

Strengthening an Alpine-Mediterranean Food System in the Mountains of South Tyrol

Christian Fischer, Silke Raffener, Brigitte Gritsch, Andreas Köhne, Verena Gschnell, Manfred Hofer, Elisabeth Hofer, Verena Breitenberger, Ulrike Laimer, Gudrun Ladurner, Siiri Eydner, Veronika Seiwald, Elisabeth Prugger and Heini Grandi

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The Food Policy Council South Tyrol (FPCST) was founded in October 2017 as an outcome of an earlier publicly funded civil society project aimed at strengthening the local food system and serves as a central structure for food policy matters in the province. In the coming years, off-shoot FPCs are expected to form in major towns, to tackle locally pertinent issues.

South Tyrol is an autonomous province of Italy, located on the border with Austria and with a population of about 520,000 people. Around 62 % of them speak German as a first language, 24 % Italian, 4 % Ladino and 10 % other languages. The two largest cities are Bolzano with approximately 110,000 residents and Merano with about 41,000 residents. Local agriculture is dominated by apple orchards, in which roughly 10 % of all apples consumed in Europe are grown, along with milk and wine.

FPCST operates at the provincial level, covering the whole area of South Tyrol because of the relatively small population. In the future, separate food policy councils might be established in the major towns of South Tyrol such as Bozen-Bolzano, Meran-Merano, Brixen-Bressanone, Bruneck-Brunico and potentially Sterzing-Vipiteno.

FPCST is composed of 16 members with professional backgrounds in education, research, gastronomy, agriculture, distribution, cooperatives, nutritional advice, public relations and NGOs. It operates as a working group and has no formal organisational structure. Once a year, it elects from its members a woman and man who represent the council in public. Council members meet every six to eight weeks at the Free University of Bolzano to organise the council's activities. At the moment, there is no public funding and expenses such as website fees are paid through private contributions from its members. Future sources of money that may be secured are public funds in the form of financial support granted by governments at the provincial or municipality levels. Other options are donations from private organisations and citizens, crowdfunding or other fundraising campaigns.

10 Values of FPCST: Community - Pleasure - Justice - Health - Participation - Sustainability - Transparency - Environmental protection - Responsibility - Diversity

FPCST's main tasks are:

- participating in policy dialogue with legislative and executive policy organs, where FPCST serves as the voice of local civil society regarding food and nutrition issues;
- conducting public education and information campaigns on food and nutrition topics;
- coordinating activities and initiatives of local organisations and institutions related to food and nutrition.

FPCST's main activities for 2019 are in the areas of health, leisure and food culture, and community catering. The council is organising a recipe award for the pulse-based dish most likely to be adopted in local household cooking. And a conference at the local university has been organised to discuss new solutions to better align community catering with user needs and sustainability requirements. Toward the end of the year, the first South Tyrolean Sustainable Food System Award will be presented. It will publicly acknowledge and highlight the outstanding contribution of an individual or an organisation to the improvement of the local food or nutrition situation.

Future activities include regional circular economy initiatives, and awareness raising on issues related to global markets, biodiversity, urban gardening and edible cities. Once FPCST is fully established, it needs to connect to similar initiatives in the region and to integrate into the European and global networks of existing food policy councils. Such groupings have emerged in the neighbouring cities of Innsbruck, Munich and Milan. They all should collaborate and exchange experiences and know-how in order to create synergies. FPCST also plans to join the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact initiative.

The council's major challenges are achieving social and political acceptance and relevance in the local policy making system. As a civil-society body that has not been publicly elected or appointed, it has to find its place in the public institutional spectrum, based on demonstrated competence, earned trust and achieved work results. Moreover, as with other volunteer initiatives and social movements, maintaining momentum depends very much on individual contributions, energy and time commitments. The local food system urgently needs improving in many ways. Whether FPCST can make a difference remains to be seen.

Free University of Bozen-Bolzano
christian.fischer@unibz.it