

Interviews:



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In the project RUMORE, Lombardy Region focuses its interest and work on the Milan Metropolitan Area. The project activities aim to promote innovation processes in both rural and urban territories by supporting the better use of potentials and synergies between territories and actors. The main objective for Lombardy Region is to implement the smart specialization strategy within the framework of the regional cluster policies. In Lombardy, the cluster policies cover the Technological Clusters and the so called Rural Districts. Lombardy Region has identified three regional stakeholders working on different levels of innovation who share

their opinions and views on the innovation needs and potentials in the Milan Metropolitan Area:

- CAT.AL High Technology Cluster as a direct actor of innovation
- Regional Government in its role as an innovation policy maker
- Cariplo Foundation as an innovation broker.

The questions below focus on three specific themes of innovation: innovation needs, rural-urban partnerships and potential innovations. The answers provide a spectrum of different ideas based on the specific role and function of the respondents.



Interview

Pierfrancesco Cecchi

Question 1: RUMORE identifies urban-rural areas as new territorial spaces for innovation: what are the innovation needs of the different actors working in the agrifood field in the Milan Metropolitan Area?

Answer: *The innovation needs of the various actors differ significantly:*

City logistics: *Innovations are needed for the creation of distribution systems for fresh food in the last mile. When possible these innovations should be compatible with multimodal transport solutions with reduced environmental impact. Furthermore, innovations are needed for the optimisation of food supply processes to stores and hotels. Last but not least, new technological innovations for safety containers, which improve the conservation systems along transport chains, are of high importance.*

Silver food: *The number of seniors living in Milan and its surroundings is significant. In order to maintain a good level of physical and mental health, seniors need food, which corresponds to their needs in terms of nutrition, labelling, packaging, portioning, active ingredients and nutraceuticals.*

Food design: *Milan is the world capital of design and there exists huge potential in the cross-fertilisation between the fashion and the food industry. Further research is needed for the development of a new concept for food design. This should go beyond the commonly believed concepts for gastronomy and restaurants and should support the evolution of new industrial food that is sold on world markets. It should improve traditional foods revising them into modern products.*

Ethnic food: *Given the increasing number of citizens with different cultural origins, it is necessary to extend food production and control systems to incorporate the different cultural methods of food processing (e.g. halal, kosher, Asians, Africans, etc.). This will guarantee general food safety and quality for all citizens and for all produced and imported food.*

Urban agriculture: *Innovations are expected for the further development of vertical agriculture, hydroponics and aquaponics as well as of all different ways of cultivation in a controlled environment. This is a niche that has large growth potential and which is already a trend followed by a number of big cities.*

Question 2: RUMORE supports the exchange of good practices between European regions, which could inspire actions of the Technological Clusters and the Rural Districts: in this context, which rural metropolitan partnerships exist or should be developed in the Milan Metropolitan Area?

Answer: *CAT.AL sees the enhanced aggregation of companies, universities and other public institutions as a way to strengthen territorial competitiveness. In this sense, it intends to activate a series of innovation tables and match-making events. All these events will support the creation of partnerships with innovative technological contents, which will be submitted to the next Lombardy regional calls for proposals.*

Question 3: One of the outputs of RUMORE is an Action Plan, which adjusts the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 to the needs of the Technological Clusters and the Rural Districts. What are the still unrevealed innovation potentials of rural territories in the Milan Metropolitan Area, which could be exploited with the support of the ROP ERDF (Innovation and SMEs competitiveness Axis)?

Answer: *The entrepreneurial specifics of the metropolitan territory must be reflected in the instrument of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020, in this sense the public authority could:*

- 1. Create reward systems for companies belonging to the regional clusters, in order to encourage aggregation to strengthen the competitiveness of the Lombardy system;*
- 2. Incorporate food and agrifood in the Human Technopole (ex Expo 2015 area) ensuring an active presence of the CAT.AL cluster on the boards representing the associated agrifood companies;*
- 3. Link the financial support more to research innovation contents, with a continuous tutoring of the technical-scientific experts, with respect to the current focus on the accounting and administrative documentation of the companies;*
- 4. Propose thematic axes of innovation that are not too top-down but still encourage bottom up initiatives of the participating companies.*



Interview

Benedetta Sevi

Question 1: RUMORE identifies urban-rural areas as new territorial spaces for innovation: what are the innovation needs of the different actors working in the agrifood field in the Milan Metropolitan Area?

Answer: *The rural territories in the Milan Metropolitan Area can be a test bed for the development of new solutions for the innovation needs of the Rural Districts. These territories provide a ground for communication and interaction between the different actors of the entire agrifood chain. At the same time, they bring together actors, who are not directly related to the agrifood supply chain, but have a high potential for cross-sectoral cooperation and cross-fertilization. Here count for example the operators of creative cultural enterprises.*

This type of companies is very open and engaged in the search for "customers" and collaborations even outside the urban context. Collaborations have proved to be more fruitful if they involve different types of companies and sectors. For instance, traditional agrifood enterprises could work together with creative enterprises, which are "specialists" in promotion, communication and marketing activities. These companies could support the exploitation of the opportunities offered by new technologies and web applications.

However, the launch of such collaborations must be supported by a mediator who has the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate the meetings and the joint work between the different parties.

A concrete example of such a collaboration is demonstrated by the CO-CREATE project. CO-CREATE is an EU-funded project involving 12 partners from 7 countries from the European Mediterranean area (Interreg MED Program 2014-2020). The Italian consortium in the project is led by the Design Department of the Milan Polytechnic. Lombardy Region is represented in the consortium by Directorate General "Autonomy and Culture".

A description of the main project activities and their progress is available under the link <http://www.cilab.polimi.it/co-create>. The link also provides information about the project methodology and used operational tools. These include among others tools related to design thinking (participatory planning) as well as information about the concept of cross innovation, which is not so common in the world of traditional companies (like the ones located in rural-urban areas).

A specific activity in the CO-CREATE project was the organisation of a training and a support path for traditional companies, including presentations of tools, which support companies to correctly identify and formulate their needs. The identified needs were presented in a call-for-ideas. The main aim behind this was to support the matching of traditional enterprises with cultural companies. As a next step, creative and cultural companies submitted proposals for products or services that meet the needs of the traditional enterprises. Finally, partnerships were created between the two types of companies and the teams were accompanied in the development of their ideas into structured projects.

This mentoring approach can be followed in RUMORE activities as well.

Question 2: RUMORE supports the exchange of good practices between European regions, which could inspire actions of the Technological Clusters and the Rural Districts: in this context, which rural metropolitan partnerships exist or should be developed in the Milan Metropolitan Area?

Answer: *In the Milan Metropolitan rural area new partnerships can be activated between "traditional" actors, holders of knowledge and rural culture, and actors of cultural and entrepreneurial creativity. Lombardy Region has experience in the development of cross-sectoral collaborations between the cultural companies and other sectors. It intends to extend these collaborations also with enterprises from the agrifood field.*

Some cases of collaborations that could methodically inspire the activities in the RUMORE project are the following:

1. The European CCAIps Project

CCAIPs was funded by the EU Alpine Space Program in priority axis competitiveness and attractiveness. The project, running between 2011 and 2014 and led by Lombardy Region, brought together partners from 6 countries (Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland) (<http://www.ccalps.eu/>)

The main objective of the project was to create an international network, in which cultural and creative enterprises could develop their full potential with the help of support networks (such as incubators, institutions, universities, research centres). The key purpose of the networks is to help companies connect with each other and the reference market, and also to develop new products and services to support competitiveness.

In particular, the Alpine area, located in the heart of Europe, needs to create and strengthen the network between urban and peripheral areas in order to increase their competitiveness. Cultural and creative enterprises can contribute to the development of the economy by introducing innovation, encouraging creativity and inventiveness: thanks to the use of new technologies.

A further aim of the project was to increase the awareness of public decision-makers for the needs of the sector and thus to encourage the development of appropriate policies for cultural and creative enterprises, which position creativity and innovation at the centre of production processes in the Alpine Space.

2. Innovacultura project

Innovacultura started in 2015 and was promoted by Lombardy Region, Chamber of Commerce of Milan, Chamber of Commerce of Monza and Brianza and Lecco, Unioncamere Lombardia and Cariplo Foundation. The project supported the creation of partnerships between the Lombardy cultural institutes (museums, libraries, archives) and cultural and creative enterprises. The latter were called to co-design and create innovative products and services that would make the cultural institutes more attractive and inclusive. The focus was placed on communication and the use of new technologies, theatrical dramatization, etc.

Following the closure of the project, in 2016 the established partnerships between cultural institutes and creative companies were offered the opportunity to participate in training activities to reflect on the outcomes of their joint work as well as to evaluate the quality of co-designed products and service.

3. Creative workshops within Viavai plus project

In November 2017, Lombardy Region participated in creative workshops called "Viavai +". These were culture activities for cross-border tandems between the Canton Ticino, the Valais Canton and the Lombardy Region, which were supported by Pro Helvetia.

The creative workshops have encouraged the creation of binary partnerships through the development in tandem of design ideas in all artistic disciplines. The project took the form of a workshop, which was open to all cultural operators (companies, institutions, freelancers, etc.) from Lombardy area, Ticino and Valais, who wished to start cross-border collaborations in the cultural enterprises field.

Seven Italian-Swiss exchanges were born, with about 20 operators involved. At the end of the course, which was managed by the Milanese association cheFare, the best and most innovative ideas were rewarded by the "Viavai +" partners with a contribution of CHF 10,000 (around € 8,600).

Question 3: One of the outputs of RUMORE is an Action Plan, which adjusts the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 to the needs of the Technological Clusters and the Rural Districts. What are the still unrevealed innovation potentials of rural territories in the Milan Metropolitan Area, which could be exploited with the support of the ROP ERDF (Innovation and SMEs competitiveness Axis)?

Answer: *The indications for the regional policies, to be implemented with the resources of the ROP ERDF 2014-2020, can emerge at the end of the project considering the potential collaboration process among companies of different sectors.*

In this case, it will be useful to direct/allocate financing not just for the creation of new companies or start-ups, but also for the creation and consolidation of stable network collaborations between rural businesses, cultural–creative companies, and institutions that support them also from the point of view of the working methods and theoretical knowledge. This could include universities or business incubators, but also intermediate bodies such as chambers of commerce or trade associations. It will be a concrete outcome of the economic development of hybridization between the rural and the urban world.



Interview

Elena Jachia

Question 1: RUMORE identifies urban-rural areas as new territorial spaces for innovation: what are the innovation needs of the different actors working in the agrifood field in the Milan Metropolitan Area?

Answer: *A source that can be useful for identifying innovation needs is a map created by Cariplo Foundation about the practices of resilience with a specific observatory tool (OPR <http://www.osservatorioresilienza.it/>). By using this tool in Italy approximately 160 practices have been mapped at national level. About 30 of the mapped practices are located in the Milan Metropolitan Area.*

The map includes the results of Cariplo call “Resilient Communities”. Within this call 10 practices from the Milanese metropolitan areas were financed in the last 4 years. The practices are characterized by their focus on the topics of urban and peri-urban agriculture and sustainable production-consumption supply chains.

The analysis of innovation needs starts from these practices and from initiatives promoted by non-profit actors. The objectives and tools developed in the practices are mainly aimed at empowering citizens towards more sustainable forms of (food) consumption and at building alliances between consumers and producers in a specific area. The practices demonstrate a widespread demand for innovation in the forms of supply and consumption of food products (healthy, local and sustainable, where the relationship between producers and consumers is also based on direct contacts). Furthermore, they reflect the need for innovative ways of sharing risks in the production chains.

A further central theme is the growing need for education offers, which raise awareness about healthy and sustainable eating behaviours.

Critical aspects and common problems of the actors managing the mapped practices are the real necessity to have a support or facilitation in terms of dialogue with the institutions and a difficulty in managing bureaucratic and administrative aspects.

The practices have generally shown an excellent ability to propose and activate processes as well as to implement innovative solutions and tools on the theme of “food policies”.

A common request to different practices (not just on the “food” theme) is to develop new forms of governance, which are capable of:

- *recognising and enhancing inter - sectoral proposals and processes;*
- *recognising and enhancing (also with forms of coordination) the role of practices promoted by non- profit associations and groups of citizens.*

Many practices try to contribute to enhancing the territory as an integrated and complex system, for example by combining agriculture and the environment. Often then find difficulties to consolidate the experimentation because of permits, procedures and rules from many different sectors at different territorial scales. Many practices have pointed out precisely there is a clear need to develop, for example

policies (from funding to procedural aspects) that hold together agriculture, businesses, social aspects and environment.

A shared solution used in various practices is: to develop public policies (aligning existing instruments and policies) that can support new initiatives based on alliances between actors and functions traditionally related to different sectors.

Question 2: RUMORE supports the exchange of good practices between European regions, which could inspire actions of the Technological Clusters and the Rural Districts: in this context, which rural metropolitan partnerships exist or should be developed in the Milan Metropolitan Area?

Answer: *Many experiences supported by Cariplo Foundation have created metropolitan-rural partnerships that have grasped the potential of material and immaterial exchanges between rural and urban environment.*

These experiences include the launch of the “Earth Market” organized by Slow Food association with the collaboration of a growing number of producers in the South Milan agricultural park and surrounding areas, the experiences of network development conducted by “Forum Cooperation and Technology” (Good market in Corsico, House of Sustainability in Cesano Boscone, an ancient grain supply chain, an ongoing experience with the Ca Granda Foundation aimed at spreading the conversion of land to the biological agriculture), and the creation of the “Ricefield Park” with the collaboration of citizens and farmers.

Question 3: One of the outputs of RUMORE is an Action Plan, which adjusts the ROP ERDF 2014-2020 to the needs of the Technological Clusters and the Rural Districts. What are the still unrevealed innovation potentials of rural territories in the Milan Metropolitan Area, which could be exploited with the support of the ROP ERDF (Innovation and SMEs competitiveness Axis)?

Answer: *The agricultural innovative experiences and practices are still a niche. However, they are not yet accepted by the regional instrument. So, the innovation lies in making the adhesion of organic conversion processes to biodiversity protection measures in the agricultural areas and in creating a system around these experiences, for example involving whole territorial rural districts or supply chains.*

Research on topics such as circular economy and green chemistry is certainly useful as well as the promotion of measures, which support start-ups or young farmers to adopt the research results.