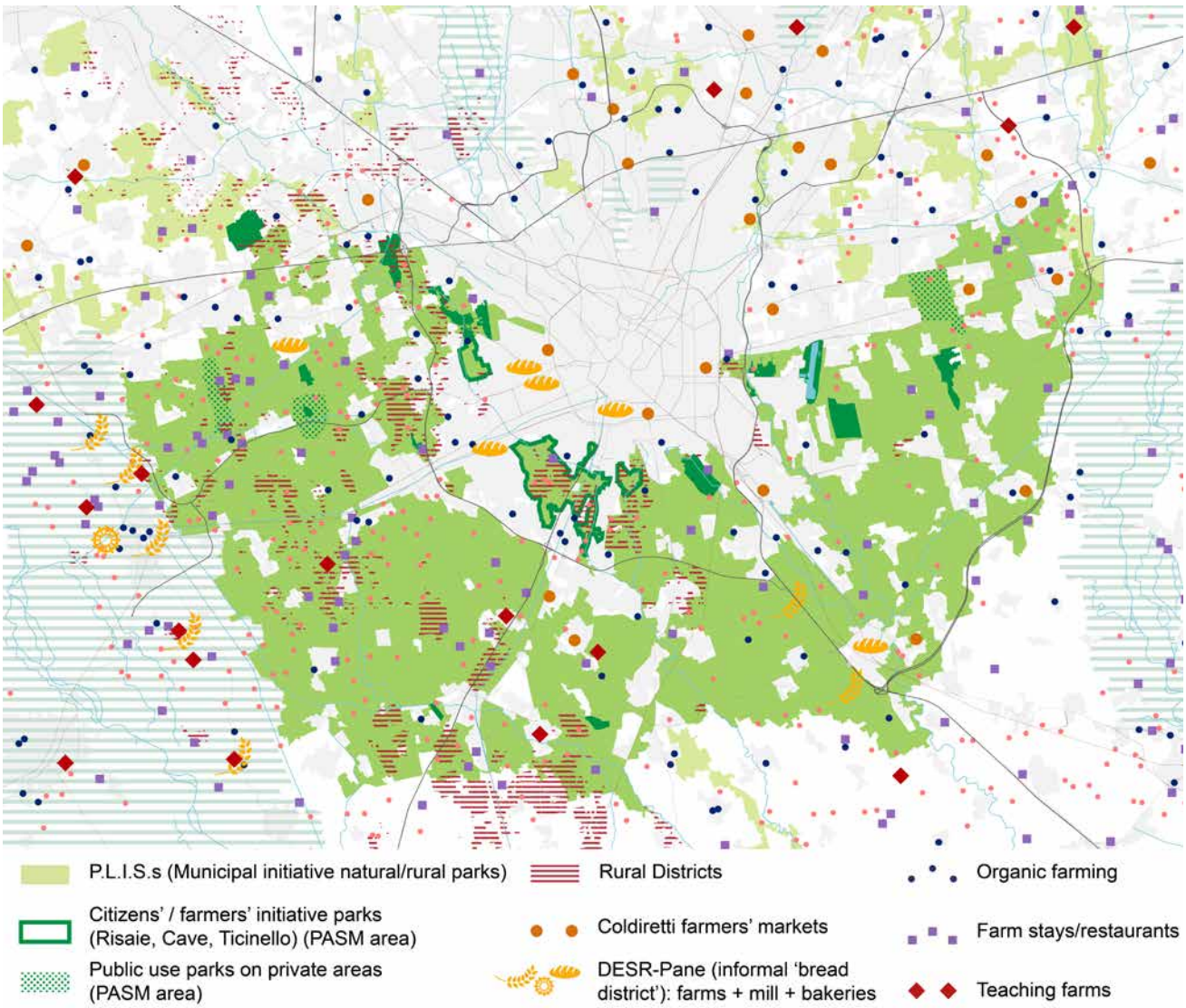

FIG. 5.2 Urban-rural policies and practices in Milan, 2016 *(Image by author)*

In practical implementation terms, however, it is far from being a 'success story'. A constant lack of public funding minimised any tangible results, while the political nature of the P.A.S.M. administrative body determined a politicisation of the process itself, deeply undermining the challenge of counteracting urban pressures as a major cause for the neglect of peri-urban landscapes (Senes, Toccolini, Ferrario, Lafortezza, & Dal Sasso, 2008). This has proved particularly true in the urban-rural direct contact zones, where building industry appetites overwhelmed any collective aspirations for an active enhancement of open spaces. For instance, local Urban Belt Regulation Plans (*Piani di Cintura Urbana*) were drafted but, significantly, never adopted (Vescovi, 2012).

However, starting from the early 2000s, a whole geography of experimental practices and locally based initiatives has been overlapping

with P.A.S.M.'s largely unrealised predictions, partly collected within an extra-institutional 'Rural and Fair Economy District' involving more or less the same territory (http://www.desrparcosudmilano.it/). A large part of these initiatives are connected with a societal rediscovery of rural traditions or a 'new peasantries' dimension (van der Ploeg, 2008); most importantly, they are independent of the formal authorship of the Park and often of any other public policy frameworks. They still tend to be labelled, or label themselves, *Parco Sud*, which is why we refer to them as a 'parallel' *Parco Sud* (Fig. 5.2).

The informal has made way for a more structured and institutionalised arrangement over the last decade, starting with an increasing public support of the parallel park (e.g. through the promotion of farmers' markets by several municipalities). This has developed alongside an increasingly important engagement on the part of NGOs and local farmers, which has, in some cases, resulted in the co-leadership of public-private projects and participation in spatial planning decision-making processes. A very important advancement has come with the constitution of four local 'Rural Districts' (*Distretti Agricoli/Rurali*) between 2010 and 2012 (http://www.agricity.it/distretti-agricoli/), following a 2001 national law that introduced this innovative tool as a combination of a business consortium structure, spatial development visioning, and public-private cooperation (Toccaceli, 2015).

In 2015, the four Districts, together with the main local and regional governmental authorities, signed a Framework Agreement for Spatial Development named *Milano Metropoli Rurale*, by virtue of which the emerging Milanese farming 'establishment' aims at asserting itself as a leading representative in several policy fields (landscape, water management etc.) (http://www.milanometropolirurale.regione.lombardia.it/). Some of the existing P.A.S.M. objectives have thus been reinforced through a more up-to-date 'ecosystem service' categorisation and a multi-actor partnership model, while some additional ones – such as the design of a locally based Food Policy, which is actually a response to already ongoing informal dynamics – have been added to the agenda (http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/).

The surfacing of new scenarios has stimulated a series of reform proposals for the old P.A.S.M., now considered to be too bureaucratic, and some suggest it should evolve in a more adaptive governance-like direction (Vescovi, 2012).

5.1 Evolving Partnership Models

What we notice throughout these developments is that all those typologies that make up the interpretative model outlined in section 4 are reflected by the various policy geometries that emerged during the *Parco Sud* process (Fig. 5.3).

The official Park in its first and still existing incarnation perfectly accords with the top-down pattern recalled by the 1st governance

typology. By contrast (and almost deliberately, one might say), what has been defined in this article as the 'parallel' *Parco Sud* initially fits into the purely bottom-up model, then shifting from the 4th to the 3rd type by virtue of an increasing legitimation by the public sector. A hybrid situation between the 2nd and 3rd pattern exists when describing Rural Districts and the *Metropoli Rurale* framework, while the future *Parco Agricolo Sud* will probably be of the second type, once possibly reformed.

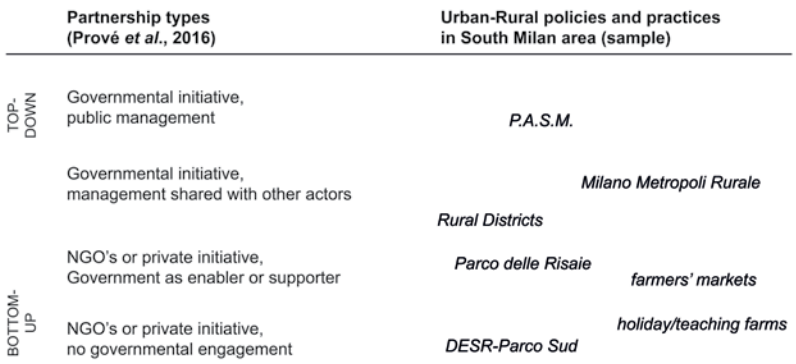

FIG. 5.3 Urban-rural governance framework in Milan and its classifications *(Image by author)*

This convergence towards the centre seems to confirm both the general tendency towards greater collaboration between local authorities, civil society, and farming stakeholders (Prové et al., 2016), and the need for a multi-actor partnership approach in order to make urban-rural policies effective.

But what is particularly interesting in the case of Milan is the promotion of peri-urban farmers from almost complete social invisibility to a growing operational role, to the level of policy leadership. In order to understand more deeply how such a reversal has come about, we should first return to the original struggle against urbanisation on the part of the local peasantry, and for survival on both social and economic levels.

5.2 Resilience and Empowerment of South Milan Farmers

As we have already mentioned, social conflict and controversy over land development choices have played major roles in the policy process. These can be seen in at least three ways:

- as the main catalyst of collective action for the defence of threatened open spaces;
- as the sociological explanation for the present South Milan landscape;
- as a factor that has contributed to shaping the identity of contemporary '*Parco Sud*' farmers, starting from stimulating self-awareness among local peasants.

In the latter case, it is important to stress that those farmers who actually participate in the current peri-urban governance framework of

Milan fall into a new category of local civil society, which is difficult to quantify or to describe in its internal differentiation. We can refer to it approximately as a minority, albeit a very significant one on a qualitative level, since it represents the latest product of a long-term co-evolutionary process (Broz, 2017). The process may be summarised in four main phases, each one characterised by particular forms of interaction between farmers, other stakeholders, and external circumstances.

The first phase (1960s – early 1970s) came with the fulfilment of the industrialist paradigm, which submitted the rural fabric around Milan to two pressures, one from overwhelming urban growth, the other as a consequence of the massive mechanisation of agriculture. Both factors favoured an ideological de-legitimation of peasant elements persisting inside a then booming urban society. In the face of such pressures, most farmers responded by either abandoning the land-holding (usually only rented) or trying to adapt to the new mass-production mode. However, some of them resorted to already available input (family labour, existing fixed capital, well-known traditional methods) in order to maximise autonomy in the face of market forces. This 'resistance through traditionalism' was particularly evident inland in the urban fringes, where considerable uncertainty discouraged long-term costly investments.

The second period (1970s – 1980s) was marked by an initial move away from individual resistance toward collective strategies and widening alliances. Green movements carried out an important role in mediating and supporting the interests of farmers in this phase. On the urban fringes, a peculiar peasant-environmentalist-inhabitant axis (quickly merging into the *Associazione per il Parco Sud Milano*) began to organise parties and luncheons inside the *cascine* as a pro-park campaign aimed to turn the stigmatised urban countryside into a resource for the under-equipped mass-housing neighbourhoods and to protect farmers in case of intimidations or evacuation attempts by property owners. Social gatherings are still employed nowadays as an awareness-raising tool (Fig. 5.4).

FIG. 5.4 South Milan: social gathering in an urban *cascina (Image by author)*

Nevertheless, the final incorporation of P.A.S.M. in 1990 turned out to be relatively disappointing for farmers. In the third phase, the process was actually hindered by their chronic lack of trust and a slight antipathy toward the Park administration, which was perceived as barely effective in preventing land consumption and as an interference in the freedom of farming activities by means of landscape restrictions and other bureaucracy.

This stagnating panorama has changed since 2000, however. In the final phase of the process (still ongoing) several new elements have favoured the participation of suburban farmers in urban-rural policy making, although this is in large part outside the institutional perimeter of P.A.S.M. Among these factors, we may list the development of social capital as a result of previous alliances and a combination of broader socio-cultural circumstances, such as:

- professionalisation and social turnover within the sector;
- revaluation of the face-to-face relationship between (urban) consumers and farmers;
- the availability of new generation rural policy tools more open to planning concepts;
- the increased familiarity of farming organisations (like CIA and Coldiretti) with spatial planning approaches.

6 Conclusions

The disappearance of traditional urban-rural borders favours new forms of integration between cities and agriculture. A collective recognition of the ability of multifunctional farming to produce ecosystem services increases mutual dependence between urban and rural stakeholders, which in turn requires multi-actor partnerships to integrate classic top-down approaches. More and more reluctant to positions as policy-takers, farmers can finally aspire to participate in decision-making processes, and urban planning itself is facing a reframing challenge in order to include agriculture among its materials, after long-term marginalisation. This is why 'ordinary' safeguard devices, such as green-belts and agricultural parks, also need to be updated and completed by additional policy tools within an emerging adaptive governance scenario, so as to permit participation and a broader consensus on new sustainable development tasks.

While confirming this general scenario, the South Milan experience can teach us other valuable lessons.

For instance, it suggests that the human and spatial components of the urban countryside are inseparable. When the former emerges from social and cultural invisibility, the latter follows. This is why *Parco Sud* emerged from imprecision and became a recognised resource for the city, once farmers actively took on the challenge of re-establishing an urban-rural relationship. No top-down action since then has ever reached the critical mass necessary to generate a new spatial identity

that is capable of defending itself against urban growth forces. This also makes us appreciate a certain degree of autonomy on the part of some resilient 'socio-ecological environments' in preserving the common good in difficult circumstances.

Secondly, it nevertheless appears that the wish of farmers to join urban-rural policies and 'agricultural park' agendas is not to be taken for granted, since it is often linked to long-term sociocultural processes and to the will to resist in a difficult environment, factors which have to be taken into account by policy makers and researchers. In the case analysed here, a struggle against land consumption, and for production autonomy and social emancipation together, has brought a formerly marginalised peasantry to sufficient empowerment and self-identification as an 'urban' community to allow its inclusion in the governance network.

Finally, participation also depends on actual interest in participating, which, in the case of farmers, partly coincides with economic opportunity and a measure of protection by the State. In Milan, a real turning point that allowed them to surmount a pure decision-taker position came with the final conquest of what used to be almost a privilege of property developers. That is, resources to be exchanged with the public, among which is a symbolic capital provided by the increasing societal appreciation of urban agriculture and its benefits. Innovative policy frameworks such as Rural Districts enable a rewarding system for ecosystem services that allows some form of reciprocity, the absence of which in the original top-down P.A.S.M. approach partly explains its ineffectiveness.

So, how capable are governmental institutions of understanding the social and cultural demands informing bottom-up instances for a 'rural-urban' policy? How willing or prepared are they to actively consider such instances? And does a significant bottom-up movement actually exist, or should it be stimulated? These are three basic research questions worth tackling for those willing to investigate the peri-urban agriculture issue in contexts where open spaces around cities remain a threatened resource and where inclusion in the decision-making process is still at stake.

Glossary

Adaptive governance is a concept deriving from institutional theory and focuses "on the evolution of formal and informal institutions for the management and use of shared assets, such as common pool natural resources and environmental assets that provide ecosystem services". It is applied to wide social learning and collective choice processes, such as "collective choices about the scope and structure of institutions that govern lower level choices by individuals and organizations." (Hatfield-Dodds, Nelson, & Cook, 2007, p. 1).

Agricultural park or **rural park** is a safeguarded area whose land use and landscape are predominantly characterised by agriculture. This label can be applied to very different cases, in terms of dimension, location, functional mix, type of production, governance characteristics or other factors. The predominant task of an a.p. can also vary from just safeguarding a pre-existing rural environment to actively fostering agricultural practices, typically in the more recent examples where multifunctional farming is also promoted (Timpe et al., 2016).

Cascina is the characteristic multi-family rural building in the Lombard Po Valley. The same term may also refer to the production unit as a whole. Land-holdings in South Milan are predominantly rented: tenant farmers are the absolute majority and actual property owners are mostly private. In the municipality of Milan however, 550 out of 2,910 hectares of arable land and 60 of the 117 active farms are still owned by the city (ISTAT, 2010). This has allowed the town administration to extend the duration of agrarian rents and to closely cooperate with the DAM rural district (consorziodam.com).

Legitimation, according to Benson's definition (1975), corresponds to the formal recognition of a private entity/category as a deliverer of public interest services. The deliverer is consequently provided with instrumental benefits: tax exemption, funding, favourable zoning regulations, etc. For instance, a private farmer meeting some particular requirements may obtain privileged access to land rental on publicly owned plots in the name of public interest (as in the case of *Milano Metropoli Rurale*). The right to legitimise somebody and to concede such advantage is held by (local) public institutions in the form of "authority" or "legitimation resources" (Benson, 1975, p. 229). Legitimation resources and economic resources, and the interaction between those who hold them, are decisive for carrying out public policy programs in a democratic system based on market economy.

Multifunctional farming allows the production of additional goods other than food and fibre, unlike conventional (or industrial) farming. Ecosystem services are included, as well as some other benefits for society such as rural employment. Being more sustainable, multifunctional agriculture is often incentivised through public policies. A valuable insight into this issue is provided by van der Ploeg (2008).

Peri-urban agriculture concerns those areas at the edge of the city, while 'urban' (or 'intra-urban') agriculture manifests itself within the

urban fabric. This basic distinction could be sufficient, but there may be some others. As it appears from a recent research report (Lohrberg et al., 2016), the former usually involves larger and less fragmented farmlands and, as a consequence, it tends to be professional rather than recreational. Its peri-urban location normally affects farming business in two opposite ways: on the one hand it threatens it (due to a constant rural-to-urban transition perspective), while on the other, it is, nowadays, also perceived as an opportunity, due to a growing interest in local products and nearby rural amenities by urban dwellers.

Policy-takers is a category widely employed (not only in scholarly works) generally referring to those who benefit, or are supposed to benefit, from public interventions or programmes without participating in their definition. In this chapter, we use this term to highlight a passive or scarcely influent role. Nevertheless, a rigid 'makers/takers' dichotomy is criticised by several authors, among them H. Bang (2005).

Reframing literally means a change of **frame**, a much more deeply-rooted structure than a mere 'representation'. According to D. Schön, policy positions rest on "frames" or "underlying structures of belief, perception, and appreciation" (Schön & Rein, 1994, p. 23). Frames are undeclared and taken for granted, and divergences between them are at the origin of policy controversies.

Social imaginary is a concept that sociologists employ to refer to how a particular society imagines itself according to its own cultural system, legislation, and state arrangement in a given historical period (Taylor, 2004).

Social learning refers, in this context, to dynamics in which participants produce fresh knowledge and possibly change their point of view while interacting with each other (Sol, Beers, & Wals, 2013, pp. 36-37). In this case, as in other cases, policy studies have borrowed some views from social behaviour theories, with the aim of better understanding what affects progress and innovation within public policy processes.

Socio-ecological system (or **social-ecological system**) is a concept that scholars often prefer to 'ecosystem', in order to overcome an arbitrary separation between 'social' and 'ecological' and to include human practices and structures (e.g. institutional) in the study of ecology. As Ostrom notes (2009), such a perspective may also help social and natural science findings to be organised within a common analysis framework and to jointly orientate the build-up of public policy agendas.

Symbolic capital is a form of capital deriving from respect and recognition by a particular society, which confers a legitimate power (within the same society) to those who hold it. The concept of symbolic capital is widely used in sociology and was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1984).

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