

Preface

Looking
at Waste
through Art

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This publication collects the contributions of those who took part in the artistic project on sustainability that Ca' Foscari University of Venice has sponsored and held for the last ten years. This project revolves around the topics of sustainable development analysed through the artistic language and creative perspective.

This year's project, called *Waste Matters* – although its implementation lasted almost two years due to the pandemic –, focuses on food waste and waste in general as something that matters.

Ca' Foscari University students and professors have worked side-by-side with the artist Gayle Chong Kwan, awarded the Sustainable Art Prize in 2019. Four years ago, Ca' Foscari established this recognition in partnership with ArtVerona – Art Project Fair to promote sustainable development and the 17 SDGs of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to encourage artists to include these topics in their creative work.

Gayle Chong Kwan focused her artistic work on food waste and the fragile balance between food production and its environmental impact on landscapes and scenarios. She conveyed and translated these topics into visionary and solid artworks. According to the artist, waste cannot be decontextualised or considered an aim in itself; instead, it is a vibrant matter, a lively and vital issue rooted in the *modus vivendi* of our society.

The *Waste Matters* project was strongly influenced by the current context, as shown by the techniques and output achieved. The pandemic outbreak in March 2020 caused the project to start in Autumn and be held online, with the Italian and foreign students connected from home.

This unexpected set-up gave Gayle Chong Kwan – based in London – the possibility to attend all the five scheduled meetings and walk the participants throughout the whole process by sharing creative ideas, concerns, and feelings related to this particular moment of isolation.

Each participant had to share their private space, such as their rooms, or houses via webcam. This condition created a deep sense of connection.

In addition, to analyse and study food waste, this set-up also allowed them to experience it directly at home and personally examine the real consequences of the topics discussed.

The artist wanted the participants to implement practical actions in their private environment, thus, providing them with the tools to carry out personal artistic and creative research by investigating their kitchen, their shopping, and their district through art. The students discovered that there are continuous study, investigation, and paths behind an artwork, leading to new ideas and artistic impressions. This new awareness debunked the misleading concept that every artwork comes from a flash of inspiration or a night dream; they experienced how the final

artwork is the embodiment of knowledge, research, and intuitions gathered by the artist and their way to see life.

This approach was also fundamental to put the theory into practice: photographic record activities, mapping, food waste collection and cataloguing, recycling, and creative composition. All these elements helped the participants find effective communication methods and raise awareness on this topic outside of the project.

Part of the meetings focused on the SDGs of the UN 2030 Agenda related to waste. In this regard, students were involved in a process made of confrontations, study, research, and new ideas and reflections. They had to investigate the issue by reading reports, looking for reliable sources of information, and carrying out data analysis, exactly as in the artistic process.

By aligning the world of Arts and the world of Academic Research, students could identify the synergy permeating their study and training course.

We based our artistic investigation on some questions, and we discussed them with Gayle Chong Kwan:

- > Where does the food on our table come from?
- > How far has the food travelled?
- > Where does our waste end?
- > What is the impact of our daily actions on the environment we live in? And again, what impact have our daily actions on the communities – often far from us – producing the food we buy, eat, and, sometimes, throw away?

The COVID-19 pandemic completely changed our lives and critically impacted the Planet; in addition to affecting the healthcare sector, this touched several aspects of our development system and shed light on the weaknesses and limitations imposed by the current production and development systems. The need to turn to a sustainable development approach by implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is becoming increasingly evident.

The dictionary defines the term 'food' as: "noun [lat. *cibus*] – any nourishing substance that is eaten". However, is this definition correct nowadays? How much food is thrown away every day across the world? 17% of the food available – intended to nourish the human population – is being thrown away.

On 5 February 2021, we celebrated the National Day against Food Waste, under the title "Stop food waste. One health, one planet". Reducing food waste is a tool to protect human health and the environment.

Food, indeed, is among the causes of climate change and has a deep environmental, human, and economic impact; the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explains why and how food intertwines with several aspects of our daily life and outlines our future challenges.

Sustainable Development Goal no. 2 revolves around food, food production, and food availability. It aims to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, and no. 12 “Responsible Consumption and production” aims to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”.

Goal no. 12 only contains one target related to food. Still, it has a significant impact on our behaviours and choices: “by 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses”.

But the UN 2030 Agenda features many other objectives related to food. SDG no. 5 on “gender equality”, for instance, connects agriculture and gender issues, as women also make up half of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. Yet, relatively fewer women than men have ownership and/or secure tenure rights over agricultural land.¹

Similarly, SDG no. 6, “Clean Water and Sanitation”, is closely related to food and agriculture. In fact, by 2025, two-thirds of the global population might be living in countries affected by water stress; reducing waste and promoting rational use of water resources can sustain the economic development and the world ecosystem in the future.

These are just a few examples. Food, however, impacts all the SDGs contained in the UN 2030 Agenda, and its management can critically influence their achievement.

These aspects lead to a vital question: how can I make a difference?

Following our discussions, we started considering several aspects: the carbon footprint of our meals, their geographical origin, whether they are seasonal products, and how their production and supply chain affect soil consumption and mobility.

Food waste arises from several causes: bad management, unsuitable transportation and storage methods, lack of skills over the cold chain, extreme weather conditions, quality standards related to the food appearance, lack of planning and cooking habits among consumers.²

To quote Inger Andersen - UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) executive director – “If food waste were a country, it would be the third-biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions”.

According to the Food Waste Index 2021, created by UNEP, 931 million tonnes of food sold to households, retailers, restaurants, and other food services are wasted each year. About 570 million tonnes of wasted food come from households. At a national level, an Italian citizen produces 67 kg of food waste per year.³

How can we raise awareness among consumers? Which are the right tools to use? Each year, around the globe, there are initiatives and events dedicated to food waste, collection of food about to expire, or unsold food coming from restaurants and supermarkets, awareness-raising campaigns, contests, etc.

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Can art play a role in this sense?

The *Waste Matters* project proves that it can. The workshops, on-field activities, and artworks of Gayle Chong Kwan reached a wide audience (students, local community, and the international community that participated in the final installation). Gayle Chong Kwan's artistic process and artwork were investigated and analysed to shed light on current and future challenges and encourage the spectators to adopt more careful and respectful food behaviours, aware that the food that they purchase impacts the Planet, as well as the society.

The following pages present the *Waste Matters* project through the participants' voices who introduce their ideas, conclusions, and challenges, as analysed over the project, including new meanings and perspectives.

Notes

- 1** See FAO: <http://www.fao.org/sdg-progress-report/en/#sdg-5>.
- 2** See FAO: <http://www.fao.org/news/story/it/item/1310445/icode/>.
- 3** See Food Waste Index, UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme, 2021.