YOU ARE WHAT YOU BUY

A Remote ReVisit
You Are What You Buy - A Remote ReVisit

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Prediction becomes reality

It's the year 2020.
Take a deep breath.
Breathe in. Breathe out.
Take three more deep breaths.
Relax and take it easy.
Think about your typical shopping.
Think about your dream shopping.

What do you usually dream of shopping?
Has this dream changed?
Or has the typical shopping changed?

You Are What You Buy (YAWYB) - A Remote ReVisit departs from a previous project entitled You Are What You Buy by Miss K (2016-2017), thus marking a second edition for the YAWYB concept. Through research and creative practice, YAWYB reacts to current issues on consumption and consumerism, offering an alternative artistic experience.

The first edition was a yearlong transdisciplinary project that departed from a reflection on our need to affirm ourselves as consumers. Through anthropological investigation and creative practice, the project aimed to question the effects of consumption on us as buyers and assess further the blurred line between ‘consumption’ and ‘consumerism’. In order to study such economic mechanisms both the research process and the final presentation were set in a supermarket in Malta. Furthermore, the project aimed at offering a different possibility of where and how to experience art – away from the art institution.

The project was the result of a collaboration involving a large group of people: researchers, a visual and socially engaged artist, a social anthropologist, a dramaturg, a group of performers whose fields range across acting, dancing, music, poetry and visual arts, as well as a group of clients and supermarket personnel. Research consisted of observations and a series of conversations with the clients, the director and employees of the supermarket. Extracting a number of shopping and consumption patterns led to the creation of a pop-up, interactive, provoking week-long performance art piece at the supermarket itself. This also included a set of illustrations installed in each of the supermarket’s elevators and a limited collection of wearable items, complemented with a book art publication. Documentation of this first edition can be accessed here.

Whether shopping is done daily, weekly, monthly or sporadically, whether we like it or not, shopping remains one of the activities we engage with most. While being enclosed in our very own private bubble we all know how we are to behave when in the store – be it a supermarket, a grocery, a market, a household store or a clothes shop. We tend to follow particular routes and habits guided by a very specific function – that of buying particular products and services so as to fulfill our daily needs.

Recalling the prediction from the first edition:

I build my own fort with products that protect me, as I hug them in return.
I shop and I wear a face mask as I select my products.
A product reaches out to me. Can I touch it? Can I take it?
As I continue selecting my products, I end up with no choice but to shop in my private bubble.
Or just enclose myself and sleep.

What might have been considered an absurd prediction or an extreme interpretation in 2017 has actually become a reality in 2020. YAWYB’s unprecedented vision was a forerunner. Indeed, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic we were bound to change our daily habits, including our social behaviours and attitudes.

• We might have previously dreaded going to the supermarket, but all of a sudden the supermarket becomes a relief – it becomes our only possible, or suggested, outing, easing us out of our boredom.

• All of a sudden we are all too cautious when entering the store, we are concerned about the routes to follow: should I take this aisle or the other? How can I avoid contact with other clients?

• All of a sudden we become too afraid to go out of our homes, and have no other option but to seek and explore online shopping, the process likely taking twice as long as we click and select items product by product and add them to our virtual cart.
• We carefully select our preferred brands, but all of a sudden we start making compromises as products are out of stock — we click on other brands we never imagined tasting or opening.

• All of a sudden we start looking forward to hearing our doorbell ring: our order is home delivered. Patiently we clean each item, product by product.

• All of a sudden we seriously consider supporting local.

• All of a sudden we are obliged to wear a face mask, rendering our vision all blurry and foggy.

All these changes are affecting our daily lives. However, such changes could be possibly manifesting themselves in a different manner, resulting in varied scenarios. For instance, the changing shopping and consumption patterns affecting a middle-aged person might be totally different to those affecting an elderly person; similarly, this changing situation has surely had varied effects on people living by themselves as opposed to people living as a family or a group.

The second edition — YAWYB - A Remote ReVisit, focusing mainly on research — aims to delve further into these new forms of confinement and to understand the potential impact, effects and reactions, as we also think of them from the future. YAWYB - A Remote ReVisit poses the question:

Inspired by changes experienced during the COVID-19 crisis, how can interdisciplinary creative practice and alternative artistic experiences act as catalysts for change in one’s shopping and consumption patterns, leading to a new, ethical and sustainable normal?

The core team of the second edition — artist Kristina Borg, cultural anthropologist Dr Virginia Monteforte, poet/author Miriam Calleja, project coordinator Aidan Aquilina and process facilitator Greta Muscat Azzopardi — in collaboration with a group of community members (all of whom will be referred to as co-creators), along with a group of service providers, attempt to answer this research question by analysing how the current changes in the shopping and consumption experience can:

• lead to changing rituals of one’s social behaviour;

• create new choreographies of compromise that are finding a new self, changing one’s identity as one adapts to new patterns, possibly creating a you are not what you buy moment, or a you are what you don’t buy moment;

• maintain an ethical sustainability in face of such changes without forgetting other global crises;

• envision new shopping experiences looking at them from the future.

As per YAWYB’s ethos and vision, this second edition of the project answers the research question by posing further provoking questions. In doing so, YAWYB - A Remote ReVisit widens its context and moves outside and beyond the supermarket space to incorporate other spaces and places of production and consumption in our neighbourhoods. These include, but are not limited to, the local grocery store or the mini-market, the open markets, the supermarket, the household store, the clothes store, the coffee place, the restaurant and online platforms.

Hence, this research project anticipates to catalyse change in our production, shopping and consumption habits, specifically inviting us producers and consumers to engage in more intelligent thinking processes while we produce and shop, with the aim of contributing to a new normal that guarantees responsible production and consumption for sustainable cities and communities. The project believes that this is only possible if it provides a series of reflective moments whereby we are invited to pose further critical questions — questioning ourselves and our practice.

Using mainly teleworking means, the research phase kicked off in July 2020 and lasted two and a half months; therefore, it is pertinent to note that this research took place just after the first wave of the pandemic, when lockdown protocols started to ease down, and just before the second wave.

The first research stage invited community members of the general public to participate in a ten-minute quantitative survey that allowed for an initial understanding and depiction of the situation in general. This survey was made available online, gathering a total of 166 responses. YAWYB aims to be as inclusive as possible and thus also offered the possibility to take part in this survey through a phone call. The fact that the survey was available online has allowed YAWYB to widen its audience to a European-based one, attracting respondents based in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and The United Kingdom. This has also provided a wider spectrum of shared experiences as affected by different degrees and levels of the pandemic in different countries. The data collected through the survey — presented in the next section — provided the groundwork for the design and development of the research stages that followed.

The research process continued with a series of one-to-one online video call conversations with 17 survey respondents, all aged over 18 and who had expressed interest through the survey to collaborate with YAWYB as co-creators. These one-hour conversations included a discussion that drew upon responses from the survey as well as two hands-on tasks. The first task invited the co-creators to list or draw and discuss: (i) items they usually buy, (ii) items they would like to buy but for whatever reason they cannot, (iii) items they stopped buying, (iv) items they would never buy. The second task encouraged the co-creators to list or draw and discuss: (i) an item purchased online during lockdown, (ii) an online meal delivery, (iii) an item they bought directly in person when shops reopened after lockdown. The co-creators’ role also
comprised their involvement in some creative tasks, namely the production of short video clips, that document their shopping and consumption experiences, and the assistance in the creation of a limited small edition of unique handmade book art works made out of their recyclables.

Twelve of these co-creators agreed to advance with the co-creation process and participated in the final research stage, featuring a two-hour online workshop. The 12 co-creators were divided into three groups and each group engaged in a number of hands-on tasks, specifically sharing of the video clips produced, a thematic discussion inspired by visuals that highlighted common thematics specific to each group and as extracted from their respective one-to-one conversations, and a group journaling exercise from the future.

It is worth noting that during the one-to-one conversations and small group workshops, food products occupied a central position in most of the discussions. Most of the co-creators automatically thought of food products and food stores, unless it was specified that they could include references beyond the food system, such as personal care, household products, and services. At times some co-creators felt the need to ask if they could include such items and services. In this context we must not forget that the shops which remained open during the (partial) lockdown were mainly food shops as they were considered ‘essential’. With this in mind, it might be worth asking, could it be that other people (the authorities) decided for us what is/was essential and what is/was non-essential?

Parallel to the small group workshops with the co-creators, a number of one-to-one conversations were held with 10 service providers based in Malta. Five of these conversations were held as an online video call, four were held in person at the service provider’s place while respecting all health and safety measures, and one took place through email. These providers included a mix of small and large businesses whose services range across different sectors, namely a mini-market, a supermarket, a farmer, a government-owned agricultural company that is service-based and market oriented, a typical village household goods store, an online food delivery courier company, a coffee place, a small organic shop, a small green-conscious business offering organic, fairtrade and ethical products, and a small eco-friendly artisan cosmetics store. This set of one-hour conversations aimed to understand the pandemic and lockdown production experience from the service providers’ point of view, including the challenges encountered, the safety measures and any alternative methods that were adopted, any observed changes, and any positive outcomes. The findings are shared through this digital publication as well as through creative means, including a series of video works documenting the new shopping and consumption experiences, developed in collaboration with the community co-creators, and a set of illustrations and poems, including one short story, presented in this digital publication as well as part of the limited small edition of unique handmade book art works made out of recyclables. All these deliverables were launched as part of a final two-day online interactive event, held towards the end of December 2020. The choice for an event online followed the health restrictions of the time, but, moreover, to also address the non-local co-creators based in other European countries. After all, a remote event moves in line with the underlying concept and methodology of the project’s second edition, earmarked as A Remote ReVisit. Furthermore, YAWYB provided the right time and opportunity to explore and experiment with interactive online methodologies that go beyond the mere ubiquitous video conferencing calls, exhaustingly overused during the pandemic months, and thus rendering the event more fun, engaging and participative.

One final note with regards to this digital publication. Its goal is to share the significant thematics and patterns that emerged from the research process in collaboration with the community co-creators and the service providers. In doing so, it aims to move away from conventional methods of reporting, and instead invites you to embark on a creative and reflective journey presented through a journal of production, shopping and consumption experiences. As you travel forward and backward, across space and time, you are free to choose your preferred milestones from a series of interrelated places, moments and episodes, while creating memories that you’re encouraged to collect in your DIY consumption inventory.

Have a good trip.

Kristina Borg & Virginia Monteforte
Malta, November 2020
The *You Are What You Buy* survey

*You Are What You Buy* launched the opt-in survey on 3rd July 2020 and was closed after two weeks on 17th July 2020. The survey received a total of 166 responses of which 116 respondents were based in Malta and Gozo during the (partial) lockdown period and 47 in other European countries. 3 respondents preferred not to declare their country of residence during the lockdown period.

Some observations from the survey:

- 75.9% are female respondents.
- 68.7% avoid aisles where other clients are shopping.
- 73.5% avoid using cash and opt for card or mobile app payments.
- 55.4% didn’t always find the preferred products and/or brands.
- 78.3% started planning further ahead and buying for a longer period.
- 48.8% shifted to local products.
- 52.4% are willing to return to restaurants as long as all health and safety measures are in place whereas 15.1% avoid them totally. 9.6% are willing to return to any restaurant.

Restricting the use of the bring-from-home reusable boxes and the re-introduction of single-use plastic containers/bags by some stores are two major concerns.

Who does the shopping?

77.7% of the respondents claim that they are the ones usually responsible for the shopping in their household, with 81 respondents doing it alone, 34 accompanied by their partner and 11 by a family member. 58.4% admit that this did not change during the peak time of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Are you usually responsible for the shopping in your household?

166 responses

- Yes: 77.7%
- No: 22.3%

Did this change during the peak time of COVID-19?

166 responses

- Yes: 58.4%
- No: 41.6%

Where do you do the shopping?

Prior to the pandemic, the majority of household shopping was usually done at the supermarket (66.3%), followed by the local or nearby mini-market (23.5%), onsite at the supermarket but with home delivery (3%) and online shopping with home delivery (1.8%). In the wake of the pandemic, 50% of the respondents opted to change their shopping place. Given the possibility to select multiple responses of where they started doing their shopping, online shopping with home delivery ranks top (60.2%), followed by the local or nearby mini-market (47%).

Prior to COVID-19, where did you/your household usually do the shopping? (Tick just ONE)

166 responses

- Supermarket: 66.3%
- Local or nearby mini-market: 23.5%
- Online shopping, with home delivery: 5.4%
- Other: 5.4%

Please specify how this changed. (Tick ALL that apply)

83 responses

- Online shopping, with home delivery: 10.8%
- Online shopping, with pickup at the store: 13.3%
- Supermarket, onsite but with home delivery: 7.2%
- Supermarket: 20.5%
- Local or nearby mini-market: 47.0%
- Other: 60.2%
Anecdotes by the survey respondents are shared in the next pages as part of the creative and reflective journey.

How often do you do the shopping?

35.5% of the respondents claim that prior to the pandemic they used to do their household shopping on a weekly basis, 21.7% used to do the bulk of the shopping weekly with essentials bought daily, 19.9% preferred doing their shopping monthly with essentials bought weekly, 10.2% used to do it daily and 7.2% monthly with essentials bought daily. In the wake of the pandemic, 56% of the respondents changed the frequency of their shopping, of whom 36.6% started doing it weekly, 22.6% doing the bulk of the shopping monthly with essentials bought weekly, and 12.9% on a monthly basis.

Prior to COVID-19, how often did you/your household usually do the shopping? (Tick just ONE)

166 responses

- Daily: 7.5%
- Weekly: 22.6%
- Monthly: 36.6%
- Bulk of the shopping done weekly, but essentials bought daily: 5.4%
- Bulk of the shopping done monthly, but essentials bought weekly: 13.9%
- Bulk of the shopping done monthly, but essentials bought daily: 12.9%
- Other: 5.5%

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Please specify how this changed. (Tick just ONE)

93 responses

- Daily: 7.5%
- Weekly: 22.6%
- Monthly: 36.6%
- Bulk of the shopping done weekly, but essentials bought daily: 5.4%
- Bulk of the shopping done monthly, but essentials bought weekly: 13.9%
- Bulk of the shopping done monthly, but essentials bought daily: 12.9%
- Other: 5.5%
The *You Are What You Buy* Journey

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JOURNAL FROM THE FUTURE
Imagine waking up one morning and thinking you’ve gone deaf. The world stopped. No one left the house. The smog that used to clog your lungs when you ran by the sea has lifted. And the sounds that your brain had to work around in order to concentrate have disappeared. The silence is so loud, it’s almost paralysing. The jiggers are slowly replaced by horse hooves and the car horns by people playing music. Then you can smell the bacon frying when your upstairs neighbour makes breakfast or the garlic simmering for an aglio, olio e peperoncino. The rain smells cleaner, like it’s rinsing the streets and not having to wash them constantly. You don’t have to worry about being cat-called because there’s no one in the street. And people are afraid to touch you.

- Physical distance and not social distance, you can maintain social connections by any other means.
- Your existence has an impact. Be mindful of your wild neighbours. Give nature back to nature.
- Your own backyard can also be an adventure.
- Less airplanes, more bird song.
Be, breathe, live.
Listen to the birds,
to the silence,
to your dearest ones’ voice,
to your neighbour’s thoughts
Taste time
Flavour the sweet side of bitter
Look closer
See further
Watch differently
Store the scents
that most surprise you
Feel the smoothness of rough
Grab the earth
Touch the sky

Be aware.
Be aware of the choices you make.
Be aware of who dictates them.
Is it you?

Keep a balance.
Keep a balance between what you want and
how others want things to be.
Life is a compromise!

Less is more.
Focus on what really interests you,
remove unnecessary embellishments and
work on the core of things (and your core!)

Keep well,
YAWYB co-creators
IN THE YEAR 2020
Our head

Whether it is a need, a desire, the repetition of something we already did, the starting of a new habit, the adherence (involuntarily or not) to the rules of consumerism, or its rejection, every act of consumption starts in our head. It is there that we start to imagine ourselves while relating to a social environment where economic transactions have become one of the main activities, if not the main one. It is there that we negotiate our individual habits, memories, needs and feelings with the social, spatial, virtual, local, international and institutional forms where this transaction will eventually take place. What to buy, how, when, where, with whom, do I really need it? Does my family need it? Can I afford this? Is it a good choice? Is it ethical? Is it safe? Will it make me happy? Will it make the people I love happy?

“I look at reviews. I won’t buy it if it has less than four stars. ...It’s always interesting to see what people think of the product.”

“The panic buying from people surrounding us affected the way things were bought for our household.”

“I usually sell recycled toilet paper but it finished as people panic-bought. Seeing the shelves empty did affect me personally, not knowing if we were going to find whatever we might have needed. It was a bit strange.”

“You think twice”

My thoughts are spending my money.
Is the decision actually on us?
Or are we, somehow, told what to buy?
Or imitating other people’s habits?
And now, more and more, are we told how and when to buy it?

“Before the pandemic, I never bought lipstick”

“Before the pandemic, I never bought lipstick.”
- Co-creator, Carole McCourt, UK

“Before the pandemic, I never bought lipstick.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“I did buy less, as the prices went up extremely.”
- Survey respondent

“I don’t like shopping for clothes, but if I do want something, I’ll go into a charity shop. I don’t like to support the fashion industry, and I was like that before the coronavirus.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“I have never really been somebody who knows exactly what to buy. I just need it and go out to buy it. I tend to be a drifter. I might notice something and buy it. In relation to other big things, like my water heater, I tend to check all possibilities and then make a decision.”
- Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“Maybe being more cautious of what you spend, not cutting costs, but being more cautious. Not taking anything for granted. You think twice. I was always very careful, budgeting, controlling everything. But I think now you end up being extra extra careful.”
- Co-creator

“When I’m in a shop, automatically I observe: the prices, precautions taken, I see if I can adopt it in my shop too, especially if it’s good practice.”
- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

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- Service provider, TXF Tech - Partners for Bolt in Malta, Cyrus & Tunisia, John Sebastian Ripard, CEO

“Fill me in:
Think about and list three products you recently bought. For each one ask yourself: why did you buy it? Which were the reasons and the context behind your choice?”

“Our head

“The panic buying from people surrounding us affected the way things were bought for our household.”
- Survey respondent

“I look at reviews. I won’t buy it if it has less than four stars. ...It’s always interesting to see what people think of the product.”
- Co-creator, Carole McCourt, UK

“As a consumer myself, the pandemic made me think how it’s impossible not to give full attention to the things which we take for granted. The basics, in other words: food, shelter, social space, friends, jobs, monthly income.”
- Service provider, TXF Tech - Partners for Bolt in Malta, Cyrus & Tunisia, John Sebastian Ripard, CEO

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From balconies and windows

Suddenly the balcony and the windows became our social microcosm, a framed and protected extension of our daily possibilities, from where we observe the streets where our habits are no longer taken for granted, where we have to rethink ourselves, our relation to the act of buying. Nevertheless, with our footsteps and outside time forcibly reduced, and our horizon appearing more and more limited, we pay more attention to the details, to the particular, to the small shop we never walked into, to our neighborhood which we begin to experience as a new, unexplored continent, involved in the same fate, or as an extension of our domestic space. We also crack open wider the windows of our memory, peering at the past and family practices, for tips to revive, interpret or change, for better behaviours of production and consumption. And in doing so, we suspend some needs but symbolically anticipate the spring-cleaning we had kept on postponing for so long, while realising that this pandemic offers, perhaps, a way into changing our patterns, to come to terms with some of them ending, and to inject our habits with some fresh air.

“I actually didn’t really know my neighbours, so it was only because of lockdown that I got to know them. And one of them has an amazing vegetable garden. Her whole back garden is just vegetables, so it is also thanks to her that I learnt and understood how to grow my own... Yeah, she gave me pointers on what to do.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“For the couple of weeks that lockdown was imposed on us, grocery shopping became an opportunity to engage with the community and socialise with others.”
- Survey respondent

“I started realising that I like shopping in local shops. It changed my perception. I started walking a lot, I discovered new places and I’m always taking photos on the way. It’s like exploring the city once again.”
- Co-creator, Sabine Küper-Büsch, Turkey

“We increased the organisation within the market by introducing a system whereby the number of people entering at one given moment was limited. The outcome was good. Out of it all we brought some normality, so the farmers were now in a better position to actually drive around, to unload and approach the platforms more easily. Usually it was very hectic, with loads of confusion. This was something that needed to be done but we were afraid to do it... but the pandemic, it turned out, gave us an opportunity to finally introduce it.”
- Service provider, Pitkalija Ltd., Mark Vella Bonnici, CEO

“A strong neighbourhood keeps you healthy

“During lockdown we tried tablet toothpaste. We stocked them as I wanted to make sure that we have a supply for any eventuality. ...I don’t think I’ll ever buy toothpaste again. I was going to transition to not getting toothpaste anyway, but I guess lockdown pushed it.”
- Co-creator

“We started delivering not just whole cakes but slices too, and it worked.”
- Service provider, coffee place, owner

“Technological items are expensive here, so we’ll buy them when we’re next in Germany. But since at the moment we cannot travel we postponed our purchase.”
- Co-creators, Sabine Küper-Büsch & Thomas Büsch, Turkey
From balconies and windows

“When I cook I become my mother, and sometimes my father.”
- Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“I tend to reproduce the consumption habits that I used to have when living with my family, but I live in a different country, so some aspects of my diet had to change as not all the ingredients are available. So sometimes I reinterpret the recipes, and that brought a change. I cannot find all the types of meat that my grandma uses to make her ragù, so I go for something simpler... I would say that my diet is influenced a lot by my past, from my childhood and teenage years. What I used to eat back then, I still eat now. Lockdown also gave me the opportunity to try out a recipe I got from my grandma, so it gave me more opportunity to connect with her, with her tradition.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“My experience of shopping is based on change - a sort of liberation from original or familiar habits. I acquired a sort of freedom, so I can do less, and I am allowed to buy less, to cook less.”
- Co-creator

“I’m from America and I’ve been living in Europe for nearly 10 years, and I also lived in Africa for a bit, so it’s constantly changing all the time. Something that I find myself doing is trying to find places where I can still get things that remind me of my childhood.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“When I moved to Malta I didn’t change my diet, but I was more happy to at least find the products I had when, as a child, I used to visit my grandparents here in Malta and feel the same taste of the food, like when cooking with Maltese olive oil and garlic.”
- Co-creator

“It reminded me of my childhood. I grew up in post-war Germany, just after the blockade of the Soviet Union of West Berlin, with my grandma, or some people from the household, planning and organising our supply of food. Even then, there was this fear of not knowing.”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey

“I don’t have kids. We’ll see what happens, but I do not encourage anyone to take up this route. I really wish it were different, but at the moment no politician is willing to take it seriously. We still have a long way ahead of us.”
- Service provider, Popeye Farmers, Marjan Cini, farmer.

“The way I shop is more similar to my grandmother than my mother, so there’s a very clear generational gap. ... They used to do the big shopping at the supermarket once a month and I’m doing that in a similar way. I remember they used to get the eggs from the next door neighbour. My mother goes to the supermarket on a daily basis. I cannot do that, it’s a nightmare. So it’s very different. I think I behave more like my grandparents.”
- Co-creator

“It reminded me of my childhood.”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey

“it’s a small family business. My grandmother started it after WWII, then my mum continued, and then myself. And unfortunately it will die with me. Both of my kids have their own profession and career, and they aren’t interested in the shop.”
- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

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- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

“My father-in-law’s father opened it as a very small shop, and maybe one day we can take it over ourselves. Maybe in the future, another generation comes up.”
- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

“Fill me in:

List three new things you discovered in your neighbourhood during the lockdown.
List three neighbours’ names.

“Catch up at the mini-market”

Do you think you have everything you need within 1km? What can you share with your neighbourhood? How can you support and actively engage in a collective effort?
The shopping list: on paper or on screen

The list, the screen. The measure of our limits or the extension of our possibilities? Whether on a paper or on a screen, a list is not just a way to remind us what we need but also a tool of control, to help us find our way through, to calm the overwhelming effect of the wide-ranging options, to warn ourselves not to go beyond the words we wrote, protecting us against temptations, against the risk of spending too much, of buying what, after all, we don’t need.

However, a list is not just made up of words... it also has white, empty spaces, and so it can be changed, revised, expanded, welcoming new items while waving others goodbye. A white space which can also be the flashing one on the screen in front of which we sit for our online shopping, when our list coincides with the act of putting products in a basket, and paying for them immediately after, with just a click. Does this online shopping experience make us feel more, or less safe? More, or less exposed? Is the “I” buying online a different one to the “I” who buys in the shop? Are we more careful? Are we likely to spend more money? Or is it the other way around? What could we never buy online?

“Being vegetarian influences my route at the supermarket. Unfortunately at the place where I shop it’s unavoidable to go through the meat and fish section, so literally I’m running, or pass in haste.”
- Co-creator

“Being vegetarian influences my route at the supermarket. I’m all over the place, I go back and forth. So I use the shopping list to help me organise myself a bit better. If I find what I need, I rip the edge of the paper. I’ve been doing it for years. It’s also a way of controlling my shopping. It’s so tempting when you buy in a supermarket, things start attracting your attention.”
- Co-creator

“Before Covid, my husband had this long list of items always saved on his mobile, and we used to go to the supermarket just once every two or three months and bought in bulk. During lockdown we bought nothing fancy. It ended up as a very short list, maybe 20 items at most.”
- Co-creator, Raisa Galea De Giovanni, Malta

“I go shop with a mission and usually forget to get things which weren’t on my list.”
- Survey respondent

“I usually spend more time than needed at the supermarket. I do not usually have a shopping list, I just have the products on my mind.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“I always prepare a shopping list. I know the plan of the supermarket and I list down the items accordingly. I couldn’t do the same thing when I shifted to the online store. I just started going through the products on the website and saw what I needed. It was not easy at first until I got used to the system of the shop. Also, not all the stores have the same type of website, some are very friendly, others are not.”
- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“The way I prepare my shopping list, it’s already built according to the map of the supermarket, so I start from the top floor and go down, and more or less I list the items according to the aisles to spend less time there.”
- Co-creator, Louise Fenech, Malta

“I’m quite chaotic when shopping. I love lists. I don’t leave the house without the list.”
- Co-creator

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- Co-creator

“With lockdown eased I’m now appreciating again the joys of doing my shopping physically at a supermarket, albeit with a visor and taking caution, but I would never replace it with an online experience.”
- Survey respondent

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The shopping list: on paper or on screen

“One of the reasons why I did not shop online was because it is more limited in terms of availability, especially when it comes to certain food intolerances.”
- Co-creator

“Actually I think, here in Turkey, the online shift had a vice-versa effect. We shifted from online shopping with home delivery to shopping in-person at local stores. It changed my perception. I now like walking to the bazaar and the quality is actually better.”
- Co-creator, Sabine Küper-Büssch, Turkey

“We launched a grocery category and a general retail category - we recognised that the whole food consumption needs to get a better online system and not just the ready made meals. We are aiming to shift our service as a need rather than a luxury.”
- Service provider, TXF Tech - Partners for Bolt in Malta, Cyprus & Tunisia, John Sebastian Ripard, CEO

“Some supermarkets did not offer all the products for delivery. A couple of items either had a near expiry date or were already expired. These could not be returned. At times, I was not given exactly what I asked for.”
- Survey respondent

“Home deliveries, especially of fruit and vegetables, are not very convenient. I’d rather choose the products myself and take them home immediately, rather than wait for the delivery, often quite late in the evening.”
- Survey respondent

“I ordered 1kg of bay leaves online - that’s a lot of bay leaves!”
- Survey respondent

“I ordered 1kg of bay leaves online - that’s a lot of bay leaves!”
- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“At first I changed to the online store of the supermarket where I usually shop. But I also tried other stores. I saw an advert on social media that they do delivery, and I tried them because my supermarket had a big demand that the delivery would have only arrived after 15 days. The others could deliver in two or three days. However, I prefer to go to the shop myself, rather than ordering online. For certain things, especially food products, I want to check the date and all the details.”
- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“Some supermarkets did not offer all the products for delivery.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“Some supermarkets did not offer all the products for delivery.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“Shopping makes me uncomfortable due to the many choices. I find it overwhelming. If I need to buy a yoghurt and there are 25 choices, that’s too much for me to make a decision, so I end up not buying the yoghurt. I’m usually good at making decisions related to work, but not to these daily life situations.”
- Co-creator, Tina Auer, Austria

“Getting some supplies in person from the store was also a reason to get out of the house. It became some kind of ritual, which was missing before when we were used to waiting for the delivery. By just picking up something from the supermarket felt like we’re actually doing something.”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey

“Often when shopping online you buy more than what you really need, as you are not seeing the quantity you have in your cart.”
- Co-creator

“Some supermarkets did not offer all the products for delivery.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

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Fill me in:

If you use a shopping list, select the one which includes most of the items you usually buy.
Keep the list and treasure it.
Make a drawing for five of these items.
At the doorstep

How many new thresholds, concrete and emotional, do we cross during lockdown while our main door remains closed for so long? Stuck at home, we travel across different mood swings, back and forth; or, once outside, we decide to explore that shop we never entered before. Adventure can take many trajectories, at times leading us also to unknown aisles. We might be fearful or uncertain, but we pluck up courage and let the adventure unfold.

Have we changed in the meantime? Are we the same persons we were before entering this liminal space? Do we respect all the doorstep’s rituals? Wear a mask, sanitise your hands, keep the distance, deliver the order to the doorstep, clean the products or leave them on the side for a few days... The space around our doorstep was never so busy. During this suspended, exceptional and be-masked time, Father Christmas often visits, disguised as a courier, echoed in all the packages we order and which we look forward to getting. Now that December has come, some worries hit the bottom line as we wonder how the Christmas we used to know will really look like.

“It took so long because only so many people were allowed in the supermarket at one time. In certain places I got fed up waiting and went back home.”
- Survey respondent

“Checking the temperature felt good for me, at least you know that someone is checking. Ok, it’s not 100% sure, but it helped, you know that the people around you were also checked.”
- Co-creator, Louise Fenech, Malta

“I wouldn’t want to have my temperature checked every time I go into a shop as it’s actually creating more of a contact with people. I wouldn’t feel comfortable being handled by a complete stranger. I take my own temperature.”
- Co-creator, Carole McCourt, UK

“People could react very aggressively if they felt one was standing too close to them. One was trying to beat me with his umbrella. I also hated to see the egoistic consumer behaviour, such as when toilet paper was sold out.”
- Survey respondent

“Shopping felt stressful.”
- Survey respondent

“Some of the clients were scared but they were glad that we took everything seriously, it wasn’t a joke. We were scared too and at one point we had to employ more people. Sometimes I used to go home crying, it was stressful, I never saw all these people here. But now it’s as if there is nothing!”
- Service provider, Park Towers Supermarket, St Venera, Raisa Catania, customer care supervisor

“Shopping at the local grocery store feels like the final duel from ‘The Good, the Bad and the Ugly’ - moving in circles, moving slowly, constantly evaluating distance, almost ready to shoot an invisible gun (exaggerating here), telling people not to come too close.”
- Survey respondent

“Wearing a face mask and keeping your distance still doesn’t seem to be in everyone’s habits. When trying to make a point on this during the peak of the crisis, still too many people looked surprised. Après moi, le déluge.”
- Survey respondent

“I couldn’t say no to some of my clients. Being in the village, I gave them my mobile number or they contacted me on Messenger for things that were essential. I’m the only shop in the village that sells these things, so I used to do the deliveries myself. I used to phone them and ask them to wait for me on their doorstep, I always used the mask and asked them to wear one too, I also took note of their names and contact numbers just in case one of us tested positive.”
- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

“Before leaving the store, you look right and then left, making sure not to bump into another person, thus breaching the safety distance. It feels like committing a crime.”
- Survey respondent

“When we went shopping we used to go early in the morning not to meet many people.”
- Co-creator

“Cleaning of products is very time consuming. It’s a big deal. I take a piece of cloth, with water and dishwashing liquid soap, and wipe them all over. As for the fresh fruit and veg, I soak them for 15 mins in sterilising fluid.”
- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“I could have been much more careful than I was. I did what was easy to do, such as washing my hands often. But putting groceries aside for several days before using them was inconvenient, so I never did that.”
- Survey respondent
At the doorstep

“There were different stages of emotions. In the beginning we were all extremely challenged, but as we started adjusting I felt a new feeling of acceptance and comfort. In my neighbourhood a lot of people were amazed that we stayed in Istanbul and didn’t go back to Germany, which they assumed to be a more clean and safe environment, which is not my experience at all. It made me realise that the centre of my life is Istanbul.”
- Co-creator, Sabine Küper-Büscher, Turkey

“Our couriers were more concerned about themselves and their safety. In fact, the wearing of masks was one of the early measures we adopted. It was surprising to see that the fear coming from the couriers was more than that from the public, the clients were almost indifferent.”
- Service provider, TXF Tech - Partners for Bolt in Malta, Cyprus & Tunisia, John Sebastian Ripard, CEO

“It was very stressful as we didn’t know for how long the lockdown would have lasted. Having said that, we kept all our staff and we focused on delivering cakes. Social media was our saviour.”
- Service provider, coffee place, owner

“We felt incompetent. When we first went into lockdown it was particularly for what they labelled vulnerable people, like me, who are old; that made me feel powerless and helpless. As I started to work things out, like having my very creative local shop around the corner set up a table across the front of their door, and who gave me their phone number so I could just phone them and say what I needed and they got it for me - that gave me a feeling of, ‘Oh, I can cope.’”
- Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“It’s always exciting when something is delivered. It’s like Christmas, you have a present to open, even though you already know what is inside.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“The idea of deliveries and receiving boxes of nice things felt like Christmas every week. I can imagine my clients saying, ‘Let’s see what she brought.’ However, the actual Christmas and gifting period is coming and we don’t know what’s going to happen. Usually in September we start planning what gifts to promote, but now there is so much unforeseen data that we do not know where we are heading to.”
- Service provider, Core Green: Organic and Fair Trade, Natalie Debono, managing director

“My worry is that if we go through winter with the pandemic, it is going to affect our Christmas sales. We already had a bad

What safety measure would you never accept in shops and restaurants?

“As I arrived back to Europe, after being away for almost three months, only a day before the lockdown in my country took place, I had to restock – not out of “panic-buying” but simply by virtue of necessity, as there was nothing in my house anymore, not even toilet paper. But indeed I couldn’t get any, not even after talking to the person right before me, explaining what my situation was. He continued insisting that he needed the last five packs of toilet-paper on the shelf.”
- Survey respondent

“We couldn’t find products we would normally buy, and when we found them, we would bulk buy a few, to store them, since these became rarities!”
- Survey respondent

“I was feeling guilty buying products that I needed, such as when there was that crazy thing with toilet paper. Everyone was obsessing so much that it made me feel guilty even to pick up that pack of toilet paper I simply really needed.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“I truly experienced how fear makes people be extremely selfish, taking much more than what a family of four would need. It was insane, even though it got better as the weeks passed by.”
- Survey respondent

“The whole experience is surreal, something between a hunt and a robbery. The groceries feel like a treasure that you’ve practically ‘hunted’ from shelves. Then you throw your bag over to a cashier and they fill it up - like in those bank robbery scenes in movies.”
- Survey respondent

“I hate big supermarkets moving things around. It really bugs me because I like to know where everything is. But this small nearby store, where I started shopping since lockdown started, never changes where they put their things, so I always know, at any given day, where everything is. It’s faster too.”
- Co-creator

“The shelves are full of products we need, or products we think we need. The shelves are full of desired products. The shelves are full of products we never imagined to add to our wish list. The shelves are also full of the absence of those products that, whether out of a sense of need or imitation, were the first ones to disappear. Are we sure about how skillfully we are playing this game of survival? Do we really need those five packets of toilet paper? Those 10 kilos of flour? That yeast which will expire before we can use it all? All those chocolate bars and chocolate chip cookies?

While most of the small activities are facing crisis, finding creative solutions to sell their product, others start to sell more, incidentally those places (or non-places?) where sociality, direct contact and relationship are already put a little aside, such as supermarkets and delivery companies. Are these places perceived as the obvious option to extend the physical distance that is being recommended?
“There is a lot of anxiety, and anxiety creates a lot of insecurity and when you are insecure you are insecure in everything, even in how you spend your money. It’s a vicious circle: my clients are tight, I am tight, and my suppliers are tight with the banks.”
- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micalef Pulé, shop owner

“Our sales increased but if this was a consequence of the safety measures or not is very hard to say. What was definite was that businesswise people felt more tense, such as our partner restaurants who were concerned on how they could continue.”
- Service provider, TXF Tech - Partners for Bolt in Malta, Cyprus & Tunisia, John Sebastian Ripard, CEO

“We did not close, of course not! Actually we increased our opening hours. There was such a big demand that in the evening there were days when we remained open until 9pm. I never saw this amount of work.”
- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

“The demand decreased. There may have been an increase in household sales, but with hotels, restaurants and cruise liners closed, the adverse impact was also very much felt. The general public helped a lot, there was an awareness, so there was a higher demand. We had quite a few blocks of apartments buying a sufficient supply of potatoes and carrots to be distributed to the families of the block. But due to the closure of some industries some food was not sold. We also countered this by opening a foodbank where we encouraged NGOs to register with us and we could distribute food to them.”
- Service provider, Pitkalija Ltd., Mark Vella Bonnici, CEO

“We had a drastic decrease in sales since we depend a lot on tourists. On the other hand, the local public seemed to refocus their shopping towards local businesses rather than ordering from abroad, so we had an increase of purchases from the local consumer.”
- Service provider, Soap Cafe, Charlene Mercieca, director

“We started having less sales from the farmers’ market, so we had to find a solution not to waste produce. We started doing deliveries all around Malta. It involves a lot of expenses: the driver, the van, the fuel. It’s not easy, but you need to move in line with the needs of the situation.”
- Service provider, Core Green: Organic and Fair Trade, Natalie Debono, managing director

“The spending power of people has decreased during the past months. Initially we thought of providing all our menu as takeaway, but then we opted to stay in our safe area and deliver cakes.”
- Service provider, coffee place, owner

“When bars, cafes and restaurants closed, our business stopped abruptly. With one client in particular we had a new stock coming for them from the UK, but they actually returned what was still on-stock. So we ended up with two stocks of the same product, not knowing what to do with them. I pay all stock in advance, so you can imagine.”
- Service provider, Core Green: Organic and Fair Trade, Natalie Debono, managing director

How does it feel to take the last product on the shelves? Which product felt prize-winning?

Think of your typical shopping route when you’re at the store. Draw a map of it, including at least five stops.
Blind hands

As the story unfolds before us, we see the products placed in a row, row after row, but we cannot watch the film. Hands off, fogged up glasses, blinded eyes, should we guess? Should we trust? Will that melon sound ripe? We cannot knock on it, we cannot smell it. We can just trust. Cans, bottles, boxes with ingredients facing the other side. We give a quick look as we cannot read through. We would like to have trained ourselves more and better in what means to shop wisely, now that labels are on the other side of our possibilities, of our touch. With the mask on, on our nose too, only our sight remains accessible - but is it really accessible? Are our eyes replacing our touch, are they enough to replace our hands?

Perhaps they already have? After all, we order online just by watching products refresh on a screen, don’t we?

“The sense of touch is very important”

“I often buy the same type of items, so not touching wasn’t that difficult. But when buying vegetables, I prefer to choose that myself.”

“Seeing the ‘Don’t Touch’ sign made me immediately panic. I have the feeling that one day I accidentally forget to sanitise my hands as I walk out through the door of somewhere and have somebody call out on me.”

“Not touching is awful. I used to touch much more of the products... I want to feel its texture, its shape, its temperature. I used to be very physical with products. ... If there is no physical encounter, then it does not happen.”

Touch once. Pay twice.
Did it ever happen to you to pick up a product and then put it back on the shelf, for whatever reason? How did this change throughout the pandemic times? How did it make you feel?

“Shopping with fogged up glasses because of the mask was an experience of disorientation. It was amusing to think I was more likely to fall down the stairs than to catch the new virus as a result of this. It also made me buy less because I could not comfortably check ingredients and best-before dates.”
- Survey respondent

“Not touching is awful. I used to touch much more of the products: see how it is made, what it contains, how the packaging is made and turn it round. I want to feel its texture, its shape, its temperature. I used to be very physical with products. Now I’m touching them less, and possibly I’m selecting with my eyes. This selection is quicker but perhaps I’m missing out on some products. Buying is a sort of meeting. If there is no physical encounter, then it does not happen.”
- Co-creator

“I like to read the ingredients, so I will pick something up, and I want to know what’s in it. If you cannot touch it you cannot do that. It’s frustrating. So I had to think more before I grabbed something, I was less impulsive and accepted the risk if, for example, the carton of milk expires the next day.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“The sense of touch is very important - as much as the smell, the taste and the sight. The more we use our senses the better experience we get. So not touching might deduct something from the experience we have.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“I’m used to telling my young students not to touch this and that, but reminding my elderly mother not to touch fruit and veg is becoming quite difficult. But we have to get used to it.”
- Co-creator, Louise Fenech, Malta

“For me it’s becoming easier. I used to hate people touching me, especially when you don’t know them. And this sign actually relaxes me quite a bit: “Ah, you can’t touch me, even if you wanted to.” Six months ago, I would have loved to walk around with this sign all over me, now I don’t have to. It’s brilliant.”
- Co-creator

“I often buy the same type of items, so not touching wasn’t that difficult. But when buying vegetables, I prefer to choose that myself.”
- Co-creator

“Seeing the ‘Don’t Touch’ sign made me immediately panic. I have the feeling that one day I accidentally forget to sanitise my hands as I walk out through the door of somewhere and have somebody call out on me.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“That image looks very scary, I would like to see something more positive with the same message.”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey

“The hands have become quite a dominant body part, but, yes, I agree with Thomas. It’s worrisome. I would keep the hand but remove the red line that crosses over, and use nice, but clear, words, something like ‘Be considerate, don’t touch.’”
- Co-creator

“Buying is a sort of meeting”

Fill me in:

Draw an alternative ‘Don’t Touch’ sign that is less violent and more positive while still conveying a clear message.
AS OUR GRANDPARENTS DID
Hi, my name is Strawberry, and I am not a fruit, in the botanical sense. No matter what my name says, I am not a berry either. Did you know that? Do you ever care, my dear human, to obtain more information about the identity of what you eat? The origin? The processes implied in the production, transport, sale? Which products are local and which are, instead, the ones coming from abroad? Sometimes you’d need to make an effort, not all of us have their birthplace in their name, you know, I might also not be from Mgarr.

To be honest – and I can be the most deliciously honest, transparent, zero kilometer false fruit ever here – I am an etaerio, an aggregate and accessory fruit. Now, being false, does that change my flavour and how much you love picking me up, smelling me, combining me to lemon, sugar or cream? I don’t think so… I love how you pick me up so carefully, you know I am fragile. It is so different when you pick up lemons, apples or qarabagħli. Or those exotic fruits which our berry and false berry ancestors never came across at the stall. I see you rummage through the boxes, without any tender loving care for the other veggies and fruits.

Definitely neither like your grandparents nor like our farmers, they always care for us as they eagerly watch us grow. You know, when lockdown came into force, here in Malta, my season had just started. As every year, hundreds, thousands of us were ready to meet you, but most of us remained in the fields, or at the market stall. Unsold. It was so sad. We could have replaced the bad taste that spring brought you that close and genuine physical encounter you missed so much during lockdown.

I made sure that the fresh food, fruit and veg, are local. So instead of going to the shops close to me I went to Ta’ Qali farmers’ market. I used to do it before, but I made a point of going more frequently during lockdown.

“Like most people, I also became aware of local produce, even though I work here. ‘Practise what you preach’ started to come through all the more strongly.”
- Co-creator

“I stopped buying fresh veg. I have this perception that in Malta the water is not very clean. I heard that it contains particles from fireworks. Of course, I don’t know what the frozen veg contains, where they come from or what has happened to them, but with fresh vegetables I always have this thought at the back of my mind.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

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At the local market

“It is quite unique coming here. People told me that our place is more than just a coffee shop, it is an experience: you come here, you go upstairs, you have the view, and the cakes are always homemade.”
- Service provider, coffee place, owner

“The principles of fair trade and organic are always very present. I love being supported by all these beautiful products, they are full of value. They are precious, even the way we handle them, we do not bang them around. When our clients come in they usually take their time to shop around, there is no rush to go. They want to read the labels, they want to know the stories about the products.”
- Service provider, Core Green: Organic and Fair Trade, Natalie Debono, managing director

“When I go back to France, I come back with a lot of cheese in my luggage. And usually I take some local ġbejniet for my family.”
- Co-creator

“When I visit my hometown in Italy I always bring a stock of pasta and tomato sauce with me back to France. There are also some veg which I just find in Italy, like the cicoria or broccoli, or the zucchini flowers and artichokes – I do find the last two in France but they are not the same.”
- Co-creator

“I left the island to travel to Asia which is basically the mecca of natural products. After months of travelling, I came back totally inspired! I decided to set up my own natural, cruelty-free cosmetic brand... I guess most people think that I simply come up with recipes and just place them on the market. It takes months and sometimes years to launch a product. So much research and work goes into each and every product.”
- Service provider, Soap Cafe, Charlene Mercieca, director

“There are no compromises when it comes to quality. But that is not even needed, because regional food becomes more valued anyway. I tend to drink Austrian wine when in Austria, in Portugal I drink Portuguese wine, and so on. I stopped buying avocado, mango and anything that is regional.”
- Co-creator, Tina Auer, Austria

“I would like to get some avocado but I don’t buy it. It’s not environmentally friendly to buy avocado from non-tropical countries. Also they’re very expensive here and as they travel even the quality changes.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“I like working at the cheese and deli counter. It relaxes me. It’s a different experience as the product is not packaged or canned. I like it there... But when you have something missing, clients blame it on you and they expect you to get it there and then. They think it’s very straightforward, but there’s a whole chain.”
- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

“When you have something missing, clients blame it on you”

“I like to sell bed linen and towels, perhaps because it reminds me of when we were young and the mothers used to prepare the dowry for their girls.”
- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

I have all kinds of friends and colleagues hailing from all parts of the globe. Think of your favourite one/s. What do they mean to you? If you were to attribute humanlike characteristics to these friends of mine, what would these be?

I have all kinds of friends and colleagues hailing from all parts of the globe. Think of your favourite one/s. What do they mean to you? If you were to attribute humanlike characteristics to these friends of mine, what would these be?

Fill me in:

Is there some product you always assumed to be local but which you later discovered was not? If you were to give up on three imported products, which would they be? Research about these products and list their country of origin.

“From farm to fork”

“From farm to fork”
Reusing containers and replanted soil

Time is key. When you listen to the stories from the past it seems that people had too much time on their hands. Time to reutilise things, time to repair them, time to prepare us, the boxes you would have needed, the ones you could bring with you from home. Let’s admit it, it is easy to just leave a tote bag in any of your bags – in your car, or in your pocket – but this becomes slightly more demanding with us, reusable boxes. But how much satisfaction, later on, of not having to deal with all those disposable boxes and plastic wraps? Plastic is directing your shopping choice, making some among you choose the places where you can avoid using it. And what about paper? Don’t bunches of salad, or tomatoes, simply look better in a paper bag? Doesn’t the bread smell better? Doesn’t the bread smell better? A paper bag which you can reuse, to dry the oil out from fried food, to wrap other food in... a paper bag which won’t linger on for decades, when left outdoors. Yes, plastic is driving out your shopping choices, the way you choose where and how to buy. Either you care for the environment, either you have a lazier approach to it, or you think hygiene is the better choice. Couldn’t you have both? After all we, the reusable boxes, can always be washed, sanitised. It is, again, a matter of time.

“Plastic usage probably increased significantly because of takeout food and the prohibition of ‘bring your own container’.”
- Survey respondent

“Tailormade soap and cosmetics weren’t available. They had to be pre-packaged and I couldn’t get refills for my bottles.”
- Co-creator

“My biggest concern is the use of the mono-use plastic gloves in supermarkets and how these end up on the street. I’ve been picking them up everywhere.”
- Survey respondent

“At the beginning of the pandemic I used gloves, but then it was suggested that it’s better not to use them. The clients didn’t really understand this, they asked, ‘Can’t you wear a new pair of gloves for every client?’ Well, you would need two boxes each day, creating a further problem with plastic. We are saving one thing but destroying the other.”
- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

“Due to health reasons, some shops weren’t accepting reusable boxes. But I knew a particular shop that still accepted these, so during lockdown I made it a point to go there and not to my usual supermarket.”
- Co-creator, Louise Fenech, Malta

“During the pandemic we didn’t allow the use of the reusable box. Personally I never liked it, even before Covid. I don’t think it’s hygienic, not everyone brings a clean box. So you either have to wash the spoon after each box or use a disposable one.”
- Service provider, Park Towers Supermarket, St Venera, Raisa Catania, customer care supervisor

“I stopped buying anything that has too much plastic. I started realising how much plastic I generate just on my own. I liked how certain veg deliveries used carton boxes.”
- Co-creator

“I would like to buy organic fruit and veg, but where I live it’s not available. And at the supermarket where I shop, it’s all in plastic, so it’s pointless. I categorically do not buy it to make a statement. And it would be a real winner if our supermarket introduces the ‘bring your container’ system.”
- Co-creator

“Three years ago we introduced a section of zero waste. So the items that we were offering packed, were also being offered loose, in glass jars. As a client you can bring your own container and in exchange we give a small discount.”
- Service provider, Hames Sensi Ltd., Sonia Sanò Suraci, director & owner

“I’ve been refusing cheese that is sold by weight, thus adding more packaging. I would prefer to go for that and reach a compromise for hygiene reasons.”
- Co-creator, Raisa Galea De Giovanni, Malta

“Can’t you wear a new pair of gloves for every client?”

“So you either have to wash the spoon after each box or use a disposable one.”

Eat the rich.
Reusable containers and replanted soil

“The health of farmed animals should be of high importance."  
Survey respondent

“My business is a revival and appreciation of handcrafted goods and good quality products, but on top of that, items that are beneficial for us without compromising the environment or the animals. I truly believe that all of this can come together.”  
Service provider, Soap Café, Charlene Mercieca, director

“Lately I started to worry about the almond milk I get for my breakfast. I’m concerned about the way in which almonds are cultivated which might be exploitative to the environment. I guess I got into a habit but sometimes I do think about what if I’m destroying a whole rainforest or something?”  
Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“During lockdown I stopped buying liquid shampoo and I tried out the shampoo bars, with less packaging. I also started planting my own ingredients. I had a lot of time, and it’s something that my mum always did.”  
Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“I used to live at home. So I started off with herbs, and eventually I would like to start using the roof and grow something else. But it depends on the time and how much space I can actually use as I live in a flat, so the roof is shared.”  
Co-creator, Carole McCourt, UK

“For me it’s important to repair something rather than buy new things. So if I can fix the product, I prefer to do that.”  
Co-creator

“Fill me in:
Think of the items that can be reused or repaired instead of thrown away.
Why don’t you try repairing one of them?
Keep a memento by treasuring a tool you used, be it a needle, a nail, a pin, a piece of wire or string.

Which non-sustainable shopping or consumption habit is the most difficult to quit? Why? On the contrary, which shopping or consumption habit are you proud of?

“It’s important to repair something”
The kitchen

How many things have changed. Once my friend, Yeast, and I used to spend a lot of time left aside, but look at us now, we barely had the time to get to know each other, that we are immediately on shortage, here, or at the shop, or we’re simply mixed together and put in the oven in no time. In any case this kitchen has never been so busy. Why are you baking so much bread? Didn’t they tell you that bakeries were in fact allowed to remain open? You reply that you don’t care, you spend more time at home, this lockdown encourages you to leave aside many other things: meeting people, touching the products, and so you need to put your hands into something tangible, you need to make something, smell the flavour. And here I am. Are you sure that experiment will work? Why not, let’s try! You know, I, Flour, have so many stories to tell. Also the stories you perhaps forgot, the stories of other kitchens: those of your parents, your grandmothers, their gestures while making gnocchi, their precision in getting the right mozzarella for that lasagna, the patience to wait for the tomato sauce, which you know, addà pippìa, should simmer very slowly...

Or maybe not. You remember. Even though you live somewhere else now. I am glad to see you narrating the same stories with your hands in the pastry, you did not forget them... And I am also glad to see that, starting from what you know, you are creating new stories, a new tradition, on your own. You know, I heard of people who did not have to wait for a pandemic to start baking. For them, it was already a consolidated practice. But it is never too late, go on, you are now part of this global baking project! Long live the project!

“My cooking was rather functional, except for some experiments”

“I liked to try recipes, especially my mother’s old recipes”

“Even people who usually would stay out of the kitchen started baking”
Did you join the global baking project? If so, what was your motivation?

“Did you join the global baking project? If so, what was your motivation?”

My husband likes to bake bread, even before Covid, but now he has improved a lot. He also started doing pasta and gyozas.”
- Co-creator, Louise Fenech, Malta

“My cooking was rather functional, except for some experiments. I tried preparing gnocchi and I also baked a cake, but that was not really a success.”
- Co-creator

“During lockdown I made it a point to bake a cake or some biscuits every weekend. I used the lemons and oranges from our trees, so it was some lemon cake or lemon biscuits.”
- Co-creator

“I liked to try recipes, especially my mother’s old recipes. I prepared and froze besciamella, I prepared crostate and cakes which I also gave to my children whenever they brought me the shopping from the supermarket. I also put some in the freezer because my eldest daughter lives abroad and she can only taste them when she visits.

I went to pick up 10 kg of cicoria from my father’s field, and spent all day cleaning it, boiling it and freezing it. My youngest daughter asked me to teach her some recipes, so I made a sort of video tutorial just for her with two different types of lasagna. And since we couldn’t meet with family and friends we exchanged photos of what we cooked.”
- Co-creator, Ines Frosi, Italy

“There was an increase in baking, even people who usually would stay out of the kitchen started baking. This pushed our sales and we invested in getting organic flour and different kinds of flour.”
- Service provider, Core Green: Organic and Fair Trade, Natalie Debono, managing director

“We started doing more experimental cooking, such as Thai food and the sort. My husband joined this homemade takeaway curry network forum and so he now makes all these curries from scratch, which take hours to make, but they are stunning. My daughter has been baking lots and since I don’t normally eat cake, as I’m allergic to eggs, she has been looking for vegan recipes.”
- Co-creator, Carole McCourt, UK

“During lockdown I spent more time cooking, so I would do something more elaborate and experimental. I made gnocchi, I baked a cake - something which I would never do in normal life. I also tried out a recipe I got for my grandma, so it gave me more opportunity to connect with her and with her tradition. Usually I never get the opportunity to cook with her.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

Seek an old recipe that belonged to someone close to you. Try it out and conserve it for future reference.
The bread bin

A fair struggle knows no limits. And I am not just referring to the growing of my dough in the oven, or the right to be baked with biological flour and turned into mother dough. I love this name, mother dough, in order to say sourdough. I heard of a place somewhere abroad where the recipe of a special sourdough bread is indeed transmitted from woman to woman, where, for decades, the bakers were women only.

I love hearing stories of female entrepreneurship and learning about the different perspectives they can instill in any economic activity. Though my dream is that, one day, you will just talk about fair and intelligent activities of production, without any gender specification... It is fun, so to speak, to observe how you always associate male or female workers with a particular activity – for instance, you consider the tiring tasks and schedules required by a bakery to be a male thing. Isn’t your impression of production and consumption too overburdened with binary considerations? Meat is a ‘male’ food, and so is its cooking, a salad is a ‘female’ dish, and so on. It’s true that most of the people providing food and basic needs at home are women, just like most of the people who usually spend a long time at home and who have so far been associated with a domestic life and with specific activities. As if these things aren’t the product of historical circumstances, as if they cannot change, as if things have always been so simple to categorise... Take me, for instance, am I a male, am I a female product? Or could I be an incentive for people to think in non-binary ways?

During lockdown everyone baked, and many, no matter their gender, will keep on treasuring this new or reiterated skill, taking it to the future with them too. And maybe I, the bread, one of the most ancient foods ever, will have an important role in changing history... you’ll see!

“From a gender point of view I just became this domesticated housewife”

“Nowadays, bread is also very masculine, aggressive and political”

“I don’t think a product is associated with any gender – male, female or non-binary”
Who is responsible for your household shopping? How has this been decided and why?

Try to engage in conversation with someone you know and discuss how gender issues can come into play in our shopping and consumption experiences. Record and write down any reactions or comments that strike you.
BACK TO THE FUTURE
At the doorstep

There are the bags, at the entrance of our house. They are filled with products that experience, taste, and habits made us buy. There is some novelty, a brand we didn’t know, but which we’d like to try, and what better occasion to do that, now that we cannot find our favourite brand on the shelves? What if its flavour will be better? Are we ready to betray its traditional counterpart? In this case, maybe yes.

However, concerning the next item, we know that we will never replace it. That is the best we will ever be able to get. We know it is impossible. Unless...? No, we can’t. Unless... Yes, maybe we might, maybe we will. But it has to be our decision, or the advice of someone we trust. And for sure not the last-minute decision of any service provider packing our online order, randomly selecting what they think could fit our needs in the same way.

At least let us know in advance! We can change our minds, yes, isn’t the fittest the one who will survive? But give us the choice, even the choice of saying, “No, thanks”. Who knows what else we will be able to buy, with that refund...

“I was never a junkie of international brands.”

“I’m very faithful to my products. I believe in what I buy and I hardly ever tried other alternatives.”

“Every morning we have porridge for breakfast”
“It was an interesting experiment in trust, as with online ordering the shopkeeper decided what products to give us.”
- Survey respondent

“When the supermarket sends the online delivery and they do not have a certain item, e.g. pancetta, you just need to think of an alternative. How can I replace the flavour?”
- Co-creator, Carole McCourt, UK

“Every morning we have porridge for breakfast. At one point, they did not have the same porridge and I replaced it with another brand.”
- Co-creator

“I wasn’t worried that food would finish, I was committed to change brands or adapt a new lifestyle if something that I used isn’t available anymore.”
- Survey respondent

“The only thing that bugged me with online shopping is when you’re not sure if they have the particular brand in stock. What if they put in a different brand which you don’t like? I’m very picky about my canned tuna.”
- Co-creator

“As soon as I find something I like, I stay with it. If I find the yoghurt I like, I will try to find it again. It’s not that I’m not open to trying out other things, but these need to be offered by someone else. As soon as there is new evidence, I change my mind. However, although I don’t usually compromise, I would be happy to compromise if my organic and fair rice becomes unavailable, as I really do need my rice.”
- Co-creator, Tina Auer, Austria

“When it comes to pasta, I usually buy fusilli and rigatoni of a very specific brand, as I like that best. I tried other brands but I didn’t like them that much. The texture of the pasta is very important to me.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“I don’t think I’m someone who gets locked into a particular brand, with an exception for certain items like the products for my face. But other than that, I’m not very aware of brands. At one point they stopped the brand of the yoghurt I usually take in the morning, and I had to get whatever the little corner shop had. So, as long as it’s low fat and with no sugar, I’ll go with that.”
- Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“I was never a junkie of international brands.”
- Co-creator, Sabine Küper-Büsch, Turkey

“Generally I do not opt for an alternative. I’m very faithful to my products. I believe in what I buy and I hardly ever tried other alternatives. I’m very picky. I didn’t like it when the supermarket sent me different products, but I thought it wasn’t the time to complain.”
- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“With the online ordering system I’ve been using, you can click the option that if they don’t have the exact product you want, they substitute it with something similar. It’s never anything crazy different, it’s always very similar, but it’s nice to try other brands. Sometimes they would substitute with something more expensive, but you would still pay the lower price. So I got to try out the fancier versions of some things and now I understand how olive oil can taste different when it’s the more expensive version. Usually they don’t charge you for the product until the day that it’s delivered. If you refuse the substitution they would just give you a refund.”
- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“Fill me in:
Keep part of the packaging of your favourite product or brand.”

How do you consider and treat your products?
Does your relationship go beyond a mere function?
The pantry

What will the pantry tell us today, with all the products organised behind its small doors? Will it remind us of the things we still need, will it inspire some new or old recipes, learnt from our family, from some friends, thanks to the products we can combine?

Or will it tell us how good we have been at selecting the correct, long-lasting products, so that today we won’t need to go back to the shop, and spend more money? We stock products with which we try to cheat the time: canned, tinned or frozen. Products which will extend (but for how long?) our food security.

And what about the next step? How far are we in the proceedings of self-sufficiency? Can we really provide and produce everything ourselves? Or are we limited to just a stage of the entire production chain? Maybe this future is bringing us back to the past, closer and closer to what our family, our grandparents used to do: planning ahead, baking bread and cakes, making pasta and gnocchi at home, and growing our ingredients. In a time when we could lose our job and run short of money, we might also conclude that it might be better to ‘buy’, to get what we need by offering something different: our time, our skills.

Maybe for once, we will start to see the products in a different light and our presence supersedes that of just a consumer. While we reflect on it, we open the pantry again, but this time we stand in front of its contents as our ancestors consulted the oracle, in order to decide how to face the future.

“I’ve found myself buying things that take up less space in the cupboard since we order food for about two to three weeks at a time, i.e. dried lentils and beans rather than canned, and soaking them myself.”
- Survey respondent

“We are planning more about what we have to stock. We are now stocking double the water we used to before…”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey

“With the first announcement of the lockdown we thought of stocking more pasta, rice, meat and froze some cheese too. Our aim was to have food for approximately three weeks, organised in cardboard boxes. They look a bit depressing but if we end up in quarantine we can at least survive. One item we usually do not buy is water as we use the filter jug. But we bought some plastic bottles, just in case something happens with the water.”
- Co-creator

“I started thinking of what I use most and what I need in the long term, and instead of buying one, I bought two or three. With certain products you can buy for one or two months, but you cannot do that with fresh food.”
- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“If we look at how things stand now, living without money is not really possible. Either everyone changes their mindset completely or else it’s difficult. In a utopian world it would be nice to exchange goods and services for other goods and services, and that would also help the sense of community to grow.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“A lot of people were making their sanitisers, so I sold a lot of aloe gel and essential oils”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“First we need green areas to be able to cultivate land”
- Co-creator

“We are planning more about what we have to stock”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey
Beyond you are what you buy, are you also what you provide and exchange?

“I started sewing my clothes”

“A lot of people were making their sanitisers, so I sold a lot of aloe gel and essential oils.”
- Service provider, Hames Sensi Ltd., Sonia Sanò Suraci, director & owner

“Self-production requires commitment, time and energy, not just cultivating food but also preserving it.”
- Co-creator

“There aren’t any green areas left. First we need green areas to be able to cultivate land. This is where museums can come in to mix art production with land production.”
- Co-creator, Thomas Büsch, Turkey

“We are growing some vegetables on the roof. The idea of food security and self-sufficiency did occur to me. We did it before, but you start thinking more about it now. Also, I haven’t been to the hairdresser as I got into the habit of cutting my own hair. I concluded that I don’t need a hairdresser anymore.”
- Co-creator, Raisa Galea De Giovanni, Malta

“I didn’t want to buy disposable masks, and at the time we couldn’t find a lot of masks in Malta, so I did some masks myself.”
- Co-creator

“People have become more aware of the lack of greenery around them and they started learning more about plants and trees and understanding how hard it is to grow something or actually get it fertilised. This can serve as an ideal illustration to show how the insect population is dying out, and how key it is for the entire ecosystem to have the right interaction at the right time between different organisms.”
- Co-creator

“I started sewing my clothes and I’m absolutely shocked with how much everything costs. We pay so little - just considering the fabric and the production time, the item becomes really expensive. But this fast fashion is so toxic, it has no transparent pricing! We should raise awareness that we do not have to buy all the time. It’s ok to wear a shirt for five years, there is no need to rush after the latest fashion all the time.”
- Co-creator

Fill me in:

Imagine a dystopian future where you are allowed to choose just one thing to eat, one service to use, one item to buy. List down what you would choose.
Eating out

It will be nice, nice and strange, when we will be able to sit down and relax again in a busy, fully packed restaurant, or at a table with people we never met but we are about to get to know. It will be nice not to leave our names and phone numbers to be traced; not to worry if someone wears a mask properly or not when serving us a meal; not to wonder what we are risking just by being there, regretting that choice; not to risk our reservation being rejected because our group does not share the same household. Though, when this pandemic will be over, it will be nice if some of the distance between the tables is kept, to relax even more, just as when the surface is regularly cleaned.

What are we going to order the next time we visit our favourite restaurant? Or shall we allow that new place to tempt us with its menu?

Some of us didn’t wait for restaurants to open, exploring instead the increase of food delivery, which, for a while, makes our home smell like the flavours of our favourite restaurants: eating out, but indoors. Some of us, who often used to go to restaurants, are instead now happy that a pandemic makes us spend more time at home, saving money, planning our personal, intimate menu.

“I genuinely prefer home cooking”

“We choose an outdoor restaurant or one with a terrace. We go check it out beforehand to see how they organise the tables”

“I never ordered anything online from a restaurant. I want to see what I get”
Did you return to restaurants or did you prefer to order meal deliveries? Or perhaps just stick to homemade cooking?

“We’ve found ourselves in the UK, so ordering food online is somewhat easier than where we live in Austria.”
- Survey respondent

“When I returned to a restaurant, keeping tables apart was good and the feeling that there was space made me more relaxed. And that the waiters had their masks on. But now certain places, somehow, are forgetting about it, and the tables are slowly moving closer again. So, I avoid them because I don’t feel safe.”
- Co-creator, Louise Fenech, Malta

“We started going to restaurants again, though not often, and we tried to keep distance. I always washed my hands after touching the menu, even before Covid, and of course I continued doing so. We opted to sit outdoors; the idea of having a better experience outside, rather than packed inside, is also something new that we started taking into consideration. The idea of service-product is changing. Maybe we will start going less often.”
- Co-creator

“I wouldn’t say I was concerned. I tend not to think about the cleaning aspect, in a way anywhere could be infected. So I hope restaurants and bars do their job well, and they clean before and after someone’s visit.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“I only got a food delivery once and I had Indian – a Malai Kofta. I chose Indian because just before lockdown kicked in, I had come back from Sri Lanka. Whenever I’m there, I always go for Malai Kofta with some local friends – it became our ritual. But the last time I was there and we went to the Indian restaurant it wasn’t on the menu, so I missed this and I needed to tick off my ritual. Actually it wasn’t really good, and in the meantime I learnt how to do it myself.”
- Co-creator, Tina Auer, Austria

“I never got online food deliveries, instead we call the restaurant and order something, like pizza or supplì or fried courgette flowers, and then we go and pick it up. We did it when it was possible to meet with the rest of the family after a long time.”
- Co-creator, Ines Frosi, Italy

“I genuinely prefer home cooking, and the food delivery packaging is very unhealthy. If I eat out I rather go to restaurants. Then again, there was no need for us to do so.”
- Co-creator

“What are the three meals you order most frequently, when you go to a restaurant?
Are you also able to cook them? List down the ingredients.
To balconies and windows

We return to the windows, to the balconies, where we observe the world from afar, this time not because we cannot access it, but because we want to look out even further. There might be some silver lining in the clouds of the overcast lockdown experience. Maybe it has been a lens through which we could observe more clearly what was wrong, what was right, what we could quit, what deserved to be kept, to be pursued, in order to handle with care this fragile, vulnerable world. We learnt that a pandemic is a collective, social experience, not just an individual disease. We wore the mask to protect the others more than ourselves, we restored ourselves from social contact, we didn't hug people we loved, because they might have been the vulnerable ones, the same category the virus was attacking most aggressively, and which the consumerist world was already progressively leaving aside. The category that was not young anymore, or that was beyond the chain of frantic production and consumption. But beyond this frantic chain there were also practices some of us started to follow: producing basic food, buying less and exchanging more. Did it reveal a collective or selfish attitude? Has this pandemic encouraged the social or the individual aspect of shopping?

“Local small shops were very supportive of the community during Covid, so we will return the favour.”
- Survey respondent

“Our customers are not numbers. I know all my customers by heart, as I live in the village. Although it’s a general shop, people also come for advice.”
- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulé, shop owner

“I purposefully opt for local products to support the people and the economy that surround me. As a foreigner living in Istanbul during lockdown, the Covid-19 experience is an interesting one. It is also a collective experience with the shop people and you meet more labourers and people on the streets because everybody had to shift some habits. For example, I got in contact with some neighbours whom I knew from before but would have never spoken to. I recognised this young couple, who have an apartment behind us, and I see them make coffee in the kitchen. I learnt that they too are migrants from Germany and we started engaging in conversation. We have a similar migration story.”
- Co-creator, Sabine Küper-Büsch, Turkey

“I miss doing my shopping at the farmers’ market… not just shopping but also chatting with the vendors and obtaining their advice on cooking methods, gardening, etc.”
- Survey respondent

“Personally, during the pandemic, I was coming to the market every market day with the farmers, so I could experience what they experience early morning, thermos in hand, and I must say it’s not an easy life to wake up at that time, just to make ends meet at the end of the month. I also met some of their families. Most probably, had it not been for the pandemic I would have continued coming here at 8am and that’s it.”
- Service provider, Pitkalija Ltd., Mark Vella Bonnici, CEO

“Many people respected employees more than previously and often engaged in meaningful conversations with checkout staff. I hope this continues.”
- Survey respondent

“I became more aware of how my own lifestyle could impact others. I would normally get the bus, but due to the situation and given that I work with a colleague who has asthma, I tried avoiding buses as much as possible. I didn’t want to further imperil my colleague.”
- Co-creator

“I am aware of how my money is spent, who it goes to and where it ends up. If I’m spending €30 here, I spend €30 somewhere else, so it’s not always the same shop that is benefitting and not the same shop that it’s suffering.”
- Co-creator

“We started exchanging recipes and products with the neighbours in our building, especially when one of us didn’t find the product that they needed. We spoke from our balconies and sent products up with baskets. Everyone started to bake. Instead of buying me the flour they borrowed from me, I asked to taste the biscuits they made with it, but they preferred to buy it, and gave it back.”
- Co-creator, Ines Frosi, Italy

“A strong neighbourhood keeps you healthy

“It is also a collective experience with the shop people”
Thinking from a collective perspective, which good practices did the pandemic reveal?

“Thinking from a collective perspective, which good practices did the pandemic reveal?”

- Co-creator, Ellie Berry, Ireland

“I have wonderful conversations with my delivery drivers. They tend to be the same one or two people who deliver to my area. The guy who is the manager of my area told me all about his grandson who was born during lockdown and how he got to meet him only after a couple of weeks.”

- Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“I live in a huge block of flats, and the roof is supposed to be common space. Some time ago I started putting pots on the roof and as soon as we went into lockdown I started growing vegetables. It’s interesting how my neighbour started growing some vegetables and other plants. There is also a reciprocity element as we started exchanging some of our resources. I’m hoping that at some point it will become a shared gardening thing. During lockdown people started using the roof more. Before, it was a curious, tense space because some people felt that they had more right to the roof space than others in the block.”

- Co-creator, Josephine Burden, Malta

“The client is the most important element in the business. So we follow what they want, we are of service to them. If there is an item which we do not stock we try to supply it so we keep our clients happy. ...Then there are those clients who like to joke, and those with whom it’s best to keep it serious. You need to change your attitude according to how they are.”

- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

“I have a very friendly relationship with my clients. I am not a believer of consumerism, so I prefer to give just that one object which they really need, instead of pushing a sale of five things. I think that the clients do feel this, that we’re not here to push a sale but to help them solve their problems or issues.”

- Service provider, Hames Sensi Ltd., Sonia Sanò Suraci, director & owner

“We have a friendly relationship with our clients. Some of them, especially the elderly, treat us as their family. Two weeks ago a client passed away and his daughter came to inform us, photos in hand. But sometimes it is too friendly, they even add me on Facebook.”

- Service provider, Park Towers Supermarket, St Venera, Raisa Catania, customer care supervisor

“I stopped buying certain brand names because of their dependance on child labour. I don’t want to provide them with the opportunity to continue implementing this practice.”

- Co-creator, Carmen Micallef, Malta

“I stopped buying fast fashion, I disagree with the poor labour conditions, as well as the quality... I would also like to have transport miles reduced.”

- Co-creator, Tina Auer, Austria

“I would like to have some smoked tofu, but that’s a luxury which is fine not to have.”

- Co-creator

“Meat consumption is a very delicate topic, very dear to me. I would like to change our thinking, collectively, as one effort, and address it in a manner that is approachable for the carnivorous. So let’s not necessarily eradicate it, but lessen it.”

- Co-creator

“I buy eco-friendly products from a specific shop close to home, where I go on foot. I cannot buy everything organic, as they are expensive. But I would like to be careful on how my chemicals end up in water as water is the most precious resource.”

- Co-creator

“Since we were inside there was definitely more cooking involved. So in an effort to not let food go to waste, I would just open the fridge and see what’s available. I also started thinking more about what lasts, but cutting on waste was already part of my shopping routine.”

- Co-creator, Raisa Galea De Giovanni, Malta.

To balconies and windows

“Fill me in:

List three things or skills you can share with your neighbourhood.

Catch up at the mini-market

Catch up at the mini-market
If any consumption starts in our head, it is just in the same place that it can be reconsidered, changed, adapted to a life which now might feel closer to what we, after all, are, or what we have always wished to be. Now, that the awareness of the relevance of a different way of consuming, buying, interacting with local providers is something we will take with us beyond a suspended and exceptional period like the one we have experienced. Now, that experience has made us realise that consumption and economic activities don’t always imply alienation, that a product can be the tangible fragment of a life story, of someone else’s dream.

Maybe our needs will appear further apart from our desires. But how can we discern what is really a need for us? Why do we often let someone else, from above, decide for us? And how can we convince them that an open theatre, a concert, a literary reading, a film screened in a cinema, is not just a caprice, but something we need? Why should we feed ourselves just with food?

Moreover, is happiness just something to buy? Or does it also mean the freedom to let go of that item on the shelf, in the virtual basket, at the market stall?

“I have found myself ordering several items of clothing. Were these purchases necessary? No. Did they make me feel comfortable? Yes.”
- Survey respondent

“Funnily enough, the thing I sold most was haberdashery – things that kept people sane and occupied. Many people went back to sewing and this was especially needed for mask-making or to renovate the house, such as mending curtains. Were these things important and essential for that time? Yes, I used to deliver them, as I knew that it was good for the mental health and sanity of my clients.”
- Service provider, Seafront General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

“We buy what we need. We need what we buy. We are so used to buying certain products that we feel that we need them. It’s also about the objectification of desire which at times becomes our need. If I have a tough day I buy a chocolate to pamper myself and my day. Even the thought of it is a need, it’s not just a physical need.”
- Co-creator, Andrea Stegani, Malta

“Often we feel we need what we buy, but if we stop and think, then we can buy less. And if we buy less, we can force ourselves to reduce our needs. It is not a real need, it’s an impression of needs. It’s not easy, as it’s so nice to acquire.”
- Co-creator

“I think we over consume and we are quite bad at buying what we need – we are very much driven by desire, and that is different from a need. Is it a need? It’s not. Most of the time it’s a desire.”
- Co-creator, Nika Levikov, Malta

“I met new clients. We never had those long queues that the big shops had, so people would just see us and pop in. Some of these are still my clients today. I appreciate that.”
- Service provider, Mark’s Self-Service, Gilbert Dalli, shop manager

“At the moment I would like to buy things I cannot buy, such as going to a concert, a theatre play or a ticket for a museum. I need these. It’s a different type of product.”
- Co-creator

“Gaining weight motivated me to be more careful about my eating and exercising habits.”
- Survey respondent

“I tried to take the pandemic as an opportunity to work on some of my habits, that under normal circumstances I didn’t have the discipline to do so. I never was a heavy smoker but during total lockdown I quit, totally. I started exercising and it makes me feel better.”
- Co-creator, Sabine Küper-Büs, Turkey

“I started realising how easy it is to simplify my life, and I also started to see how my consumption behaviours reflect this. I drastically reduced the money I spent and I started prioritising and learning how to live more simply.”
- Service provider, TXF Tech
- Partners for Bolt in Malta, Cyprus & Tunisia, John Sebastian Ripard, CEO

“Often we feel we need what we buy, but if we stop and think, then we can buy less”
As you go back to your present day and think of your near future, choose the tag (see next page) you would like to identify most with and print a copy:

I am not what I buy, I am what I do not buy,
I buy what I need, I need what I buy

“Lockdown gave me a sort of different relation to shopping. I’m realising that we need less. I felt I was just reducing my shopping list, going for more essential and healthier stuff.”
- Co-creator

“The only positive thing is that for some time people became conscious that local produce is needed, unlike before when it was not sought for. They started appreciating it more, and hopefully they will not forget everything once again.”
- Service provider, Popeye Farmers, Marjan Cini, farmer.

“I’m sorry, it’s a bad situation.”
- Service provider, Seafont General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

“The most positive effect of all is that on a global level there is more awareness of the local producers and their fresh food – not just in terms of fruit and veg, but across all the agricultural sector. On a personal level, I understood the problems our farmers face much better. So I will continue remembering the Covid experience as a positive problem.”
- Service provider, Pitkalija Ltd., Mark Vella Bonnici, CEO

“Every day is the same, you come in at seven, you finish at two. Some people talk to us as if we are objects.”
- Service provider, Park Towers Supermarket, St Venera, Raïsa Catania, customer care supervisor

“I created the shop to my image, putting inside what I would have liked to find as a consumer. So, a place according to my ethics and my beliefs.”
- Service provider, Hames Sensi Ltd., Sonia Sanò Suraci, director & owner

“From a very young age I used to suffer from various skin and scalp issues. So apart from the right study and research, my business also originates from a personal need to find a proper answer to my issues.”
- Service provider, Soap Cafe, Charlene Mercieca, director

“My shop is my life and passion. It is not just a job, it’s me.”
- Service provider, Seafont General Store, Tessie Micallef Pulè, shop owner

“My project is part and parcel and an outward manifestation of who I am, what I do, what I believe in and what I think the world should look like. It’s all about connecting and being one.”
- Service provider, Core Green: Organic and Fair Trade, Natalie Debono, managing director

Fill me in:

List down your most recurring need for 2020. And list down your most recurring desire for 2020.
- I am not what I buy
- I am what I do not buy
- I buy what I need
- I need what I buy
YOU ARE WHAT YOU IMAGINE
Vulnerable, a choreography of movement

It goes ‘I protect you, you protect me’
I crossed the road to avoid brushing past
You looked at me like I’m the enemy

No one to hug, I guess I’ll hug a tree
I move towards you, you move away fast
It goes ‘I protect you, you protect me’

I wanted love but nothing came for free
I shopped too fast and it fogged up my mask
You looked at me like I’m the enemy

So I designed a new choreography
Hoping it’s one that won’t leave you aghast
It goes ‘I protect you, you protect me’

The things I missed were in my memory
Went through the list from first until the last
You looked at me like I’m the enemy

Chinstrap, earring mask, I won’t let you be
And so I tried, my options were not vast
It goes ‘I protect you, you protect me’
Don’t look at me like I’m the enemy
Touch only what you plan to keep

Hold out your hands
As if they’re phantom limbs
Detached and full
Of responsibility
Plagued with visits
To your facial features
Haunted by a past
Of rails, doors, and knobs
Après moi, le déluge

Hold out your hands
As though they’re ticking bombs
Chissà dove sono stati?
Be with cleanliness
So infatuated
Touch only
What you plan to keep
Just touch me once
And I’ll be yours forever
Din it-triq ilhom biex jirranġawha

Issa ħadu ċ-ċans
saqajja weħlu ġos-siment jien u ghaddej, insejt
f’liema direzzjoni kont sejjer. Mid-dehra waqaft ghat-tul hawn.
Id-drawwiet meta tfarfru minn fuqi?

Dak iż-żmien kont noħrog spiss, issa
nistenna r-rigali li xtrajt jumejn ilu
imbaghad f’mossa ta’ ninja -
maskra, sanitiser, post fejn nifrex kollox
ahsel, imsah, stenna tlett ijiem.
Subject: hi!

This isn’t where I imagined I’d be in 2020. And neither did you. It all started with having too much time on my hands. As soon as we heard of the first few cases in the country, my boss suggested that we could start working from home. It was as though she’d been looking for the first excuse, despite the fact that several of my colleagues had suggested remote working before. I can see her now, packing her collection of paper weights and holding an impossible pile of files under her arm.

I’ve missed seeing that collection of paper weights grow every month, taking over her desk. We spoke every day after that on Zoom. Within a couple of weeks I felt that I’d gotten to know my colleagues far more than in the previous two years. As the weeks went by we spoke less and less about work and we all picked up a new interest or two. Uncharacteristically my boss decided to take up cooking.

It all seemed fairly regular to me. After all, most of my friends had been through the bread-making and banana bread-making phase. Then came the sourdough variations. The day before things changed our call was interrupted by a delivery to her door. She returned somewhat flustered and quickly rounded up the call.

The next morning she wanted to talk shop. There was a new plan. I was to abandon my previous tasks in order to devote my time (I remember she said ‘all’ my time) to making a new website. Catherine, our writer, was to draft up some new content. The topic: bay leaves.

Now you have to understand that we’ve provided such services (sometimes with similar deadlines) to several clients before, so neither of us raised an eyebrow. Until, that is, my boss momentarily disappeared from behind the screen to return with sack upon sack of bay leaves. While she was gone I noticed that the paper weights behind her now had a purpose. They were holding down more and more bay leaves.
That was a mere month ago. We’ve designed face and body scrubs, nutritious compost, teabags, elixirs for stomach problems, supplements for diabetics, lucky charms for keeping in your wallet. You name it. And the lucky charms have started to work – and how! Just see for yourself the picture attached. That is my new car parked outside my new villa. I can’t have anyone over at the moment, but you, my dear friend, will be one of the first to get an invitation to a soirée once this pandemic is over.

Do you want to turn up with your very own brand new car? Well, lend me your ears for another minute...
OUR SUPER FOLT
(Bla) patina

There is an element of understanding
_Ghamilni ma mniehrek, ghidli naqra_
The origin is clear
_Jien friska ta, issa qatghuni_
This didn't travel very far
_Grazz talii ghazillni_
This kind of thing is dear
The missing ingredient

It’s not absentmindedly executed, gone are those days of ‘just popping in’.

If we’ve finished the milk you’ll learn to drink it black not worth the trip and the risk unless there’s a list.

I’m not sure where to draw the line
if there’s only a little make it last one more day and what if someone else has taken the last bit?

The recipe calls for two more ingredients of red wine and chocolate we don’t have enough.

A purchase makes surplus time unprecedented we must experiment with substitutions.

Let’s make do with elbow bumps just more planning to execute it no frill, no thrills we’ll just get it done.
DIY CONSUMPTION INVENTORY
Have you been collecting memories in your DIY consumption inventory?

Here is the last Fill me in that completes your inventory.

Take four pieces of paper of any size.
Each paper will present a list.
Name each one as follows and list or draw the items accordingly:

1. I usually buy...
2. I would like to buy but I cannot... (for whatever reason)
3. I stopped buying...
4. I would never buy...

Once you compile the four lists, treasure them as part of your inventory.

Well done!
Your DIY consumption inventory is now complete and full of memories.
Attach the tag you printed from page 37
Place the glass jar somewhere special in your house where you can easily return to from time to time.

Take a photo of your complete DIY consumption inventory and email it to youarewhatyoubuy.project@gmail.com
The following images present a selection of the first set of four shopping lists that were compiled by the co-creators during the one-to-one conversations.
I would like to buy but I cannot

Travel tickets to visit my sister

I would never buy another car

I usually buy:
- bread
- olive oil
- eggs
- chocolate
- potatoes
- microwave
- toilet paper
- shampoo
- cat food
- cat litter

I usually buy:
- meat products
- pasta
- frozen peas (ready meal)
- white chicken

I would like to buy but cannot

I would never buy:
- fruit products
- pork
- bread
- dirty clothes
- car

I would like to buy but cannot
- vegetables
- fresh fish
- Chinese supermarket prints

I stop buying:
- fruit
- nuts
- dried nuts
- pet food
- pet toys

I would never buy:
- pet food
- pet toys
- inefficient stuff
- anything with too much plastic
- there is too much waste
- there is too much processed

I would like to buy but cannot
- tickets for a concert
- an exhibition
- a theater play
I usually buy

- Essential food items: bread, fruits, milk, coffee, bananas, yogurt

- Coffee, drinks and dinners out

- Before and after lockdown

I STOPPED BUYING

- Remaining low-efficiency food (eg. pizza)

- Cotton, shoes

- Books online (connected to research, will probably shop again as I continue research)

I would not buy

I would not like to buy

I usually buy

- lettuce
- fuy
- cut fruit
- coffee
- vegetables
- fruits
- pasta
- prawn/prawn
- olive oil

I STOPPED BUYING

I would never buy

I would like to buy

- avocados
- cucumbers
- green beans
- mangoes
- cheese
tomatoes
- eggs

I STOPPED BUYING

- gluten
- coffee
- bread
- pasta
- tomatoes
- eggs

I would never buy

- gluten
- coffee
- bread
- pasta
- tomatoes
- eggs

I STOPPED BUYING

- canned wine

I WOULD LIKE TO BUY

- gluten
- coffee
- bread
- pasta
- tomatoes
- eggs
The following images present a selection of the second set of lists prepared by the co-creators during the one-to-one conversations, featuring an item purchased online during lockdown, an online meal delivery ordered during lockdown and an item bought directly in person when shops reopened after lockdown.
purchased online
- 4 cotton masks
- swim suit
- a pair of shoes

restaurant food
- moleca (Mexican)
- moroccan food

1st thing I bought after quarantine: a facelift

Products purchased online
- crafts stuff
- gifts
- books

what I purchased directly after lockdown
- tea towel

First purchase after lockdown
- new travel tickets
- hotel reservations
- beauty services

Online
- Nozzles for my drip irrigation system

Online meal delivery
- Wine

- Red wine

- Malai Kofta

- Books
  - 2 x non-fiction
  - 2 x crime
  - 1 x history
  - 1 x poetry
A product from an online delivery from some restaurant.

- Pizza

1. City Farm Organic Cheese
   - Skipped for Home Spuds

2. No Food Order

3. Bathing Suit
   Textiles for summer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online purchases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fleur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelf cabinet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lockdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0. Hand mixer by law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nothing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0. Road shop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Blower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>