



Second International Conference on

AGRICULTURE IN AN URBANIZING SOCIETY

Reconnecting Agriculture and Food Chains to Societal Needs

14 - 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 | ROME | ITALY

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Food education at school "Add a seat at table"

M. Bisagni¹, M. Calliera², L. Borghi³, C. Boccalari⁴, S. Solvi⁵, E. Capri²

Abstract – Piacecibosano, is an NGO coordinated in partnership with the Research Centre for Sustainable Development OPERA- Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore of Piacenza, a synergetic initiative aimed at developing a sustainable and healthy food production network based on public participation. In order to reach this objective the association has developed a local network to bridge the communication gap between all the actors in the chain and the lack of recognition of the added value of active participation in increasing sustainable consumption, linked to the territory and values. In November 2014, the project "Add a seat at table" was launched involving 4 secondary schools of Piacenza for a total of 30 students and 5 teachers. Students identified some issues of their interest related to food, organised them into five thematic groups and started a discussion with their teachers sharing knowledge and experiences. At the end of the process, projects proposed by the students will be realized and will be presented at the international exhibition (EXPO) in Milan.

Keywords – Sustainable consumption, active participation, conscious choice.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the Piacecibosano is a network made up of 35 public and private actors representing the sustainable food and agriculture production chain in a given territory. In this vision "the sustainability" thus becomes a factor in competitiveness and development, generated by an interconnection between communication and participation, but also by a connection with a territory and its culture; these are the basic elements upon which innovation, understood as the continuous renewal of knowledge and existing technologies, is constructed.

This network, which is currently in its initial phase of realization, is aimed at developing methods and tools to spread the participatory approach to improve the consciousness of actors in the chain making it replicable in all territorial, social and educational, contexts. To this extent the Association Piacecibosano will organize events, such as:

1-workshops, called "CAFFEXPO", to promote scientific and technological applications for food quality and safety and innovation for enterprises. The event consists in a series of informal conversations on sustainability, which facilitate, for example, the communication to consumers and citizens to increase awareness on sustainable production and consumption.

2-secondary schools food education programme, through innovative participatory experiences with a light on the quality of school lunches, by valuing the identity of food and its production process; developed in collaboration with Chamber of Commerce of

Piacenza. The aims that motivate this action is that generally young people are not fully capable of making independent and informed food choices and end up adapting to trends proposed by society.

Therefore it's a priority to form a critical consciousness that can help young people to develop an autonomous and aware behavior in choosing the food.

Nevertheless, schools offer a poor number of initiatives about nutrition for students.

In addition, the large amount of the projects regarding nutrition lacks a dialogue between the school system, institutions and associations, aimed at creating a shared educational orientation with respect to the theme of healthy and sustainable food.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In April 2013, according to these limits and goals, the Association started some actions of education about nutrition. In October 2013, 350 students from 11 secondary schools of Piacenza were involved in an Open Space Technology dedicated to food (Harrison 2008, Valente 2009). Due to the success obtained by this initiative, the Association Piacecibosano decided to support schools with a new initiative. In November 2014, the project "Add a seat at table" was launched involving 4 secondary schools of Piacenza for a total of 30 students and 5 teachers.

The project aimed at involving students and teachers in discussions and in-depth analysis about issues of their interest related to food, in order to collect data, products and events to share with peers.

The Piacecibosano team planned four meetings between November 2014 and June 2015 and extra "online" support using a whatsapp chat and a mailing list dedicated to the project.

In the first meeting, students and teachers identified five thematic groups, that concerned: Nutrition and sport, Vegans and vegetarians, Food and culture, Food disorders, Conscious choice and Sustainability.

After choosing issues, each group composed by students and teachers started a discussion about the topic focusing on contents, products and events.

In the early stages of the project, the bibliographic analysis was of great importance, supporting the groups with two extra events related to topics and methodology, also with the format "CAFFEXPO" in the school. After acquiring the knowledge to make a proper use of sources, each group involved different subjects to develop their own themes. In total a nutritionist, 8 teens from different cultural background, one vegetarian, 75 citizens of Piacenza were contacted and interviewed. Once content were developed, groups were encouraged to identify the most appropriate approach and event type to spread the results among peers.

RESULTS

The themes that reached the final stage of development, each with a different objective and

¹ Bisagni M. Sociologist. President of Association Piacecibosano, Piacenza, Italy miriambisagni@libero.it

² Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore Piacenza-OPERA Research Centre-Italy

³ Servizi educativi e scolastici Unione Terre d'Argine. Modena - Italy

⁴ Professional educator in the school sector - Italy

⁵ Association Piacecibosano, Piacenza, Italy



recommended products and roles to achieve them, were in total 4 as described in the table below.

Table 1. Projects developed by students and teachers.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Sport and nutrition</i>
<i>Objective</i>	To disseminate knowledge on healthy eating for those who practice sport
<i>Products</i>	Bibliographic research on the relationship between diet and sport - nutritional physician interview - standard menu specific to sportive people and student the seven rules for people practicing sports
<i>Issue</i>	<i>Vegan and vegetarian</i>
<i>Objective</i>	To transmit information on vegetarianism and the nutritional properties of related food to overcome the stereotypes associated with this eating style.
<i>Products</i>	- Web Search on vegetarian food (definition, nutritional properties, recipes...)- Vegetarian interview - A survey involving 75 citizens in the area of Piacenza about vegetarian's knowledge and social representations.
<i>Issue</i>	<i>Cross-cultural food</i>
<i>Objective</i>	Raise awareness of the food heritage of different cultures.
<i>Products</i>	A video ("cross-cultural people and food") that collects interviews conducted among students from different countries and food habits
<i>Issue</i>	<i>Food disorders</i>
<i>Objective</i>	To provide reliable knowledge in order to catch the first signs of the food related disorders
<i>Products</i>	Multimedia presentation containing images and brief information about eating disorders

To the extent to spread these results to a broad public, a full day dedicated to alimentary education is planned by the early months of the next school year involving various schools (Puton 1999).

The day will be scheduled as follow:

1. Sport event (volleyball tournament or other) to promote a standard menu specific to sportive people and the "seven rules" for people practicing sports;
2. A vegan and vegetarian buffet realized by students with typical and different products from various Countries;
3. The projection of the video "cross-cultural people and food" that collects interviews conducted among students from different countries and food habits;
4. The diffusion, through flyers and brochures about eating disorders in order to spread reliable knowledge to catch first symptoms and related risks.

The students will present the same products in a dedicated day within Expo 2015.

CONCLUSION

The experience is an example of promoting food and nutrition education using a participatory approach with all the actors of the education system involved (Lambiase, Bisagni 2014). Students learned more about methods to increase their knowledge and how practice a peer education. Peers and schools will share final products and events with similar actors. These actions will improve a schools exchange approach that could be replicated in other contexts interested in addressing the theme of sustainable nutrition. Strengths of the program are the following: participation, nutritional awareness, empowerment, pro-activity, peer communication, listening and consideration of the needs and demands of students and teachers, inter-institutional dialogue created between different schools around the subject of food, the connection between school and institutions. Problems found are the following: need to find referee to coordinate each group of students and teachers in the design of interventions and need of strong coordination between the schools, students and teachers. Indeed poor coordination can affect the communication and management of organizational processes.

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