

# Creative Food Cycles Experience

## Goa CFC-festinar: a virtual banquet for an innovating research celebration

PhD course in  
Architecture and Design  
University of Genova

curated by / a cura di  
**Silvia Pericu**  
**Manuel Gausa**  
**Alessia Ronco Milanaccio**  
**Giorgia Tucci**

**Addoc Logos**  
**Visual Languages**  
**and Communication**  
A multiscalar PhD Laboratory

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## Visual Languages and Communication

### #3 | Creative Food Cycles Experience

#### Goa CFC-FESTINAR: a virtual banquet for an innovating research celebration

**CFC (Creative Food Cycles)** covers different scales and levels of action (and a socio-cultural activism) from production to distribution, from distribution to consumption, from consumption to disposition (and re-production) trying to promote a **strategic integration**, innovative and fresh at the same time, from the territorial and urban scale to the scale of the creative-social celebrating event or creative-design product, in which the factor “**food**” as a **productive** indicator takes on a priority meaning as an inducing agent of new **sustainable and innovative processes** at the same time.



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Via Balbi, 6 16126 Genova

Tel. 010 20951558 Fax 010 20951552

e-mail: [gup@unige.it](mailto:gup@unige.it)

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# summary

## I/ INTRO APPETIZER

### The CFC Background. Celebrating Food as a new creative matter

- 13 **Manuel Gausa - dAD, UNIGE - CFC-MULTISCALAR CHALLENGES.**  
*Celebrating Design, Enjoying Research: an experiential Creative Food Research*
- 53 **Chiara Farinea - IAAC, Barcelona - INTEGRATED APPROACH TO URBAN FOOD PRODUCTION**
- 61 **Jörg Schröder - LUH, Hannover - CREATIVE FOOD CYCLES: FOOD NODES AS ACCELERATOR FOR URBAN TRANSITION**

## II / STARTERS

### CROSSING VOICES

#### 1. Cosmopolitan together toasts

- 73 **Nicola V. Canessa - dAD, UNIGE - FOOD AS A TOOL FOR TERRITORIAL PLANNING**
- 83 **Willy Muller - IAAC, Barcelona - NEW PARADIGMS FOR NEW AGRO-CITIES**
- 87 **Emanuele Sommariva - dAD, UNIGE - CrEATing Cities, recrEATing savours**
- 99 **Matilde Pitanti - dAD, UNIGE - ODE TO WINE. Ancient and contemporary values of the wine cycle**
- 111 **Mohamed El Atab - IAAC, Barcelona - MYCO-PANEL.**  
*Mycelium panel towards a more sustainable construction*
- 117 **Federico Soriano - ETSAM, UPM, Madrid - BUILDING A MEAL, BUILDING & FOOD.**  
*Four Hyper-minimal articles n. 6*

#### 2. Primal greek culture

- 131 **Konstantinos Grivas, Eleni Nikolaou - DoAUP, Patras - FOOD WASTE RITUALS IN PUBLIC**
- 141 **Alexandra Stratou, Leonidas Kalpaxidis, Iris Vassilopoulou - DoAUP, Patras - E. D. E. N.**
- 149 **Leonidas Papalampropoulos - DoAUP, Patras - FOOD PROTOCOLS. The Mechanical (M) other**

### BREAK-PERFORMANCE 1 - The Histories-Teller

- 155 **Luca Mazzari - dAD, UNIGE - CORNISH PASTY**

## III / FIRST PLATE

- 167 **Giorgia Tucci - dAD, UNIGE - RATION(AL) FOOD ATLAS. Second life for urban waste.**

## IV / SECOND PLATE

- 219 **Alessia Ronco Milanaccio, Giorgia Tucci - dAD, UNIGE - GOA REASONED RECIPES BOOK.**  
*Prototyping, experimentation and innovation to rethink the food waste.*





## V / SIDES

- 315 **Silvia Pericu - dAD, UNIGE -** *THE PERFORMATIVE ACT AS A DESIGN ACTION RESEARCH EXPERIENCE.*

## BREAK-PERFORMANCE 2 - *The Dancer*

- 329 **Giulia Soldati - Performer -** *SCARPETTA HAND DANCES*

## VI / DESSERTS AND COFFEE.

### The GOA Festinar: a virtual banquet for an on-line interaction

- 337 **Chiara Olivastri - dAD, UNIGE -** *THE GOA FESTINAR: THE URL OCCASION TO RETHINK IRL EVENT*

## BREAK-PERFORMANCE 3 - THE FOOD FASHION SHOW

- 347 **Alessia Ronco Milanaccio - dAD, UNIGE -** *CELEBRATING WASTE.*  
*A timeless set for an ephemeral action*

## VII / FINAL DE FIESTA

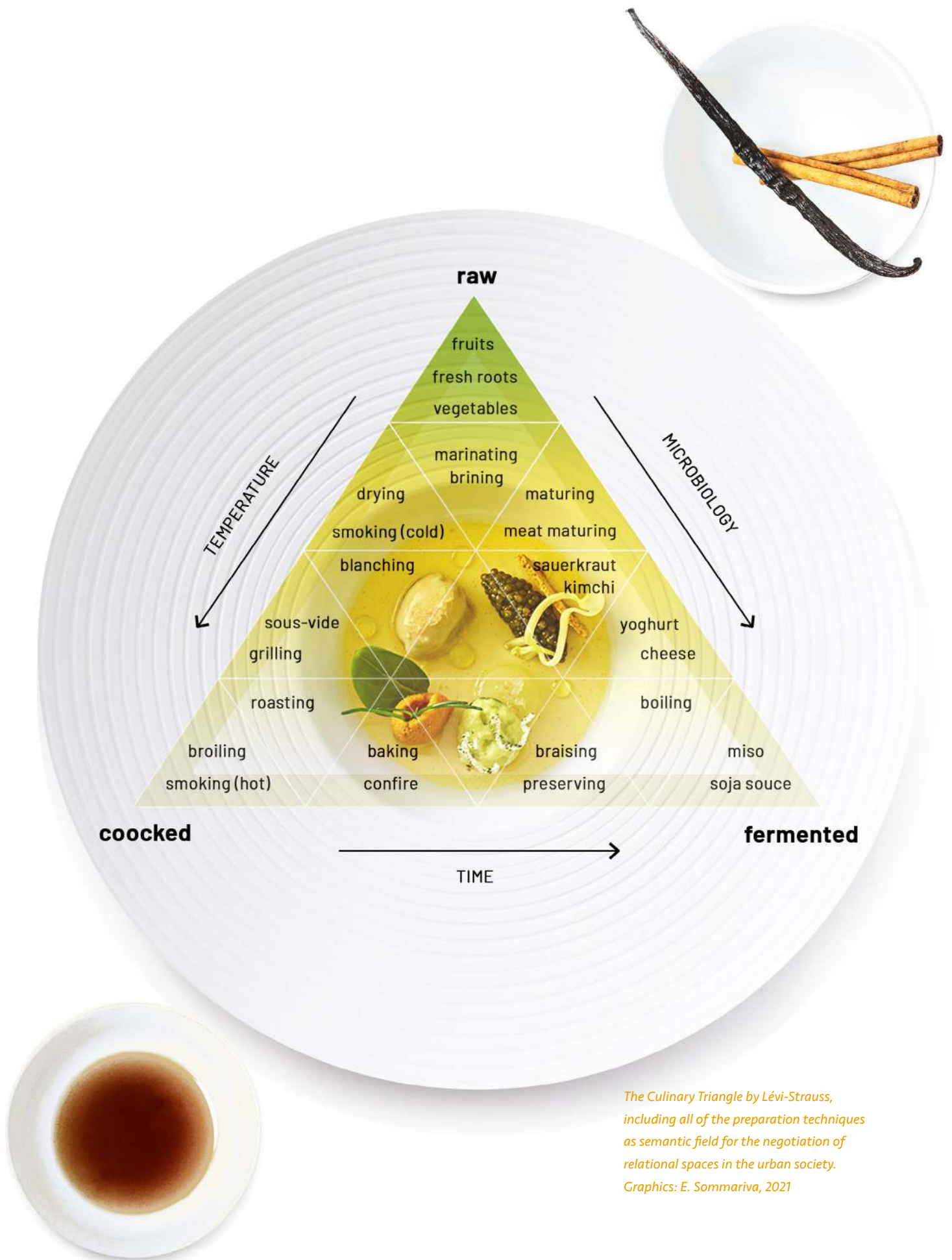
### Fireworks: artificial pyrotechnics

- 411 **Manuel Gausa with Nicola Valentino Canessa - dAD, UNIGE -** *THE BANQUET: THE GREAT-FOOD.*  
*Plates and dishes, eat and eaters, moments... and movements: profusion, arrangement, interaction.*
- 453 **Francesca Vercellino - dAD, UNIGE -** *WHEN THE STREETS DON'T BACK DOWN IN FRONT OF THE TAKEAWAY SOY SAUCE, BUT SIDEWALK DOES!*

## BREAK-PERFORMANCE 4 - THE FILM PROJECTION

- 465 **Davide Rapp - Video artist and Architect / -orama.** *FOOD IN MOVIES*

- 473 **VIII / BACKSTAGE**



*The Culinary Triangle by Lévi-Strauss, including all of the preparation techniques as semantic field for the negotiation of relational spaces in the urban society. Graphics: E. Sommariva, 2021*

## CrEATing Cities, recrEATing savours

Food preparation and consumption, in the general context, is a recurring topic in media, art, literature and culture that reveals significant components of societies' structure. Against the merely nutritional aspects, food embodies a series of significances, which result from the collection of contextual and relational social practices, through personal experiences of other *foodways*<sup>1</sup> (Molz 2007; Duruz *et al.* 2011).

<sup>1</sup> In the context of this essay, the term *foodways* describes a holistic approach to food as a medium of creative invention, cultural identity and material aspects which profoundly shape urban society and people daily routines and habits. For more information see 'Foodways: Diasporic Explorations at the Age of (Digital) Discoveries' (Sommariva, 2020)

Already Claude Lévi-Strauss in the book "*Le cru et le cuit*" (1964) traced in the form of a *culinary triangle* a semantic field through which the various forms of transformation of food recipes and their mutual influences (in terms of techniques, tools, talents, traditions, etc.) shaped the negotiation of relational spaces in the urban society. In an augmented semiotic interpretation, the work of Roland Barthes and Lévi-Strauss is crucial to understand food as system of communication, a language with rules not unlike grammar (Dusselier 2009). Borne out of change and subject to cultural evolution through differentiations, food is a phenomenon of material culture, able to orient local economies, commercial exchanges and people movements since the foundation of our urban society, being a constant part of its renewal cycles.



Today, in the context of radical transformations of food cycles, meaning at times the standardisation and commodification processes, at times the diverse re-localization of production, distribution and consumption —often based on new technologies and new media— the globalization of *gastronomic landscapes*<sup>2</sup> represent a significant area of investigation, which underlines the enduring constant of food: the *changes* and *exchanges*.

One of the great ironies of our contemporary society in the wake of worldwide migration, from one side, and social distancing due to global pandemic, to the other, is the fact that foodstuffs can still be transported across the globe regardless any socio-spatial and environmental implications, patterning geographies of demands and eating habits according to a “take-make-dispose economy” (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014) which includes regions of lack. As Robyn Metcalfe argues in her recent book *Food Routes* (2019) our food cycles depend upon reliable quantity, quality and schedules, in a continuous quest for newly fresh and healthy produce we can trust, but also able to satisfy consumers’ convenience, wishes as well as their phobias. We want the peaches from the farmer next door, one hundred types of bread, spices and exotic fruits for all seasons, dozens of coffee types, long-life milk and great quantities of pork, chicken and beef, which indeed is not quite

*Maritime Spice Routes indirectly connect markets from East to West already in middle ages*  
 Graphics: E. Sommariva, 2020

<sup>2</sup> The notion of *Gastronomic landscapes* refers to the multiple value chain creation mechanisms around food cycles: from production to distribution of foods, from the destination’s cultural and culinary identity, to the tangible and intangible heritage (culinary crafts, recipes, innovation and cross-overs, etc.) until the meal and convivial experience.



the most efficient way for feeding us, considering the intensive land-use transformation for creating new arable and pasture lands in the Global South.

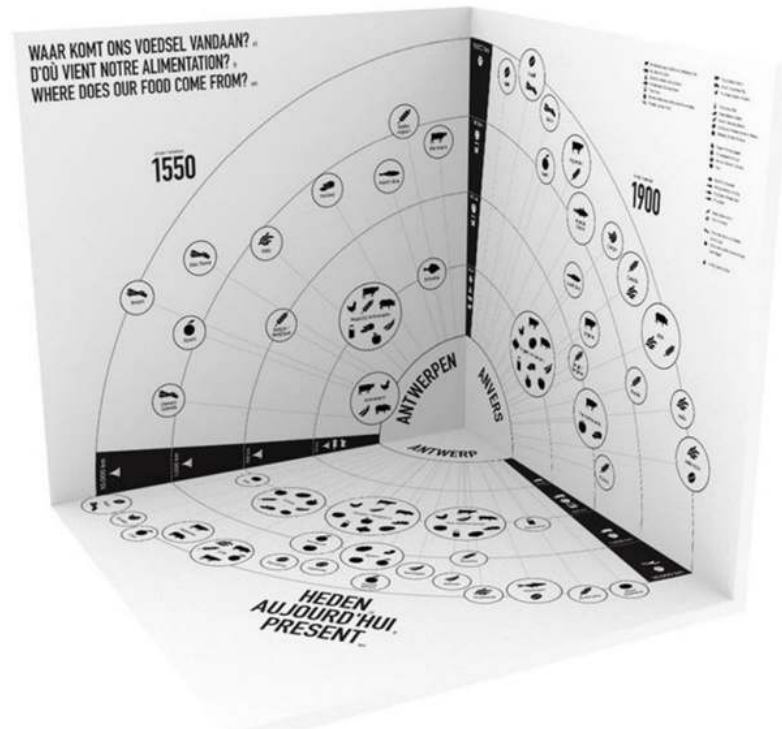
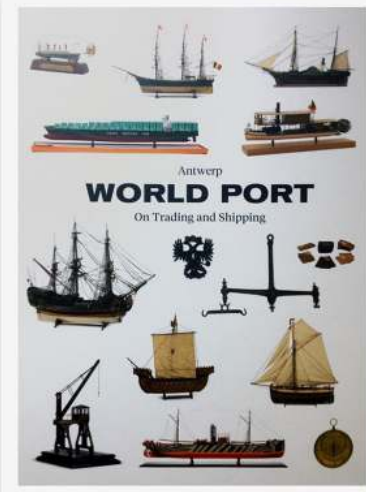
Moreover, the climatic urgencies by worsening the perishability and the biodiversity level of some produces, further force dietary and culinary adaptations for any migrant community, who may have wished to reproduce their food habits in the new home land. Historically, similar uncertainties have been associated with attempts to move food plants and animals from one region to another in order to introduce new possibilities of production and extending markets' control. (Atkins *et al.* 2007).

However, foodstuffs in relational terms are hybrid products in an emerging cosmopolitan habitat: material objects blended with human actions (Whatmore 2002), subject to heritage-making process as a response to the extreme industrialization of food processing and the subsequent transformation of domestic economies. In a liquid society (Baumann 2000) knowledge formation through food cycles is the most accessible threshold of a different culture (La Cecla 1997); recalling the protective intimacy of a domestic space and re-creating, time to time, local savouries and territorial identities through global trends and cultural crossovers.

A significant impetus for these topics, in line with the *Creative Food Cycles* project, came from a series of studies, researches and exhibitions which illustrates the future potential of a networked view of food exchange and how much our urban society has all evolved through food. Among others, the inspiring lecture about *Hungry Cities* (2009) by the London architect Carolyn Steel, the work of the Dutch anthropologist Irene Cieraad on the architecture of food supply, and the international exhibitions *Food Revolution 5.0* at the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (2017) and *Antwerp à la Carte* organised at MAS Museum (Beyers, Van Damme 2016) contribute to depict a portrait of cities as the pivotal field of action and innovation of *food hubs* between local foodscapes and cosmopolitanism.

In every culture food supply and foodways constitute an organized system of cultural habits, rituals and fundamental prerequisites for the creation and maintenance of urban life. Our cities and landscapes, houses and markets, habits and routines, tastes and local economies have all evolved through the importation of food directly from other regions if not overseas, embracing all four positions of Warde's model of the diffusion of exotic produces: *rejection*, *indigenization*, *restyling*, and *authentication*.

Most early cities followed this pattern. Rome, at its height, was one of the most populated cities in the ancient world, and it was forced to import shiploads of grain, olive oil, pork, honey, wine, fish and *garum* – a fermented fish sauce derived from Greek/Phoenician cuisine, no Romans could live without – from Egypt, North Africa, Sicily, Middle East, the Black Sea and the North Atlantic coast. Feeding Rome was a bane of every





<sup>3</sup> Historians have defined a shared origin of pasta culture, flourishing in the Mediterranean region as the result of exchanges between neighbouring early-medieval cultures at the juncture of Sicilian, Italian and Arab world. A significant reference has been traced by the work of Emilio Sereni *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* (1961), where he mentions how the fresh fine sheets of dough (lasagne) derives from the Greek-Roman *lagana*, while the long filiiform dry pasta would come from *itrium* of the Arab-Norman culture and in the records of Jerusalem Talmud.

emperor so that Cicero reckoned that the *Cura Annonae*, a free grain dole handed out to one third of citizens, cost Rome a fifth of all its revenue. A regular and predictable supply of grain and the grain dole were part of the Roman leadership's strategy of maintaining tranquillity among a restive urban population by providing them with what the poet Juvenal sarcastically called "*panem et circenses*". (Rickman 1980)

However, Mediterranean regions could not have been the same, without an intricate far-flung web of indirect connections to Asia, stretching from eastern merchants' routes such as the Eurasian Silk Road, to the maritime Spice Route for the supply of precious spices and luxury goods. Catalyst of discoveries and exploration, foodstuffs exchange represented throughout history one of the main drivers for reshaping world's supply and trade geographies and, by extension, civilization.

Among many biographies of explorers and mariners discussing East-West historical exchanges and long-distance food-related dialogues, Marco Polo's journey (1295) on his return from Katay (modern China) is at the centre of controversies<sup>3</sup> among historians for establishing the origin of one of the staples of Mediterranean diet: the pasta. Polo referred to a kind of noodles made from breadfruit flour he had seen in Java. However, the use of *durum wheat* and dried pasta, as we know today, was already linked to the culture and lifestyle of the nomadic Arab tribes to withstand long journeys in the desert, where water was scarce (Steingarten 1998). The cylindrical and empty shape similar to macaroni would be a legacy of this influence, early mentioned as *itriyya* by the Arab geographer Al-Idrisi (1154) in the compilation of exported food products from the court of Norman kings of Sicily. Today two traditional recipes from Palermo '*vermicelli di tria*' and from Salento '*ciceri e tria*' by recalling the Arab term, evoke the long strands of dough, wrapped like balls of wool and exported in the main ports of the Mediterranean since 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Thanks to the commercial trades promoted by the Maritime Republics the Middle-East with Alexandria, Cairo, Constantinople, Acre and Antioch represented the direct access to riches. At that time many European port-cities and markets were supplied with appalling food necessitating huge quantities of pepper, ginger and cinnamon to disguise rancid taste or the salt used to conserve dried old meat; and when these fine commodities arrived to its destination, often they were ready to embark new route to be distributed across Europe. Some were resold directly to merchants arriving from the North or to emissaries of the Hanseatic League, operating from Flanders to the Baltic Sea, while others were shipped on barges up the Po Valley, and carried on mules across the Alpine passes to Switzerland, Germany and France. Just to give an idea of the commercial values of spices, Venetian and Genoese merchants were used to sell a pound of pepper in London and Bruges, for

◀ *Antwerp à la Carte: on cities and food*  
exhibition at MAS Museum aan de Stroom,  
Belgium  
Photos: E. Sommariva, 2018



“This duty, senators,  
devolves upon the emperor  
and if neglected, the utter  
ruin of the state will follow

Emperor Tiberius 22 AD, Cura Annonae

..... Distribution of grain, olive produce, c. 2,000 yrs B.C.  
—— Cultivated grain, olive produce, present days







*Reine island is one of the Lofoten archipelago foodhub for stockfish fishing and processing before exportation*  
 Photo: R. Mantero, 2017

<sup>4</sup> A Genoese fishermen and trading output has been established at *la Caleta* in Gibraltar since the 15th century. The heritage of this community is evident throughout Gibraltar but especially in the architecture of traditional courthouses with terrace gardens and the local cuisine cross-overs: like *la calentita* a chickpea flour-based flat-bread similar to Genoese *farinata*.

◀ *Cura Annonae*, a free grain dole to maintain tranquillity among a restive urban population, was part of the Roman food's strategy to supply the city by overseas import of grain, olives, wine and other foodstuffs  
 Graphics: E. Sommariva, 2021

a sum equivalent to a week's work for a carpenter or a shipwright. (Cipolla, 1997)

These operations were of great magnitude and both Genoese and Venetian settlers established a networked presence of docking outposts or coastal settlements with the primarily intention to control over trade routes, market outlets and to preserve particularly monopoly of import/export of fine goods and foodstuffs. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a part from the western Mediterranean commercial routes to Black Sea and Crimea, Genoa had established a presence in Gibraltar<sup>4</sup>, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, on the Northern Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula (Santiago de Compostela) till the English Channel and Northern Sea largescale fishing hubs, opening new mercantile and culinary exchanges and contaminations.

Stockfish (dried cod) founds its way to Mediterranean cuisines during 15<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of large fish trade practices among Norway, England and continental Europe. This increased demand is probably explained both by Christian fasting practices —especially during the Lent period— and by growing urban populations looking for cheap and easily preserved foodstuffs. (Barrett *et al.* 2004)

If the Vikings probably already knew the process to dry cod, the Norwegian trade of stockfish from Lofoten islands, Newfoundland and Labrador, represented the perfect solution for the abundance of provision and the versatility of culinary uses: from fish soups to main course, it became extremely popular and widely consumed in Portugal, Spain, and in Italy. The ease and stability of conservation allowed this dried fish to sustain

both long journeys by sea and by land, reaching also the innermost continental markets.

Again, creative inventions and social innovation triggered by growing food markets and commodities demand, resulted in extensive overseas explorations to find new sources of supply. Food and fine goods started to be mapped alongside nautical routes to reach them in newly-discovered lands outside Europe. Whether the Asian colonial empire of Portugal, England and the Netherlands might be said to have sprouted for the sake of precious foodstuffs and how fortunes were made and lost due to them, yet to modern eyes it might seem unrealistic that food should have exerted such a powerful attraction.

Understanding how food supply represented a powerful factor in European urban society to foster social innovations and new economic perspectives, can also answer to a desire for public recognition of difficult past times and deal with themes of multiculturalism, migration and intercultural contact, providing a space of dialogue and hybridization to explore differences otherwise difficult to deal with.

These narratives grew out of largely invented foundation myths and traditions of individualism and nationality. Instead of exploring specific countries, the intention of this essay is to underline the necessity to focus on transnational spaces, from medieval Europe to contemporary challenges of urban society conscious that European cosmopolitan habitats of the future needs not to forget the lesson learned throughout history of being inclusive, curious and pours to cross-cultural learning and connections.

*Ciceri e Tria, traditional Apulian pasta recipe  
recalling the legacy of Arabs/Normans*

*itriyya*

*Photo: I profumi dell'orto - V. De Felice, 2017*









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◀ *Stoccafisso accomodato, traditional Ligurian stockfish stew recipe listed in the regional agri-food products*  
Photo: A Small Kitchen - E. Monzani, 2020

**CFC (Creative Food Cycles) covers different scales and levels of action (and a socio-cultural activism) from production to distribution, from distribution to consumption, from consumption to disposition (and re-production) trying to promote a strategic integration, innovative and fresh at the same time, from the territorial and urban scale to the scale of the creative-social celebrating event or creative-design product, in which the factor “food” as a productive indicator takes on a priority meaning as an inducing agent of new sustainable and innovative processes at the same time.**



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