

CHAPTER 11
EATING OUTSIDE THE HOME:
FOOD PRACTICES AS A CONSEQUENCE OF ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SPAIN
NEW WAYS OF 'EATING OUT' IN SPAIN:
FOOD PRACTICES AS A CONSEQUENCE OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

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Introduction

This paper argues that among the sectors of Spanish society most affected by the economic crisis of recent years, food insecurity, understood as an economic and political phenomenon, entails not only paradoxes and tensions but also alternative strategies, giving rise both to suffering as a consequence of dietary constraints and to uncertainty as a source of empowerment. The working hypothesis is that whilst food insecurity creates uncertainty, which limits the quality of life, because food procurement requires a change of tactics, environments and interlocutors; it also encourages actions that not only minimise the impact of irregular access to food on physical and emotional health, but also transforms subjective experiences of food insecurity into points of departure for new ways of providing daily sustenance. ~~Other~~New ways of eating outside the home (in soup kitchens, in the street, in relatives' homes, etc.) are an example of ~~precarious~~these 'new' situations. In this context of uncertainty, people attempt to diversify the sources of food for their households, and even incorporate the most compromising and painful of these difficulties into their everyday habits as well as into their bodies. With the foods they buy, are given, or otherwise find, they try to create or reproduce orderly meals that are acceptable (gastronomically) by cultural standards. This study hypothesises that when food is in limited or uncertain supply, people may also engage in more disorderly (gastro-anomic) food practices, substituting cheaper ~~and~~ lower quality ~~or more obesogenic~~ foods ~~and also~~ using food as a way to mitigate anxiety and stress, ~~or~~ altering the distribution of food among family members.

Economic Crisis and Food Aid

Over the last ten years, the socioeconomic situation in Spain has changed significantly because of the global crisis (Maluquer de Motes, 2013). The average income of Spanish households fell from 27,700 Euros in early 2008 to 22,700 Euros in 2014 (a decline of 18 percent), while wealth fell from 190,400 Euros to 119,400 Euros in 2014 (a decline of 37 percent). Meanwhile, average income fell from 36,100 to 30,400 Euros in this period (-15.8 percent). Although some macroeconomic indicators improved in 2015 and 2016 (according to the Active Population Survey, the unemployment rate fell to 20.90 percent and Spain technically came out of recession during this period), the number of unemployed still exceeds 4.5 million people. Additionally, the quality of jobs has worsened, with more temporary contracts and lower wages which do not allow many workers to lift themselves out of poverty (Ayllón, 2015). In fact, according to the At-Risk-of-Poverty- or-Social-Exclusion (AROPE) index, the proportion of Spain's population at risk of social exclusion rose to 29.2 percent in 2014 - over three points more than the figure for 2010 (26 percent), and 13.3 million people are below the poverty line, of whom 3.3 million are at risk of exclusion due to severe material shortages (Gracia-Arnaiz, 2017).

The progressive impoverishment caused by economic policies based on austerity has had various consequences on the lifestyles of the groups most heavily affected by cuts in the social and health services, and consequently on their diets¹. In terms of consumption, people with fewer resources have fewer opportunities to acquire varied and high-quality food, and less frequently. Some authors point to the decline in purchasing power as the primary explanation for the changes in consumption of certain products, and especially those that are cheaper and less healthy (Antentas and Vivas 2014), as well as the decline in spending on food outside the home. According to Medina et al. (2016), a comparison between the data provided by the Food Consumption Panel for Catalonia in 2008, the year that the crisis began, and those for 2012, confirms the downward trend in food consumption in general (746.87 kg of food per capita in 2008 compared to 705.62 kg in 2012), with the sharpest fall registered for dairy products (although not for yoghurts and cheeses, which experienced only a moderate decline), vegetables and bread, followed by meat, fruit, potatoes and fish. Conversely, there was a slight increase in the consumption of beer and pre-prepared meals. However, caution must be exercised when interpreting the dietary patterns according to this statistical source, as these studies usually only mention per capita consumption of major food groups (e.g. fats and oils), which may contain more or less nutritious or affordable foods. On the other hand, levels of consumption of products considered very healthy, such as fruits and vegetables, changed little between 2008 and 2014 (Martin, 2016).

One of the most notable impacts of the increasing insecurity is apparent in the difficulties that people have in meeting their basic needs, as is demonstrated by the indicators in the Survey of Living Conditions (2013): 16.9 percent of households report great difficulties in making their income last until the end of the month, an increase of 3.4 percent compared to 2012, while 27 percent say they cannot afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every day. Meanwhile, according to the latest Fundación FOESSA (*Fomento de Estudios Sociales y de Sociología Aplicada*) report (Valls and Belzunegui, 2014), 16 percent of Spaniards are forced to follow a poor diet due to a lack of financial resources. People with limited resources try to cut costs, and this includes food costs. This reduction in expenditure can be achieved by minimising leftovers, increasing purchases of private label goods, or by prioritising price as the main criterion when selecting and preparing meals (Gracia-Arnaiz, 2014). If these measures are insufficient, they then seek help outside the home.

Government policies related to these difficulties have been contradictory over the past five years. On the one hand, there have been cuts in social welfare benefits, with a consequent increase in poverty, while at the same time it has been necessary to design or increase mechanisms and programmes to relieve the growing food insecurity (Kramer and Gracia-Arnaiz, 2015). The Food Aid Plan of the European Union (EU), co-financed by EU and government funds, is the programme that currently provides the most extensive assistance of this type in Spain. A hundred and fifteen million kilograms or litres of food were purchased through this plan in 2015, including rice, baby food, children's cereals, powdered follow-on milk, chickpeas, beans, full cream UHT milk, olive oil, canned tuna, spaghetti, canned tomato sauce, dehydrated cream of vegetables, biscuits, canned green beans and canned fruit without added sugar. These measures have been accompanied by the programme for the collection of fruit/vegetables for distribution free of charge. While the Spanish Government bought 63 million kilograms or litres of food in 2010, the figure had almost doubled by 2015.

¹ A larger version of this text is in Gracia-Arnaiz (2017). "Otras formas de comer fuera de casa: itinerarios alimentarios en un contexto de precariedad", In Diaz, C. and Novo, A. (eds). *Comer fuera de casa*. Editorial Icaria, Barcelona pp:107-128. Based on a qualitative study of persons who have experienced forms of precarization as a consequence of the economic crisis in Spain, this article explores their food itineraries: the everyday practices and trajectories through which they obtain food for themselves and their families.

Charities and civic organisations have been mainly responsible for the management of the food aid which has reached people in precarious situations. Supranational institutions such as Banco de los Alimentos, the Red Cross and Caritas have undertaken initiatives to store and distribute surplus basic commodities from the agribusiness sector and from private donations. The latter two institutions have also undertaken other programmes in collaboration with local authorities such as social discounts for purchasing food, and social canteens and supermarkets. An example of these mechanisms are the pre-payment cards that enable users to buy food in supermarkets and shops without showing the purchaser's status as a claimant and thereby avoiding stigmatisation: *'Dignificar la ayuda alimentaria, promover que las personas que se han empobrecido puedan seguir comprando en los establecimientos donde lo hacían normalmente y que sean ellas mismas las que decidan qué alimentos les hacen falta para que su alimentación sea equilibrada, suficiente y adaptada a sus necesidades'* (to dignify food aid, enabling people who have become poor to be able to continue shopping in shops which they used to visit, and giving them the power to decide for themselves what foods they need so that their diet is balanced, adequate and tailored to their needs)². The government has therefore decided to address the problem of food poverty by strengthening the role of these organisations, and their institutionalisation and corporatisation. According to data provided by the Spanish Federation of Food Banks (2014)³, the Federation distributed 142,124.00 kilograms to 8,652 charities in 2014, which reached more than one and a half million beneficiaries - an increase of 20 percent compared to the previous year. 22 million kilograms were collected in the IV Food Collection⁴ which took place at retail outlets in November 2016 alone, making Spain the European country where citizens donate the most food.

However, the social and health care dimensions of this problem are unknown. Apart from the numerous monographs on poverty and social exclusion that have been produced in recent years by various organisations and observatories (the FOESSA Foundation, Caritas, the Red Cross, etc.) no official report or specific survey on hunger, insecurity and food aid has been produced in Spain, unlike those recently produced in other European countries (Feeding Britain 2015 in the United Kingdom⁵, and Études ABENA in France). Even the 'Food Security Barometer' produced by the Catalan Food Safety Agency (2016) from 2008 to 2015 has not added any new variables, apart from collecting data on nutritional knowledge, habits and the perception of risk⁶. Unfortunately, we have no accurate diagnoses on the extent of this phenomenon, because in reality there is no consensus about its nature. There are also no methodological tools that directly measure this issue, and many of the available data come from secondary sources.

What we do know is that food aid has been incorporated into a range of old and new strategies for its supply, distribution and consumption among the poorest members of the population (Gracia-Arnaiz 2014), which are very similar to those adopted in other European countries (Sutton 2014; Caplan 2016). These are changes in locations for purchase, the types and frequency of the products purchased and the brands chosen, with the cheapest sought out in order to reduce spending; changes when dining, with fewer meals in restaurants and bars, or celebrations at home; in the ways meals are prepared, avoiding the preparation of dishes

² <https://blog.caritas.barcelona/es/ayuda-a-necesidades-basicas/caritas-implementara-la-tarjeta-barcelona-solidaria-para-alimentos-a-las-familias-en-toda-la-demarcacion/>

³ <https://www.bancodealimentos.es/la-federacion-espanola-de-bancos-de-alimentos-hace-balance-de-su-colaboracion-con-la-fundacion-amancio-ortega/>

⁴ *La Gran Recogida*, an action carried out by Spanish Federation of Food Banks every year in the last weekend of November

⁵ <http://www.frankfield.co.uk/upload/docs/Feeding%20Britain%20100%20Days.pdf>, but it should be noted that UK also does not measure food insecurity officially. Report referred to is based only on some food banks.

⁶ <http://www.gencat.cat/salut/acsa/html/ca/dir3059/index.html>

that require a great deal of energy, and particularly in the amount and treatment of leftovers, in search of an equivalence between what is purchased and what it consumed, in order to minimise waste and recycle leftovers. There have also been changes in the ways food is perceived, as it is considered a resource to which access is limited and uncertain, and which must be rationalised, protected and redistributed. The unavoidable - although flexible - need to eat to survive means that all possible measures are considered.

The data in the triennial report by the Bank of Spain (Encuesta Financiera de las Familias 2014⁷) confirm that young people, the employed and the unemployed are the groups whose incomes and wealth have suffered most during the crisis, while the incomes and wealth of retired people have stabilised due to lower inflation rates. However, most of these pensions amount to less than one thousand Euros a month. Although the subjects are heterogeneous in terms of their origin, histories and expectations, our study highlights substantial changes in eating practices in general, although the ways food are obtained are the best evidence of the tensions caused by the difficulties that have emerged. Apart from what is available in stores, people with fewer resources obtain food by means of social assistance (public canteens, grants, pre-payment cards, food stores), collecting leftovers from restaurants, supermarkets, rubbish bins and skips, handouts of food in the street, cultivating allotments, begging and even shoplifting in stores or markets. For example, 'eating' or 'from the street,' and leftovers or waste in particular is a practice related both to economic insecurity and to the awareness that edibility can be found far beyond the conventionally 'safe' spaces of shops that sell food (Gracia-Arnaiz 2017).

Resources, Spaces and Networks

During this period, people who have experienced rapid declines in their economic security have seen their purchasing power reduced to the point that they are unable to access essential goods. Unemployment, the end of social welfare benefits and having to meet the costs of a mortgage are usually mentioned as the main causes that lead people to seek food support (Egbe, 2015). While, on the one hand, feelings of helplessness and shame at the day-to-day pressures are repeatedly mentioned by the informants, on the other they also say that they consider themselves lucky to have found support from different places and people: *'At first you don't know which door to knock on, but once you've left your embarrassment behind, you find out about what's available and you start to ask around...'* (María, 45 years old). Indeed, the various government bodies have expanded or instituted different types of aid which act as a type of 'moral safety valve' (Poppendieck, 1998). These are used to meet the nutritional needs of the most disadvantaged groups, easing the social pressure on the State and government bodies that would arise if public opinion felt that the country's citizens included hungry people. These institutions are presented as a moral achievement, as they put into practice the values of solidarity and altruism of thousands of donors and distributors of food and the volunteers who take part in them. However, this is the triumph of a vertical type of charity and non-judgemental solidarity (Riches and Silvasti, 2014) because something that is donated or given away is not intended to change the causes of poverty, but instead to alleviate the effects. An example of this is the role played by food banks, which are championed as institutions capable of making the best use of food surpluses, and according to the food banks themselves, prevent waste, feed the most disadvantaged groups and help businesses to increase their social responsibility and solidarity-based marketing (Gascón and Montagut 2015).

⁷<http://www.bde.es/f/webbde/GAP/Secciones/SalaPrensa/IntervencionesPublicas/DirectoresGenerales/economia/Arc/Fic/eco240117.pdf>

Apart from these institutions' ability to put food from agribusiness and private donations into circulation and make it reach the poorest people, it should be stressed that this is one resource among many. Food itineraries do not end at charities, as individuals try to solve the problem of a lack of regular access to food by using various interlocutors and tactics. The informants explained that one of the first measures they took to spend less on food, in addition to using leftovers, was to buy private label products and avoid impulse buys, and make simple dishes that are quick to cook. The limited food in the larders of those receiving food aid is striking, at least in relative terms, compared to the number of times that some people leave the home to eat. In cases of extreme insecurity, many meals are not eaten at home. In these cases, strategies are used which, whilst not necessarily new or unfamiliar, are a very different way of eating outside the home. They are no longer synonymous with doing so because of work or during leisure time, but because there are various resources outside the home that mean they do not have to use their kitchens, which in some cases cannot be used due to the costs of energy used for any cooking.

A significant proportion of the respondents report that they eat less at home since their living conditions became insecure, and they do not cook a great deal. They explain that they no longer manage their household budget as they used to before their lives became insecure, when they had one or two stable salaries and were fully employed. None of them had ever thought beforehand that they were going to be in this situation; none of the mothers thought she would have to had to skip one or two meals a day or have to eat less to ensure that her children would have enough to eat: *'I dish out what there is, and it gets smaller as it goes along - my children first, then my husband and I'm last. If I'm hungry I eat more bread... and I drink more water. It swells up in your stomach and takes your mind off it'* (Carmen, 49 years old). The absence of an income and low levels of stable funds, the demands made by imponderable factors such as paying for gas, electricity and housing costs, leads them to 'improvise' in many areas, including food: *'I went to look where I thought they could help me... I remember the shame I felt at the food collection at the school, asking my son's teacher... if I could have some'* (Rosa, 37 years old).

Such people diversify their strategies in this area, which do not only consist of seeking food to take home, but also eating wherever possible. The groups that have established the most complex itineraries are families with children in their care. Those responsible for the daily diet - who are usually women - say that the non-perishable food that charities give them does not meet their needs. They usually receive pasta and rice, milk and tuna, whereas they receive fruit, vegetables, eggs and meat much less often. It should be noted that fresh foods, such as fruits and vegetables, and those requiring refrigeration, are gradually being added to the stocks of food banks and humanitarian institutions.

Informants who eat outside the home do so for different reasons and in different ways. One possibility involves eating in other 'homes'. Some families, who, perhaps for cost reasons, do not have access to energy in their home (known as the 'energy poor') have access to flats managed by charities or provided by municipal councils so that they can cook and even eat there. These have a store with non-perishable food (pasta, rice, etc.), and users bring perishable foods which they have sometimes purchased, and other times obtained from other food banks or from supermarket vouchers. They are allocated three hours per week, and they organise themselves for cooking. They usually prepare simple dishes, thereby optimising the limited time available. They cook as quickly as possible, and several dishes at once: pasta with pâté or tuna; white rice with tomato sauce and a fried egg; dehydrated vegetable soups or soups of pasta/rice in winter, etc. Canned pulses are lightly fried with garlic or stewed with potatoes or other vegetables if these are available. In some cases, it is possible to eat in the same place, although most take lunch boxes home. In one of them, cooking workshops take place every fortnight with volunteer cooks sent by the municipal council. When there

are children in the household, the midday meal that was previously eaten at home is eaten in the school canteen if their school lunch is fully or partially subsidised and is therefore also eaten outside the home. Some children also have breakfast and their mid-morning snack at school. This aid programme is for families with limited resources and is organised by parents' associations in schools in working-class neighbourhoods. The families appreciate this, because they say they are thereby sure that *'At least my children have a good meal once a day'* (Fina, 31 years old).

Another way of eating outside the home among adults consists of 'returning' to their parental home. There are many senior citizens in Spain who provide meals for their children and grandchildren; they cook using both what their children obtain from donations (if they have asked for them and do not consume them at home), but above all they use what they can buy with their pensions: *'I used to complain because my pension was less than 800 Euros, but now it pays for all of us to eat - the two of us, and my children and grandchildren'* (María, 72 years old). The informants say that if their relationship with their parents is good, and especially if the person who has always been responsible for cooking in the household is still alive, they do not even have to ask, because the parents are the first to notice that they lack resources. Going to their parents' home *'avoids the embarrassment of having to ask for food in other places, I prefer it a thousand times to a soup kitchen'* (Marta, 41 years old). But it is not only a question of shame. They report that it is more convenient and personally more comforting. In addition to not being subject to inflexible schedules, they are able to eat familiar dishes that are also usually in line with their tastes and limited budgets: *'My mother always asks me: what shall I make for you today? And she knows what we like... But her kitchen isn't a restaurant, so we adapt to her budget. The thing is we all eat hot food together with the people we love'* (Marta, 41 years old).

Going to a soup kitchen is another common way of eating outside the home, but it is not available to all informants. Although the number of soup kitchens has increased in many cities since 2009, and they provide daily meals, access is usually a result of a referral from the social services. Some informants consider them to be one option among many possibilities. They usually provide one meal, either breakfast or lunch, although a night-time soup kitchen has opened in Barcelona. It can be a resource for the whole family, but in most cases, they are used by elderly couples or single people. They are run by parish churches, municipal authorities or civil organisations and have hired staff and volunteers (Kramer and Gracia, 2015). Lunch is entirely prepared with products from food bank donations and private donations. In addition to maintaining the three-dish structure of the meal (starter, main and dessert), they attempt to combine and prepare food using processes that replicate more or less widespread and culturally accepted recipes (noodle casserole, paella, beef and other stews, etc.). This does not necessarily mean that the expectations and wishes of the diners are met. The hospitality is perceived in dialectical terms. Feelings of gratitude for the hospitality and the possibility of a donated meal are mixed with feelings of a loss of autonomy over food choices and satisfaction of tastes. Indeed, the diners have little (or no) autonomy in terms of deciding 'what', 'how much', 'where', 'when' and 'with whom' they eat.

Finally, eating in all these places can take place simultaneously with consuming food collected in food stores, or food obtained from collections in the street by humanitarian organisations and civic groups at specific points in the neighbourhoods of the city. However, these practices have sometimes been prohibited by the local or regional government due to a lack of sufficient healthcare checks. Some of the people who regularly use these options are those who did not have a fixed address before the crisis, but they are increasingly frequented by people who had never previously used them. In general, asking for food from shops or collecting food distributed in the street is seen as one of many opportunities to increase their

scarce resources. The informants know the times, days and places for the food distribution, where food is usually distributed at night and where it is distributed first thing in the morning, at breakfast time. A guide has been published in Barcelona, providing information about the location of these programmes, with location maps, timetables and the type of services available⁸. These places usually distribute sandwiches of Spanish omelette, cheese or ham, some fruit, hot soups, coffee and pastries, etc.

Women and men also explain that they visit bars, supermarkets, food stores, bakeries, patisseries and cafeterias in their neighbourhood to collect any leftovers or food. This food consists of leftover cakes and unsold bread, tapas, cooked dishes from the set meal, packages of food with damaged packaging, etc. These businesses typically put the leftover food in bags or plastic Tupperware containers or cardboard boxes. At other times, when the practice is systematic, the informants bring their own receptacles. Other initiatives related to free food distribution are the food stores or food banks self-managed by residents of the city's most deprived neighbourhoods. Their structure is assembly-based, and they meet weekly to arrange collections from shops, transport, distribution and cooking. Stores say they are unable to meet the demand for distribution of food from religious institutions, volunteers from NGOs and users: *'Nothing gets thrown away here!'* (Supermarket sales staff, 2A). In general, people choose to eat this food in the street, *'depending how hungry I am or what the weather is like'* (Enric, 52 years old), and sometimes they take it home to cook and/or share with other members of the household, or simply consume it at another time of day.

In the streets of big cities, there are people who resort to leftovers out of necessity whereas others do so because of their anti-consumerist ideology. The latter are those who in turn tend to be involved in the organisation of *soup discos*, which occasionally take over a public space, such as a square, a market place, a hospital, etc. in order to produce a large meal with the aim to reduce food wastage. During fieldwork in 2014, we attended the Gran Dinar in Barcelona, organised in the El Raval neighbourhood by the 'Aprofitem els Aliments' group. More than 150 volunteers were involved in cooking for some 4,000 people. While it is true that because of its sporadic nature it is not a regular source of food for our informants, their participation is socially relevant. These meals aim to show that other forms of eating - cheaper, healthier and more sustainable - are possible. They are usually organised by people who are highly critical of the global system of agribusiness, especially with regard to its waste and environmental costs. With the economic crisis, these activists have incorporated the effects of the population's progressive economic insecurity into their ideology. They advocate horizontal democracy and the need to seek other alternatives to food poverty that do not reproduce welfarist logics. Some of these platforms aim to educate the people, made most vulnerable by the system, about the need to change the rules, by inviting them to participate actively in projects that generate resources in their communities, learning to produce food (e.g., in community allotments), or rescuing and reusing food that has been produced but which is not considered edible. In all cases, the aim is to create a response to the economic policies which are hindering people's right to food, by involving those most affected.

Conclusion

One of the consequences associated with the process of insecurity in everyday life is related to the change that has taken place in the ways of thinking about food. This, among people who have suffered most from the effects of the crisis in particular, is considered something to

⁸ That was the case for the guide published by the Comunitat de Sant'Egidio for the City of Barcelona, (http://www.santegidio.org/documenti/doc_1069/Guia_ON_2016_def.pdf)

which access is limited and uncertain, and which has to be rationalised, protected and redistributed. The decline in the ability to obtain food independently on a regular basis has led to the reappearance of terms such as 'shortage', 'eat what you can' and 'skipping meals' in their everyday language. The results of this study show that they manage their needs by adopting a variety of strategies, both old and new, negotiating with various individuals, groups and institutions in different contexts. The most frequent alternatives include meals originating outside the home. In some cases, these are provided or prepared by friends, family, or civil society organisations; in others, food sources include restaurant leftovers or unconsumed portions from group events. As embodiments of penury and hunger, these solutions constitute experiences of social suffering; but they are also opportunities to question the role of government and the institutional measures currently being taken to ensure the right to food. With the food they buy, they are given, or find in one way or another, they try to create or reproduce food that is socially and personally acceptable. Some of these solutions highlight experiences of suffering, as asking for food or searching for it among leftovers is often accompanied by feelings of shame and guilt. However, others involve an alternative response to economic policies that are calling into question the right to food in a way that has not been experienced since the transition to democracy, as they go beyond the usual forms of assistance provided by charities, and they show that other more sustainable and equitable ways of producing and redistributing food are possible.

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