



Research Fellow 

Ieva Miltina

Food as a Catalyst in Research
Design for the Cultural and
Creative Sector

FOOD AS A CATALYST IN RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR

By Ieva Miltina

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABR - Arts Based Research

AI - Artificial Intelligence

CCS - Culture and Creative Sector

CCE - Culture and Creative Economy

EU - European Union

SME - Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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1.INTRODUCTION

The multifaceted nature of food, consciously shifting from mere nutrition to sentimental, tactile, sensory, political, or cultural dimensions, presents immense potential for innovation, exploration, and creativity across various domains, borders, and sectors. Rooted in a commonality shared by every human being, food also possesses a unique quality that brings people together and encourages them to share their innermost feelings. In the context of the culture and creative sector, food plays a significant role as an agent of culture, a prominent element of the services offered, and, in some countries, even a part of the creative economy.

In the intersection of these findings and the author's previous experiences with food, the intuition pointed at the great potential that it might provide for the researchers. It felt meaningful to tap into a more thorough exploration, starting by answering the **following questions**:

- How can food be used as a research tool to explore complex topics regarding future scenarios, hopes, fears and other aspects within culture and creative sector?
- What are the steps and considerations one shall know in adapting or creating food-related participatory research methodology for exploring aspects of culture and creative sector?

Answering these questions has led not only to a comprehensive overview of the **potential benefits and risks of using food as a part of research methodology** but has also provided a list of **scenarios and cues for research designers**. All of these elements offer a useful **framework for developing a food-related arts-based research methodology**. Highlighting questions for future research, the paper serves as an appetising guide for further exploration and experimentation within the field. Additionally, it underscores the meaningful potential of culture and creative industries in addressing contemporary challenges and briefly explores the issue of work-life balance among employees in Latvian CCS.

This project has been conducted with the kind help of PhD Maija Kāle and Dr.oec Ieva Zemīte.

AI has been used throughout the report only for purposes of revising the quality of text.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The starting point of this report lies in deep curiosity about the power of food as a creative medium. The idea to explore the topics of this research emerged while researching the diverse array of food-related facilitation approaches in youth work in the EU (Miltina et al., 2023). Some of the most exciting examples displayed how food-related events and participatory research methodologies (Pettinger et al., 2017 and 2019) were used not only to gain insights in harder to reach audiences, but also provide social impact to those who took part in the process. Building on this, a more detailed look into the existing literature and opportunities seemed necessary to understand the full potential and directions for further work.

To better perceive other approaches already implemented by practitioners in the field and the existing gaps in the literature, in the following subchapters the theoretical intersections between food and research practices will be described in more detail.

2.1. The role and qualities of food as a medium

Food progresses from being a source of nutrition and sensory pleasure to being a social marker, an aesthetic experience, a source of meaning and metaphor, and, often, a moral entity (Rozen, 1996, p.18).

It is essential for survival, but it also plays a vital role in our culture, social interactions, and personal well-being. As a medium it can communicate our values, traditions, and identities, or also be used to express emotions, build relationships, and create memories (Belasco, 1999).

Primarily food possesses a **tangible dimension** that engages our senses - taste, smell, touch, hearing, and even our intra-body senses that all play a role in crafting many of human experiences. Through such sensory engagement, its **psychological and social dimensions** are elicited - food brings us pleasure, entertainment, curiosity, and a wide range of other emotions which in turn build the **more complex cultural and philosophical aspects of human existence**.

The **omnipresence of food assures the feature of relatability and familiarity** that translates across borders, ages and other variables regardless of our cultural background or personal preferences. Taking into consideration all of the above mentioned aspects, it quickly becomes clear why and how food becomes of interest as a medium or an agent for change.

Summarising the vast amount of available literature, the most common effects can be divided into three categories - biological, psychological and social effects that food might generate on a human being. Table no.1 describes each of these categories in more detail.

Biological (senses, in logical order)	Psychological	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sight ● Smell ● Touch ● Hearing ● Taste ● Intra-body senses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Memories ● Emotions (disgust, pleasure, etc.) ● Feelings (nostalgia, guilt, etc.) ● Beliefs ● Values ● Habits ● Identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultural practices (rituals, traditions) ● Social bonds and their dynamics ● Sense of belonging ● Public identity

Table 1. The effects of food on human beings

As a natural part of human life, these effects are spontaneously triggered in individuals and social groups on an everyday basis. In research, they are often among the commonly explored aspects either in isolation, in relation to other facets and themes of human experience, or sometimes as a desired outcome when using food as a medium.

The most vivid example of considerations for the sensory aspects of food might be visible in the creation of dining experiences, and are broadly explained in **literature and sciences primarily intended for food enthusiasts, restaurateurs and chefs**. To understand the plethora of the considered aspects, one might start by exploring the multisensory flavour perception through psychophysics and neuroscience (Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence, 2016) or even considering the non-food and beverage factors that influence the diner’s overall experience (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014).

Even though the sensory aspects of food are crucial, and provide the basis for all the other effects, a deeper understanding about the role of food in our lives should be sought to paint a more rounded picture. On top of these effects, roles, and interrelations of food with other spheres of life are most often explored by **social, cultural, and other branches of psychology**. Motivated by explorations of disgust, Paul Rozin beautifully describes the broadest array of possible connections in his writings, making it worthwhile for individuals to acquaint themselves with his work in order to explore the themes, vocabulary, and other notions related to the topic of food beyond the nutritional domain (Rozin, 1996; Rozin, 2007). Going even further, the theoretical perspective of **Gustemology**, delves into how food and the sensory encounter with it play a pivotal role

in examining individuals and their connections to the universe, belief systems, and lifestyles (Sutton, 2010).

The above-mentioned approaches for viewing the role of food through various scientific lenses represent just a few examples, yet they provide valuable insights into the **depth of meaning and possibilities associated with food as a medium**. In this chapter, after establishing an understanding of how to view food throughout this report, in the next one the angles and qualities already employed in the research design will be explored.

2.2. Food as a tool in arts-based research design

As a contrast to quantitative data that allows concluding objective and large-scale data, **this paper rather focuses on qualitative research** that allows exploring aspects that can not always be quantified by numbers, for example, values, behaviours and emotions.

To understand the human experience efficiently and tap into the full richness and ambiguity of it, **arts-based research** historically emerged as researchers noticed the potential of arts therapy in the context of the research process (McNiff, 1998). In the core of ABR design lies the notion that we can learn about ourselves and the world in various ways - including emotions and intuitive perceptions as well as intellectual cognition (Greenwood, 2019). From this perspective arts as a tool for inquiry serve as a potent segway for exploring, interpreting, expressing and assigning meaning to the most complex notions - providing a possibility to do meaningful work on complicated topics. Even more importantly, it is often used as a purposeful strategy to make the participation in research more accessible to usually harder to reach audiences and contest the existing power and privilege structures within the research field (Leavy, 2020). Thus, the popularity of these approaches has grown particularly across education and the social sciences.

Observing the considerations for using different arts it is possible to see that **each of them bring a particular set of benefits and limitations to the table**. Just as an example - photography allows documenting parts of one's life and reflect on it (Marn & Roldn, 2010), dance allows exploring the embodied experiences (Pentassuglia, 2017), and the visual arts like drawing have a strong potential to awaken or portray complex emotions (Ward & King 2020). Subsequently, this brings us to curiosity about benefits and ways of using food within the realm of ABR. Leaving out the more usual contexts where food is often used for exploring connections to one's cultural habits or dietary preferences, in this chapter the light will be primarily shed **from the lens of research in fields of social impact, education or arts therapy**.

Potentially, the most comprehensive view on food as a research tool is available in the work “Food as an Arts-Based Research Method in Business and Management Studies” (Weston & Farber, 2020), that explores how food could be used to **achieve enriched understanding in the behaviour of the organisations**. It demonstrates how food and dining can serve as a research context for studying social engagement, and how that can function as a tool to elevate and enrich social interaction within a research framework. The authors provide two practical examples from their own experiences - the utilisation of food as an arts-based method within an action research context through an artist-talk dinner series, as well as a perspective on how food can play a crucial role in the dissemination of research findings. Anyone looking into the research instruments around food will find use in their how-to guide for setting up a food intervention and debriefing it.

Pettinger et.al (2019) in “Participatory food events as collaborative public engagement opportunities” alongside oral surveys and audio interviews uses observations of social cooking, eating and creative visual arts activities to **explore and engage with ‘harder to reach’ communities**. Their work is especially meaningful for the detailed record on ethics of participation and considerations for the sensitive balance of researcher - research subject. On other occasion a pilot study of the same lead author employs photography in relation to food - a group of homeless service users are invited to document their daily food-related activities over ten days through photos and then volunteer to engage in focus group discussions to explore the meaning behind their food experiences (Pettinger et al., 2017). It is an example that clearly visualises the synergy of food as a topic and tool, other type of art and a meaningful topic in a harder to reach audience.

An especially broad description of the **tangible benefits and approaches to using baking in the arts-therapy** (with the potential to overlap and be used in ABR design) is described in the work of Cherilynn Ang (2022). In her dissertation thesis “Edible Art: Baking as a Modality in Art Therapy and Its Therapeutic Benefits”, she explains psychology of art materials, parallels between food and arts supplies, therapeutic benefits as well as a list of the proposed data collection strategies. Some of **these tangible qualities might overlap with the literature about other crafts in ABR**, for example Koivunen & Ahmas (2020) explore knitting and handicraft as a method of research. In their approach knitting is portrayed as a tactile and emotional form of everyday crafts, and poses strong materiality. Following their statement that various materials have the potential to either facilitate or restrict the extent of emotional engagement in learning, thus influencing creativity, it is easy to imagine how food could be seen in a similar light, and embody the same tangible qualities necessary for research design.

Leaning into the field of arts, the potential of food can be seen also in the play “Pepper and Honey” by Kristina Gavran (2019). Besides being an experience that explores the

concept of home, it used a blend of theatre and baking together with the audience to **explore their opposing views** on Brexit in a more subtle way, and **foster dialogue between the audience members**. Even though this was performed primarily as an artistic endeavour, it inspires and offers potential crossovers for the realm of research too.

Similar crossover might be sought for in the **examples of facilitation methodologies for mostly, but not exclusively non-formal education**. The array of available examples is very broad, and showcases many meaningful topics - most prominently, sustainability, inclusion (especially intercultural activities), mental and physical health (Miltina et al., 2023). Some of the more curious examples make a connection between food and sexuality (finger-licking experiences by We Feast Berlin), intergenerational dialogue (gardening workshops by Cool Ukis) or digital technologies (various activities by Food Futures Group). A much broader list of concepts is explored and available in the report "Relatable, Creative and Barrier-breaking: the Power of Food in Facilitating Activities for Social Impact" by Ieva Miltina - research designers might benefit by adopting or getting inspired from many of the portrayed facilitation techniques or examples of intersectional topic combinations.

Taking into consideration all of the above mentioned approaches, it becomes clear that food, similarly to forms of art, like music, may not be able to speak on its own (Daykin, 2004), and therefore is often used in combination with other forms of creative expression - photography, creative writing or tactile-visual work (for example, the focaccia decorations in arts therapy). In the following chapters, though, more focus will be devoted to using food as a rich medium on its own.

3. RESEARCH PROCESS

The beginning of this research lies in the curiosity of potential that food provides for research design. Initially the methodological plan consisted of five stages - online survey, literature review, ideation, testing and concluding. In the process it quickly became clear that the greatest value for readers from this paper would consist of primarily offering an exploration of the aspects for development of food-related research methodology concept from a variety of angles. Thus, a plan emerged that highlights the available theoretical aspects, and the considerations necessary to plan this process successfully. This way the need for a thorough online survey and broad testing has resided and the latter one serves only as an example in the testing phase. In this chapter steps of the research plan will be explained separately, elaborating on the changes, challenges and considerations that a fellow researcher might find useful in planning their own methodology.

3.1. Defining the research design

Similarly to principles of ABR, this research relies on explorations of the concept development and creative process instead of data from a broad audience. Among others, the challenges mostly revolved around the need to learn and read a broad amount of literature to get to the essence of how food (field of author’s expertise) overlaps with ABR from a scientific perspective (not in the field of author’s expertise thus far).

Phase	Methodology	Provided benefits for replicability/ continuation
Defining CCS challenges in Latvia	- publicly available statistics - conversation with an expert	no significant benefits
Gathering insights and information necessary for ideation	literature review about ABR and overlapping themes around food as a medium	- introduction to the aspects and considerations for research designers that wish to consider food as a medium in their research - links to other research for gaining deeper insights
Ideation	creative process, synergies between concepts and approaches	exemplary ideation strategy that highlights the necessary considerations and opportunities
Testing	observation of research methodology instruments and implementation	description and templates for research design
Conclusions	-	potential questions and considerations for future research

Table no.2. Research design applied in this project

The particular details of research design only emerged after a few months of work, and it became clear what aspects would be most beneficial for the replicability and sustainability of this project. Namely, the starting point should be the qualities of food - to define what sets it apart from other ABR tools or methodologies. After having a clear image on what effects of food evokes humans, and the potential already implemented in this and overlapping fields of research, it was finally possible to see the missing gaps and the prospective scope of outcomes to portray in this report. Thus, a research methodology and justification emerged, as portrayed in table no.2.

In the next subchapters a more detailed insight will be provided on the three phases that were not described in the previous chapter - the definition of challenges in CCS in Latvia, the ideation and testing

3.2. Understanding the background

After longer considerations it became clear that the research design does not necessarily require very detailed information about the CCS in Latvia, but gaining brief insight about it was still necessary to see if the proposed approaches have any curious intersections with the gaps in the explored literature.

After exploring the main statistics regarding the creative industries¹ in Latvia, it was clear that there are serious problems on a systemic level - no reliable and comprehensive information is available from recent years. The sources of the Ministry of Culture only provide one statistical item - number of companies in creative industries, and the most recent data is from 2021. Other, more comprehensive data referenced in other writings dates back to 2015, and does not portray the current situation objectively. At this point it was clear that exploring the challenges through such methods would not provide the necessary outcomes, and a conversation with an expert was initiated instead.

A deliberate choice was made in favour of Ieva Zemīte, the program director of the joint academic Postgraduate study program "Creative Industries and Growth Mindset" at the Latvian Academy of Culture and Riga Technical University. Her decades of work in management science and research in creative industries provided ample information to shape the intended findings for this report. Although the initial plan involved conducting a formal interview with her at a later stage, the first investigative conversation regarding potential research directions proved sufficient. This conversation illuminated not only systemic but also individual challenges faced by individuals working in creative industries. This proved to be a valuable learning experience as her expertise helped establish clear boundaries concerning the limitations of this research. Specifically, while much of the approach draws from a therapeutic background, this work can only consider methodological and management science perspectives, as any therapeutic effects fall within the domain of psychology, outside the author's field of expertise.

Having laid the baseline for further explorations, the next phase of research could take place and explore the potential connections between the literature, existing approaches and potential benefits that food could bring in ABR.

¹ In Latvia, the officially accepted term is "creative industries".

3.3. Ideation and creative phase

Embarking on the ideation phase proved to be a truly confusing task. The amount of available information and the intersections between food, research methodologies and CCS are indefinite and truly depend on the creative skills of anyone working on developing a new methodology. Such a chaotic and vast amount of information asked for a more methodical approach, and systemizing data a proposal for approach emerged. It is displayed in table no.3, and will be most useful for anyone interested in developing the research methodology from scratch or complementing an already existing methodology with a food-related element. In this case, different qualities of food are considered for their sensory, psychological or communal effects on an individual or a social group. Following that, a type of methodology can be developed, and below a more detailed description of the process within this project follows.

Ideation started by defining the goal of the activity. Primary question was - **what methodology can we use to explore work-life balance among employees working in CCS**. Taking into consideration the previously defined and prevalent majority of freelance and SME employment in the sector, the elements of work-life balance were determined from the literature on this topic. Commonly, the barriers to freelancing workers' personal and professional balance appeared to be thinking about work while at home and about home while you are at work (Abug et al, 2023).

The second consideration was the gap in the existing approaches - to provide some novelty, it was decided to focus on a food-related research methodology that does not employ any other art forms alongside food as a medium and fully relies on the tactile and sensory effects of food (contrary to the broadly available approaches where food's collective qualities are explored). Based on this, an internet search was done to see the potential overlap of the above described work-life balance issues with the keywords "sensory questions", but it did not turn out to be very beneficial.

After careful considerations about the conditions for conducting the research, it was decided to opt for testing in solitude (contrary to group setting) for several reasons. First, it was needed to avoid the influence of the food's social effects and test an approach only on tactile and sensory qualities of it. Secondly, it would give space and time for participants to avoid distractions and focus on the task at hand, namely self-reflection. The additional benefit would be the ability to explore the developed approach not only within research, but also as a self-reflection method for management purposes. For such a decision, common risks of self-reported survey methodology should be taken into consideration when interpreting data.

Qualities of food	Desired role within research	Examples
Sensory qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foster memories, nostalgia ● Connect with a topic ● Connect with oneself ● Connect with a past experience ● Induce associations and feelings around a topic ● Promote creative thinking and creative connections ● Serve as a tactile tool (e.g. dough kneading in bread therapy etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mindful eating as an appetiser for research process ● Focaccia art for visualising one's experiences or feelings ● Using different flavours to promote lateral thinking and connect with other topics ● Bread kneading as a process to connect with oneself and inner thoughts
Social qualities / community building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Team building for more efficient results ● Explore group dynamics ● Explore traditions/rituals ● Explore complex topics in groups ● Explore questions around identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooking together to see the power dynamics and relationship in team ● Dinner around a joint table to discuss/ explore a particular question ● Food journals to determine the integration in workplace
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interdisciplinary connections with other topics ● Symbolic meaning of foods and processes around foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exploring eating habits through ABR to define untold beliefs and challenges of life ● Exploring food-related metaphors as a way to interpret one's thoughts and emotions

Table no.3. Qualities of food in context of research goals and methodologies

As a result of all these explorations and necessary aspects, the “The Lunchtime check-in” was created. In the backbone of it is a concept of lunch as the meal most commonly taken as a break during working hours. The participants are asked to use a mindful lunch break where they use their meal to first, “warm up” by connecting to themselves through sensory cues of the meal, and then reflect on a few questions around their work and life balance right after the meal. Inspired by the healing principles of art therapy, having a meal that requires mindfully connecting to one’s body and thinking about something other than the pending work tasks, might also contribute to other positive side-effects for participants. More detailed description available in Annex no.1 and the following subchapter.

3.4. Testing “The Lunchtime check-in”

After starting the theoretical work it became clear that testing will take a secondary role in the process of this research, and only serve the purpose of exploring the process of planning, implementing and evaluating food-related research methodology. Namely, the gained data, even though curious on their own, will not be analysed in much detail as this does not serve the primary focus of this paper.

The methodology was tested in late September 2023 over one week, involving a test group of four (n=4) employees from creative industries in Latvia (a photographer, graphic designer, event producer, and cultural event venue top-level manager). They were selected based on availability and interest in exploring their work-life balance beliefs, primarily through personal connections with the author. While this approach may not suit research aiming for objective data analysis, it was strategically beneficial in this case, saving time and effort while fostering genuine and critical participant engagement.

To ensure a uniform process, they were briefed individually in person or through the Zoom platform about their task, and provided with a written checklist of actions and questions (Annex no.1). The benefits of food were employed twofold - to connect the participant to their own senses and clear their mind from distracting thoughts, as well as a gateway to information, memories and overall feelings regarding the concept of “taking a break” during work time. After giving them a week to conduct the planned activity and submitting the results, they were asked to fill out a survey about their experience with the conducted methodology (Annex no. 2).

In response to the question, "How does today's lunch differ from other days?", all four participants agreed that this lunchtime was notably different from their usual experiences, with one participant remarking, "I never have as much time for lunch as today!" Subsequently, it became evident that three participants lacked a sense of work-life balance, and one participant expressed a dedicated effort to taking mindful breaks to prevent burnout, leading to the response "I think about work during lunch break as little as possible" to the second question. Additionally, the majority (three out of four) reported consistently thinking about work-related tasks during lunch, with two expressing frustration and one feeling neutrally about it. These participants cited reasons such as the desire to finish work sooner, the habit of working during lunch, and difficulties in putting work-related thoughts aside.

In the question about work arrangements, two respondents found their work environment suitable for breaks (one wished not to interrupt ongoing workflow), while two cited their high-paced, pressure-filled occupations as reasons for a lack of dedicated lunchtime. Regarding lunch's impact on their work-life balance, one admitted limited awareness and

a need for closer observation, another felt minimal impact, and the last two believed that lunch quality significantly influenced their work-life balance, with one valuing mindful breaks and the other desiring more uninterrupted ones.

As mentioned earlier, the collected data won't be analysed in much detail, but is provided for context. What's crucial within this paper are the post-activity survey responses. Participants generally found the approach helped them reflect on using breaks for work-life balance, connecting with their thoughts. Some mentioned challenges like difficulty switching off work-related thoughts abruptly and therefore not being able to fully invest in the process, and another commented on feeling tired from work-related thinking, stating that the activity ended up taking away the actual break they needed.

Regarding the experience of the author, the most complicated aspects revolved around ideation and finding the right approach to explore a topic that is not within the field of expertise (work-life balance). Nonetheless, as a methodology it proved to be efficient and worked around the responsibility over participants' dietary experiences (it was their own responsibility). Overall, a more thorough work could have been done, but within the given timeframe the testing served its purpose to give insights about the process.

4.ANALYSIS AND MAIN INSIGHTS

One of the main implications regarding the overlap of this topic with the CCS is slightly disappointing, but simultaneously very liberating. The central role of food in every aspect of human life is one of the reasons why it is extremely versatile, adaptable and interdisciplinary. And so are the cultural and creative industries that span over disciplines, themes and borders. Sifting through the existing concepts it became clear that the **following conclusions can not be narrowed down to CCS**, even if the testing phase leaned towards exploration of a challenge that is very evident in the particular sector.

In the initial chapters of this paper, the primary value lies in creatively combining existing approaches from various fields and presenting them comprehensively. This makes it accessible for anyone interested in using food as a tool in research design. The main takeaways are structured in five subchapters: benefits, risks, opportunities, and conclusions. Alongside insights from literature, this serves as an appetising guide for further exploration and experimentation in this topic.

4.1. Benefits of using food as a tool in ABR

Observing the ideation process and concluding from other authors it is undeniable that food does serve as a potent agent and holds great power for enhancing the research work. To limit the amount of information, this subchapter will only focus on benefits that specifically relate to food over other qualitative research tools.

One of the most important benefits is the fact that food is familiar and comforting to most people. If applied methodologically, **food might be the one with the lowest barriers for research participants** if compared to other ABR tools. In fact, literature already states that it works well among harder to reach audiences (Pettinger et al., 2017 and 2019), and helps to ease conversation on polarising or complicated topics (like “Honey and Pepper” by K. Gavran). Even though for researcher it means extra effort in setting up the research process (more in the next subchapter), for participants it reduces the amount of effort to get acquainted with the task at hand, and simultaneously also reduces barriers in communicating their realities with other people in the group and the researcher. Subsequently it enables reaching greater depth in the desired research data.

Second benefit revolves around commensality - **eating and cooking together can have a tremendous impact on opening people up in group settings**. Sometimes, just as little as a delicious treat to gather around might help strangers to feel more comfortable with each other, and thus a more open communication follows. Such quality is of utmost importance when gathering data from groups of people either from the same or, especially, from differing backgrounds. For particular questions of research, food interventions might also become a setting where group dynamics can be observed more naturally.

Invoking some lateral connections, the third beneficial quality of food is rooted in its interdisciplinarity. Its multidimensional role in human lives offers the **opportunity to make the most diverse connections between food and other topics** that wouldn't otherwise be attainable. Namely, when participants are asked about their relationship with food, in particular contexts it is possible to paint a rich picture about their daily lives, beliefs and challenges from their answers.

One might delve deeper in additional benefits, but many of these would be rooted in assumptions or speculations based on other fields of expertise, as food has been explored as an ABR tool rather scarcely. Therefore, a list of qualities can be explored and creatively implemented in research design in the future.

Following qualities of food pose strong potential for efficiency of research design:

- Food activates senses, feelings, emotions (in research might be used as a positive trigger, associative medium and soothing presence for bringing out sensitive emotion)
- Food fosters connection with oneself, the environment, others (aids the process of opening up, helps to develop bonds, facilitates group dynamics) and fosters intimacy when necessary.
- Creative in its versatility (food embodies broadest sensory and psychological qualities that have a potential for boosting creativity, but also provide a vast amount of applications in practice).
- Positive effects on engagement and motivation (mostly, a pleasant aspect of life, food can be used to increase engagement and willingness to contribute to the research process)
- Activities around food facilitate collaboration (through recipes and logical processes, commonality and simplicity of medium)

The amount of positive effects is as vast as the creative potential of humanity, but this great potential also comes with a number of great limitations and considerations that should always be taken into consideration.

4.2. Risks and other considerations

Even outside the realm of research food comes with a broad set of risks due to the perishable and ingestible nature of this medium. Additionally to this physical dimension comes the intangible one - our individual relationship with food that is deeply seated in connections with memories, emotions, people and places. It is a responsibility and ethical requirement of researcher to consider all of these aspects, and make sure that the research process, similarly to biomedical studies, adheres to the principle *first do no harm* (Leavy, 2017).

Type of risk	Risks
Risk for participant's health/ livelihood	Allergies and dietary restrictions
	Food safety (freshness of ingredients, mistakes in preparation process, contamination, etc.)
	Workplace safety (e.g. incompetence using specific equipment, using inappropriate equipment)
Psychological risk	Difficult relationship / stigma with food (e.g. eating disorders, restrictive behaviours that might trigger emotional response)

	Cultural ambivalences / associations
	Emotional discomfort with unpleasant flavours (universally or individually)
Process risks	Reduced flexibility in terms of tangible and process restrictions around food (need for particular space and equipment etc.)
	Lack or malfunction of equipment
	Inappropriate location (does not allow conducting the intended process or is uncomfortable)
	Food safety regulations might need to be in place to conduct food-related activities in person (not applicable to all countries)
Risks to the outcomes of research	Complicated recipes, ingredients, equipment - take away focus from the necessary research path
	Creativity dynamics - different levels of knowledge among participants around food can create psychological tension, but also affect the gathered data
	Psychological effects of particular flavours, textures and foods items that might lean collection or interpretation of data in one way or another (Spence, C., & Piqueras-Fiszman, B., 2014)

Table no.4. Primary potential risks for using food as a tool in ABR.

As noticeable from entries in table no.4, the severity of risks span from mere effects on the research outcomes to livelihood of participants. Keeping this in mind, having a thorough risk mitigation plan should be of utmost priority for the researcher. Some of the below described strategies will help in addressing these risks.

Knowledge around avoiding health risks depends on the level of expertise of the researcher. Since these are the most severe risks, the easiest way to work around those is thinking in analogies of designing a food experience. The easiest way for a novice in this field would be to make sure that on the research team there is a person with particular food-related expertise - either in a role of a permanent staff or hired expert that evaluates the planned process. Alternatively, opt for a food-related research method that does not require to ingest food (e.g. using only the tactile qualities, smell, or visual cues) as a creative way out of the health risks. Choosing simple ingredients and recipes that use food items with long shelf life and don't spoil easily might lower the complexity of the task, and going through a certified food-safety course would increase the awareness greatly, too.

One more strategy for avoiding harmful physical or psychological risks is very detailed, upfront and transparent communication with the participants of research. In the ideal case, conducting a short survey with the chosen target group (allergies, dietary requirements, other food-related information) ahead of the session and afterwards informing them about the details of the planned food intervention should give enough knowledge for both participants and the researcher to stay on the safe side.

Additionally, all of the surrounding aspects of food process should be considered and planned appropriately - the environment (suited for food interventions), tools and equipment (amount and quality of those, as well as participants' familiarity with them), the available amenities (a tap with water to wash hands and equipment), and many more. And finally, everything around the group process should be planned too - does the methodology require the presence of other participants, and if so, then how does group interaction influence the necessary outcomes? This subchapter has shed light on a few of the most prominent underlying risks, but a more thorough risk assessment planning is in the hands and responsibility of the researcher.

4.3. Opportunities and approaches to explore

Considering both benefits and risks prompts the question of practical implementation, and as previously mentioned, the answers lie within the boundaries of human creativity. To condense this paper's information, the opportunities described below focus on a specific issue identified during CCS exploration in Latvia. The country faces a significant challenge due to its predominant self-employment and SME workforce in CCS, resulting in a lack of work-life balance. Given Latvia's unique ecosystem, these employees often struggle to address underlying reasons for their challenges due to limited time and resources. Viewing this existing challenge at hand, and combining already existing research approaches (either from food research, in combination with other ABR methodologies, or food-related facilitation methodologies for social good), a non-exhaustive list emerged in the creative ideation phase. The table no. 5 presents some of the potential ideas that could be explored further.

Goal of research: reflection about aspects of work-life balance among CCS freelancers in Latvia	
Intention for using food in the research process: associations, memories, feelings around particular topics, a moment to think (aspects necessary for reflection)	
Methodology	Description

food and mood journals	Using food as a reference point to reflect on energy levels, productivity and other aspects necessary for work-life balance.
creative culinary experiences	Drawing on parallels between culinary innovation and one's work through food creation and experimentation.
culinary metaphors	Using food-related metaphors to describe creative work, challenges, and successes.
collaborative cooking sessions	Cooking and baking together to reflect on teamwork, communication, idea sharing, drawing parallels to creative collaborations.
food-related visual diaries	Using food-related elements to document the creative process through sketches, photos, collages or other.
creative food tasting panels	Exploring connections between taste perceptions and creative expression, participants explore and describe different food items as well as thoughts and feelings those evoke.
food and mindfulness	Enhance self awareness and personal reflection on different processes through combining mindfulness with food (e.g. food meditation etc.)
storytelling dinners	Themed dinners where participants share stories, breakthroughs, or answer other particular aspects.
food and idea generation	Food-related prompts or stimuli involved in idea generation sessions (promoting lateral thinking and creativity).
edible art expression	Creating edible arts installations, decorating baked goods or painting with mashed food items to express thoughts and feelings about a particular topic.

Table no.5. Food-related ABR methodology ideas for exploring aspects in CCS.

As it is visible, using food as a tool in ABR is full of opportunities, but this is a field still to be fully explored for a more thorough understanding about reasons and strategies for employing particular methodologies.

4.4. Overall conclusions

The research conducted in this project has resulted in several conclusions.

- In the ABR context, food does indeed possess numerous strengths and potential benefits. Its ubiquity, adaptability, interdisciplinarity, and relatability simplify researchers' work and provide opportunities for gaining a deeper understanding of complex issues across a diverse range of audiences. When employed systematically, food has the potential to minimise barriers for research participants (physical, psychological), making it a significant advantage over some other tools in ABR.
- Working with food requires relevant expertise. In addition to its numerous benefits, using food as a medium also presents significant health, psychological, and research process-related risks. When conducting ethical research, it is of utmost necessity to plan for the avoidance and mitigation of these risks.
- The proposal for using food in ABR invokes a critical question. With such specific expertise necessary to avoid risks - who will be able to use and newly introduce such methodologies in their research work? More thorough research on adaptability among researchers with lower food-literacy should be conducted to understand if in such cases the presented benefits outweigh the risks and effort necessary for preparations. Simultaneously, food-literacy of participants should be of concern, too.
- Additionally, it would be primarily necessary to explore if within the research design the connection of food to the research subject is a prerequisite for more efficient interpretation of the task among participants. Subsequently it will help to define if using food in ABR is predominantly efficient only in food-related contexts.
- Throughout the research, it became clear that there is very little scientific understanding available regarding the use of food as a tool in ABR. Among other conclusions, one of the most notable is the extensive work that remains to be undertaken to develop a comprehensive understanding of this topic.
- The testing phase was beneficial to reflect on the conceptual considerations of the created methodology. After all, the approach helped participants to reflect on using breaks to achieve work-life balance, but more thorough testing would be required for objective results regarding the gathered data.
- In the process of defining CCS challenges in Latvia a few trends emerged. First, the lack of reliable and transparent statistics on the government level. Secondly, the increasing number of freelancers and SMEs that dominate the work market in the sector. And third, related to such ecosystem dynamics, is the need for support mechanisms and self-appraisal tools to alleviate the hardships and improve the work-life balance working in the field. These trends may serve as the focal points for future research.

5.LINKING BACK TO CIRCE

How do your insights contribute to CIRCE's overall questions?

CIRCE works on exploring and developing new ways how policy can support the cultural and creative industries and strengthen their impact in Europe. The insights provided in this report further CIRCE goals at least two-fold. First, by working on developing an approach that might further be used within other topics, contexts and research, especially with harder to reach audiences. And secondly, by clearly highlighting and showcasing the innovative power of CCS for generating lasting social impact. Even if gastronomy is still not considered as a part of CCS in many countries, the multi-faceted cultural, personal and sensory qualities make it an undeniable part of this sector both directly, or as a subject of CCS services.

In the context of policy making, having a set of efficient tools for needs analysis is the base for addressing the existing challenges in CCS. But simultaneously - making all voices or perspectives heard and taken into consideration isn't always the easiest task due to various power structures and varying levels of openness in target audiences. The approaches described in this paper simplify the access to profound insights into the needs of target audiences of interest, and therefore have a potential to contribute to the resilience and increased impact of CCS on local and subsequently international levels.

What do they tell us about the role of the cultural and creative economies in the crises of today and tomorrow?

The results of this report highlight the significant role of CCE as a powerful source and setting for the emergence of current, efficient, and innovative solutions within the state of crisis. ABR is rooted in artistic and cultural practices but provides opportunities for exploration beyond CCE. Furthermore, these methodologies are strongly tied to the potential for social change and alleviating the existing damage in underprivileged audiences, which is what society in crisis desperately needs. The principles and potential of CCE mirror similar concepts on a broader scale.

What conclusions can be drawn for the future of the cultural and creative economies in Europe?

Especially, after the discussions among fellows of the program, it is evident that one of the common scenarios for the future is painting a rather bleak picture. With humanity facing multiple crises, many areas of CCE face danger of being left to fight on their own - with financing and support mechanisms being directed to "more urgent" needs. The

analogies of the creative and social potential embodied by CCE are visible throughout this paper and serve as a proposal for the betterment of the future. The benefits harnessed by this sector should be used methodically to mitigate the damage of these crises and keep up the livelihood of it.

Do your insights speak to other CIRCE projects?

The most obvious connection lies in the work done by Fabian Frey who has conducted edible exploration of culture, communities and urban change through the concept of sharing a sandwich. Even though he explores the aspects on how sharing food can foster change in communities, his approaches have the potential to be explored as food-based ABR for understanding social bonds in the creative industries.

Are there specific implications for policy making (optional)?

Primarily, more recognition and financing should be devoted for modern and innovative research within the CCS and its intersectional benefits. Particularly in Latvia, more importance should be assigned to exploring, researching and also publishing transparent and reliable information about the creative industries. The current level of information available on the website of the Culture Ministry of Latvia is very low. In order to ensure recognition, sustainability and meaningful change in CCS, a transparent and representative overview should be available for anyone willing to look into it. This way recognition and awareness about the contributions of CCS to the broader economy can be created, but even more so - the gaps and needs can be defined and easier addressed by entities on all levels of economy: public, private and civic society.

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ANNEXES

Annex no.1

Instructions handed out to the participants of testing “The Lunchtime Check-in”

TASK:

You will be asked to take a mindful lunch, and then answer a row of questions related to how your work and life intersect and influence each other. To allow yourself the time for enjoying the meal and having a well deserved rest, it is suggested to write down the answers to the questions only after the meal is finished. The goal of this research is to find out if such methodology works, and the amount of detail you provide in your answers completely depends on your willingness to share those details. Any data published will be anonymised and only in a summarised way.

PREPARATION:

- You will need a minimum of uninterrupted 30-45 minutes with no distractions from colleagues or work tasks - make sure that on this day you are able to schedule this time for the task. Choose a quiet and comfortable place to enjoy your lunch.
- Select a meal that includes a variety of textures, flavours, and colours to stimulate your senses. You are free to choose any meal upon your liking that includes a variety of these elements.
- Don't forget to take with you this list of instructions and paper with the questions.

DURING THE TESTING:

- **Prepare your meal** and sit down comfortably.
- **Pause and breathe** - begin by taking a few deep breaths to centre yourself and bring your awareness to the present moment. Close your eyes briefly to disconnect from external distractions.
- **Engage Your Senses:**
 - Sight: Open your eyes and take a look at your meal. Notice the colours, shapes, and arrangement of the food on your plate. Take a moment to appreciate the overall look.
 - Touch: With your eyes closed, try touching the different elements of your meal with your fingertips (if you are comfortable with it). Feel the textures and temperatures.
 - Smell: Bring your nose close to your food and take in the aroma of the whole plate and then of the individual ingredients. Inhale deeply and feel the different scents.
 - Sound: Listen to any sounds associated with your meal, such as sizzling, crackling, or other sounds from the surroundings.
 - Taste: Take your first bite slowly and deliberately. Chew your food thoroughly, paying attention to the taste and texture. Notice how the flavours evolve with each bite. As you chew, focus on the sensation of your teeth breaking down the food and the flavours mingling in your mouth. Try to identify individual ingredients and their unique tastes. Put your utensils down between bites to fully engage with your food.
- **Reflect after finishing the meal:** how do you feel now? How does the food sit in the stomach, and what thoughts are going through your head? How is your mood and is there any tension or other particular feelings in the body?

AFTER THE MEAL:

Sit down and think about the following questions. Consider how much they reflect your usual days, and try to take time to answer. Feel free to use food-related metaphors obtained during the meal to give necessary insights about your reality.

How does lunch today differ from lunches other days?
How often do you think about work-related tasks during your lunch? Does the frequency satisfy, frustrate you, or do you have no feelings towards this aspect?
Do you feel that your work-related arrangements encourage taking a break for a mindful and balanced lunch, or do you feel pressure to continue working during that time?
How does the quality of your lunchtime experience impact your overall work-life balance, and what steps could be taken to improve it?



1.What was your feeling embarking on lunch? And how had it changed afterwards?

2. Did the mindful lunch help to connect with yourself and the emotions at that moment? Elaborate on the process briefly.

3. Would you say that the task allowed you to get a clearer picture on your state of mind, body and soul, and truthfully answer the questions afterwards? Can you describe the insights you gained, in your own words?

4. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the process of this inquiry?

Thank you!