1. Titolo del progetto di ricerca

Understanding transformative pathways in European urban food systems implementation

2. Stato dell'Arte

European urban food systems are currently facing complex and interrelated challenges concerning climate resilience, environmental justice, food security, and the quality of urban spaces. Food production, distribution, consumption, and recovery still largely depend on long and highly specialised supply chains, often poorly integrated with local green infrastructure, the built environment, and community-based forms of governance. This condition increases the vulnerability of cities to climatic, economic, and social shocks, while limiting their capacity to provide equitable access to healthy and nutritious food.

In recent years, urban agriculture, nature-based solutions, food policy councils, circular food systems, and Living Lab approaches have emerged as relevant tools to reconnect food with urban regeneration, ecological transition, and social inclusion. However, many existing initiatives remain fragmented, locally isolated, and difficult to transfer across contexts. They often address only one component of the food chain, such as production, consumption, distribution, or waste recovery, without developing a systemic framework capable of connecting governance, public policy, spatial planning, social values, and community participation.

The Horizon Europe project REDESIGN, "tRansformativE fooD valuE Systems reshapInG resilient urban laNdscapes", addresses these gaps by exploring how urban food systems can be transformed into Transformative Food Value Systems. In this perspective, food is not treated only as a commodity, but as a social, ecological, cultural, spatial, and economic infrastructure. REDESIGN operates through three Living Labs located in Salt, Dortmund, and Teviot, each focusing on a different dimension of urban food system transformation: inclusivity and integration, policy and governance, and spatial regeneration and circular economy.

Within this framework, particular attention must be dedicated to Governance, Policy and Exploitation. They play a crucial role in understanding how the innovations developed in the Living Labs can be consolidated, transferred, and amplified. Its activities include stakeholder and social network analysis, policy analysis, the assessment of policy makers' attitudes, the evaluation of upscaling possibilities, and the analysis of the sustainability implications of scaling-up processes. These activities are essential to translate local experimentation into transferable knowledge, implementation scenarios, and policy action plans.

3. Descrizione della ricerca

The research project aims to analyse and support the development of transformative pathways for the implementation of more resilient, inclusive, and replicable urban food systems in Europe, building on the conceptual and operational framework developed by REDESIGN. The research will focus specifically on the governance, policy, and upscaling activities, connecting them to the first two specific objectives of the project: enhancing local urban climate resilience and making local food systems more inclusive and accessible.

The project will investigate how the experimentation carried out in the Living Labs can be translated into blueprints for replication, transformation pathways, policy-support tools, and models that can be adapted to other urban and peri-urban contexts. The focus will not be limited to the analysis of local interventions, but will also include the institutional, social, cultural, and territorial conditions that enable such interventions to be implemented, accepted, consolidated, and potentially transferred.

Obiettivi specifici

This research aims to analyse how the actions developed in the Living Labs contribute to urban climate resilience through the integration of urban agriculture, green infrastructure, built environment regeneration, and circular resource practices. Particular attention will be paid to the role of place-based and nature-based solutions in improving the ecological and social quality of urban contexts, as well as their capacity to generate local benefits in terms of climate mitigation, biodiversity, circularity, and community resilience.

Furthermore, it aims to examine the role of local actors, institutions, intermediaries, and policy makers in implementation processes. The research will help reconstructing actor relations, governance configurations, and cooperation mechanisms that either support or hinder the transformation of urban food systems.

Finally, the project aims to contribute to the definition of upscaling scenarios and policy action plans, translating evidence from the Living Labs into operational recommendations for public administrations, territorial networks, civil society organisations, and food system actors.

Attività principali

The first activity will consist of systematising REDESIGN's theoretical and operational framework, with particular attention to the concepts of Transformative Food Value Systems, the Transformative Loop Methodology, and the Urban Food Value Framework. This phase will provide the analytical basis for interpreting transformation processes not as isolated local initiatives, but as complex systems connecting actors, values, spaces, policies, and food practices.

The second activity will focus on reporting on the already made stakeholder and social network analysis in the Living Labs and help carrying out the same analysis in the broader REDESIGN Network. The research will consider cooperation, financing, intermediation, and governance relations among local actors, public institutions, policy makers, communities, non-governmental organisations, and economic actors. The objective will be to identify strategic nodes within the networks, actors able to facilitate implementation, and possible governance gaps limiting the consolidation of innovations.

The third activity will be dedicated to policy analysis. The research will examine synergies and conflicts among food policies, urban policies, climate strategies, planning instruments, and local regulations. The objective will be to understand whether and how existing policy instruments support the integration of urban agriculture and food system innovation into urban regeneration and climate resilience strategies.

The fourth activity will analyse the attitudes of policy makers towards the implementation of the Living Labs and the replicability of the solutions tested. This will make it possible to understand institutional perceptions, priorities, resistances, and opportunities, contributing to the definition of more effective and realistic recommendations.

Metodologia

The methodological approach will be interdisciplinary and mixed, combining qualitative methods, network analysis, document analysis, and participatory tools.

The qualitative component will be based on literature review, analysis of project documents, policy analysis, and dialogue with the actors involved in the Living Labs. This approach will allow the research to reconstruct local implementation conditions and understand the social, cultural, and political meaning of ongoing transformations.

Policy analysis will be conducted through the lens of policy coherence, considering objectives, instruments, and implementation practices. Particular attention will be paid to the coherence between food policies, urban planning, climate strategies, and social inclusion measures, in order to identify regulatory barriers and opportunities for integration.

The participatory dimension will be central. The research will also benefit from the international comparative dimension of REDESIGN, using the diversity of the three Living Labs as a basis for analysing different transformation pathways across European urban contexts.

4. Risultati attesi

From a scientific perspective, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the implementation processes of transformative urban food systems, with specific attention to the links between climate resilience, social inclusion, and governance. It will provide an integrated interpretation of Living Labs as spaces of experimentation, learning, and transfer, overcoming sectoral and fragmented approaches to urban food system innovation.

From a methodological perspective, the research will contribute to the systematisation of tools for analysing transformative pathways in urban food systems. In particular, the integration of stakeholder analysis, policy analysis, and upscaling assessment will provide a replicable model for other European projects and for public administrations interested in promoting more sustainable and inclusive local food systems.

At the applied level, the research will generate useful indications for the development of policy action plans and implementation scenarios. These outputs will support public administrations, local networks, civil society organisations, and economic actors in designing urban food interventions capable of producing environmental, social, and cultural benefits.

A particularly relevant expected result concerns the identification of conditions, barriers, and enabling factors for the replicability of the Living Labs. The research will help clarify which elements are strongly place-based and which can instead be transferred to other European urban contexts.

5. Articolazione del progetto e tempi di realizzazione

The project will be developed in coherence with the second phase of REDESIGN, accompanying the activities related to governance, policy analysis, upscaling assessment, and the valorisation of results.

In the initial phase, the research will focus on the review of the theoretical and documentary framework, with particular attention to REDESIGN materials, tasks activities, and the specific objectives of the project. This phase will allow the analytical framework to be defined, relevant indicators to be selected, and the research methodology to be refined.

The second phase will focus on the elaboration of upscaling scenarios and operational recommendations. The results of the previous analyses will be integrated in order to identify possible trajectories for the amplification, adaptation, and transfer of the solutions tested in the Living Labs.

The final phase will be dedicated to the synthesis of results, the production of scientific and operational materials, and the valorisation of the evidence generated. This pathway will contribute directly to REDESIGN's objectives by strengthening the understanding of how innovations in urban food systems can be implemented, consolidated, and diffused across Europe.