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Thematic introduction – Understanding farmers’ markets: contexts and opportunities in the case of Bologna

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Who's selling at farmers' markets? The case of Bologna

Likely to be men (72%),
with a lower level of education,
and aged 51–60.

Average dimensions of the farm
(22 ha) was double the national
average (11 ha), but in line with
the regional one (19 ha).

The farm is on average
**73 km far from the
farmers' markets.**

On average, 57% of
their sales happens
at farmers' markets.

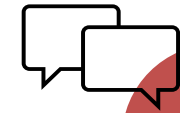
Most farms are organic
(certified or not): 72%.

**97% of what farmers sell is
produced by them.**



Why do they sell at farmers' markets?

3 main drivers emerged:



Mean	6.72
Cronbach alpha	0.795

CONSUMER DRIVER
Direct contact with consumers is the main farmers' driver: **creating a relationship of trust** and communicating the quality and value of local food production.



Mean	5.66
Cronbach alpha	0.795

ENVIRONMENTAL DRIVER
The more **practical environmental aspects** (i.e. packaging) are more strongly felt than generic sustainability-oriented motivations.



Mean	5.52
Cronbach alpha	0.831

SOCIAL DRIVER
Civil and community aspects (fostering cooperation among farmers and opportunities for **socialisation for the local community**) is also a crucial driver for farmers.



- satisfactory earnings are not necessarily reached
- increase in consumer base
- fair price compared to other sales outlets
- costs are not lower than in other outlets



Who currently manages farmers' markets in Bologna?

- On a weekly basis, the city of Bologna has **21 farmers' markets** in 20 different market areas. The market areas have between 10 and 20 stalls.
- Farmers' markets in Bologna are organised by **6 associations**, which act as FMs organisers and each overseeing one or more market areas.
- Each organisation has a **different set of values** (approaches to farming and visions of agricultural values), as well as **various social and political backgrounds**. Each FMs offers a variety of activities and experiences, some strictly dealing with agricultural products, while others include street food vendors and children-friendly areas.



Who currently manages farmers' markets in Bologna?

- The Municipality issues a call for tender inviting all interested actors to participate.
- The final decision considers the actors' previous FM's history and is elaborated in agreement with the neighbourhood councils. Once a FM's organiser is awarded a space, it is entrusted to manage it for a minimum of **five years**.



How does national legislation support or hinder FMs?

- In Italy, **the Ministerial Decree MIPAAF 20/11/2007** regulated FMs as a form of direct selling, specifying that FMs are characterised by the **direct sales of agricultural products** (mainly fruit and vegetables), cultivated and/or transformed by the farm.
- Direct selling of agricultural products needed formalising as it represents an increasingly important sales outlet for farmers in many Italian cities: in 2020, 21.7% of farmers chose to sell directly to consumers without intermediaries a percentage of their produce (ISMEA 2020). According to the Decree, FMs are short supply chains, as only farms based in the regional territory can sell there, unless differently specified by the local authority.
- The national Decree is then implemented at urban level by Italian municipal authorities with ad hoc regulations. The national framework is generally considered insufficient on its own provides a basis but **leaves cities to do substantial regulatory work on their own.**



How do local policies support or hinder FM's development?

Until November 2022, the operations of Bologna's FMs were governed by a Regulation (PG 58564/2009) that was no longer capable of managing their increasing complexity.

Such Regulation was deemed inadequate for 3 reasons.

1. It allowed the allocation of areas to the FMs organisers only for **short periods of time (3 years)**, resulting in high precariousness.
2. It **did not allow food serving** on the FMs premises, contrary to Article 2135 of the Italian Civil Code where transforming agricultural raw materials is possible for agricultural entrepreneurs.
3. It considered **agricultural producers as mere traders**, needing an overall change of vision on the role of small-scale farmers in FMs.



How do local policies support or hinder FMs development?

- The **new Regulation called “Regulations for conducting direct sales markets of agricultural products”** (DC/PRO/2022/76 of November 2022) allows food service on the FMs premises, and it extended the tender period to 5 years.
- Recognition of the values associated with FMs, acknowledged as promoters of social innovation through the activation of **community ties**. They are recognised for fostering local and urban development by **establishing trust-based relationships between consumers and producers**, which also promote greater awareness of high-quality local products.
- Although the new Regulation was developed through a series of **participatory meetings** with stakeholders involved, it has been cautiously received by FMs organisers.



How do local policies support or hinder FMs development?

– Farmers' opinions

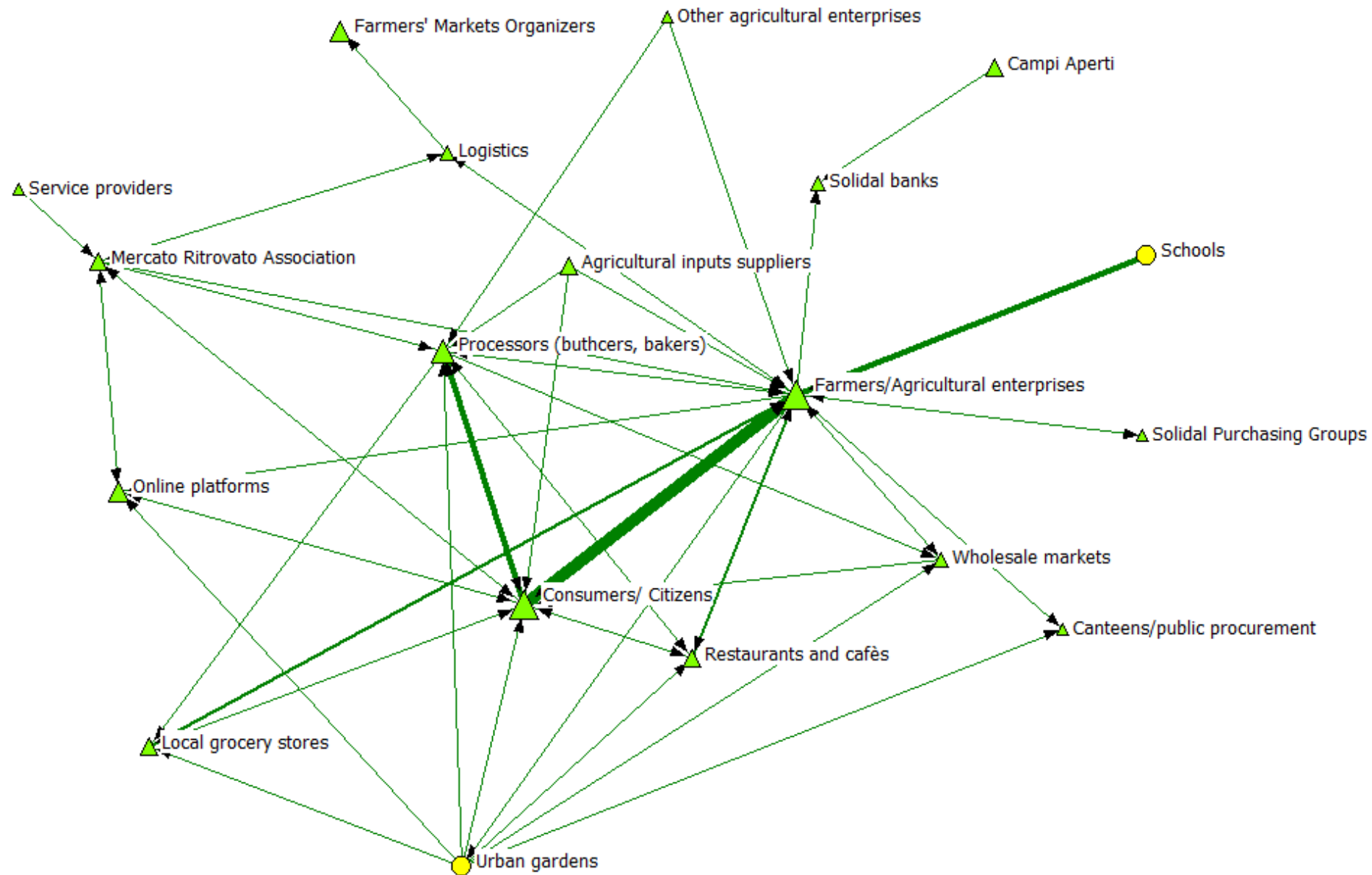
The Regulation was **overall well received by farmers** (it highlights social and community aspects that are also the main motivations for farmers). But there is **limited satisfaction on the Municipality support for local food supply chains.**

Not all farmers took part in the co-design process of the new Regulation, but those who were more involved were generally less satisfied with the outcome.

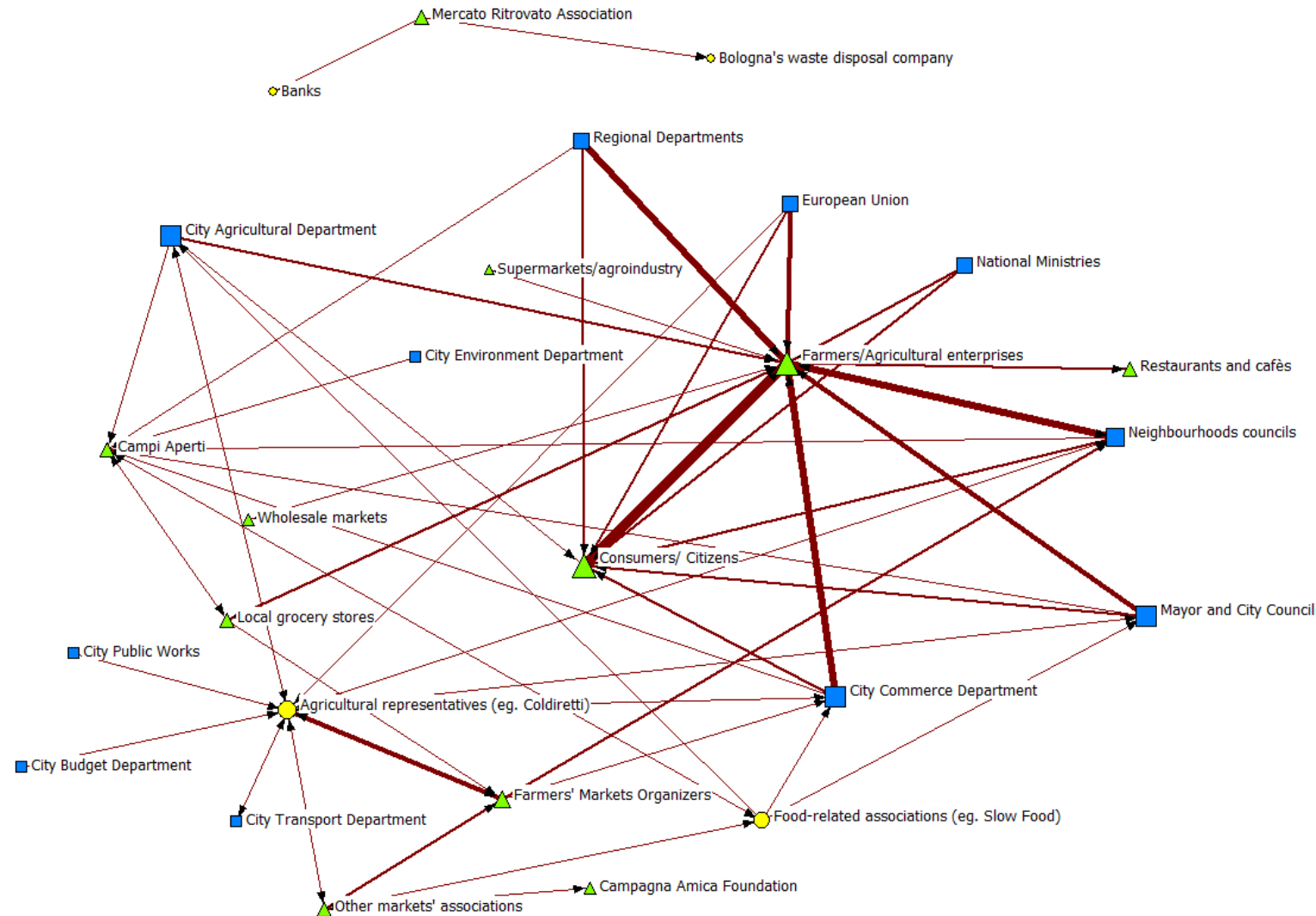
There is consensus on the **low quality of services at the market areas**, such as access to clean water, toilets and electricity.



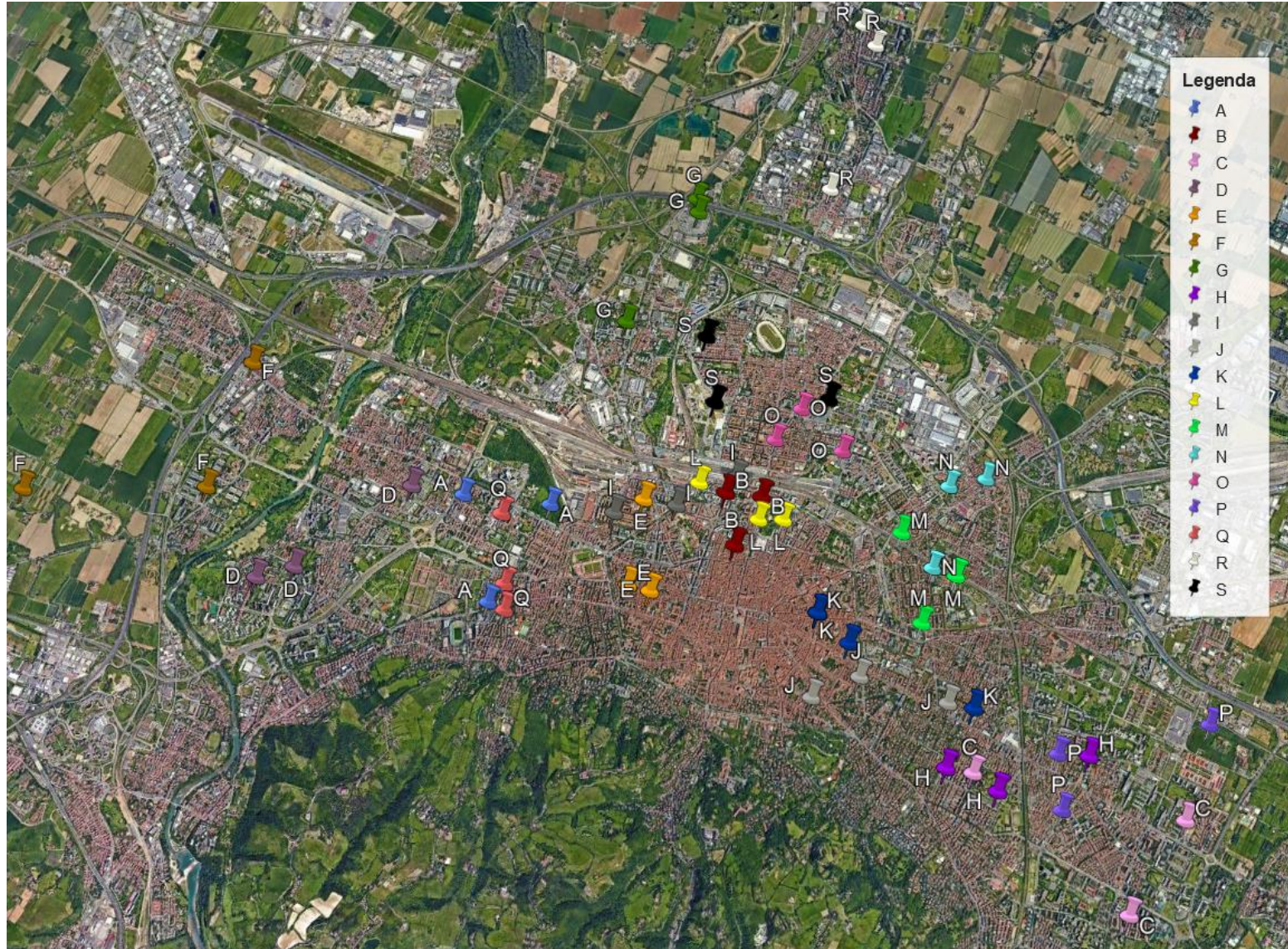
What infrastructure does Bologna currently provide? – Economic ties



What infrastructure does Bologna currently provide? – Hindering ties



What challenges exist in ensuring affordability and accessibility for all residents?



What challenges exist in ensuring affordability and accessibility for all residents?

- Data collected at all farmers' markets in the Bologna metropolitan area and at nearby supermarkets (Coop, Conad, Esselunga) and discount stores (Lidl, Aldi, Dpiù).
- Data was collected in person at the markets and supermarkets/discount stores in April 2025.
- The **range of organic products is greater at markets** than in supermarkets/discount stores: many markets sold organic products that were not available in supermarkets/discount stores.
- **5 out of 19 farmers' markets have lower average prices** of fruit and vegetables than the corresponding supermarkets and discount stores.
- **In almost all supermarkets and discount stores, organic vegetables cost more (up to 19% more).**
- **In almost all supermarkets and discount stores, organic fruit costs less (up to 65% less).**



Conclusion

Bologna's association-led FM model shows promise, but needs stronger feedback loops between the Municipality and farmers.

Precarious access conditions and commercial competition continue to marginalise small-scale producers and peripheral community actors.

01

03



02

04

Farmers who participate in farmers' markets in Bologna share a common sentiment of **overall satisfaction** with their experience of selling their produce there.

Bologna's 2022 Regulation is a national benchmark, but FMs still lack recognition in Italy's strategic rural development plans.



Bibliography

Agriculture and Human Values
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Harvesting connections: the role of stakeholders' network structure, dynamics and actors' influence in shaping farmers' markets

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Abstract

Farmers' markets (FMs) represent a crucial player in urban food systems, being the interconnection of local production and consumption, and serving as spaces for both economic exchange and community building. Despite their transformative potential, there is a scarcity of research that comprehensively investigates the dynamics of FM structure and the influence of the actors shaping FMs. The present article delves into the network of relationships between FMs in the Italian city of Bologna. This study adopts the Social Network Analysis (SNA) methodology applied with the Net-Map tool. The research objectives are to visualise the underlying network structure, map the dynamics, and identify key actors who play pivotal roles in Bologna's FMs and their level of influence. The research carried out interviews with FMs stakeholders, revealing the network of relationships between 54 actors, divided into three categories—city, food economy and public administration. Actors were linked by a total of 428 relationships across three types of support, economic, and hindering. Findings indicate a strong support network structure characterised by varying centrality among different actors. Farmers emerge as a central node due to their pivotal role in providing fresh produce. Additionally, local institutions contribute significantly to FMs resilience and growth. Our research demonstrates the importance of recognising the embeddedness of FMs within the local context. By understanding the network structure and influential actors in FMs, policymakers can devise more effective policies for promoting local agriculture, and enhancing the sustainability of urban–rural exchanges. In conclusion, the present study offers valuable insights into the network structure of FMs, highlighting their crucial role in the sustainable development of urban and local food systems.

Keywords Farmers' market · Alternative food network · Social Network Analysis · Agri-food system · Urban food policy

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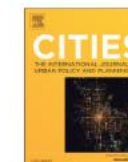


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Unveiling farmers' perspectives on urban food policies: The case of farmers' markets in Bologna (Italy)

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ABSTRACT

Farmers' Markets (FMs) are increasingly recognised for their transformative potential in the food system, as they represent a viable alternative to large-scale food distribution in urban areas. Given their increasing importance at city level, ad hoc urban food policies to regulate FMs have been implemented by several Italian municipalities. However, both policymakers and academia tend to focus on consumers' opinions and needs, while farmers' perspectives on urban food policies regulating FMs have been overlooked, as well as the relationship between various levels of governance involved in FMs. The present research aims to fill this gap by delving into farmers' drivers for selling at FMs, as well as their perceptions on FMs Regulation in Bologna (Italy). The research adopts a Multi-Level Governance (MLG) theoretical approach to show the relationships between the three levels of governance involved in FMs (macro, meso, micro) and provide recommendations on how the governance dynamics can be improved. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, analysing questionnaire answers with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive insights from FMs farmers. In terms of quantitative methods, the answers of 140 FMs participants are analysed through an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and a Multinomial Logistic regression model (MNL).





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