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The Urban Lab of Europe !

The OpenAgri project Journal N° 3

Project led by the city of Milan



**JOBS & SKILLS
IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY**



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



Région
Hauts-de-France

The OpenAgri project

The City government of Milan decided to set up an urban coalition with a series of partners (Universities, companies, associations) in order to apply for the first call of UIA Initiative (Urban Innovative Actions), with the desire to scale up this positioning in the peri-urban agricultural industry, setting up a stable growth and creating new jobs and skills.

OpenAgri is mainly an urban policy experimentation that follows the place-based approach, focusing on new skills for new jobs in peri-urban agriculture. The project area can be defined as an “urban fringe”, representing the transition zone between the consolidated part of the City and the agricultural lands. The challenge is to locate here an innovative urban service aimed at creating new jobs, skills, start-ups and innovation in agri-food sector (including production, processing and food waste) while increasing the level of resilience and sustainability of the City. With this in view, a series of selected partners have been engaged on using in the best possible way a public owned 30 hectares plot of land surrounding the south Milan Parco Sud boundaries.

An ‘Open Innovation Hub on Peri-Urban Agriculture’ to prototype disruptive and innovative solutions regenerating the concerned peri-urban zone of the city by making it an example of social inclusion and innovation.

Partnership:

- Comune di Milano
- Camera di Commercio, Industria, Agricoltura e Artigianato - Chamber of commerce
- Fondazione Politecnico di Milano - Research Centre
- Fondazione Parco Tecnologico Padano - Incubator dedicated to technological companies and startups
- Università degli studi di Milano - University
- Politecnico di Milano - University
- Avanzi - Think Thank
- Cineca - Research Centre
- FUTURE FOOD INSTITUTE Trust (FFI) - Research Centre
- ImpattoZero Srl - Private Company
- La Strada Società Cooperativa Sociale - NGO
- Sunugal - NGO
- Poliedra - Centro di servizio e consulenza del Politecnico di Milano - Research Centre
- IFOA – Istituto Formazione Operatori Aziendali - Training Centre
- Mare s.r.l. impresa sociale - NGOFOOD PARTNERS SRL - Private Company

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1. Executive summary

The third edition of *OpenAgri* Journal describes and analyses the progress of the project in the last nine months, from March 2018 to November 2018. During this period the partnership reinforced the implementation of the planned activities but also dealt with some challenges that forced the partnership to put in practice some contingency actions.

The content of this third edition is based on my site visit to Milan that took place on 4th to 6th December 2018 and on regular online meetings with the *OpenAgri* team. The journal is organized in 5 sections.

Section 1: The widespread hub – addressed the concept of the “widespread hub” which consists on the test and validation of some activities of the project in temporary premises before moving in a permanent basis for the Cascina Nosedo hub.

Section 2: Progress on the 18X30 Lab – sketches the distribution of land in Cascina Nosedo by the 18 selected projects and group them accordingly to their land needs, thematic clusters and type of project.

Section 3: OpenAgri Artists-in-Residence - outlines the open call with the purpose to select a project in the scope of contemporary artistic languages (such as performance, public and participatory art) for a nine-week long residency, interacting creatively with UIA Openagri’s partnership and activities.

Section 4 – “Main Implementation Challenges” – outlines the main implementation related challenges faced by the project. Although progress is very good overall, special attention is needed on three of the UIA implementation related challenges, namely: “*Leadership for implementation*”; “*Monitoring & evaluation (measurement)*” and “*Upscaling (incl. resizing/ re-planning interventions)*”.

Section 5 – “Key Learning Points and Next Steps” – highlights three learning points of the period and launches the next six months

of the project that will be very active and full of activities.



OpenAgri stakeholders meeting (June 2018)

2. The Widespread Hub

The idea of **The Widespread Hub** was born in the mind of the **OpenAgri** partnership as way to bring forward some of the most innovative and risky activities of the project. Before the hub at Cascina Nosedo be ready to receive those activities, the partnership believes that it is important to test and validate them, prototyping with the local community of **OpenAgri** such co-creative activities in an open manner.

The partners' come up with solutions that reinforces the presence of the project in different locations of the city and increases the capacity to engage new stakeholders. The creation of temporary arrangements in the city for implementing/testing the OpenAgri activities is in practice in the form of **The Widespread Hub**.

“The Widespread Hub is the perfect solution to keep the project running and the partnership engaged.” Rossana Torri

The projects that will be testes and validated in a temporary basis on other locations are:

- **Temporary OffiCucina** – at Cascina Casotello (OpenAgri partner n°12 Sunugal Headquarter). Future food institute will manage an Officucina format in cascina Casottello testing and experimenting creative cuisine, exploring new methods to revamp food production and supply chain, with a local impact on the socio-economic system. This approach will set the basis for the creation of new job figures. Innovation and creativity will

be boosted through the Food alchemist lab, offering new perspectives on the traditional concept of food, taking into account the social dimension and inclusion, with an eye on key message of sustainability and responsible food culture;

- **Aquaponics Greenhouse** – ImpattoZero (OpenAgri partner responsible for the aquaponics) visited the new location available for the Aquaponics Greenhouse which is in a public space owned by the municipality on the main street of Cascina Nosedo a few meters from the original location. The considered location, close to Cascina Nosedo, presents some infrastructures that must be removed or renewed to be reutilized in the Greenhouse project on the short term. The works will continue during the forthcoming weeks;
- **Prototype Development Center** – will be adapted to an outdoor “Pilot” Development Center designed on 30 hectares needs and 18x30 Lab opportunities.

The Widespread Hub represents a renovated commitment of the partnership with the project implementation and will allow the partners to test their innovative activities before moving to Cascina Nosedo.

The project has been redesigned according to the new locations and the partners engaged in the different pilots are moving for implementation.

3. Progress on the 18X30 Lab

The **18X30 Lab** has a sectoral focus on the agri-food value chain, as well, integrating several food policy experiments in a single strategy, and operating as a living lab to foster innovation in the agri-food sector. Agriculture-related SMEs and start-ups are experimenting with innovative tools their creativity. Players from various parts of the value chain are involved: farmers, but also suppliers of technologies, seeds, plants, materials; logistics, marketing, and knowledge/research institutes.

“Having an idea is one thing, turning it into an innovation action is another”, Rossana Torri

The **selected 18 projects** co-created the acceleration program based on the critical needs of their business ideas, such as: water and irrigated land; energy; warehouse for storing tools, cold room for storing fresh products; readiness of the soil to be used; safety of equipment’s and products; funding needs for market uptake; time needed at the experimentation laboratory; selling point needs; delivery service and others. Taking

this in consideration, the acceleration program has been co-designed with the selected projects in terms of pre-incubation activities, advanced training, mentorship and strategic networking, depending on topics and degree of maturity of each project.

Analysing the selected projects and grouping them accordingly to land needs, thematic clusters and type of projects, the work developed by **OpenAgri** team in the past months has focused on creating the perfect conditions for the kick-off activities of the **18X30 Lab** program.

The **Land Needs** were identified in an early stage of the acceleration program and the public owned 30 hectares plot of land surrounding the south Milan Parco Sud boundaries has the enough land to meet the project’s needs. Only 10 of the 18 selected projects demand land to develop their business.

The following table presents the distribution of land per project accordingly to type of innovation and activity:

Project	Innovation	Activity	Land in hectares
SMAF - Smart Agriculture for Flowers	Technological	Propose a multifunctional and precision agriculture project, which involves the cultivation of alimurgiche, edible and aromatic flowers, using smart agriculture solutions to optimize water consumption.	4 plots of land with a total of 1,62 ha
City Organic Delivery	Social	The proposals include the direct cultivation of ancient fruits and vegetables at zero km using cutting-edge techniques of conservation, biological and integrated pest management.	3 plots of land with a total of 1,94 ha
Officine Agricole Milanesi	Technological	Advanced Automation project in the Agrotecnico field	1 plot of land with 1,84 ha
Zappada	Agro-system production and services	The project aims at the cultivation of biological populations of cereals fallen into disuse following the Green Revolution, together with the cultivation of Hemp from fiber and oil with a purifying effect of the soil. The project will also include educational activities.	7 plots of land with a total of 9,03 ha
SCARABEO	Agro-system production and services	The main objective of the project is the multiplication of quality seeds with a biological system, focused on the production and distribution of varieties suitable for low-input systems (eg organic farming) and the maintenance and recovery of conservation varieties, indigenous, ancient and traditional.	2 plots of land with a total of 1,34 ha
IO P-ORTO	Agro-system production and services	The project proposes a path of job placement of migrant people based on a set of activities such as: the world garden; the urban gardens; the pick your own model managed by migrants and others.	1 plot of land with 0,71 ha
SensInCampo	Social	The project proposes the creation of a light structure for demonstrative / didactic purposes of how it is possible today to work around the idea of Environmental Ecological Networks with a view to Circularity and Energy Independence.	1 plot of land with 0,72 ha
Sinergie AgriCulturali in Vettabbia	Social	The project lays the foundations for the creation of a permanent regenerative inclusion area (AIPR) or a place where agriculture harmonises human activities with the natural processes of the surrounding environment.	1 plot of land with 2,18 ha
Narrare il pane	Agro-system production and services	The retro innovation at the service of the city "is a project of innovation of the bread supply chain in the local area.	3 plots of land with a total of 6,4 ha
Birra Per Il Corvetto	Agro-system production and services	The goal is to create a brewery in the spaces of Cascina Nosedo. Our agricultural brewery will offer local products, and could make people belonging to vulnerable groups work, offering a protected, pleasant and accessible space for all age groups.	3 plots of land with a total of 2,35 ha

Visualization of the distribution of land per project on the 33 hectares plot of land surrounding the south Milan Parco Sud boundaries:



From the 10 projects with lands, 4 already signed contracts with the municipality and the others are in the process of formalizing their contracts.

Together with the 18 projects **OpenAgri** team is working in the perspective of interdependencies between activities and the perspective of interdependencies between actors. Many agricultural issues are in fact a series of linked processes or activities that involve multiple actors, e.g., supplying agricultural inputs, cultivating, harvesting, post-harvest handling, transporting, processing, marketing, and distributing.

The 18 projects were clustered into 3 themes: *Technological innovation in the agri-food chain (8 projects); Productive and agro-ecosystem services (5 projects) and Sharing economy and social innovation (5 projects).*

The use of the public owned land organized by thematic clusters accordingly to their innovation background, contributes for an urgent need of innovation and renovation throughout the value chain considering a sustainable approach at all the project stages, namely:

Production – Many local farmers, in fact, still adopt traditional methods, even though addressing biological, integrated and social cultivation with increasing interest, but still not enough to make a change. Indeed, the transformation segment is highly interested in introducing more local and biological productions but the scarcity on the supply side does not meet market needs. “Km 0” is perceived as an important segment to be incentivized and safeguarded in its distribution (by reducing logistic barriers, e.g.) and commercialization across local markets,

wholesale and mass market retail. In fact, local biodiversity must be supported both as a cultural heritage and as part of biodiversity itself, probably one of the most powerful and characterizing resources of the territory occupied by the **18X30 Lab**.

Transformation - shorter is the value chain (ex. Km 0 products), harder it is for sanitary inspectors to supervise the transformation, showing the contradiction in the matter of quality check vs. genuineness of the product. In this segment, the **18X30 Lab** create the conditions to experiment new ways of food conservation and make them affordable for small producers and consumers.

Distribution and Commercialization – all the projects expressed the necessity for a better logistic support and integration in order to reach both intermediaries and final customers. In this sense, a general logistic center, in particular one specifically contemplated for certain categories of agri-production (Bio, km 0, biodynamic, etc.) it's being considered as an online platform based on the **OpenAgri** online platform that can promote the link between small producers and large-scale retailers.

Marketing and Communication - Having a clear market vision and being able to effectively communicate this added-value is one of the fundamental elements for successful **18X30 Lab** start-ups in the market. As a general trend, food supply must become a more comprehensible and accessible. Consumers are increasingly using hi-tech tools for scanning products and discovering their properties and proveniences in order to make a buying decision. Producers should then acquire new competences in order to manage the mutable requests from the heterogeneous groups of consumers. **OpenAgri** digital platform will be a tool available to the 18 projects to promote their digital business and to reach this audience.

The **18X30 Lab** is the heart of **OpenAgri** project, in which infrastructures and services are jointly and dynamically stimulating open communities of farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, and others, building new collaborations and networks so cities can understand innovation, innovators can understand cities, citizens can become effectively engaged and users can become content providers, service producers and deliverers.

4. OpenAgri Artists -in - Residence



OPEN CALL

per progetti in residenza artistica dedicata
a "OpenAgri – New skills for new jobs in peri-urban agriculture"
il progetto europeo che sta attivando un Open Innovation Hub sull'agricoltura periurbana
nell'ambito di Nosedo – Porto di Mare – Chiaravalle, a Milano.

To activate the Open Innovation Hub, **OpenAgri** launched in October 2018 an open call with the purpose to select a project in the scope of contemporary artistic languages (such as performance, public and participatory art) for a nine-week long residency, interacting creatively with UIA Openagri's partnership and activities.

The goal is to find site-specific and in-vivo projects that reflect, draw inspiration from and deal with "territorial regeneration" issues, using participatory-art language.

The residency's objective is the production of a performative, public or participatory artwork, related to the themes of **OpenAgri** project, and involving the different stakeholders: citizens, selected start-up companies, **OpenAgri** partners, associations and activists in that area.

For the success of this activity, **OpenAgri** engaged 3 social innovation organizations with experience in this field:

- **Mare culturale urbano (OpenAgri partner)** - <http://maremilano.org/> - is a centre for

artistic production based in west Milan with a mission to build a new model for suburban territorial development;

- **Terzo Paesaggio** - <http://terzopaesaggio.org/> - is a Milan-based non-profit organization, founded by a multidisciplinary group of professionals animated by shared conception of the value of landscape as a social context;
- **Sunugal (OpenAgri partner)** - <https://www.sunugal.it/> - is a socio-cultural association that operates both in Senegal and in Italy, dealing with culture, education, performing arts and international cooperation.

The submitted projects must be original and have clear and well-defined authorship. They don't necessarily have to be unreleased and they must start and end within the residency time. The selection will favour site-specific and in-vivo projects that reflect, draw inspiration from and deal with "territorial" issues, such as:

- Experimentation of innovative practices, which strive for a cohesive and cooperative management of the 30 hectares of land;
- Agriculture as the new frontier of urban innovation, through the reinforcement of the collaboration between the 18 innovative start-up companies locally active in the area;
- Territorial resignification process, triggering activities in the 30 hectares of land, in particular: start of the farming activities, design the new landscape, networking and landmark system, new territorial narratives;
- The relationship between city and countryside, peri-urban agriculture and urban food policy;
- The upgrading site of Cascina Nosedo and its relation to the wider surrounding context;

- Landscape reconstruction processes, even if short-termed, such as the completion of the Vettabbia Park and Wood, the restoration and replenishment of the water supply network, the restoration of the farms surrounding Cascina Nosedo, the final configuration of the sewage pipes going to the water treatment plant, the fostering of free-time and nature-related activities throughout the Vettabbia Park, including Chiaravalle;
- Projects that will directly or indirectly encourage the development of skills and competences of the local youth population, eventually with the involvement of schools, will be considered worthwhile for selection purposes.

The 32 candidate projects for the artistic residence come from 14 countries: Belgium; Canada; Germany; Egypt; France; Indonesia; Israel; Italy; Netherland; Nigeria; Poland; Spain; Switzerland and United States. The selection process will run all over December 2018.

The selected project will have a prize valued 11.000€, besides other rewards such as: get-to-know excursions, meetings and workshops with the stakeholders, guided analysis of the materials, exploration walks together with experts and local facilitators. Also, they will have the right to have workspace and rehearsal space, for the entire duration of the residency, as well, accommodation for the whole artistic team for the entire duration of the residency at Cascina Casottello's guesthouse.

All the projects will be communicated and disseminated through the partners' media channels and through specialized press, besides the communication of public events.

The work will be articulated in three-week sections, starting on the spring of 2019.

OpenAgri, by establishing a strong bond with its surrounding local dimension is activating processes of social inclusion, urban regeneration

and cultural innovation. Combining artistic research and community social planning on a series of residencies focused on the creation of content and services, the project is maximizing the territorial impact.

5. Main implementation challenges

This section outlines the main implementation-related challenges that emerged from the past nine months of the project:

- 1. Leadership for implementation;** the “widespread hub” approach will demand a stronger leadership from the *OpenAgri* coordination team. It’s crucial to guarantee a good link between project activities and a good flow of information between the different activities.
- 2. Monitoring & evaluation (measurement);** the city of Milan wants to understand the impact of *OpenAgri* at economic, environmental, social and governance level. The measurement of the ‘impact’ of *OpenAgri* is often far more subjective than the direct inputs and outputs. Determining the impact may also require a degree of interpretation and may not be evident until months or years after the project is taken. At this stage *OpenAgri* is building a monitoring and evaluation matrix based on the project baseline, the expected results, results indicators, expected impacts and project beneficiaries. A dedicated team is working on the monitoring and evaluation methodology and indicators.
- 3. Upscaling (incl. resizing/re-planning interventions);** In the context of the Widespread Hub, the *OpenAgri* digital platform gain more relevance as an element that will link all the project activities and users but also as the main tool for upscaling the project activities. Thus, the digital platform is conceived as a mean to support businesses, and notably start-ups, SMEs and nontech industry, in their digital transformation. It will contribute to push up the wide community of *OpenAgri* for the adoption of ICT solutions for more productive and sustainable agriculture systems. Moreover, traditional barriers such as company size, place of origin or market entry will be reduced thanks to an improved connected society.

In future editions of the OpenAgri journal we will revisit the UIA challenges and assess the progress made and lessons learned.

6. Key Learning Points and Next Steps

A **first key learning point** from the period, March 2018 to November 2018, was the management of interdependencies as a critical aspect of project coordination. Some delays in the renovation works required contingency measures to keep going with the implementation of the other project activities. To overcome this difficulty, the implementation team followed two perspectives of interdependencies, i.e., on the perspective of interdependencies between activities and on the perspective of interdependencies between actors (project partners but also other external stakeholders). Based on these two perspectives of interdependencies, the “widespread hub” come up as a solution that has been built on the existing capacity of the partners to receive on a temporary basis some project activities. Besides the interdependencies at project level, the management team is successfully managing the horizontal integration of the project at city department levels. A good example is the water management strategy for the Cascina Nosedo area that actively involved 4 municipality departments, such as: urban planning, environment, agriculture, urban economy and public works.

A **second key learning point** was the progress on the infrastructural development at the land surrounding the south Milan Parco Sud to receive the 18 selected projects. By working to support and develop this infrastructure, OpenAgri makes a major contribution to the establishment of more sustainable spatial, socio-economic, and environmental linkages between urban and peri-urban areas. Particularly relevant was the development of urban planning mechanisms (such as zoning and land use regulation) that

can capture the impacts of peri-urban resource management and climate change on urban food systems and improve peri-urban/urban cooperation to mitigate those impacts. This territorial approach supported and created a more inclusive food ecosystems and improved planning for agricultural production, green infrastructure and natural resource management at the urban-regional level.

Finally, a **third key learning point** of the period is the capacity of the partnership to keep going with the project activities, reframing the project when needed.

The main steps over the next 6 months are:

- **Renovation works (permanent activity)** - The buildings renovation are delayed. The buildings of Cascina Nosedo present critical aspects related to their age, history and management. This results in a bad state of conservation of the buildings (1) (scarce information is available), in a total degradation of the courtyard (2) and in a difficult social context with current inhabitants (3). The combination of these 3 factors, together with delays on the public procurement process for the renovation works, has generated delays in the renovation of the buildings and it has led the **OpenAgri** partnership to come up with some creative decisions and actions to keep going with the project activities.
- **Open Badges playlist** – The various skills and competencies growing in and around the Cascina Nosedo innovation hub are being mapped, as well the different ways to develop and assess them. In this way the

different training opportunities that will arise in OpenAgri project, will be matched to Badges and interconnected to form learning pathways that the learners involved in the project will experience, demonstrate and finally share. A first Open Badge “Pathways” concerning entrepreneurship competencies needed to start up a project in periurban agriculture has been published (<https://bestr.it/badge/show/800>), more will come on the first months of 2019.

- **Planning the activity of “job Shadowing” (early 2019)** – it is expected that by December 2018 the 18 projects involved in the lab will have completed the 1 to 1 assistance phase, as well as the communication and marketing component. In 2019 will start the job shadowing activity, which consists on a short stay at a partner organisation with the aim of getting trained shadowing professionals in their work and exchanging good practices, developing knowledge and skills and / or building long-term partnership through direct observation as well as participation.

- **Artists-in-residence projects** – The work will be developed in 2019 and will be articulated in three-week sections:

- o Phase 1 (approximately around April 2019):
 - › a. A welcome party for the start of the residency in collaboration with SUNUGAL. During the party the artists will introduce themselves to the local community through a performance or work featured from their repertoire.
 - › b. Start of the action research process that will lead to the identification of the themes that will guide all the various steps of the creation and spark the

necessary synergies directed towards the development of the project.

- o Phase 2 (Approximately June/July/August 2019):
 - › a. Following up with the planning and drafting of the project, together with the reinforcement of the necessary connections and relations.
 - › b. Performance rehearsal
- o Phase 3 (September 2019):
 - › a. Performance/public exhibition of the work and farewell party to greet the locals and the territory.

- **OpenAgri digital platform** - The platform is in development and the identity and functionalities are under discussion. The next months will bring news about the platform.

- **OpenAgri international event (April 2019):** two days to imagine future skills, technologies, narratives and policies that will design the way cities will challenge the relation with production, consumption and agri-urban sustainability. The main idea is to attract a wide range of target interested on OpenAgri from different perspective, but all representing a segment of OpenAgri’s value chain. The event will offer visibility also to start-ups and projects that participated at the acceleration program and the 18x30 Lab considering the 30 hectares of agricultural land.

I am looking forward to the next six months and the journey ahead with *OpenAgri*! I will keep you posted in the next issue of this journal.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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