

# Food Citizens?

An anthropological project  
on collective food procurement  
in European cities



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## Preface and acknowledgements

This collection gathers the most significant blogposts, reports, and guest essays that appeared on the Food Citizens? project website ([www.foodcitizens.eu](http://www.foodcitizens.eu)) between September 2017 and February 2024. It is divided in six sections, which articulate the origins of the project, its methodological development, and the team members' reflections from their fieldworks in Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland. Further, it includes guest interventions from scholars who interacted significantly with the team, either as members of the project Advisory Board, or as guest speakers at seminars, or discussants at the project Final Conference. The last sections present the project results, outline their impact and the future research agenda.

I wish to thank all the authors: from the Food Citizens? team: Federico De Musso, Aleksandra Gracjasz, Marilena Pouloupoulou, Robin Smith, Hanna Stalenhoef, Maria Vasile, Vincent Walstra; the guest authors Agata Bachórz, Caterina Del Bello, Francesca Forno, Maris Gillette, Paolo Graziano, Alessandra Manganelli, Ginevra Montefusco, Olga Orlic, Alessandra Periccioli, Alessandro Pisano, Colin Sage, Arnold van der Valk; and the Food Citizens? methods school alumnae: Simone de Boer, Živilė Miežytė, Ginevra Montefusco, and Hanna Wernersson.

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Leiden, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Cristina Grasseni

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1.1

# Provisioning Activism

CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 7 JUNE 2017

An increasing body of literature identifies and compares various strategies for alternative provisioning, namely procuring food and other goods and services in a consciously oriented way. Why is this anthropologically interesting?

### **Alternative agro-food networks**

A growing literature identifies alternative strategies for self-provisioning: i.e., for procuring food and other goods and services in a consciously oriented way (for example Seyfang and Longhurst 2013, Schor 2010, Stevenson et al. 2009, Stolle et al. 2005). A large part of this scholarly interest focuses around the topic of 'alternative agro-food networks'.

A few results stand out. Firstly, some scholarship has highlighted the fact that alternative food networks often focus more on sustainability and quality, less on social inclusion and 'food justice' (access to resources for underprivileged groups). What are the limits and potential of these networks? Secondly, we lack a coherent conceptual framework to demonstrate the ways in which 'civic food networks' (Renting et al. 2012) may appropriate and express notions of citizenship and societal participation.

### **ERC Consolidator project**

These are two of the challenges I will address over the next five years in the ERC Consolidator project *Food citizens? Collective food procurement in European cities: Solidarity and diversity, skill and scale*. I will set out to identify and ethnographically observe alternative provisioning initiatives that move beyond the idea of '[alternative food networks](#)'. The case studies examine collective food procurement on multiple scales and in three European cities, focusing on the cultural dimensions of collective food procurement.

Building on a one-year comparative pilot project in Italy and USA funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, I propose a set of questions: How do styles of procurement match styles of participation? Might some models of participatory engagement reproduce hegemonic views of what 'active citizenship' should be, and what 'alternatives' should look like? How can we compare skill, scale, diversity and solidarity across different types of networks? How do we foster new imaginaries of food and of societal participation?

### **Active citizenship**

Collective forms of provisioning promote a number of different projects and agendas, such as viable local economic circuits, responsible production, and ethical consumption. Furthermore, it has been argued that they provide alternative paradigms for active citizenship through democratically controlled regional economies. However, the histories and meanings associated with such paradigms may be very diverse. I build on my comparative ethnography of two areas of advanced industrial or post-industrial development: Massachusetts (U.S.) and Lombardy (Italy). Local understandings of what a 'solidarity economy' might amount to, and how to set up and run 'solidarity economy networks' varied considerably between these two locations.

Although some of the protagonists of these networks share an understanding of what a 'new economy' (Alperovitz 2012) should strive for and

*“ It makes sense to focus on the diverse and profoundly cultural dimensions of skill, scale, solidarity, and diversity in European urban practices of collective food procurement. ”*

shared some literature and inspirational examples, they tended to focus on different practices: whereas in Italy the focus lay on re-engineering short provisioning chains (mostly in relation to food), in the U.S. the emphasis was on striving for ‘green and just’ energy provision, weatherized and socially affordable housing, and setting up workers’ cooperatives.

### **Cultural dimensions**

Building on this, I will focus on the cultural dimensions of collective food procurement: skill is a good example of this. An ethnographic investigation of skill means analysing the practical and organisational know-how – how and whether local knowledge is locally reconstituted in such networks – and exploring to what extent it succeeds in creating new forms of wealth (e.g. relational rather than financial). Such wealth would be defined for example in the capacity to nurture networks of mutual help.

Grassroots initiatives for local provisioning date back to well before ‘the crisis’ – a watershed moment that is often inappropriately associated not just with an artificially induced financial breakdown, but with socioeconomics. With a much broader focus, anthropologists share an active interest in carrying out in-depth ethnographic investigations of livelihoods as necessarily economic arrangements: ways of organising life in such a way that it reproduces itself.

These arrangements naturally involve diverse interpretations and practices of sustainability and of participation. With this in mind, it makes sense to focus on the diverse and profoundly cultural dimensions of skill, scale, solidarity, and diversity in European urban practices of collective food procurement. This approach is the natural result of engaging with an interdisciplinary scholarship that offers fieldworkers the opportunity to ethnographically investigate contested and contextual imaginaries of societal alternatives at work. Wish me luck!



# — What we have done, how, and why



CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 29 FEBRUARY 2024

The Food citizens? team has included two post-docs, three Ph.D. candidates and two research assistants working with the Principal Investigator. The Winter School involved nine Masters and Ph.D. candidates from the universities of Bologna, Gothenburg, Kaunas, Leiden, Louvain, Tromsø, Turin and Utrecht.

Beginning in 2017, the project involved a literature review on the topics of solidarity, diversity, skills and scale in the anthropology of food, as well as case study essays on urban agriculture, short food chains, and local food councils authored by Robin Smith and available open access on our project's [public resources portal](#).

The PhD candidates received bespoke training in audiovisual methods and participated in dedicated seminars with experts in the topics and regions they studied. Guest speakers included ERC laureates Tim Ingold, Erik Bähre, Anouk de Koning, Marianne Maeckelbergh, Martijn Koster, NWO-VICI winner Bart Barendregt and Spinoza laureate Birgit Meyer. Three symposia were held to discuss work in progress with the project's advisory board in 2018, 2019 and 2020 in the cities of Leiden and Gdańsk. Local restitution workshops are being planned in the cities of Turin and Gdańsk.

The project blog documents the multiple ways in which team members have participated in local and international societal debates, in person and online, through workshops, conference presentations, and media engagement.

The Ph.D. candidates conducted 17 months of fieldwork each in the cities of Gdansk, Rotterdam and Turin respectively (including the COVID outbreak in 2020), interspersed with periods of intensive teamwork. These 'taking stock' periods were aimed at progressively constructing a matrix of case studies, reporting on first findings and synergizing insights, hurdles and directions taken in the field. Ethnographic field-sites were identified and brainstormed for their potential significance in

the contexts of food self-procurement, short food chains and food governance. They were investigated, according to the project's research protocol, with the method of participant observation with an additional battery of qualitative methods including in-depth interviews, mapping, documentary analysis, focus groups and video- or photo-elicitation.

### **Scientific and Societal Impact**

The project's Digital Platform, edited and coded by Federico De Musso, represents this field research in a synoptic and comparative way.

The teams' publications and featured dissemination activities examine the different types, premises and consequences of collective forms of food production, distribution and consumption in the three European cities and beyond.

The project's Winter School crowned the PhD candidates' four-year long period of research, engagement and apprenticeship by passing on the project's methodological tool-kit to a selected cohort of nine Master and Ph.D. candidates. The project's conference presented the first results of the field research, the Digital Platform and the Winter School projects.

The project continued until February 2024, investing in scientific dissemination and societal engagement. Further milestones included the launch of the i-doc on the project's website, two journal special issues (on Collaboration, Comparison and Mediation for Anthrovision VANEASA online journal and on Skills for Sustainability for KE, the Journal of Swedish Anthropology), and two 'restitution workshops' with stakeholders and scholars in the cities of Gdańsk and Turin.



*Solidarity food delivery by Groenten Zonder Grenzen in Rotterdam (kitchen and bike) (Photos by Federico De Musso)*

## 2.1

# Making it Happen: comparison through teamwork in the Food Citizens? project

On February 4th, 2022 the Food Citizens? conference wrapped up four years of research in the ERC Consolidator project *Collective Food Procurement in European Cities: Solidarity and Diversity, Skill and Scale*, this is the Leiden Anthropology blogpost profiling the team's comparative research

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CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 18 FEBRUARY 2022

## Relativizing food citizenship to context

Collective food procurement is an emerging phenomenon: networks of people organise direct food production, distribution and consumption at multiple levels (foraging and self-production; short food chains and direct sales; food aid and governance of the urban green areas through local institutions, but also through networks of NGOs). The Food Citizens? project has investigated collective food procurement comparatively in the post-industrial cities of Gdańsk (Poland), Rotterdam (the Netherlands) and Turin (Italy) to get a concrete idea of how people and networks engage with and through food, particularly asking questions about their socio-cultural dimensions: solidarity, diversity, enskilment and scale of action. Are these networks leading to emerging forms of ‘food citizenship’? And if yes, what might this mean for European society? In other words, do ‘solidarity’ or even ‘active citizenship’ mean the same, even in the relatively homogenous normative context of the EU? Could food procurement styles tell us something profoundly anthropological about the ‘styles of participation’ of each city – and their broader sociocultural contexts – about how one is expected to participate and belong (Mol 2013)?

As explained in the project’s inaugural article on ‘collective food procurement in European cities’, I raised questions such as: does the emergence of collective food procurement networks and practices indicate a new form of ‘food citizenship’ or even ‘food democracy’ (as advocated in some of the literature on alternative food networks, see Renting et

al. 2012)? What are the underlying imaginaries and societal expectations? When we investigate this notion in depth and in a comparative fashion, which understandings do we gain about the diversity of European local discourse and practices of participation and belonging?

## Comparative research design

While comparison is widely used, especially in European projects, how to make it happen with qualitative methods and a multi-researcher team working in parallel in different sites is less often conceptualized. The project’s methodology was based on the ethnographic tenet of going into the field with an open mind, but also with a common framework. This was ensured firstly by an initial matrix of potential case studies, access to which had been negotiated before the project, thanks to pre-existing research or contacts in each site. The field researchers added and changed the sites as they progressed in fieldwork, and they developed a personal angle on emerging themes for their dissertations. Secondly, a common background was cultivated through shared readings and seminars on solidarity, diversity, skill and scale in alternative food networks for the first two years together. This ‘language’ we had in common so to speak (a vocabulary of categories for investigation and a syntax of empirical levels of investigation), would allow us to come back from the field and talk about relevant distinctions and connections across sites.



Food waste recollection in Turin’s Porta Palazzo market (Photo by Federico De Musso)



*Dumpster divers in Gdynia (Photo by Federico De Musso)*

## **Teamwork**

Over four years, three Ph.D. candidates (Ola Gracjasz, Maria Vasile and Vincent Walstra) worked together with two post-docs (Robin Smith and Federico De Musso) and me, with the help of a research assistant (Hanna Stalenhoef and Marilena Pouloupoulou). They were trained in audiovisual methods, research ethics and academic writing, presenting at conferences, publishing journal articles, and teaching at the project's Winter School. Sixteen months fieldwork in iterative and incremental periods of three months (pre-field, starting December 2018), six months, and seven months (extended due to COVID until August 2020) alternated with periods of 'taking stock' as a team in Leiden. Importantly for the feasibility of a longitudinal plan, the project funded also accommodation expenses, travel to and from the field, conference participation and additional costs such as transcribing and subtitling up to about 12,000 euro per field researcher. A shared Research Protocol included participant observation, interviews, cultural maps, focus groups, life

and career histories, and documentary analysis. 'Taking stock' meant holding sustained sessions of collaborative reflection in person, narrating field experiences, mind-mapping similarities and contrasts and connecting them to the project's categories of analysis. The team's activities are documented on our website, as a public resource.

## **Collective food procurement networks respond to diverse needs**

The research shows how collective food procurement networks respond to diverse needs, which are embedded in the histories and challenges of the respective cities: for example, the ongoing urban renewal but also social struggles in post-FIAT Turin; the different worldviews underlying aid to the homeless and underemployed through food banks vis-à-vis activist food waste recuperation in the postindustrial port and shipyard 'Tricity' including Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot; and the bottom-up strategizing for sustainable food provisioning in the most densely populated Dutch urban

region (the 'Randstad') which is also home to intensive export-oriented agriculture. During the Food Citizens? conference, the three Ph.D. candidates addressed explicitly how teamwork facilitated comparison, for example through using a single research protocol and by sharing fortnightly field reports within the team. One of the exercises in the 'taking stock' sessions in fact consisted in presenting another person's fieldwork (something almost unimaginable if we picture fieldwork as an essentially singular and serendipitous experience).

### **The temporality of scale**

Gracjusz, Vasile and Walstra elaborated jointly on the comparative aspects of their research on urban food gardens: for example in all their field experiences temporality, gentrification and the cosmopolitan aesthetics of urban renewal projects came to the fore. In terms of scale (one of the four analytical categories, or 'lenses' through which the field researchers were invited to look at their case studies), some initiatives found it important to cultivate their temporal dimension just as much as considering the size of one's activities. In other words, land tenure vs. short-terms gardening permits, and the capacity to invest in and develop a project longitudinally vs. being (forcibly) periodically relocated, were just as important as scaling 'up' (in terms of expanding operations) and scaling 'out' (namely establishing one's model for new initiatives in other locations

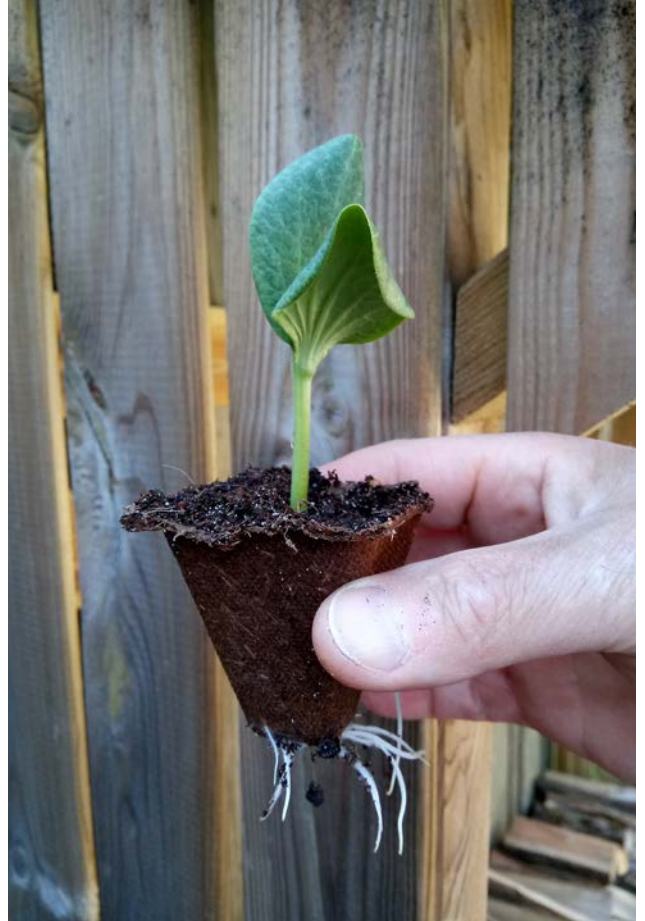
or networks). In sum, the temporal and relational dimension of scale as much as the spatial one emerged from fieldwork.

### **Scientific and Societal Impact**

The project continues until February 2024, investing in scientific dissemination and societal engagement. Forthcoming milestones include the launch of the i-doc on the project's website, two journal special issues (on Collaboration, Comparison and Mediation for Anthrovision VANEASA online journal and on Skills for Sustainability for KE, the Journal of Swedish Anthropology) and two 'restitution workshops' with stakeholders and scholars in the cities of Gdańsk and Turin.

### **Winter School**

The Food Citizens? conference also culminated the two-week Winter School, handing down the methodological toolkit of Digital Visual Engagements in Anthropological Research to a group of nine Masters and PhD students from universities all over Europe. Participant Carolina Nemethy (Arctic University of Norway) stated: 'I found the Leiden Winter School to be a valuable opportunity to learn about a broad range of tools and methods for multimodal ethnography, as well as the new practical and ethical considerations that go with them. [...] The limited timeframe of the projects encouraged effective collaboration with group members and sparked an opportunity for joint effort that would otherwise be uncommon in a (largely solitary) PhD journey'.



tuindery Amelst Hof  
Verse oogst  
vektala 1,75 zaagje  
pnel 1,50 zaagje  
Spruuten 1,50 zaagje  
dabok 1,50 zaagje  
warkool 0,50 zaagje  
warkopstokken 1,00 zaagje  
Dank u! we maken graag  
uw bestelling graag  
en we bezorgen ook  
gratis per toer!

2.2

# Online Collaborations

@VirtualOtherwise  
2022



tracing the possibility of relations

FEDERICO DE MUSSO | 8 AUGUSTUS 2022



## FEDERICO DE MUSSO ON PRESENTING ONLINE AT THE CONFERENCE VIRTUAL OTHERWISE (2022)

When I am working with master's students, I often hear myself or my colleagues praising the importance of establishing good relations with collaborators in the field. Research quality, we usually add, reflects the ability to ground inquiry on an open and trusting relationship. Consequently (and even though plenty of stories of misunderstanding abound), anthropologists are usually proud of their ability to overcome initial field awkwardness – successful collaboration with their interlocutors a sign of forthcoming high-quality research output. It therefore baffles me sometimes to look at collaboration with other fellow researchers and see it less recognized or formally acknowledged than that 'out in the field'.

Much of my work as a postdoc for the Food Citizens? Project has been about finding ground to develop research at the collaboration intersections between other team members, with these relations a driver in fine-tuning and syncing ideas in the project i-doc. The importance of how each researcher's footprint affects the other's

research was the object of the multimodal presentation I made for the Virtual Otherwise online conference in early June. I presented the Disjunction and Reverberations panel with Adam Fleischmann, Mónica Cuellár Gempeler, Alonso Gamarra, and Atoq Ramón. The panel addressed the gaps and overlapping instances between the virtual and material across our field experiences.

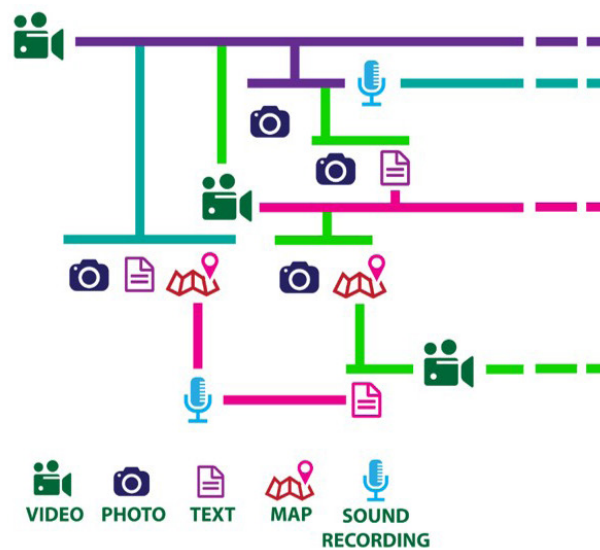
The presentations also explored the possibilities and potentials of collaboration in bridging the virtual and material, the panel's strength emerging through the shared thinking-through of the transformation that knowledge undergoes in its circulation between people and media, generations and places. As the conversation after the panel highlighted, the end result was even more appealing because the panelists had collaborated on multiple, different, previous occasions – their take on collaboration nurtured by actual efforts to work and think together. It was really just an excuse to come back and work together again.

**All contributions reverberated with the importance of collaborating and building on each other's feedback. Welcoming the role of other anthropologists into our ethnographies is a means to find a way of basing our practices on nurturing multiple and enriching types of collaborations.**

## 2.3

# Interactive Platform: The food citizens i-doc

FEDERICO DE MUSSO | 31 DECEMBER 2024



The i-doc connects 50 case studies, identifiable as icons on a cartography that ideally conjoins Gdańsk, Turin and Rotterdam in a single digital canvas, crossed by a stylized river symbolizing the important waterways that characterize the life and topography of each city: the Vistula and port waters of the gulf of Gdańsk, the Dora and Po in Turin, and the Rhine/Meuse estuary in Rotterdam. The case studies include community gardens, allotment gardens, food banks, (networks of)

food aid NGOs, (networks of) solidarity economy groups and shops, food markets, innovative food entrepreneurs such as vegan shops and cafes in Gdańsk and the Fenix Food Factory in Rotterdam, food cooperatives and online delivery platforms among others. The i-doc allows to browse 60 videos, 70 photo slideshows, 10 sound files (soundscapes and interviews), and 10 text documents gathered during fieldwork.

**The Food Citizens?  
i-doc enables a  
virtual navigation  
of a selection of 50  
case studies and  
their comparative  
connections, which  
the research team  
has ethnographically  
investigated and  
audio-visually  
documented in the  
cities of Gdańsk,  
Turin and Rotterdam.**

Interactive Platform: The food citizens i-doc





Each item is described with a short text, multimedia attachments, and connects with other items in the same city and in the other two, exploring the dimensions of solidarity (what does 'solidarity' mean for this initiative?), diversity (how do they interpret and act upon 'diversity?'), skill (which skills are learnt and taught and to whom?) and scale (do these initiatives want to scale 'up' or 'out', can they, and why?). These are the four categories we used to 'slice up' similarities and contrasts among cases and to create a comparative narrative connecting the people, places and networks we encountered ethnographically. The i-doc reproduces in digital and multimodal form the conceptual maps we drew during our collective sessions. You can find the i-doc online at: <https://www.foodcitizens.eu/jdoc/>



# 3.1 Broken Promises and Precarity in a Small Croatian Farming Community

ROBIN SMITH | 25 JANUARY 2019



Robin Smith, post-doc on the ‘Food Citizens?’ project featured in the Leiden Anthropology blog reflecting on her fieldwork on the role of trust in the wine industry in Istria.

## Community in Economic “Kriza”

Over two decades have passed since Croatia embarked upon a transition towards a market economy. Even though it is the EU’s most recent member, rural regions continue to struggle with economic precarity.

Wine is the basis of the economy of Istria, an Italian minority region in western Croatia on the northern Adriatic, annexed to Yugoslavia after WWII. I set out to tell a story about Istria’s winemaking transition, but along the way I came to realize that the experiences and perspectives of these winemakers and farmers reflect broader issues that encompass many of the major problems of the transition of post-socialist states to capitalism and democracy.

## Broken promises

The post-socialist region has been adapting or ‘transitioning’ to the western European market and political norms for over two decades. While many countries have now joined the EU, many regions within these countries remain quite ‘unfinished’. I arrived in Istria in the midst of an economic crisis plaguing Europe, and talk of the ‘kriza’ pervaded everyday discussions about how people were to make ends meet. From the perspective of my informants, the transition has not created a healthy market and democratic political environment promised by reformers. What I found was that this was leading to falling support in Istria for national and local government initiatives in general.

## Yugonostalgia

I lived in Istria for almost six years in all, doing research and writing up. During this time, my interlocutors would regularly point out that they were the only ones to gain a border at the fall of socialism: due to the region’s former special economic status as part of the Free Territory of Trieste, its border with the then Yugoslavia was more porous than today’s. Memories abound and circulate in cafes about how easy it was to do business over the border in Italy, with local families selling their entire vintage of wine to two or three restaurants on a recurring basis for decades, thanks to enduring friendships and kinship ties. This has made Istrians more critical than most about how the new regime of economic governance is facilitating or detracting from the region’s development.

## Stark contrasts

In the post-socialist context, the market Istrians work in is plagued by low prices, slow payment, problematic

enforcement of business contracts, and unfair market control by state insiders. These issues lead Istrians to conclude that what existed during Yugoslavia was a freer and fairer market economy than what exists today, creating continued nostalgia for Tito and Yugoslavia amongst Istrians of all ages, despite the limits on political choices. This harsh verdict on transition affects how Istrians interact with state institutions and in the economy as businesspersons. Contemporary political corruption has led many Istrians to disengage from politics and local governance institutions. A particularly critical voice is that of businessmen who are trying to develop their businesses in an environment plagued by insecurity in payment and contracts, in which legislation changes faster than they can make business changes to comply with them.

## ‘If you don’t have friends, you don’t exist’

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that winemakers and farmers, in general, are turning towards one another with greater intensity to try and help one another make ends meet. Istrians regularly repeat the phrase that ‘If you don’t have friends, you don’t exist’. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how any one farming family could manage on its own. By spending time in their cellars and vineyards, I watched as winemakers would buy the grapes of neighbors, not because the grapes were good or because they particularly needed more volume, but because they knew that if they didn’t buy the grapes, the neighbor would lose a year of income. A winemaker told me, ‘It takes a poor man to know poverty’, another commenting on his decision to buy such grapes that ‘If no one buys his grapes, he will be broke, and that will still be my problem because we are neighbors’.

## Helping competitors

Once, when I was in the wine cellar of one informant, Marko, a restaurant owner called Ivan came in out of the blue and announced he wanted to buy a large volume of wine. When Marko asked how Ivan had found him, Ivan explained that he usually bought wine from another winemaker, Luka, but that Luka had run out of wine at the end of this especially busy tourist season. Luka had told Ivan that Marko’s wine was of an exceptional quality that rivaled his own, so Ivan should go to Marko. Marko was taken by surprise but was very grateful for this gesture of goodwill. He happily filled Ivan’s car with cases of wine. Businessmen in this community were intently focused on finding ways to help one another, revealing the power of friendships in times of economic precarity

## 3.2



# Shaping the food future of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region

12 MARCH 2019 | HANNAH STALENHOEF

How can we organize the food system in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region in a more sustainable and democratic way? Cristina Grasseni gave a presentation of her work at the Food Council Metropolitan Region Amsterdam.



## Food Council Amsterdam Metropolitan Region

Food Council Amsterdam Metropolitan Region was founded in 2017. Its aim is to contribute to the transformation of the regional food system: a more sustainable system that provides healthy food for all groups in society, the origin of which can be traced, without the exploitation of people and exhaustion of natural resources. They do this by connecting citizens, entrepreneurs, administrators and experts from various sectors and disciplines around the theme of food.

### A Dutch solidarity purchase group?

Solidarity Purchase Groups (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale) are alternative food procurement groups, in which a group of citizens organize themselves to buy food

directly from small local producers, and distribute this food amongst their members.

The audience, consisting of members of the Food Council MRA and various other interested parties, were invited to think about possible applications of this type of collective food procurement organization in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region.

The interest in joining a Dutch version of a solidarity purchase group was high amongst the people that were present. However, the audience also pointed out various cultural and economic differences in the Dutch context and compared GAS with existing initiatives such as VOKOs (voedselcollectieven) in the Amsterdam region, some of which involve students from our own Institute!



Jeffrey Spangenberg, one of the co-founders of the Food Council MRA, proceeded with updates on the projects the Food Council is currently working on: 'We Make the City' and 'Project De Nieuwe Markt' (the New Market Project). For more information on the activities of the Food Council MRA, please consult their website: [www.foodcouncilmra.nl](http://www.foodcouncilmra.nl)

# Edible Cities Network: Negotiations between citizens and the state

VINCENT WALSTRA | 13 AUGUST 2019

Rotterdam is one of the cities participating to the Edible Cities Network (EdiCitiNet), an international cooperation of municipalities that aim to increase the 'edibility' of urban spaces. In this blog, Vincent describes his experiences at one of their recent workshops.



In Het Klooster, a meeting place for local communities and organizations, a group of about fifty are sitting together. They have gathered to discuss the launching of an 'Urban Living Lab', an initiative of the municipality of Rotterdam to facilitate the increase of edible greenspaces in their city. 'We must put seeds in the ground; it is growing season'', someone from the audience says. This particular comment does not refer to the gardening season, but is a metaphor used by an urban farmer to stress the urgency of action.

This workshop is organized by the Rotterdam representatives of the Edible Cities Network (EdiCitNet), an international cooperation of municipalities that aims to increase the 'edibility' of urban spaces. Aside from the international members of the EdiCitNet, a variety of local civil servants, urban farmers, scientists and other people with relevant knowledge have been invited to debate about the fundamental purpose of this project. The search for a collaboration between top-down and bottom-up actors is echoed in a key question posed by one of the leading figures of the Urban Living Lab project: 'Where does the municipality meet the initiative of its citizens?'

### **Critical reflections of urban farmers**

As anthropologist I am, or try to be, aware of the various perspectives and interests of different actors, and the friction between them. Today, I find myself at the heart of this friction in Rotterdam, where top-down governing and bottom-up innovation meet. What's more, is the added horizontal dimension of the EdiCitNet who aim to share best (and worst) practices between the collaborating cities Andernach, Oslo and Rotterdam.

At first glance, the inclusion of urban farmers in the process of designing the Urban Living Lab and its purpose show an attempt at establishing a collaboration between citizens and the state. However, the fact that these urban farmers, who encompass about one-fifth of the attendees, are the only ones expected to be present on a voluntary basis, reveals something about the power relations amongst today's attendees. One could say that the urban farmers are obliged to attend because they depend

on the municipality for both financial and spatial support. Although being absent might not directly impair the future of their projects, it would exclude them from the negotiations around shaping the future of the urban landscape.

From a more positive vantage point, the informal and interactive atmosphere of the workshop creates a platform where the urban farmers can articulate their desires and dissatisfaction about the municipality's governance directly to civil servants. And they don't hesitate to do so:

'The Urban Living Lab exists for ten years already, with the citizens!'

'Sometimes pioneers make mistakes.'

'This will never be a commercial project.'

These are three statements voiced at the workshop that summarize some of the main concerns and critiques from the urban farmers. Firstly, urban farmers are impatient because there have been multiple projects like the Urban Living Lab, but generally they do not achieve distinctive results. Secondly, there is need for structural support from the municipality that would create a sense of trust that the urban farmers can rely on support even when they lose their 'newness' and momentum, or make mistakes. Thirdly, there is need for an appreciation of initiatives beyond finance and numbers, one that acknowledges the qualitative values urban farmers add in the social and ecological domain of our society. In this case, trust goes the other way, from the municipality to the urban farmers.

### **The mobility of civil servants**

The next day, the workshop continues, but now only with the EdiCitNet-members. Having processed the comments of the previous day, I wonder how hard it can be to give in to the requests of the urban farmers. After all, the demands from yesterday were quite clear.

However, civil servants are no machines, they are citizens themselves, who operate in a tightly structured bureaucratic system. With a new administration every four years, they have to answer to new agendas and visions time and again.

A lack of structural support should therefore not be entirely unexpected. Especially when this support has to be based on valuing qualitative contributions in a society where actions are legitimized in predominantly financial terms. Moreover, what yesterday's discussions indicated is a requirement to shift from auditing through contracts, financial records, and paper documentation, to an auditing system based on mutual integrity and trust.

There are citizens, be them urban farmers or civil servants, who search for possibilities to alter or bypass this society-wide system of financial favoritism.

The need for such a transition in the auditing culture in the Netherlands is further emphasized when we visit the Voedseltuín Rotterdam. This is a publicly open food garden where they are growing food for the urban poor. Their initial idea to supply the foodbank failed due to hygiene restrictions. Hence, administrative obstacles restrict this initiative's mobility in a meticulously regulated society. However, thanks to innovative thinking they have found a way to supply their

target group through alternative distribution channels, going around the costly processes of monitoring their food subjected to top-down hygiene restrictions.

What strikes me during this two-day workshop is the municipality's fear of favoritism when supporting urban farmers. Especially when considering that under the rubric of 'the free market', a neoliberal discourse masks a system of financial favoritism. Whereas the government is anxious about favoritism for non-profit social projects, it does not hesitate to allow for-profit multinationals to occupy urban spaces. As a result, in Rotterdam, the reality is that it is easier for a fastfood restaurant to open a new franchise than for a local food garden to produce free fresh vegetables for local citizens. Fortunately, the EdiCitNet workshop has also made me aware that there are citizens, be them urban farmers or civil servants, who search for possibilities to alter or bypass this society-wide system of financial favoritism. I look forward to delving deeper into this friction between established systems and innovative movements, and as an academic contribute to the negotiations between citizens and the state.



## 3.4

# Torino: From food to demands

09 JUNI 2020 | CATERINA DEL BELLO, ALESSANDRA PERICCIOLI  
AND MARIA VASILE



**This blog post narrates about one of the grassroots and self-organized food aid initiative that developed in Turin during the COVID-19 emergency: the Rete Aurora Solidale (Aurora Solidarity Network - Aurora is a neighbourhood in north Turin - ). Since the start of the Italian lockdown on March 10 2020, many families had to face increasing economic difficulties due to lack of income or access to institutional support. Municipal interventions to tackle food insecurity were limited (and strongly reliant on third sector organizations) and left behind many people in need. Networks of grassroots movements, collectives and committees developed to respond to the demands that remained unheard and are now pursuing their intervention by giving visibility to these and forwarding political demands. The post is a translation of an article originally published on Pop off quotidiano on May 19 2020.**

## **A protest to ask for adequate institutional support**

“We don’t want your charity, we ask for income support and accessible social policies”: this is one of the messages written on the boxes – empty but full of demands – brought in front of the Circostrizione 7 (local administration office) in Turin on May 15. More than 50 activists and families compose the network Zona Aurora Solidale who has developed a self-organized initiative of Spesa Sospesa (pending shopping) to remind the institution of its obligations. “Unpreparedness and insufficiency of the measures put in place, lack of awareness and information about the people that are poor or at risk of poverty, partial and contradictory interventions”: these are the shortcomings of the municipal administration according to the demonstrators.

Together with the activists, families were present to speak out their difficulties, which are exemplary of the conditions of many other people in the city. People who cannot afford to buy food to pay their rent, families with children who cannot participate in online didactical activities because they lack the means or linguistic support, people whose reddito di cittadinanza (basic income) has been reduced – to be substituted with other measures such as bonuses, which have not yet been distributed –, others who are still waiting for the cassa integrazione (unemployment benefits). Many of the people present are among the ones who, in April, asked for the buoni spesa (shopping vouchers), developed by the municipality thanks to central government funds, without managing to obtain them. In Turin, around 8 thousand families who asked for such aid remained unsupported as the vouchers exhausted a day after the application process started.

## **Food insecurity and poverty increase in Turin**

The situation of many people who already were in a condition of social and economic hardship is therefore worsening, but the administration fails to put in place structural support measures. Besides shopping vouchers, the municipal attempt to guarantee the primary needs of citizens has been minimal: it

was limited to the endorsement of the network Torino Solidale (Turin in solidarity) formed by a series of hubs, where food boxes are prepared and distributed to families in need. This network is based on the work of associations and big donors such as the Banco Alimentare. Because of the limited public resources provided, such food aid does not support everyone who needs it. In this way, the intervention remains a form of marginal assistance, largely based on voluntary work and which responsibility is left entirely to the associations which are managing the hubs. At one of the hubs in North Turin, for example, since a few weeks the official food donations are reduced and arriving with delay: that is why the cooperative launched a fundraising campaign, attempting to find alternatives – and, we argue, fill the gaps left by the public administration – thanks to the direct support of other citizens. The contribution of big private economic players such as Compagnia di San Paolo was also limited: only 240 thousand euros devolved to respond to primary needs of people in situation of insecurity, as part of a total of a 13.5 millions intervention.

## **The response of the administration**

Some of the people facing such situations of hardship and getting no official support founded the ‘spesa sospesa’ initiative forwarded by the committees and collectives that compose the network Zona Aurora Solidale, or similar solidarity networks developed in other neighbourhoods of the city. All of them, as stated during the protest, insist on the importance of public responses from the city administration, whose present position is revealing precise political choices. The reaction of the president of Circostrizione 7 Luca Deri was quite surprising as he proposed (during an interview to the newspaper La Stampa) to “distribute 900 vouchers left over [from April]”, as of today, never distributed despite the many cases of people in need in the area. The only other solution he advanced was to restart as soon as possible the two big regeneration projects and building sites in the area.


“The resources to intervene exist – replied Zona Aurora Solidale – but it is up to the administrators to decide how to allocate these. We believe that there is nothing more urgent than the protection of the people and the territory in which we live. But poverty does not seem to be seen as a relevant issue if not in relation to issues of public order”. In fact, since a few weeks the largest public intervention in the neighbourhoods of Aurora and Barriera di Milano was the establishment of permanent police and military garrisons. This decision was

explained by the mayor as a necessity to demonstrate the presence of the State even in the more “complicated” areas. As underlined by the activists: “in the last years, regardless of the political colour of the administration, the decisions taken were very clear: privatisation and centralisation of healthcare, the dismantlement of the local services in our neighbourhoods, disinvestments in schooling and education, freezing of the assignment of social housing”. The State, apparently, prefers to invest in the imposition of order and control.



*While different administrative levels are involved in such processes, their cumulative effects are readable in the local discourse about the area and its desirable transformation, often centred around the need for more security and urban regeneration. These reasonings seem to be leaving behind key elements (and drivers of contemporary tensions in the area) such as the importance of employment, adequate income, social protection and related public responsibility in these domains to ensure that no one is left behind.*

*Today, the network Zona Aurora Solidale continues advancing political requests and organizes weekly food distributions in the public park in front of the local administration office. Local families are invited to come and discuss their needs publicly and collectively. So far, no communication line was granted by the Circostrizione nor many larger responses are being implemented by the central government yet. More generally, every day in Turin protests and sit-in are being held in front of different administrative offices, including the municipality and the regional authority (based on the nature of the claims).*



3.5

# Solidarity Networks in Times of Crisis: New Initiatives and long-term Networks in Gdańsk, Poland

OLA GRACJASZ | 23 MARCH 2020

**In the context of recent drastic changes and the emergence of novel ways to create and to continue solidarity networks, one might ask whether there is any hope for long lasting societal transformations? On the Leiden Anthropology Blog Ola Gracjasz reflects on the possibilities for continuing solidarity networks in Gdańsk, Poland.**

As of the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 there are 367 cases of infections and 5 deaths as a consequence of COVID-19 in Poland. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 the Polish Government closed its borders for a period of ten days. For returning citizens it has implemented border control and an obligatory 14 day quarantine. International air and rail connections are suspended, however cargo transport is still in use making sure that products can come and leave the country.

While public media are speculating whether the government will introduce stricter measures that could severely restrict individuals, the government is urging the public to stay home, regardless of age or health conditions, calling for social and civic responsibility. As a response, many people have entered into self-imposed isolation even if they had no contact with anyone who might be infected. Via social media people are calling for responsibility and



solidarity by using topical memes and Facebook profile pictures framed with hashtag #staythefuckhome. As face-to-face contacts become highly restricted, social media is becoming the main means of communication and an important space for local and national mobilization.

## Solidarity

In the context of these drastic and abrupt changes, people are acting out novel and innovative types of solidarity. Historically and culturally Gdańsk has been often described as the city of freedom and solidarity. Indeed, the ex-mayor of Gdańsk Paweł Adamowicz has often referred to solidarity as being the city's most cherished 'social value'. Now, especially, the reference to solidarity is used for motivating small-scale, city-wide mutual aid initiatives.

As an anthropologist in the field I observe small-scale actions, noticeable both in real life and online spaces. One of the most visible examples is the emergence of a Facebook group called "Visible Hand Tricity" (with more than fifteen thousand members at the time of writing). Its initial purpose was to establish connections in the neighbourhoods and facilitate mutual help. However, as the crisis evolved and started threatening to severely damage public health institutions, the group's main purpose has shifted to delivering free food to people working in assistance professions - doctors, firefighters, nurses, policemen, soldiers. At the same time there are several city-wide crowdfunding campaigns to buy the necessary equipment lacking in local hospitals or fund meals for the medical staff. Nevertheless, in contrast to the 'horizontal' solidarity projects organized by civil society and the air of heroic narrative that they provoke, citizens remain critical of the government approach to the crisis, questioning the use of public money, lack of equipment for medical staff and low amount of tests being done.

## Bridging gaps?

Over the last eight months I have been researching solidarity networks in Gdansk. Strikingly, I find a lot of continuity between the current solidarity initiatives and solidarity networks that have built up over a longer period of time. For example, the anarchist initiative Food Not Bombs came up with new solutions to avoid crowds and continue distributing hot meals to the homeless. As closing down all restaurants in the country poses a threat to their survival, the most vulnerable are small and local places, still fresh on the market. Many of those, such as a popular neighbourhood vegan place, are urging their customers to order take-away meals and therefore let them generate income. At the same time they use social media to promote other local places that are facing the same crisis situation. Similarly, other local initiatives with more resources are using their position to openly help out. By making large take-away orders, adding products for free, and promoting it on social media as solidarity action, they also promote themselves. Finally, another popular vegan restaurant of the neighbourhood is sharing sourdough and a bread recipe for free.

To what extent these actions are types of self-advertisement, handling of waste or genuine modes of survival in times of crisis is unknown. However, these are strategies of dealing with a situation that took everyone by surprise and they function as a result of the already existing solidarity networks. It is relevant to ask whether these types of solidarities, in a country strongly divided by political orientations, can bridge the generational, class, and political societal gaps for a longer period of time. Given the scope of the initiatives that were already emerging before the crisis, there is reason to hope a sense of solidarity may continue to shape Gdansk in these uncertain times. However, it would not be the first time that the nation is uniting in the face of crisis only to come back to the old, deeply rooted divisions.

# Impact of COVID-19: Digital food collectives in Rotterdam

3.6



VINCENT WALSTRA | 25 JUNE 2020

VINCENT WALSTRA REFLECTS ON ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND MUTUAL AID IN THE CITY OF ROTTERDAM DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

## Dutch response to Coronacrisis

Empty train stations, canceled holidays, sick acquaintances, shortage of hospital beds, people hoarding toilet paper... COVID-19, the Corona-virus that caused a pandemic, has disrupted everyday life, flooded the healthcare system, and halted the economy. Daily talk is all about the Coronacrisis, but where normal life has been distorted, alternative social interactions emerge. The digital space is booming through video chatting, online teaching and meeting, as bulletin board for offering help, for organizing solidarity initiatives,

and for pure entertainment. In this review, I will reflect on the influence of the Coronacrisis in my research field in Rotterdam. From my apartment, after nearly two weeks of isolation, I feel the urge to write about this crisis with special attention to digital activities related to the research topics of collective food procurement and citizenship. Since measures and knowledge change almost daily, it is important to note that this review is written on Thursday and Friday the 26th and 27th of March 2020.

On Thursday morning 26th of March, in the Netherlands, there are 6.412 registered Corona cases, 644 people are at the Intensive Care, and 356 people have died due to the virus. Although these numbers are rising, the first signs of a 'flattening curve' have been reported by the government. In the past weeks, the Dutch have been criticized for not being rigorous enough in their approach to fight Corona-virus. The government (supported by all but the two right-wing parties) seems to be doing everything to prevent from going into full lockdown. Anthropologists Erik Bähre and Irene Moretti, comparing Dutch and Italian government measures, suggest that this might be because the Dutch approach is relatively much focused on maintaining economic stability, possibly at the cost of human lives. Looking at this Thursday morning's headlines of the Dutch public broadcaster we can see that indeed three of six headlines are about economic topics like recession, financial insurance and unemployment in times of Corona. Aside from this economic outlook on the Coronacrisis, the top-right headliner shows another development in Dutch communication about the virus. For the past two days, the public broadcaster has emphasized the severity of the Corona disease through expert-interviews, informative videos and stories of victims. In particular, they stressed the possible lasting damage of the disease, also for younger people. These anxiety politics are an almost threatening appeal to individual responsibility, using a rhetoric of individual health instead of collective care. It is likely a response to the lack of collective responsibility in the Netherlands, after a weekend where people seemed to enjoy outdoor activities as if no pandemic exists. At the same time, and this will be the focus of this review from now on, the Coronacrisis has moved citizens to start solidarity initiatives in a twenty-first century fashion of 'collective' action, employing digital means of mobilization in times of social distancing.

## **Physical Distancing and Social Media**

On the World Health Organization's (WHO) list of basic measures against the spread of the Corona-virus we are introduced to what is called 'social distancing', meaning people should maintain at least 1 meter distance from each other. It is a misleading term, since what is actually meant is 'physical distancing', a minor but important nuance, as social distancing is the opposite of what we need right now. Because where physical interactions are increasingly limited or even prohibited, social interaction and solidarity activities are persisting, albeit in a different space. Online platforms like Twitter and Facebook, or communication tools like WhatsApp and video chatting services, provide digital alternatives for public and private interaction, and concomitant collective action.

In their blogpost about 'technologies of care', Priscilla Song and Joseph Walline report on the explosion of Social Media in China since the Corona-outbreak. They specifically focus on the rise of a civic care system that these platforms facilitate, allowing people to 'gather' and provide mutual care through the digital world. In Rotterdam the use of digital platforms is likewise facilitating the continuation of social life. Family and friends meet through group video chats, checking in on each other's health and circumstances. People reach out to vulnerable groups through the Dutch #coronahulp (translation: #coronahelp) and the international #FlattenTheCurve. In the light of my research, I am paying special attention to how the digital space provides an outcome for collective food procurement practices. Small-scale farmers and food entrepreneurs normally thrive on direct interaction with customers, differentiating from the large-scale food industry by providing food experiences and transparency in direct social interactions. However, direct interaction is now prohibited. Through digital online platforms these small-scale businesses maintain their interaction with

customers, which is facilitated by mediating Twitter or Facebook accounts that function as digital marketplaces where these vendors 'gather' by retweeting and tagging each other. In Rotterdam, there are for instance 'Rotterdamse Oogst' (normally a local farmer's market), 'Rechtstreex' (online short chain supermarket), and 'Voedselfamilies' (network connecting short food chain initiatives), who regularly tag, retweet or are tagged and tweeted at by small-scale local producers. Aside from tagging each other, they incentivize people to buy locally with the #supportyourlocals, calling for solidarity purchasing at small-scale and local vendors. From my own experience at one of about forty distribution points of Rechtstreex, I can tell that the amount of orders has doubled, if not tripled, since the government introduced Coronavirus measures two weeks ago. Thus, the Coronavirus might have created physical distancing, but socially people have merely shifted their means of communication to the digital spheres. In some cases, the Coronacrisis has even proven to be an incentive for increased solidarity through sharing online resources like social networks, or through initiatives for solidarity purchasing.

### **Food provisioning and digital mobilization**

If anything, the Coronacrisis makes us aware of the interdependency of human beings worldwide, be it in trade, care, food procurement, or mere social contact. Positively, the abundance of digital alternatives invented in the past three decades creates a social space where we can maintain physical distance and social contact simultaneously. On the opposite, however, this shift of social life to the digital space revealed a generational gap that is causing exclusion. Take the example of #coronahulp. People are patting each other on the back for their demonstration of solidarity and generosity, whilst rarely someone in need replies to a #coronahulp-

tweet. From a conversation with the initiator of a Twitteraccount initiated to aid people in Rotterdam during Coronacrisis, I learned that zero people responded to the offer of aid. According to the initiator of the account, the people in need are not 'online'. This issue was noted by a food recuperation collective in Rotterdam, called Groenten Zonder Grenzen (GZG; Vegetables Without Borders). Their way of organizing is exemplary for the social function of another digital tool, WhatsApp. This collective uses WhatsApp as a means for online private gathering. Whereas public social platforms are used for discussing and sharing, WhatsApp facilitates collectiveness and mobilization, like in the case of the Coronacrisis.

On Monday the 16th of March, one of GZGs volunteers posts a call for action in the general WhatsApp group of GZG, which has seventy members. In the next two hours the Appgroup is overloaded with messages of people brainstorming about what they can do to fix the humanitarian issue of people not being able to get access to healthy food. After the WhatsApp group has become overloaded with ideas, one of the initiators of GZG starts a new Appgroup for people who want to be involved in setting up a coronaperiod spin-off. It is the birth of a temporary Groenten Zonder Grenzen initiative called Veggie Rescue. Three days later, on Friday the 20th of March, the group has arranged a list of companies that are willing to freely hand over their food waste, a location for sorting the products, addresses to deliver boxes of food to, an action plan, and a list of seventeen volunteers that will do the collecting, sorting, and delivering of the products. On Saturday the 21st, about forty households receive a box full of recuperated vegetables.

To fix the problem of reaching the people in need, the volunteers called with community centers, foodbanks and other social organizations. Although they are not curing the gap in the digital community, they are at least

patching it through their mobilization on WhatsApp to start collective action in these times of isolation. WhatsApp as means of online gathering provided a space for incentivizing each other in these times of physical distances between people. This is not to say that in pre-digital eras such things would not have been possible. Paolo Gerbaudo, researching digital culture, points at the trap of fetishizing Social Media by attributing them almost mystical qualities. In his book 'Tweets and the Streets' (2012) he explains Social Media as creating a 'choreography of assembly (...) as a process of symbolic construction of public space' (Gerbaudo 2012: 5), emphasizing the role of its emotional appeal. What Gerbaudo tells us is that digital platforms are a communication technology that strongly influences our means of organization and mobilization, and therewith collective action. Similarly, anthropologists Heather Horst and Daniel Miller in their book *Digital Anthropology* (2012) argue that the digital space does not make us more mediated or more real, nor does it exist apart from physical or other life forms. Moreover, we should analyze the social interactions that emerge in the digital space not as new, but as a way of understanding contemporary cultures of collective action.

### **Philosophizing about post-Corona society**

The excessive measures taken globally to restrain Coronavirus have put the world on hold. Not only does this cause alarming situations like the danger of an economic recession, it also forces the world into a moment of reflection. Journalists, politicians, scientists and citizens are debating what we should learn from this crisis, or how we can use the lockdown period to settle certain matters. For example, in the valuing of labor. The crisis forced the Dutch government to nominate 'cruciale beroepen' (crucial professions; see picture) in our society. It is embarrassing to realize that these

professions – e.g. in care, food, education, transportation, and security – have been suffering from underpayment and overburdening for the past years. Historian and popular-science author Yuval Noah Harari is one of the people writing about the dangers and opportunities looming in the Coronacrisis. He claims that this crisis allows for 'experiments' that would otherwise have never been possible to take place. He talks about trust and solidarity as the solution to this global challenge and sees a 'major test of citizenship' ahead. As usual with crises, the first people to feel the blow are vulnerable groups. The Coronacrisis is not different. In Rotterdam foodbanks are struggling to supply the large group of people who are systematically dependent on others to be fed. I decide to share the podcast that made me aware of this issue in the Groenten Zonder Grenzen WhatsApp group. It should not have surprised me to learn that they have already been in touch with the foodbank that is mentioned in the podcast episode. For GZG the crisis has forced them to experiment with food deliveries to vulnerable people. A volunteer tells me that she hopes they will continue doing this after the crisis as well. Similarly, consumers have taken the effort to experiment with buying their groceries through Rechtstreeks. Mara, who runs the distribution point I am volunteering at, believes that after the crisis some of them will remain regular customers. On a macro-scale, we have seen how a virus has physically isolated but socially unified people worldwide. With #FlattenTheCurve going viral, Social Media mediates in the mobilization of the global population to strive for the shared cause of combating the Coronavirus. Unintentionally, this has resulted in an experiment of global solidarity to unify against a humanitarian crisis. If this experiment succeeds, might it be the onset of a global community tackling other humanitarian crises as effectively, like that of poverty or climate change?

3.7



# A multi-disciplinary conversation about urban transformation in Turin The case of Mirafiori Sud

MARIA VASILE AND ALESSANDRO PISANO | 4 JANUARI 2021

**This blogpost reports on conversations, that Alessandro Pisano, political science student at the University of Turin, and I had with regards to the transforming neighbourhood of Mirafiori Sud.**

Why did we both focus on this peripheral area? How did we approach the study of its transformation? What are our analyses of the impact of local urban greening and food production projects?

## **Learning from the periphery**

During my fieldwork in Turin I had the opportunity to exchange thoughts with several researchers investigating same areas and projects but from a

different disciplinary angle. Despite the dissimilar research questions and methodologies, such exchanges always enriched my understanding of the context and benefitted my analysis.

Urban peripheries are often researched as emblematic entry points for the study of a city and its future challenges. In Turin, peripheral areas are particularly telling of the city's history, demographic trends and

socio-cultural transformations. Until the 1980s, most Turinese peripheries were the beating heart of the city as it was where industrial activities were located. Therefore the economy of the city and the employment of most of its inhabitants revolved around these areas.

The industrial crisis and closure of the majority of the city plants severely affected the local economy and the working class's living conditions, which in most cases were already fragile. To attempt tackling consequent issues of poverty and marginalization, the municipality of Turin developed over the years several urban regeneration plans, involving both urbanistic restructuring as well as the promotion of social activities, through the mobilization of various associations. Among these, the central project *Periferie* (1997 – 2005) and its “urban recovery programs” are particularly telling of the type of interventions and vision which characterised such plans, namely an idea of redevelopment focused on strengthening social relations and community building.

The reasons that brought the two authors to explore peripheral areas and their transformations are quite different. Alessandro Pisano investigates urban regeneration policies and projects to gain insights about their inclusiveness and related perceptions by the local population. He links these with issues of gentrification by looking into their relation to the rent gap. The rent gap is a concept used in geography and aimed at identifying the difference between the potential and current value of a given neighbourhood. Value is used here in a broad sense and is referred in the literature as rental income and property value but more generally also as financial, competitive potential or economic opportunities. In Turin, the link between urban regeneration and the potential value of different areas has become quite visible: neighbourhoods closer to the centre and with a financially attractive potential have undergone a faster

transformation (for example, in terms of building and infrastructural renovation, development of economic activities, nightlife) but also a more exclusive one, less functional to the needs of local inhabitants. Pisano main research question is: how much can the rent gap affect the results of territorial regeneration?

Maria Vasile arrived to the same areas through her ethnography within food related initiatives. She got increasingly interested in the networks that these were part of and in understanding how the projects contributed to define urban regeneration in practice. In her research she explores the friction between different visions of regenerations and sustainability in these local projects.

### **Mirafiori Sud and its transformations**

The area of Mirafiori Sud represents the quintessential industrial neighbourhood. Since its inauguration in 1939, the FIAT car factory was at the centre of its redevelopment from a rural area to an urbanized and production pillar of the city. After World War II, the plant was at the centre of the Italian economic boom and Turinese demographic transformation, attracting millions of workers from all over Italy.

Between 1951 and 1961 the city population passed from 719 thousands to 1,025 millions of inhabitants. In the 1970s the Mirafiori FIAT plant employed around 70 thousand people. Such changes resulted in the transformation of the area also in terms of fast housing development and the emergence of many social problems linked to the difficult living and working conditions and later, with the crisis, lack of employment.

Mirafiori Sud was also an emblematic Italian case for what concerns workers organizing, political activity and sociality more generally. Among these, the events of 1969 and 1980 are particularly telling of the workers struggles

and their efforts to advance better working conditions, resist to massive dismissals and promote a culture of solidarity. Despite the crisis and scaling back of the industry, this important heritage is key to understanding the history of the area and the ways in which work, social organizing and the role of institutions transformed over time.

Despite the urban regenerations plans of 1990s, today the neighbourhood is in a process of depopulation and still faces issues of unemployment. As discussed in the research of Alessandro Pisano, Mirafiori Sud is still generally regarded as unattractive from an urban marketing perspective as it is far from the city centre and has few tourist attractions. According to Pisano, this is actually playing a positive role in terms of the inclusiveness of ongoing local urban regeneration projects. In contrast to areas where regeneration is nested with gentrification, most of the projects in Mirafiori Sud remain targeted to the local population and developed to strengthen local communities. From an anthropological perspective, the picture is more nuanced: Maria Vasile examines the projects she investigated both in terms of regeneration narratives and cohesive experiences as well

as welfare transformation and the promotion of more standardized ways of practicing the right to the city.

### **Greening projects: environmental restoration and a new sociality**

Greening projects represent an important aspect of the regeneration efforts of the last years in Mirafiori Sud. Among other, the neighbourhood includes a vast green frontier which divides the city from the nearby towns and agricultural fields. In the industrial period, the development of this green public area was neglected and it was partly used as dumpster by factories. Today it is an area where several projects of environmental regeneration and urban agriculture experimentation are taking place such as the European project ProGireg and the urban gardening initiative Orti Generali.

Orti Generali resulted from the conversion of a large agricultural area and part of a public park into individual allotments that can be rented by the city inhabitants. In addition to the development of such urban allotments, Orti Generali also provides a series of activities, such as training courses and collective gardening sessions, giving a considerable importance to volunteering. Both authors studied this project, identifying similar



*Left: Housing in Mirafiori and part of the FIAT plant. Retrieved on December 11 2020 at: <https://espresso.repubblica.it/plus/articoli/2015/10/15/news/mirafiori-2015-cosi-il-quartiere-operaio-di-torino-riprende-vita-1.233728#gallery-slider=undefined>  
Right: FIAT workers Autumn 1980. Retrieved on December 11 2020 at: <https://volerelaluna.it/commenti/2020/10/15/fiat-autunno-80-quando-incominciammo-a-finire/>*



points particularly worth analyzing in relation to urban transformation. Among these, the emphasis on voluntary work and the jeopardizing of other ways of using this space such as the activities of unauthorized gardeners cultivating in the area since several decades.

A general tendency to focus on volunteering as a new form of (unpaid) labour is particularly tangible in Italy and often criticized, especially in the context of high unemployment. According to several of the researchers' respondents, unemployment however is not the only challenge present in the periphery. The lack of spaces for socializing was often presented as a problem as well as a possible starting point for further socio-economic revival. Volunteering was experienced as an opportunity to create a network of acquaintances (even for possible future employment), a way for acquiring new skills and counteract forms of isolation typical of many post-industrial suburbs. While the authors do not analyse these positions here (and work around it along different theoretical reasonings), these elements are important to unpack the local meanings of volunteering and they are also telling of the changing sociality in the area. Urban transformation is indeed accompanied by a change in social experiences (the way these are set up, the actors

that are involved in their organization, the role of external institutions, to name a few) and expectations of the local population, but most importantly a new morality that is reproduced through such social initiatives.

The case of unauthorized gardeners, also analysed by both authors, is telling about some of the limitations to the inclusiveness and extended sociality of these regeneration processes. The practices of unauthorized gardeners have a long history linked to the industrial past of the area as many of them used to be factory workers, for whom gardening was always a mean for self-subsistence and for compensating alienating working hours in the factory. While projects such as Orti Generali tried to dialogue with them - and proposed them to remain while adapting to the new rules of the project - not all wanted to adapt and were de facto expelled from these areas. Their case is an interesting entry point to study urban transformation dynamics on the ground and the way in which these processes include silenced clashes with what was there before. The idea of promoting greening and sustainability can in fact be advanced in multiple ways and the careful observation of the ways in which this unpack on the ground reveals all of its complexity and moral aspects.

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## 3.8

# Herenboeren Rotterdam: Farming for the Future

02 MARCH 2020 | VINCENT WALSTRA



Consumers are encouraged to think of food production and consumption as amoral activities – Michiel Korthals in his book *Goed Eten: Filosofie van voeding en landbouw* (2019, 353)

## Envisioning the future

“And here will be the fruit orchard and mobile chicken coop”, says tour guide Margot to a group of ten potential Herenboeren farm owners. We are looking at a meadow, flanked by a line of trees on one side and a railway on the other. We are in the natural reserve ‘Vlinderstrik’ in Berkel and Rodenrijs, just within the borders of the Rotterdam municipality in the Netherlands. “Here we will grow pears, apples, plums and nut trees, like hazelnut”, Margot tempts us with the future farming plans. “What about cherries? I am a cherry fan!” I hear someone commenting from behind me. Leaning on our bikes we listen to Margot as she explains how the chickens will take care of the orchard by picking worms and insects from the soil. This form of maintenance simultaneously provides the chickens with a spacious habitat, feeds them, protects the trees and churns the soil.

This is one of the five checkpoints of our bike tour around the future twenty-hectare Herenboeren farm. The idea is that two-hundred households, in collaboration with a hired professional farmer who does the work, will run the farm as a cooperative. Through vivid descriptions, Margot helps us envision how within a year a farmland will arise behind the decayed gate in front of us. “Here you will be able to harvest your own zucchini”, she excites two children chilling in their mother’s cargo bike. She enthuses another attendee when we talk about lemons: “to make your limoncello”.



## Reconnecting citizens with food

The nationwide Herenboeren organization use the slogan ‘Samen Duurzaam Voedsel Produceren’ [Sustainably producing food together]. During a ‘living room’ information meeting later that night, Pieter explains the meaning of this slogan. The Herenboeren farm is obviously about ‘producing food’, but the ideology of the project manifests itself in the concepts ‘together’ and ‘sustainably’. Working as a cooperative and distributing the harvest equally (except for the choice between vegetarian or meat consumption) should enhance the formation of a non-hierarchical community of two hundred participating households. Furthermore, Herenboeren builds on agricultural principles that safeguard nature and biodiversity. This is demonstrated by the budgeted ‘predatory costs’, for example. Having learned from the experiences of the pioneer-Herenboeren farm in Boxtel, Herenboeren Rotterdam anticipate foxes stealing a chicken every now and then. In Boxtel they thought of a solution to include the fox in their farming system. They found out that foxes live in individual territories. In other words, if the chickens would live in the territory of one fox, this would protect them from others. The predatory costs therefore are the inclusion of the fox as an extra ‘mouth’ consuming the chickens. Another possible solution would be to keep geese, which are such strong animals that the fox would not dare to come near the chickens.

To understand the innovative character of this project we need to zoom out and look at the bigger picture.



Contemporary agriculture is dominated by multinationals that make use of a globally distributed food system for their pursuit of profit maximalization. Nowadays, the consequential exploitation of farmers and natural resources is becoming mainstream knowledge. However, people are less aware of the fact that this industrial system enhances the loss of knowledge about food procurement and the concentration of agricultural land to a handful of powerful corporations. The quote at the beginning of this blog cites philosopher Michiel Korthals. He writes about the challenges of our contemporary food system. One of his conclusions is that in the Netherlands (and in other Western countries) we have become estranged from food. Where does it come from? How is it made? How does it taste? Who makes it? When people lose the skill of food procurement, and lack land to produce it autonomously, they become dependent upon others. As long as the owners of the food system share a common interest with people and the environment, there is no issue. But what if they do not? This is the topic of food sovereignty, a recurring theme amongst today's attendees. One of the cyclists, Paul, tells me that he is already autonomous in his energy supply, and sees Herenboeren as an opportunity to make his own choices in food procurement as well.



## Cultural transition: We instead of me

The supermarket supplies us with sustainability labels like Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, Animal Welfare and whatnot. It gives the consumer the impression that they can influence the food system, which might be true to a certain extent. At the same time, the existence of these labels is controversial. The citizen has to pay extra to purchase food containing qualities that should be self-evident. It hurts to say, but in the contemporary food system these citizens are the exception rather than the rule. Herenboeren wants to offer the conscious but powerless consumer the opportunity to develop itself to an autonomous citizen. Instead of having to choose for the best (or least bad?) option from the supermarket shelves, these citizens take matters into their own hands and decide what they eat based on their own moral principles. Herenboeren is a societal experiment in its collaboration between nature conservation organizations, citizens and government institutions. But maybe more important, it is a sociocultural experiment: What happens when two hundred households are given the responsibility over their shared food system? Above all, Herenboeren is an experiment confronting the consumer with the reality of having to compromise for the benefit of the community and to live by the laws of nature. How will they deal with the umpteenth cabbage appearing in their weekly harvest? In other words: How far does solidarity reach when the individual needs to compromise for the sake of the community or nature?

During the living room meeting the likely situation of a product surplus is mentioned and immediately the first creative solution is put forward: "I could dry them so we can preserve them". If you want an alternative future, you have to create it yourself.

# Utrecht: Unexpected allies and food activism in quarantine



MARILENA POULOPOULOU | 01 FEBRUARY 2021

**Marilena Poulopoulou reflects on the food relief initiative she took part in between May and August 2020 in the city of Utrecht.**

## Sandwiches against viruses

Remembering the first lockdown, almost a year ago, it felt like we were entering a new and uncertain situation. However, we had our energy bars full and our creative potential intact, compared to now. Our lives were turned upside down from one day to the next but at the very least we were faced with some challenges which required mobilizing, thinking out of the box and re-inventing the ways we go about our lives. Back then, numerous initiatives popped up as an immediate response to the new situation providing material or immaterial support to those affected. The contrast between the quietness of this second lockdown and the mobilization of the first one is striking but at the same time creates some space to reflect on the previous period.

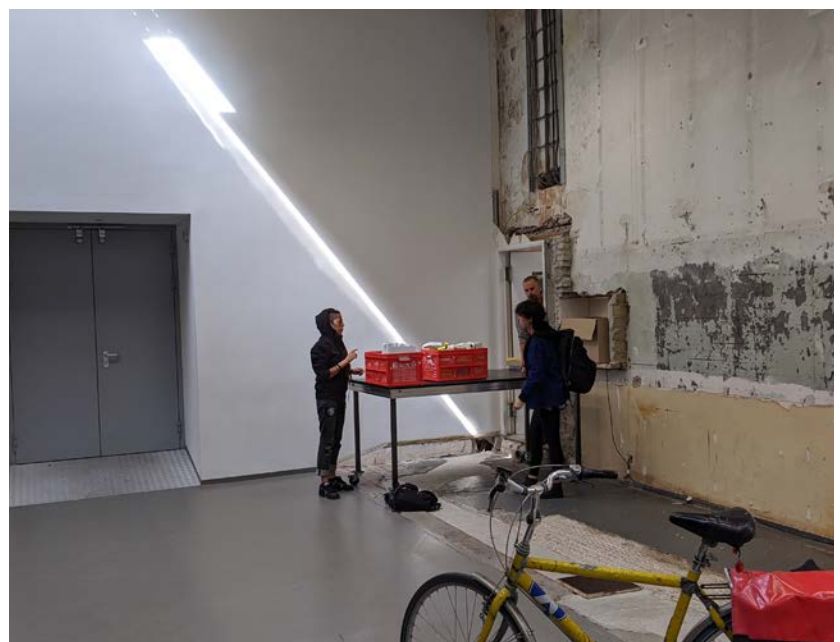
While a good two months of quarantine had redefined our lives in an unprecedented way, I got a message from a friend asking if I would be interested in helping out with a solidarity meals initiative. Aiming to relieve vulnerable groups from food precariousness caused by the Corona-crisis, the plan was simple, we would prepare lunch boxes every Monday and Friday at BAK art institute and we would distribute them at Utrecht's social center ACU. At the time, a group of volunteers had been preparing and giving out 100 dinner meals a day at ACU already for weeks. Based on the demand, expanding to providing lunches as well, seemed to the people involved as the next logical step. The idea was appealing: there is an evident need, there was a structure to support it, the collective

Basic Activist Kitchen of BAK, a collective which organized discussions about the politics of food and cooked collective meals during various occasions in the art institute. With their know-how and equipment on board, as long as volunteers were found the project would be ready to kick-off.

Without much hesitation I agreed, I was suddenly found with plenty of time in my hands and I surely wanted to put it in good use. Solidarity meals and food activism of various strands, be it grassroots or implicated in government or other official structures were no news to me. My friend knowing my involvement in social projects/activism and my past experience in food sovereignty initiatives reached out to me, among others, trying to mobilize her networks. In turn, I sent an email to the housing union I am part of – a union of residents who manage a building of 30 living units, typically attracting members of a socially engaged profile-asking whether people were interested in participating. After a chain reaction type of events, a steady group of volunteers was formed, ready to start operations. The group consisted of some members of the housing union, volunteers of BAK and some volunteers from ACU. As Vincent Walstra, PhD candidate of the ‘Food Citizens?’ project discussed in his blog post [Impact of Covid-19: Digital food collectives in Rotterdam](#), digital platforms of communication such as Whatsapp tend to mediate the formation, coordination and

operation of such loosely defined, action-oriented groups. Following this trend, our communication and organization was largely Whatsapp-based. Shifts were organized digitally and practicalities were communicated among encouraging emoticons and photos. Every Monday and Friday the cooking team would gather at BAK. While some already knew each other from other initiatives, the majority met for the first time through the project and enthusiasm, eagerness and motivation were ample. These two days of the week were for many of us the most active ones in a quite dull and repetitive quarantine-life.

The friendly responsible of the space would let us in and then the cooking would start in the professionally equipped kitchen of BAK. Around noon the distribution team would go by BAK to pick up the lunch boxes some fruit and juices and would head to ACU where the distribution took place. Just like all the steps of the process, preparing food, collecting and distribution were organized with strict hygiene measures. Masks, gloves, a protective plastic panel and social distancing were the measures applied to protect the volunteers and the people who received the lunch boxes. A table would be set up on the front door of the social center as barrier and a sign publicizing the lunch boxes would be put out, on the pavement. Word was already out that we offered lunches since the dinner team had been informing people coming





in for their meals and on average we distributed about 20 lunches a day to more or less a stable group.

Much to the volunteers disappointment, the lunch boxes were not as popular as the dinner meal. Casual brainstorming while cooking or while giving out meals revealed the anxiety: 'We should put photos of our sandwiches on Instagram!' or 'How about we tell beneficiaries to spread the word more'. Regardless of the volunteers desires, the reality was that on the one hand having to be at a distribution point two times a day, waiting in line for a meal is simply impractical for many of those receiving the meals and on the other hand , the idea that everyone shares the same eating habits, lunch at 12:30 and dinner at 18:00 pm is just not true.

Nevertheless, the social contact we had with the volunteers and the beneficiaries was in itself a success, as was the ability to provide support to disadvantaged groups. A type of support which extended to friendliness and warm interactions next to material goods. Especially since we were active during the first lockdown where social interactions were scarce. A short talk with people coming in for lunches seemed to make a difference. Thus, next to the material help, a point of reference addressing the most marginalized in the rather gentrified center of Utrecht offered a certain recognition and

feeling of visibility in a moment of crisis. A space that opened up for people in need while the whole city and its support mechanisms were shutting down.

The project ended in August 2020 with the idea that the activists' resources were running out both in terms of energy from the volunteers side and material goods while the responsibility was deferred to the municipality to find a structural solution, as the online article of the Utrechtse Internet Courant reports (in dutch).

#### Crossing institutional boundaries

What stood out for me in this whole experience, was the infrastructure supporting the project. As mentioned above in the chronology of our small contribution to the city's solidarity scene, the spaces which were used were the art institution BAK, Basis voor Actuele Kunst and the social center ACU. Both with different history and mission, these two entities managed to create a platform where such types of projects could emerge. How was that possible?

From ACU's website one reads: 'ACU is a political-cultural center in the Voorstraat directly in the center of Utrecht. ACU is noncommercial, independent from the municipality's agenda and fully run by volunteers. ACU has found its niche as is for more than 40 years an integral part of Utrecht's

cultural and political scene'. A legalized squat, remnant of the roaring squatters movement of the eighties and deeply rooted in a tradition of egalitarian politics, direct action and autonomism it is very much expected from a space like this to host solidarity meals. People's kitchens and solidarity meals (eetcafés and volkskeukens or vokus as they are called in the Netherlands) is what activists of this genealogy have been doing for decades after all. However, one would wonder – and rightfully so – what does an art institute have to do with charitable meals or activism of this kind?

The relationship between art and activism or political discourses has been an established field of study and a well-known debate as often one of the functions of art and artistic practice is to criticize but also figuratively – and quite literally in some cases – 'paint a picture' of the wrongs of the contemporary world. Moreover, art speaks to the imagination of people, presents new worlds and possibilities. It is therefore a powerful tool of persuasion and mobilization for affirmative change.

If one would closely look at BAK's program they would immediately recognize the institute's commitment to such causes. Furthermore, the idea of bringing together practitioners, artists, activists and thinkers while creating a platform for emerging boundary-crossing projects is evident in many of BAK's activities. For example, the series BAK, basis voor... was conceived by artist and BAK collaborator Jeanne van Heeswijk as a basis for collaboration and interaction of grass-root organizations, communities and unexpected formations as the playful use of the ellipsis in the series name implies. The last year quite a few individuals and collectives have found shelter in BAK including Extinction Rebellion, refugee women's organization New Women Connectors and the grass-roots, radical left festival 2Dh5 to name a few.

Collectives one wouldn't expect to meet in a museum or a gallery or an art space somehow make their appearance in BAK.

Like so, the Basic Activist Kitchen, which I mentioned earlier, has turned to be an organic part of BAK which in an opportune moment can introduce topics of food procurement, food waste, solidarity meals, cooking and eating together as a political act in the institute's agenda and beyond. In a moment of crisis, these actors were able to quickly respond to emerging urgencies and set up projects like the one I participated in, bringing together different people and institutions and the various sets of skills and world views that they bring along.

As far as I could tell, this atypical collaboration of an ex-squat, current autonomous social space, an art institution and volunteers was possible because of the involvement of actors operating in both spaces and the intentional opening up of BAK to collaborations outside the 'usual, institutional, suspects in the period prior to the pandemic'. Activists, organizers and other actors found each other, interacted, bridged their interests and concerns and most importantly built networks of trust and mutual help. By mobilizing those networks, friendly relations and their capacity, our food relief initiative became – apart from a gesture of solidarity towards the disadvantageous groups in the city of Utrecht – an experimentation in overcoming the strict definition of an art institution and its role in city life.

Rather than official agreements or declarations of long-term collaborations these unforeseen joint forces point to a direction of more fluid and flexible institutional work where the meaning of culture as public good translates into a quite tangible form. A definitely interesting development to reflect upon and something to follow in the future!



## 3.10

# Reflections from the field: Linking the past with the present through pickling, fermenting, and food preservation in Gdańsk, Poland.

Ola Gracjasz writes about fermentation practices in  
Gdańsk, Poland.

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OLA GRACJASZ | 22 JUNE 2021



The work of the ethnographer has the advantage of taking one to places and situations that, otherwise, one might not have been able to find oneself in. While doing my 15 months fieldwork in Gdańsk, Poland, I visited places and met people that would have not crossed my path otherwise. One of such events were fermentation, pickling and food preservation workshop.

### **Pickling and fermenting as a culinary tradition**

Fermentation is not something I had never heard of, on the contrary. I had just never imagined myself going to cooking workshops, as all the recipes I learned came through my family or other social networks. Being Polish by birth and having spent the first 18 years of my life there, fermented foods (known under the umbrella term “kiszonki”) constituted an integral part of my diet. Every spring my mum would soak young ground cucumbers in salted water for a few days to make “ogórki małosolne” (salted cucumbers). Every year my granddad, at least a week before Christmas Eve would prepare a special fermented beetroot juice which would later be used as a base for one of the most important Christmas dishes in my family, the beetroot soup called “barszcz”. Sauerkraut, that is fermented cabbage, was a typical side salad at my school canteen. Fermentation was an essential part of Polish cuisine long time before I was born. It was especially common after the Second World War and during PRL (Polska Republika Ludowa, Polish People’s Republic), when people experienced a ‘shortage economy’, and insecurities were looming large.

Things have changed. Poland is one of the most economically stable countries in the post-soviet bloc. As Joe Smith, Tomáš Kostecký, and Petr Jehlička puts it, ‘it is worth noting that particularly in the Polish case the economy has been one of the most buoyant in the European Union, with some of the highest growth rates despite the wider economic recession since 2008, yet still we have found sustained practices of food self-production across all social groups’ Smith et al 2015,

227). In cities like Gdańsk, women work outside the home, pursuing personal careers. Products availability is as wide as in any capitalist economy country. Why would anyone organize and take part in workshops about food preservation, pickling and fermenting? Interestingly, sociologists have observed that practices of food self-production in Central and Eastern European Countries are performed mainly by the middle classes, rather than working classes (Jehlička et al 2015, Stroe 2018).

### **Pickling and fermenting as a global trend**

Fermented foods are experiencing a massive come-back, not only in Poland, but also in Europe and some other countries of the Global North. For example, goodfood.com reports that “Australia’s kombucha industry is now worth of more than \$200 million”[1]. American food writer Sandor Katz has been touring around the USA, presenting his books on fermentation[2], spreading the knowledge on health benefits of fermented foods and educating the general public on home-made fermented products. The internet and especially social media are full of tutorials on, recipes of and health tips about fermentation in all its forms (including sourdough, kombucha, kimchi, etc.). In the same article published on goodfood.com the author Callan Boys shares that the reference to ‘gut health’ and ‘fermented foods’ on social media has significantly increased over the last two years[3]. A YouTube video titled “The Complete Guide to Fermenting Every Single Vegetable” scores more than 1, 5 million views, reflecting this fermentation hype. The global pandemic and resulting lockdowns around the world have also contributed to people’s increased interest in at-home culinary practices and food self-preservation. Interestingly, skills and knowledge which used to be passed from mother to a daughter to grand-daughter are now a form of commodity, which can be branded and sold either as ready-made products or workshops.

## Recasting tradition: a closer look on Gdańsk, Poland.

This rise of interest in food self-preservation goes hand in hand with a rising awareness on health benefits among Polish urban middle-classes. For example, Zakwasownia (from the word zakwas which literally means leaven or sourdough) is a company that sells jars and bottles of specialty food products with a particular attention to fermented and pickled vegan foods and drinks. It started as a family manufacture who sold their products mainly at an exclusive organic food market in Gdańsk and with the help of its affluent customers, the food market's popularity, and successful advertising grew exponentially within just few years. It was set up by a couple who had worked in the corporate environment before. Combining the food preservation skills of their older family members with personal skills gained in a corporate context (branding, advertising, profiling and running social media) was crucial to developing their company. Magda, one of the founder of Zakwasownia said in an interview for Mint Magazine: "We started pouring the fermented beetroot juice into beautiful wine bottles and labelling it. Fermented beetroot juice from a wine glass is much more pleasant to drink"(Zaczęliśmy

rozlewać zakwas w piękne butelki od wina i opatrywać etykietą. Zdecydowanie przyjemniej pije się zakwas z kieliszka.) (Mint)[4]. Their online promotion is filled with beautiful pictures and information about health benefits of consuming kiszonki.

Similarly, several women who took part in a pickling and fermenting workshop with me, told me that one of the main reasons for attending was to learn "natural and healthy ways of cooking" and to be "independent from the agro-industrial system", whose products cannot be trusted. Knowing how to make fermented goods is a skill of self-sufficiency, desired out of the distrust towards the industrialized food production.

If there is something we can learn from Central and Eastern Europe is to look into traditional and local practices which are now being re-defined and re-cast as fashionable among urban-middle classes. While commodification of these domestic practices can be seen as a sign of roaring capitalism it can also be seen as an empowerment of those who are gaining these skills and those who teach those skills, mainly educated, working women living in cities.



*Photo from the pickling and fermenting workshop organized in ZiemiaSfera – an emerging hip vegan-cum-zero waste shop/café in Wrzeszcz, an up-and-coming neighbourhood of Gdańsk. This workshop was attended only by women (between 25 and 35) although other workshops also attract men and women of different ages.*



# Groenboerenplan

CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 23 OCTOBER 2023

## A plan for the future from green farmers.

About 7650 people, of which almost 900 organizations, support the Green Farmers Plan (Groenboerenplan). The Green Farmers Plan partners lobby together and participate in societal dialogues, for example about the so-called 'top polluters' (piekbelasters), which importantly feature in the current Dutch political debate on environmental imbalances in

the Netherlands. Here, particularly pollution from nitrogen (stikstofproblematiek) is of national concern as a result of intensive agriculture and other industrial and building activities.

On the Green Farmers Plan web page one finds information about their recent activities. In February

2023, a start-up conference hosted at Utrecht University gathered about 350 invited participants (amongst whom the PI of the Food Citizens? project). Through a 10-point plan, the ‘green farmers’ sent out their manifesto about a positive future for Dutch organic farmers, based on natural systems and optimal water usage to build a circular economy, learning to live with climate change, and making society more nature-oriented (see the conference report). This happened just before the Dutch ‘provincial elections’ rocked the political landscape in March, with the landslide victory of the pro-farmers party BBB (BoerBurgerBeweging) and, one could argue, contributed to the fall of the fourth and last Rutte government in the summer of 2023.

In the light of this dynamic political landscape, and in preparation of the upcoming political elections of November 2023, the ‘Green Farmers’ have been busy: partner Biohuis participated in the negotiations for the national Agricultural Agreement (Landbouwakkoord). In the light of its failure in June 2023, the Green Farmers have launched a video message proposing a ‘Food Agreement’ (Voedselakkoord) with organic, non gen-tech agriculture at its basis.

Green Farmers partner Caring Farmers is busy at the main table for negotiations around the Animal Husbandry Covenant (Convenant Dierwaardige Veehouderij).

While lobbying for better policy forms a fundamental part of the Green Farmers Plan, they also underline how consumers can make a big difference with their choices: for example buying exclusively organic, and preferably from a local farmer, or through a short-chain initiative such as a Community Supported Agriculture scheme.

Other popular initiatives include participating in cooperative schemes to create or join a land trust: such as Herenboeren, Land Van Ons, Aardpeer, and Lenteland.



## 4.1



# Seminar with Wojciech Goszczyński and Ruta Śpiewak in Leiden

OLA GRACJASZ | 14 DECEMBER 2021

On 27th of October 2021 the Food Citizens? team welcomed Wojciech Goszczyński and Ruta Śpiewak for a day-long seminar at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology.

The Food Citizens? team had the pleasure to host a one-day seminar with two Polish rural sociologists: Wojciech Goszczyński (Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń) and Ruta Śpiewak (Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw).

The seminar was an intensive exchange about each other's research projects through rich and stimulating discussions. After the presentation by the three ERC PhDs on their current state of thesis development, Federico De Musso shared a work-in-progress visualization of the project's digital platform, which will be launched at the project conference on February 4th, 2022.

Dr. Goszczyński and Dr. Śpiewak presented their current research-in-progress with the titles: "Relational rural: performing rurality through alternative food practices" and "Commons or Commodity: Alternative Food Networks in Poland?", respectively.

The discussion that followed was particularly beneficial for Ola Gracjasz, our Polish PhD candidate (since both scholars have been working on food procurement in Poland over several years), but everyone shared insightful comparative comments and questions, for example over the role of cooperatives in the 'alternative' food scene in Europe, and about the commodification of the 'experience' of the rural in heritage foods venues and events. Both the Food Citizens? team and our guests were happy to use the opportunity to meet in real life and brainstorm on further cooperation.



## 4.2

# The Making of a Food Policy Network

ARNOLD VAN DER VALK | 1 FEBRUARY 2023



**Arnold van der Valk on the Food Council of the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam (MRA).**



Food policy networks are innovative governance instruments that aim to stimulate food system transformation. The first example of a food policy network in the Netherlands was established in 2014 at the city of Rotterdam. By 2020 it had practically dissolved due to a lack of funding and political neglect, much to my regret. The regret stems from my involvement in the conception of the second specimen of such a network in the Netherlands, i.e. a food council for the metropolitan region of Amsterdam (Food Council MRA). The demise of the Rotterdam food council seemed a bad omen.

Until-retirement in 2017 I researched the performance of food policy councils. Through my academic work I became befriended with dr. Wayne Roberts the (retired) director of the Toronto Food Policy Council. He encouraged me to establish a food council at Amsterdam, taking into consideration lessons learned at Toronto over almost three decades. With financial support of an entrepreneur, two provinces, four municipalities, and Rabobank, the organizing committee i.e. Jeffrey Spangenberg and Arnold van der Valk managed to congregate some 300 people from all ranks of society including politicians, bankers, scholars, social workers, entrepreneurs and foodies. On December 7th, 2017, at the Berlage Beurs - a reputed conference venue - Food Council MRA was born. Its future looked bright.

Soon enough the founders were confronted with an array of obstacles, many quite similar to the ones that Cristina Grasseni and her team have explored in the Food Citizens? programme. Conflicts of interest, conceptual confusion, lack of funding, internal struggle, greenwashing, political manipulation and much more. In retrospective the pioneering years between 2017 and 2023 compare to an Echternach procession, first three steps ahead and then two steps back.

January 2023 a (near) miracle happened, the European Commission approved a 12 million Euro Horizon proposal under the acronym of FoodClic. Food Council MRA partners with the foundation Voedsel Verbindt and Amsterdam municipality thus are able to spend a substantial budget for the entire Amsterdam metropolitan region. The goal of the FoodClic programme is the creation of strong science-policy-practice interfaces in order to develop evidence-based and integrated food policies and render planning frameworks food-sensitive. The programme focuses on the conception of resilient urban food environments and empowerment of deprived and vulnerable groups in eight European urban regions. One important lesson from five years of pioneering work is that cooperation is the road to success for civil initiatives such as our bottom up food policy network.





# — Skilling for sustainable food

MARIS GILLETTE | 04 APRIL 2023

## Is Europe skilling for sustainable food?

This question preoccupies many of us, including the anthropologists who contributed to a recently-published special issue of *kritisk etnografi* – the Swedish Journal of Anthropology. As Cristina Grasseni and I note in our introduction, sustainability has become mainstream today, and nowhere more than in the food system. Yet as the contributions to the special issue make clear, Europe’s denizens have rather different ideas about what sustainable food entails, and so what skills are needed to achieve it.

For example, among the agroecological market gardeners that Loodts studied in Wallonia, sustainability hinges on optimising the

day-to-day conditions for plants to develop. By developing their capacity to see what is happening in the garden beds and anticipate what is needed to promote healthy plants, the gardeners avert the need for pesticides and produce vegetables that they consider more sustainable than those provided through industrial agriculture. For the coastal fishers who participated in the research described by Gillette, Arias Schreiber, and Siegrist, sustainable seafood is linked to their own capacity to continue wild fisheries capture despite a management regime that prevents them from fishing a multitude of species they encounter in local ecosystems. These fishers have unwillingly learned to navigate regulations, paperwork and bureaucracy to continue fishing, while also developing skills to argue for their desired fishing practices in the hopes of influencing public opinion about sustainable fishing. Vasile's interlocutors in Turin, by contrast, take a very different approach to sustainable food. As she describes, numerous small non-governmental organisations have collaborated to form a network that cuts back on food waste at Turin's open-air markets while offering assistance to vulnerable populations. Yet while this network won an award for its contributions for sustainability (the result of a public-private partnership), Vasile notes that such practices do not only contribute to food waste reduction, they also "sustain" the government's retreat from social welfare. The two food cooperatives that Plender scrutinises are premised on still different understandings of sustainable food. Food sustainability is central to Britain's cooperative movement, not only because such cooperatives purchase and sell food that is local and organic, but because they promote working cooperatively in order to acquire food from outside the mainstream provisioning system. As Plender's research shows, the skills required for cooperation are not easily acquired in contemporary Britain: organisational structures and deeply-rooted individualism inhibit cooperative participants from developing coherent shared visions for collective action to promote sustainable food.

### **Sustainability's bottom line – the individual and the collective approach**

Recent reports suggest that sustainable food, and the skills

to achieve it, have taken on new meanings in contemporary Sweden. Sweden's Central Bureau of Statistics reported that the price of food has risen more than 20% over the past year. Such a rapid rise in food prices has not occurred since 1951. Given that this has been accompanied by higher interest rates on mortgages, higher electricity prices, and general inflation, many Swedes have had to change how they buy food – in other words, reskill. According to Swedish public radio, one new skill Swedish food shoppers have manifest in recent months is buying cheap food, which, as the Swedish meat producer interviewed in this reportage points out, means food "produced on the other side of the world." It also means abandoning nearby food shops in favour of superstores which are farther away. Yet another manifestation of such new skills is cutting back on purchases of fruit and vegetables, a development that the Swedish Food Agency has criticized. Swedes are also buying less dairy, fewer eggs, and less organic food. Consumption of candy and ice cream, however, remain high.

By and large, such news suggests that that the individual's or family's economy is the bottom line for "sustainable food" for many Swedes these days – at the expense of health, social solidarity, and the environment. On the individual or family level, these newly-manifest skills are about making personal finances work. At the system level, the cumulative impact of these newly-manifest skills is billions in profits for the three food giants ICA, Axfood, and Coop. In addition to sustaining (or enhancing) economic inequality, these practices of "sustainable food" also maintain an agri-industrial food system that makes a significant contribution to global warming and environmental degradation – undermining the systems and processes on which it depends, as the European Environmental Agency points out. The Swedish government has thus far refused to take any steps to address this situation. By contrast, France has budgeted significant sums to compensate families for inflated food prices, and the French government has successfully pressured major food retailers to cap food prices, at least temporarily. At least some European countries appear to recognise that food sustainability is not simply a matter of individual choices.

# Researching food-centred social networks with participatory visual methods

GINEVRA MONTEFUSCO | 9 MAY 2023



## Ginevra Montefusco on participatory visual methods.

Our Winter School alumna Ginevra Montefusco defended her Master thesis this March with the title *Food in the Margin: a feminist analysis of sense of place in Barriera di Milano, Turin* (supervisors: Alessia Toldo and Egidio Dansero).

This dissertation, based on fieldwork research in Turin investigates the dimension of the ‘margins’ of urban contexts, in both spatial and social sense. Ginevra analyses the sense of place of those who inhabits ‘the margins’ of Turin through the lens of food. Two projects (the ex Public Baths of via Agliè and il Boschetto in the Turin neighbourhood of Barriera di Milano) adopt diverse strategies of social care through food, enhancing its transformative power. Participants exercise a sense of place through urban food sovereignty, building community ‘at the margins’. Both projects also feature

in Maria Vasile’s forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation, and in the *Food Citizens? I-doc*.

Ginevra Montefusco’s article about Turin’s popular neighbourhood Barriera di Milano is forthcoming soon. Her visual research output is the interactive documentary *Food in the margin*. This research employs participatory visual methodology, inspired by decolonial and feminist epistemologies.

Currently, Ginevra is furthering her research and visual methods skills at CAWR (Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience) where she is conducting a participatory mapping and video project with women farming in Gaza and Khan Yunis in the framework of *Gaza Foodways* | [agroecology.world](http://agroecology.world).

# SOLIDARan

OLGA ORLIC | 6 MARCH 2023

## Anthropological Research on Solidarity Economy in Croatia: the case of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

In 2013 I became familiar with community-supported agriculture (CSA), thanks to my friend who started to grow vegetables near Zagreb. When she explained to me how she planned to sell these vegetables, her explanation about CSA triggered both my private and professional interest in topics related to food sovereignty, food systems and food citizenship. Soon I learned that these practices were important building blocks of a wider agenda: a globally expanding grassroots movement striving to create a change – solidarity economy (often encompassed by an umbrella term – social and solidary economy, abbreviation SSE). If you are not satisfied with the way things function today (climate change, pollution, poverty and inequality caused by the extractive capitalism) it is easy to fall in love with the idea of trying to create a kind of a new world – a kind

of ecotopia – by making changes on a micro level. However small these changes might appear, it may turn out that it is not easy to make the change from consumers to prosumers.

### Solidarity Economy

The 2008 crisis caused a somewhat more intensive encounter among theoretical reflections about this transformation, and the COVID-19 pandemic showed quite clearly the importance of food sovereignty. Practices concerned with the necessity for change, which existed earlier, gained momentum, and they began to network on various levels. From 2007 onwards in the USA, a Solidarity Economy Platform was set up, resulting in further networking and a global expansion in numerous initiatives and movements from below. Scholars noted differences



at the level of state-inclusion in such initiatives, across different parts of the world (Kawano et al 2009). Precisely because of its sheer numbers and the diversity of forms in which it appears, the solidarity economy has different names in different parts of the world – e.g. the good, alternative, green or human economy (Puđak, Majetić & Šimleša 2015), or simply the ‘other’ (Spanish *otra*) economy (Cattani, Coraggio & Laville 2009). Solidarity economy initiatives often encompass the somewhat wider concept of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) (Laville 2010, Dash 2014, Šimleša et al 2016). This is often perceived as a kind of “third sector” in the economy, directed towards sustainability in general, and correcting negative capitalist practices (Evers & Laville 2004, Laville 2010, Fonteneau et al, 2011).

## SOLIDARan

My interdisciplinary team of researchers was lucky enough to get funding from the Croatian Science Foundation for the research project “Solidarity

economy in Croatia: anthropological perspective” (SOLIDARan). Research on the solidarity economy is not only important in the Croatian context, but also at the global level, especially because the topic represents an important link between the complex field of scholarly research (attempts to transform the dominant economic system via various social innovations) and the social and economic influence that the researched phenomenon itself effectuates.

As every complex term, solidarity economy is difficult to define, but researchers of the SOLIDARan project presume that a set of disparate initiatives and movements are focused on creating and practicing “alternative ways of living, producing and consuming” (Bauhard 2014). This includes practices such as communal living, community kitchens, Open Source initiatives, workers’ cooperatives, urban gardening, community-supported agriculture, eco-villages, ethical financing, alternative currencies, LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems), fair trade initiatives and numerous others. With this project we try to gain in-depth insights on attitudes, values and experiences of people involved in SE practices. This enables us to scrutinize classical anthropological terms such as solidarity, reciprocity and community in the contemporary, transformative moment. Diverse initiatives that appeared on the Croatian territory in the past decade have become the core case studies of the project, including a female beer brewery cooperative Brlog (Zadar), Vestigium – a community centre providing food provisioning amongst others (Zagreb), various cooperatives from rural areas as well as cooperatives aimed at achieving integration of vulnerable groups at work (Gračac, Osijek, Zagreb, Čakovec), CSA groups in Croatia (Zagreb area, Osijek, Istria), and common-pool resources such as Gajna pastoral community (Oprisavci). The results of this research project, together with contributions of scholars involved in researching related topics (such as Cristina Grasseni and Peter Simonič who acted as invited lecturers) have been presented at



the “Practicing Solidarity for the Future” conference that was held in Zagreb, 14–16 September 2023). The complete conference proceedings will be available by the end of 2023 in an edited volume open access on <https://solidaran.inantro.hr/>.

## CSA in Croatia

In particular, CSA groups in Croatia have so far developed in two directions (Orlić 2019). A CSA in Istria was founded by the first Istrian certified ecological producer. Therefore, in Istria, producers have been equal members of the group and they have to be certified organic or in the process of conversion. Since 2015, Istrian CSA groups have been named Solidary ecological groups (SEG) because they wanted to differentiate themselves from groups operating in other areas of Croatia (mainly the Primorje region and Central Croatia). They also have organized, with the help of local administration a sort of pop up market (SET) where producers have been selling their organic products to non-group members at a different price. The other type of CSA, named Groups of solidary exchange (GSR) started operating in 2012 based on the example of Italian Gruppi d'aquisto solidale (GAS), whose routine(s) and meanings for wider society was elaborated by Cristina Grasseni (2013). Therefore, these groups did not insist on farmers being certified organic. Members of these groups displayed distrust to the state administration and private companies involved in the certification process, and focused their group on the creation of mutual trust, transparency and solidarity. These groups have been successful, although some of them have experienced ups and downs, depending on ever-changing group dynamics. However, they have been a good bottom-up model for public policy initiatives that started to be implemented in Croatia, mainly thanks to the European Green Deal. In relation to food, this has mainly been focused on Short Supply Chains (SSC), however in Croatia the emphasised benefits of organized provisioning within the SSC has not been so much on the organic production of food, as much as on provisioning of locally produced

food. CSA in Croatia – both GSR and SEG – can be analysed as bottom-up predecessors of SSC, which are yet to be implemented on a wider scale – so far only one – AGRISHORT SSC has been organized based on a top-down model (Bagarić 2021).

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# From urban food organizations to food policies

Comparing gazes between Turin and other cities in the global north.

01 JUNE 2023 | ALESSANDRA MANGANELLI, GINEVRA MONTEFUSCO AND MARIA VASILE

How are urban food organizations evolving in the Global North? Are these forming networks? How should we differentiate these organisations and related networks from urban food movements? How are these organizations working towards the development of local food policies? Starting from these questions, on March 24, 2023, the researchers Alessandra Manganelli, Ginevra Montefusco and Maria Vasile presented insights from their respective work in the context of a seminar organized at the University of Turin.



### **PunTo: towards a food policy in Turin?**

The seminar was promoted as part of a broader process called PunTo Al Cibo: Paesaggi e Comunità Urbane per Nutrire Torino (Urban landscapes and communities for nourishing Turin), which brings together non-profit organizations, academics and public administration representatives, who work on food-related themes in this city. The aim of PunTo is to start a process that can facilitate the development of an urban food policy. Several attempts in this sense were already made in the past. These resulted in the organization of collective brainstorming events as well as the publication of a booklet in 2016 (Bottiglieri et al. 2016), which reports on most of their outcomes.

Several years later, in 2022, to bring back the attention on the importance of local coordinated food actions and food policies, the University of Turin (and, in particular, the Atlante del Cibo di Torino Metropolitana's research group) proposed to local organizations working on food-related issues to meet again. After developing an updated map of these organizations and their work, next steps include the discussion a joint vision of the role and potential of urban food organizations, what they would like a local food policy to look like, and what should be their contribution.

More generally, as discussed by Alessia Toldo in her introduction to the seminar, debating on contemporary diversity of urban food organizations, movements and policies represent an opportunity to reflect on possible ways forward in Turin. In this perspective, the speakers were invited to share some suggestions, grounded in their different research experiences, with regards to PunTo and its objectives.

### **Food policies or the hybrid governance of urban food movements?**

Alessandra Manganelli introduced her research on Urban Food Movements in Europe and North America,

in particular in Brussels and Toronto. Among other things, Alessandra discussed elements of her recently published book *The Hybrid Governance of Urban Food Movements*, where she developed the concept of hybrid governance applied to the transformative challenges of urban food movements. Focusing on critical "governance tensions", she highlighted challenges to carve out spaces in which developing food growing practices; to mobilise collective action in order to shape sustainable food organisations; and to co-construct enabling institutional frameworks (Manganelli 2022).

Her reflections included remarks on the (lack of) inclusiveness of some policy processes. Furthermore, she reflected on the need to design institutional frameworks that can preserve the autonomy of grassroots projects and their critical voices and identity. Alessandra also explained how the food policy in Toronto has been undergoing a phase of re-adaptation from 2019 onwards, due to drastic changes in higher level policy institutions as well as the emergence of the Covid-19 that has revamped food justice concerns. This case exemplifies how food policies are difficult to manage with continuity over time. Moreover, it reveals the ways in which they might go through governance tensions and crisis, and how food needs to work out its position on the agenda of local policy makers.

### **How to include labour and right-to-the-city issues in food policy discussions?**

Building on her research on Collective Food Procurement in Turin (Vasile 2023), Maria Vasile focused her contribution on some themes which are central to the work of food organizations, but only rarely discussed at governance level (nor addressed via existing food policies in Italy). In particular, Maria referred to the issue of voluntary (or unremunerated) labour in food organizations. Voluntary labour is in fact at the heart of many contemporary food organisations such as food aid initiatives. At the same time, it should be problematised in relation to the sustainability of such projects, as well as in relation to the issue of work precarity, the importance of employment contracts and

social protection.

Maria asked if food policy arenas can be sites where such labour configuration can be acknowledged and critically discussed. She also hinted to the importance of considering how food-related projects play a role in city transformations and might be integral components of top-down urban renewal or gentrification processes. This represents in her view yet another reason for policy integration. For example, food policies should not be discussed separately from urban social planning but tightly related to issues of inclusiveness, building on the perspectives of current local inhabitants.

### **Analysing the work of Turin food organizations from a feminist perspective**

The work of Ginevra Montefusco (2023) similarly highlighted the importance to critically explore food organisations as part of their broader context, and in particular processes of urban marginalization. Building on her recent fieldwork in northern Turin, Ginevra highlighted how different local projects tend to approach jointly the issues of access to food and social inclusion through food aid initiatives and social gardens, for example. By analysing food-related organizations from a feminist perspective,

she highlighted how these projects can incorporate quite different perspectives on local resources and needs, as well as people's sense of place, belonging and visions around the idea of care. Her work, investing the urban margin starting from food organizations, develops a reflection on the transformative power of care in food-related projects in deconstructing fractures based on race, class and gender in a marginalized and multicultural neighbourhood.

In terms of her suggestions for PunTO, Ginevra highlighted the importance of giving the right space to collaborative efforts around the definition of food-related interventions using participatory tools such as countermapping. This is important to start from and build on the ideas of local inhabitants. Overall, her research suggests rethinking researchers and practitioners' approach around the ways in which needs are discussed, acknowledged and framed, especially in marginalized contexts. Ginevra suggests including people direct gazes, various positions in the design of food projects and evaluation of their outcomes. The research emphasises the importance of cooperation between food organisations to bring together different interventions to comprehensively respond to the material, social and psycho-emotional dimensions of food poverty.

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# The transformative power of food

Creating a good life and new work values through foodwork?



AGATA BACHÓRZ | 15 DECEMBER 2023

## MasterChef pattern and biographical transformations

Food researchers are well-acquainted with the ongoing discussion around the potential transformation of social and economic relations through food. Among others, discussions frequently revisit the theme of alienation: a few examples of discourse on the engagement with food and food production could be referenced. For instance, Isabelle de Solier (2013) suggests that the middle classes' interest in food production serves as a response to the lack of creativity and material productivity in both work and leisure. The non-alienating nature of craft production in an ethnographic case study of neo-traditional cheesemaking (Paxson 2013) is another example that can be explored. According to Dwight Furrow (2016), the Western world is currently undergoing a “food revolution,” motivated by endeavors to generate new significance in response to bureaucratization, standardization, and an overarching

emphasis on economic growth. These themes are also reflected in “Sitopia” by Carolyn Steel (2021), where the author envisions a social utopia achieved through reestablishing the relationship with food, highlighting the role of manual food-related work as a remedy to the repercussions of industrialization.

This context has led individuals to pursue food-related work, whether as a leisure activity or a passion-driven profession, while attributing to it the potential to reclaim authenticity and agency within their own life stories. The relatively recent cultural phenomenon prompts people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to use food as a framework for narratives of self-discovery and personal fulfillment. This paradigm, accompanied by the notion of the “empowering force of passion”, is prevalent in popular culture, including reality shows and lifestyle media outlets, with their grand-narrative of a “life-makeover”.

### **Class, career and manual labor – paradoxes**

I have been intrigued by the motivations behind these professional choices made within a specific historical and socio-cultural context: contemporary Poland, a postsocialist country that has experienced significant structural and cultural shifts over the last 30 years (and, accordingly, earlier, throughout the 20th century). In my research, described in detail in an article published in Polish journal *Studia Socjologiczne*, I examine real-life transitions from white-collar jobs to roles within the food industry. I have tried to reach people, living in a few large Polish cities, who voluntarily remodeled (or were in the process of changing) their current professional paths. These were biographical projects focused on professionalizing earlier activities practiced in private spaces primarily for leisure, which contrasted with previous jobs by involving a significant manual labor component. This was often, though not entirely accurately, referred to as “downward social mobility,” yet they possess a paradoxical nature concerning social class.

In post-socialist Poland, the desired career paths have been closely linked to higher education and white-collar jobs. The educational boom of the 1990s and early 2000s reflected people’s aspirations and a collective drive toward a meritocratic and middle-class society.

Dominant career trajectories were associated not only with non-manual work and Eastern European intelligentsia values, but also with stable or upwardly mobile professional paths. This is why deviating from these established career paths—such as those who professionalized their passion for food—might appear revolutionary and radical. Paradoxically, however, transitions from intellectual labor to roles in foodwork also confirm middle-class notions of an ideal professional life, not only because they are performed by

privileged social actors with different forms of capital. They also underscore the importance of a “correct” alignment between work and passion. They are anchored in middle-class ideas of self-control, agency, flexibility, and the creative crafting of one’s biography. According to Andreas Reckwitz (2017) it is the “deviation from the norm” that is increasingly becoming socially accepted nowadays.

In fact, individuals who start to produce food instead of continuing office jobs pursue careers that may be seen as valuable in a postindustrial society that undermines “the ladder career” in favor of more personal standards (Gruhlich 2023). At the same time, they allow us to address questions on rebuilding work relations. When changing career paths, the research participants do not do this in response to burnout or a sense of helplessness. Instead, they actively attempt, albeit with some experimentation, to “add on” to their experience this new dimension of a good life.

### **Engaging in food-related professions and a “good life”**

Tasked by the editor of the thematic section of *Studia Socjologiczne*, Anna Horolets, to reflect on the concept of the “good life,” I investigated how a career transition towards food production might shed light on this notion. One of the individuals I interviewed shared his experience with the decision he made: “My mother thinks that my previous profession was excellent and provided stability. You’re in a good position—what more could you want?”. This “more” is a key aspect here: I aim to comprehend the experiences of individuals who opted for a shift, “dropping everything to work in a restaurant.”

Based on the collected material, it turned out that the allure of engaging with food stems from the clear, visible, and controllable outcomes of one’s efforts. The

new profession is not merely categorized as manual labor—career switchers intertwine manual labor not only with conceptual work but also with educational, publishing, or business management activities. They eagerly emphasize the knowledge-intensive nature of working with food. However, within these various forms of new commitment, it is the tangible results that hold significance for people. What I find particularly intriguing is that while physical effort is not at the core of this new professional path, materiality—understood as the visibility, sensuality, and tangibility of the work's outcome—is rewarding. It stands in clear opposition to alienating abstraction and emerges as one of the primary demands for transforming the human relationship with professional work.

Some individuals may express dissatisfaction with their previous roles, feeling ensnared in a lengthy chain of dependencies where they perceive themselves as somehow “invisible.” Working in a kitchen appears to be the antithesis, offering a clearer perception and control over the scale and time invested “from the effort to the outcome”. The tangible relationship with the outcome of one's work yields a particularly significant result—it fosters a connection with another individual: a consumer, or more appropriately, a guest or a partner. Thanks to my interviewees I am convinced that this aspect notably, and perhaps even centrally, contributes to the concept of improving lives through work. For example, the return of empty plates to the restaurant kitchen symbolizes the essence of work, evoking notions of gift-giving beyond mere economic transactions.

I discovered that working with food indeed offers something that helps counteract the alienating nature of certain professions, and characteristic of late modernity. This is why I propose to apply the concept of resonance, as suggested by Hartmut Rosa (2020[2013]), to better comprehend the experience of career changers. Rosa's fundamental proposition is set against the backdrop of the world's complexity and illegibility, which eludes human experience and intervention.

He writes about the need to reconstruct the relationship between people and the world in the era of “acceleration.” According to him, people are concerned with building a dynamic, two-way relationship with the world—one that is not solely rational, optimal, or instrumental. Resonant relationships are non-instrumental, aimed at an affective and bodily response from another person and connected to the transformative action for both sides of the relationship and for the world. At the same time, resonance is not synonymous with recognition, praise, or reward. Its essence includes an unknown factor: it cannot be entirely planned, predicted or deliberately manufactured, unlike the contemporary work environments focused on standardizing outcomes. Despite the paradoxical relation to class and albeit relatively limited potential for transforming the system, I think the career shifts towards food production should not be interpreted only as extravagant private decisions. Resonance in Rosa's concept is more of a fleeting spark than a stable state, but it nevertheless sets the direction for thinking about a good life and the place of work in it.

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- Acknowledgement: *This blog post is based on an article published in the Polish sociological journal Studia Socjologiczne as: Agata Bachórz, „Rzuciła pracę w korpo i zajęła się... gotowaniem”. Praca z jedzeniem, nieoczywiste transformacje zawodowe i poszukiwanie alternatywnej relacji ze światem [“She Quit Her Corporate Job and Took Up... Cooking.” Professional Food Work, Unobvious Career Shifts and the Search for an Alternative Relationship with the World], Studia Socjologiczne 2013, 1, 59–86, DOI: 10.24425/sts.2023.144833. The article is a part of the thematic section dedicated to “alternative visions of the good life,” initiated, edited and introduced by Anna Horolets.*

# — Winter School a — success!



FEDERICO DE MUSSO | 9 FEBRUARY 2022

**Nine participants attended the Winter School, two weeks of intensive training in Digital Visual Engagements in Anthropological Research.**

Coming from Belgium, Ghana, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The Masters and PhD candidates in the universities of Bologna, Gothenburg, Kaunas, Leiden, Louvain, Tromsø, Turin and Utrecht committed to two weeks of intensive training in Digital Visual Engagements in Anthropological Research.

Rashida Alhassan Adum-Atta, Simone de Boer, Luca Di Clemente, Gabrielle Fenton, Živilė Miežytė, Ginevra Montefusco, Carolina Nemethy, Isotta Rossoni, and Hanna Wernersson attended five days of intensive theory and hands-on training organized in six interactive modules: Interactive documentary and Multimodal ethnography (taught by Federico De Musso), Ethics and informed consent (taught by Cristina Grasseni), Positionality and collaboration in the field (taught by Maria Vasile), Photography in Ethnography (taught by Ola Gracjasz), and Multi-methods focus groups (taught by Vincent Walstra). Then the students enjoyed three days of shooting and visits in the field – some of which were facilitated by the team or organized by the students

in collaboration with gardeners, market vendors, farmers and wild gastronomy chefs in South Holland. We wish to thank for their availability and for welcoming our students: Rotterdamse Oogst, GroenGoed and Markthal in Rotterdam, and, in and around Leiden: Vrienden van het Singelpark, Vrij Groen, Het Zoete Land, Kruidenprikkel and Boerderij Boterhuys.

The second week of school included a collective feedback session on the methods used, reflecting on the experience of fieldwork with a camera; then supervision and editing/coding work in pairs and small groups, to produce four interactive digital documentaries. The i-docs were presented as part of the Food Citizens? conference on Friday 4th February, in a session chaired and discussed by Federico De Musso and Sander Hölsgens, who both teach at the Visual Ethnography specialisation of the Leiden Master programme in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology. Here is a drawn postcard illustrated by the Winter School cohort as a token of their collaborative thinking and making.



Photo taken by Ola Gracjasz

## 5.2



# The Food Citizens? conference

FEDERICO DE MUSSO | 11 FEBRUARY 2022

On Friday 4th February 2022 we welcomed in hybrid format (in person and online live streaming) 154 registered participants, of which 97 online, to present the first results of the Food Citizens? ERC Consolidator project.



After working together for four years, the speakers presented the project's comparative research framework and methodology (Cristina Grasseni, Principal Investigator), the field research in Gdańsk, Turin and Rotterdam and the relevant themes emerging from 16 months ethnography (Ola Gracjasz, Maria Vasile and Vincent Walstra, Ph.D. candidates), and the i-doc namely the project's interactive digital platform that will be launched February 28th on this website (Federico De Musso, postdoc).

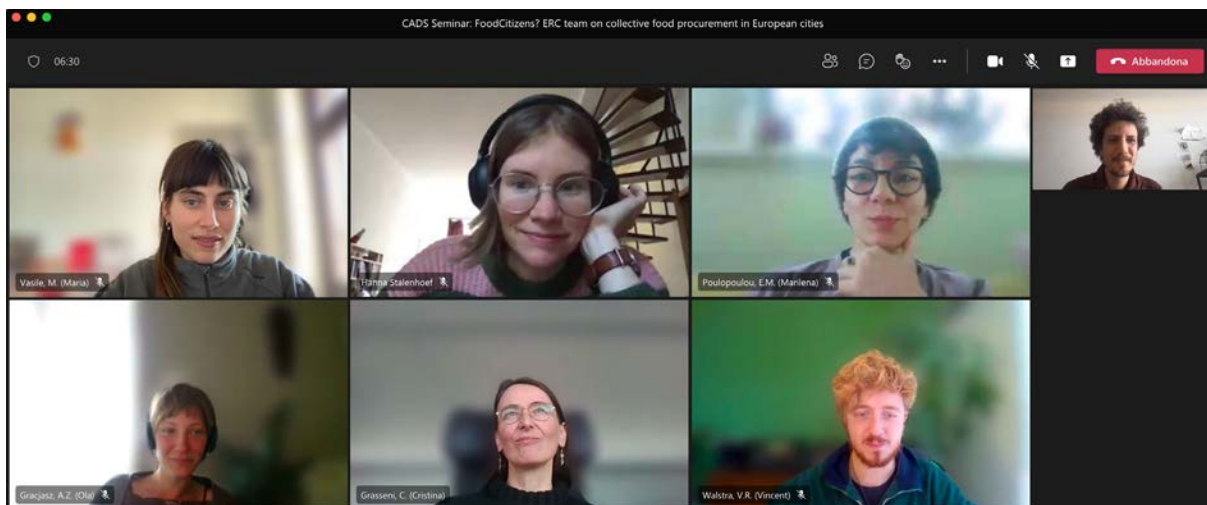
Cristina Grasseni's introduction retraced the steps of the making of the project, highlighting the comparative research design of the project which makes use of concerted, collaborative steps for a narrative approach to ethnographic comparison. The reader can retrace each milestone by consulting the readings lists, literature review, research protocol and 'taking stock' seminars available as public resources on our website, as part of our dissemination and outreach effort. Other forthcoming output are two journal special issues currently submitted and under review – one on Collaboration, Comparison and Mediation for Anthrovision (VANEASA online journal) and one on Skills for Sustainability for KE, the Journal of Swedish Anthropology, in collaboration with Maris Gillette (Gothenburg University) – and of course the PhD dissertations, which are in the making.

While thanking our interlocutors and research participants, without whom, and whose time and consent, this research would not be possible, we are also grateful to our advisory board members, who in different capacities have commented on the project submission, facilitated its implementation, responded to its developments, participated in workshops in Leiden and Gdańsk in 2018, 2019 and 2020, joined us for seminars and book presentations, and are planning our 'restitution workshops' in Turin and Gdańsk, to be held in the course of 2022, with us. Advisory board members Agata Bachorz, Francesca Forno, Colin Sage

and Paolo Graziano acted as discussants, together with Leiden colleagues Francesco Ragazzi and Sander Hölsgens who kindly responded to our i-doc and Winter School digital projects.

Scholars and civil servants, practitioners and representatives of associations – many of whom participated online from abroad – were informed about the project and supported it by facilitating access to the field and introducing the PhDs to cities they were entirely new to. We take this opportunity to thank them: Andrea Saroldi (ReteGAS), Elena di Bella (Città Metropolitana di Torino), Vittorio Bianco (Orti Metropolitan Torinesi), Aetzel Griffioen (Rotterdam Vakmanstad), Jan Willem van der Schans (Task Force Korte Keten), Cees Bronsveld (Eetbaar Rotterdam), Jaro Stacul (Memorial University of Newfoundland) and Jacek Kołtan (European Solidarity Centre). The conference also completed the project's Winter School, which engaged nine Masters and PhD students and five members of the Food Citizens? team in teaching and learning Digital Visual Engagements in Anthropological Research over two weeks. We also wish to thank the other members of the team who have contributed to the project since it began in September 2017: Robin Smith (postdoc), Hanna Stalenhoeft (research assistant) and Marilena Pouloupoulou as current research assistant. We wish to thank the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University, represented at the Conference by Scientific Director Bart Barendregt and Research Director Marja Spierenburg, for the many ways in which it supports this project in scientific and administrative terms (including encouraging the extension of this project) but especially for developing a protocol for ethnographic research in times of COVID-19 at a challenging moment, when even asking to go or stay in the field, or meet in person to carry out our narrative approach to comparative ethnography, seemed odd.

# 5.3



## One year of dissemination and engagement

MARILENA POULOPOULOU | 15 FEBRUARY 2022

**Besides the project Conference and Winter School, the Food Citizens? research has profiled in numerous societal and interdisciplinary venues, online and offline, over the last year. Here is a brief summary.**

On January 10th 2022, the project team presented their joint research to the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University, which hosts the Food Citizens? project. Ph.D. candidates Ola Gracjasz, Maria Vasile and Vincent Walstra presented selected results of their fieldwork together with Principal Investigator Cristina Grasseni, focusing on food markets as case studies in the cities of Gdańsk, Rotterdam, and Turin

within the framework of the 'Food Citizens?' project. They discussed the different meanings behind concepts such as solidarity and diversity through a comparative lens, and shared their experiences and reflections on collaboration as a methodology after working closely as a team for four years. On November 30th 2021, Cristina Grasseni presented the project to the Research Team Institutions for Collective Action, a highly interdisciplinary group

(sociologists, anthropologists, historians, social business experts) coordinated by Tine de Moor at the Rotterdam School of Management of Erasmus University, who are constructing the knowledge repository *CollectieveKracht*, looking at citizen collectivities from different expertise angles.

On October 26th 2021, Cristina Grasseni presented the *Food Citizens?* project to Future Food Utrecht, one of the four research hubs under Utrecht University's strategic theme *Pathways to Sustainability*. The online lecture opened their series on 'inclusive transformation of food systems' (focusing on food policy, behaviour, culture, justice and equality), and was followed by a response by Manpreet Janeja, cultural anthropologist and food scholar whose research focuses on the importance of food to social relations and identity, including trust, power and conflict. Discussion was led by Future Food board member Eggo Müller, whose research includes questions such as media as food intermediaries, food communication & cultures, and pathways to sustainable and healthy food systems.

In October 13-15th 2021, Cristina Grasseni attended the *Boerenlandbouw Conferentie*, the conference of the Dutch agro-ecological movement. This was a three-day of workshops, community-building and co-learning in Dordrecht, jointly organized by the Dutch CSA network, *Farmers for the Future* and the Dutch Federation of agro-ecological farmers. Together with Vincent Walstra, she participated as speaker in the Dordrecht's *Citizen-Farmer dialogue*, a talkshow featuring in the Dordse

*Voedselvierdaagse*, organised by *Drechstadsboer* in the framework of *Dutch Food Week*. The programme was streamed live by RTV Dordrecht by *Via Cultura*. Subsequently, nitrogen-crisis expert and Environmental Sustainability professor Jan-Willem Erisman together with Cristina Grasseni opened the *Agroecology Conference* at Leiden University on October 16th, a day of collective reflection followed by the establishment of theme-based working groups during which *Toekomstboeren*, *CSA Netwerk* and *Federatie van Agroecologische Boeren* amongst others worked together to congeal as an agroecology movement.

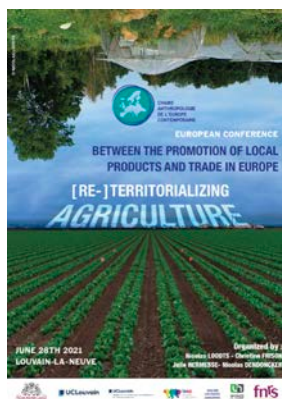
On June 28th 2021, the *Conference Re-Territorializing Agriculture*. Between the *Promotion of Local Products and Trade in Europe (Louvain-la-Neuve)* invited presentations from Federico De Musso ('*Between Sheep Territory and Wine Terroir, perspectives on territoriality from the Pyrenees*') and Cristina Grasseni ('*The role of citizens in innovative food supply chains. Work-in-progress results from the Food Citizens project*'). Co-organized by Nicolas Loodts, Julie Hermesse, Christine Frison and Nicolas Dendoncker, this interdisciplinary colloquium explored ways to build resilience in European food systems. On June 10th 2021, Cristina Grasseni was invited speaker in the *Plenary Opening Session* of the *Conference of the Italian Geographical Society*, chaired by Egidio Dansero, and dedicated to the topic '*Geography and Food: spaces, places, landscapes, regions, and territories of food*'. Together with scholars from law, urban studies sociology, agrarian economy, history and political sciences, she participated in an '*undisciplined*

dialogue’ (thus non-disciplinary rather than interdisciplinary) on the relationship between the in-depth understanding of contexts, and knowledge of and through food. The conference was held online as part of the activities of Turin’s University project Atlante del Cibo, translatable as Atlas of the Food of the Metropolitan City of Turin) and featured also Food Citizens? team member Maria Vasile, who presented a critical analysis of the city’s social food gardens in the framework of urban regeneration, city branding and ‘foodification’.

On 22nd April 2021, Cristina Grasseni was one of four keynote speakers at the (online) National Dialogue on ‘food as a key factor for a healthy planet’. Organized by Voedsel Anders, the World Food Forum and Ons Eten Den Haag, the webinar program, video, and summary are available (in Dutch) here. Vincent Walstra contributed to the discussion with his work on social solidarity in the

city of Rotterdam illustrating the collaboration among different food networks during the COVID emergency to deliver (free) food.

On 13th April 2021, the project and team research featured at the Livable Planet – Livable Communities priority research cluster of Leiden University. The questions discussed were: what are the diverse societal imaginaries about citizens in food transitions? Is this diversity represented in policy and global discourse about transition to sustainability? Cristina Grasseni shared some work-in-progress conclusions, namely that food procurement must be investigated and understood beyond ‘sustainability fixes’, and that we need to have a more complex and diverse approach to scalability: ‘one size does not fit all’, because societal and economic contexts of transitions to (food) sustainability are too diverse to be encompassed under one model.



## 5.4

# Work-in-Progress seminar at the Center of Multimodal and Audio-Visual Methods (ReCNTR)



## Team ReCNTR gives feedback on the Food Citizens? I-doc

CRISTINA GRASSENI | 12 SEPTEMBER 2022

On June 16, Federico De Musso and Cristina Grasseni presented the WIP version of the i-doc ([Interactive platform – Leiden University \(universiteitleiden.nl\)](https://www.universiteitleiden.nl)) to colleagues of ReCNTR at Leiden University's Faculty of Social Sciences. The goal of the peer-reviewed seminar was to invite a maker (or scholar, or scholar/maker) to show the connection between methods and research in their own work-in-progress (digital) artefact.

### Three projects

Three projects were presented and discussed: by Aiwen Yin (CASCO) with Myriam Vandenbroucke on the ecosystem of commons art and Yin's WIP latest art economy project, Nile A. Davies (anthropologist, ethnographic film-maker) on his WIP film on the Magbass sugar plantation in Sierra Leone, and Federico De Musso with Cristina Grasseni on the Food Citizens? I-doc. After a 30-minute presentation, the projects were discussed at length focusing on first reception (during which the presenters were asked only to listen) to then extend discussion to involve the makers.

### The i-doc's conceptual heuristics

Grasseni and De Musso presented on the i-doc's conceptual heuristics and how it works: navigating a digital map of a fictional three-city space (Turin+Rotterdam+Gdańsk); interacting with icons that were authored and designed in order to look like the most significant fieldwork locations; operating a 4-way dial that allows one to connect specific locations within the same city as well as across to the other two cities; connecting and juxtaposing our categories of analysis (solidarity, diversity, skill and scale) by contrast or similarity.

### Feedback

Grasseni and Musso elicited feedback on the i-doc's digital affordance for interaction, digital experience of navigation, and what kind of understanding of the project one does one obtain without previous knowledge. They received excellent feedback on how to improve user-guidance in the explorations of the interactive platform and to link it better to a conceptual and methodological illustration of goals and methods. Many thanks to all the participants for their insightful comments!

# Impact of the Food Citizens? Winter School

CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 15 MARCH 2022

We asked our Winter School students to evaluate the effect and significance of this learning experience on their current research trajectories and future plans. Here are some reflections.

## Simone de Boer (Ph.D. candidate, University of Gothenburg)

I really appreciate the hands-on approach of the Winter School. In addition to gaining a better understanding of both the opportunities and challenges of using audiovisual and collaborative methods, I feel encouraged and inspired to continue experimenting with creative methods and to make them central to my PhD research.

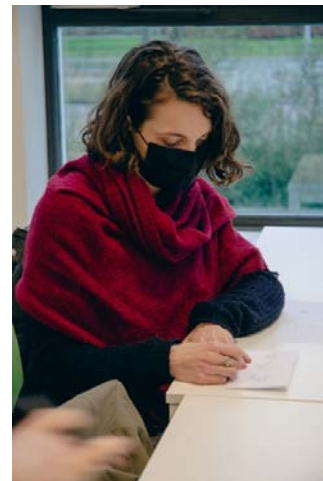
## Gabrielle Fenton (Ph.D. candidate, University of Louvain)

I'm very grateful I was able to take part in the Winter School for many reasons. After two years of Covid, I really appreciated the sort of 'magic' that emerges from bringing together a group of people from various lands so that they can share together around non-linear ways of thinking and doing anthropology, and be encouraged to experiment with that and try it out there and then. I am currently drafting my methodological plan for my up-coming fieldwork and will be using a lot of what we learnt in there. One thing that will stay with me for a long time is that multi-modal anthropology is not only a matter of creating a finished product at the end of a research: more importantly, it's the ongoing process of using (and experimenting with) different means of observing, collaborating and analysing ethnographically. As Federico explained to us, ethnography is an exercise in clarification - to ourselves and for others - that requires a constant multi-modal back and forth between the 'data' and what we make from it. I also found it very helpful that the conversation about ethics was not presented to us as a satellite issue, but as a central part of the entire process, key to ensuring the quality of our work.



**Carolina Nemethy (Ph.D. candidate, the Arctic University of Norway)**

I found the Leiden Winter School to be a valuable opportunity to learn about a broad range of tools and methods for multimodal ethnography, as well as the new practical and ethical considerations that go with them. Moreover, the activities broadened my own network of visual anthropologists and fellow researchers interested in working with these methods, and with whom I've had fruitful discussions and found both inspiration and motivation to continue pursuing and experimenting with various media. The limited timeframe of the projects encouraged effective collaboration with group members and sparked an opportunity for joint effort that would otherwise be uncommon in a (largely solitary) PhD journey. I highly recommend this Winter School for anyone willing to work with visual anthropology and daring to step out of their academic comfort zone into head-on, relatively short-term and practical engagement with visual methods. Everything I've learned in this short time I will now find useful in my long-term academic journey. Overall, the project kindled an awareness of the challenge and amount of work and care put into visual/multimodal ethnography for effective, in-depth communication.



**Isotta Rossoni (Ph.D. candidate, University of Leiden)**

The Food Citizens winter school was a truly eye-opening experience. I can safely say that it has immensely broadened my horizons in terms of visual methodologies, introducing me to a host of new and exciting opportunities and ways of conceiving, producing and disseminating research. The perfect combination of theoretical sessions and hands-on practice, the course brought together a diverse range of participants, promoting individual skills-development, as well as collaboration and mutual learning. I look forward to continuing my visual methodology learning journey and putting the knowledge garnered so far into practice.



# Restitution workshop in Turin



MARIA VASILE, CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 02 JANUARY  
2023

Maria Vasile and Cristina Grasseni have presented the results of Maria's ethnography in Turin.



On November 21, 2022 at the Aurora neighbourhood community centre Cecchi Point, in Turin, Cristina Grasseni and Maria Vasile presented the Food Citizens? field results to invited research participants and stakeholders.

Cristina presented the framework of the project as well as the interactive documentary (i-doc). Maria's presentation was entitled "Urban, welfare and labour transformations in Turin. An analysis building on the study of Collective Food Procurement". The talk focused on some of the key themes that crisscrossed the ethnography in Turin such as the topic of urban renewal and the dichotomic narrative around urban decorum and urban decay. Maria also introduced part of her analysis on how spatial, citizenship and welfare

transformation happen together, critically discussing, among others, volunteerism, community-based welfare and green gentrification.

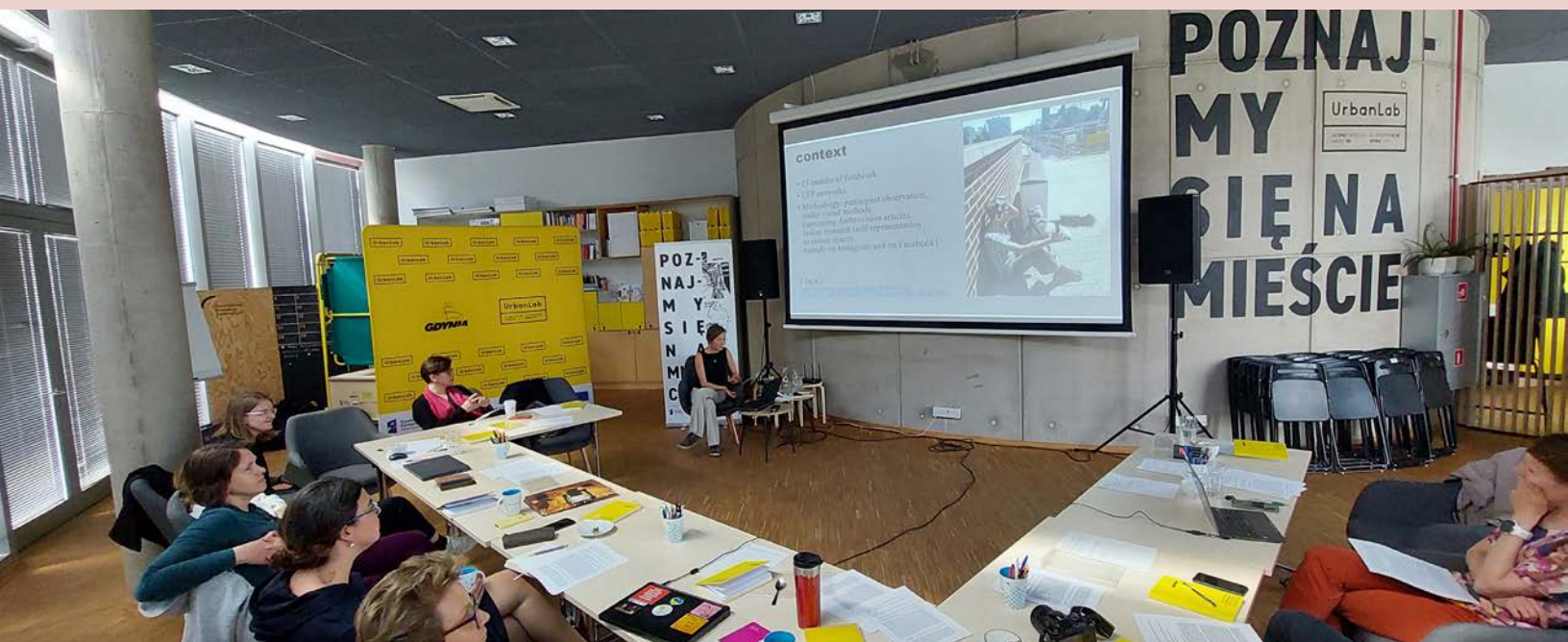
The presentation was followed by a brainstorming session about inclusion and exclusion in access to food, especially from the point of view of involvement of the third sector (NGOs and volunteers' associations) in urban renewal projects. Academics, solidarity economy activists, students, NGO project managers, freelance consultants, journalists, social and environmental NGO representatives participated in the round table and discussed the 'funding treadmill' which often distracts from rooting empowering and participative dynamics in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.



# 5.7

## Producer-consumer collaborations

02 JUNE 2022 | OLA GRACJASZ



### Cristina Grasseni and Ola Gracjasz organize and participate in workshop with Polish scholars in Gdynia, Poland.

On a windy afternoon of 26th of May 2022, in the seaside town of Gdynia, Cristina Grasseni, the project's principal investigator and Ola Gracjasz, one of three PhDs, in collaboration with UrbanLab Gdynia, met together with Polish scholars to present and discuss the topic of collective food procurement networks and producer-consumer collaborations.

The rationale of the day was to bring together researchers currently working with qualitative social research and in-depth understanding of cultural context, on and around

the 'social' or 'collective' dimension of food procurement in Poland today, including new developments and dimensions of producer-consumer collaborations, from multiple points of view (such as urban gardens, cooperatives, new farmers, collective learning, new food entrepreneurs, etc.). How does this rich ethnographic/empirical research in Polish urban contexts position itself vis-à-vis current academic debates on 'alternative food networks', 'food sovereignty' and 'food justice'? How do the topics of 'citizenship' and 'sustainability' interact and contaminate each other in these social phenomena and in

these networks? What does the distinction, complexity and singularity of the Polish context offer to the international debate to reposition, question, or perhaps redefine some of the terms of the debate? Are (any of) the analytical categories the project used in its comparative framework (solidarity, diversity, skill and scale) useful to capture (some of) the aspects of the (work-in-progress) results and research interests?

The workshop was hosted and co-organized by the UrbanLab Gdynia: the space of a pop-up, flexible 'living lab', which is part of the broader Social Innovation Lab of Gdynia's municipality (which includes amongst others a participatory budget programme, community centres, and an urban revitalization project). Joanna Krukowska, manager of UrbanLab opened up the meeting by briefly introducing the role and the wide variety of activities the UrbanLab coordinates. Agata Bachórz (University of Gdańsk), member of project's Advisory Board, introduced the workshop with Cristina Grasseni, who presented the Food Citizens? project and i-doc.

This was followed by a set of presentations, starting with Ola Gracjasz who shared her work-in-progress on the topic of community around vegan eating in Gdańsk. Next, Agata Bachórz presented "Career shifts, new food entrepreneurs and the micropolitics of food storytelling" focusing on a

particular example of a local enterprise and its history of development and change.

Sadly, due to illness, Magdalena Popławska (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) could not join the workshop and share her ongoing research in the area of knowledge and learning practices within food communities. Aleksandra Bilewicz (Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw) presented results of her study titled "Building the resource base – new farmers as part of food networks in Poland". Finally, Ewa Kopczyńska (Jagiellonian University in Kraków) closed off the workshop part of the day discussing her food concerns approach as a conceptual frame to study food citizenship.

The discussion which followed was facilitated by Wojciech Goszczyński (Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń), Ruta Śpiewak (Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw) and Renata Hryciuk (Warsaw University).

Cristina Grasseni and Ola Gracjasz would like to express their thanks to all speakers and participants, including Jaro Stacul and Jacek Kołtan (European Solidarity Centre) for their engagement as well as the team of UrbanLab Gdynia for organizational help. The meeting generated a lot of fruitful and passionate discussions in the topic of collective food procurement practices.





# — Food Citizens? project presented at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute

CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 25 JULY 2023

As part of the Radcliffe Summer  
Fellowship program 2023.

Every year, the Harvard Radcliffe Institute offers previous fellows the possibility of renewing their connection by participating in a Summer Fellowship Program. This year's summer Radcliffe Fellows included, amongst others, the historian of mathematical cultures Karine Chemla, the Director of Public Interest Technology at University of Massachusetts Amherst, Francine Berman, and computer scientist Tawanna Dillahunt, an information scientist who researched, amongst others, online grocery delivery services in transportation-scarce areas as an opportunity to address food disparities in the Detroit metropolitan area.

As summer fellow, Cristina Grasseni has enjoyed a quiet time on Radcliffe yard to work at her monograph

(in preparation) *Exploring Food Citizenship*, based on her longitudinal fieldwork with Dutch allotment gardeners (2020-23) and comparative ethnography of solidarity economy networks in Lombardy (Italy) and Massachusetts (2011-14), as well as reconnecting with colleagues and friends in the Massachusetts' solidarity economy networks – such as the Wellspring Cooperative and Global Village Farms.

The Summer Fellowship Program includes weekly fellows' talks during which Cristina presented the *Food Citizens? i-doc*, reflecting with other Radcliffe fellows on ethnographic comparison, the methodology at the core of the project. The seminar took place in Fay House on July 5th, 2023.



# Food Citizens? featured in Horizon Magazine on urban food systems.

CRISTINA GRASSENÌ | 19 JANUARY 2024

**Some of the following project results about the diversity of citizens' self-organization around food provisioning have been mentioned in the article 'The green shoots of urban agriculture' on 13 October 2023.**

**Below are full answers and questions, for more contextualized information on how Food Citizens? approaches the topic of urban food systems.**

## TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS AND HOW YOU GOT INVOLVED IN THIS TOPIC OF FOOD?

As a cultural anthropologist, I have studied food from different points of view through the years: first in traditional dairy farming in the Lombard mountains, then in heritage cheese making in the Italian alps, and currently in food gardening in the Netherlands. I do so through ethnography which means participating in, while observing, the practices of the communities we study.

For example I spent two seasons with cow-herders (taking cattle to high pastures, up to 2,000 metre high, in the Italian Alps), took a diploma as cheese taster, and now I volunteer since 2020 in a city farm in Utrecht. Relevant publications are: *Developing Skill, Developing Vision. Practices of Locality at the food of the Alps*. 2009. *The Heritage Arena. Re-inventing cheese in the Italian Alps* (2017). And the latest article, "More than Visual. Apprenticeship in Skilled Visions", *Ethos*. 2022.

**TALK TO ME ABOUT THE BACKGROUND TO FOOD CITIZENS? - WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW TO UNDERSTAND THE PROJECT?**

The project is about reintroducing local contexts to the understanding of food provisioning. Even just across Europe, one finds a diversity of histories, styles of governance, and economic standards. Consequently there's a diversity of relevant societal debates, ways of getting by, and modes of participation in culture and society. Because of this diversity, practices of food procurement exceed techno-scientific imaginaries of 'future foods' and one-size-fit-all 'sustainability fixes'.

**WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS PROJECT? WHAT IS MEANT BY "COLLECTIVE FOOD PROCUREMENT"? HOW DO YOU INVESTIGATE COLLECTIVE FOOD PROCUREMENT NETWORKS?**

The project started in 2017 plus an 18-months budget neutral extension because of pandemic disruptions. It will end February 2024. The aims of the project are to re-introduce the social element in the analysis of food provisioning. The goal is to investigate styles of societal participation through an analysis of local styles of food procurement, in three representative post-industrial European cities (Gdańsk, Rotterdam and Turin). Empirically, 'collective food procurement' defines the participation of multiple people in production, distribution and consumption of food. How do you investigate collective food procurement networks?

What is meant by urban foraging, short food chains, food gardens, local food governance, and how do they fit into the project?

We scouted for examples of participation of multiple people in the production, distribution and governance of food consumption. This can happen at multiple levels and with varying objectives. We chose three levels of empirical observation: 1. self-production and foraging (for example in community gardens), 2. short food chains (for example through food cooperatives, but also farmers markets) and 3. local food governance (for example through city food councils, but also through associations of allotment gardens such as the Polish PZD, or third-sector NGOs). We identified a pre-selection of potential case studies for ethnographic fieldwork, then the PhD candidates conducted about a year and a half of ethnographic fieldwork in each city to go in depth in the case studies. We asked: Which skills do people involved in collective food procurement acquire or lack? How do they operate across and within diverse communities? Do their networks scale 'up' or 'out', and how? How do they interpret and articulate solidarity? Our Research Protocol included participant observation, interviews, cultural maps, focus groups, life and career histories, and documentary analysis. It's published under Dissemination/Public Resources on our website. There's about 50 case studies described in the project i-doc, designed by Federico De Musso. This is an interactive platform.

## GIVE SOME EXAMPLES OF STUDY CASES FROM THE PROJECT

### **In Gdańsk, Rotterdam, Turin**

Urban foraging and short food chains in Gdańsk:

In the city of Gdańsk, Ph.D. candidate Ola Gracjasz made a comparison of two radically different styles of collecting and redistributing food. She participated both in Food not Bombs and the Food Bank among other case studies. Food Not Bombs is an international anarchist network, groups are found in many cities across the world. Also in Gdańsk, they collect perished food at the end of a market day and cook warm soup, giving it away for free to whoever wants it in the town centre, whether they are tourists or homeless. On the other hand, the food bank where Ola worked as a volunteer was run by the city social services and had a much more bureaucratic way to assess whether one would be eligible, with long queues and strict surveillance. In a published article we reflect on these two radically different meanings and practices of 'gifting' and 'sharing'. The published article is (click on title for open access): Gracjasz A. & Grasseni C. (2020), Food-gifting in Gdańsk: between food not bombs and the food bank, *Ethnologia Polona* 41: 33-50. Further reflections are in the project blogs by Ola Gracjasz, for example: Reflections from the field: Linking the past with the present through pickling, fermenting, and food preservation in Gdańsk, Poland (Chapter 3.10).

### **Urban foraging and short food chains in Turin**

By contrast in Northern Italy most grassroots interventions fill gaps left by the state. For example in Turin there is a long tradition of open-air food markets, but when it came to the logistics of food aid deliveries under COVID, the large food distribution was the easiest to get on board, while there was no easy way to connect logistically with the abundant agricultural production in the area. Local producers were under strain because they didn't have means to deliver, and the fresh markets were closed. Only large supermarket chains were allowed to open... so volunteer food aid tried to bridge this jarring paradox of food aid that doesn't contain fresh and local food. Maria Vasile has written extensively about the paradoxes of volunteerism in food aid, food waste recuperation, and in urban greening agendas. Here is for reference a published article (click on title for open access): Vasile M. & Grasseni C. (2022), Visions of the Urban Green; Interrogating Urban Renewal in Turin's Periphery, *Anthrovision* Vol 8.1, 2020, and one of the blogs: Torino: From food to demands (Chapter 3.4).

### **Local food governance in Rotterdam**

An interesting Dutch example is Herenboeren. In Dutch, Herenboeren were landowners who could afford to employ others to work their land - and it has been reinvented. It's taking food as a form



of sustainable investment movement which does not generate income returns, but a shared harvest. Vincent Walstra visited a land trust of 20 hectares north of Rotterdam which, since 2019, is cooperatively owned by about 200 households and employs a salaried farmer. Herenboeren farm organically and wildlife-friendly. They participate in the management of the land trust and volunteer with on-farm tasks. So the Herenboeren are all shareholders in fact, in a land trust. They learn from the farmer and share the risk of the harvest, while guaranteeing the farmer an income as an employee. Here is Vincent Walstra's blog about this movement: Herenboeren Rotterdam: Farming for the Future (Chapter 3.8).

**WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE WAY FOOD IS PROCURED AND DELIVERED IN EUROPE RIGHT NOW AND HOW COULD THAT BE IMPROVED IN YOUR VIEW? WHAT BENEFITS CAN THIS PROJECT BRING?**

If we look at the imagery surrounding the global food system today, there's very little space for nuance, context, and for its sociocultural dimension - namely for agency, conflict, and diversity, or for relationships among humans, and between humans and non-humans. Instead, the Food Citizens? project shows how each bottom-up collective who organizes themselves spontaneously around food, tells us also something about the contexts of which they are representative. The 50 case studies tell us how in each of the three contexts some manners of

self-organization around food are meaningful and some not. That is why the title has a question mark in it: 'Food Citizens?' This hints to the fact that it does not make sense to imagine one kind of 'food citizen' or one best practice of 'food citizenship'. Rather we have to look for forms of self-activation on the ground, which make sense according to the needs, the resources, and the specific local cultures of self-organizing that we can find -for example - in Turin, Rotterdam, and Gdansk, and by extension in southern, western, or eastern Europe.

**WHAT ARE THE OVERARCHING CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PROJECT?**

In sum, more than 50 case studies tell us that in each of the three contexts (Italy, Netherlands, and Poland) only some manners of self-organization around food are meaningful, and some not. For example, volunteering can be used as excuse to withdraw public services from already marginalized local communities (as Maria Vasile has shown in Turin regarding food waste recuperation, and food aid under COVID). Vice versa homesteading sounds like a thing of the past, but as studied by Ph.D. candidate Ola Gracjusz, it is being rediscovered by food entrepreneurs and urbanites in Gdansk, Poland in ways that represents and reinvents their agency at the heart of a Polish society under transformation.

# 6.1

## Paolo Graziano on the research potential about 'food citizens'

PAOLO GRAZIANO | 08 JULY 2022

### A political science perspective on our project's comparative ethnography.

I truly enjoyed the one-day conference on February 4th where the research results have been shared with the members of the Advisory Board. The work conducted so far is impressive, and the case studies are very useful in understanding how food procurement networks operate. Here following come some ideas on how the research may also possibly be developed in a 'policy analysis' perspective.

First, the in-depth, ethnographic research is very useful for inductive research hypotheses development

with respect to the analysis of practices of alternative food production and distribution, and waste prevention. The richness of the detailed case-studies may be used in order to understand which may be the drivers and facilitators for the development of local food policies. Put differently, by comparing the case studies patterns of 'success' or 'failure' in terms of influencing the local policy agenda may emerge and be used for other research projects which may cover other countries and/or cities.



Second, a structured comparison may also allow us not only to understand how institutional actors may be mobilized by alternative food social movements, but it could also allow us to know more about the constellation of other social actors (other agricultural groups? other citizens' groups?) which may be conducive to local change in terms of both food production and distribution and food waste reduction.

Third, another very original research development could be to investigate if political strategies are used by

alternative food networks actors in order to gain support for policy innovation. We may identify two possible local trajectories: the first may be more inclined to support alternative social practices and expand the social relevance and reach of alternative food networks; the second could be more policy oriented, with the aim of building social and political networks in order to develop or change local food policies. The 'Food Citizens?' project could help us shed new light also on these relevant issues.



# Francesca Forno on the Food Citizens? i-doc

FRANCESCA FORNO | 09 MAY 2022

**Advisory Board member Francesca Forno shares insights about the Food Citizens? project.**

Being a member of the Food Citizens? project Advisory Panel was a great opportunity for me, as I could follow from year to year the many improvements and discoveries made by the research team. I should say that I was impressed during the February 4th final conference to see how much this project has produced in terms of new knowledge and understanding while exploring different forms of food activism in different contexts.

In recent years, food has once again become a central topic in political and public debates. The reasons for this are various and have expanded over the last years. I, myself, feel often lost in the multitude of books and articles published on food-related issues. As known, food scandals have caused people to pay more attention to the healthiness of what is on their plates and, in general, there has been a growing awareness of issues related to the conventional agri-

food supply chain. All over the world citizens are mobilizing, both individually and collectively, as they increasingly recognize that the way in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed has significant environmental and social impacts.

Food activism can take different forms, emerge on different issues, and involve different types of people. Motivations to take action may also vary, as often those mobilized have a different understanding of how society should work. Although it is interesting to see that similar practices and organizations are mushrooming simultaneously in different parts of the world, it is also important to recognize how the same practice can take a very different meaning in different contexts.

The Food Citizens<sup>2</sup> project has observed a number of comparable experiences in three different European cities: Turin, Rotterdam, and Gdańsk. By following from the very beginning a clear research design – which kept the focus on four key issues: solidarity, diversity, skill, and scale – the project has made it possible to appreciate and acknowledge diversity in similarity. As the researchers explained to us, the

project proceeded through continuous discussions and confrontations among the members of the team and between the researchers and their informants. Besides the many achievements of the project in terms of academic publications, what I have also found extremely important and original was the researchers' efforts to set up an innovative tool through which to disseminate their findings also outside the academic world.

During the conference, I was particularly fascinated by the presentation of the i-doc digital platform. Through this instrument, everyone interested has the possibility to visualize actors, listen to their voices, and see them in action. The i-doc contains 50 case studies which include among others community gardens, food banks, food aid NGOs, solidarity economy groups and shops, food markets, vegan shops and cafes, online delivery platforms, etc. Watching videos and photo slideshows, listening to sound files, and reading text documents allows one to appreciate even more the impressive research work made during the project. The i-doc represents something tangible that researchers have given back to research participants, for their reflection and analysis.

## 6.3



# Colin Sage on the Food Citizens? Conference

COLIN SAGE | 28 MARCH 2022

Advisory Board member Colin Sage shares insights about the Food Citizens? project.

As a member of the project's Advisory Panel, I was delighted to participate in the one-day conference on February 4th and acquire a deeper understanding of the work that has been undertaken in Gdansk, Rotterdam, and Turin. I was also impressed by the i-doc digital platform and I look forward to browsing through that in the months ahead. Here, however, I want to share some brief thoughts that came to mind during the final discussion session of the conference.

From my perspective the importance of the project lies with exploring the various ways in which urban residents resist the ongoing neoliberal penetration of our lives. In this regard, food has come to occupy a strategic terrain of contestation that presents opportunities for a collective and collaborative response to corporate power and the logic of the market which otherwise governs us as individualised consumers conforming to the model of 'economic rationality'. Attending to food reveals the latent power of solidarity and the extraordinary potential that can emerge from unleashing our collective imaginations.

As we turn a 'food lens' onto particular places – as the project has done – we see quite different civic responses reflecting the diversity of local circumstances and their available human resources. Irrespective of whether the prevailing emphasis is given to food growing, food waste prevention, public procurement initiatives, solidarity purchase schemes and so on, each demonstrates the capacity to 'do food differently' from the status quo. More importantly still, such initiatives reveal the ways in which 'food citizenship' begins to

emerge and take concrete form through claims to rights to the city.

As the state continues to retreat from responsibility for welfare provision – albeit interrupted by the pandemic and the necessity for it to retain some legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens – the food system has starkly exposed the deep injustices that run through the societies of most wealthy countries. Food poverty in particular has been a growing issue and, indeed given recent events, is set to become a very serious challenge to the notion of the Right to Food. In the absence of effective action by most states, the charitable food banking sector has emerged as a key actor in providing a temporary patch to social safety nets. Yet emergency provision of surplus food stocks from corporate retailers now spared the cost of disposing to land fill is not a solution to food poverty that enhances choice, agency, or the dignity of charitable recipients.

I was struck, in the course of her presentation, by Maria's use of the term 'deservingness' and I think this is a powerful word that will require close monitoring in the months ahead. For as food prices continue to rise as a consequence of disruptions to global supply chains, we must remain alert to the possibility of divisive – even xenophobic – narratives that assert some people are more 'deserving' of food than others. For those of us concerned with matters of food security we must continue to advocate that not only do all have the right to eat, citizens also demand the right to exercise agency in determining their own food futures. In this respect the work of the 'Food Citizens?' project invigorates this vital and ongoing struggle.



## News from Food Citizens? Winter School alumnae

Almost two years have passed since the Food Citizens? Winter School (January–February 2022), and we asked our school graduates to share their further accomplishments and ongoing projects. Was the Winter School of any help or inspiration for them?

ŽIVILĖ MIEŽYTĖ, HANNA WENERSSON, SIMONE DE BOER,  
GINEVRA MONTEFUSCO | 15 NOVEMBER 2023

### Hanna Wernersson and Simone de Boer

Hanna Wernersson and Simone de Boer continue their individual Ph.D. studies at Gothenburg University, while also exploring various ways of working together with creative methods. Upon returning home from the Winter School, they presented some of their Winter School and subsequent creative and collaborative work to their colleagues and students. “The Winter School has been very helpful for us as it has formed the foundation for the creative collaboration we have been developing since. We are currently working on a multimedia montage combining our individual and collective work/research, in the context of the Multispecies Ethnography and Artistic Methods (MEAM) network founded in 2022. Apart from our collaborative work we continue to explore audio/visual/creative methods in our individual Ph.D. projects.”





### Živilė Miežytė

Živilė Miežytė is currently working at the Vilnius City Museum as a curator of education programs. “This year I have coordinated an amazing project with high school students from one neighbourhood of Vilnius, during which they explored their neighbourhood in different ways and methods, including filming, making photo diaries, collecting interviews, and doing sketches to name a few - that has been absolutely linked with my experience at the winter school. After 8 months of experimenting with all that, we opened a small exhibition at the museum this June and it was a great success! Here are a couple of pictures from the opening.” Next, Živilė plans to continue working on projects with participatory approaches. “I can absolutely confirm that the Winter school has had a huge influence on me and my work. Even though I don’t use these skills/ideas in the academic context, I think it has also given me the confidence to experiment with different mediums.”

### Ginevra Montefusco

Ginevra Montefusco, who is wrapping up her project on Gaza Foodways for CAWR\* (Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience | Coventry University), has been admitted to the joint Doctoral School of Padua University and Ca’ Foscari University of Venice in History, Geography and Anthropology to develop the project “On the margins of urban food systems: critical and visual analysis of food, identity and resistance in Mediterranean cities”. Previously, we reported on her Master’s thesis research in Turin and the interactive documentaries produced in the Italian cities of Turin (Food in the margin) and Bari. “My interest for the visual dimension has been shaped by the Winter School and has enabled innovative and creative ways of looking at the field in my research, which has been highly evaluated as part of my Master’s thesis. Visual skills for mapping and creating a participatory video were also highly appreciated for my internship on agroecology.”



# Authors' biographical notes

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GlobalProject.info

## **Francesca Forno**

Francesca Forno, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Sociology Department of Sociology and Social Research University of Trento.

## **Maris Gillette**

Maris Gillette is Professor at the School of Global Studies (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

## **Ola Gracjasz**

(Ph.D. candidate on the project) is based in Brussels as a photographer and anthropologist and defending her dissertation November 2024 at Leiden University.

## **Cristina Grasseni**

(PI of the project ) is Professor of Anthropology at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University.

## **Paolo Graziano**

Paolo Graziano is Professor of Political Science at the University of Padua and Associate Fellow at the European Social Observatory in Brussels.

## **Alessandra Manganelli**

Alessandra Manganelli, post-doctoral researcher in the DFG-Research training group "Urban future-making" (HafenCity University, Hamburg).

## **Živilė Miežytė**

Vilnius City Museum

## **Ginevra Montefusco**

Doctoral School of Padua University and Ca' Foscari University of Venice in History, Geography and Anthropology and Ginevra Montefusco is an alumna of the winter school.

### **Olga Orlić**

Olga Orlić is the PI of the CSF funded research project “Solidarity economy in Croatia: Anthropological Perspective (SOLIDARan)”.

### **Alessandra Periccioli**

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### **Alessandro Pisano**

Alessandro Pisano was a Political Science student at the University of Turin.

### **Marilena Pouloupoulou**

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### **Colin Sage**

Independent Scholar (Portugal), Visiting Professor Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche di Pollenzo, American University of Rome.

### **Robin Smith**

Robin Smith (postdoc on the project) is lecturer at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, after a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellowship at Copenhagen Business School.

### **Hanna Stalenhoef**

(research assistant on the project) is a freelance Communication Specialist, Photographer and Illustrator.

### **Arnold van der Valk**

Dr. Arnold van der Valk is an emeritus full professor of Land Use Planning at Wageningen University and co-founder of Food Council MRA and foundation Voedsel Verbindt.

### **Maria Vasile**

(Ph.D. candidate on the project) defended her dissertation in September 2023 and is currently a post-doc at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Pisa.

### **Vincent Walstra**

(Ph.D. candidate on the project) is completing his dissertation while currently a scientific researcher at the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Agency.

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