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**11TH
AESOP
SUSTAINABLE
FOOD
PLANNING
CONFERENCE**

**19-22.06.2024
BRUSSELS
& GHENT**

**CONFERENCE
PROCEEDINGS**



with the support of FWO and AESOP4Food

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11TH CONFERENCE

AESOP SUSTAINABLE

FOOD PLANNING

Conference Proceedings of the 11th AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Conference — 19-22 June, 2024 — Brussels & Ghent

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Papers are organized according to the paper session in which the paper was presented during the Conference.

This is the edition published online, after the conference took place. It can be accessed online via the DOI [10.5281/zenodo.12938367](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12938367)

— 28th of June, 2024

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New Actors in Food Governance. The Potential role of Museums and Ecomuseums

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New Actors in Food Governance. The Potential role of Museums and Ecomuseums

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to explore urban food co-governance, or hybrid governance processes (Manganelli, 2022), by examining the contribution of some actors in making them more inclusive, sustainable, and able to stimulate learning and capacity building processes. Andrée (2019) underscores a crucial aspect in the discourse on urban food governance: the imperative for enhanced integration within the various facets of food-related responsibilities in central governments. This entails fostering a discussions regarding the contributions and the roles of diverse food system actors, from businesses to civil society organizations.

Our research hypothesis is that museums and ecomuseums can be an entity that, while not directly involved in food policies, can contribute to food co-governance practices to the extent that they employ learning and capacity building tools that engage the local community or national and international visitors.

The role of museums today is changing. From dusty repositories of ancient artefacts deemed important by a handful of scholars, museums have become 'social agents', capable not only of assuming social responsibility but also of catalysing change through capacity building. This idea is an evolution and active expression of the school of thought known as 'New Museology', which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. New Museology focused on how museums could support disadvantaged communities and stimulate processes of social, cultural, and environmental change.

As is well known, according to the latest ICOM definition of 2022, a museum is “a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing” (ICOM, 2022).

Ecomuseums are a type of museum that extends 'beyond the walls' of a traditional museum, to encompass the ecosystem of the surrounding territory, including its tangible and intangible cultural and natural assets, and the local population. Conceived as an on-going process of becoming, it has been defined by Peter Davis as: “a community-based museum or heritage project that supports sustainable development (Davis 2007: 116).

To achieve the objective and discuss the hypothesis outlined above, the paper is structured as follows: the first paragraph defines the theoretical framework. The second paragraph describes more in details what museums and ecomuseums are. The third section presents some case of special interests from various countries. The final section returns to the hypothesis proposed at the beginning and draws final conclusions.

Keywords: Food, Governance, Museums, Ecomuseums

The co-governance perspectives: the role of learning process and capacity building

The main objective of this section is to propose a theoretical reflection on the current orientations of food system governance. Governance of the food system, as well as governance in a more general sense, is oriented towards the adoption of collaborative governance approaches. The concept of co-governance has been defined as the joint work of

multiple actors to achieve common goals (Kooiman, 2004). Johnston and Andrée (2019) identify other useful definitions for this analysis, such as the one promoted by Emerson et al. (2012) that describe co-governance as a collaborative, voluntary and public policy process engaging “people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (2012). In these approaches the construction of relations both between the actors of a given territory and with the territory itself become decisive.

The issues briefly outlined above find ample support in the literature, which states that governance encompasses a broad spectrum of relationships, processes, rules, practices, and structures, both institutional and discursive, serving as the conduits through which power, control, and decisions are orchestrated. It extends beyond the confines of the state and its affiliated agencies, recognizing the formal and informal roles played by a diverse array of actors in the intricate web of policy-making processes. Unlike the concept of “government,” which is characterized by a rather narrow focus, the concept of governance acknowledges the inherent multiplicity of actors and perspectives in public decision-making structures, prompting a critical examination of these structures and their implications. Civil society organizations, akin to governments, actively engage as agents in public policymaking, social provisioning, and discursive interventions. In a democratic context, the concept of governance is normatively anchored in the belief that enhanced participation from non-governmental actors, such as the private sector and civil society organizations, is not only beneficial but also desirable. The premise is that through broad-based participation, governance processes can surpass the effectiveness of governments acting in isolation, leading to the attainment of shared, public objectives (Healey, 2017), especially evident in contemporary rescaling processes (Brenner, 2001), decentralization and a ‘hollowing out of the nation state’ (Jessop, 2013).

The vision of place governance outlined above found a moment of great development and focus with the institutionalist approach. This approach was supported by the Newcastle upon Tyne School, which defined governance as the capacity of territories to act, ultimately conceptualizing governance capacity as institutional capacity (Healey, 1999).

Institutional capacity (Cars and Healey, 2017) refers to the ability of territories to establish fruitful and constructive pathways of action, to enhance the physical resources of places and to foster continuous reflexive dialogue between territorial actors. This process lead to the construction of new discourses about the places themselves and to transformation efforts (Habermas, 1987).

In this sense, territorial governance is a learning process that implies the maturation of new capacities for action and for the formation of new networks. These governance ‘capacities’ have also been recognised by scholars of food system governance who, without explicitly citing the institutionalist school, believe that “in a growing number of cities around the world, local government officials and non-state actors are designing and actively implementing policies, plans and strategies for more equitable and sustainable urban food systems. The involvement of non-state actors (such as farmers, private businesses, civil society and community groups, academics, the media, etc.) in food policy is a hallmark of the shift from top-down government to governance in public management that has taken place in many parts of the world” (Stoker 2000 in Halliday, 2022)

Museums and Ecomuseums in Action for Sustainability

The International Council of Museums (ICOM)’s official website affirms, “The definition of a museum has evolved, in line with societal developments.” Since its creation in 1946, ICOM has updated this definition to reflect the realities of the global museum community.

Previously, ICOM defined museums as “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2007, p.9).

The Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM approved the new museum definition in Prague on 24th August 2022. According to the new definition, "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing" (ICOM, 2022).

As Bennet (2005) underlines, the significance of museums extends beyond mere repositories of artifacts, in fact, they have played a pivotal role in shaping social spaces and organizing temporal structures. Their influence extends beyond the confines of the museum itself; museums have played a pivotal role in establishing the spatial and temporal frameworks that support programs of social administration conducted outside their premises. Bennet (2005), drawing a parallel with Latour's assertion in the article titled 'Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world' (Latour, 1983), wrote: 'Give me a museum, and I will change society'. This perspective acknowledges the museum's unique capacity to engineer new entities by manipulating the relationships between people and objects within a purposefully designed environment. These entities can then be mobilized, both within and outside the museum, to contribute to diverse social and civic programs.

An ecomuseum is "a community-based museum or heritage project that supports sustainable development" (Borrelli and Davis, 2012). The notion of ecomuseum was firstly introduced in the 1960s and from the 1970s the concept has evolved over time. It can be stated that the origins of ecomuseums can be traced back to the Lurs Conference in 1966. The conference introduced the idea that French parks did not have only the role to preserve the natural part of the park but also its cultural heritage (Borrelli, Dal Santo, Davis, 2023, p.286). Between 1971 and 1974 the ecomuseum became an institution focused on community development and new ecomuseums were introduced (Borrelli, Dal Santo, Davis, 2023). Today, ecomuseums have become a relevant notion in "New Museology" (Borrelli and Davis, 2012), playing a role as a social actor in the transformation of the territory and its community. The primary function of ecomuseums is to safeguard and promote local socio-cultural traditions. This is facilitated by the preservation and revitalization of collective memory, deeply rooted in the cultural and historical heritage of the region. To sustain their pivotal role, ecomuseums usually conduct comprehensive research and scholarly inquiry into the thematic aspects of the territory. Furthermore, the conservation efforts undertaken by ecomuseums are predominantly oriented towards sustainability, thereby fostering tourism development through the judicious valorization of the local landscape.

As previously mentioned, heritage is one of the key elements considered in the notion of "ecomuseum", as it is strongly connected to the development of self-awareness and identity of the community involved. Another key factor that should be considered is the notion of "sense of place". The sense of place is highly interconnected with human interaction as it is created by natural and cultural elements (Borrelli and Davis, 2012). The sense of place involves the development of "a set of structures and habitual ways of understanding inherent to a society or group" (Borrelli and Davis, 2012), known as "habitus". However, habitus is not static, it evolves over time in relation to different factors such as relationships, environments and education. Ecomuseums need to focus on these aspects, as they play a significant role in creating a deep connection between people and territory. Such connection is tightly linked to the presence of territorial governance systems that facilitate "capacity building" (Borrelli and Davis, 2012), as this process empowers stakeholders by enhancing their skills and involvement in decision-making processes. This governance aspect is crucial because it extends beyond state politics, involving a broader range of actors. By developing practices of democratic territorial governance, ecomuseums introduce and foster a sense of responsible behavior within both local stakeholders and individuals.

As far as sustainability is concerned, ecomuseums need to be involved with SDGs. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced in 2015, when it was assessed that

the previous framework, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), had failed its purpose. The SDGs are 17 goals introduced in the Agenda 2030 in order to create a collaboration between different sectors to address and fight the many challenges existing all over the world. Along these lines, Peter Davis introduced the “21 Principles”, specifically developed for ecomuseums, in order to give a guideline to evaluate the collaboration of ecomuseums with sustainable development (Borrelli, Dal Santo, Davis, 2023). According to the vision proposed by the 21 Principles, ecomuseums are strongly focused on the involvement of the community and decision-making processes, two aspects also found in the Agenda 2030. Furthermore, ecomuseums promote collaboration between different actors, such as schools and the community, in order to bring culture and the territory together. Finally, as far as sustainable development is concerned, ecomuseums play a necessary role of promotion of a sustainable approach to the territory, creating opportunities for the community to acknowledge global issues and to act upon them. It is therefore possible to affirm that, through the implementation of initiatives aimed at the stimulation of active participation within the community, thanks to digital innovation and to a bottom-up approach, ecomuseums can affect the future of the territory and its community.

Some Practices Around the World

Many scholars remind us that the food system is far from sustainable because much of the power is in the hands of food and agricultural input companies, while farm workers and consumers do not hold enough power (United States Department of Agriculture, 2022). Finding new ways of communicating the relevance of a sustainable food system can support the growing awareness of these marginalized stakeholders to advocate for a change in food systems and empower their ability to modify their own food choices.

The ability of museums to become places of knowledge transfer and dialogue is expressed in different contexts: there are national and international museum projects that have focused on sustainability, climate change, and in some cases even food. All these projects promote and discuss how to raise the awareness of both local society and international visitors, and how best to achieve sustainability goals. Moreover, it is important to mention that in 2020 ICOM (International Committee for Museums) has launched a new working group on sustainability, dedicated to the discussion of actions that could be carried out to support the achievement of the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs)¹

As presented by Hjalager and Wahlberg (2014), museums can also become strategic partners for the involvement of users into regional food innovation processes. They can serve as experiential and participatory spaces where it's possible to build solutions for regional challenges, and forge collaborations with other actors of the system, such as academia, food producers, restaurants, local and tourism organizations.

An Italian interesting project called “The integrated Museum” develop the relationship between museums and sustainability. This experience aims at making museums key players in the local implementation of national and regional sustainable development strategies (Rota, 2019). Specifically, in the context of the implementation of the Italian National Sustainable Development Strategy – NSDS², the Integrated Museums intend to: create a place for comparison, exchange of good practices and in-depth study on sustainable development issues; actively integrate with urban, metropolitan and territorial agendas for local development; promote the function of museums as civic and cultural platforms that operate in close relation with entities and citizens in a logic of a "diffuse museum"; create a cultural ecosystem dedicated to museology for sustainability; produce a guideline document to be signed, which articulates the themes on which museums can contribute to the construction of

¹ For more information looks at [Working Group on Sustainability - International Council of Museums - International Council of Museums \(icom.museum\)](https://www.icom.museum/en/working-group-on-sustainability).

² The NSDS/SNSvS represents the political framework to implement the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs in Italy. [highlights-italy-action-plan-pcsd.pdf \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/12/1/11231231.pdf)

policy and their strategic role in key processes on the territory and as facilitators in local sustainable development; open a dialogue and convergence with the themes of the National Forum for Sustainable Development and the sustainability indicators of the NSDS (Rota, 2019).

Another interesting project is the Food Museums network in the province of Parma, which intends to be a place of memory and a monument to past generations, but also a theatre of today, capable of illustrating and demonstrating the value of products that are the protagonists of Italian gastronomy and the Mediterranean Diet. The aim of this network of museums is to remind current and future generations of the relevance of protecting local food (Musei del Cibo, 2023). Still in Europe, on the shores of Lake Geneva in Swiss Vevey, there is another interesting example: Alimentarium is a museum devoted exclusively to food and nutrition, which includes a large educational vegetable garden (Alimentarium, 2023).

In Washington D.C. Jacobson is developing a National Food Museum for the United States. Such a museum will include a physical museum, a richly informative website, and community activities. The museum aims to be connected at local level with community-based activity and at global level organizing activities addressed to visitors and extensively utilizing social media platforms.

Other interesting examples are the Climate Museums. As Newell (2020) illustrates, there are at least 5 Museums in the world that have been opened over the last few years and that have the specific objective of proposing initiatives on climate change and raising the level of awareness of these issues both on a local and global scale. The museums in question are those in New York, Rio, Hong Kong, Oslo and Bremerhaven (Germany). As Newell well reminds us, these are museums inspired by the “new museology” and therefore much devoted to participation, with an approach that is not only didactic, but above all dialogical. Their aim is to stimulate forms of active listening on the part of the interlocutors that allow them not only to hear, but to “feel” with all their senses the importance and gravity of the current climate situation. In addition to these museums, which were created precisely with the aim of opening up a debate on climate change, it is important to remember that some important museums have organized exhibitions, including permanent ones, that deal with this theme. Some examples, again reported by Newell (2020), are the exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History; that of the American Museum of Natural History; that of the Australian Museum; the National Museum of Australia; and the Papa Tongarewa/National Museum of New Zealand. The central issue we wish to highlight, beyond the different initiatives, is that Museums can become important vehicles for communicating sustainability messages to both the local community and visitors. Both these communities can approach these issues using different languages and forms of communication.

A last example of food related exhibition is the one that opened on 15 September 2022 in the City of New York Museum, whose title is “Food in New York: bigger than the plate” and whose objective is precisely to explore the different phases of the food system and how they can be changed to become more sustainable.

Coming to the experiences developed by ecomuseums, according to Zago “the themes of ecomuseums related to food culture are the most diverse” (Zago, 2018, p. 199, author’s translation): in Italy there are ecomuseums dedicated to a specific agricultural product, or traditional agricultural processing. In general, ecomuseums promote all local features, as “in enhancement and promotion activities, the territory must be considered in its entirety, as a place of knowing how to live and knowing how to produce” (Zago, 2018, p. 195, author’s translation), so food is part of this local development system. Ecomuseums are also able to create networks, such as the “Eco Slow Road” project, which was promoted during Expo 2015 from a collaboration between Italian Ecomuseum Network (EMI), Slow Food Italy and the Ecomuseum Acque del Gemonese. As well as creating a network for the promotion of ecomuseums with a wide agri-food heritage, the project aimed to enhance little-known geographical areas, supporting the preservation of traditional culture as a resource to develop

a sustainable model of tourism. Another important network related to food is the “Ecomusei del gusto”³, aimed in ecomuseums promotion based on local food and wine enhancement.

Two virtuous ecomuseums that works with food are Ecomuseo Lagorai in Trentino Alto Adige, and LIS Aganis, Ecomuseo delle Dolomiti Friulane in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. Ecomuseo Lagorai is located in a territory where numerous traditional “malghe” produce cheese with a local traditional methodology. “Malghe” are typical pastureland in the Italian Eastern Alps, and to some extent in the Central Alps, where animals, especially cattle, graze during the summer. It also refers to the buildings, or complexes of buildings, constructed from wood or a combination of wood and masonry, situated on these pasturelands. These structures are used for housing livestock, storing milk and tools, and providing temporary accommodation for staff. In the “malghe” of the ecomuseum is safeguarded traditional butter and cheese making, which is a Slow Food presidio (conservation label). The ecomuseum created Youtube videos where these traditional cheese making techniques are narrated and disseminated.

At Lis Aganis ecomuseum food is enhanced in different ways and with different activities. One of them is the “ancient apples project”, an itinerary of ancient apple trees accompanied by educational panels; it aims in recovery, safeguard and promotion of old apple trees, in collaboration with the Association Ancient Apples Lovers. The ecomuseum have also working tables called “Nature and Colours” specifically dedicated to the recovery and rediscovery of local natural plants for local development and to strengthen territorial bonds. The ecomuseum organized meetings (also online during the Pandemic) with different topics (such as traditional recipes, biodiversity, tastings) where local community is actively involved in sharing and learning about local products. The ecomuseums organized periodic meetings around food as cultural heritage (traditions, food and art, recipes, laboratories, seminars and conversations) in collaboration with local associations and stakeholders.

The experiences of Ecomuseo Lis Aganis and Ecomuseo Lagorai demonstrate that local development is achieved by the collaboration between stakeholders for fostering local identities and networking (Zago, 2018, p. 195): in that case the transmission of food and its promotion are a way for local identity promotion.

Conclusions

In light of the discourse developed so far, in this last section we will mainly reflect on the innovative aspects highlighted and their possible impacts in the field of food system studies. As far as the innovative aspect is concerned, we argue that the role of museums as active stakeholders of hybrid systems of governance has not yet been adequately taken into account in food governance discourse. At the moment there is a vacuum that needs to be filled. Reasoning about the potential role of museums and ecomuseums may indeed become useful/important in order to define food governance strategies that have an impact on the system in terms of sustainability transformations.

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³ More information are available at the webpage <http://www.ecomuseidelgusto.it/>

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