

# Creative Food Cycles towards Urban Futures and Circular Economy

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**foreword**

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**Creative Food Cycles** has the objective to enhance creative practices between food, architecture, and conviviality in a transnational and European perspective, setting food in the centre of cultural discoveries and societal innovation. Food is targeted as a field that materialises and—at the same time—influences ongoing deep changes in society and technology, in everyday invention and shifting routines, in scarceness and abundance: a forefront topic to explore and shape pathways of cultural creativity in strong links with society.

Food in terms of food systems regards complex sets not only of economic activities, but also of cultural actions and human exchanges that sharply affect Europe's long-term sustainability and the living conditions of its cities.

With the term **Food Cycles** we aim to grasp novel concepts for the interaction of technological, environmental, and societal forces in food systems and food culture. We feel that **Food Cycles** can become a driver for positive change: for urban qualities, for cultural practices, for new urban commons, urban education, as well as overall for economic development, ecological targets, and social integration.

The project **Creative Food Cycles** is initiated and performed by creatives and researchers in architecture and design in order to address food for urban futures: it seeks to provide understanding, models, and practical tools for **Creative Food Cycles** as a **culture-based approach to circular economy**.



### **From Re-discovering Harvest as Urban Practice towards Creative Urban Futures**

Starting point for this creative exploration is the disruptive change induced with the economic crisis of 2008, leading to question apparent securities and putting forward a re-definition of values. For cities, in this context, the topic of food re-emerged from the backstage, in a spectacular turn regarding the understanding of food since modernity that saw food as technical infrastructure tackled with managerial solutions. In a similar way, as we learned in the last years to follow the origin of energy again—before, in general understanding, it came out of the socket—, we discovered that food does not come out of the supermarket. This change of paradigm regarding food as urban element is provoking major innovations in the concepts and modes of food culture and economy, of everyday urban practices, and it is also strongly affecting our vision of urban futures. Various attempts already targeted at integrating food into urban planning, mainly with a traditional infrastructural view of “feeding the city” (Morgan 2009). The work of **Creative Food Cycles** takes a step forward to overcome these traditional planning and policy perspective with a decidedly cultural approach, responding the need of sustainable cities for integrated policy-making that builds on culture (UNESCO 2016). On the other hand, a strong civic and entrepreneurial engagement in urban agriculture, direct marketing, and overall sustainable and ecological food initiatives is a remarkable urban phenomenon since 2008. In the perspective to renew with this impulse the thinking and planning for urban futures, though, several questions are currently put forward: How to sustain civic and entrepreneurial initiatives beyond short time-spans? How to foster the upscaling of these social innovations towards resilience? How to formulate concrete strategies of urban change? How to include enlarged actor-constellations into new form of urban strategy building? In this ongoing public and scientific debate, we believe that the cultural approach of **Creative Food Cycles** can be developed into concepts and tools for the “missing link” between virtuous but abstract policies and immediate and *instagrammable* spatial change, influencing both of these two increasingly divided spheres. **Creative Food Cycles** wants to contribute to an ongoing impressive creative, architectural, and spatial turn in the work for urban futures—that corresponds more effectively to societal challenges, in the immediate impact and as direct experience as well as on the long run.

We believe that creative and cultural innovation for urban futures needs to relate strongly to new forms of everyday life, common activities, and civil engagement. Cultural creativity needs to be understood as a major driving force

for the envisioning, articulation, and realisation of processes of positive urban change. Thus, **Creative Food Cycles** is not only targeting innovations in the topic of food, but wants to put forward new ways towards co-designing liveable and sustainable cities as spaces of positive experiences. This creative approach can contribute highly to implement the objectives of the EU Urban Agenda (2016) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2016). The topic of food is involved in almost all of the single targets of these agendas, with considerable relevance for the inclusiveness of society, for economic inventions, for human health, for dealing with climate change, and for preserving and making use of biodiversity. Overall, **Creative Food Cycles** puts forward the topic of food not only as cross-cutting factor, but as accelerator of desired urban change.

### **A creative approach towards Food Cycles as driver of innovation**

**Creative Food Cycles** starts from the objective to combine specific innovations in three fields into a **multi-actor and multi-disciplinary innovation process** that is initiated and sustained by a creative-cultural approach:

#### **1) to foster Creative Food Cycles as driver of urban resilience**

Resilience is targeted here in a proactive sense: so not only to ensure the fitness of existing food systems against disturbances as in the traditional infrastructural paradigm but to foster novel Food Cycles as driver for future resilience. The approach of **Creative Food Cycles** aims to extend the current initiatives towards a regenerative food system as part of *circular economy* (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2019) into a creative paradigm aiming at adaptive Food Cycles as process of change. What originated from the ecological thinking since the 1970s and has been coined as “cradle to cradle” and “closed loops” principles in production processes is already leading to initiating technologies and knowledge towards a “performance economy” (Stahel 2006) with impact on job creation, economic competitiveness, resource savings, and waste prevention.

Towards **Creative Food Cycles**, the concept of *circular economy* can be understood as accelerator of transformation towards resilience, in streams and flows not only of materials, but also of energy, knowledge, behaviour, and abilities, as generator of sustainable futures in economy, society, and culture (Schröder 2016).

## **2) to enhance Creative Food Cycles as social innovation**

As contributor sustainable urban futures, **Creative Food Cycles** extends civic participation towards active engagement in co-design, involvement, and sharing and combine it with new models of collaborative and social entrepreneurship.

**Creative Food Cycles** aims at showing how individual engagement can be developed towards new urban communities, bound to a revision of concepts of urban rituals in the city (Sennett 2012).

In this context, the manifest change in social aggregation and its further opportunities based on digitisation are considered of high influence. Furthermore, Food Cycles target digitisation not only in terms of community-building through communication, monitoring, knowledge-provision, and new entrepreneurial and financing models, but also in interaction with innovative models of urban governance for a "responsive city" (Goldsmith&Crawford 2014).

## **3)to develop Creative Food Cycles through digital-technological innovation**

With the aim to design interactive protocols and prototypes that are linking ICT with digital production and cultural practices, **Creative Food Cycles** can provide devices with strong cultural and societal impact. The potential of digital manufacturing towards open innovation and co-design is seen as a major background for **Creative Food Cycles**.

Furthermore, digital-technological innovations are on the forefront to strengthen and initiate urban practices that can bridge the gap between strategic frameworks and bottom-up initiatives.

The concept of "augmented city" (Carta 2017) in this context can be seen as a framework how digital inventions in combination with cultural and social inventions change the paradigms and practices of urban research, design, planning, and policies.

We see the **creative-cultural approach** of **Creative Food Cycles** as empowering force to combine these three fields of innovation into a design&research innovation process to formulate specific objectives, concepts and tools for Food Cycles. The city as the field of action and manifestation of societal change provides the lens and the target for this working programme.

We believe that sensorial-artistic and communitarian-entrepreneurial activities towards **Creative Food Cycles** are strongly bound to a material experience of urban space, to urban practices, and to ideas of urban futures. Therefore, the creative setup of design and architecture can be understood as driver of innovation in interaction with specific technical, social, and environmental inventions.

New multiactor and multidisciplinary constellations are the basis for this new role of architecture and design, that builds on several design&research projects of the last years in the field of food and the city: e. g. METROPOLIS OF BIODIVERSITY (Boeri 2011) in preparation of the EXPO 2015 in Milan; the European project RURBANANCE (Schröder 2015) for tools for urban-rural cooperation, shared visions and governance models; FOODSCAPES in the frame of the research exhibition FOOD REVOLUTION 5.0 (Schröder&Hartmann 2017); AGRI-CULTURES, AGRO-CITIES, ECO-PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES with focus on the Mediterranean (Gausa&Canessa 2018).

**Creative Food Cycles** seeks to extend and sharpen the understanding and concepts of everyday urban qualities linked to food, as well as their strategic-visionary force. This concept is bound to a new awareness to combine social and technological innovations with artisan and vernacular knowledge and cultural identities, to link bio-agriculture to green economy and bio-research, and to refresh traditional concepts of city with including metropolitan scales, regional contexts and urban-rural linkages.

In this sense, **Creative Food Cycles** understands the term city as *human habitat* that not only addresses growing metropolitan agglomerations but a vast range of settlement as human living space in Europe, from towns to villages and farmsteads.

### **Targeting culture, research and urban futures**

The multiple pathways of innovation pursued with **Creative Food Cycles** target culture, research, and urban futures: they cross boundaries between creativity, science, and policy-making. We are aware of the many implications and limits of such an approach that we see not so much as comprehensive but more as initiative to start processes of change between often quite strongly delimited fields; not to speak also of sectorial boundaries implied in all of them. We feel that architecture and design—in the sense of a meta-innovation—can become an increasingly important force to extend and enhance the interface between cultural-artistic invention and open research, in dialogue with society through the stage and the impact of the field of the involved cities.

**Creative Food Cycles** aims to bridge knowledge gaps between architects, product, communication, and service designers with cultural actors and active citizens, and to empower them to assume a proactive attitude regarding food and its expressive capacity, as a cultural vehicle of identity, innovation and social integration. The targets of capacity building and audience development address also the involvement of experts from municipalities, stakeholder groups, policy-makers and wider urban society, to take advantage of the European transnational exchange and collaboration in this project.

### **From phases to cycles**

In order to structure the working programme and to explore more deeply starting points and sectors of innovation, **Creative Food Cycles** operates with a 3-phase-model: from *production to distribution* (phase 1), from *distribution to consumption* (phase 2), and from *consumption to disposition* (phase 3).

The 3-phase-model is also to stimulate a deeper interconnection among cultural creators, cultural professionals, institutional stakeholders and active urban society through an open and inclusive approach. In the evolvement of the working programme, the phases are investigated not only for concepts and tool towards holistic models that provide material-sensorial experience of all phases of Food Cycles. But, **Creative Food Cycles** aims a setting design-centred cultural creativity as main driver for deepened understanding, modes of co-design and realisation of **Creative Food Cycles** as systemic contributions to circular economy.

### **European dimension and Project partners**

**Creative Food Cycles** is a project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. In a not only transnational but clearly European perspective, the project aims to develop a profound study of creativity for food cycles, particularly addressing circular economies for positive urban change. The **Creative Food Cycles** project works in several actions, from the set-up of publications, workshops, installations, to a festival and symposium, and an itinerant exhibition. The activities are developed by the project partnership of the Chair for Regional Building and Urban Planning of Leibniz University Hannover (LUH), with the Institute of Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC), and with the Department of Design and Architecture of the University of Genoa (UNIGE).

The catalogue Food Interactions is a first main activity in the **Creative Food Cycles** framework. It collects 30 successful projects of creative food practices, selected through an open call and through the expertise of the project partners. The catalogue understands **Creative Food Cycles** as social and cultural creation with a holistic view on the whole cycles. Thus, the leading questions raised for this catalogue are also main questions to answer with the **Creative Food Cycles** project: How can we create new conviviality through Food Cycles? How can we scale-up Food Cycles as models of co-design? How can Food Cycles enhance positive urban futures?

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