

## Final comments on achievements of the FOOD2GATHER project



FOOD2GATHER explored the relations between food and public spaces in the context of migration. It focused on the role food plays in shaping opportunities for intercultural communication and relations between places and the peoples that inhabit them.

The CRP addressed the experience of food **in public spaces from a relational perspective** that focuses on the way **people connect with others and the environment physically and symbolically through a myriad of food-related practices**. Most particularly, FOOD2GATHER was interested in problematizing the possibilities and limitations of food as a driver of opportunities for intercultural communication and interaction and, thus, for integration and living together in European societies.

The concept to broaden our understanding of peoples' relational experiences through food in the public space was/is that of **'foodscapes'**. Research on foodscapes constitutes an innovative approach to address the nature, scope and limits of contemporary ideas of public space(s). We saw foodscapes as interlinked, socially constructed places wherein food practices, values, meanings and representations intersect with the material and environmental realities that sustain the experience of food. Foodscapes emerge thus as crucial agents in the construction of dynamic and reciprocal relationships among all the communities (migrant, refugee, and local) in Europe today. FOOD2GATHER aimed at **mapping human and nonhuman societies within foodscapes in order to understand and appraise the uses, accesses and behaviors that mark the public spaces – both at a spatial and digital level**. Through different but complementary ethnographic studies in six European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway), the project promoted cooperation between researchers, stakeholders and the civil society through fieldwork, joint learning and interactive collaboration. FOOD2GATHER *aims to think **about public space, with public space and for public space***.

The theme of forced migration is of crucial importance in contemporary European societies, especially for countries within the European Union, being one of the most sensitive policy issues under discussion with constant pressure on EU frontiers and internal borders, and the consequent partial suspension of Schengen by some countries. The framework outlined since 2014 to date is particularly relevant to Mediterranean Europe and the Balkans but has repercussions throughout the EU area: the disintegration of Libya as a political entity, the ten year long Syrian conflict, the continuous destabilization of Afghanistan, and the most recent Ukrainian conflict are all critical events that continue to fuel migratory flows. Incoming flows occur through the four following main routes: the central Mediterranean route (which more directly involves Italy), the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean route, the western Mediterranean route (which includes the African land enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla) and the Atlantic route from the African coasts towards the Canary Islands as access to the EU space: thousands of people on the move that, more often than not, have no interest to apply for international protection in the arrival countries. Hence the importance of having researched, through the privileged lens of food, contemporary European scenarios in the process of formation.

Although we consider our macro perspective, called contextual approach, the management tool and ways of disseminating with films, photo exhibitions and scientific articles and books as original contributions, we mean that **the most innovative/original scientific contribution(s) of FOOD2GATHER are related to conceptual framework and empirical approaches**. In short three dimensions:

**Our conceptual framework** called "negotiating foodscapes" was both a reflection and a self-reflection about food in public spaces. Our main theoretical objective was to critically consider the main concepts, both used in the proposal and to be used in the field. We proposed then to negotiate foodscapes by means of a dynamic approach of the main concepts: "Public space(s)" is one of them. The idea of "negotiating" within the project is to observe how foodscapes are at work and at the same time to actively contribute to them. FOOD2GATHER considers researchers negotiating foodscapes as well as how people negotiate foodscapes in public spaces.

[Our empirical perspective](#) builds on a combination of micro approach (WP3) and is based both on fieldwork and an experimental component (WP4). We conducted fieldwork in 6 countries with more than 19 case studies (1-6 case studies at communal level in each partner country). All case studies were focused on public spaces, and the way public spaces are stimulating, or not, social relations through the lens of food and migration.

[Our experimental approach](#) (WP4) included pilot projects in each participating country (for example, exhibitions, food trucks or other collaborative activities) in public spaces. They have been chosen during the last project period, through dialogues with associate partners and hybrid forums. FOOD2GATHER investigated the role food plays in the construction of identities, shaping senses of belonging - and thus in bringing people together or distancing them – for migrant populations in relation to European societies and vice versa. The central issue being how food may prompt reflexivity about identity, civic engagement, and mutual learning, as well as exclusion, between migrants and members of host societies. We explored questions: about the use of food as a relational resource for migrants, refugees and civil associations, about the protagonists of these initiatives and if they created empowerment for migrants and for local communities and about the role of food in reactivating memories and rituality, suspended by migration were addresses through the lens of foodscapes in public spaces. We also studied and answered questions directed towards the food-related initiatives, specifically targeted at migrants and refugees (i.e. what they reveal, who join in, who stay away) and explored how these initiatives can foster civic engagement and mutual intercultural knowledge. These questions were all investigated through the core conceptual framework of ‘foodscapes’, originally defined as [socially-constructed spaces wherein food-related practices, values, meanings and representations intersect with the material and environmental realities that sustain the availability of food](#)<sup>1</sup>.

[One innovative aspect](#) of our research is the constant negotiation of concepts and continuous adjustments to different research venues. Following Hannah Arendt, we decided not to limit the concept to physical or geographical boundaries or to predetermined typologies. With the pandemic in 2020 it turned to be useful as we noticed an expansion and change in digital and virtual public spaces. By adjusting to the digitalization of the public space and by digitalizing parts of our planned fieldwork, FOOD2GATHER underlined and played on purpose on the multifaceted dimension of the concept of public spaces, that is to say not only the political dimension, but also [the constitution of the public space through specific social interactions](#). We found out that while geographical, physical or temporal boundaries did not help to define a public space, the process of constructing the space was more interesting than the result, or definition. Public spaces are *Food for thoughts*, a space for dialogue where we share both food and stories. Public spaces are therefore a place for giving, receiving and acknowledging - each other. We think of public foodscape as non-traditional consumption places but more construction places where *goodness* is more important than *goods*.

[A second innovative aspect](#) of our research is that FOOD2GATHER explored [the various dimensions of cultural integration of migrants and locals in public spaces with focus on “foodscapes”](#), which are considered as crucial agents in the construction of dynamic and reciprocal relationships in urban and rural contexts of migration among all of the communities that find themselves in Europe today. Since food is one of the public arenas where societies come closer to “the other” through consumption practices<sup>2</sup>, foodscapes constituted a stimulating laboratory for the analysis of different paths of integration and thus contribute to the European understanding of “making up society”. The concept of integration –as well as the concepts of ‘insertion’ and ‘inclusion’ and, more broadly, notions like ‘living together’ and ‘cohabitation’ – were critically employed and applied throughout our research and seen in connection with notions of equality and justice. This concept turned out to be especially challenged during the period of the Covid pandemic.

We could observe that migrants are not only recipients of policies but are both agents within and producers of

---

<sup>1</sup> Dolphijn 2004, Goodman 2016; Johnston and Goodman 2015

<sup>2</sup> Martin 1998

public spaces like any member of the society. The study of foodscapes forced us to conduct a constant interplay between the conceptual and empirical dimensions throughout the research. Besides revisiting old concepts (such integration, intercultural encounters) new concepts have emerged from the empirical studies such as: agency and agentic potential, mobility, conviviality, trust and mistrust, food insecurity and food safety, among others. The study of foodscapes helped us to shed new light on the agency migrants exercise to become part of host societies, such as participation in either institutionalized or *grassroots* initiatives. Our micro and ethnographic approaches confirmed that foodscapes are differently negotiated from one public space to another, emphasizing that acting and organizing public spaces together is a core pillar of any fair society<sup>3</sup>.

A third innovative aspect builds on methodology, and especially in the systematic development of experimental approaches in close collaboration with partners and participants from the field. This ended with hybrid forums and pilot projects in each country. We observed that the concrete participation and enthusiasm of partners, their colleagues, local communities, local stakeholders and the general public during all the phases of the pilots strongly contributed to its impact. It underlined that the agency that makes things happen is not the result of processes, people, institutions and entities that can be apprehended alone or in isolation, but as an assemblage of entities, human and non-human, tangible and intangible, working in collaboration towards mutual enhancement. So at the end, the process of collaboration may have more impact than the concrete result. In this perspective, each and everyone of our pilot projects are full of hope and remind us about the non-utilitarian sociology of the gift that Philippe Chaniel develops in his recent book named “Our generous reciprocities – to weave the common world”<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding the concept of **public space and its negotiation** in different situations and countries, both fieldwork and experimental approaches (combining hybrid forums and pilot projects) emphasized some lines of reflection that can be fruitful for the **JRP about public spaces**:

- 1- **The difficulty of determining the concept of space, in public spaces, by geographic physical or time boundaries.** Already in the application we noted that, inspired by Arendt<sup>5</sup>, we would not limit the concept of public space to physical or geographical boundaries or to predetermined typologies. In FOOD2GATHER public space is the arena (both in time and place) where citizens and citizens to-be, humans and non-humans alike, meet, act and create social relationships. Our micro approaches underlined that a geographical perspective on public spaces is not especially interesting or fruitful, even when looking at digital public spaces. We observed that **the process of negotiation or construction is more enriching to examine:**

#### **How are those public spaces built?**

- Above all the antinomic notion of private space, makes a potential definition easier  
Nevertheless there is an ambivalence between public spaces and private spaces. The public space of one becomes the private space of the other. Or the opposite, the private of one becomes the public of the other. Examples from French fieldwork with Squat, Italian fieldwork with public gardens or inhabited sidewalks – and Dutch fieldwork with bus stop (when there is no more possibility to private - the public becomes the private. We are here)

#### An analytical overview could be:

- Public open - street, parks
- Public closed - restaurant, canteens
- Semi-open public - university, library, school
- Private - home, personal space
- Digitalized public space - we find the same dimensions between private/public/hybrid

---

<sup>3</sup> Arendt 1958

<sup>4</sup> Chaniel, P., 2022. Nos généreuses réciprocités - Tisser le monde commun. Actes sud

<sup>5</sup> Arendt, H., 1958. The human condition. . Chicago University Press. , Chicago

- Interactivity of material and immaterial public spaces: Importance not only to include the digitized room as public space, but to see it interwoven in the physical public space.
- Public space as encounter (see deliverable 3 on fieldwork approaches) built through exchanges between human and non human.

## 2-Public space as *Food for thoughts* (to refer here to Levi Strauss) a space where we share – both food and stories.

Arendt pointed out that public space is a space for meeting and dialogue. **It is more** – space where stories are told and shaped/created – a constant process of telling and of « narrative identity » (here reference to Ricoeur emphasizing the importance of telling a story in the construction of the self – choosing the words, choosing the memories – the one we speak about the one we forget)

The public space, as a place where we can tell stories, where we want to tell stories.

- Meaning of the word political.
- The story as a public space and the story as a gift of self, as sharing
- Public space as a meeting place and I narrate
- But also, and because of this, a space of recognition and reciprocity

## 3- Public spaces as a place for giving- Acknowledging

- Public space as a dialogue where giving, receiving and acknowledging are central pillars. (direct reference to Mauss, the gift)
- Considering public space as a room for meeting and dialogue we observed that the framework of the dialogue and the meeting are different from one dimension to another, but in all cases the possibility of intervening and acting in the given space, the gaze and the recognition of others are fundamental points.

## 4. Public spaces as cosmopolitan, even in rural areas.

While some nevertheless reject this idea and can give way to a sometimes uninhibited racism - especially in rural territories where citizens feel forgotten by the State where we observe the rise of the extreme right in politics. The notion of public space reveals, through food, the way in which our societies are crossed by migrations, but also the way in which our territories are made up of people who have become "from here" but sometimes come from elsewhere. In other words, we can speak of cosmopolitan public spaces. Here two examples showing how public spaces are shaped by the people who compose them, who themselves exercise their ordinary citizenship. 1) Food markets of Ste Foy La Grande revealed the migratory puzzle of the rural society and the rootedness of those who are still often sent back to a "strangeness". 2) In the urban area of the Bordeaux metropolis, certain militant mobilizations in the public space give life to sorts of accidental communities around food and migratory policies.

## 5. Public space and food/ public foodscape as non-traditional consumption places but more construction places where *to be good* is more important than *goods*

Consumption defined by four basic phases: planning, purchasing, using and disposing/throwing away

- **Public foodscapes in market economy** (supermarkets, restaurants, open markets etc.) : a fundamental social, commercial and political role

**Contextualisation:** *The shop could be seen as a private space in term of property but with supermarket shopping is done in a public space (semi public if entrance limited) . But the open food market is open to all. The role of migrants is complicated and made more difficult in markets based on closed commercial structures / private contracts, while the open market allows (in theory) everyone to offer their production. (note here the influence of regulations and EU standards on normativity which nevertheless makes entrance to open market*

complicated). Digitalized public space is open to all -who have a smartphone- , especially for ordering food, but also for sharing experiences (Note Amplification of noises when eating video of people eating.) Public space open to all also for food but with distribution in different physical spaces.

- Social role to share and distribute goods – in a commercial perspective we observed a lot of exclusion, by money and norms.
  - Commercial role - We noticed huge changes under the pandemic. Digital has taken off by making the link between the public and the private sector, particularly restaurants at home.
  - Policy role – If Public space is presented as place where you can express yourself, almost without limits, sometimes to an extreme point, this is not possible without money in a market economy.
- **Public foodscapes in Gift economy – (street, park, school, etc.)**

**Contextualisation:** Food plays a central role in public space/foodscape. But in our fieldwork the system is not only based on **exchange of goods** (Douglas) but -obviously more- in a human relation structure where the system is based on **exchange of goodness**. The main difference is the absence of an economic system which objectify everything into goods, from food product to human generosity. Most of the relationships and interactions we observed within groups of involved people (as voluntary, migrants, association, local community) could have been an illustration of a “local communalist policy” (Descola et al., 2022) where human and non human all together search for a decent and respectful way of leaving in a common place.

- Public foodscapes opened a door towards a more sustainable and human consumption based on gift and reciprocity. Inspired by Chaniel’s work on the gift , the respect of each other -included non human- and the power of associations and local communities <sup>6</sup> we see here a potential model for a better society.
- If Consumption is defined by four basic phases: planning, purchasing, using and disposing/throwing away then Construction could be defined by four basic phases: missing/needing, getting/receiving , using and giving back
- **Constructing**, which as an idea if not the wording, emerged from the FOOD2GATHER fieldwork
- Referring to Mauss’s works, and later Godbout, Caillé or Chaniel, on the gift we emphasize that giving is a solid model as long as the one who gives does not function in a “economy exchange” system. As Godbout puts is: “we win on condition that we are not interested to have any gain, not to adopt the schema of individual interest, not to not calculate”<sup>7</sup>
- Public space an area where food can change relationships from consuming to Constructing. Engaging human to build together

Let’s conclude this overview of main results from FOOD2GATHER with Paul Ricoeur’s words:

*“Giving remains a common gesture that escapes the objection of calculated self-interest: it depends on the one who receives the gift to respond to the one who gives it by a similar gesture of generosity. This disinterestedness finds its public expression in holidays, in celebrations with family and friends. The festive in general is heir in our market societies to the ceremony of the gift, interrupting the market and tempering its brutality as it brings its peace into this sphere. This intertwining of struggle and celebration is perhaps the indication of an absolutely primitive relation at the source of the social bond linking the defiance of the war of all against all with the good will that arises from the encounter with the other, my fellow human being.»<sup>8</sup>*

---

<sup>6</sup> Chaniel 2022 Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Godbout, J., 2000. Le Don, la dette et l’identité. La découverte, Paris . p.167

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ricoeur - Asserting Personal Capacities and Pleading for Mutual Recognition, in Acceptance Speech for Kluge Prize, December 2004. P.3-4