



TIRANA ALBANIA

FOOD SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

June 2023

Written by Let's Food

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

CONTEXT

- In a world with limited resources and an ever-increasing population, food is an essential issue. The transition to more sustainable and equitable agricultural and food practices - essential for the survival of biodiversity and adaptation to global warming - must be considered both locally and globally. Strengthening sustainable food is a challenge that must be approached in a systemic way, considering all the components and actors of food systems. Local authorities and governments must seize this transition to build food-producing territories with the actors of the food system and thus guarantee access to quality food for all.
- Although cities around the world are gradually taking up the food issue and are increasingly communicating on the public, private or associative actions underway, there is still little information on public policies and local initiatives in favour of sustainable food systems in Mediterranean cities.

LET'S FOOD

- Let's Food is a French based NGO aiming to support territories in building sustainable and resilient food systems through territorial cooperation and the exchange of good practices at local, national and international levels.
- The NGO has 3 specific objectives:
 - Support the development of sustainable local food policies in France and across the world.
 - Promote and operationalise the sharing of knowledge and initiatives among the different actors of the food system in order to accelerate a food and agroecological transition on a global scale.
 - Raise awareness and provide training on territorial sustainable food systems in order to strengthen the skills needed to set up sustainable food policies.

ZOOM: ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF A FOOD SYSTEM

The French NGO Let's Food has developed a methodology to analyse the sustainability of a food system. This is based on Nicolas Brucas' definition built from the definitions proposed by the FAO, Bioversity International and IPES Food (2015):

"Sustainable food systems:

- Protect the environment without depleting non-renewable resources and biodiversity and without polluting ;
- Provide access for all to sufficient, safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable food;
- Are based on an inclusive economic system that creates jobs for all and reduces inequalities of power for a fair distribution of added value;
- Promote social cohesion and respect for diversity;
- Restore confidence in the system and allow citizens to participate in its evolution".

The proposed methodology aims to analyse the connections within the value chain in the light of the dimensions of sustainable development in order to identify the main challenges.

ZOOM: ASSESSING URBAN FOOD ACTIONS

The initiative assessment aims to:

- Assess the impact of the initiative on the priority sustainability issues of the food system;
- Determine the replicability of the initiatives and the conditions for their replicability;
- Identify success factors and areas for improvement.

The proposed methodology is based on two reference methodologies:

- The "Syannlinnov food project impact assessment guide", produced by Montpellier SupAgro, AOCConsulting and the Carasso Foundation.
- The participatory analysis method implemented by the URBAL (Urban-Driven Innovations for Sustainable Food Systems) project, developed by CIRAD, Montpellier SupAgro, Wilfrid Laurier University, Esta and the UNESCO World Food Chair.

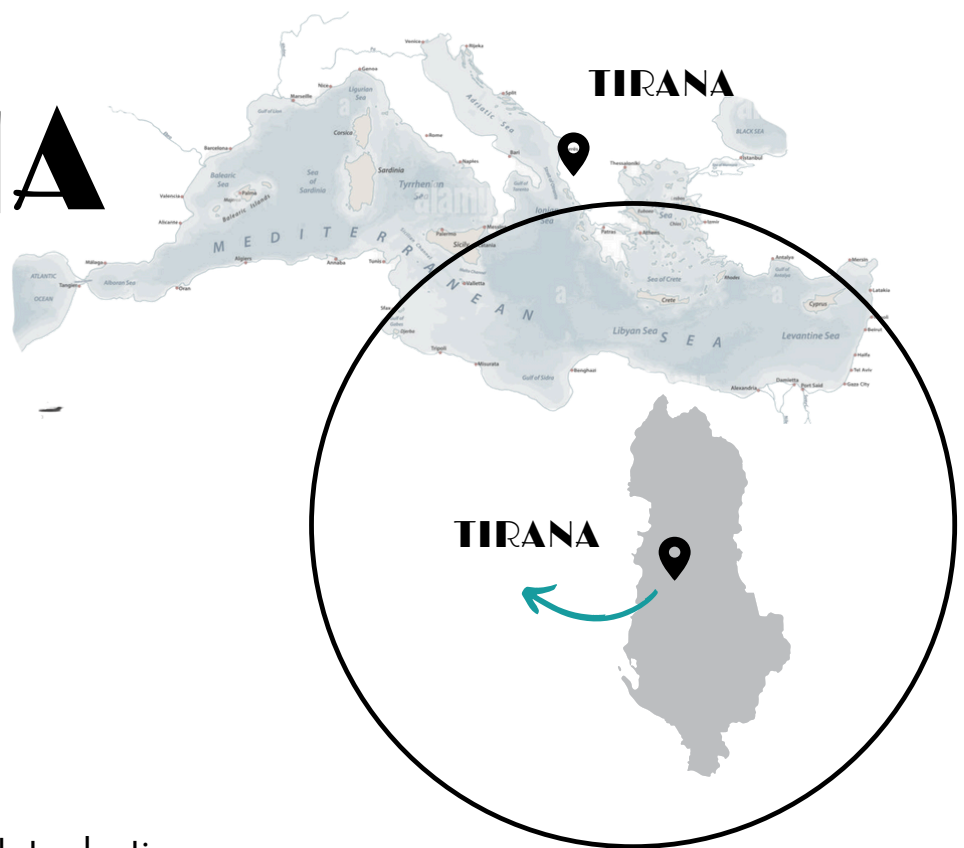
TIRANA

ALBANIA

- 28,748 km² with 2,829,741 inhabitants (2021)
- Parliamentary republic
- Prime Minister: Edi Rama (Socialist Party)

TIRANA

- District: 1,652 km² with 910,511 inhabitants (2022)
- City: 41.8 km² with 511,559 inhabitants (2022) (1)
- : Erion Veliaj (Socialist Party)



Introduction

Situated in a valley 40 km from the sea, Tirana is Albania's capital and most populous city, accounting for almost 50% of the country's population. Albania remains deeply marked by its Communist dictatorship, which ended in 1991 after 46 years of repression. The country is strongly influenced by Greek, Balkan, Turkish and Italian culture. Traditional cuisine is appreciated and preserved, despite the country's significant economic development. Since 2016, Albania has been a candidate for membership of the European Union.

I. Food and nutritional security

- One in three Albanians is food insecure ("A person is food insecure when he or she does not have regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life" FAO) (2022) (23)
- 21.3% of the Albanian population is obese (2018) (27)
- 11.3% of children under 5 are stunted due to malnutrition (2023) (35)
- Food purchases account for 42% of the population's budget (2018) (36)

A double nutritional burden

In Tirana, there is a double nutritional burden, typical of developing countries:

- A growing obesity rate, due in particular to a transformation in eating habits associated with Western influence (ultra-processed products, fast food, etc.). In 2018, 21.3% of the Albanian population was obese, and a study by the Global Map of Obesity estimates that by 2030 this rate will have risen to 37% (27).
- Undernutrition is still present, but is tending to diminish as a result of the structuring of food chains and awareness-raising among families of healthy eating habits: in February 2023, 11.3% of children under 5 were stunted due to malnutrition (compared with an average of 4.5% in Europe) (35).

Various factors can influence the food security and health of Tirana's inhabitants: affordability of fresh produce, level of awareness and food choices that follow nutritional recommendations, availability and stability of the food supply, physical access and distribution of the food supply across the territory and finally food safety.



FATMIR GURI

"Food is not available in its diversity for all parts of the population of Tirana, for 2 main reasons: Economic availability and lack of information about what is considered to be a healthy diet among the general population and especially the youngsters and children"

Fatmir Guri, Head of Economy and Policies of Rural Development Department, Agricultural University of Tirana.



ROVENA DEMAJ

"During communism, all the help would come from the government, there were no charities, NGOs... it is very new. Therefore the level of assistance in Albania is still very low. It is not in the culture to help and donate, at the level of individuals or at the level of businesses. Additionally, with the current economic situation, people do not have the ability to donate when they already struggle in making ends meet."

Rovena Demaj, executive director, Food Bank of Albania

Affordability, the primary factor in food insecurity in Tirana

The average standard of living in Tirana is relatively high compared with the rest of the country: in 2023, the average salary in Tirana was €452, compared with €400 nationwide (3). However, there are major economic inequalities within the city. It can be difficult for residents of some of Tirana's generally poorer suburban districts to access quality food on limited incomes. In addition, there is no structured food aid system, nor any incentive for companies to donate surplus food (on the contrary, companies also have to pay VAT on these donated products) (44). Solidarity initiatives are extremely rare, as the culture of donation and solidarity is relatively underdeveloped in Albania due to the legacy of communist dictatorship, where the state is responsible for providing basic services to the population. However, the intervention of public authorities, and in particular the State, in the field of food insecurity is insufficient or non-existent (44). There is the Food Bank Association, which recovers some unsold food for redistribution to precarious families. However, the association suffers from a lack of funding (it depends on private funding from foundations), a shortage of food to distribute due to a lack of incentives for companies to donate, and a lack of logistical resources to transport and distribute food (use of personal vehicles, distribution via other associations, etc.).

Furthermore, 42% of household budgets are devoted to food expenditure (36) (for comparison, 17% in 2019 in France). This can be explained by a low average income in relation to the cost of food, but also by limited subsidiary expenditure. As a result, Albanians and Tirana residents are particularly vulnerable to rising food prices, as a large proportion of their income is already spent on food, leaving them little flexibility. However, thanks to the State which took charge of the increase in energy prices to limit the impact on consumers, Albania has been preserved from the current inflation (36).

Culinary habits and traditions threatened by Western influence

Traditional Albanian cuisine is halfway between East and West, influenced by Turkey, Italy and Greece. The Albanian diet is similar to the Mediterranean diet, characterized by abundant consumption of fruit, vegetables, legumes, cereals, aromatic herbs and olive oil, and moderate consumption of dairy products, eggs and meat.

However, the opening up of the country to Western influence in the early 1990s led to the development of restaurants, particularly fast food outlets, and the introduction of new products on the Albanian market, notably processed products rich in sugar, fat and salt. The Westernization of lifestyles is also taking place through the media, which target young people in particular and tend to inculcate unhealthy values and habits (consumption of junk food, sedentary lifestyle, etc.). There is also a lack of information and awareness among the population about how to define and adopt a "healthy" diet (36).

However, despite this ongoing transition, Albanians remain particularly attached to their culinary traditions. They are still accustomed to cooking fresh produce on a daily basis, for cultural as well as economic reasons - fruit and vegetables and preparing meals at home being cheaper than processed products and restaurants (44).

A population dependent on food imports

The urban area of Tirana is dependent on imported foodstuffs to feed its population. A 2008 FAO study showed that the Tirana region produced enough food to cover 7% of the needs of the capital's inhabitants. However, this rate is tending to decrease as a result of the artificialization of agricultural land associated with urban development, which increases the vulnerability of urban populations to possible supply disruptions on international markets (8). On the other hand, rural populations in the Tirana region are more resilient to crises, thanks to a high proportion of individual production (kitchen gardens) for personal consumption (46).

Health risks associated with informal vendors

There are many illegal businesses and informal vendors, some of whom do not necessarily comply with hygiene regulations. This can lead to health risks for consumers, with poor storage conditions leading to bacterial contamination, or pesticide levels in the products sold exceeding authorized thresholds. These sellers are exempt from taxes and mandatory health inspections. As a result, 68% of Tirana consumers consider street vending to be "a problem". It also undermines consumer confidence in their food (44).

A diversified, well-distributed food offer

The people of Tirana benefit from a diversified food supply that is well distributed throughout the territory. Fresh produce, particularly fruit and vegetables, is available and easily accessible through a variety of sales channels (44). There are 3 main types of food marketing channels in Tirana (24):

1. Grocery stores and formal retail markets: there are 8 municipal markets (managed by the Municipality) in Tirana where residents can buy fresh produce. A mobile market has also been set up by the local authorities (48). There are also a large number of grocery stores selling fresh produce, particularly in the city center.
2. Informal sales: Some merchants and producers set up shop and sell fruit and vegetables illegally in the streets of the city center and along the roadsides in peri-urban areas. Many of Tirana's residents also buy directly from peri-urban growers or those in more remote rural areas. This connection is made possible by word-of-mouth, which is still strong, and by Albanians' continuing ties to their rural areas of origin (44). Informal sales and formal grocery stores/retail markets account for 75% of food purchases in Tirana (24).
3. Large and medium-sized retailers: In the 1990s, the opening up of the country to Western influence, marked by the end of the communist dictatorship, led to the development of supermarket chains offering a diversity of food products, often represented by over-packaged and processed products. Today, these companies account for 25% of all purchases and are gaining ground. Consumers are increasingly turning to supermarkets for their convenience and associated food safety (24)(44).

II. Economic sustainability

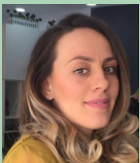
- Agriculture accounts for 23% of the country's GDP and 45% of jobs (2018) (16)
- In Tirana, agriculture accounts for only 5% of employment (2017) (15)
- In the Tirana district, 35% of agricultural land is fallow (18)

A fragmented agricultural sector in decline

Albania's agricultural sector plays a central role in the country's economy, contributing 18% to national GDP and accounting for 45% of jobs nationwide. The main crops grown in Albania are fodder (around 40% of the UAA), cereals (around 35%), fruit trees and vegetables (around 25%) (16). In Tirana, 5% of jobs are in the agricultural sector. These are mainly market garden crops and small livestock (15).

Albania's agricultural system is still marked by the country's communist past. In the early 1990s, when Albania's communist dictatorship was dissolved, agricultural land that had been collectively owned was redistributed to farmers on an equitable basis. This reform led to the transformation of 560 large collective estates, averaging 1,060 hectares, into more than 465,000 private micro-holdings of around 1.1 hectares. The result is small farms with parcels of land that are often highly fragmented and sometimes difficult to farm due to the rugged terrain. The post-collectivist agrarian landscape is thus dominated by very small farms: today, 50% of farms are less than one hectare, and only 14% are larger than 2 hectares (29). These are essentially mixed farms (mixed farming and livestock breeding), enabling smallholders to make a living from subsistence farming and to be more resilient in the face of climatic hazards thanks to the diversification of their activity. The Tirana region has 5,446 hectares of agricultural land farmed by 18,177 farmers or family businesses. The size of these farms varies from 0.6 ha to 1 ha. Nationwide and in the Tirana Region, only 1/4 of farmers sell their produce commercially, while the remaining 75% produce for their own consumption and sell their surplus through various channels (18).

The agricultural sector receives relatively little support from the State (agriculture accounts for 2% of the budget (34) - financial aid is distributed through the Albanian Food Authority). Small-scale subsistence farming is neglected by the central government, whose agricultural policy aims to develop large, specialized farms capable of exporting their produce to European markets. As a result, the latter receives the majority of agricultural subsidies. In addition, the lack of a structured supply chain and conscious intermediaries capable of marketing the limited quantities produced by this type of farm means that small producers cannot make a decent living from their activity. As a result, these farmers abandon the activity, often migrating to the city to find work, and the sector's lack of appeal to young people, who abandon the profession. In the district of Tirana, 35% of agricultural land is fallow because it has been abandoned by its owner (urban planning documents do not allow it to be resold for a use other than agricultural or natural) (18).



BESMIRA
HASKAJ

"Small producers that own many fragmentarized / small plots, are leaving/ abandoning the farm because it is not profitable enough. They can't sell the land for residential or commercial thanks to the current policy for the protection of the agricultural land. As a result, there's a lot of wasteland in the rural area of Tirana."

Besmira Haskaj, former Head of Rural Economic Development Sector, Municipality of Tirana



GENCI KOJDHELI

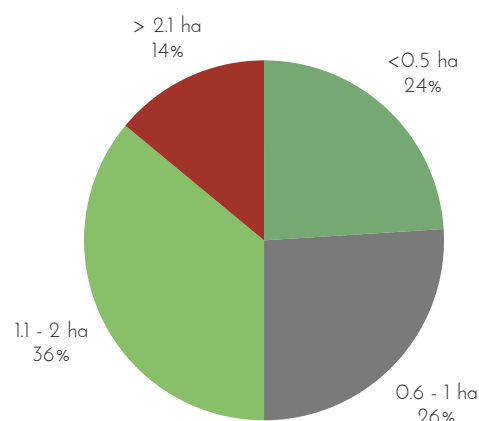
"During communism, private ownership of land was nonexistent. The Ministry of Agriculture and Municipalities tried to convince farmers to join forces in cooperatives. But in Albania, cooperatives does not sound good, people are afraid of the word. As a result, we have very small farms, which makes it hard for them to access markets."

Genci Kojdheli, Director General of Integration, Strategic Projects and Economic Development, Municipality of Tirana

The cooperative organization seems to be an appropriate solution for preserving the diversity and resilience of food production while pooling certain costs and accessing certain markets more easily. However, the country's communist past has led to mistrust and even fear of the cooperative system. As a result, there are very few cooperatives or producers' associations in Albania, despite incentives from the State and the municipality of Tirana (36) (43).

However, a few initiatives are emerging to support local food-producing agriculture around Tirana. The Municipality has created a "Made in Tirana" brand of local produce to meet urban consumers' demand for traceability (12). It also recently built the territory's first public wholesale market, giving easier access to small producers in the country and the Tirana district (48).

Farm structure by size in Albania (% of total, 2011)
Source: Albanian Ministry of Agriculture, 2011



Unfair competition with imported products works against small scale albanian producers

In 2009, the European Union signed a bilateral "Stabilization and Association Agreement" with Albania to facilitate trade between Albania and the EU, and vice versa. This free trade agreement has enabled certain privileged producers to develop their businesses on the European market. However, it is also responsible for unfair competition in Albanian markets. Indeed, European Union producers, benefiting from CAP financial aid, are able to offer products at unbeatable prices, which small Albanian producers, with little state support, cannot match (36) (38).

Create value through agritourism, food processing and the development of protected designations of origin (PDOs)

The downstream sectors remain highly disorganized, with product collection problems (for example, there are no longer any organized milk collections, initially managed by the state) which led to the decline of the food industry sector in the early 2000s (13). In Tirana, however, there are now 15 food industries (14). Moreover, home processing is still very much alive (canning, pasteurization, production of coulis and pickles, etc.) (45).

In Albania, and particularly in the Tirana district, the agritourism sector is developing rapidly. It is a relevant tool for valorizing the terroir, in particular local products, creating jobs and thus generating wealth in rural or peri-urban areas. However, their development is limited by several factors: lack of infrastructure in rural areas (roads, water, electricity...), lack of food safety certification to be able to sell the artisanal products produced by these structures, or the lack of attractiveness of the agricultural sector in certain remote rural areas (49).

The recent development of protected designations of origin is also helping to create value in rural areas and preserve traditional agricultural and culinary culture. By 2022, Albania had 4 PDO products (cheese and honey) (45).

Unequal distribution of value along the food chain

Intermediaries play a key role in food distribution, acting as a link between producers and consumers (8). However, there is no control over the margins earned by the growing number of intermediaries between producers and consumers. As a result, individual food producers, whose bargaining power is very weak in the face of intermediaries and distributors, recover only a limited share of the cost price of their products (36). The lack of price transparency maintains an inequitable distribution along the value chain (36). Furthermore, it is difficult for consumers to distinguish between producers and resellers on municipal markets managed by the Municipality's Market Agency, as the latter imposes no conditions as to the nature of the vendors present on the markets (48). Short and local circuits could increase producers' income, but they are still very rare or informal. Some consumers in Tirana are interested, but the absence of a successful model and the lack of trust and transparency along the value chain limit their development (43). Public catering (especially in schools) could represent an interesting market opportunity for small local producers and serve as a successful example of short supply chains in the region. However, the municipality's lack of competence and the organization of school days (optional meals, sometimes replaced by snacks) limit the implementation of such an action (see chapter 4) (48).

III. Environmental sustainability

- 60% of the country's water resources are devoted to agriculture (22)
- 284 hectares, or 0.02% of agricultural area, are farmed organically (2010) (9)
- Target of 25% organic agricultural area by 2030 to meet commitments under the European Green Deal (39)
- 47 kg of meat consumed per person per year in Albania (2017) (25)

Agriculture with limited impact on natural resources, but threatened by global warming

Albania has relatively abundant freshwater resources, with a multitude of springs and rivers. Despite this abundance, global warming is leading to a reduction in rainfall and an increase in the frequency of hot spells, resulting in significant evaporation in summer. This phenomenon is responsible for water shortages, which particularly impact agricultural activity, especially in the western plains and the south of the country (21). Irrigation is therefore increasingly vital to maintain agricultural production: 48% of arable land is irrigated, and agriculture consumes 60% of available water (22) (13).

Since the 2000s, the decline in livestock farming in favor of crops, particularly cereals, has led to an increase in the use of synthetic organic fertilizers (on average 120 kg of nitrates/ha), threatening water quality (16). However, pesticide use remains negligible compared to Western European countries. This is primarily due to a lack of financial resources rather than ecological concerns (13) (18).

The intensification of part of Albania's agriculture has led to the erosion of certain farmlands, resulting in their impoverishment and loss of productive capacity (reduced organic matter, nitrogen and phosphorus content in soils) (16).

Albanian agriculture also affects biodiversity (particularly bee populations) through intensive management, the opening up of farmland (removal of hedgerows) and the drainage of wetlands (16) (47).

However, these various impacts only concern intensive farming systems. Small-scale subsistence farming, which is still in the majority, contributes to the preservation of ecosystems through its practices (18).

The role of organic farming in Albanian agriculture

In 2010, organic farms represented just 0.02% of the agricultural area. These are mainly large-scale farmers producing for export. Despite the limited development of organic farming, Albania has 2 organic farming certification bodies, a dedicated research organization (Institute for Organic Agriculture - IOA) and a producer organization providing technical advice, the Organic Agriculture Association (BioAdria) (9). The Sustainable Agriculture Support in Albania project, launched in 2009 at the initiative of the Swiss Cooperation Agency, supports organic farming by providing technical assistance and facilitating access to organic inputs for producers. Support is provided by IOA and BioAdria.



FATMIR GURI

"There is a low use of chemical inputs (pesticides and fertilizers) because it costs a lot and farmers cannot afford it, not because of environmental awareness. It makes it easy to convert to organic agriculture. Farmers need guidance and extra investment to make it possible."

Fatmir Guri, Head of Economy and Policies of Rural Development Department, Agricultural University of Tirana

Farmers are poorly informed and unaware of the issues involved in protecting natural resources. However, certain traditional practices are beneficial to the environment (limited use of chemical inputs, trees to prevent erosion, plant cover, drainage channels, etc.) (18). Agroecological or sustainable production is not valued as such, as the local organic market is not structured. In addition, farmers lack information and understanding of the organic label, as well as the financial resources to access the label (18).

Ambitious action is needed at both local and national levels to strengthen organic farming. Especially because Albania committed to achieving the European Green Deal target of 25% of its land devoted to organic farming by 2030, a sine qua non for joining the European Union (39).

Olive processing generates waste

Olive oil processing is an important activity in Albania. This activity generates 2 main types of waste: solid waste, known as pomace, which can be reused to fertilize the soil or as heating material; and liquid waste, known as margines, which are potentially toxic for the soil and marine biodiversity if discharged into the environment without prior treatment. Although legislation exists, the lack of information and awareness among processors, the lack of treatment infrastructures and the absence of controls lead to sometimes significant pollution of soils and waterways (36).

Consumers with little awareness of environmental issues

Albanian consumers are still not very aware of the sustainability issues involved in their food practices, preferring price and freshness as their primary purchasing criteria. Moreover, there is often confusion between fresh produce from small rural producers and organic products. This can be explained by a lack of information, awareness and inspirational stories to guide consumers in their purchasing and eating habits (43).

Nevertheless, there is a timid but growing demand from informed consumers, especially in the capital Tirana, for products with environmental and health credentials. The supply of organic products for local consumption is developing through a few grocery stores and initiatives but remains very rare and reserved for a higher-income segment of the population (45).

Since the end of the communist dictatorship (1990), the country's per capita consumption of animal products (particularly mutton) has risen steadily. This is due to an increase in purchasing power and the end of a long period of restriction. In 2017, meat consumption in Albania reached 47 kg/year/person, which is close to the world average (43 kg/year/person) and much lower than the average for Western European countries (around 84 kg/year/person in France in 2020) (25). However, the experts interviewed point to a stagnation or even a reduction in consumption in recent years, for both economic and health reasons (43).



ROVENA
DEMAJ

"People are concerned because there are no controls on the use of pesticides. But they don't have certified organic food to refer to. There is a misunderstanding of what organic food is: Sometimes they refer to organic on just "fresh" food. Some companies have the UE organic label, for export mostly but also for the local market. But it is very isolated, and expensive. Only the Albanian upper middle class can access it."

Rovena Demaj, executive director, Food Bank of Albania

Little biowaste recovery in Albania, but promising initiatives in Tirana

In Tirana, waste is collected and processed by the Municipality of Tirana. A differentiated collection system for cardboard, metal and plastic waste has been set up, using sorting garbage bins. In 2019, the Municipality carried out an experiment in sorting and collecting biowaste on a neighborhood scale. However, the experiment was unsuccessful due to a lack of awareness and commitment among residents (18).

Furthermore, retailers are not incentivised to donate their unsold produce to food aid associations. As a result, unsold goods are often thrown away (44). The Municipality of Tirana has taken ambitious action by setting up a partnership with several supermarket chains to recover their unsold produce, which is then distributed through social centers run by the local authority (48). It also wants to develop on-farm composting to meet producers' needs for organic fertilizers (18).

IV. Food governance

STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING AND ANALYSIS

This stakeholder mapping was carried out with the experts interviewed in Tirana. It aims to position the main categories of actors in the food system according to their degree of commitment and their capacity to impact the sustainability of the food system.



THE MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA'S COMPETENCES FOR FOOD SYSTEMS

The decentralization process launched in 2014 led to a revision of the administrative boundaries of the municipalities. The Municipality of Tirana has seen its perimeter expanded, integrating peri-urban and even rural territories with an agricultural vocation. In 2016, the Rural Economic Development Department was created within the Municipality to support the development of these areas. The process of revising administrative boundaries has been accompanied by a strengthening of municipal competencies and financial resources. As a result, the Municipality of Tirana is able to mobilize a range of skills to take action on food systems:

- Infrastructure and public services: water supply, sewage disposal, waste management, parks and public spaces.
- Local economic development: preparation of development programs, regulation and operation of markets and trade networks, support for the development of small businesses, particularly in agriculture, veterinary services, protection and enhancement of local forests and pastures.
- Social, cultural and recreational responsibilities: safeguarding and promoting local historical heritage and cultural assets, organizing leisure activities, and social services (including orphanages, crèches, and retirement homes) (19).

The Municipality of Tirana is committed to a sustainable food system beyond its mandate

The Mayor of Tirana is particularly committed to supporting the local agricultural economy and developing a sustainable food system for Tirana. In this respect, the Municipality has taken the liberty of stepping outside its strict mandate in order to take ambitious action: (48)

- Digital inventory of Tirana's farmers in order to identify them and provide them with better support;
- Technical advice to small-scale food producers in Tirana to increase their production;
- Annual agricultural fair (in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry): exhibition and sale of products from small-scale local and Albanian producers and processors in downtown Tirana for 3 to 4 days, with free access for producers.
- Creation and management of an AgroHub, the first public wholesale market: free selling space for small-scale farmers, centralization in a single location of players supporting the agricultural sector, etc.
- Distribution of snacks to kindergartens and nurseries in Tirana: definition of snack composition with dieticians, sourcing of fresh local produce, subsidized snacks to make them more affordable for parents.
- Agreements with certain supermarket chains to recover unsold food, which is then distributed through social centers managed by the Municipality;
- Support and distribution of food baskets to isolated and vulnerable elderly people in the aftermath of the 2019 earthquakes and the COVID-19 health crisis (40);
- Signature of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (2015) and participation in the European FOOD TRAILS project: through this project, the Municipality aims to create a comprehensive food policy focusing on food waste, access to healthy, quality food for all and the promotion of sustainable food systems (17).

At a national level, despite an agricultural policy geared towards the development of intensive, export-oriented production, a number of noteworthy initiatives are underway to build sustainable food systems:

- Participation in the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly Foundation (since 2015): The country has set up the National Food and Nutrition Committee and a secretariat to support its operation, as well as coordination structures established at regional and local levels (41).
- Participation in the "Food Systems National Dialogues" following the Food Systems Summit organized in 2021: this consultation process aims to co-construct a sustainable food strategy at the national level based on the results and objectives set at the 2021 Summit.

An underdeveloped civil society

Although a few associative or private initiatives in favor of sustainable food systems have emerged in recent years, they remain rare and often lack the support they need to become established. As independent associations and businesses were banned during the communist dictatorship, there remains a cultural barrier to their development, despite more than 30 years of post-communism. Moreover, civil society does not benefit from any financial or technical support from the Albanian State or Municipalities (associations are often dependent on foreign backers, such as foundations, international organizations or cooperation agencies) (45).

Academic players are dynamic and carry out research into the sustainability of the Albanian food system. However, they suffer from a lack of connection with public authorities to be able to advise them and influence political decisions (43).

A lack of trust and confidence that limits the participation of citizens and local stakeholders in decision-making processes

The experts interviewed for this study point to a general lack of trust among Albanians towards public authorities, associations and companies, and other citizens in general (42). A Europe-wide study shows that less than 10% of Albanians claim to trust others, compared with over 90% in Northern Europe (48). This mistrust works against the mechanisms of citizen participation and consultation that are so essential to building a local food policy that is acceptable to all. Today, we need to build a new narrative around sustainable food in order to create vocation and a desire to commit to the development of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive food system in Tirana (43).



GENCI KOJDHELI

"The Mayor of Tirana is very committed to the development of an inclusive local agricultural economy. Because of this commitment and Tirana's position as capital, the Municipality allows itself to step outside its strict mandate to take ambitious action."

Genci Kojdheli, General Director of Integration, Strategic Projects and Economic Development, Municipality of Tirana



ELENA KOKTHI

"We need to change or build a new narrative to guide food habits towards sustainability. We need a vision to bring all stakeholders together. We also need better information and knowledge transfer from Universities to decision makers."

Elena Kokthi, Associated Professor, Lecturer & Researcher at Faculty of Biotechnology and Food, Agricultural University of Tirana

A FEW INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS

MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA - MUNICIPAL WHOLESAL MARKET "AGROHUB"

- Public market providing free space for smallscale farmers
- Centralisation of the organizations accompanying the agricultural sector

MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA - PROMOTING LOCAL SMALLSCALE FARMERS PRODUCTS

- "Made In Tirana": brand created by the Municipality to promote Tirana products
- Agricultural fair: annual event showcasing Albanian small-scale farmers

"WE ARE WHAT WE EAT" RESTAURANT AND BLERINA FARM - BLERINA BOMBAJ

- A restaurant in the center of Tirana: healthy recipes made with fresh local products
- An agritourism infrastructure and restaurant on the outskirts of Tirana: Blerina Farm

MIA (MADE IN ALBANIA) ORGANIC

- Shop and online platform for albanian fresh and processed food
- Certified and non-certified organic products

LUAN BALILI - PRODUCING FRESH FOOD IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

- Transforming a parking lot into a green area for growing fruits and vegetables
- Company selling fruits and vegetables to inhabitants of surrounding buildings

PAZARI I RI - TOURISTIC MARKET

- Central Tirana
- Open governance: board with sellers, farmers, restaurants, and municipality

SLOW FOOD CHEF'S ALLIANCE

- Network of committed restaurants working with local products from smallscale farmers
- 21 active chefs in Albania

NARI LUNDRA - PROMOTING HEALTHY AND LOCAL FOOD

- Agro Farm: production of fruits, vegetables, olive oil and meat
- Restaurant Në Lundër: recipes made of fresh products coming from the farm
- Catering services: production of food for private schools

FOOD BANK OF ALBANIA

- Albanian NGOs distributing food to people in need through NGOs dealing with families in difficulties, families of prisoners, etc.
- Fresh food project: collecting fresh food from farmers

LUGA E ARGJENDIE - PROMOTING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD HABITS

- Created by Dhurata Thanasi
- Shop for local products
- Awareness-raising workshops and conferences

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE OF TIRANA - PILOT PROJECT FOR SCHOOL GARDENS

- 5 piloting schools in Albania, 1 in Tirana

BLERI DERVISHI - RESTAURANT GZONA

- Slow Food Chef's Alliance member
- Supplying fresh food from smallscale farmers in Albania

ASSESSMENT OF THE “AGROHUB INITIATIVE”

MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA

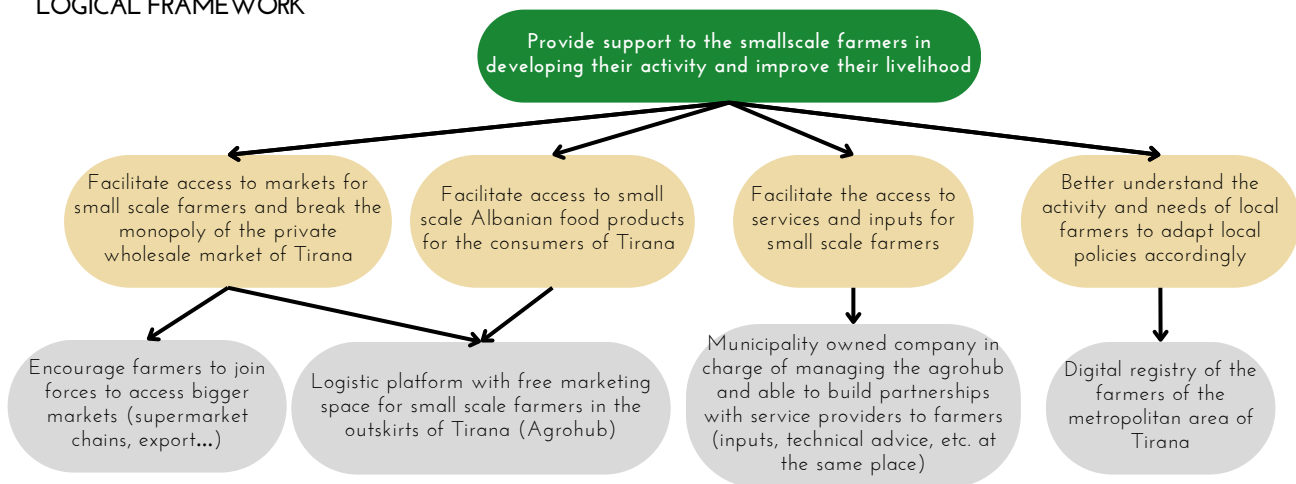
The assessment of the initiatives aims to:

- Assess the impact of the initiative on the priority sustainability issues of the food system;
- Determine the replicability of the initiatives and the conditions for their replicability;
- Identify success factors and areas for improvement.

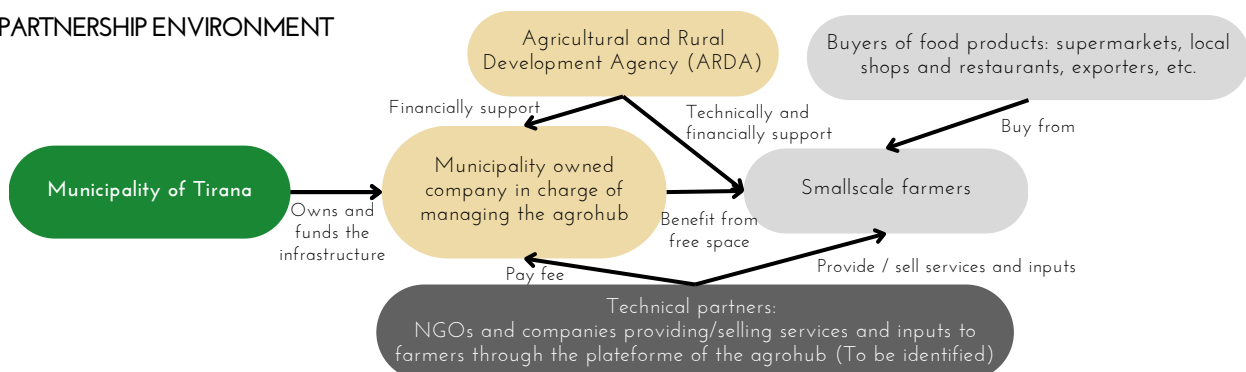
NATURE OF THE PROJECT AND TERRITORIAL SCOPE

- Target of the project: Smallscale farmers of Albania and specifically around Tirana
- Financial resources mobilised: Municipality
- Scope of action: Albania and more specifically metropolitan area of Tirana
- The expected level of impact: Better access to market and adapted services and inputs for smallscale farmers
- Stage of the progress of the initiative: Final stage - fully operational in February 2024

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK



PARTNERSHIP ENVIRONMENT



AGROHUB INFRASTRUCTURE



Source: Tirana Post

AGROHUB - AERIAL VIEW



Source: Priza.AI

SMALL-SCALE FARMING IN TIRANA

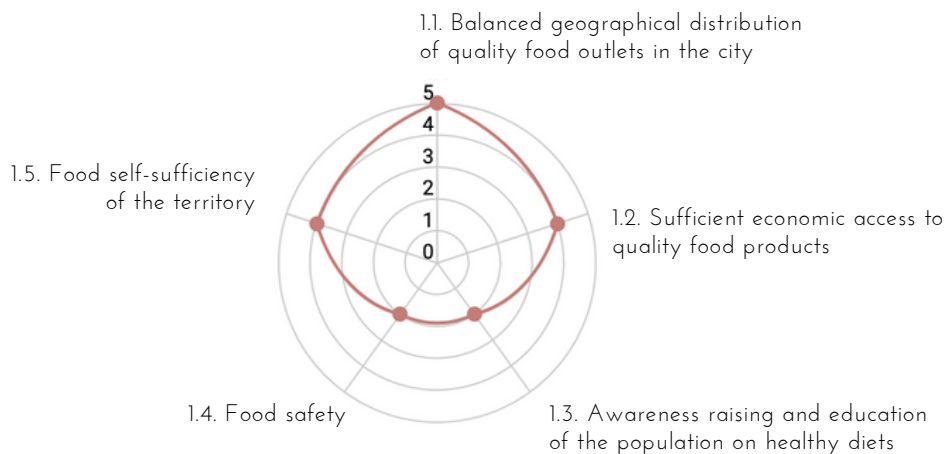


Source: Lets Food

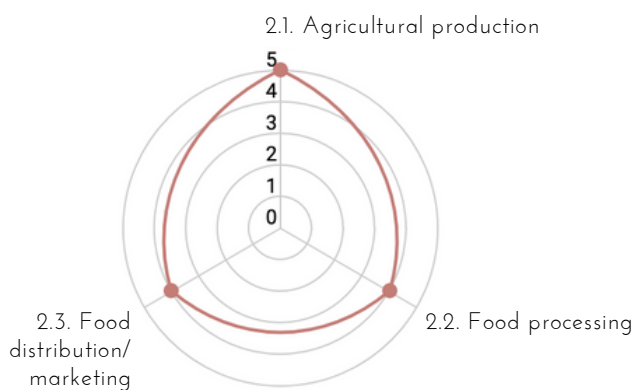
CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOOD SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY

The various illustrations represent the components and sub-components of a sustainable food system as defined in the methodology proposed by Let's Food. This assessment was carried out by Geni Kojdheli, Director of General of Integration, Strategic Projects and Economic Department Service of the Municipality of Tirana. 1: Low contribution of the initiative to the sustainability component ; 5: High contribution of the initiative to the component.

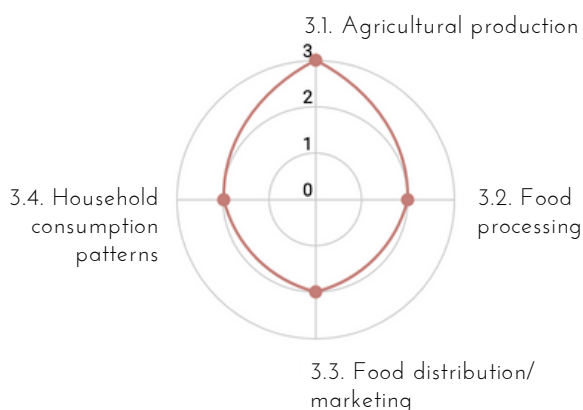
• FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION



• ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY



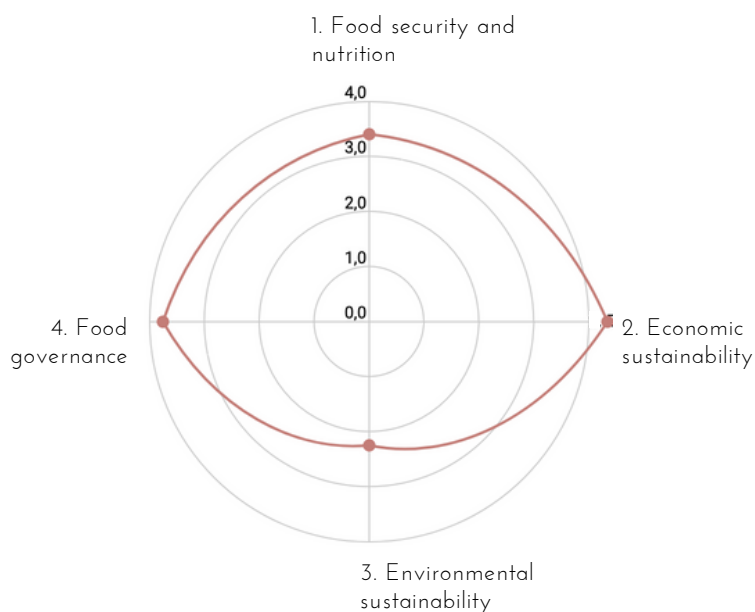
• ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



• FOOD GOVERNANCE



CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOOD SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY



Through its various actions, the Municipality of Tirana contributes to the **4 dimensions of a sustainable food system**. In particular, it contributes to the creation of an **inclusive food system** that creates sustainable jobs, through the establishment of its AgroHub and the "Made in Tirana" territorial brand. The Municipality also ensures a good distribution of food outlets in the city through its markets, and aims to increase the territory's food autonomy through its support for small local producers (contribution to the "**food and nutritional security**" component). In addition, its political commitment, its involvement in various international cooperation projects and the organization of convivial events around the local terroir have enabled it to achieve a score of 4 out of 5 in terms of **food governance**. However, its involvement in reducing the **environmental impact** of the region's agricultural and food activities remains limited.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT) MATRIX FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE AGROHUB

STRENGTHS

- Municipal **competencies** are limited, but Tirana being a capital city, they allow themselves to overstep.
- Infrastructure managed by a municipal **company**: wider abilities to collaborate with technical partners, possibility to build a business model based on self-financing to not rely on public funds, facilitated access to funds (compared to a Municipality - loans for example).

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of willingness from farmers to work together (fear of **cooperatives** coming from the communist dictatorship era, lack of trust, etc.).
- No tool or mean used to ensure transparency and control of **food prices**.
- No incentive to promote **agroecology** or sustainable agriculture.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Strong **political engagement** coming from the Mayor.
- Involvement of Tirana Municipality in international projects such as **FOOD TRAILS**.
- **Urgent need and demand** from farmers to break the monopoly of the private wholesale market of Tirana (expensive for farmers to access).
- Political will to develop a **label or certification** framework to better identify the products made in Tirana sold through the AgroHub (but no appropriate solution found yet).

THREATS

- The **governance** of the Agrohub is limited to the Municipality for now: risk of lack of engagement from the stakeholders (buyers, technical partners, farmers, etc.).
- **Competitiveness** with the private wholesale market.
- Lack of **attractivity** of the agricultural sector and artificialization of agricultural land.

ASSESSMENT OF THE INITIATIVE BASED ON INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH

- **Genci Kojdheli**, Director of General of Integration, Strategic Projects and Economic Department Service, Municipality of Tirana
- **Besmira Haskaj**, former Head of Rural Economic Development Sector, Municipality of Tirana

ASSESSMENT OF THE “BLERINA FARM”

AGROTOURISM - BLERINA BOMBAJ

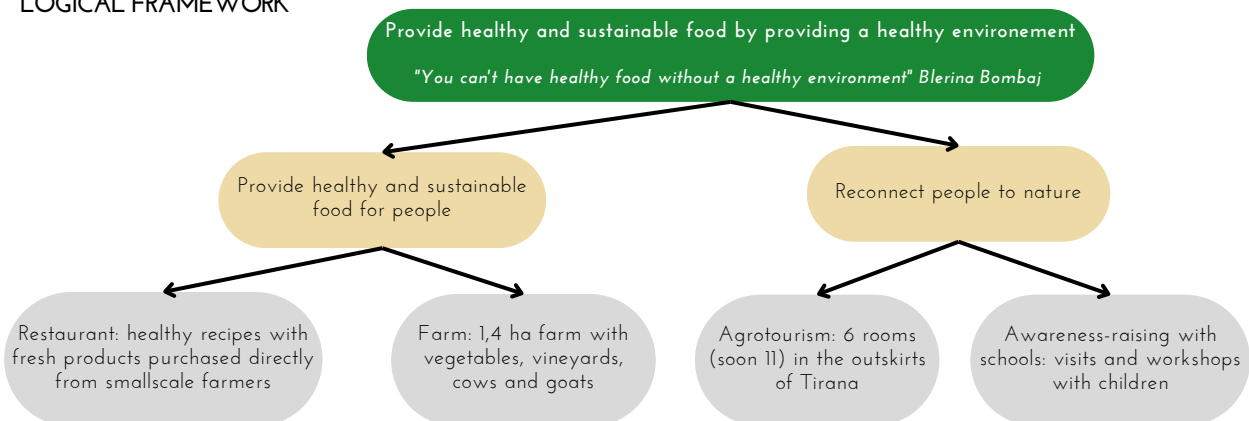
The assessment of the initiatives aims to:

- Assess the impact of the initiative on the priority sustainability issues of the food system;
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- Identify success factors and areas for improvement.

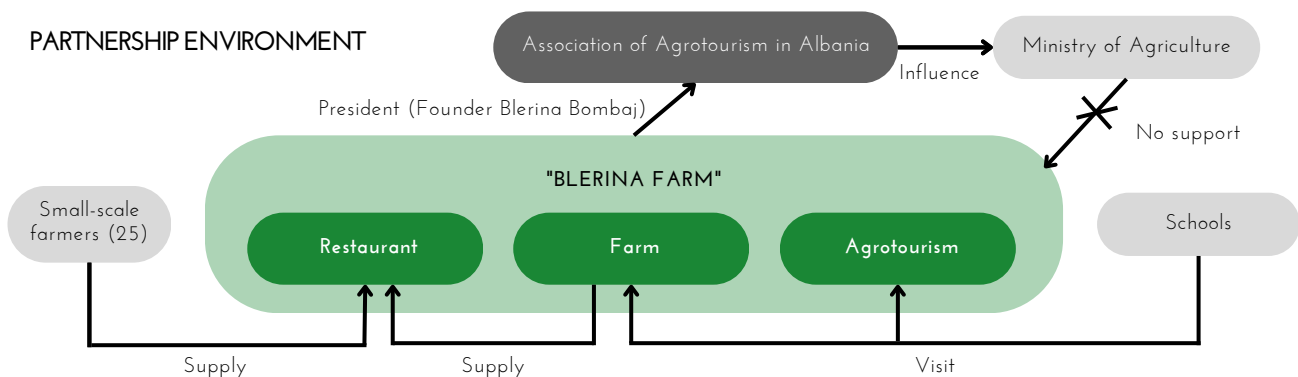
NATURE OF THE PROJECT AND TERRITORIAL SCOPE

- Target of the project: Albanian citizens.
- Financial resources mobilised: Self-funded.
- Scope of action: Albania and specifically Tirana city and suburbs.
- The expected level of impact: Healthy and sustainable food for all and a strong connection to nature
- Stage of the progress of the initiative: Operating.

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK



PARTNERSHIP ENVIRONMENT





AGROTOURISM

Source: Let's Food



FARM (WITH BLERINA BOMBAJ)

Source: Let's Food



RESTAURANT

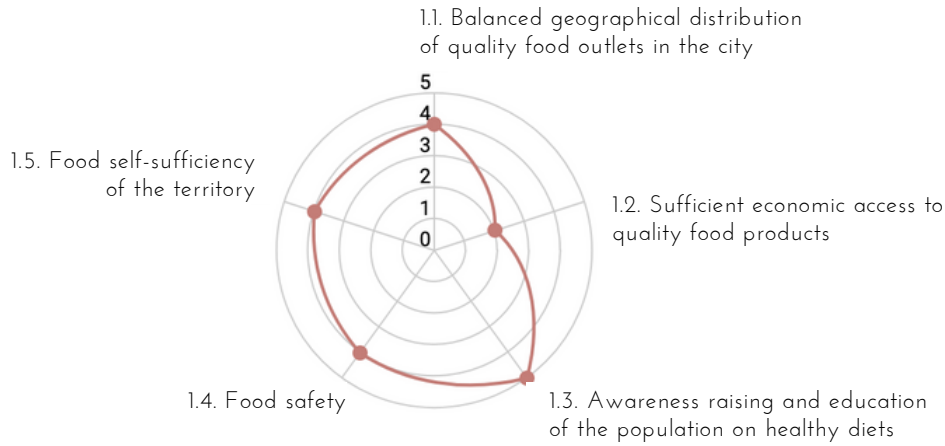
Source: Let's Food

CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOOD SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY

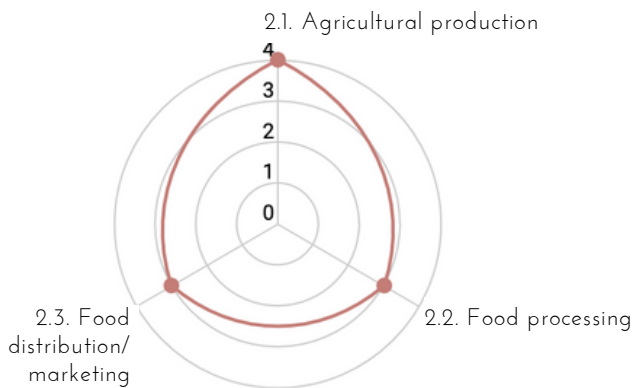
The various illustrations represent the components and sub-components of a sustainable food system as defined in the methodology proposed by Let's Food. This assessment was carried out by Let's Food, based on an interview with Blerina Bombaj, founder of Blerina Farm.

1: Low contribution of the initiative to the sustainability component ; 5: High contribution of the initiative to the component.

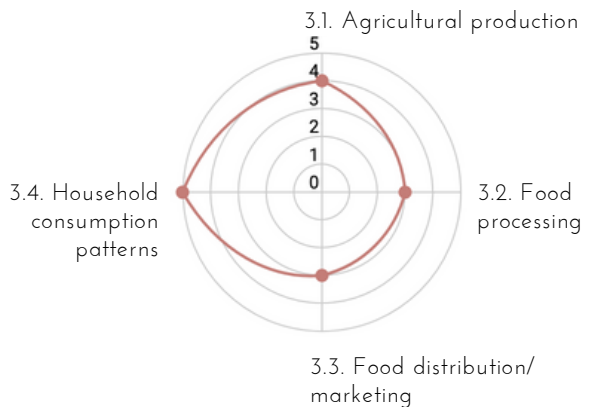
• FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION



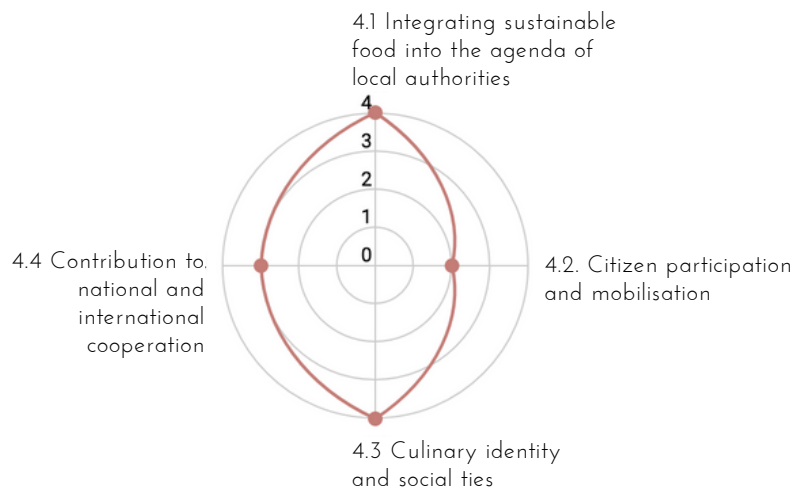
• ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY



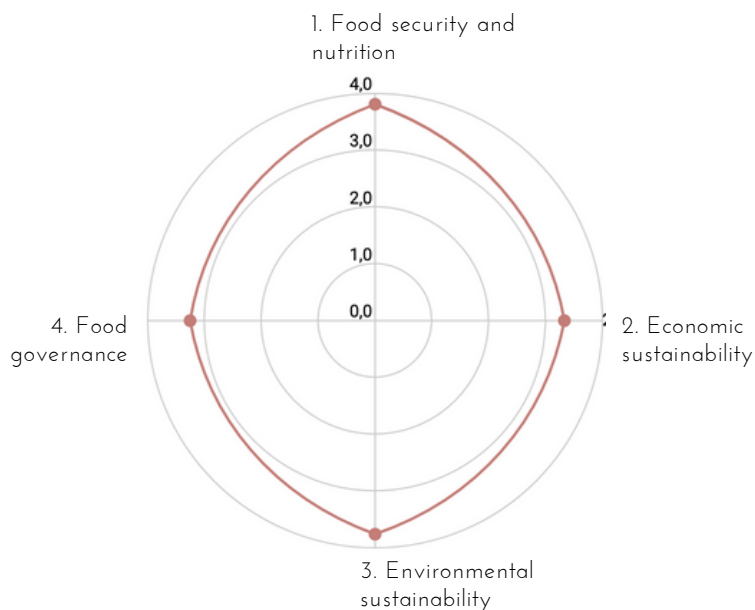
• ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



• FOOD GOVERNANCE



CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOOD SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY



Thanks to its pluriactivity, Blerina Farm addresses the **4 dimensions of a sustainable food system**. Organic production and processing on the farm contribute to **environmental sustainability**. Agreements with small local producers and processors to supply the restaurant contribute to building an **inclusive economic environment**. Awareness-raising activities on sustainable agriculture and healthy diets through the agrotourism facility and workshops with children contribute to **food and nutritional security**. Finally, Blerina Bombaj's role as president of the national agrotourism association enables her to advocate for favorable conditions for the development of agrotourism in Albania (contribution to the **food governance axis**).

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT) MATRIX FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE INITIATIVE

STRENGTHS

- **Strong commitment** of the founder Blerina Bombaj and her family (family business).
- **Multi-activity** providing better economic resilience (farm, restaurant, agrotourism, workshops, etc.).
- Proximity to the **capital city of Tirana and the airport**: easy access for the Albanian upper mid-class.
- **Family land** to start the business.
- Strong **network of small-scale farmers** in the area, in Albania and Greece.

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of proper **road infrastructures** to reach the agrotourism (a new road has just been built).
- Lack of **certification** on agrotourism infrastructure.
- High **prices** compared to the average salary in Albania: targeted to the Albanian upper mid-class.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **UN Food Systems National Dialogues** focusing on agrotourism as a way to support smallscale farmers.
- **Financial support** coming from the Albanian Food Authority, but only for the agrotourism infrastructures implemented in rural areas (Blerina Farm is located in an areas considered as "urban").
- Strong visibility of Blerina Bombaj towards Albanian citizens (through social media and TV shows).

THREATS

- The farm is maintained by a couple approaching **retirement**.
- Lack of **qualified human resources** willing to work in agriculture.
- Lack of experience and training courses on **business creation and management** in Albania (for potential successors/buyers when/if Blerina's family wants to stop the activity).

ASSESSMENT OF THE INITIATIVE BASED ON INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH

- **Blerina Bombaj**, founder and manager of "Blerina Farm"

CONCLUSIONS

>> STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT) MATRIX - BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL FOOD SYSTEM IN TIRANA

STRENGTHS

- Strong **food culture**, still well protected from westernization.
- Strong culture of individual **gardening production** for own consumption: higher individual food resilience.
- Diverse and well-distributed **food selling points** across the city.
- Numerous **small-scale farmers** around Tirana, producing a wide range of products.

WEAKNESSES

- No proper **national food aid framework**, no incentive for citizens and consumers to give, very little culture of solidarity.
- Lots of informal sellers who are not subject to **food safety controls**, threatening consumers' health.
- Fear of **agricultural cooperatives**, as a legacy from more than 40 years of communism dictatorship.
- Many extremely small farms are unable to **access urban formal markets**.
- Lack of **infrastructure** to collect, process and market agricultural products.
- Low **consumer awareness** on environment-related issues.
- No solution to sort and **recycle organic waste** in Tirana.
- Fear and **lack of trust** in one another and specifically public authorities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Growing interest in developing **agrotourism** infrastructures to promote small scale farmers and rural lifestyles.
- Recent development of « **protected designations of origin** » labels to promote local products from small scale farmers.
- Low use of **chemicals** in agriculture therefore great potential to transition to organic agriculture.

THREATS

- **Westernization of diets**, food habits and what is socially valued (especially for the youngsters): higher consumption of food rich in fat, sugar and salt.
- Dependence on **food imports** to feed Tirana population.
- **Artificialization** of agricultural land around Tirana.
- Unfair **market competition** due to the bilateral "Stabilisation and Association" agreement between the EU and Albania.
- **Climate change** and its threat to water availability.
- Growing **inequalities** in the different neighborhoods of Tirana with part of the population that can't access proper food.

>> STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT) MATRIX - STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING

STRENGTHS

- **Capital city**, a municipality with higher resources, possibility for the Municipality to overstep its strict **competencies**.
- **Financial grants** distributed to farmers by the Albanian Food Authority.
- **Committed Mayor** and local administration developing ambitious projects for sustainable food systems.

WEAKNESSES

- Very low **access to financial grants** provided by the Albanian Food Authority for small scale farmers
- **Double-sided agricultural policy** led by the Ministry of Agriculture: supporting small-scale farming while promoting large-scale intensive farming for exports.
- **Numerous middlemen** between farmers and consumers, negatively impacting the farmers' revenues.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Emerging **initiatives and NGOs** working in building fairer marketing conditions for farmers in Tirana.
- Participation of Albania to the **UN Food Systems National Dialogues**.
- Participation of Tirana in **international cooperation projects** such as FOOD TRAILS and MADRE.

THREATS

- Development of **supermarket** chains that impose their prices on farmers, and introduce highly processed food on the Albanian market.
- Monopoly of 2 **private wholesale markets** around Tirana.
- Underdeveloped **civil society**, very weak counter-power.

CONCLUSIONS

>> CONTRIBUTION OF TIRANA FOOD SYSTEM INITIATIVES TO THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

Methodology

- Identification of 11 fields for action in favour of sustainable territorial food systems
- Distribution of the 17 SDGs according to the 4 dimensions of sustainability of a food system (see proposed diagram).
- Qualitative evaluation of the contribution of the local food system initiatives to each of the dimensions based on the interviews conducted, bibliographic elements and initiatives identified.
- The evaluation consists of the attribution of a grade from 1 to 4 or 5, one point given for each SDG addressed.

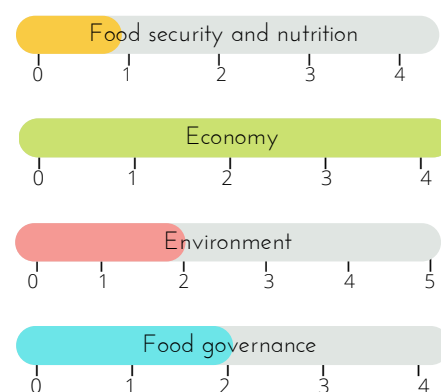


More information on the methodology used in the methodological guide "[Mettre en action les objectifs de développement durable de l'ONU par les projets alimentaires territoriaux](#)"

Contribution

23 initiatives identified in Tirana:

- Adding value to local products through agri-food processing: 1
- Development of short value chains: 3
- Education on healthy and climate-friendly diets: 2
- Enhancement of local heritage: 4
- Financial support for organic or sustainable agriculture: 2
- Food insecurity and social cohesion: 2
- Food waste management and fight against food waste: 2
- Local food governance: 1
- Protection and enhancement of agricultural land: 1
- Sustainable canteens: 2
- Urban agriculture: 3



RECOMMENDATIONS & COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES

#1

Encourage the creation of farmers' groups through incentives and by showing successful examples from elsewhere

- **Targets:** Municipality of Tirana, Albanian Food Authority
- **Examples:** Palestine Social and Economic Development Centre, Timouras Cooperative: Cooperative of young caper and fig producers in the province of Taounate (Morocco).

#2

Develop a territorial brand that promotes local products grown or raised without chemical products (build an adapted charter) (or adapt the "Made in Tirana" label)

- **Target:** Municipality of Tirana
- **Example:** The participatory guarantee system of the RIAM farmers' markets (Morocco).

#3

Limit access to municipal markets to small-scale food producers only through a farmers' market charter

- **Targets:** Municipality of Tirana, Market Agency
- **Example:** The "Marchés de producteurs de pays" brand of the Chambers of Agriculture (France)

#4

Experiment with the implementation of a school canteen in Tirana's primary schools

- **Targets:** Municipality of Tirana, Albanian Ministry of Education
- **Example:** "Ma Cantine Autrement" programme, Montpellier (France)

#5

Build a multi-stakeholder food governance body led by the Municipality to promote the exchange of information and develop synergies

- **Target:** Municipality of Tirana
- **Example:** City Food System actor network platform, led by GUPAP (Gaza)

#6

Build an incentive-based regulatory framework to establish a functioning national food aid system

- **Target:** Albanian government
- **Example:** In France, Garot law (2016), EGalim law (2018).

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- (46) Kikino M., 2023. Interview conducted by Let's Food with Mandi Kikino, consultant, former chef, March 2023.
- (47) Kuliçi M., 2023. Interview conducted by Let's Food with Manjola Kuliçi, Associated Professor and Researcher at the Faculty of Biotechnology and Food, Agricultural University of Tirana, March 2023.
- (48) Kojdheli G., 2023. Interview conducted by Let's Food with Genci Kojdheli, General Director of Integration, Strategic Projects and Economic Development, Municipality of Tirana, March 2023.
- (49) Bombaj B., 2023. Interview conducted by Let's Food with Blerina Bombaj, Nutritionist and Director of the "Blerina Farm" agrotourism initiative, March 2023.

