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Policies and practices of urban and peri-urban agriculture: a great deal of participation but a little public action

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Abstract

The paper deals with the Italian planning and the unresolved discrepancy between urban and agricultural policies, due to the long-standing separation between urban and rural world at the various levels of local government as well as in education and research. To frame this problem the paper recalls some of salient aspects of the Italian city planning, since when the agricultural areas were regulated through the classification and the building rights assigned by the city plan, to the present attempts and the persisting contrast between city growth and agricultural activities.

The paper presents this matter since the 1950s up today and from the municipal planning to the regional plans, outlining how the historic gap between agricultural 'activity' and functional 'zone' ends up in a two not-consistent and low-effective policies, those supporting the productive activities and those directed to the landscape protection; it discusses the 'agricultural park' as a promising attempt to overcome the historical backwardness of planning by integrating objectives and tools of both spatial planning and agricultural activity, with particular reference to the peri-urban areas; it documents three peculiar experiences of Italian agricultural parks (South Milan Agricultural Park; Agricultural Park of Villaretto, Turin; Paduli Park, Salento); it illustrates the arising of a field of action where policies, practices, public and private actors are connected in a scenario of development exposed to a continuous remaking of conflicts/synergies about soil protection and transformation.

The paper ends by commenting how a true innovation is therefore underway, both in the formal planning and in terms of governance and participatory approach. This innovation raises the role of agricultural park as a major tool to develop and regulate agricultural activities within a framework of multi-functionality and urban uses, profiting from the city proximity to produce additional benefits.