Appendix 2
Tuscan ‘Alliance for Food’ workshop, Italy

The second food systems change case focused on food assistance in Tuscany. Italy saw an increasing number of people relying on assistance through various parts of the food assistance system (Arcuri et al. 2016, Galli et al. 2016, Hebinck et al. 2018). The main actors of food assistance are non-profit and volunteer-based organizations who operate either on the frontlines directly with food aid recipients or they act as second-level entities focused on food surplus recovery. They are often embedded in already consolidated and organized structures, which results in fragmented governance: often uncoordinated and sometimes even competing. Funding is reliant on donations from companies, EU-subsidies, and minor financial resources from regional and local government. The process was initiated by directors of the aid organisation Caritas, who saw the collaboration with TRANSMANGO as a good fit for their objectives. The researcher entered an earlier established assembly of key actors around the coordination of food poverty and food aid. The main objective of the process was to establish better relationships with the key actors involved in food surplus recovery and re-distribution. Their original idea was for food assistance stakeholders to operate under one umbrella called ‘Alliance for food’.

To fit these objectives, two workshops were planned, two months apart. A combination of visioning, back-casting and scenario-testing was designed to highlight and reflect on the role of these diverse actors. A broad range of high-level stakeholders participated in the workshops including: members of the Department of Citizenship’ Rights and Social Cohesion of Tuscany Regional administration, directors of 10 Tuscan church administrative units, which includes Caritas; the coordinators of Emporia of Solidarity; the fund-raising manager for the Food Bank Tuscany; representatives from UniCoop Florence; and academics. The process did not include the vulnerable groups that are at the heart of food assistance activities. The first exercise that entailed visioning, resulted in the identification of the macro-themes that were considered essential to founding the ‘Alliance for Food’; strengthening governance, addressing education on multiple levels and setting up a food assistance approach focused on the individual’s needs. This was complimented by the second normative phase; back-casting was essential to the cross-pollination of strategies among the different participants. For example, the combination of development of fundraising schemes, volunteer training, and food safety guidelines. While the process was led by Caritas, the representatives from the government had considerable sway over workshop dynamics. They were particularly influential during the explorative scenario exercises and able to actively steer and design their eventual role. The explorative scenarios reinforced the awareness of the importance of anticipating trends in two key variables. First, the degree of pro-activeness of local governments, which for example affects the degree of reliance on public actors in leading the plans. Second, the extent of the openness of civil society, which affects the ability to capture needs and approximates the required reliance on volunteer action.

The foresight workshops attempted to find connections between the fragmented Tuscan food assistance actors and contributed to the mobilisation of a small, yet influential, number of public and private actors. In the final drafted plans, government actors play a coordinating and supporting role in the governance of the food assistance network and monitoring of food and nutrition security in the region. Throughout the process we saw the initial steps to the ‘Alliance
for Food’ in Tuscany, which was based on prior existing relationships whose potential was not yet utilised. However, there was difficulty in driving wider mobilisation for the Alliance. This was rooted in the pursuit of ownership of the results: Caritas was involved as a main actor from the start. The experience and the positive outcomes were primarily identified by Caritas. Nevertheless, the spaces provided by the foresight processes gave way to continued interaction around the topic of food poverty, even though prior to the process this was not seen as a goal. All participants, notably the public actors, were all highly motivated to take some of the back-casted plans forward. The collaboration between Caritas, the Food Bank, a retailer and the regional government was consolidated into a “regional table” composed of the main reference people at regional level, that gathers regularly. Furthermore, it has resulted in a continued relationship between the researchers and Caritas, who are collaborating on further research. The result of the foresight process was transformative to food assistance in Tuscany; while the vision of the Alliance itself was very Caritas focused, which, once implemented resulted in a continuing collaboration through a ‘regional table’ used for updating around progress and providing coordination.

LITERATURE CITED