

Science Café Evaluation Report

Botanical Garden of the University of Vienna

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The Botanical Garden of the University of Vienna (HBV) was founded in 1754 under Empress Maria Theresia and is located in the center of the city, next to historic building complex Belvedere, one of the top tourist attractions in Vienna. The HBV is easily accessible by public transport.

On the one hand, the mission of the HBV is to facilitate access to plants for academic research and teaching, on the other hand to contribute the public to the conservation of plant biodiversity and to raise awareness for it. For this purpose, the HBV acts as a window of the University of Vienna, especially to connect issues related to research, scientific education and conservation with public, society and art. Moreover, to train gardeners with horticultural skills, especially needed in scientific plant collections. Most visitors see the HBV as a park-like recreation area and biotope within the city of Vienna.

The H2020-EU project Big Picnic brings new additions to the garden like several raised beds planted with various food plants or the exhibition “Diversity on Your Plate”. This is an opportunity to outreach to the public and our visitors in many ways, for starting discussions related to food security and for facilitating the exchange of knowledge as well as thoughts and worries.



Therefore, Science Cafés were conducted during the last two years at different locations as a tool to promote responsible research and innovation and for empowering and enabling participants to take part in discussions on topics of food security.

At the beginning of the project (summer 2016, months 2-5) the topics of food safety as a main concern arose during various co-creation processes with scientists, teachers, staff of the garden as well as the public. The participants of the co-creation meetings showed great interest in food and health safety as well as food trends. The request for further and more in-depth information from experts, as well as guidance on where to get trustworthy information have been implemented in the planning of the upcoming Science Cafés.

Together with members of our FSAG (food security advisory group), we decided to conduct Science Cafés on the topics “food safety” and “food trends” as well as “regional and seasonal supply of food”, also as a possibility of autonomy and an alternative for highly promoted superfoods.

The first series of three Science Cafés took place in a pub, since they were scheduled in October and November 2017, a time of the year botanical gardens are not ideal locations due to weather conditions and the lack of indoor facilities. The starting time of the Cafés was 7 p.m., so people could come after work; the duration of two hours was set with the invited experts. The atmosphere at the pub was casual and unusual for scientific talks, but set a great base for inspiring discussions. We conducted a pilot beginning of October, which led to minor alterations of the schedule and allowed enhancement of activities and more involving discussions. Participants were invited via newsletters, social media, flyers as well as posters being disseminated at the university, grocery stores and Cafés.



The second series of three Science Cafés took place in May 2018 in one of the glasshouses of the botanical garden, the site of the exhibition “Diversity on Your Plate”. The topics varied more due to the setting of the exhibition and the topics covered there. We hosted a Science Café on the topic “soil”, “regional and seasonal diversity” and “food safety and trends”. The second series was more interactive: we invited two speakers and offered a series of experiments, cooking and tastings. These interactions enabled a far better mixing of participants and experts as well as scientists. In total

we hosted 150 participants in six Science Cafés.

Our goals were to collect views of participants on the topics of food security, their worries about future sustenance and supply of food. Furthermore, to inform them about the importance of biodiversity as well as to provide insight on food myths like superfoods and food trends that can cause heavy impact on the environment.

We collected questions and expectations of the participants at the beginning of the events, conducted interviews with them at the end of the respective Science Café, and asked for their “take-home messages”, meaning the content that was new for them, surprising and/or will make them change behavior in regard of food and consumers choices. The latter was collected either written with feedback surveys (during the first series of Science Cafés) or by use of interviews conducted by collaborators of the project (during the second series Science Cafés at the location of the exhibition).



The collected data sets were incorporated in the *Food 2030* (European Commission) and the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals*.



After each Science Café, we evaluated the event and adapted the procedure slightly. The first series of Science Cafés showed that interactions and experiments as well as tastings were essentially. These activities enabled a better platform of informal discussion and worked as an ice breaking activity for discussing with scientists.

Schedule of Science Café “Food Safety”, 15th of November 2017 at pub “nachBar”

- 19:00 -19:15 - welcoming and first round of collecting people’s questions on the topic with post it notes. We offered little bags of unknown content to start discussion on hidden ingredients
- 19:15 - 19:45 - talk of Prof. Karl Heinz Wagner head of department of nutrition University of Vienna
- 19:45 -20:00 - game on how to fill your fridge, so food will stay fresh and safe longer
- 20:00 - 20:15 - talk of Patrick Goestl on online sources for trustworthy information online
- 20:15 - 20:30 - discussion of collected questions at the beginning
- 20:30 - 21:00 - conducting interviews and collecting “take home messages” of participants

We hosted 30 participants, 22 returned feedback and “take home messages”.

1 age 54, 17 age 19 to 32, 4 no info

Quotes of participants:

“I will clean my fridge more often”, “I got new insights on food safety and which sources of information I can trust”, “I can still eat food after best before date”, “how much money gets wasted by throwing out food, that is actually still good”

Schedule of Science Café “Regional and Seasonal Food”, 22nd of May 2018 at Botanical Garden of the University of Vienna

- 17:30 - 17:40 - welcoming and collection of questions and views of participants
- 17:40 - 18:20 - introduction of professional cook and first preparation of food together with participants
- 18:20 - 18:45 - talk scientist DI Wolfgang Palme of horticultural college Schönbrunn
- 18:45 - 19:00 - tasting of samples provided by DI Plame
- 19:00 - 19:20 - cooking and tasting of prepared food combined with discussion on importance of consumers choices
- 19:20 - 19:45 - conducting interviews and taking field notes of discussions of participants

We hosted 20 people with a more diverse age range. 12 participants age 20 to 30, 8 participants older than 30.

Quotes of participants:

“it is more important to buy regional than organic”, “we can grow salad in winter in Austria and I learned about how do grow my own wintergarden”, “I will start growing my own sprouts at home”, “I loved the discussions in small groups, we could exchange a lot”

For the first set of Science Café we invited beside one scientist also students who have been working on their master thesis on one of the main topics. After the pilot event, we realized that interactive activities such as tastings needed to be incorporate to loosen up the atmosphere. Therefore, during the second and third Science Café, the talk of the experts was limited to 20 minutes and so, the discussion got much more in focus. For the events during the exhibition, we chose to invite two speakers: a scientific expert and a professional working in the field of the covered topic, e.g. an organic farmer at the SC “soil”. We informed both about the idea of an intertwined sequence with various activities, to avoid a scientific and lecture-like atmosphere. To everyone’s satisfaction, this worked out very well.



We collected data with interviews as well as listening protocols conducted by collaborators of the project. The collection of views of participants was rather staff intensive.

The setting at the HBV was informal too as people were taking place in a semi-circle during the talk of the scientist. Afterwards they formed smaller groups around bar tables and started to discuss with one another and with the invited experts.



Recommendations:

Food, nutrition and food security are topics of great interest for everyone. Visitors and participants of co-creation and Science Cafes were very open to share thoughts and traditional knowledge.

To enable exchange of views in regard of responsible research and innovation as a linchpin of the project Big Picnic the format of science cafes were optimal. Participants were motivated to engage in discussions, as well as open to share their thoughts and concerns in interviews or written feedback.

“I learned about trustworthy sources of information on food safety”;

On the other hand, the invited experts and scientists had a good opportunity to listen and discuss with the audience. *“I didn’t have the ecological impact of avocados in mind, but that changed”*-Prof Wagner after his first science café on food trends

Food security touches everybody and most interviewees shared traditional knowledge as well as ideas for future. The concerns arose mainly on topics globalization, problems of distribution and the mistrust in food industry and global companies. The importance of regional food sovereignty was mentioned frequently. Austrian standards in food safety, also in connection with farming are highly trusted, whereas the global companies are being mistrusted.

“I try not to buy processed food, because you don’t know what is in there”

“market economy is one of the biggest problems when it comes to fair distribution”

“If possible I buy regional food. It is important to know where your food comes from”

“I learned to cook and how to plant vegetables from my grandmother”

For upcoming Science Cafés, we recommend a broad outreach in advertising the events, besides social media, newsletters as well as newspaper and radio. For the choice of experts and scientists it is vital to talk about possible points of discussion on the topic beforehand.

These topics should be collected during co-creation.

An informal setting, like bar tables, enables discussions of participants and experts.