

CREATING A SYSTEM OF BIO-DISTRICTS IN ITALY WITHIN THE NATIONAL POLICIES

by Kim Assaël

The innovative practice of raising territorial Bio-districts is spreading from southern to northern regions of Italy.

A Bio-district is a territory where farmers, citizens, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources based on organic production and consumption (short supply chain, local purchasing groups, organic canteens in public offices and schools).

In a Bio-district, the promotion of organic products is closely linked with the promotion of the territory, to achieve the full development of its economic, social and cultural potential.

In Italy 28 Bio-districts are actually functioning, while 30 more are almost being developed, including 58 territories distributed in 19 Italian regions.

The great success of this innovative territorial approach is framed within the world-leading trends that involve producers and consumers in order to promote the organic agro-food production. Data released by the national information system show that in 2016, Italy recorded a 20% increase in farmland cultivated with organic methods compared to 2015.

These positive outcomes also underline the prominent role of rural areas, most often left aside from the big investments, in increasing the value of local and typical food produce, culture, traditions, natural resources and landscape in an overall wide strategy aimed at reducing depopulation and renewing the territorial development.

In September 2017 the Italian Ministry for Agriculture has signed an agreement with the International Network of Bio-districts and Eco-regions INNER to enhance the exchanges among Bio-districts and their potential territorial development. With this agreement Bio-districts play a strategic role into the policies undertaken by the Ministry for Agriculture to support organic agriculture and agro-ecology, as foreseen by the 2014 - 2020 European Agenda.

The Ministry also wanted to frame this agreement in its policies to strengthen rural areas to make them become sites of innovation, research and experimentation, social inclusion, resilience to climate change, biodiversity conservation, valorisation of traditional culture and knowledge.



The agreement with the INNER network foresees to foster cooperation among Bio-districts with information and knowledge exchange, territorial promotion, information on the potential of the territorial approach of organic farming, by organising a wide range of activities, including meetings and conferences on the sustainable development of the rural areas.

The agreement also envisages to support actions of development and transfer of innovative know-how into international cooperation programmes, creating new premises to enhance the international dimension of the INNER Network.

The INNER Network already associates other Bio-districts' experiences ongoing in Austria, France, Portugal, Hungary, Slovakia and Switzerland, but the potential of this approach is certainly wider.

In 2017 the working methodologies of Bio-districts, for example, have been published among the agro-ecology profiles featured by the [Agroecology Knowledge Hub](#) managed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation FAO.

Those methodologies have also been qualified among the six best international "Good Practices on investments" for the FAO *Healthy Food Systems* policy and presented within the [44th Plenary Meeting on the Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#) held on the 10 of October 2017 at the FAO Headquarters in Rome.

During the meeting INNER has been taking contacts with representatives of other countries experiences ([Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers Forum \(ZIMSOFF\)](#), [Ministry of Planning Development and Reform, Government of Pakistan](#), [Department of Food and Nutrition, Ministry of Health, Chile](#), [Africa Region Partnership Countries HarvestPlus](#)) in view of creating knowledge exchanges and concrete collaborations.

To know more

[Bio-districts in FAO website](#)

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