

Foodprint: Social innovation towards a sustainable European food system

From consumers to food citizens: Where do you want your Foodsteps to lead?

Topic-domain: Consumption

Foodprint's core message is that we can be more than passive consumers and actively participate in shaping a sustainable European food system. We participated last year in the Collider, we learned a lot, grew a lot and are now thrilled to be part of the second edition of the Collider. Here is all you need to know for this Challenge!

Introduction & Context

Our food system is broken. Whereas more than half of the planet is overweight, the others starve to death. Food production is linked to GHG emissions, deforestation, resource depletion, soil and water pollution, biodiversity loss and ocean dead zones, to name but a few. In Europe, standard diets based on large consumption of animal products and highly processed foods are detrimental to the environment and people's health.

In the context of its Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Union wants to encourage positive transformative change towards a more sustainable and fair food system. In particular, the EU called for more societal awareness of and engagement with the food system, and for the adoption of more sustainable diets based on low-processed and plant-based foods. However, top-down, market-based and normative approaches perform poorly in this respect. For this reason, more bottom-up and social ways of transforming and innovating towards more sustainable and conscious food behavior are needed. Educating on food and dietary sustainability and increasing food awareness are central in this respect. This includes not only providing quality and unbiased food information but re-thinking and re-designing the food environment especially for younger generations. In this context, this Challenge wants to enable young Europeans to give an informed answer to the question: *Where are your Foodsteps leading, and where do you want them to lead?*

What is the Waste Challenge?

When considering food, we are used to think of waste as what we may throw away in the bio trash can. But in this Challenge, we want to explore the idea of waste from a different angle. First, food waste is also the food that is lost by an inconsiderate and inefficient use of resources. In this sense, behind some foods we consume, there might be an intrinsic waste we do not see. Second, consuming food unmindfully and with no awareness of its real value in a sense is also a form of waste as it is careless; this is also linked to actual food waste in its conventional meaning, e.g., we buy more food than we need (because we don't value it) and end up throwing it away.

Considering these two dimensions, the Challenge aims at finding innovative ways to empower people to understand, reflect on and shape their Foodprint. The goal is increasing education on food sustainability on the one side while also re-connecting people with the food they eat and the ways they can contribute to positive change in the food system. The Challenge is highly open-ended as participants can start from the analysis of the context and the relevant stakeholders to discuss and explore what are the best innovative solutions and initiatives to implement to contribute to the goal.

Ideally, the group could build on the work the Foodprint team already did in the last edition of the EuroTeQ Collider. There, the group came up with a concept for a Foodprint Canteen, a scalable model for an “empowering canteen” that could be virtually applied to any school/university canteen in Europe.

The concept was based on an approach of information and education by design. The idea is to transform the school or university canteen from a place where you go to just consume food into an empowering environment where people can get more connected to and learn about the food they eat, and more in general about food sustainability. The **Foodprint Canteen Model** is based on two main pillars:

- **Pillar Food Environment**: changes in the design of the food environment, especially in the menu design, in ways that make the environmental impacts of different foods clearly visible and understandable. For this pillar we thought about building a Foodprint Calculator that could automatically compute environmental impacts of different dishes served in the canteen. This is coupled with a color-coded label that would be displayed in the menus to visually communicate the impacts to users.
- **Pillar Transformative Education**: implementing transformative learning in the canteen environment to (re-)educate on dietary sustainability. Transformative learning is based on the idea that you cannot just educate people like they were empty containers, but you need to address their existing fears, doubts and beliefs (about diet and sustainability in this case). We explored the possibility to use the EDx App, an open-source transformative learning app developed in partnership with the United Nations to offer smartphone micro-courses to big communities of learners.
- **NB: for getting an email with more information (i.e., mock-ups, last year’s report or pitch presentation) see contact details below!**

Whereas we got to work a little more on the first pillar, we did not get the chance to really explore the second pillar in detail. This could be one of the areas where the project could be expanded. There is indeed much to explore, for instance a detailed course program could be developed, maybe even looking for professionals who would participate in creating it. Also, considering how to exactly implement the courses in the canteen environment, for instance using QR code installations. Also, we individuated many stakeholders last year as well as possible partners and sponsors, so in this edition it could be interesting to contact them and include their perspectives on and evaluations of the Foodprint Model, in a real design thinking spirit! Also, last year we already held qualitative interviews with canteen users, but only more in general to understand their attitudes towards food sustainability and their needs. This time students could also confront users already with a more developed model and get constructive feedback on user end, in the spirit of co-creation.

Of course, there were many other initial ideas we did not get to explore at all in the last edition such as:

1. QR-code installations in strategic points (such as waiting line) that students can scan. These could contain information, fun facts and other inputs related to the foods that are in the menu that day.
2. (An expansion and more sophisticated version of the above) QR-codes to scan for each or some of the foods served that day. These could contain general information about the foods, their production and resulting environmental impact, their history, current data or issues related to it.

3. Create an app for canteen users that keeps track of your Foodprint (linked to the Calculator). You could track your progress, share it with others. According to technical capacities, this could even be expanded even further by elaborating positive reinforcement mechanisms.
4. (This could be you!)

In general, whereas it could be interesting to build on the project of last semester, this is not mandatory. You are not limited by our past work or the directions we took last year. Many other initiatives / projects in the university, online or in the city are possible, and countless! What initiatives are chosen by the group will of course depend much on the preferences of the group and on the type of (technical) expertise and resources available.

Desired Outcome

People eating in the canteen will be empowered and more informed about their food choices, and some might even change their consumption choices. The concepts, solutions and initiatives elaborated in the project should be flexible and scalable enough in ways that they can be later applied and extended to virtually any university / school or even public institutions, adapting it to the relevant contexts and publics.

In addition, the very participants of the Challenge will come out of this experience feeling enriched and empowered. Also, valuable connections and synergies could outlive the project itself as the students could become part of the Foodprint student organization which is currently still forming.

Desired Impact

Knowledge is power. Being aware of the real impact of daily food choices and food-related behaviors, people can make more informed decisions about their diets that better align to their values and the future they want to help bring into being. By educating people about food and dietary sustainability, we empower them to become responsible food citizens instead of mere passive consumers. In this sense, we also contribute to enhancing food democracy and set the grounds for a more participative, inclusive and fair governance of the food system.

How-To-Foodprint:

- How do we address the problem? To participate in the Challenge, people need to be open-minded, open to dialogue and perhaps even ready to reflect critically on their own beliefs and behaviors. The key is to always be respectful of others and be aware that food is linked to culture, traditions, experiences and memories of the people we love. Even if we do focus ultimately on food sustainability and educating food citizens, we should keep in mind food is also much more. The fact that the project group will have high diversity and international character should be our strength, not our weakness.
- What is our spirit? What is our communication? We do not want to make people feel judged or overwhelm them with too much or too technical information. We aim at people's brain and stomach but we actually want to hit their hearts. The communication and spirit behind the initiatives should be positive, empowering and non-judgmental. This also includes

avoiding what I call the “rhetoric of sacrifice”. We are not trying to shame people into “restricting” their behaviors and “give up pleasures” in the name of higher moral principles. The spirit is not that of “less”, but of “more:” we want to benefit people by educating and empowering them. We want to encourage them to be active and make informed decisions. We are offering, we are not taking away or imposing. We cannot and do not want to force people to have more sustainable diets, but we want to enable them to by giving them access to quality information/education.

- How do we educate? Educating is not equal to informing. Whereas giving information in the strict sense of the term is of course a big part of it, education can come in many creative, innovative and even unconventional forms. Even when we are simply “informing”, the way information is conveyed can vary a lot, with great impact on the outcome. This does not only include the communication, but also the form information takes. We can be absolutely open about this in the Challenge and explore many different mediums and concepts to convey this information. Everything goes, as long as it is feasible, flexible and empowering!

Would you like to participate in the Challenge? Do you have any questions, remarks, comments? Would you like to get an email with our presentation for last year’s pitch, the report and see our mock-ups of the Foodprint Model?

Do not hesitate to contact us anytime!

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