ANIMA Investment Network, in partnership with the Agency for Sustainable Mediterranean Cities and Territories (AVITEM), organised a Transnational Working Group on farmers’ innovation on 8 and 9 November 2017, as part of the European project MADRE - Metropolitan Agriculture for Developing an innovative, sustainable and Responsible Economy.

It was the opportunity for 50 participants from the 6 metropolises associated with MADRE (Barcelona, Montpellier, Marseille, Bologna, Tirana and Thessaloniki) to:

- Share real-life experiences and best practices related to urban and peri-urban farming innovation, in its broad approach (technological, marketing and organizational);
- Discuss specific issues and identify Mediterranean specificities for urban and peri-urban farming innovation;
- Define common solutions to the constraints and needs faced by Mediterranean metropolises;
- Formulate policy recommendations as a basis for a Policy Paper on metropolitan agriculture in the Mediterranean;
- Express their expectations vis à vis a transnational cluster/network on metropolitan agriculture in the Mediterranean.

The event was part of the Mediterranean Urban Agriculture Days.
The methodology applied for the facilitation of working groups was the World Café. Participants were distributed in 3 working groups of 10-15 people, including representatives of the 6 MADRE metropolises. Each group discussed successively 3 common issues for farmers’ innovation in the development of Metropolitan and Peri-Urban Agriculture. Each table had a dedicated group leader, in charge of facilitating discussions and translating EN/FR when needed, as well as a rapporteur to share the working group’s results with all participants at the end of the TWG.

The following 3 common issues have been discussed:

- Economic model of urban and peri-urban farming businesses and development of added value activities
- Collective organisation of farmers to access larger markets and share costs
- Capacity building and support services for current farmers and newcomers

For each common issue, participants have been invited to discuss the following 3 questions:

- What are the main constraints and needs on the targeted issue?
- Are there Mediterranean specificities to this issue?
- What political, institutional, operational and citizens’ solutions should be put in place?

You will find below the outcomes of this Transnational Working Group.

**Table 1 - Economic model of urban and peri-urban farming businesses and development of added value activities**

- **What are the economic possibilities for urban and peri-urban agriculture?**

This topic was large and complicated to delve into but participants identified an interesting opportunity to analyse the economic possibilities for urban and peri-urban farmers when focusing the thread of the storyline on water management and waste management:

1. **Water management**: Currently, farmers are using drinking water to water their crops, often paying the same price. Additionally, water for cultivation in an urban setting is sometimes hardly accessible, making it difficult to grow fruits and vegetables. It was suggested that, in those cities where using drinking water is mandatory, there should be a shift that allows the implementation of rainwater harvesting. Farmers saw a huge benefit from this as they would be able to use and treat this water that eventually will recharge the watersheds. Considering that most of the rainwater is lost in urban areas due to the extensive use of cement, this is an important practice! The economic value here is to allow farmers to use this water and therefore reduce the cost of building infrastructure to supply them with water. Additionally, the city can pay those farmers who are recharging the watersheds since the scarcity of water in Mediterranean...
countries will be of special concern in the coming years when considering climate change effects.

2. Waste management: Currently, cities transport organic waste outside of the cities when this organic matter could be reused by farmers (in France, the cost of dumping the waste into these spaces costs € 50 a ton). In some cities, private companies and/or public bodies are trying to transform organic waste but farmers report that the organic matter they receive is not useable for cultivating because of a high presence of plastic. In France, some companies are directly getting in touch with farmers to avoid the costs related to disposal of their waste. Farmers gladly accept this donation since they have control over its treatment for organic matter. The outcome of this is that farmers end up using the organic waste generated within the territory to grow the food that the territory will eat. This allows for more natural processes to take place in the farms. It is therefore important to consider how farmers are creating a circular process along the food production chain that is valuable for society. Therefore, participants identified two opportunities for economic benefit in this example. On the one hand, it is possible for farmers to charge companies a price that is competitive compared to dumpsters outside the cities and to incentivize companies to send their organic matter to them. On the other hand, governments can pay these farmers and reward them for improving the soil, enriching it, and using harmless practices in their agricultural processes.

To sum up these two points, farmers have the opportunity to increase their value in society by bringing to light not only on their products and their methods of production but also the positive impact they have in resisting climate change threats, which reduce every year the water quantity and soil quality - points of focus and importance to farming possibilities. This proposal is easy to understand since this approach is frequently applied in our society: companies are rewarded for their good practices. The recognition by society of virtuous practices should thus be extended to farmers.

- Consumer trust

These findings lead to an important point, which is building consumer trust. Farmers are concerned that their products and labour are not appreciated by the consumer. It is still difficult to attract more consumers to fruits and vegetables grown using permaculture or organic agriculture techniques. Farmers are pointing out that there is a need for a cultural shift that would recognise their labour at its true value. This is the only way for them to compete with modern food production systems - often categorised as being chemical intensive, water intensive, and monoculture. The proposed economic values aforementioned are seen as incentives that will help this cultural shift take place.

In addition, consumer trends over the last years have shown that customers are interested in purchasing local food or km zero, as well as purchasing food whose production methods are focused on climate change resilience. Farmers who participated in the Transnational Working Group directly concerned by such practices. For example, member farmers of Campi Aperti in Bologna created the association to pool their efforts in becoming distinctive and visible.
Economic cooperation

Making the transition to climate resilient agricultural practices is not easy nor is starting a farm. Farmers mention that it is costly, especially when taking into consideration laws that restrict the use of land and are often unclear towards land ownership. There are also little economic incentives and support. That is why some farmers are uniting in the form of cooperatives or associations where they not only share knowledge on agricultural practices and seed varieties, as the case of Campi Aperti, but are also the cost of machinery that is sometimes needed to facilitate the work on the farm. This is a way farmers found to create an internal economic structure.

Other cooperative practices include sharing the costs of an outlet, that if assumed by one farmer only can limit his/her visibility and chances to sell his/her products. Additionally, even when united in such forms, farmers still express their concerns about their ability to compete in the food market as their outlets are often outside of the city. If located in the city, there is a restriction on the number of days per week they are permitted to sell their products.

A final remark on this point was that consumers are not well educated when it comes to food visual appearance. Farmers express concern when their products are not consumed and have to be thrown away because of customers’ expectations. If farmers were to assume the task of educating consumers, it would take time off from their actual work. Since this education is needed, it was suggested that farmers join forces with other sectors to encourage a cultural shift and extend cooperation through several levels of society. For example, farmers can partner with the audio-visual sector, either from the university or professionals, offer them the space for the creation of stories and, this way, initiate consumers’ education that, as pointed out before, is lacking at the moment.

Viability of these economic opportunities

How do these efforts demonstrate economic viability for farmers? It is important to consider the economic opportunities that arise from creating the cultural shift that derives from the aforementioned arguments. There are plenty of forms of circular economy that are supported by different sectors in society. The point that ties all these practices is the concern about land ownership and the complicated laws that hinder farmers’ development. It was expressed in the working groups held so far in Barcelona and Marseille that landowners are hesitant to sell or give their land for such practices. If there is an economic transition that values fairly farmers’ work for its positive contribution in creating climate resilient conditions, landowners will start to see land as a viable economic opportunity. So, there is an opportunity to launch pilot projects on the aforementioned dimensions to start analysing the impact of these transitions and evaluating their outcomes.
Collective organisation of farmers to access larger markets and share costs

The discussion started with a quick listing of the main types of “farmers' organisations” that were subject of the debate:

- Collective farmers' outlets;
- Farmers' markets;
- Community supported agriculture (CSA) - AMAP networks (Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne);
- Cooperatives (for sharing equipment and/or other);
- Web-based trading platforms.

Even though each of these types has specific needs, constraints and possible solutions, the discussion maintained an overall approach.

➢ What are the main constraints and needs on the targeted issue?

The constraints and needs were discussed separately when possible, but many links appeared between the two. The main ideas that were exposed can be grouped into 9 topics:

1. Practical issues

Farming activities (both producing and selling) often leave farmers little time for getting together and participating in collective actions. This constraint is even bigger in particular moments of the year. Distance between farmers is another important issue, as farms are often located in remote areas, with poor connections to transport networks.

2. Pooling of resources, services and equipment

The main driver for farmers' collective action is that pooling resources, services and equipment and sharing the costs can be a relief for small producers and a way to support fragile projects. There is a number of skills that are increasingly needed by farmers: farming techniques (especially for newcomers), monitoring of consumption trends, communication strategies, product marketing, understanding new forms of distribution, etc. Collective organisations and initiatives can easily address these needs by disseminating relevant information, organising specific trainings or promoting the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. However, many farmers still aren't aware of these opportunities. Besides, collective action often requires a dedicated person to coordinate and facilitate networking and cooperation between individuals, and it is not easy to ensure the resources to support this role.

3. Behavioural dimensions

Relations between participants in collective initiatives must be seriously considered. Firstly, taking part in this kind of initiatives for the first time requires farmers to change old, often deep-rooted habits regarding economic procedures or decision-making. Secondly, it demands to
establish relations of mutual trust based on knowing each other. These two processes can be difficult and time-consuming. Thirdly, the individualistic and competitive behaviour of many farmers – that can work in favour of certain projects’ viability – often creates conflicts of interest between the individual and the collective. This vision can be grounded on memories of failed projects, and it is not easy to shift it towards a more cooperative approach. Strong characters and people prone to abrupt interventions can exacerbate this kind of conflicts.

4. **Viability of projects**

Long-term sustainability of collective organisations is an important issue, mainly in terms of securing the necessary funds. This can be especially relevant as projects enter a middle phase, once the initial push is over, or when the economic and institutional context changes significantly.

5. **Support from public administrations**

The need of public support for farmers' organisations was widely discussed. There was a widely shared perception that the legal framework is not favourable to collective initiatives in this field (because of the absence of specific regulations or because existing laws constrain or limit their development – e.g. for sharing equipment). Apart from that, in some contexts, there is a lack of consideration (or under-consideration) of peasant and organic agriculture by policy makers, which translates into lower chances of getting funding or being taken seriously. Other needs regarding this issue have to do with the use of public space for distributing or selling produce (which should be facilitated for free or at low prices), the introduction of specific schemes for social enterprises in the farming sector and for farmers’ organisations in general (both for their creation and for long-term sustainability), and access to land in urban and peri-urban areas and the preservation of agricultural land.

6. **Access to public tenders**

In relation to the previous point, there is a special need to adapt the conditions of public tenders for collective catering so that small farmers and their organisations can meet them, not only large agricultural businesses and wholesalers. This has to do with the requirements, criteria, size and other aspects of public tenders.

7. **Community awareness**

There is a need for greater visibility of farmers’ organisations amongst society and, particularly, potential consumers. Farmers should find ways to raise awareness on the importance and benefits of these projects, and the need for consumers to support them. Opening to wider social sectors would also be beneficial.

8. **Traceability and fair competition**
Unfair competition is a serious problem for small-scale and sustainable projects. It should be combated where possible. The adoption of reliable methods to ensure the traceability and good labelling of products could be a good option.

- Are there Mediterranean specificities to this issue?

  1. Social relations

  Strong and impulsive temperaments are quite frequent in the Mediterranean region, and this kind of behaviour can be dangerous for collective action. Trust is also essential in social relations in the Mediterranean countries, but not easy to obtain or manage – there is often a framework of regulations, but then a non-formal way of navigating through it.

  2. Common climate

  The region has a broadly similar climate, and consequently shares some characteristics regarding agriculture, such as the large diversity of crops or the capacity to grow food all year round. This could ensure self-sufficiency in supplies (no need to import food) and enable collective organisations to meet local demand throughout the year.

  3. Agricultural practices

  In relation to the previous issue, there are important similarities in agricultural practices in Mediterranean countries. This opens the possibility for a fruitful exchange of knowledge and know-how.

  4. Bureaucracy

  A high amount of paperwork and bureaucracy in legal procedures seems to be common to most Mediterranean countries. This is a strong burden for small-scale projects.

  5. Attitude towards cooperation

  There seems to be differences regarding this issue: on the one hand, countries like Italy or Spain have a long history of association, which facilitates the development of collective initiatives; on the other hand, countries like Greece or Albania have a generally negative perception of cooperatives due to historical reasons.

  6. Balance between supply and demand

  The discussion on this issue also revealed deviation: in some territories, there is a bad connection between production and consumption in summer (strongest period for production but lowest in terms of consumption because of holidays); in others, however, it doesn’t seem to be the case.

- What political, institutional, operational and citizens’ solutions should be put in place?
1. Legal framework

One of the strongest recommendations was the development of norms and regulations that enable and incentivize collective initiatives (e.g. removing the constraints on the maximum number of farmers, facilitating cooperation between private and public initiatives, providing financial incentives such as tax breaks to local farmers and cooperatives, simplifying procedures through the so-called "fast track" for certain types of farmers, etc.).

2. Public support in marketing, certification and branding

Public administrations could in particular support farmers' organisations in the development of strategies for marketing, certification and branding. Non-farmers associations that promote local and sustainable agriculture should also be supported.

3. Use of vacant and abandoned spaces

Public authorities should facilitate the use of vacant and abandoned spaces of public or private ownership to develop collective projects for farmers (e.g. stable places to sell food, food processing facilities, logistic centres, etc.).

4. Logistic facilities

The distribution of production is a central challenge for small-scale projects. Exploring new ways to support the transportation and sale of food would be useful, e.g. by introducing collection and selling trucks going through neighbourhoods.

5. Farmers’ markets

Farmers’ markets are a form of direct sale from producers to consumers that offers large benefits to producers. The development of farmers’ markets, without site fees or at an affordable rate, should be explored in its various forms: either big, centralized, every-day markets or smaller, weekly markets spread across the metropolis.

6. Service providers

The development of service providers for farmers (equipment rental, distribution, marketing...) would foster a sharing economy among farmers.

7. Web-based tools

The Internet opens the way for new platforms and forms of connectivity. They should be explored to optimize flexibility, efficiency and outreach to consumers for urban and peri-urban farmers.
Capacity building and support services for current farmers and newcomers

- What are the main constraints and needs on the targeted issue?

  1. Difficulty to access appropriate training

The problem is different for each territory:

In Barcelona, Thessaloniki and Tirana, there is no vocational training in agriculture. Universities provide agricultural courses but they are often disconnected from the reality of farming businesses, as professors are often more concerned about the prestige of writing articles in research publications than transmitting useful knowledge to their students. There is a need for a more applied and practical approach to fill this gap. Enterprises and citizens should design the courses together with the State.

In France, there are many training programmes and they are well organised and framed. However, two constraints were raised: first, these programmes are not accessible to all, especially urban farmers, who are not considered as farmers (definition problem) and do not pay HAS; second, they do not include urban and alternative farming techniques and address mainly intensive and conventional agriculture needs (even if there are some organic trainings).

  2. Specific field training needs

**Soil pollution**: the start-up of a farming activity requires expertise and studies to analyse the soils. This need should be addressed by the creation of dedicated laboratories and the simplification of procedures to access their services.

**Innovative techniques**: there is a need for specific knowledge in photovoltaic equipment, water use and new irrigation systems, light redirection, etc.

**Food processing**: farmers also need specific education and training on food processing, e.g. typical products and varieties of processed food. It would allow them to add value to their production.

**Management skills**: farmers in most countries lack knowledge and skills in marketing and budgeting. Specific training programmes or other tools should be developed to support them on these issues.

**Analysis and promotion of external effects**: there is a need for specific knowledge and expertise to analyse and promote the external effects of urban and peri-urban agriculture such as circular economy, conservation of biodiversity or health improvement.

  3. Understanding the legal framework of urban and peri-urban agriculture

The current legal framework is not easily understandable. Some legal means exist but they are unused due to bureaucracy, inappropriate conditions, different types of commercial contracts and the absence of links between the different legal frameworks.
The existing legal framework needs to be enriched: there is a lack of public policies on urban and peri-urban agriculture, no support from State agencies, insufficient studies and lawyers targeting the urban and peri-urban agriculture legal framework, no coordination between the different local, regional and national authorities in charge of the land policy.

For example, in Barcelona, it is very easy to do agriculture and have an informal activity because 80% of operating costs are related to human resources. So, farmers sell their products without declaring their activity and paying related taxes. This situation generates a lot of informal work. And it is difficult for farmers to formalize their work in the absence of an appropriate framework and dedicated schemes.

So, there is a need of training and technical assistance to new farmers for all legal and administrative aspects: accounting, transition from an informal activity to a formal business, etc.

4. Capacity building governance

There is a lack of governance in the field of agricultural training: no person in charge, lack of voting system and problems in the decision process.

It is also difficult to involve people in the long term and in a sustainable way. For example in Albania, partnerships work for one hour or one day but there is no sustainability.

➢ Are there Mediterranean specificities to this issue?

Several Mediterranean synergies were raised:

- Ecosystems are fertile and unique. Farmers should have in mind all the environmental issues specifically related to the Mediterranean area.

- Climate change is happening (water shortages, soil impoverishment, proliferation of fires…) and there is a need of adaptation. Training and educational programmes should take into account these progressive changes related to climate change.

- Family culture: family is a power factor and a potential to be tapped.

- Value of the food: we are what we eat! Food has always been very important in Mediterranean cultures. It is very important to transmit these values to future generations. A new way of thinking society, facing environmental problems and taking care of both the city and the countryside is through the food system. There is a need for education programmes on synergic agriculture, permaculture.

- There is a need for mentors, experts and people that help farmers in their development process.

- Absence of status for urban farmers: due to this gap, urban farmers do not get access to certain schemes, in particular training. They are not traditional farmers and that is a
problem because they do not have the same insurances. A new status needs to be created to cover this new type of farmers and offer them specific training and support.

- **Lack of capacity building initiatives**: related services should be put in place. Unfortunately, there are no supporting measures for this kind of services.

The following points were considered **not common** to the various Mediterranean countries:

- **Rural development programmes** are different from one territory to another.

- **Lack of cooperation culture in Greece and Albania**: in these countries, farmers have a bad negative perception of cooperatives because of the political past. The word cooperative is directly linked to communism. There have been some attempts of creating new forms of cooperatives, which could have provided training to farmers. However, these attempts haven’t been very successful. Moreover, there are no specific training programmes on cooperation in these countries and farmers are not used to discuss problems together. Generally, training programmes are implemented by NGOs and related organisations.

- **Lack of agronomic skills in Greece**: there is insufficient staff to support farmers at the national agriculture agency and a lack of knowledge on alternative cultivation methods. Besides, state aids should support new farmers. Two years ago, an American farming school has been opened to train students and all persons who want to become farmers. This initiative is accompanying the ongoing movement of young people from cities to villages caused by the economic crisis and unemployment issues. These young people are facing two main problems: the lack of knowledge on agricultural techniques (very crucial) and the lack of capital to purchase machines and seedlings.

- **What political, institutional, operational and citizens’ solutions should be put in place?**

  1. **Experience sharing and facilitation of exchanges among farmers**

    Metropolises should organise events on urban and peri-urban agriculture one or twice a year, gathering all local stakeholders. An exchange programme between MADRE metropolises should also be developed. Accompaniment while the project is taking place not only before.

    Associations and networks can also facilitate these exchanges, like Terre de liens, Confederation paysanne, AgriBio or Solidarité paysanne is France.

    Other places and initiatives to share information and experience should also be established, such as cooperatives and farmers' associations, etc.

    A system of mentors involving retired farmers should also be experimented to encourage generational transmission.

    A common social media on urban and peri-urban agriculture could also be useful.
An international exchange programme on agriculture like ERASMUS+ exchanges between universities and schools should also be developed.

2. Thematic trainings

New thematic training courses on agriculture-related topics should be developed, for instance on climate change, organic agriculture/permaculture, food marketing, etc.

Existing education and training programmes provided by universities and schools should also include new modules on health and nutrition issues.

All organisations supplying food products need to be trained in local food systems and urban farming.

3. Innovative ideas and tools

- **Do it Yourself platforms**: the dissemination of user friendly tutorials through such platforms would address the lack of technical knowledge of some new farmers.

- **Agricultural test areas and innovation hubs**: this schemes facilitate the development of new ideas, skills and techniques.

- **Creation of a locally responsible label** and support to farmers in their accession to the label.

- **Development of the Territorial Food Projects** by metropolises and adoption of support measures for urban and peri-urban farmers.

- **Establishment of soil pollutions labs** to facilitate soil analysis and cleaning.

- **Pilot actions to test solutions at local level** before defining the national legal frameworks.

**Discussions on the next steps - Towards the MADRE Cluster**

Finally, on the 9th of November, participants discussed their expectations vis à vis the future MADRE Cluster and its possible tools.

First, they identified the kind of information that could be made available through the MADRE web platform:

- Centralisation of academic studies and other useful documents on urban and peri-urban agriculture;

- Information on urban and peri-urban agriculture in the various countries participating in the MADRE Cluster (legal framework, best practices, ongoing projects);

- Data on available land and abandoned spaces where to develop urban and peri-urban agriculture projects;
- Promotion of existing training on urban and peri-urban agriculture (soft and hard skills);

- Monitoring of funding opportunities to develop activities related to urban and peri-urban agriculture.

The main goals of the MADRE Cluster could be as follows:

- Raise awareness on the emergency to change our food supply system at the international level and advocate for urban and peri-urban agriculture at the European level;

- Push local governments to initiate dialogue with the private sector and civil society;

- Demonstrate that collective action is possible and beneficial;

- Develop linkages with Southern Mediterranean territories on and peri-urban agriculture.

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