

SARA TORNABENE, PhD

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WORK EXPERIENCE

RAAS CMCC | Venice, IT | Associate Scientist, Policy Analyst | 12 January 2026–Current

- Senior research scientist designing, coordinating and implementing scientific research projects for the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaptation Strategies division
- Conduct research activities related to EU-funded projects on climate adaptation, including Adaptation-Hubs, ARCADIA and CLIMAAX

APRE | Rome, IT | Project Manager | 19 May 2025–31 December 2025

- Research and Innovation Project Manager designing and managing projects within the Horizon Europe Pillar II, Cluster 2–Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society, Cluster 5–Climate, Energy and Mobility, Cluster 6–Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment, and the Adaptation to Climate Change Mission
- Designed R&I proposal (RIA, IA and CSA); Managed proposal development processes, including consortium and bilateral alignment meetings, feedback processes, proposal writing and editing
- Managed funded projects, including WP alignment meetings, general assemblies, and bilateral meetings; Developed tailored stakeholder engagement activities to strengthen ecosystem development
- Tracked and monitored financial and technical progress for reporting purposes

City of Boston | Boston, US | Assistant Director of Policy | 5 September 2023–30 May 2025

Assistant Director of the Greater Boston Coastal Resilience Jobs Alliance, funded by the Federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Ready Workforce Grant Initiative - \$9.8 Million

- Developed the grant application, including background research, international best practices identification, alignment with federal, national and local policies
- Management and strategic development of the Alliance, including workforce development system alignment, needs assessments, and gap analyses; development of work plans, GANTT charts, and project timelines; implementation of monitoring and compliance strategies
- Stakeholder outreach and engagement, including organization and facilitation of regular meetings, capacity building events, and policy dialogues involving 30+ governmental, academic, and civic society partners; manage and facilitate partners' alignment and coalition-building efforts
- Monitored federal-level policy changes and ensured alignment and compliance with federal, state, and local policies and goals
- Strategic communication and reporting, including developing, executing, and coordinating communication strategies tailored to the type of audience; developed federal semi-annual progress reports and supporting documents
- Staff supervision and coordination

Lead Boston Green New Deal Workforce Needs Assessment - \$210,000

- Managed and coordinated the activities of two external research teams, two advisory committees, and cross-agency government expert teams; designed and adapted the research process to emerging needs
- Monitored and aligned the research study with local and state-level policies
- Developed, managed, and coordinated the GND Internal working group; provided strategic planning support; identified and implemented strategies to create opportunities for staff collaboration

Lead [Life Sciences Workforce Development Initiative](#) - \$5.2 Million

- Management and strategic development of the Life Sciences Career Alliance, involving 1 intermediary organization, 8 workforce development organizations (including academic institutions), and other stakeholders; organized and facilitated Alliance convenings; managed and facilitated partners'

alignment and coalition-building efforts; coordinated internal teams working on the initiative; responsible for external partners' engagement and relationship-building

- Co-designed data collection, monitoring, and evaluation efforts, including the development of evaluation metrics and implementation of monitoring meetings with partners
- Strategic communication, including developing the structure and content of the webpage and newsletter, developing and implementing a communication plan to align internal and external communications efforts; prepared talking points, memos, policy briefs, and presentations

UMass Boston | Boston, MA | Research Associate | 1 May 2023–25 August 2023

- Developed a social justice urban design training curriculum for the Summer Program in Urban Planning and Community Development, offered to disadvantaged youth in Boston
- Organized and coordinated regular staff meetings and mentor training; identified and coordinated weekly guest speakers and informational field trips
- Wrote, edited, and presented the final report for the summer school

UNC Charlotte | Charlotte, NC | Graduate Researcher and Project Coordinator – Changing Migrant Foodscapes (NSF CARRER grant No 1945132) | 21 August 2017–16 December 2022

- Responsible for outreach, relationship-building, and organization of meetings with stakeholders, community members, and business owners in Washington DC and Charlotte; Mentored, advised, and coordinated the work of undergraduate students
- Designed, managed, adapted to Covid-19 restrictions, and implemented a comparative mixed-method research project; Managed, coordinated, and implemented a comparative study across three metropolitan areas; Designed and implemented two mixed-method research studies
- Designed and executed more than 80+ virtual and in-person in-depth interviews – 45 in English/Spanish - designed and administered more than 35 surveys; designed and facilitated several focus groups, gentrification field surveys and collective mapping activities
- Collected, organized, cleaned, analyzed, and visualized secondary data; Performed statistical, regression, textual, and spatial analyses of primary and secondary data; collected, organized, and analyzed qualitative and quantitative spatial data in ArcGIS Pro; assessed economic development policies and developed policy reports; Designed, created, organized, and maintained a publicly accessible database; ensured data quality
- Developed and revised applications for grants, fellowships, and awards and received a total of \$17,100 to support research activities
- Developed visual representation of data and disseminated findings for academic and non-academic audiences; co-organized and facilitated 3 conference sessions; presented research findings at 6 conferences; co-designed, developed, and coordinated 4 virtual events; Designed and managed 2 project websites to disseminate research findings

University of Memphis | Memphis, TN | Visiting Scholar and Research Assistant | 25 February 2015–13 May 2017

- Designed, created, and implemented the kick-off event and participatory activities that launched the University of Memphis Design Collaborative and led to the Memphis 3.0 Comprehensive Plan
- Collected primary data; conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation activities in school cafeterias in support of the project "School Meals: the social meaning and impact of food assistance"; Organized, managed, and facilitated students' fieldwork activities
- Provided bilingual translation (Italian-English), cultural mediation, and teaching support during the 2015 and 2016 editions of the Community Planning and Ecological Design summer school in Sicily

University of Catania | Catania, Italy | LabPEAT Research member | 7 January 2013–24 February 2015

- Research member of the Laboratory for the Ecological and Environmental Planning of the Territory, an action-research lab addressing social and environmental inequalities in Eastern Sicily
- Led and facilitated stakeholder working groups and dialogues in support of the development of the Simeto River Agreement; co-designed and co-wrote community reports - the Simeto River Agreement and the Community Development Plan for the City of Paterno; presented findings to different stakeholders
- Co-designed, facilitated, and implemented participatory research activities and community events in support of the Simeto River Valley action research process; co-designed, developed, and implemented participatory, service-learning, and collective-learning activities and events

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Geography | University of North Carolina Charlotte | Charlotte, North Carolina, USA | 7 November 2022; Graduation 16 December 2022

Dissertation title: *A Constellation of Economic Possibilities: Latinx Food-Based Diverse Collaborative Economies as Catalysts for More Sustainable Economic Futures.*

Dissertation Committee Chair: Dr. Colleen Hammelman; GPA: 4.0/4.0

Dual Master's Degree in City and Regional Planning and Applied Anthropology | University of Memphis | August 2016-May 2017*

*Not Completed, GPA: 4.0/4.0

MS in Architectural Engineering and Community Planning | University of Catania | 27 October 2014
Laurea Magistrale a Ciclo Unico in Ingegneria Edile Architettura (4/S)

Thesis Title: *The Video as A Tool in Participatory Action Research Processes in Planning: The Case of the Improve, Don't Remove Foote Homes Campaign (Memphis, TN, USA)*

Thesis chair: Dr. Filippo Gravagno; Thesis co-chair: Dr. Laura Saija; Grade: 110/110 Cum Laude, Thesis Recommended for Publication by the Graduate Faculty Committee in Architectural Engineering

SELECTED TRAINING AND CERTIFICATIONS

From Research to Policy: International Training on Evidence-Based Policy Making for Decent Work. International Training Center International Labour Organization, 2024, Credential ID 107048182

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Mother tongue: Italian; Other Language(s): English (bilingual); Spanish (A2)

Other skills:

Research: Mixed-method, engaged, and participatory action-research design and implementation; Primary and secondary data collection, cleaning, and analysis; Social network analysis; Policy Analysis; Editing, fact-checking, proofreading, and translations; Grant writing

Strategy and Management: Vision, strategic development and planning; Evidence-based policymaking; Stakeholders engagement and management; Outreach, partnership-building, and collaboration; Program design and evaluation; Timelines, work plans, effective team coordination; Event organization and facilitation
Leadership and Communication: Team leadership, staff supervision and coordination; Data visualization and communication for different types of audiences; Infographics, mapping, website content development and management; Storytelling; Public speaking and teaching

PUBLICATIONS

Academic Publications

Tornabene, S., & Raciti, A. (Forthcoming 2026). Beyond the Capitalist/Alternative Economic Binary: Diverse Economies in Urban Planning. In *Companion to Urban Planning*. Routledge.

Tornabene, S. (2025). Global Food Crisis (2007-2008). In J. J. Funke, W. Ahmed, I. Chatterjee, S. M. McCauley (Eds.), *Geography in the 21st Century: Defining Moments that Shaped Society [2 Volumes]* (1st ed., pp. 187-198). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Hammelman, C., Carr Salas, C., & Tornabene, S. (2024). Paving over taquerias to put up condos: constructing urban imaginaries of migrant foodscapes via digital food narratives. *Food, Culture & Society*, 27(4), 1126-1145

Salas, C. C., Hammelman, C., & Tornabene, S. (2022). "Looking for true Mexican food in Charlotte" Insights into How Authenticity Is Produced, Experienced, and Interpreted in Migrant Food Spaces. *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 22(2), 29-42

Tornabene, S., & Nilsson, I. (2021). Rail transit investments and economic development: Challenges for small businesses. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 94, 103087

Policy Briefs

Tornabene, S. (2024). Wage Theft in the United States: How to increase wage compliance and effectively advocate for workers protection.

Reports and strategic plans

With UMass Boston UPCD members (2023). (Re)Designing Lower Roxbury to Combat Increasing Extreme Heat. Available [here](#)

With CoPED members (2016). Community Development Plan for the City of Paterno

With Simeto River Valley community members (2014). Simeto River Agreement, Community Mapping, and Community Values, Projects, and Priorities for the Valley. Available [here](#)

Rome, 5/1/2026