‘New Citizens Farmers’. An exploratory study in Rome
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Abstract

By considering several urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) cases studies in Rome, this research attempts to elaborate a first ‘morphology’ of this relatively new phenomenon. Besides to describe the background and motivations of the actors involved in such initiatives, attention is given to the new ways they organize themselves by mobilizing socio-cultural, financial and environmental resources and by constructing strategic networks and partnerships to better achieve their goals. Further considerations are made on their interactions with other formal and informal initiatives, the majority of which aim at strengthening the rural-urban linkage, and with institutions.

UPA in Rome is acknowledged by its promoters as a way to successfully tackle a multiplicity of issues like: food quality, safety and security, social exclusion, unemployment, environmental degradation, property speculation, economic crisis, the high public expenditure for parks maintenance, education, agro-biodiversity conservation, maintaining a link with the original culture (farmers immigrants) and strengthening the rural-urban linkage among the most important.

Furthermore, as part of this research some important actions have been already developed and planned to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, information and experiences between UPA actors, local, national and international institutions.

Keywords: UPA, strategic networks, exchanges, institutions, traditional agriculture, rural-urban linkage, re-connect people to nature
Acknowledgments

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I dedicate this work to my father Paolo and to Loredana, mom and friend, because their devotion and incomparable sacrifice for allowing me studying. I will never never forget you. To Luigi and Concetta for teaching me the value of nature and the best way to use and cook its products. And then again, to Flavia Lombardi for her support and vicinity in finding out together even new ways to manage life complexity! Thanks Flavia from my hearth. Moreover, to a person I experienced the countryside with in the childhood: sorry Vale if sometime I have been too rude and thanks for your uninterrupted support! Finally, I hope that child I met in one garden, who were jumping with a smiling dirty face and throwing mud in the sky while shouting ‘Freedom Freedom Freedom’ will be benefited soon from this research.
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Introduction

The main goal of this research is the elaboration of a first ‘morphology’ of UPA in Rome as a contribution to the wide debate about the role such activity can play in developed countries. However, this research has also its roots in something different and older than the actual academic debates. The first citizen farmer I met in my life has been my grandfather who arrived in Rome from a rural area in the Umbria Region when child and never stopped to farm on its roman roof and to collect herbs, fruit and vegetable in roman parks and fringes. Furthermore, I was born in the city but soon my parents moved in the near countryside that till few years ago saw a high peasants presence. During all my childhood I lived between the countryside and the city house of my grandparents and many times I got confused, and I still get confused, as sometime I have been treated as a stranger in both the city and the countryside. In the city I used to be nimbly defined a kind of provincial peasant while in the countryside like an urban migrant sometimes denigrated for his supposed little knowledge about farming sphere. In the end I can say, it made me ever more curious about the relation between the rural and the urban as a unique entity that interact, exchange and support each other. Nevertheless, soon I realised the relation between the two was at odd as the city was growing by devouring the countryside. Mainly for this reason, I started to support the countryside in many of its expressions and in the end opted for this research as a way to hopefully contribute both to the international debate on the rural-urban linkage and the development on new more sustainable policies.

At Wageningen University I had the opportunity to gain new knowledge and analytical tools to better investigate rural development and how this is connected with the urban. Furthermore, the same university facilitated my relationships with many institutions and civil society initiatives that provided me with very important information and also gave me the opportunity to propose new ideas and future plans. However, when I started to work on this research I got surprised by the limited literature on old citizens farmers and the completely absence of literature on new citizens farmers. Such lack of information further motivated me, and after several considerations on the available resources I had for this research I decided to focus a little bit more on new emergent expressions of UPA and so on ‘New citizens farmers’. However, it is important to highlight that such expressions do not include exclusively citizens that entered the UPA sphere recently but also all citizens that have been farming for years and only recently organised themselves in associations, collectives and more in general partnered with other farmers in order to find out new ways to be acknowledged by institutions and therefore gain resources access (principally land and water).

After giving information on the methodology I used, in the first chapter I do an introduction to the UPA roman panorama by reporting information on what was already knew when I started the research and what are the current research projects. In the second chapter, I describe in details nine cases studies that can be included in six UPA sectors: association, committee, informal, institutionalised, private and cooperative/medium-big farms. While describing such cases studies I focused on their social histories meant as the ways these sectors have been created and have evolved through specific strategic social networks. Moreover, in the third chapter I report and analyse the data I personally collected about the actors involved in UPA and I make some consideration on the difficulties that can emerges by caring out an UPA association. In the fourth chapter I describe the factors that make UPA very complex in Rome and I give information on the institutions that are getting involved in UPA.
panorama also by competing each other and on the positive and negative outcomes of this competition. Furthermore, I try to define ‘The right to farm in the city’ by considering the opinions and motivations of many citizens farmers I met during this research and before. In the fifth chapter, I make a comparison between traditional agriculture sphere and UPA as by previous considerations on UPA emerged clear that many citizen farmers look at traditional agriculture values and practices as a better way to develop a more sustainable agriculture and city. Then I consider how the different UPA sectors evolve along the three axes (repositioning, extended regrounding, self-regulation) elaborated by Van der Ploeg and the social, cultural, economical and labour contribution of UPA in strengthening urban food systems based on strong rural-urban linkage. In this chapter I also try to understand if UPA is an expression of an increasing re-peasantization meant like a growing interest for peasant society and its modalities to produce food, other products and services. Finally in the last chapter, I describe the actions I carried out along this research by using my researcher’s position and so my contacts to connect institutional and not institutional actors with the aim to elaborate practical activities to sustain a further UPA development. This last part gives to my research the character of an action-research. This paper finishes with a final consideration of the main findings and some recommendations. Furthermore, I also added a critical reflection on how I could develop further this research.
Methodology

The cases studies considered in this paper have been investigated in a period of one year, between September 2009 and September 2010, through a field research in Rome. Information has been gathered through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that often overlapped: literature research, direct observation, a semi-open answers questionnaire, structured, semi-structured and open interviews and focus groups. Since its beginning this research has been set on an actor-oriented perspective and with the intention to consider UPA not as an isolated phenomenon but rather in the wider context made of networks that aim at creating a more sustainable urban food system by developing new strategies that benefit both the city and the countryside (the rural-urban linkage).

Looking for literature information has been the first step I made when writing the proposal behind this research to understand what was already known on UPA. Soon, I realised the data were really little (I report it in the first chapter). Therefore, I decided to look through the networks I cited above. Conversation by conversation and observation by observation in the organic shops, cooperatives, assemblies, trains, pubs, friend and relatives houses and whenever I had some social relation I started to gather information on UPA in Rome. To be honest, I already had some knowledge as often I had participated in such networks like farmer, organizer and consumer.

In about one month and half I gathered basic information and my agenda was full of new contacts. Furthermore, I also individuated the first privileged informants like the presidents of several associations and the managers of private agrarian enterprises that collaborate with the civil society initiatives. Therefore, I was introduced to several urban farmers and after many informal conversations with them I got a general idea of what was going on and started to elaborate a first questionnaire. In the same period I also started to interact with institutions, in particular with managers/politicians and technicians. This double interaction represented an important factor for my research, as from managers and politicians I got wider and more political visions on urban food system and UPA issues and from technicians more practical issues. Moreover, as managers and politicians change along line electoral cycle, who holds information that related to the past evolution of considered issues and have the possibility to work on them on the long-term are the technicians.

By interact with institutions I tried to understand what information about actors involved in UPA could be useful for them to know in order to make more grassroots based policies. Therefore, I integrated the questionnaire with questions centred on institutional interests. At that point, I tested the questionnaire, improved its structure and made easier questions. Then, I defined a sample of analysis that however got bigger as I knew other UPA cases. I never changed the questionnaire structure but in some case I omitted some questions on sensitive issues I knew could harm the interaction with some farmers (for instance when I submitted the questionnaire to informal farmers I omitted the question elaborated to know if they used to sell products or not, as I knew they worried financial controls).

Along the questionnaires, that in the majority of the cases I personally submitted to farmers, I also made several interviews. I used open and semi-structured interviews to get more general information and structured interviews for more specific information. In some occasion, when I knew I was going to interview actors that like to speak a lot and mix several issues altogether I opted for structured interviews. Furthermore, as during the last phase of this research I got information on the existence of another interesting UPA association case (Orto Solidale Santa Caterina), and I had not enough time to carry out questionnaires with its members, I decided to
gather basic information on these farmers by organizing a focus group.

The next methodological phase was the data analysis for which I used SPSS. As I will explain at the beginning of the third chapter I threatened the data that related to actors involved in different UPA sectors all together mainly because at this early research stage on UPA in Rome it is better to provide a wider idea of their identity, way of acting and motivations. However, I considered singularly every case study by reporting specific information on their creation, dynamics and structures.

All the contacts and information I got through the mentioned methodology soon made me think about the possibility to use it for a concrete action. Furthermore, institutions themselves in same case asked me data to better develop their future policies on UPA. In this sense, although I organised several actions that I will illustrate in chapter 6, the most important action I carried out has been the research itself.

The validity of this research has been sometime challenged by my previous vicinity to the considered actors and a strong personal interest for what they do and in general for the future of urban food system and UPA panorama in Rome. However, I addressed this problem first of all by becoming conscious about it and then by using the most common principles used for participatory field research.

I used triangulation, by combining the different methods, to obtain and verify information. When it was possible to get information on one issue by using different sources I used all of them. Rather, when I found only one actor to get the information I needed I questioned him/her on the same issue by using different questions. I did the same when I elaborated the questionaire as I posed ‘hidden’ interrelated questions on one issue in a way that allowed me to cross final answers and verify their coherence and validity (see introduction to chapter 3 for more details).

The interactive and feedback process behind this research stimulated me to share and discuss information I gathered and new ideas that came up from their consideration with many actors involved at different levels in UPA. In this way I also had more opportunities to establish a common agenda between my research and its outcomes and the realization of their needs and interests in a most sustainable way.

The most tangible result of such approach has been the use, the Municipality of Rome did, of the research data to plan new UPA sites and projects and my involvement in practical actions.

Finally, I intentionally chose to include several cases studies in this research in order to consider almost all UPA expressions and give a wide panorama on this phenomenon. This approach gives more chances not so much to generalise the findings, as they exclusively relate to the case of Rome, but rather to make important comparisons with other cities in developed as well as developing countries.

Main research questions:
- What is the state of UPA in Rome?
- Who are the citizens involved in UPA? What are their interests/motivations and how do they organize (strategic networks) and act?
- What is the role of institutions?

Sub research questions:
- Are there similarities between traditional farming sphere and UPA?
- At what degree UPA initiatives evolve along the three axes (Van der Ploeg)?
- Is UPA an expression of an increasing re-peasantization?
Chapter 1: What is already known

1.1 Introduction to the roman UPA panorama

With its 100,000 hectares of green areas within the city limits Rome has a primate in Europe. According to the Municipality of Rome (2009) “the green areas in fact make up two-thirds of the entire municipal landscape: one third of the city’s territory consists of agricultural land and another third of protected areas subject to a rigorous regime of environmental safeguard”. Whilst a great percentage of these areas are distributed outside the city centre, we also have many green corridors between it and the periphery. This factor makes Rome quite different by many other cities characterised by a compact urban city centre markedly divided by the surrounding green areas. Another important data that makes Rome an interesting case are the 1300 different plants varieties that can be found only inside the roman ring (Blasi et. All, 2009).

UPA in Rome is relatively a new phenomenon as the first cases are dated back at the ancient Romans age. The typical roman villas were often located on the board of the old city and composed by different buildings surrounded by green land used in a very multifunctional way to farm, hunt, collect wood and for other cultural and social activities. However, at that time urban settlement were less intense than in modern time and green/agrarian areas were not well defined by rural areas. Therefore UPA was not perceived as we started to perceive it at the beginning of the 20th century when the city started to expand further and quickly in coincidence with the Second World War. It is in this period that many romans started to endeavour for creating the famous (at least in Rome) ‘war gardens’ (‘Orti di Guerra’) in the middle of the city to increase food security and independence level.

In line with other European and west cities, especially during the period between the 60s and 80s, small farm and UPA in Rome are considered not economically convenient and cultural hinder factors to the agrarian and industrial modernization. Furthermore, in such period spontaneous UPA activities are carried out in marginal areas by using makeshift materials, like eternit, bed nets, baths, metal cans, plastic panels, etc, mainly to build up fences and sheds and to collect water. Especially among very poor people is also frequent to construct little huts in the middle of the garden. Also for these reasons UPA is often considered cause of urban landscape degradation especially when compared with the more modern concept of urban garden and park. It is only with the first economically crises in the 80s that the pressure on UPA decreased. However, UPA in Rome will remain not acknowledged and supported by authorities almost till 2008. This is the main reason why UPA in Roma has still a strong informal and spontaneous connotation.

What is relevant to know is that during the 60s-80s period UPA sees the participation of many immigrants from the countryside that came in Rome from other Italian regions to find a job in the industry or institutional sectors. They brought all their knowledge and often the (agro-) biodiversity typical of their places. So, little plots of land or roofs became the best place to ensure continuity to their original cultures.

The majority of these farmers used to farm in a part-time modality not only for ensuring continuity to their values and social practices but also to integrate their income. A fast and not well-planned urban sprawl conditioned widely their activities and it often reduced the continuity of their action in the territory. An extremely flexibility is needed to quickly change place as soon as plots are destroyed by bulldozers or rivers flooding.
Moreover, the social network behind UPA, with its strong relation character, resulted often eroded. This in conjunction with the ‘cultural shame’ attached to UPA hindered the possibility to organise a strong resistance. We have to wait the 1977 to find a first successful case, when a group of unemployed young people and farmers have been able to found the Integrated Social Cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ (see chapter 2.1.1).

Other important initiatives followed for the protection of green areas with the participation of important national associations like ‘Lega Ambiente’, ‘RomaNatura’ and ‘Italia Nostra’. However, although different research projects and actions have been planned little has been done specifically to understand through a systematic approach the complexity behind UPA and its different expressions and to legalize and promote UPA activities till few years ago.

1.2 A first census and map of the informal sector

Between 2003 and 2006 the X Environmental Policy Department of the Municipality of Rome carried out a first census denominated ‘Census of spontaneous vegetable gardens in the territory of the Municipality of Rome inside G.R.A.’. Such census addresses only informal UPA activities. Unfortunately, it did not reach all informal farmers because their fast mobility, their little willingness to talk with institutional representatives and finally because it was interrupted prematurely due to a resources allocation change at the Municipality of Rome. However, is worthy to include the results of this census because: it covers a wide sample and is the only source we have to give a rough idea of the dimension and distribution of the informal sector.

According to the census we know that “..the sites (where informal farming is carried out) detected during the census, in their variety of forms, dimensions and location, can be attributed to three main kinds: historical sites of big dimensions, young sites with minor dimensions, very young sites less relevant for number of plots and dimensions.”

Has been estimated that 25% of the land occupied by these sites is property of the Municipality of Rome. Other provincial and regional institutions and private entities own the remaining land.

Relevant is that “..many of these sites are located in marginal areas like riverbanks, alongside railway lines, ditches and inside of the many ‘green corridors’ in the city” and in public parks (9.1 Parco della Caffarella, 10.1 Parco degli Acquedotti, 4.6 Parco Regionale della Valle dell’Aniene). Different sites have been removed (site number 19.7, 12.4, 11.10, 15.5) but at the same time others have been set up (5.6, 4.12, 5.8) or enlarged (4.1, 5.4, 19.4, 2.1). This, besides to testify the strong mobility of informal UPA also highlights its growing tendency.

In the riverbanks sites water is often collected directly by the rivers and it can be cause of contamination. Furthermore informal UPA is in many cases still carried out by using makeshift material and in three sites (5.5, 5.1, 2.2) huts and masonry construction used as or to make houses have been individuated.

Additional information regards the presence of urban farms associations in contrast to the main broken up character of informal UPA. In the site 4.6 urban farmers, all retired people, founded an association that is in close contact with the Union of Italian Retirees (S.P.I.). Another association, very well organised with a clear internal regulation, has been found in the site 11.1 whilst in the site 19.2 farmers express their strong willingness for it.

Below are reported the most important data emerged with the census:
Another significant initiative was carried out by the Italian Geographic Society with the project “Urban gardens mapping, green areas of Rome”, which goals are:
- Merging data from the Municipality of Rome
- Mapping roman green areas
- Comparative analysis with other Italian regions cases
- Biographies of roman urban farmers (Di Renzo, ‘Tor Vergata’ University, 2006.)
- Map summary with early hints of possible next programming that refers to:
  - Urban garden parks
  - Public fruition
  - Districts areas
  - Social spaces and green spaces
  - Areas for animal wellbeing
  - Sport facilities
  - Urban forestry
  - Urban services and traffic islands
  - Ornamental green

This research project is the first based on a multi-disciplinary approach with a special emphasis on the geographical and social dimension of UPA and more in general on the use of green lands in cities. GPS technology is both used to map green areas where citizen farmers operate and to individuate landowners and possible dangers, like rivers’ flooding and sources of possible contamination. The next step is the individuation of alternative green areas, as closest as possible to these areas, to move the gardens in. Two sub-municipalities, the IV and V have been mapped to test this system.

In such a way it becomes easier to better organize UPA activities also in line with other existing infrastructure and farm initiatives. By having a look to the maps

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below, it is possible to recognize red areas that correspond to the existing ‘dangerous’ vegetable garden sites whilst with the little violet-blue dots are indicated the possible new sites and with the little blue-violet rectangles are pointed out the sites where new farmers markets will be created.

So, besides to improve the legal and material conditions of farming in the city this project also aims at create new economic opportunities for urban farmers by giving them the possibility of selling products in the local farmers markets which construction has been planned by the Municipality.

Italian Geographic Society, 2008
Italian Geographic Society, 2008
Chapter 2: Cases studies description

In this and other chapters the term ‘sector’ is sometime used to refer to the specific framework where the considered cases studies can be inserted for their particular characteristics. However, whilst at the moment the committee, institutionalised and rented out gardens cases represent themselves three whole sectors, as unique cases with specific characteristics, all other cases refer to sectors that also include other cases not considered in this research. Nevertheless, attention has been put in the attempt to choose the most representative and interesting cases of these sectors and in the case of the informal sector a farmers’ sample has been elaborated by selecting farmers inside different sites to better account their geographical distribution.

2.1 The civil society association: ‘Acqua Sole Terra’

‘Acqua Sole Terra’ is an association created in 2009 by an idea of the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ to promote organic UPA development in Rome. At the moment it is the biggest civil society UPA association in Rome. On May 1st “Acqua Sole Terra” inaugurated 120 plots of 40 square meters each distributed on a 5000 square meters land located in the south peri-urban area of Rome. The success has been immediate and all the plots have been assigned in few days so much that it was necessary to make a waiting list of about 100 people that is now tripled.

Except the waiting list and the acceptance of the internal regulation there is not any other criteria that refers to the age, social and economical background of possible aspirant farmers, to assign the plots through a four years contract. During the first phase every associate paid a sum of 350 euro to provide the structure with fences and an irrigation system alimented by solar panels. The normal year fee is variable according to any specific necessity and during the second year has been fixed at 50 euro.

The Cooperative “Agricoltura Nuova” has actively supported the formation of this association by sharing its ideas on UPA with its customers/partners as well as by providing the land (8 years lease), facilitating the access at its near garden centre, meeting locations and other informative material (brochures, videos, etc). Informal conversations and discussions followed the creation of a first little group of participants. Quickly, information started to circulate widely by word of mouth and board began to appear. As interest increased, different meetings were held in the Cooperative and experts (lawyers, agronomists, etc) contributed to legalizing the association and to writing down its regulations.

‘Acqua Sole Terra’ activities are developed by taking in to account six important statements (R. Saponaro, D. Dell’Orco. Preparatory sheet for a round table at Regione Lazio, 15/10/2009 Rome):

- Nowadays, many cities in the world are experiencing an effective quality of life’s deterioration because the very fast rhythms, pollution, traffic jam, high criminality rate, etc.. To exacerbate such situation in the city of Rome is the quick urban sprawl that evolves along line with the erosion of the small and medium agrarian practices and their attached social values and economy. These are considered more sustainable, at socio-cultural, economical and environmental level, because based on a strong land-man relationship in contrast to the local modern urban development model and industrial agriculture.

- The rhythms that characterized the rural environment and its socio-cultural dimension could be re-assimilate only if lived in first person through the cultivation of
a crop. In addition, the land-man relationship will be strengthened and enhanced in the case are consumed agricultural products whose growth has been assisted and encouraged by himself.

- The creation of a garden is one of the most important occasions for enabling every citizen to receive the land as a common good that must be safeguarded and protected together. For these reasons in addition to the recreational function for every urban farmers, garden represents an important centre to promote agrarian, social and environmental culture.

- The sphere of sociality has an important role in this context: the garden becomes a place not only to produce but also to meet, exchange information and opinions. The garden is the place where every life role is overcame by using a unique language based on the concept of sociability-nature-wellbeing.

- Urban garden offers a special opportunity to teach pupils where the food they consume comes from.

- UPA has the potential to generate new professional labour and create new employment

The association’s main slogans are: sociability, sharing, educate, having fun, re-establishing a contact with nature, food quality and sovereignty. The main claims are: the use of public lands/funds to expand UPA, institutional acknowledgement and the right to produce food in the (peri-)urban areas.

Due to the great and quick success of this initiative, the association board has endeavoured to enlarge it and export the model in other areas. The development of new institutional relationships has been preferred like the best way to gain new lands and get founds for the needed infrastructures. The first institution to be contacted, through this research (for further details see paragraph 6.1), has been the Agriculture Department of Regione Lazio (at that time lead by Daniela Valentini) that owns several lands especially in the peri-urban area of Rome.

Also in the wake of new elections nearness, this department quickly assigned to the association the management of a land of more than four hectares inaugurated on the 21st March 2010 with a public ceremony. Furthermore, another important outcome was the possibility to engage the association with “Sapere i Sapori” tours program, an initiative from Regione Lazio, and so to create economic opportunities, as for every tour in the garden an established sum is paid.

One of the objectives of Sapere I Sapori is to give kids the opportunity to visit the sites and structures of food production: farms, orchards, vegetable gardens, wineries, mills, bakers, cheese factories, etc.. In addition to providing opportunities to study, it will create the conditions to acquire a direct and profitable knowledge of many professions related to the agricultural sector. In this way it becomes possible to create an effective educational and vocational guidance, useful to the selection of future studies.

Whit this objective, tours and excursion are organized and often a little plot is given to the school that has to care about it. However, the normal tour provided by Sapere I Sapori is enriched with the use of a simplified theatre representation to better gain children attention (see chapter 2.1.3). This creative idea has been elaborated in collaboration with another association, “Psicoanalisi Contro”.
Child enjoying the land while his father is working it

The aunts and their nephew garden
2.1.1 Strategic participative tools: the lessons learned

Enhancing internal participation/sociability and improving its networking capacities were the key factors that brought about the foundation of the association ‘Acqua, Sole Terra’. Since the creation of this garden, it has facilitated the sharing of information/knowledge/values as well as nurtured new projects and strategic alliances/partnerships.

-Association foundation and expansion
The social integrated agrarian cooperative “Agricolture Nuova” has an extended network that includes partners at local as well as regional and national level with other civil society groups, farmers and institutions. Considering the evolution of other minor UPA associations or groups that are trying to create an association in Rome, we can observe that in this case the difference was made thanks to the cooperative’s active role in facilitating participation to this new initiative. Besides the logistic help, the cooperative provided internal and external credibility for the foundation of the association. On one hand new members were encouraged to participate, being cooperative participation considered a guaranty of feasibility and reliability. On the other hand institutional interest and participation were favoured. By stimulating people’s participation (website, emails, announcements, etc) to the many activities carried out regularly by the cooperative, the association maintained a constant and strong relationship with it.

Main lesson learned: Collaboration with an experienced group facilitates the emerging of a new group. Besides logistic support the experienced group can provide external/internal credibility.

-Familiarizing with agriculture
Agronomists regularly carry out free agrarian lessons every three weekends in average. The aim is to inform new aspirant farmers about organic agrarian techniques. The public is encouraged to ask questions, to give its own opinions, inputs and feedback on the use of previous learned knowledge. Also external people attend the lessons. During the winter season, these lessons represent the most important social meeting occasion; as the time spent on the fields diminishes, farmers have fewer opportunities to meet. To provide further sociability occasions, organic dinners follow every lesson. Outdoor lessons are also held directly in the garden during the spring and summer periods.

Excursions for primary schools take place on the field thanks to the financial support of the regional agrarian department, as said through the project Sapere I Sapori. Simple drama representations stimulate children’s attention and introduce them to the complex agrarian issues and the food production cycle. Games, tales, drawings, music, costumes and puppets are widely diffused during the excursions. Extra lessons are also held in the schools where teachers and parents’ participation is welcomed. At the end of every lesson cycle, a new plot of land is destined to “children” farming.

Main lessons learned: The open structure of agrarian lessons encourages participation and enhances members’ self-esteem. Combining agrarian lessons with recreational activities facilitates further socialization especially during the winter seasons. Creative form of communication like theatre can be successfully used to capture children’s attention and participation on agrarian issues.
-Reaching all members
To support participation, it is important that each member receives the information necessary to know what is going on (discussions, initiatives, rules, etc). The association board does its best to facilitate the access to information by organizing meetings where participants can express their own opinions. As it was soon recognized, not every member has an easy access to the web or can attend meetings (meeting reports are published on the website). Consequently, information leaflets, questionnaires and face-to-face interaction are widely used. Anonymous questionnaires are particularly useful in convincing the more reserved ones to express their opinions.
Main lesson learned: do not presume that everyone uses new communication technologies. Always integrate these technologies with more traditional communication systems. To use a simple anonymous questionnaire on main issues is a good way to know the opinion of members who cannot or do not want to take part to the meetings.

-Making partnerships/alliances
Every single member has the right to propose new collaborations with other associations/cooperatives, institutions, institutes and universities. As the associations’ members are highly differentiated in terms of socio-cultural and economical background, they can create alliances at different levels. For this reason, the board encourages every member to propose new strategic collaborations. To create a wide consensus means an easier access for all to public funds, lands and other logistic facilitations such as the use of extra infrastructures.
Main lesson learned: by empowering association members to look for new collaborations and by evaluating their different backgrounds as a precious resource, self-esteem increases and participation becomes more active.

-Shared values/interests
The cooperative and the association board always use a language that aims at reminding and emphasizing the main shared values/interests. This is probably the simplest and most useful participative tool that has ever been used.
Main lesson learned: using a language which refers to the most shared values/interests stresses the association community character and enhances participation.

-Collective work
Instead of paying external workers, collective work is organized so as to maintain clean the common space around vegetable gardens. It represents another important occasion for social meetings and like all agrarian lessons it is always followed by a lunch.
Main lesson learned: to avoid external work besides “saving money” stimulates social interaction among members.

-Next steps
As the association is very young other participative tools are being planned for the future. The most important are:
To encourage/facilitate members with an agrarian background to share their knowledge with other members
To organize seeds/plants exchanges
To exchange vegetable garden products (‘Scambiare i sapori’)

20
2.2 The cooperative

This paragraph includes the case study of ‘Agricolta Nuova’ and its aim is not to report very detailed information but rather to describe the main activities and the important role played by ‘Agricolta Nuova’ for the creation and evolution of other initiatives. ‘Agricolta Nuova’ is the first and biggest social agrarian integrated cooperative in Rome. It was established in 1977 by a mixed group of unemployed young people, farmers and farm hands that referred to ‘Feder Braccianti’, ‘Alleanza Contadini’ and ‘Associazione Regionale Cooperative’. Their main objectives were the creation of new employment in the farm sector, because the unemployment generated by the agrarian modernization and the protection of a very extended green area destined to the construction of new urban settlements. The process was not easy as part of the land was first squatted with tractors and only after nineteen years of resistance it was conceded by local authorities. Furthermore, in 1998 the whole area have been declared as the Regional Park of ‘Decima Malafede’ and its perimeter was finally fixed at about 6000 hectares (http://www.agricolturanuova.it/).

After a conventional farming set off, the cooperative converted to organic agriculture in 1990 and to organic breeding in 1996 whilst in 2010 it converted to biodynamic agriculture all its activities. In total, 257 hectares are used to farm and breeding a wide varieties of crops and animals that make this cooperative highly independent from external inputs. Products are also processed in its cheese factory, mill and bakery and sold in its four stores, two of which in the local market and used in its restaurant. Some product is also imported from other organic cooperatives. The cooperative also offers educational farm excursions, an info point dedicated to sustainable architecture, horse riding, a camping area and many other meeting places.

Since its establishment, the cooperative opted for not selling through the big production but only directly to consumers. Such decision had a strong influence on cooperative internal organization and production and it stressed the relational and participative character of the interaction among its promoters and between them and their costumers.
Nowadays, ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ has an important role in guaranteeing food quality, safety and security in Rome. It represents the most important and participated ‘alternative’ big food production system and a landmark for many initiatives carried out by the civil society, associations, cooperatives, volunteer and schools sectors. As said in chapter 2.1.1 ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ has an extended network with many different realities and institutions and in this way it has been able to develop its own strong web.

2.3 The solidarity initiative: ‘Orto solidale Santa Caterina’

‘Orto Solidale Santa Caterina’ is an initiative created in 2009 by the members of ‘La Cometa’, a non-profit organization very active in the voluntary sector. ‘Orto Solidale’ is a communitarian organic vegetable garden made on a 1000 square meters private land provided free of charge by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy Hospital. It is located along train tracks in a central north area of Rome and hosts 15 plots of about 100 square meters each, settled in combination with a little park, a henhouse and a shared orchard.

- Every plot is managed by two families that pay 200 euro each yearly which sustain garden expenditures and are used for solidarity initiatives. Besides the land they get other services as reported directly by the internal regulation:
  - Water access
  - The basic ground preparation
  - Mentoring of an expert farmer
  - The possibility to purchase at reduced price seeds, bulbs, and other products such as natural fertilizers and pesticides
  - The possibility to borrow agrarian tools
  - The use of a dressing room and tools shed
‘Orto Solidale’ has been created with a specific goal: combine a new interest for food production and nature with solidarity activities. The money the association earns, through the annual quotas are used to sustain several volunteers projects. At the same time many products of the garden are donated to the hospital. All the associates do not have any agrarian background and besides the expert farmer provided by the association, they can consult the association website where there are information on crops rotation, seeding time and on how address problems created by possible parasites.

Orto Solidale Santa Caterina Map

As I met these farmers during the last phase of this research I had not time to personally submit the questionnaire used to gather data relative to other actors involved in UPA. However, as the promoters of this initiative showed a great interest for my research, for being included in it and a strong availability to facilitate my activities, I decided to organise a focus group to at least acquire some more basic information on them. The focus group has been attended by 23 farmers and I decided to report the results below, separately by the data that refer to the other 93 interviewed farmers as I used two different research methods.

35% of farmers sample resulted to be female and 65% male, their average age is 47 years with a minimum of 27 and a maximum of 70. A great majority of them are retired and white collars both at 27%, followed by 13% of housewives and researchers, engineers and craftsmen all at 9%.
Their households are composed in average by 3 members with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 8 members except the case of the two nuns. Every farmers lives in the city centre, very close to the garden as in average they have to travel for 1 kilometre to reach it with a minimum of few meters and a maximum of 5 kilometres that in average takes 5 minutes.

An average of 5 hours is spent weekly in the garden during spring/summer period with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 12 hours whilst during autumn/winter period the average falls at 2 hours with a minimum and a maximum of 1 and 5 hours respectively. Farmers also use the labour of collaborators that in average are 2 with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 4. These collaborators, often beneficiate of garden products but however, also other occasional people like friends and neighbours beneficiate, as the beneficiaries’ average rate is 5 with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 8 people.

Almost 25% of these farmers have good agrarian knowledge whilst the others have basic or no knowledge. More than half of farmers come from a farm household. More experienced farmers represents the first source of knowledge for 83% of less experienced farmers, whilst 52% and 44% of them refer respectively to agronomists and relatives and only 4% to internet and books.

Seeds and plants are in the majority of the cases bought in the market (87%)
and also self-produced (22%). Rather, only one farmer uses handed down seeds and plants and not any farmers exchange this material with other farmers. Furthermore, 9% of the sample use local or rare plant varieties and surprisingly only 26% wish to farm such varieties.

Farmers motivations are multiple although a motivation shared by the whole sample is ‘Socialization’. This is followed by ‘Valorise free-time’ and ‘Pleasure to grow up vegetables’ both at 87%, ‘Food quality/safety’ at 83%, ‘Contact with nature’ at 57% and finally ‘Learn new things’ at 35%.

The majority of farmers had a first contact with this initiative through the religious parish they use to attend (91%) whereas the remaining 9% got aware of this initiative by mouth of word. Finally, 87% of them are very satisfied with the garden size whilst 13% would like to have a bigger garden to extend their gardens.

2.4 The neighbourhood committee

Garbatella is a neighbourhood very adjacent to the city centre and is populated by about 45,000 people. It is characterised by a particular architecture, a dense social sphere, a strong political identity linked to the partisan resistance and a strong sense of local identity that make Garbatella more similar to a small town rather than a city neighbour.

Garbatella was built between 1920 and 1930. At the beginning, and almost for ten years Garbatella was built following the English ‘garden city’ model: buildings no higher than three floors with a lot of public and private green areas and farming lands. The original idea was to allow many rural immigrants to integrate their incomes and maintain a link with their original countryside culture and social practices. With the advent of fascism higher buildings started to appear and the inclusion of green and farming lands declined dramatically and it was partially replaced with the creation of many public spaces like wash-houses and kindergartens. Finally, Garbatella was marginally affected by the property speculation of the 60s and it remained almost the same till now.

In this neighbourhood are nowadays active several associations and
organizations whose interests include environmental protection, the right to house and employment, the promotion of culture and social inclusion especially of weaker social strata. In 2008 Lega Ambiente Garbatella, Action le Casette, Casetta Rossa, Casale Garibaldi (International Civil Servants), CSOA (Squatted Social Center) la Strada and Controchiave” came together and found a committee. One of their main goals is the creation of several vegetable gardens and a park in a degraded area that in 1996 was designated by the Municipality to become the neighbourhood public park.

The area is 4.5 hectares and delimits the neighbourhood on one side in coincidence with one of the largest and most frequented city streets that connect Rome with its famous ‘Agro Romano’ located on its south-west side. Such area represents a little buffer zone between the neighbourhood and other dense urban environments. However, the park designed by the municipality has never been created, rather ‘Lega Ambiente Garbatella’ in partnership with other citizens have been fighting for more than 15 years against several attempts of property speculation.

Furthermore, during such period two other main problems have been recognised as having a widespread negative impact on the neighbourhood quality of life: the presence of several groups that are experiencing economic and social hardship with an unemployment rate of 12% above the average of Rome of 7% (Data elaborated by the Municipality of Rome, 2008) and the percentage of elderly (29%) higher than that of the city (25%) (Data elaborated by the Municipality of Rome)

According to what is reported on the committee’s internal regulation and presentation of the entire project, the establishment of vegetable gardens can play an important role in solving this problem. In particular it becomes possible to:
- Contrast the negative effect of economic crisis with an initiative that can generate income
- Develop models of self-production and self-organization based on the real citizens’ needs
- Safeguard areas otherwise vulnerable of speculation
- Develop moments and places of social meetings
- Recover farming practices and culture and involve local citizens and schools
- Accommodate an increasing desire for green areas
- Create opportunities of socialization for older people that often live in isolation
- Promote solidarity by reducing the gap between older and younger generations through a learning vegetable garden

What makes this case very interesting is the combination of formal and informal practices. In fact, the committee is participated by entities that use different approaches to pursue their interests. For instance “Lega Ambiente” is a big environmental association that operates at national as well as local level and has consolidate relationships and partnerships with institutions. On the other hand, “Action Le Casette” and “CSOA la Strada” are two organizations that prefer to operate outside the institutional framework and use the occupation (Squatting) of public and private properties like a way to re-conquer public spaces and organize what they think the institutions are not able to do. So, they are familiar with the civil society activism and participation and they tackle in a more direct and practical modalities neighbourhood’ s problems.

Moreover, the participation of moderate associations like ‘Casetta Rossa’, ‘Casale Garibaldi’ and ‘Controchiave’ balanced the almost opposite ways of acting the other above mentioned organizations use. The creation of synergies between these
different entities brought to a positive relationship with another institutions presents in Rome that is the Province of Rome.

Such interaction has generated both positive and negative outcomes. The Province of Rome allocated a sum of 3000 euro to sustain this project without the possibility to impose any restriction or standards on its future development as the area designed to create the vegetable gardens is out of the Province competence as it is owned by the Municipality. The important point here is that the committee does not interact smoothly with the Municipality as they refer to divergent political panoramas.

On one hand, it generated the possibility to quickly create 20 vegetable gardens and the basic infrastructures (fence, gate and water system) with just 3000 euro, as any bureaucratic process and standards adaptation has been skipped. It favoured a faster and more creative approach in building the gardens. However, on the other hand, although vegetable gardens have been created they have never been officially recognised by the Province and not recognised at all by the Municipality. For instance, it generated problems with water access as a first water irrigation system has been connected without any permission to a public fountain of the Municipality that soon provided to interrupt water supply and it caused the dead of the less drought resistant crops.

It is curious to observe that on the area where the vegetable gardens have been created overlooking “Regione Lazio” headquarters. Its politicians look with great interest at what happen in Garbatella garden however without any possibility to intervene, if not in the same way the Provincia did, but of course with the possibility to take other similar initiatives in the areas it owns.

Especially the case of Garbatella gives us the opportunity to better illustrate how the three different local and regional institutions relate to UPA phenomenon and to shed light on their interaction. We will address this issue in paragraph 4.4.

**The neighbourhood garden and the headquarter**

Picture took by the neighbourhood committee Garbatella
2.4.1 Addressing unemployment by becoming peasants

Eutelia Information Technology is a big telecommunication Italian company founded in 1998. It has a wide network in Italy as well as abroad and its business budget growth faster since its foundation. It allowed Eutelia to include other companies and further improve its business. However, at the beginning of 2009 Eutelia managers opted for a corporate reorganization that included the displacement of 2000 workers.

It is the beginning of one of the toughest and symbolic conflict between workers and company board in Italy during the last years. The final result is the absconding of Eutelia CEO, the arrest of other managers and the workers situation still to be solved.

In the meantime some workers got inspired by the experience of the urban gardens in Garbatella neighbourhood and start networking with their promoters in order to evaluate the feasibility of creating another vegetable garden. They discuss the idea with other fired workers and finally they decide to create a big-shared vegetable garden for their subsistence and for selling products. On the 6th September 2010 the “EutOrto” garden is finally established thanks to the found of 19,000 euro allocated by the Province of Rome and to the collaboration with the State Technical Agrarian Institute Garibaldi.

The institute owns an 80 hectares of agrarian land, with 1000 olives threes, a wine yard and a cowshed that produce more than 1000 litres of milk daily which are sold for financing the school activities. It provided these workers with 2000 square meters land to start their activities with the possibility to expand it as soon as they will become more confident about agrarian practices. As many of these workers are engineers and mathematics without any agrarian experience, the institute also facilitated knowledge acquisition by giving them the possibility to consult the institute scholars and professors. Moreover, they are also teaching new farmers to breed hens and they are already thinking of create a big not intensive breeding hens.

The institute also opened on the possibility to sell what is produced in the EutOrto in the weekly farmer market the Province of Rome created inside the same institute and to the many ‘GAS’ (‘Gruppo di Acquisto Solidale’) (Box schemes) they are in contact with. This factor gives a strong economic connotation to this initiative and is stimulating its promoters to create a bigger agrarian cooperative.

This case highlights two important issues. The alliance between fired workers, Garbatella committee, the institute and the Province of Rome made this initiative possible. In particular, it provided the initial capital, the land, the knowledge and the possibility to immediately enter commercial sphere. Secondly, it shows the contribution of UPA in strengthening urban food system, food quality, safety and security by connecting consumers and producers while generating new professional urban farmers and job opportunities.

2.4.2 Other creative initiatives

‘Primavera Romana’ is a very participated local association that aims at construct a more sustainable social, economical and environmental dimension in the city by acting at the grassroots level. Besides to be committed with the elaboration of the ‘Stati Generali della Cittadinanza’, Primavera Romana relates to the Garbatella neighborhood initiative and proposes something different about food production.

It organizes two main events. The first is the harvest of public olives which trees are scattered in the city, whilst the second, called ‘Agro-Nomadismo’ is a tour that touches many points where still grow wild plants and fruit trees. ‘Primavera
Romana’ testifies the increasing interest of many romans for a reconnection to the nature.

Another creative initiative is carried out by a young television director. It is a web community of urban farmers (www.ortourbano.it). They use to exchange agrarian knowledge and experiences through the use of a webcam placed in their own gardens. The website has been initially set up like a personal diary on urban farming but soon it has became an important reference for many other citizen farmers.

2.5 The informal farmers

Without any doubt informal farmers sector is the most widespread and biggest for number of gardens, size and people involved. As we saw in the first chapter, in the majority of the cases it is developed by squatting public and private lands, the spaces along railway lines and river embankments. The informal sector includes the participation of farmers with a strong agrarian background that in some case commercialised their products (Di Renzo, 2006).

Such sector is generated by a strong will to farm and the impossibility to buy a land in the city because the very high prices. It is also characterised by a general distrust for institutions that are often considered the problem rather than the solution. Institutional distrust is motivated by one main factor. The impossibility to use public lands for farming if not by squatting them generates little rooms for collaborating. Rather, institutions are often only considered for privileging big private investments on public lands and for their repressive side that comes up when informal UPA activities are carried out both in dangerous places like rivers’ embankments or in places designed for further urban development. For many years, policy-makers have considered informal farmers only as a reminiscence of an obsolete food production system and culture.

Informal sector results to be the most susceptible not only because the missing institutional acknowledgment but also because the difficulties to come together in associations. According to the census elaborated by the Municipality of Rome only in two cases the informal sector generated associations. Three causes for such trend seem to be quite clear.

The first related to the difficulty to make long-term alliances with other informal farmers in the same area as they have to move frequently as soon as their land is reclaimed. The second is about their network with other informal farmers, which is developed mostly at the communitarian level and very little at the macro social level. It means they tend to have little relationships with other informal farmers that operate in other areas and consequently it affects the possibility to make wider alliances outside their own communities and to recruit enough members. The most common answer when they are questioned on the reason why is difficult to have relationships with other farmers that do not operate in the same community or near to it is: “The vegetable garden requires many energies and sometimes we do not ever have time to talk with our neighbours, we want just to farm”. Often they also use a proverb to explain how much energy should be spent in the garden to have good results: “L’orto vuole l’uomo morto” that literally translated in English means: ‘the vegetable garden wants the man death’.

The last motivation concerns the perception these farmers have about the associative sphere. This is often considered too limitative because its internal regulations and what they often consider the ‘forced participation’ to activities that are not perceived relevant for farming. During the interviews, has been often pointed out their very high agrarian knowledge and experience and the willingness to farm full
time with little interruptions rather than to spend time with meetings, lessons, and again ‘forced socialization’ with other members.

What the consideration of these three factors should stimulate is a discussion at the policy level on the necessity to find out alternatives to the legalization of the informal sector through the associative mechanism. It is worthy if we consider the high potential this group can have in terms of enforcing local food systems inside the city and providing agrarian knowledge to other potential farmers.

2.6 From the informal sector to the first institutionalised vegetable garden through the association

In 1980 a group of citizens reclaimed an abandoned and very degraded green area in the north area of Rome in order to farm and re-develop their neighbourhood. After ten years of informal farming local authorities fined them for illegal use of public property. A first legal argument is opened as these people refused to pay the fine by motivating their action as good for the neighbourhood’s wellbeing and accusing local authorities of little interest for their problems. However, the fine stimulated these people to think about the creation of an association that was finally founded in 1996.

The association ‘Fosso Bravetta’ has today 64 associates and in 2007 the XI sub-municipality developed a plan to better organize part of the area with the intention of combining UPA activities with a park. It took three years and about 300,000 euro to create 22 plots of about 200 square meters each equipped with tools shads and water access. Every plot has been initially assigned for six months but the association is looking for a long-term lease of at least 15-20 years. The municipality followed a list made by the association for assigning the plots.

These are deployed around a central area provided with several passages for walking, children rides, toilets and a meeting room. The combination of a park with several vegetable gardens represents a new model in Rome to develop green areas. Such combination has been elaborated by the Municipality to address two main issues. The first is the increasing demand for land to farm and the second is the limited resources the Municipality has to manage the very extended roman green areas and especially public parks.

The idea behind such new model is to empower people themselves to manage public parks in exchange of farming land and the basic services like the tools shed and water access. Park management just includes the cleaning up, the opening and closing and finally a minimum of surveillance.

It is clearly soon to understand if this model will work well in this specific context and if can be exported in other roman areas as planned by the Municipality. However, it is curious to observe that during the interviews with these farmers in some cases emerged dissatisfaction for such combined model. In particular, some farmers argued that a vegetable garden should just be a vegetable garden where farm activities can be carried out in silence and with more privacy also to better contemplate the nature rather than in the ‘crowd’ and ‘noise’ of a public park. Though, according to other farmers the real reasons why there are worries is not because the noise and the less privacy but simply the little willingness to work further for the park.

Other concerns regard the imposition of a rule by the Municipality that prohibits the development of any lucrative activities. This results in the impossibility to participate in other institutional programs, like for instance the association ‘Sole Acqua Terra’ does with the regional program Sapere I Sapori, and so to generate a
basic income that can be used for better managing the garden. However, to be paid with farmer material and other services instead than with money can represent an escape to such rule as it only limits cash incomes.

The recovery of this area triggered several critics from the civil society as well as the current administration to the former administration who took the lead of this initiative. The main concern is the amount of money spent to make this area usable by the local community. However, the official motivation for that amount is the strict public spaces security standard regulation.

So, while on one hand this case shows both the interest of authorities for UPA activities and of informal farmers for reaching authorities, on the other hand it also highlights how the existing regulations together with a very complex bureaucracy can make the diffusion of this model really expensive and slow. Furthermore, as it came out during the interviews, it also had a negative impact on farm activities. For instance, when these farmers have been questioned on the use of local or rare agro-biodiversity in their gardens many of them said it has been almost lost, as their gardens have been destroyed to make the new park.

This case stimulates a discussion on the necessity to elaborate a new specific policy framework and simplify the existing bureaucratic system to faster promote this new model. Furthermore, it poses the question on what extend is possible to legalize informal UPA without eliminating its material heritage and organization and the creativity usually linked at its spontaneous character.

The garden/park Fosso Bravetta
2.6.1 On the other side of the street: associates that still farm informally

The park where the vegetable garden has been set is part of a larger green area extended on the other side of the street that delimits one side park. Since the 80s urban farming activities have been carried out in both sides but in 2007 only one side have been chosen to create the park. The other side has remained as it was in 1980: populated by informal farmers. However, the interesting point is that these farmers are in an unclear process of transformation as they are both farmers that are acting illegally and members of a well-acknowledged farmers association.

The consideration of this case stresses the importance we should give to the understanding of positive and negative factors that may result from the legalization process of the informal sector. According to the interviewed informal farmers, they tend to consider positive the legalization process because it can better ensure land access. However, at the same time they look at what happens with the legalised park and worry the Municipality will impose strict rules on land use and its own spatial organization.

Although we are considering a case of informal agriculture, this group of people has been able, through the association, to find an unofficial compromise with the municipality that has allowed them to farm uninterrupted in the same land since 1980. These thirty years of farming activities have generated a real farm community with its internal organization made on collective work, reciprocity, exchange of favours, knowledge, plants and products. Furthermore, a specific landscape has been shaped and farmers have strong link with it and their individual plots of land.

This short inside does not give specific information on the process that led to the community creation and does not elaborated in deep on the positive and negative outcomes that may derive by the legalization of informal activities. Rather, its intention is just to point out the centrality of considering the necessities and dynamics
belonging to a consolidated informal farmers community when elaborating new UPA policies.

It is paramount not only avoid the community network erosion that can emerge during the legalization process but also acknowledge the inestimable value and potential of this rare example of urban community farmers. For instance, emerged clear from the interviews that the level of agrarian knowledge and experience in this community is very high. So, its potential can be represented by the possibility to ensure land access without applying any important changes at the original spatial and social organization in exchange of some hours spent teaching to other aspirant urban farmers the basic agrarian knowledge.

2.7 Renting out vegetable gardens

The case study considered in this paragraph has been chosen as representative of the emerging interest for UPA activities of little and medium private landowners.

“Horti” is a private initiative created at the beginning of 1990. Its founder is an electronic engineer with a strong background in botany, especially in wild European and tropical plants consolidated during more than twenty years spent in Ivory Coast. As he got back to Rome he decided to buy a five hectares land to reproduce his own little African garden. After several studies on land quality, winds and local biodiversity he has been able to set up a little semi-tropical ecological system by combining Mediterranean and tropical plants with a specific water system for generating the right humidity.

‘Horti’ is located in the north peri-urban area of Rome on the border of the regional park of ‘Veiò’. The original idea was only about the creation of a palm garden and a ‘cultural supermarket’, as the owner likes to call it, to promote culture around the use of wild plants that includes both culinary and medical knowledge. However, as the social network of its founder expanded many new people also manifested the intention of learning how to farm.

Farm activities started in 2007 with ten plots of land and immediately it stimulated the interest of other people. The year later other ten plots have been created and a waiting list has been made with the intention to double the number of plots this coming year. The rent for a plot is 400 euro yearly and includes the basic preparation of land twice a year, agrarian tools and the water supply.

Here, the main motivations for farming in the city are as follow (reported and translated by the official website www.horti.it):
- Have vegetables and herbs of own production is an inestimable satisfaction. Today the possibility to eat food not treated with pesticides, preservatives and various poisons put us in peace with the world.
- The most delicious and rare varieties of vegetable and fruit are not compatible, generally, with the interests of large retailers.
- “Horti” offers to Roman citizens ‘Culture’ and ‘Cultivation’ of household vegetable gardens.

For the ‘Culture’ ten annual meeting are planned, one every month except for December and August, for the farmers’ community to make them know how to farm in a organic way. Also even weeds can be a resource if known, from the ‘Tarassaco’ to the Chicory, from the ‘Farinaccio’ to the ‘Gramigna’ and then the ‘Ramolaccio’ and wild Fennel, etc. Natural pests control can be made by using garlic, onion, nettle, melia, artemisia, propolis, etc.. And then crop rotation, the enrichment of soil nutrients by using other plants. Special emphasis is given to plants ignored by large retailers and food of great interest.
The main scope of “Horti” is to provide informative and formative support not only to urban farmers but also to other people, to the park visitors and to the roman voluntary sector. “Horti” offers nine courses with a strong emphasis on the role and use of wild plants in the kitchen and in the garden. The reconnection with the nature happens through farm activities considered in their complex relation with the whole ecosystem.

“Horti” also aims at teach immigrants that cannot easily found the ingredients of typical African recipe in the local market how to replace it by using wild local plants. For instance, according to “Horti” owner it is possible to replace Manioc leaves with ‘Piattello’ (*Hipochoeries Radicata*) or Gombo and Ogra with Malta sprouts.

During this research, “Horti” resulted to be the most developed private initiative in UPA framework. However, an increasing interest for UPA of several private landowners has been perceived. For instance, during the time of this research, I have been personally contacted by three private owners and other six owners contacted the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ to have suggestions on how to set up urban plots and to gather contacts of new aspirant farmers. However, unfortunately such tendency has not been scientifically documented through this research because the limited time and human resources.

An important factor motivated this trend. Many little and medium size green lands used in the past for farming and nowadays almost abandoned but also farmed lands, are potentially eligible for developing new urban settlements because the increasing house shortage, to make it an a diplomatic way, or because an increasing property speculation to be more realistic. So, who own these ‘stand-by lands’ has a strong interest in waiting and if possible pushing for changing the destination of use of such lands which is regulated by the Municipality town plan. The problem is that this waiting time does not generate any income but instead it costs money because the high taxes on land property and the price for keep it clean. So, UPA is increasingly considered by several land owners as a good temporal solution to keep the land clean while making money and hopefully like a valid alternative to further urban development.

Even if private UPA activities will probably never generate the capital generated by the construction sector in the short term, it is valuable to find out alternative solutions and facilitations to stimulate more private landowners to invest in this sector.

### 2.8 Synthesis

By considering altogether the information reported in previous paragraphs we have a quite exhaustive first UPA ‘Morphology’. What emerges clearly by reading such morphology is the great complexity around UPA generated by a multiplicity of responses to the problems that arise from the environmental, socio-cultural and political contexts. Although these responses are centered on widely shared problems, they are organized differently according to the degree at what citizens get involved in UPA and develop strategic networks for improving their conditions. In other words we can say the quality of every response depends from the social resources mobilized to organize it. It simply means that every response has its own social history.

As we saw, the civil society association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ evolved along line the activities carried out by the oldest and bigger social cooperative in Rome ‘Agricolutra Nuova’ and based its activities by taking in to account six important statements. The success of this experience is linked to the cooperative sustain but also
to the association board that endeavored to stimulate participation, through specific tools, as a way to promote exchanges of information/knowledge/values, the inclusion of new potential citizen farmers and the development of new partnerships with other similar initiatives and institutions. All these efforts brought ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ to quickly expand its activities, the number of associates and the collaboration with other associations and institutions.

Moreover, we considered the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, born as an initiative of unemployed young people, farmers and farm hands that networked with local citizens and future clients. It represents an important landmark for many civil society initiatives as the oldest, bigger and most affirmed integrated social cooperative in Rome. This case differs widely by the others as represent the only considered case where more extensive agriculture and animals breeding are carried out and final products processed and trade inside and outside the cooperative. Furthermore, extra activities are organized along farming. These practices make the ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ web quite strong and independent.

On the other hand, the citizens active in the solidarity garden, have been able first to get together through the parish they are used to frequent and therefore to create a vegetable gardens site with the goal to combine food production, nature protection and solidarity. What facilitated their activities has been the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy Hospital that entrusted them the needed land and in turn benefits of the garden products. Also here, but at lower levels, associates are stimulated to collaborate and share their knowledge and experiences by using specific tools.

Then we considered the case of the neighborhood committee that allowed us to make several considerations on the outcomes resulted from the collaboration of very different civil society associations and organizations that use a combination of formal and informal, legal and illegal practices. Such mixed approach resulted by the necessity to address social exclusion and injustice, environmental erosion and property speculation on the base of a wide shared consensus and participation at the grassroots level. Furthermore, we also observed how this model stimulated the creation of a collective big garden by a group of displaced workers. These, by partnering with the committee, the Province of Rome and the Agrarian Institute, succeeded in taking the land, sponsorship, free agrarian lessons, the access to the local farmer market and to spread news about their initiative in the wider context. We also quickly saw other two similar initiatives: ‘Primavera Romana’ and www.ortourbano.it. The first promotes tours to harvest wild plants and fruit and olives in public parks (‘Agro-Nomadismo’) whilst the second a web community of urban farmers that exchange their knowledge and experience through the website.

Another interesting, besides than one of the older UPA case in Rome, is the informal sector mainly generated by a strong will to farm and the impossibility to pay for a plot of land. The precarious position of informal gardens, as they have to move as soon as landowners reclaim the lands they use, is also a con-cause of their little predisposition to create associations as it generates difficulties to make stable and long-term alliances with other informal farmers. Moreover, other two causes are: their social networks with other informal farmers seem to be more developed at the micro levels and little at the macro social level, and finally they tend to consider the associative sphere too limitative in terms of regulations and what they consider a ‘forced participation’ perceived not relevant for farming.

Additional information have been reported on the first institutionalized vegetable garden through the association and on the farmers from the same association that still farm informally. This case showed the evolution of a group of
informal farmers that started its activities more than 30 years ago and only recently, and only a part of them, succeeded in being recognized at institutional level through a new formula elaborated by the Municipality: a vegetable garden site surrounded by a park that should be kept clean by farmers themselves in exchange of the used plots and water access. Furthermore, it highlights the positive and negative outcomes of the institutionalization process: on the one hand ensured resource access, and on the other hand a long bureaucracy, high expenditures, biodiversity loose and restrictions that some farmer does not like. From such considerations emerged clear the necessity to better evaluate informal farmers’ necessities and their original spatial and communitarian organization at the policy making level.

Finally, we considered the case of a private landowner who decided to create several vegetable gardens plots and rent they out to citizens. He also supports these citizens by organizing agrarian courses and giving practical help in the garden. Whilst the social network and so the partners of this sector seem to be limited to the farmers involved in farming, this initiative is relevant for many little and medium private owners as it shows a new way to generate incomes with their lands and so the possibility to pay the high taxes on land property and the price to keep them clean when not used. It is a further encouragement to do not use such land for further urban development.

In the next chapter are reported the data about a sample of farmers involved in these networks. As I am going to explain below, unfortunately it was not possible to reach an equal number of farmers from every sector and in some case reached farmers have been too little to be considered.
Chapter 3: Cases studies data analysis

The data reported in this chapter have been gathered through the use of a questionnaire that is possible to find in the appendices of this paper. A sample of about 150 urban farmers directly involved in the management of a vegetable garden, have been considered but in the end only 91 questionnaires have been selected by considering the coherence of the different answers and the missing answers. In other words, questionnaires with contrast answers on interconnected points, like for instance a positive answer on seed, knowledge and experiences exchange with other farmers and at the same time a negative answer on relationships with other farmers, have been considered the result of little interest for the questionnaire and so not trustworthy attitude in answering.

Unfortunately, the 91 questionnaires are not illustrative of all considered cases chosen as representative of the whole UPA phenomenon in Rome. 62 of these questionnaires come from urban farmers that operate in the association (many of them previously involved in other sectors as we are going to argue below) sphere whilst the rest come from the informal sector and the first institutionalised case. Furthermore, the questionnaires neither aim at representing the considered sectors in a balanced way as we do not know exactly the number of actors involved in each sector and because there is not a similar number of cases for each of it. By a first consideration, also the choice of interviewing a higher number of farmers in the association sector when we already knew the majority of UPA farmers operate in the informal sector may result ambiguous. This is motivated by the little resources availability and so by the possibility to reach more farmers all together through associations. Moreover, informal farmers are often not easy to reach because very scattered around and their tendency to be little available for interviews.

Other problems are relative to farmers’ categorization. For instance it is difficult to include institutionalised farmers in a specific category as they have been members for many years of an association but they farmed informally till few months ago when the Municipality of Rome has entrusted them 20 plots of land. Moreover, also the consideration of associations’ members presents some problem as the associations were created one year ago and some members have been farming informally till that time or involved in the private sector.

As I will argue in the next chapter different UPA expressions coexist and in some case urban farmers can be involved at the same time in different UPA sectors or switch quickly to the most convenient sector. So, in this phase of UPA evolution in Rome what really makes the difference is not farmers’ membership but more in general the modalities to set every case and its main advantages and disadvantages. So, at this point it is worthy to consider the 91 questionnaires all together as representative of the association, informal, neighbour committee and private sector.

Finally, the main aim of this chapter is to better understand who are old and new citizen farmers involved in UPA, their motivations and how they organize their action especially at the very micro level of their garden. For this reason a special attention is given to their interaction inside the gardens and to the main elements such interaction is made on.

3.1 Gender, age, household dimensions and profession

The considered sample results to be highly differentiated in terms of gender, age, household dimensions and profession. A majority of citizen farmers (72%) are male whilst 28% are female. The average age is about 55 years with a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 89 years whilst the average age of the female group is 52 years.
and of the male group is 57. As it is possible to note by looking the graph below the majority of male farmers are on their 60s whilst the majority of female farmers are equally distributed between the 40s and 60s. There is also an interesting case of a woman almost 90 years old that resulted to be among the most motivated farmers met during the research.

The average household is composed by 3 members with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of six members. It corresponds to the typical Italian household (ISTAT data).

The majority of these farmers are retired (37%), followed by white-collar farmers (28%). Then we have self-employed farmers (7%), blue-collars, agronomists (3%) and other fourteen different professions between the 2% and 1%. The bar chart below (Graph 3.2) visualized all citizen farmers’ professions.
3.2 The residence, the garden and the first link with it

The majority of considered urban farmers (57%) live in the roman periphery whilst a 40% of them live in the city centre and a mere 3% in the countryside. The average distance between the gardens and the citizens’ residences is 7.6 kilometres with a minimum distance of 200 meters and a maximum of 20 kilometres. The necessary time to travel such distances is in average 18 minutes with a minimum of 2 minutes and a maximum of 50 minutes. It is interesting to note the presence of farmers that travel for about 20 kilometres and also spend almost one hour to reach the garden. This happens because these farmers do not have any opportunities to farm close to their residence and so this factor can be considered as a testimony of their very strong motivations. Not by accident among these farmers there is some very active in looking for possible lands close to their residence for settling new gardens.

Although the aim of this chapter is not to consider the separate groups that compose the whole sample as said in the introduction, it is curious to note that the majority of farmers that live more far away than others are members of associations that also spend less time in the garden and make the lowest number of visits in comparison to the other groups. In the future will be interesting to analyse at what degree the distance factor influences the time spent in the garden and the visits number and to look for other possible factors that may influence such trend.
An important question comes up when considering the great number of farmers that do not live close the garden they manage: how did they get in contact with the vegetable garden initiative or how did they know the places they are using informally?

The most used channel, especially among informal farmers is to pass information by mouth of word (63%). Even when informal farmers have been the initiators of a vegetable gardens site, they however used this mean to get informed about the land they were close to use informally (owner and future possible plans) and later they use the same channel to inform other potential farmers.

The second important channel is represented by the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ that put in contact with UPA initiative 30% of the whole farmers sample that now are associates of ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ (see paragraph 2.1.1 for more details). Other important channels to establish a link with UPA initiatives are internet, TV and newspapers at 5% followed by 2% of farmers that have simply seen and asked information.
3.3 Garden management and production

70% of the gardens are managed at household level, 28% individually whilst the remaining 2% is managed by an association and by a farmer and his friend. The association is Slow Food Ciampino, a local branch of Slow Food Italia. The garden is in one of the plots created by the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’. This garden results from an important partnership between the agrarian social integrated cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ that supports the initiative of ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ and Slow Food movement. Although the garden has little dimensions, it has a high symbolic importance. In fact, Slow Food besides to provide a good reference combines its initiatives with the associations activities and together make a bigger social network.

In 85% of the cases farmers have a minimum of one till a maximum of five collaborators whilst in the remaining 15% they farm alone. The majority of them are relatives and friends but also paid workers in the two case that farm in order to sell products. This is an important data, as the presence of collaborators can improve farmers’ performance and enlarge the farm networks. Furthermore, we can also speculate on the possibility these collaborators will actively enter the urban farm sphere in a near future.

During the spring/summer period the garden is visited 4 times a week on average with a minimum of 1 time and a maximum of 7 times whilst during the autumn/winter period the average falls at 2.62 with a minimum equal to zero and a maximum of 8 times.

A similar trend regards the hours spent every week in farming activities. On average during the period spring-summer citizens farmers spend 12 hours with a maximum of 48 hours and a minimum of 2 hours whereas in the period autumn/winter they spent on average 8 hours with a maximum of 30 hours and a minimum of zero hours. Although the visits and time spent in the garden may seem little, we do not have to forget that these data only refer to the main vegetable garden manager and not to their collaborators which can spend in the garden the same amount of time or little less.
87% of gardens are managed organically, almost 10% conventionally and the remaining 3% by combining organic and conventional methods. However, although this data appear very positive for environmental sustainability it is fair to precise that has been often recognized among farmers a confusion or imprecisions in defining the kind of agriculture they were doing.

For instance, the use of manure is always defined as organic practice even when it comes from not organic breeding animals. Also the sporadic use of chemicals had been often consider part of organic agriculture especially by arguing that it cannot harm and that it is necessary when you do not have other solutions. Is interesting that especially many old farmers, when questioned on the kind of agriculture they carry out, in many cases answered almost in the same way whose general meaning is “I farm as I have always farmed” or “I farm as my parents thought me to farm”.
The average size of considered gardens is little bit more than 200 square meters with a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 7500 square meters. It is almost the half the average size of informal gardens (386 square meters) individuated through the Municipality census. The associations have the smallest gardens whilst the considered informal farmers manage the biggest. This is also another reason why many informal farmers do not really want to be included in the association sphere. However, while a 60% of farmers are satisfied with the dimensions of their gardens and a 10% is little satisfied a relevant percentage (30%) is not satisfied at all and expresses the desire to enlarge it for different reasons.

Among the most frequent reasons there are: the necessity to farm more, the possibility to plant fruit trees and to use the garden for other ludic activities, to have space to breed little animals and keep dogs.

Only two farmers trade their products. However this data cannot be considered valid as especially informal farmers are not open to talk about such issue because they worry authorities fine them for illegal trade and for the possible risks that can derive from farming without respecting any safety standards.

The average number of beneficiaries for each garden is almost 5 with a minimum of 1 and maximum of 10. The most stable beneficiaries are relatives (96%) whilst occasional beneficiaries are friends (46%) and neighbours (5%).
3.4 Knowledge level/source and previous agrarian experiences

The majority of farmers (49%) have basic agrarian knowledge that means they are able to farm the most common plants that do not require special attentions. However, the action of these farmers is just limited to plant the most common seeds/plants, water them, eradicate weeds and harvest the final products. They do not have any knowledge on how to increase production, on farming cycles and have little knowledge on how to address emergencies generated by pests and other elements that can affect crops’ vital cycle.

34% of considered farmers have good farming knowledge. In other words, they know how to improve production, how to choose the most profitable combination of plant, to recognize land nutrients, address emergencies and reproducing the best seeds/plants. As the data on knowledge and material exchange show, more experienced farmers usually play a key role as they are often consulted by less experienced farmers on practical agrarian issues.

The remaining 17% of farmers have not any agrarian knowledge as they are entering the agrarian sphere for the first time in their life. As this group can be considered as the tangible prove of an extended growing interest for UPA of actors that have just a general idea about agriculture practices, it is interesting to better investigate their status. They result almost equally divided in terms of gender (47% females and 53% males) whilst their average age is 55 with a minimum of 42 and a maximum of 67. Except the presence of one doctor they are equally divided in retired and white collars. The whole group opted for organic agriculture and the majority manage the garden at household level (80%) and in three cases in partnership with a friend, individually and with Slow Food association.

The motivations they share the most are ‘Contact with nature’ (60%), followed by ‘Food quality and safety’ (53%), ‘Children education’ (40%), ‘Socialization’ and
‘Free time’ (33%), ‘Pleasure to grow up vegetables’ (27%) and ‘Building up alternative food production system’ (20%).

An important question comes up while reading the high percentage of farmers with basic and no knowledge (66%): where do they take the needed knowledge to farm? The most preferred source is represented by other farmers (68%), then by specialists (48%), relatives (42%), friends (27%) and Internet (11%). Farmers seem to be preferred because differently by the other sources they are always present in the same garden and so have more possibility to pass knowledge by giving practical examples (learning by doing together!).

Another important data that relates to farmers knowledge level is their previous involvement in the agrarian sphere. 64% of them have had different agrarian
experiences before to start farming in the city whereas the remaining 36% have never had any previous experiences. Among farmers with previous agrarian experiences, 82% had an agrarian experience at the household level, in some case when children/teenagers, in others when adults and often in both cases. 15% have had occasional experience in the horticultural sector or in the olive and grapes cultivation that requires occasional labour during the phase of pruning and harvesting. Another 12% have had a studies experience whilst the 8% have had a professional experience.

3.5 Seeds/Plants sources and varieties

The acquisition of seeds and plants evolves through four channels: commercial, self-production, hand down and exchange. In the majority of the cases farmers combine these four channels. The commercial channel is used by a great majority of farmers (96%) whilst the exchange channel by 35% of them, the self-production by a good 30% and finally the handed down channel by a 10% of them.

To buy seeds and plants is often motivated by the difficulty to reproduce it. As reproduce seeds and plants need specific knowledge, attentions and also a minimum infrastructure like a little greenhouse, many of these farmers do not have this possibility because they do not have enough space in their garden or house and
because the majority of them do not have adequate knowledge. However, it is interesting to observe that when farmers are questioned on what they would need to farm in a better way they very often include a little space, private or shared, to reproduce seeds and also the possibility to create little greenhouses without asking permissions.

The exchange of seeds and plants frequently evolves through an interesting exchange of knowledge and recipes on how to farm specific varieties and use it. The exchange of seeds and plants plays an important role in fostering social relationships between farmers. It promotes reciprocity and makes their web more independent by external inputs. Another important channel for acquiring seeds and plants is the hand down modality. Through such channel are transmitted generations by generations important rare or typical varieties of a specific region. It is mainly by using this channel that 19% of considered farmers have in their garden old, rare and local plants varieties. Moreover, it is encouraging that 96% of farmers showed a great interest in farming for the first time such varieties or in adding new ones in their gardens.

3.6 Relations between neighbour farmers

89% of farmers have different kind of relations with their neighbours while the remaining 11% do not interact with them. Unfortunately this research did not focused on the main reasons for this last trend but rather it investigated the main kind of relations carried out by the majority of them.

65% of the sample develop relations with other farmers because the exchange of experiences, material and knowledge. Such exchanges play a crucial role in enhancing the communitarian and relational character of the considered UPA cases. As we are going to observe in the next chapters, a high degree of exchange plays a crucial role in ensuring a good independence from external stimulus. As said above, in this exchange system farmers with good agrarian knowledge play a special role as they represent the main referents for less experienced farmers.

A good percentage of farmers (57%) have also friendship relations with their neighbours. The important point here is that this friendship keeps in contact farmers also outside the garden. We can suppose this factor generates more opportunities to consolidate farmers’ networks and to extend it, as between several friends that have common interests about UPA there always can be other actors. In other simple words, two or more friends that talk about issues related to their gardens in the bars, offices, schools and other places have more possibilities to stimulate the interest of the other
actors that interact with them.

28% of farmers also have a solidarity relation with neighbour farmers as they provide each other favours and mutual help. Also this factor is functional to support the communitarian attitude detected in many analysed cases as it strengthens trust between them.

Finally 22% of farmers have only occasional relations with their neighbours that means they have minimum relations just based on mutual respects. The majority of these farmers are distributed among the associations. There are two main reasons for this trend. On one hand they are new members of the association and so they have not had enough time and opportunities to interact. On the other hand, as sometimes they have full-time work based on intense social relations, they explicitly farm in order to “enjoy the silence” of nature and so they deliberately prefer to have minimum relations with other farmers.

3.7 Farmers motivations, wish to develop self-financing activities and institutional partnerships

The great majority of farmers are stimulated by a multiplicity of motivations. The most shared motivation (75%) is ‘Food quality and safety’ closely followed by ‘Contact with nature’ (70%) and ‘Use in a more positive way my free time’ (53%). Then we have ‘Socialization’ (35%), ‘Children education’ (32%), followed by ‘Pleasure to grow up vegetables’ (11%) and ‘Build up an alternative food production system’ (9%). Other less shared motivations are ‘Better known how the association works to create a new one in other places’ and ‘Learn new things’ both at 4% and ‘Sell products’ 2%, ‘Increase the income’ at 2% and finally a curious motivation is ‘Acquire agrarian knowledge as preparation for moving to the countryside’ (1%).

It is curious to observe that the motivation ‘Food quality and safety’ results to be not exclusively related to the production of organic food. In fact, 64% of conventional farmers are also driven by this motivation whilst at the same time 24% of organic farmers are not guided by it. There are two explanations for such trend. On one hand conventional farmers tend to consider organic food safer but not necessarily of better quality in terms of organoleptic characteristics. Rather, they often advocate that some vegetable varieties among the tastiest need some chemicals to better grow up. On the other hand, what may partially justify the high percentage of organic farmers not driven by the considered motivation is the easy access these farmers have to cheap, tasty and safe food. In fact 80% of organic farmers are from the organic UPA association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ which gardens are located close to the big agrarian cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ that sells high quality organic products.
The motivation ‘Contact with nature’ is linked to the desire of a growing number of urban citizens to reconnect their lives with nature. This desire is testified by a rapid emergence of several different initiatives that aim at the protection and creation of old and new green areas. Farming in the city offers both the possibility to stay in the nature while at the same time producing food. To have a constant ‘Contact with nature’ is often consider functional to eliminate the stress generated by an intense and fast life-style and to observe, touch and enjoy something less artificial than what is offered by the urban panorama. So, stay in ‘Contact with nature’ while farming plays an important role in farmers’ lives as it changes at different degree their life-style starting from what they eat every day. Furthermore, if farming is also functional to have a closer contact with nature also the other way around can be true. In other words, if we consider green urban areas as possible places to farm we can add more reasons in advocating their protection by asserting that a wide number of citizens is potentially interested in using these areas for farming.

Again, when we consider farmers driven by the motivation ‘Use in a more positive way my free time’ we have to think about life-styles. Many of this farmers state they do not like to spend their free time watching a television or sitting in a bar with their friends. Furthermore, some of the oldest farmers say they prefer farm rather than spend their time in an elderly or social centre. Interesting is the case of two elderly associations, contacted by local authorities to build up a bowls field for their free-time, that refused the field and opted for a shared vegetable garden.

To facilitate socialization is another important function farmers attribute to urban farming activities. The social sphere in Rome, as well as in many other big cities worldwide, often resulted eroded by the construction of ‘dormitory neighbourhoods’ or big commercial centres in the peripheries, an increasing criminal rate and anti-social behaviours, fear of foreign people and the typical individualism of modern society. So, the agrarian sphere tends to be considered, sometime also in a very romantic modality, as a protected domain for social relationships based on mutual exchanges between people. It is also interesting the case of people that immigrate to Rome from the countryside in their young age and now can in part join the social relations typical of farming world or can however have a hope to recuperate it.

The necessity of teaching children on food production is shared by both local authorities and the considered farmers and as we said in the second chapter collaboration between the two is going on (‘Sapere I Sapori’). The real problem is that many children in the city do not have any basic knowledge on the food they consume every day. To use a very often cited phrase: “many children nowadays do not know where a tomato comes from” or worst “they think a chicken has four legs as their parents use to buy four legs packs in the supermarkets”. Educate children on food production not only stimulates their imagination but also their attitude to recognize the land as a fundamental element for life continuity. Again, also this motivation is about the creation of an alternative life style based on social and environmental sustainability.

Also the remaining less mentioned motivations are about the construction of a more enjoyable urban panorama. The ‘pleasure to grow up vegetables’ relates to the satisfaction sphere of farmers as concrete outcomes result from their activities. Rather, ‘Build up an alternative food production system’ is a motivation of farmers that try to connect urban farming with other initiatives, like box schemes, direct sell, farmers markets and CSAs, in order to create a strong and self-sustained alternative system to the mainstream food chains. This last group of farmer is very important for
networking UPA with these and other initiatives.

4% of farmers, from the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’, farm in order to ‘Better known how the association works to create a new one in other places’. They live quite far away from the association vegetable garden. However, it does not discourage them but rather makes them think about the idea of importing this successful formula close to their houses. Finally there is also a quite curious motivation of one farmer that exasperated by the city definitely chose to move to the countryside in a close future. However, in the meantime this farmer found convenient to gain some agrarian knowledge by farming in the city.

Quite surprising, excluding the two farmers that commercialized their products, only 2% of the sample farm for increasing their income and nobody seems to farm in order to ensure a higher food security degree in the city. When farmers are questioned on the effective possibility to save money through farming activities their answer is always negative. They argue that if we calculate the time spent in the garden and the money spent to reach the garden and buy materials and we compare it with the very cheap prices of conventional and organic vegetables in the market there is not an effective saving of money. Rather, in some case they argue the expenditure for farming is much higher than what they would spend for buying food.

What seems to be very important for urban farmers is the possibility to combine their preference for high quality and safe food with other activities more related to their passion for nature, their social attitude and to the possibility to teach their children about food production. As we are going to further argue in the next chapter, this tendency highlights the strong multi-functional connotation of UPA in Rome and its relational character, both between citizens and between them and nature. Furthermore, such tendency may also be one cause for the missed recognition of the important role urban agriculture can play in ensuring a high food security degree.
An important factor that relates to farmers' activities and so to a positive realization of their motivations is their willingness/wish to develop self-financing activities and partnerships with institutions.

Self-financing activities can play an important role especially in the association sphere. In fact, while the association formula ensures land use and other services on the long-term, it also includes many costs that in the consider cases are paid directly by the associates. Although the associations represent a crucial mean for institutions to deploy their UPA policies, besides to receive land, water access and the basic infrastructures they do not receive any cash. And the problem is that, besides insurance and other services’ costs, also the association management has a cost that is often not paid as members themselves play many tasks. However, a further problem is that such tasks are not equally divided among associates as, to say it with the trailer metaphor, in the association there is often who pull and who is pulled and the negative point is that this last group seems to represent the majority.

As found in the case of ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ the board is very active in developing tools to foster participation, also because the above cited metaphor, but this organization requires plenty of time so that they often consider it as a real part-time job. So, developing self-financing activities can offer the possibility to pay back this work and to make it more professional. Furthermore, as we are going to observe through the consideration of UPA activities and the three axes elaborated by J.D. van der Ploeg (chapter 5), self-financing activities have the potential to invert the negative
economic trend shared both by the little/medium agrarian farms and urban agriculture associations. In other words, self-financing activities can make possible not only to save money through farming in the city but also to generate possible extra incomes to be reinvested in other initiatives.

From these considerations also comes out an important difference between the association sphere and the informal sector. While the association can provide many benefits by legalizing farming activities it also requires further efforts to be maintained. These efforts are not only represented by practical tasks but also by possible costs linked to the legal association framework. On the contrary, informal agriculture does not ensure land and water access on the long-term but it neither requires extra costs both in cash and practical tasks. This is a further reason that explains why the informal sector is still the most widespread in Rome and why in just few cases it generates associations.

Therefore, if institutions aim at legalizing informal farming activities through the association formula, as the case of ‘Fosso Bravetta’ shows, it becomes paramount to allow and facilitate associations in developing self-financing activities.

As resulted by considering only associates farmers, 57% agree on developing self-financing activities whilst 7% agree with reserves, 21% do not agree and 15% do not know. The farmers that express doubts, just fear self-financing activities will change the ludic character they link to farm as it is not a case that 80% of them share the motivation ‘Free-time’. Rather, farmers that do not agree worry civil society initiatives will turn in capitalistic enterprises whilst in their opinion money should stay out of these kind of initiatives.

Another important point for improving the condition of all UPA sectors is the willingness to interact with institutions in order to develop partnerships. As we said in the second chapter, in at least four cases (the committee, ‘Acqua Sole Terra, the first institutionalized garden, and the displaced workers) the interaction with institutions has been central in getting founds and land and water access.

At the moment in Rome there are three main institutions involved in UPA: the
Municipality of Rome, the Province of Rome and the ‘Regione Lazio’. As we are going to argue in the next chapter they are committed in UPA development at different levels. However, what is important to highlight here, is their interest for developing partnerships with UPA associations and committees. This means there is a shared wish from both parts for an interaction that aims at improving UPA evolution.

However, while institutions seem to be always interested in interacting with associations and committees, some of these or some of their members look with suspicion what they often consider a sudden institutional interest for UPA. At the base of such distrust there are in some case political motivations but more generally the idea institutions are quite far away from understanding people needs and working for their satisfaction. Distrust generates different kinds of civil society antagonism which UPA is only one expression among many other initiatives that target a more sustainable urban life-style. Such initiatives on one hand aim at propose independent alternatives and on the other to change the institutional panorama. In order to achieve this goal, many initiatives aim at networking with other similar initiatives. It allows them to become more independent and to have more power in negotiating with institutions.

The presence of three competent institutions on UPA issues offers more possibilities for interactions also for the most ‘intransigent’ UPA actors that can choose the most suitable according to the realization of their goals.

65% of farmers agree on developing institutional partnerships whereas 10% do not agree, 12% agree with reserves and about 13% do not have an idea on this issue. The farmers in favour often argue this is the only way to get founds and to be acknowledged whilst the farmers that discard such possibility claim they entered the non-institutional sphere to create an alternative not to interact with what they consider the main cause of actual problems in Rome. On the other hand, the farmers that agree with reserves debate the necessity to find out a way to interact with institutions in a manner that would not generate dependence.
Chapter 4: Evolution of UPA in Rome

4.1 Complexity around UPA

The consideration of five models as different expressions of recent UPA development in Rome leads us to recognise the multi-actor, multi-level and multi-aspect character of this phenomenon.

The multi-actor character of UPA activities is nowadays linked to its fast growth that includes an increasing participation of new actors which are, in the cases deeply investigates through the use of the questionnaire, very differentiated in terms of age, gender, socio-cultural and economical background. Furthermore, whilst till few years ago farming in the city was mainly functional to maintaining a contact with an original farm culture and integrate the income, nowadays it is increasingly linked to a wider multiplicity of interests of such new actors.

Their motivations, identity and way of acting make them the novelty in the urban context. Sometime more classical citizens or in other cases more peasants, free-time, part-time, full-time urban farmers, they all share the passion for farming and the necessity to do it in the city. Their diversity is their strength as facilitates the diffusion of discourses on and practices of agriculture through a multiplicity of social networks.

As we saw, every sector evolves through different strategic networks. The informal sector resulted to be the less developed in terms of a social network intentionally created in order to gain a political acknowledgment. Informal farmers have a very developed social network with other informal farmers more at micro level based on exchange of information, material and knowledge and on mutual help. However, they lack a more extended network with other farmers and institutions deliberately made to solve their problem with water and land access.

Instead, the association and committee sectors evolve along several and very extended social networks that by crossing each other give to a great number of people the possibility of exchanging information, sharing values and making new alliances. What often emerges by the integration of different elements from these networks, are new UPA strategic networks that deliberately aim at involve new actors, reach new goals, mediate with institutions and gain more autonomy.

The considered private sector case is characterised by a network organised and managed by the owner of the land that represents the only referent for land and water access. This network does not seems so developed as prevalently includes the participation of farmers which do not have responsibilities or tasks as their accomplishment is included in the price they pay for farming. In other words, these farmers do not really need to create UPA strategic networks as the continuity of their action is ensured by the private property.

On the other hand, the cooperative is based on wider networks developed by promoting strong relations with consumers grounded on face-to-face interactions and by directly involving them in the main decision tasks. Furthermore, these relations are grounded on a very differentiated offer of products and services typical of multifunctional agrarian enterprises. The low price they sell such products and services make them really attractive for consumers and stronger in competing with the big food distribution sector.

The evolution of such networks is strictly interrelated and depends from a multi-level and multi-aspect process that includes new stimulus, challenges and risks triggered by the processes of policy making, socio-cultural, economical and environmental changes that happen at local, national and supranational level.

As a matter of fact, the reasons why many new actors are getting involved in
these networks is the necessity to react to several negative externalities mainly generated by global policies elaborated on strong capitalistic interests. A practical example is given by considering the consequences of food production de-localization. Such de-localization, described by Castells as an increasing distance between the “places of production” and “places of consumption” (Castells, 1996), allows big companies to reduce the production costs by farming in developing countries, where labour market is cheaper and food safety and environmental sustainability standards are lower. While these practices make worst socio-economical and environmental conditions of such countries and reduce the possibility consumers have to know about this negative effects (Buttel 1997), they also generate increasing commercial food distrust and make very difficult for little and medium farmers in developed countries to compete with them.

In Rome as wells as all around the world, as a reaction to such trend are flourishing many initiatives that aim at creating strong alliances between consumers and producers by acting at the civil society, private and local, national and supra-national institutional level. Although the majority of these initiatives focus on local food networks they do not exclude partnerships of solidarity with consumers and producers active in the national and global context. Furthermore, as we saw through the case of the integrate social agrarian cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, such initiatives also represent a good arena and offer practical instruments for promoting and organizing the direct involvement of citizens in the agrarian sphere. Indeed, as the case of the two associations, the neighbour committee, the displaced workers and the private sector show, UPA development is stimulated by the possibility to address a myriad of problems, generated at local, national and global level, as food quality, safety and security, the danger to lose the original farm culture as a consequence of migratory flows in the city, job displacement, urban sprawl and the erosion of environmental and social sphere.

Therefore, UPA is also an interesting multi-aspect phenomenon because it makes the urban as the arena where many different actors foment different aspects of farming according to their worries and needs of citizens. Furthermore, as in the majority of the cases they are citizens which main income is not based on farming, their action marks the strong multifunctional character of UPA in Rome. Moreover, by combining urban and rural aspects new syncetic life-styles are set and the representation of the urban in contrast to the rural is challenged.

4.2 Institutional competition

UPA in Rome is a growing phenomenon that sees the participation of an increasing and differentiated number of actors. This phenomenon is also quickly growing because a strong media attention. Almost every week on local newspapers and television programmes there is a space dedicated to its different expressions. For this reason, UPA is becoming a good spot for institutions that aim at wider their consensus among society.

As said in the previous paragraph, there are three institutions that relate to UPA issues. The first is the Municipality of Rome, which owns the majority of the lands used to farm and more than 200 hectares of abandoned green areas. Its main UPA initiative is the creation of the first public vegetable garden considered in paragraph 2.4. The second institution is the Province of Rome, which recently has financed the committee and the displaced workers initiatives. The third institution is the Lazio Region that owns many lands in the peri-urban areas and also some inside the city. In the spring 2010, its previous administration assigned a land of more than
four hectares to the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ for the creation of new vegetable gardens allotments.

In the spring 2008 the Municipality of Rome and the Province of Rome changed administration. The first passed from a left wing to a right wing coalition, whilst in the second a new left wing coalition took over from the previous left wing coalition. Exactly two years later also at Lazio Region a right wing coalition replaced a left wing coalition. Since that time the new political framework has been characterised by a strong alliance between the Municipality and the Region.

As we saw by describing the evolution of the considered cases studies, different actors have bridged relationships with different institutions. This is mainly motivated by the political preferences of such actors and institutions. However, what needs our attention is the competition that seems to going on between the Municipality of Rome and the ‘Regione Lazio’ on one hand and the Province of Rome on the other.

If we look at the newspapers and Internet articles, the different television programs and the political claims of that time we can get easily confused to understand which was the first vegetable garden to be created through the institutions support. To make clear this point, the vegetable garden created by the neighbour committee, made with the economical contribution of the Province of Rome, was the first to be inaugurated on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of June 2010. On the other hand, the Major inaugurated the vegetable garden established by the Municipality of Rome (the first institutionalised vegetable garden we treated in chapter 2) on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of July 2010. However, the inauguration of the committee garden has not been followed by a full farming activities, as the garden was not well organised at that time whilst in the first garden of the Municipality of Rome such activities started before its inauguration.

Although for this research is not so relevant to understand which institution created the first vegetable garden, it is interesting to briefly consider the consequences generated by what can be considered a kind of competition between different institutions in creating the first public vegetable garden in Rome and more in general in showing their commitment for UPA.

Although, the not coordinated and sometime competing institutions’ interest for UPA is at its very early stage, we can already observe some positive and negative effect. On one hand, it speeded up the bureaucracy for an economic sustain to the committee and for the land entrustment at the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’. On the other hand, it made these two cases more a good media spot for politicians rather than well organised initiatives.

For instance, the lack of coordination between the Municipality and the Province generated practical problems in the committee case, as the first owns the area where the committee set the garden without any official permission with the money of the Province. As result the garden still does not have public water access as a first connection was created informally by using a public fountain and quickly cut by the Municipality. Furthermore, recently started to circulate the news that is in the intentions of the Municipality to entrust such area to a private company that organises concerts and other events. In addition, also the initiative promoted by the Lazio Region few days before the new elections has made very little progress since that time.

Although competition between institutions generated some positive result and probably will generate others, it gives little chances to address the complexity around UPA. In fact, as institutional interest for UPA is very young, there is a general lack of basic knowledge on it. So, what is really desirable are partnerships between different institutions, at least centred on basic UPA issues, which will allow an integration of
knowledge and more coordination in developing new policies.

4.3 Towards the right to farm in the city

The definition of the concept of city has never been easy. In the past as well as in the present the concept of city has been prevalently defined in contrast to the concept of countryside. The city is the place where the population and the infrastructures are very dense whereas in the countryside their presence is very reduced and scattered.

However, the most important issues that mark the difference between the city and the countryside are the crucial role the countryside plays in producing food and the co-production between man and nature at the base of such production (Van der Ploeg, 2009). With the industrial revolution such difference got deeper as the city became the main dominion of many factories, where urban citizens and rural migrants found an employment, and the countryside started to be used intensively to produce food. The actual result of this tendency is an increasing disconnection between urban citizens, farmers, food production and nature. This made the majority of the cities all over the world highly dependent on the countryside for food production.

UPA challenges the binary division between what is typically considered the urban and the rural, as it brings many features of the countryside inside the city. Differently by other activities carried out in the city, which may be strongly connected to the agrarian sphere and so represent it, UPA has the potential to bring in the city a living farming culture.

As this research shows, such culture is advocated by an increasing number of urban actors as a way to re-establish a contact with nature, produce food and other services. These actors acknowledge positive elements of both the city and the countryside and endeavour for a perfect combination of them. The maximum expression of this attempt is the claim for the right to farm in the city.

Such claim is based on the principle of food sovereignty in the city, on the necessity to hamper the quick urban sprawl and on the possibility to combine agriculture with other activities. Unlike other initiatives based on an alliance between consumers and producers, several actors involved in UPA aim at producing food themselves, not only in order to know what they eat but also to develop other correlated activities along farming. However, as their action is not yet really acknowledged, promoted and shared by institutions and the majority of other citizens, their main problem is land access. Although the Municipality of Rome has about 200 hectares of degraded green lands, 50,000 hectares of farming lands and almost an equal portion of parkland, the great majority are already used by medium and large scale enterprises. Furthermore, these and other private lands are at high risk of property speculation. Therefore, farming in the city besides to be still considered a cultural strangeness by the majority of the citizens and a little profitable economic activity has also a physical limitation as the little land availability.

The right to farm in the city promotes the idea of using degraded green areas and lands at high risk of property speculation to produce food rather than to expand the city limits. Furthermore, such right found their fundamentals in the possibility to create new citizens meeting places and services along the establishment of new UPA sites.

Although several farmers mention the right to farm in the city, at this early stage of new UPA evolution in Rome there is not any coordination in promoting it at the social and legal level. A good step in this direction is the increasing recognition of
the importance to create a supra-structure to coordinate the existing networks by involving similar experiences at local as well as regional and national level.

The acknowledgement of the right to farm in the city will depend from the evolution of this supra-structure as well as will a more sustainable future of Rome and other cities.
Chapter 5: Traditional agriculture and UPA

5.1 Main similarities between UPA and traditional agriculture

From the case studies analysed in this research emerged clear that several elements which driven the majority of UPA actors refer to the traditional agrarian sphere, here considered as peasants culture, practices and more in general “the peasant principle” (Van der Ploeg, 2008). However, although there are some differences between peasants of the world, the majority of UPA actors consider the ‘peasant principle’ as a ‘glory box’ of values, knowledge and practical tools which can sustain them in the construction of new spaces inside the city, highly independent from the market inputs and more sustainable at social and environmental level.

In the context of UPA, a key role in making usable such ‘glory box’ is played by very experienced farmers in every sector and by agronomists in the association and private sectors. Therefore, it is interesting to understand in the end at what degree this use generates similarities and differences between UPA and traditional agriculture sphere. To better develop this analysis, I will refer, one at a time, to the main elements that characterize “The peasant condition” individuated by Van der Ploeg (2008).

**Co-production and Resources base**

Co-production refers to the production of new natural and social resources, knowledge and skills, and their improvement, which results from the simultaneous evolution between man and nature. In order to better satisfy its needs, man continuously moulds nature by using and combining its resources to create an ever richer resources base. This interactive process is sustainable if man makes possible the conservation and regeneration of natural resources and also their improvement on the long term. An example of coproduction is given by considering the agro-biodiversity at the base of traditional agrarian practices, which is the product of a very long interaction between peasants and nature. Peasants by continuously managing nature in a way that ensured its reproduction and so the continuity of their lives, have improved their knowledge, skills and social resources that allow them to expand their resources base by selecting new plant varieties (more productive and pests/drought resistant) which use makes easier and better the satisfaction of their needs.

If we consider the broader sphere of peasants activities, the knowledge, skills and social resources that result from the coproduction process do not only refer to the degree of managed agro-biodiversity. They also relate to the way peasants process final products, define new tasks and ‘jobs’, commercialise their products and develop social relations inside and outside the family unit as a base for developing more strategic social organization and networks that better supports their activities.

As we saw by considering different UPA sectors, UPA is set intentionally or unconsciously, to short the gap between man and nature for several motivations. However, at the moment the highest co-production degree relates to the cooperative and informal sectors, which has been active in Rome for a longer time than other sectors. ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, by acting like a big peasants family has been able to protect a large green area from urban sprawl by using it and valorising its natural characteristics. Such use includes the creation of a typical farm landscape and the development of several extra activities along farming practices that generate new important economic opportunities. Furthermore, new specific knowledge, jobs occasions and social relations have been developed through this process.

Instead, if we consider the informal sector, in some case we can find the tangible expressions of the considered co-evolution. The main examples are the
creation of new hybrid varieties by crossing cultivated and wild species, the
cultivation of plants that attract beneficial insects, new knowledge that account the
environmental specificity, the recovery of degraded lands, the creation of micro
communities based on the mutual help and the construction of little infrastructures
used to farm and for other family needs. However, what often hampers the co-
production process in this sector is the instability generated by the necessity to move
frequently as soon as the lands where many vegetable gardens are located is reclaimed
by its owners. This instability fosters the tendency to develop at lower levels the
interaction with nature than what informal famers would like to do, in the sense that
farmers invest less on the long-term. The many temporary sheds made with makeshift
materials present in many informal gardens are not only the expression of the poverty
of many informal farmers but also the main symbol of this impossibility to develop a
deep co-production process. Informal farmers often use the follow proverb: “Il
contadion ha il cervello fino” to say that peasants have a close relation with and
knowledge on their units which for this reason can be managed in a clever and
autonomous way.

All the other sectors are very young and aim at developing a co-production
process by regenerating lands, creating parks, orchards, new infrastructures and
activities. They do it by deploying new strategic networks, stimulating participation
with specific tools, facilitating the exchange of information especially by creating new
rooms for meetings between less experienced and experienced farmers and
agronomists and by developing educational activities on how to use nature in a
sustainable way.

Patterning relations with markets in ways that allow for autonomy

Peasants develop specific relations with markets by interacting with the wider
context where they operate and by shaping it in the most convenient way that
correspond to reach the “maximum flexibility, fluidity and autonomy”. A basic factor
in determining how peasants shape external relations is their tendency to distrusts
external inputs as “reflection of, as well as a response to, hostile environments”, this
last understood as an environment of dependency from external resources that then is
difficult to regenerate inside the farm unit. Such peasants’ distrust is often considered
like peasants’ stubbornness.

What is important is that this distrust makes peasants doubting the possibility
to easily and quickly reach benefits through a wide use of external resources that
probably would be make them less independent. Therefore, peasants are more
predisposed to mobilize and regenerate their own resources and also to develop their
commercial channels by using “local, social and material resources”.

As we consider the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, we can observe how it
endeavours to mobilize its own resources, process, commercialise and use them to
reproduce new resources inside its farm unit and also outside by developing strategic
networks with other actors involved in the construction of an alternative food and
multifunctional web system. Furthermore, ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ enriches its internal
resources base by taking in to account the needs of its extended customers’ network,
which is possible to know by having a face-to-face interaction with them and by
allowing them to enter the cooperative at different levels. A similar tendency but at
lower level, is observable in the other sectors. Here farmers are really active in
creating systems with good levels of self-sufficiency especially at the micro level of
their communities that are strongly based on a reciprocity that includes exchange of
knowledge, material, experience and favours. However, what is missed, at least at
official level, are the relations with markets.

**Survival**

This element refers to “the reproduction and, hopefully, to the improvement of one’s existence”. It refers to the satisfaction of peasants’ household needs, the generated income and “the relations with the state, capital groups, other social groups, classes and institutions, as well as the internal relations within the peasantry itself”. It triggers a continuous adaptation and integration of different forms of incomes with the scope of surviving.

As we saw, the majority of considered citizen farmers do not farm to generate income or because they cannot afford to buy food as they are often involved in other main jobs. Rather, it resulted they find more expensive to produce food themselves than buy it in the market. However, the situation is different for the case of ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ that by offering high quality organic products through face-to-face interactions with its customers, and other services at low prices succeed in competing with the tough concurrence of food corporations.

**Further strengthening of the resource base and Reducing dependency**

To further strengthening the resources base does not only includes the resources themselves but also the wider relations and networks that allow acquiring better resources, use and valorise them. By reaching a good survival degree and the resources base strengthening is possible to reduce the dependence. Rural subsistence tolls can be improved, both in the short and long terms, through continuous and innovative efforts direct to reduce the dependency.

The further strengthening of the resources base also includes their patrimonialisation that “…involves transforming an object, a space, a practice or a product into more than the sum of its parts. It involves the mobilization of historical and symbolic traits to give specific and ‘authentic’ meaning, whether in terms of production or collective identity.” (Willis and Campbell, 2004, p320)

Whilst the informal sector resulted to be more developed in terms of micro networks it was not possible through this research to understand if it is involved in developing strategic networks to acquire, use and valorise new resources. Instead, as we saw all the other sectors have quite developed strategic networks also used to acquire, use and valorise new resources. However, once again the case of ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ resulted to be the most developed in such terms.

**Striving for autonomy**

The straggle for autonomy implicates a not subdued and exploited peasants condition and so the possibility of developing a production system based on the satisfaction of their interests. Such straggle, besides to occurs through revolutionary movements, in the majority of the cases occurs in all that places where peasants take important decisions on what and how to farm and breed. Therefore, the way peasants organize the inside of their agrarian units is strictly related to the possibility of succeeding in the straggle for autonomy.

The cooperative “Agricoltura Nuova’ represents an important symbol of such straggle for autonomy in Rome. It was founded, through an ‘illegal’ action, by young peasants in 1977 that were suffering the negative externalities generated by the increasing industrialization of agrarian sector. At the beginning it was set as a conventional farm and subsequently converted in organic (first biological method and then biodynamic). This change has not been only functional to produce safest and
better quality food but also to structure internal organization in a more self- sustained way. Indeed, organic agrarian practices reduced the use of external inputs like chemicals especially when based on the use of local plant varieties and animal races. Furthermore, the recent conversion to biodynamic farm methods in the next future should allow ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ to reduce further such inputs.

In the same way but sometime in a less dense modality and probably at less conscious level, the straggle for autonomy is shared by several citizen farmers actives in different UPA sectors. As a matter of fact, 35% of them exchange seeds and 30% reproduce it inside the farm unit. Furthermore, the most preferred source of knowledge (by almost 70% of farmers) is represented by other farmers instead than by experts.

**Pluriactivity**

By developing a multiplicity of activities, centred at different levels on farming practices, peasants become able to sell extra services an to generate extra incomes that can ensure a higher independency degree from external financial sponsors. Through pluriactivity peasants are able to buy the resources they need and manage, valorise and improve them inside their units according to their needs and interests. Therefore, by generating the extra incomes necessary to buy such resources, peasants have more possibilities to organize their units according to the social and economical structure they consider the most convenient. The independency acquired through such process increases the chances to win the straggle for autonomy. In the specific Italian and Roman framework, pluriactivity refers to the development of five extra activities carried out by peasants:

- Direct sale (face-to-face) inside the farm unit
- Direct sale outside the farm unit: farmers markets, box schemes
- Agro-tourism, food and wine routes
- Social agriculture
- Educational agriculture

If we consider UPA context, pluriactivity is carried out with the scope to generate extra incomes only in two cases, the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ and the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’. In the first case pluriactivity is functional to pay the association’ costs that as described in paragraph 3.7 (wish to develop self-financing activities) relate to its legal and management framework, to improve and create new internal infrastructures and to make urban farming more economical convenient (see farmers motivations, paragraph 3.7 for further explanations on the economical inconvenience of farming on very little scale).

Indeed, in the second case pluriactivity represents the most important element in the construction of strong relations with consumers. Through extra farming activities, like food processing, direct sale inside and outside the farm unit, the restaurants, the bakery, the mill, educational tours, the riding school, etc., the cooperative has the opportunity to attract a wider portion of consumers. Furthermore, as the president of the cooperative states, pluriactivity contributes to about the 40% of total cooperative income.

The potential of UPA to generate well-being, economical and social benefits is great as its easier accessibility for many urban citizens that often struggle to reach the countryside as the traffic jam, the oil prices and the little time that characterises modern urban life-style.
Patterns of cooperation

Different forms of cooperation are often necessary to address problems related to a “hostile environment” and also to unfavourable political and economical circumstances. As Van der Ploeg states, all over the world there is a great “variety of institutions that order and regulate cooperation within peasant agriculture”. By cooperating, peasants become able to better harmonise the diversity of their interests and adapt them both to their personal and communitarian interests. Cooperation is functional to gain more autonomy, which often is built up at “higher levels of aggregation”.

Cooperation is a recurrent factor in all considered UPA sectors although it is developed at different aggregation levels. For the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ cooperation has been an essential factor since its creation that was made possible through a strong partnership between citizens, ‘Feder Braccianti’, ‘Alleanza Contadini’ and ‘Associazione Regionale Cooperative’. The cooperative however, since that time has never stopped looking for new possible partners. Often among these partners there are also consumers that can provide several forms of support, besides the economical ones, like for instance political, practical and knowledge support.

Also the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ is very active in promoting cooperation inside and outside its gardens. In the first case cooperation is promoted along line participation by using specific tools well described in chapter 2 (paragraph 2.1.1 Strategic participative tools: the lessons learned) that also has a positive effect on developing external partnerships as every single associate is stimulated to share its ideas and contacts to develop future activities and alliances with other similar initiatives. Main partners of ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ are the cooperative ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, Slow Food and ARSIAL. Instead, in the case of the association ‘Cometa’ cooperation is only stimulated at the farm unit level as associates are intentionally provided with allotment to share in at least two families.

In the neighbour committee case cooperation has been developed with other civil society organizations (‘Lega Ambiente’, cultural organizations, direct-action movements) and independent citizens in order to create an almost permanent garrison in the squatted land (especially at the beginning), regenerate it, limit the pollution contamination and gain the economic sustain from the Province of Rome. Differently, in the informal agriculture sector, cooperation is very developed at the micro level as it evolves along a reciprocity system that sees the participation of peasants that operate in the same site. Such system allows them to solve problems like water shortage, for instance by constructing a shared well, to improve the quality and quantity of what is produced, by exchanging genetic material and knowledge, and in general to exchange favours.

Another important similarity

As Van der Ploeg states in defining the “Peasants condition”, all previous definition tends to treat “peasant condition” as passive, with really little possibility to decide their destine and “underdog” (Shannin, T, 1971). Instead, the new definition he gives of “Peasants class” accounts important elements of reaction and self-determination that testifies the existence of peasants’ agency. These elements are at the base of an important distanciation, defined as (……)

A similar distanciation attempt is at the base of many UPA initiatives created as a reaction to the negative externalities generated by the urban sprawl, the industrialization of food production, the arise of economic crises and environmental
One important difference: part-time farming/farmers

Several differences between traditional agrarian sphere and UPA already emerged by considering the main similarities between them. However, a further important difference is made by the time the majority of citizen farmers spent in their gardens. It tends to be lower especially in the private, association and committee sectors where almost all farmers are engaged in a part-time farming. Moreover, in few cases their actions have more a symbolic relevance, in the sense that the vegetable garden in some way shapes their imaginary and discourses.

Use the terms part-time farming/farmers to describe the UPA context in Rome needs same explication as these terms can have different theoretical implications. According to Bryden et al. (1992) "'Part-time farming' focuses attention on farming rather than farm households, and implies that solutions to the income problems of farm households must be farm-focused solutions; it is an ideological term. The fact that it is widely accepted cannot be sufficient justification for its acceptance.”

Moreover, this term is often associated with inefficient farmers. As Fuller states “…It was further assumed that part-time farmers operated small units: that part-time farmers were less efficient than their full-time counterparts and that part-time farmers were on their way into or out of agriculture” (Fuller, 1990).

Such considerations fit only in part the roman UPA context as strongly focused on the economical benefits produced by farming in a part-time modality and do not account all the other benefits, linked to the satisfaction of many other farmers’ needs, that in the words of farmers themselves result to be much more important. Indeed, through part-time farming activities in UPA sphere farmers become able to address several different problems linked to the erosion of social, cultural, environmental, infrastructural, institutional and also economical spheres. In this sense, all part-time farmers are always very efficient also when they operate at the minimal levels. For such reasons the more suitable meaning of part-time farming/farmers for such research is that proposed by Barlett (1986) who suggests to consider “part-time farming as a life-style” which is the result of the spreading of a multiplicity of interests in the framework of a more fragmented society.

It is interesting that often are citizen farmers themselves, especially the associates, to mark the difference between the ‘Ortisti’ and the ‘Ortolani’. The first term refers to part-time farmers whose first job is another than farming and to farmers that combine an urban life-style with elements of the rural culture. Some of these farmers dream to become ‘Ortolani’ one day. This term refers to farmers that spend the majority of their time farming, have very deep knowledge and farming culture that tends to have an important weight in their ‘urban life-style’. Urban “Ortolani” testify both the necessity of these people to move to the city as consequence of the increasing industrialization of the countryside, where many of them were born, and the necessity to conserve their original culture or at least part of it. Since the beginning of the 60s they have been the protagonists of a peasant culture resistance in Rome.

We can also add a further category of urban farmers: the ‘radical chic farmers’ or to may be ‘occasional farmers’. They have a good economical situation, own a plot of land, like to tell about their garden, stress the importance of producing food themselves but in the end they spend little time farming. Although their action in the field is quite limited, they represent an important mean to spread the message in different social strata and to create new partnerships and alliances.
5.2 The three axes and UPA

As we described in the previous paragraph many typical features of traditional agriculture sphere are also present at different degree in the roman UPA context where they are used to construct new rural spaces inside the city. Also inside the city, these features are central elements in the process of giving responses to the risks generated by the crisis of agriculture production as consequence of the ‘mega project’ (Van der Ploeg, 2006) of agrarian modernization. In the majority of the cases valid responses are organized around the three axes indicated by Van der Ploeg that are: repositioning, extended reground and self-regulation. However, while in the rural context these axes imply “…a re-introduction of cultural, ecological and social capital into the process of agricultural production” (Van der Ploeg et al., 2000), in the urban roman context they also imply the possibility to address social exclusion, urban sprawl, pollution, food quality and safety lowering and other problems common to many modern cities.

According to Van der Ploeg et al. (2006), repositioning entails the ‘diversification’ of farm activities and “…the development of a mixed resource base as well as the multiple uses of single resources (Wiskerke, 2001,)”. Developing a pluriactivity farming system (“diversification”) is a fundamental point in the process of “broadening” farm activities that ensures extra incomes to farmers especially if they are able to avoid external inputs by re-internalizing into the farm the necessary organization and knowledge (human capital) for the management and development of such new and also already existing activities. Central factors in repositioning are the cooperation, the exchange, the creation of synergies and alliances with who is possible to share and advocate similar interests.

Furthermore, repositioning is not only about the internal organization of farming activities but it also includes the creation of alternative channels for the commercialization of farm’ products. For instance, by re-orienting the production for the increasing demand of organic, high quality or regional food. “In a wider sense, repositioning also has broader effects on agriculture’s relations with society at large. By delivering a range of good, fresh, safe, tasty and high quality products, through new and controllable circuits, food production once again becomes a vehicle for generating and maintaining trust” (Van der Ploeg, 2006).

In UPA context repositioning meets its perfect environment, as many actors with very different backgrounds and motivations (different ages, more than 20 different professions, almost ten motivations) have more possibility to get involved in structured or less structured groups with the aim of developing several activities according to their needs. These activities produce economical benefits in the case of ‘Agricoltura Nuova’ and ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ as their products are at the same time used by their members and sold to external citizens. In all the other UPA cases, such activities are more functional to satisfy the necessities of household members, their relatives and friends. Although in this case they do not generate extra incomes they however create relational services that at different degree replace the institutional vacuum in addressing social, economical and environmental issues. Furthermore, the more activities are developed the more the UPA networks get wider and new actors are stimulated to enter UPA sphere and the chances to create self-sustained and independent UPA sectors increases.

The second important axe to promote alternative rural spaces is the extended regrounding that relates to the link between human activities and the use of natural resources. By managing natural resources (the ecological capital) in a way that allows their conservation, regeneration and improvement, farmers become able to farm in a more autonomous way as well as to use the landscape for other activities (education,
socialization, agro-tourism/touristic routes, leisure, sport and others). Regrounding includes the development of particular ‘ecological structures’ like natural areas characterized by specific ecological system (combinations of ponds, wild areas, forests) and the ‘revitalization of food webs’ (Van der Ploeg, 2000) that refers to the biodiversity and the complex relations between different forms of life (micro-organisms, insects, worms, and others).

As we said in the previous paragraph when considering coproduction and resources base, to have a high biodiversity degree inside and in the surrounding of the farm unit, increases the possibility to improve and regenerate land nutrients, fight pests, differentiate and increase production, improve food quality and other opportunities. Moreover, by re-creating a typical and differentiated landscape farmers have more possibilities to develop extra activities along farming. All together these possibilities allow farmers to reduce their dependence from external inputs and therefore to improve their economical conditions.

Whilst in the traditional agrarian sphere “..extended regrounding is about the reintroduction of nature into the agricultural process of production.” (Van der Ploeg, 2006), in UPA context it is about the reintroduction of nature in the city through urban agrarian practices. In other words, the necessity to develop a strong ecological capital matches both the necessity to farm in the most profitable and independent way by external inputs and the necessity to enrich and protect many green areas inside the city at risk of degradation or property speculation. Furthermore, as we are going to observe in chapter 6.3 (Promoting in situ agro-biodiversity conservation in the city), UPA actors are inclined to manage a high biodiversity degree and improve it as its use allow a better, wider and direct satisfaction of their nutritionals, aesthetics, ludic and social needs. However, in the cases of ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ and some informal farmers nature is protected, regenerated and improved also in connection to economical activities.

Finally, self-regulation refers to the claim for different kind of regulations and policymaking models that should be shaped around the new emerging interests of rural actors who express their disagreement and construct alternatives to the imposition of the ‘dominating socio technical regime’ (Van der Ploeg et al., 2000). By re-constructing the social capital around these alternative interests, though the involvement of new actors and the development of new alliances and partnerships, it is possible to reinforce the negotiation, struggle and action power in the policy-making arena.

As we observed, UPA in Rome includes the participation of group of people that share common interests and at the same time are highly differentiated in terms of social background and social relations. They often opt to organize themselves in associations and cooperatives that by assigning task and facilitating the exchange of information can be functional to harmonize and valorize their diversity. It is such diversity that gives them more possibility to make new alliances and develop stronger strategic networks with other actors that operate not exclusively in the UPA context.

The most important claims of association, committee and cooperative UPA sectors are the entrustment of lands and the access to other natural resources (water, parks), the economical support and in the case of the first institutionalized association the possibility to develop self-financing activities. These claims, however, do not evolve along the claim for an institutional regulation of the considered UPA sectors as they already have their internal regulation that endeavor to maintain as shaped on their particular exigencies and on the social, economical and environmental contexts where they operate.
5.3 The contribution of UPA in strengthening urban food systems based on a strong rural-urban linkage

By considering the case of the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ we observed in details how the initiatives of ‘Agricoltura Nuova’, which aim at boosting the urban food system by re-enforcing the rural-urban linkages, have supported the creation and further development of the association (paragraph 2.1). We also saw how other initiatives centered on social and environmental issues are interrelated with and support the activities carried out by the neighbor committee. However, what we have not considered yet, at least explicitly, is the contribution of UPA in strengthening urban food systems based on strong rural-urban linkages and so on the creation of alternative ruralities.

The most careless observers would define UPA as little relevant for the creation of alternative ruralities as its actions are developed exclusively inside the city limits. Moreover, they will probably consider only its ludic character and so point out its little productivity and economical relevance. These considerations, besides to be not shared by all the considered cases, forget the important role UPA has as catalyst of new citizens interested in farming and how this can have positive effects on rural-urban linkages. Furthermore, such considerations do not account the possibility to develop new economic opportunities along line UPA evolution.

As Van der Ploeg supposes (2008), the emerging of UPA in many parts of the world may indicates the appearance of new actors, without any agrarian background, that aim at becoming peasants in a part-time modality. He describes this phenomenon like an “inflow” of new actors in the agrarian sphere, which is also documented by several other researches. One research is that carried out by Bassi, Bock and de Rooij (2000, in Van der Ploeg, 2008) on little agrarian enterprises created by no-farmers (teachers, policeman, truck drivers, etc.) in the Netherlands. Another is the case study carried out by Willis and Campbell (2004) on the “Chestnut Economy” in a France fringe that shows how ‘neo-peasants’ with an urban background can provide a great contribution to the establishment of alternative ruralities. These ‘neo peasants’ by using their differentiated knowledge, negotiation skills and knowledge about regional, national and international regulations and policies became able to develop strong networks that link them to politicians, other institutions and local community (in this last case with some initial struggle) and to regional and national projects.

Different UPA sectors stimulate this “inflow” (Van der Ploeg, 2008) of new actors interested in farming and give them several opportunities to learn how to farm directly inside the city. This can have positive consequences at least at two different levels. The first level is represented by actors that want to learn farming in order to produce food and other services for their family whilst the second level include the participation of actors that want to learn in order to create an agrarian cooperative, share the new knowledge with other people in their neighborhood or move to the countryside and became full-time farmer. The first case relates to the displaced workers that are trained by the school of agronomist, the second to the farmers taught inside the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ and the last to only one actor active in this last association. More in general, UPA has the potential to educate new citizens both in a part-time or full-time modality.

Furthermore, such “inflow” of new actors can have other positive implications if we consider the idea (that will hopefully concretize in a real project) of the Agrarian Department of the Municipality of Rome to develop new UPA sites inside the lands owned by several multi-functional or conventional farms that operate in the peri-urban areas of Rome (many of which as said are at risk of property speculation). This
scenario would generate two positive outcomes. The first is the possibility to create new economic opportunities for these farms, as they will rent out their lands to UPA actors whereas the second relates to the closeness between such actors and more experienced and professional actors that operate in the farm. This last scenario has the potential to give more possibilities to UPA actors to learn more about how a little or medium farm works and also to get inspired to create new farms.

Another important initiative, planned by the Agrarian Department in partnership with the Italian Geographic Society, regards the possibility of linking UPA activities with the existent Farmers Markets and with the new ones that should take place in a near future. Right now, the displaced workers whose agrarian products are sold in the close local farmers market already practice this possibility. Finally we can say that one of the greatest contribution of UPA in strengthening urban food systems based on strong rural-urban linkages, is represented by the fact that through UPA, a living peasants culture has a privileged way to enter urban society at different levels as the diversity of ‘new citizen farmers’ and their social integration in different society strata. As Francis C et al. argues (2005) by mentioning Kloppenburg et al. (1996), “When distant from food production fields, consumers are often completely unfamiliar with the impacts of production practices on the land and overall ecology of that unknown place where others till the soil. It is unlikely that they could have much more than an abstract concept of farming, and certainly no in-depth understanding of the environmental and social implications of the types of systems where their food is growth. When the role of the consumers is confined to purchase of food from an unknown source, and a small fraction of their income is spent for this essential need, it is not surprising that most people are uninterested in any change in the food system, or even questioning why change might be needed.” In this sense UPA actively promotes a solidarity/vicinity with traditional peasants/farmers that operate outside the city.

Furthermore, as Rome is the place where many local, regional, national and international institutions are located, this solidarity can bring directly peasants interests in the policy-making arena. This already happens in Rome, as many citizens active in strengthening the urban-rural linkage at the political level did not stop to endeavor for it after they got involved in UPA activities. Indeed, their new position made them more aware about peasants’ problems and so more motivated in defending their interests.

Therefore, the improvement of the conditions of the rural peasants involved in the urban food system and the strengthening of this system do not only evolve along the development of new civil society initiatives that aim at providing economical support by connecting peasants with new consumers, by also along UPA evolution as it generates new available social capital (potential “‘neo-peasants’”) and provides an important sustain at cultural, social and political level.

5.4 Is UPA an expression of an increasing re-peasantization?

Re-peasantization can be defined as a process of re-embedding the farm activities in a contest of knowledge, values and social practices typical of the peasant sphere that resists the modernization of agriculture. Such elements are usually considered to be more sustainable at the social, economic and environmental level. It is because they resulted from a long co-evolution between human needs and their satisfaction on one hand and a less intensive use of natural resources on the other. Re-peasantization is based on the rediscovery and revaluation of these elements as means to resist the disconnection between nature and farming and between humans’ needs
and their satisfaction triggered by agriculture modernization operated by the “Empire” (Van der Ploeg, 2006, 2008). Re-peasantization is nowadays an important concept at the base of the construction of many alternative ruralities. However, although re-peasantization seems to relate exclusively to rural development, it is interesting to understand if it also has some implications for the UPA sphere.

The “Empire” described by Van der Ploeg does not only represent an ordering principle for the farming sphere as it regulates food production also by considering the potential consumers demand for such food. Furthermore, it continuously shapes new consumerism’ patterns along new socio-cultural life-styles and therefore creates the perfect conditions for an interrelated production and demand mainly elaborated on the profits maximization rather than on real consumers’ needs.

As a consequence, the negative externalities generated by the “Empire” impact directly and indirectly on both the countryside and the urban where the majority of world’s citizens live. In this sense we can say the “Empire” and its externalities are highly democratic. The main externalities in the city are the great availability of cheap, low quality and safety food, environmental degradation, increase of food related illnesses, high unemployment rates, mass migration of displaced rural workers and most important the increasing disconnection between citizens and nature.

“As a reaction to the negative externalities of this new context, several kinds of counter-movements aim to construct rural spaces which differ from, and challenge, the trajectories of conventional modern agriculture” (Halfacree, 2006). Responses to such externalities are multiple and often result from the alliance between rural producers and urban consumers that generate CSAs, box schemes, face-to-face interaction and farmers markets that provide economical and often practical sustain to producers. In many cases, such initiatives are leaded by urban citizens as they have more possibilities to access and use a multiplicity of communicative, institutional and informal means and to networking with other actors with similar worries and interests as the dense urban population. For instance, Van der Ploeg states (2008) that the majority of the first organic agrarian producers had a strong urban background. Therefore, we can already say that urban citizens play an important role in fostering initiatives based on a re-peasantization process and as we know that UPA is functional to sustain such initiatives we can also affirm UPA and re-peasantization are correlated.

However, what connects the two in a more direct way is the active role citizens farmers play in producing food and other goods by themselves. To carry out this production the majority of considered citizens farmers refer to the “peasant principle” (Van der Ploeg, 2008) and use its values, knowledge and practical tools. This allow them to both develop a sustainable agriculture and at the same time to solve problems that emerge in the city as a consequence of the “Empire”. Therefore, the “peasant principle” is utilised as a base to create a new lifestyle that does not include only an external sustain to the peasant sphere but also an appropriation of it at different levels.

In the end, we can say that UPA in Rome shows the features of a peasants resistance in the case of informal farmers that have been active since a long time by resisting to environmental and political adverse contexts. Furthermore, we can state that all the other sectors are an expression of an on-going re-peasantization carried out at different degree of consciousness at least inside the areas where farming activities are carried out. Indeed, what can be considered desirable is a diffusion of the “peasant principle” to the wider society not engaged in UPA and its combination with other important principles of social, environmental and economical sustainability.
6. Actions

This chapter describes the activities I carried out while developing my research, to improve and foster further UPA development. The possibility to do something practical during my research came out as my researcher position brought me to establish many contacts with several citizen farmers, local policy-makers, local, national and international institutes and universities. Since the beginning of my research activities I recognized that all such actors were often working on the same issues but they did not know each other, as never had the opportunity to meet and discuss about UPA.

As Sonnino argues (Sonnino, R. 2009), “Applied researchers have a dual role to play here. On the one hand, they can support knowledge-building processes at the municipal level by providing data and in-depth case studies that help planners and policy-makers to understand the functioning of the urban food system, its potential and its limitations. On the other hand, social scientists can contribute to foster knowledge-exchange between different cities”.

My action consisted in becoming a go-between these actors, proposing new ideas, remembering the importance of collaborating and integrating their knowledge and tools and in the end also mediating between them as sometime their interests and approaches differed widely. As I am going to describe in the next paragraph there have already been good final outcomes and some projects have been planned on the long-term.

6.1 Linking institutions and associations

As mentioned several times, associations represent important means for institutions to develop their policies. This happens because while associations are really rooted in the context they operate in and have very deep knowledge of its dynamics and problems, institutions often completely lack it. The main reason for such tendency is the long previous institutional indifference not only to UPA but also to many issues relevant for the sustainability of the city. This indifference triggered a widespread institutional distrust that generated a multiplicity of civil society movements, which endeavour for the creation of independent initiatives. As main consequence, in the majority of the cases neither formal communication channels nor informal exist between the two. Stimulated by such considerations, the first action I organised to invert this trend regarded the establishment of a privileged communication channel between the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’ and the Lazio Region. Instead, the second was an attempt to replicate the previous experience by involving the Municipality of Rome and the neighbour committee.

I was able to organize a first meeting between the assessor of the Agrarian Department of Lazio Region, Daniela Valentini, and the association after gathering several times formally and informally with both of them. The first meeting had a great symbolic and practical value for two reasons. Firstly, I managed to bring the assessor in the association vegetable garden and secondly the assessor acknowledged the association had succeed in enhancing participation as nobody had done before, in stimulating people to get interested in farming practices and in developing a sustainable UPA model. Finally she also acknowledged the association had anticipated her institution and therefore suggested to take its model as main reference to elaborate future UPA policies. A similar event is well described by Roep and Wiskerke (2003) when arguing on the Dutch cooperatives VEL and VANLA (Page 205)

In order to make such suggestion real, the assessor proposes to establish a round table between the association board, its staff and other external experts. The
roundtable lasted till the moment the assessor and its staff left the leadership of the Agrarian Department and generated two important outcomes: the association participation in the project ‘Sapere I Sapori’ and the entrustment of a new land (see paragraph 2.1).

Instead, the second action had a similar beginning but different outcomes. Like in the previous case I first established a contact with the director of the Agrarian Department at the Municipality of Rome, Paolo Gramiccia, and with his staff. By this meeting born an informal collaboration, based on an exchange of information and data on what was going on in the UPA sphere, which became more formal when I also started to mediate between the Municipality, FAO and Bioversity International in order to establish a long-term partnership between them (see next paragraph for more information).

Some time after I had intensified the collaboration with the Municipality, I had a first contact with the neighbour committee promoters that gave me the possibility to better know their history and the difficult interaction they still have with the Municipality. In particular, I was explained they tried several time to establish a contact with the Agrarian Office by sending twice the same letter, with their motivations and problems, directly to the assessor of the Environmental Department from which the Agrarian Office depends. However, they never received an answer from the assessor office and it marked further the distance between the two opposite political memberships.

In the first place I explained the committee promoters they had better to interact directly with the director of the Agrarian Office because I knew it was responsible for a new UPA policy plan and so strongly interested in establishing a contact with UPA initiatives. To be really practical I asked them to choose some committee representatives in order to facilitate the interaction with the Agrarian Office department and its director. Finally I informed them I was organizing a first meeting at the Municipality.

The committee promoters replied by saying they needed time to choose their representatives as in their committee every decision should be taken on the basis of a large popular consensus. So, I was told to wait few days till their next popular assembly. Some week later I contacted them again and I was informed it was not their intention to interact with the Agrarian Office. They motivated such decision by arguing on the missed answer from the assessor. At that point I tried to investigate if the assessor really received the letters and I found a negative answer that however did not change the committee position.

During such last experience I had the sensation the final decision taken by the committee was not really motivated by the missed answer but rather by a preconception linked to its strong political connotation. I also learn a significant lesson: it is important to take decisions on a large popular consensus but when there are rare occasions like the considered one, to organize a first meeting with institutions through a ‘privileged’ channel, it would be better do not wait for such consensus that however can be used to take an eventual final decision on the outcomes of the meeting.

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6.2 Combining local and global knowledge: a new partnership

UPA is a worldwide growing phenomenon with different connotations in developing and developed countries. Whilst in the first it is recognised for its important role in maintaining a high food security level, in developed countries it also plays other functions more related to food quality/safety and to its strong multifunctional dimension.

The majority of international research institutes have till now focused prevalently on UPA and other initiatives that aim at implementing the rural-urban linkage in developing countries as the urgent issue of ensuring food for their fast growing urban populations. However, recently a high food security risk has also been acknowledged in developed countries as a consequence of the world economic crisis, the arise of food prices and the possible negative impact of climate change on food production/distribution.

The growing interest of international institutes for such issues evolves by establishing new partnerships with local authorities and the civil society movements in order to better combine global and local knowledge. The text below is a letter of agreement between local and international authorities and institutes in Rome, which motivates the necessity to make a new partnership between them and describes related goals.

Such agreement is another result of an action I was stimulated to carry out when, by having establishing contacts with these actors, I realised they did not know each other. An important trigger of my action has been meeting the FAO promoters of the network ‘Food for cities’ and Bioversity International promoters of the ‘Biodiversity Week’, an important event born in the framework of the international celebration of the year of biodiversity that was held in Rome during last spring.

What I did is relatively simple. I informed FAO and Bioversity International the Municipality of Rome was caring out a new integrated policy to boost local food systems centred on cities. At the same time, I informed the Municipality these two institutes were interesting in better knowing such policy. Therefore, I endeavoured to thoroughly organise a first meeting that had positive outcomes and was followed by several other formal and informal meetings. The practical results till now have been the elaboration of a letter of agreement, which is reported below, and the organization of an event in the framework of the ‘Biodiversity Week’.

I elaborated the letter of agreement in collaboration with Stefano Padulosi from Bioversity International and an almost final version was presented on the 11th March 2010 at FAO. However, mainly due to bureaucratic procedures the representatives of involved institutions/institutes have not yet signed up the letter.

Objectives
Through this Agreement, The Municipality of Rome, Bioversity International and FAO seek to stimulate interest in, and enhance research on local food systems centred on cities, seen as a strategic approach to contribute towards improving people’s livelihoods in urban areas while boosting local rural economy and to also further the scientific knowledge, and sustainable conservation and use of agricultural biodiversity and associated culture and traditions.

Background
The scope for such collaboration has arisen from a number of informal meetings held among representatives of the above mentioned agencies, including those which took place at FAO and Biodiversity on February 2nd and 4th, 2010 respectively, during
which a closer cooperation on the theme of enhancing food security and nutrition in cities was advocated by all parties. The initiative was prompted by the shared realization that strengthening relations between international institutes and local authorities can be a strategic instrument to improving a number of important conditions that relate to sustainable and reliable local food production/distribution systems. These include inter alia: 1) the contribution of local food productions in strengthening food and nutrition security in ways that are environmental friendly, socially and economically relevant; 2) the contribution towards the conservation of biodiversity on farm along with associated cultures and traditions; 3) the economic benefit for local little/medium farms; 4) the consumers-producers alliances (i.e. GAS-Italy, AMAP-France, CSA’s, farmers markets, box schemes); 5) the flourishing of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) initiatives; 6) the emerging of a new agrarian multifunctional framework, especially in peri-urban areas, which makes the countryside more attractive for urban population; 7) source of opportunities to strengthen green belt zones around the cities; 8) the role of agriculture for landscape conservation.

Proposed Collaborative Framework
In order to start in earnest the collaborative partnership, and seizing the momentum offered by the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, the herewith undersigned parties identified three components for the immediate implementation of the collaborative framework, namely:

1) Organize an international seminar in May 2010 in Rome
2) Organize an international Conference in spring 2011 in Rome
3) Launch a collaborative research on local food systems

1) Organize an international seminar in May in Rome
The seminar will be organized in the framework of the celebrations of the ‘Settimana della Biodiversità’ which will take place during the week 17-21 May, 2010. The objectives of the seminar will be 1) To officially launch the inter-institutional partnership and present its strategic objectives; 2) To draw attention on the important role played by local agrobiodiversity in meeting the goal of food security and nutrition; 3) To present some preliminary results of experiences in Rome. The seminar will include a number of key presentations by international experts and an open debate involving strategic stakeholder engaged in local food production activities within Rome. During the seminar, the formal announcement of the international conference planned for the spring will also be made.

2) Organize an international Conference in spring 2011 in Rome
The justification for holding an international conference on local food systems centered on cities arises from the realization that the recent financial, food availability crisis and the rise of food prices further highlighted the role local food systems all over the world can play to alleviate poverty and strengthen food/nutritional security to an ever growing urban population. Whilst more local food systems become a first priority in many developing countries owing to the necessity to ensure a basic food security level, it often assumes different connotations in developed countries. In western societies, local production is frequently also motivated by the necessity of producing better food quality in response to increasing commercial food distrust. Furthermore, it often represents the catalyst of new social dynamics, social
inclusiveness and community building activities in the framework of an emerging agrarian multi-functionality. An international debate is needed to share data and experiences from different contexts around that will allow gaining an up-date state of the art on this phenomenon. The conference in particular will aim at the following: 1) To provide an updating of the current local production phenomenon and constraints around the world through case studies that will illustrate similarities, needs, new challenges and opportunities; 2) To shed more light on the contribution of local food systems with regard to food security and nutrition; 3) To provide more information on the role played by local food production and marketing in income generations, particularly for the poor sector of the society; 4) to exchange experiences and knowledge on the role that particularly multifunctional agriculture can play to support social integration/self-esteem of fragile members of society; 5) to highlight the importance of consumers/producers alliances and UPA; 6) to shed more light on the role of local food systems in conserving biodiversity and the role that biodiversity itself plays in supporting this phenomenon; 6) to identify those enabling policies that would favor the development of sustainable local food system models centered on cities; 7) to provide a space where the civil society can initiate a constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue over local food production and develop collaborative platforms for its enhancement; 8) to involve new institutional partners.

3) Collaborative research on local food systems

The research will follow the international seminar and conference as a way of deepening the topics treated during these two events. In consideration of the many benefits offered by local food systems, more research is needed to shed light on its current dimension, relevance and methodological approach for its enhancement. Research efforts are needed on issues related to the mapping of local food systems, assessment of their contribution to nutrition security of people living in the cities. Other aspects need to be better investigated in order to gain a good understanding of local food systems and their strategic role in peoples’ livelihood, including 1) identification of main actors; 2) identification of main constraints; 3) women/gender issues and social integration opportunities for fragile members of society; 4) statistics on value chains; 5) seed systems that support local production; 6) local agrobiodiversity on farm conservation; 7) impact of climate change on environment and local food systems 8) impact of global market on local food systems; 9) role of ‘local drivers’ (such as city-based restaurants) in promoting the use of indigenous nutritious crops and in so doing contributing to improve peoples’ diets/ nutrition and health; 10) consumers-producers alliances and UPA; 11) safety/health hazards due to the use of biological wastes as fertilizers, or contaminations of produce due to air and water pollution in local food systems.

With the aim at contributing towards a better understanding of these issues, a research starting with the case study of Rome will be shortly launched and subsequently extended to other cases. This research represents an initial step of a longer-term research collaboration envisaged under this framework.
6.3 Promoting in situ agro-biodiversity conservation in the city

Through the collaboration with Bioversity International and Lazio Region I had the possibility to know the activities promoted by ARSIAL, the Lazio Region agency that promotes the development and innovation of agriculture. ARSIAL is very active in cataloguing local animal and agro-biodiversity and in promoting its conservation and diffusion also by directly providing it to farmers.

In the same period, by interviewing UPA actors I recognised the important role agro-biodiversity plays or can play for farming in the city. In particular I observed how to maintain a high agro-biodiversity degree is functional to better satisfy in a direct way many needs of the households members involved in UPA. Moreover, I found out that in 19% of the cases I analysed through a questionnaire agro-biodiversity resulted in part composed by old and rare plant varieties whilst in the 96% of the cases farmers expressed their wish to integrate the agro-biodiversity they manage with such varieties as they have difficulties to found it.

Maintaining a high (agro-)biodiversity degree is also functional to preserve a strong ecological structure in the field which is indispensable especially for organic UPA activities as the employ of more resistant varieties and plants that attract ‘positive’ insects, is highly required in order to avoid the use of pesticides/herbicides. Therefore, it also plays an important role in reducing external inputs and consequently farm expenditure.

It became clear that the development of a sustainable UPA model also depends by the conservation and use of a high agro-biodiversity degree. Hence, it becomes a fundamental task to spread the message among all UPA actors, teach ‘New citizen farmers’ and finally to facilitate the access at local and rare plants/seeds.

Motivated by such ideas, I consulted two UPA associations and ARSIAL to understand if they were interested in developing a collaboration in such direction. I had a positive answer on both sides and so immediately started another consultation round to better understand how to develop such new project. Right now this project is at its very early stage and not any formal agreement has been made yet.
Conclusions and recommendations

By reading this research is possible to get a first idea on how UPA evolved from its first appearance in the Second World War through the informal farmers at the beginning of the 60s until the new movements of the present days. Indeed, we observed how UPA was first considered urgency, then a reminiscence of an obsolete culture and reason of shame to be finally revaluated as a crucial tool in the process that aims at developing a more sustainable city.

Furthermore, we saw how the actors involved in the considered UPA cases endeavour to carry out several activities, by mobilizing social, cultural, financial and environmental resources and by constructing strategic networks with other initiatives in order to gain institutional acknowledgement and further resources access. This brought us to recognise a great diversity among different cases studies that however does not always exclude synergies on shared interests. Although it was not always easy to categorize such cases, they can be included in six main UPA sectors.

If we consider the different UPA expressions in terms of dimensions, expansion and participation we can individuate three major sectors: the informal, the associative and the cooperative/medium-big farms. What contributed to their success is the possibility to farm really economically in the first case, the necessity to farm in a more stable modality in the association case and finally the necessity to compete with the big food distribution and also to provide extra services to citizens in the last sector. On the other hand, the remaining sectors also play important roles and often are less expanded and participated only because they are quite new initiatives.

Indeed, what resulted to be widely shared by all sectors is a strong pluriactivity attitude. However, whilst in the informal sector extra activities seem to occur at a lower degree and to be less organised, in the other sectors they are often well planned and also used as tools to promote participation and attract new actors. Basically, the city with its dense and differentiated population represents a perfect environment for developing extra activities along farming which are often functional to satisfy an increasing necessity to re-base urban life-styles on nature. Moreover, a further important feature common to every sector is the marked UPA relational value. Indeed, vegetable gardens represent privileged places for developing a new sociality based on the exchange and reciprocal help. However, to be shared are not exclusively knowledge and materials but also experiences, discourses and feelings.

Furthermore, agrarian knowledge are not only shared but also passed to inexpert actors and new generations that also include children. These, by participating in an amused modality are stimulated to enlarge their imaginary mainly made on what they see and experience in the ‘classical’ urban context. By speculating a little bit, with a positive attitude, on the consequences of this important knowledge transmission we can suppose more urban children will get interested in farming practices in a near future.

However, besides these suppositions is already a fact that UPA is in the majority of considered cases intentionally organised in a way that challenges modern urban culture especially when it reduces citizens’ role just to consumers of food and other goods/services. As we saw such tendency already generated an interesting claim, ‘the right to produce food in the city’ or in other words the possibility to self-determining one’s own life-style starting to what one eats. However, although such claim still remains informal, there are several conditions to forecast a future where agriculture will play a central role in setting a new culture and society. We can simply say UPA and other initiatives around food production/consumption represent just the beginning of new historical phase that at least in part acknowledges the failure of the
very intensive industrialization of the urban and the rural. However, this does not mean the actors involved in UPA and other movements refuse a priori the benefits is possible to achieve through a less intensive industrial system as they often promote its construction and use its outcomes (critical/ethical shopping). Rather, this new historical phase should be understood as the possibility to hamper the increasing industry intensification by starting to reframe our life-styles by reconnecting our lives to nature and producing food inside the city and therefore by setting new favourable environments, socio-cultural and economical conditions.

An important role in this process is also played by institutions and by the capacities of UPA actors to shape them according to their interests. However, as we saw institutions risk to be less effective in developing new UPA policies on the long-term especially when they compete or when there is little continuity between different institutions’ administrations that change along the electoral cycle. We can speculate a lot on the possible best solutions to solve these problems but it will probably take at least the time of another research. Rather, what we can suggest to institutions right now is the necessity of a new UPA policy that while regulating informal farmers will also account their creativity and original spatial and communitarian organization. Furthermore, in order to better develop new UPA sites for new potential citizens farmers, becomes paramount to first collect basic information on who are these citizens and their interests. Finally, I would suggest avoiding the binary division between the rural and the urban. Indeed, by considering their interrelation it is possible to better develop new infrastructures and policies to facilitated their continuous exchanges.

Critical reflection

As final part of this research it is important to have a critical look at the way it was set and carried out. To do it I will consider some of the questions elaborated by Ash et. All (2006) for a systematic critical reflection methodology:
- Have I provided sufficient information?
- Could I elaborate further?
- How does this help us deal with the issue being discussed?
- Have I acknowledged the complexity of the issue?
- Is there another way to interpret what this means?
- Do my conclusions match the evidence I have presented?

When planning this research I first decided to focus only on one UPA case, the association ‘Acqua Sole Terra’. Then, I immediately realised the framework that brought at its creation was quite embedded in several different interesting initiatives. For this reason, I soon changed approach and meantime I managed to get a large amount of information I decided to extend my research to other cases. Furthermore, since the beginning I was conscious about the lack of general information on the whole UPA phenomenon and thus in the end opted for elaborating a first ‘morphology’ of it. However, although for the majority of the cases I reported quite detailed information I did not report detailed information about informal farmers. This is mainly because informal farmers result really scattered in very vast territory and not always available to been questioned, as they worry authority controls. Therefore, as I carried out the research alone (except the little help I had for one day to submit questionnaires) and with very little financial resources, I opted for a less deep consideration of this sector by focusing on a little sample of informal farmers.
Furthermore, when I started the research I already had knowledge about informal farmers and soon I discovered that had already been elaborated a biography on 20 informal farmers (Di Renzo, 2006) and a census (The Municipality of Rome, 2006).

However, if I look at the wide UPA panorama in Rome and I consider the already mentioned little resources, I definitely believe I provided sufficient information or at least the basic information that would be very useful to plan future researches. Indeed, I consider what resulted by this research just a first step that can facilitate the future individuation and understanding of other UPA dynamics. Furthermore, besides the emerged final data, which is not possible to generalise, I hope this research will be also considered for its wide and integrated approach that tried to understand the connections between the micro and the macro level. In this sense I can simply say this research aimed at describing the complexity around UPA often by using scientific data. However, what I could elaborate further is a deeper analysis of such data. Nevertheless, I do not think it will be really worthy as many of these data relate to very new initiatives, some of which are not yet well organised and shaped. Rather, what I think would be really useful is a comparison with other UPA cases in developed countries to individuate similarities and differences and to integrate knowledge. Therefore, such comparison can provide an important base to develop new UPA policies in Rome as well as in the whole E.U.

However, I hope the final result of this research can contribute to the international debate on UPA that tends to be more consistent when to be considered are developing countries, as the important role UPA plays in boosting their food security levels. On the contrary, such debate seems to be at its early steps when to be considered are developed countries. Moreover, I also hope this research will be considered by roman policymakers who lately express their will to improve, sustain and further promote UPA activities. However, although this research represents the first systematic research on UPA in Rome, it should not be intended like the only way to analyse this phenomenon and indeed I really hope other researchers will address it from other perspectives and will be open to discuss and integrate their outcomes.

Finally, I think the conclusions of this paper really match what I have reported as they acknowledged its diversity, complexity and ‘novelty’ character and also suppose and give suggestions on the future scenarios always by considering the desire, sensations, interests and claims of the several and different actors I met while caring out this research.
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[http://www.horti.it/](http://www.horti.it/)

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Appendices
Please contact author at daniele_dellorco@hotmail.com if documents are not attached

- Questionnaire (English translation by the original Italian version)

- A first census and map of informal farmers (The Municipality of Rome)