

Case study

Rsa brief 2- cultivating community

How can we use a space to bring people of different cultures together with food in a sustainable manner?

Introduction

This case study aims to explore research on how we can use food to bring people together from different communities whilst also combatting the issue of food waste. A study conducted by Oxford University in 2017 showed that the more regularly people sit down and eat together the more “happy and satisfied they feel with their lives” (oxford, 2017). Similar research in 2014 was done by the ‘Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’ which found that young people who do not share a meal more than twice a week are 40 percent more likely to be overweight (c.delistraty, 2014). The survey concluded that this was because eating alone creates a feeling of “alienation” and goes on to say sharing a meal provides a rare occasion in our busy schedules to put stress and work aside and talk” (c.delistraty, 2014) . Therefore, as social beings it is important that we share meals to increase well-being. However, “the big lunch” found that on average “adults eat 10 out of 21” meals per week alone in isolation (oxford, 2017) .

Food wastage is a major issue in today’s environment. The Food and Agriculture organisation of the United Nations estimates that “one third of food produced in the world for human consumption gets lost or wasted” (nations, 2010). In addition to this, the food wastage footprint paper of 2013 states that “if food waste were a country, it would be the third largest greenhouse gas emitter” (footprint, 2013). This research shows just how important it should be to aim to reduce food waste.

The aim of my case study is to increase the well-being of people by giving them the option to eat together and to decrease the food waste they produce. The main hurdle is, why should people bother to use community eating spaces when it is faster and often cheaper to eat on the go or alone at home. I took a focus group of students in societies at Winchester University, questioning said group found that on average they eat with others once a week.(appendix a) talking with them showed a real love for going out to dinner as a group or even meals shared around a table in the house which further supports the idea that this should be encouraged. Therefore, if an area was established where people could collectively eat together, with strangers and new different cultures, would it eventually lead to a rise in people eating together more regularly. In such an environment the food production could be controlled so that waste is taken down to a bare minimum.

Aims and objectives

How can an incentive to eat together be provided to students at university?

Research how well received ideas are when put forward to a focus group and use their feedback to produce an iterative process of something they would agree to is an incentive.

How can meals be eaten and at the same time reduce the amount of food waste produced?

Research into processes that can be implemented into food production systems to radically reduce food waste.

What is good and bad about creating a community space for people to eat together?

Investigate the consensus from the focus group on the feasibility of the community space and whether it would be something they would use.

Methodology

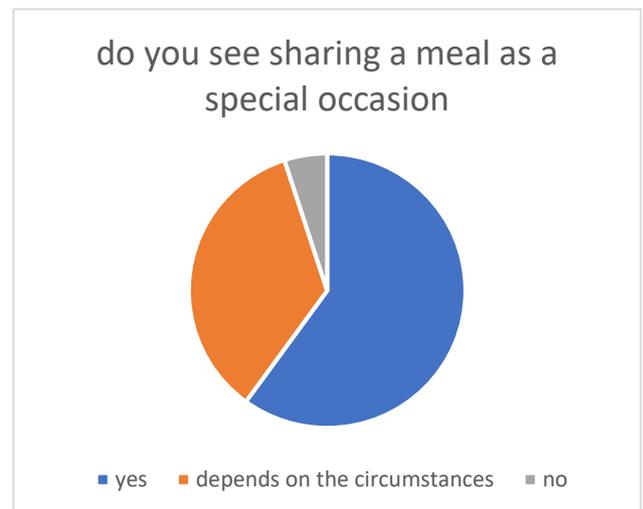
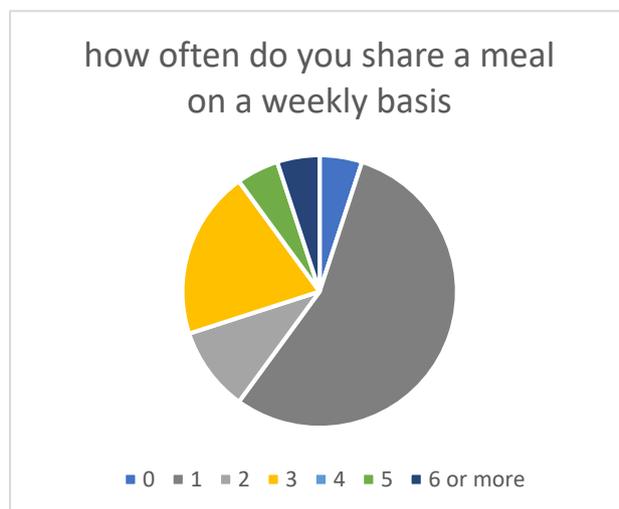
To gain research I took focus groups from societies. As this takes the demographic of people at university but also a wide variety of people, as sport includes people of different cultures therefore, I used this to my advantage. (appendix A). I used a series of pre thought out both open and closed questions to find the eating habits of the students. The open questions allowed them to answer fully in their own words allowing me to see why certain things were done in a specific way. I wanted to find out not only if they were eating on their own but why. Following these further questions would help to shape the design and build of the communal space for eating and influence the systems put into practice within it.

The other things I wanted to find out in the group were what their limited disposable income goes on, the type of food they are eating the most and would they be willing to try some of the schemes I was putting forward to them.

Additionally, I also wanted to find out how they found out about new schemes and news around the university. I therefore put questions to them regarding the social media platforms they use and find the most effective for finding out about this. The answers to the above would be to influence how I would market my solution.

Secondary research was used for improvement of the sustainability of my solution. Papers written on the physics of electrical engines were used to improve the environmental sustainability as well as the economics of it.

Findings



Do people eat together?

This survey was completed to find out how many meals were eaten together per week. As seen in the survey above, the most common answer is to share one meal per week with others. As well as this, is seen as a treat or a special occasion rather than it being commonplace.

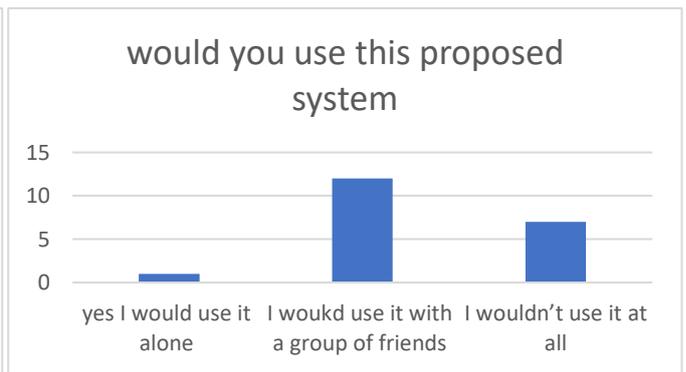
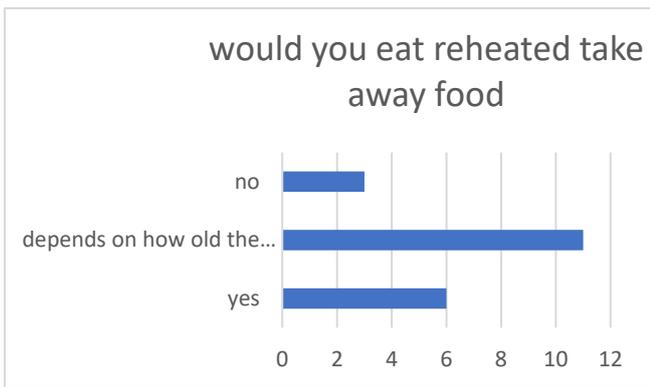


do people feel happier After eating together

After interviewing the group on whether they felt more happy or social after sharing a meal almost all of them said yes. However, some said that if a meal was shared but didn't encourage social interaction, ie. eating together but just watching TV, the group felt that the meal had no effect on the overall happiness of the consumer. The other point that was made by the group, was that if a meal was shared but with peers, they were not confident as this could make their overall mood worse as this encouraged feelings of awkwardness.

How much food is wasted per year?

A paper published by the "food and agricultural organisation of the united nations" states that in Europe, the average person wastes between 95-115 kg of food per year (nations, 2010). Food waste also has a massive environmental problem. For example, if food production was a country it would be the third largest greenhouse gas emitter.



Would people use my initial solution?

The target group was asked whether they would eat food from a takeaway company that would otherwise have been thrown out, as it would have gone cold, if they would eat it after being reheated. As shown in the results in the survey above, the general answer was yes but if the food wasn't too old.

The group was also shown the initial idea (appendix B) of a layout for a desired solution to the problem. The main answer was that they would have used the layout provided but only if they were in a group of people they already knew and could converse with.

How can I make this system greener as a whole?

To research into the design and engineering of the system I watched “real engineering’s” video on the new tesla truck to aid me with this research (engineering, 2017). I found that using an electric engine would not only be feasible but beneficial to my solution as this massively cuts down on harmful gasses put into the atmosphere. It is also economical as rather than having to purchase fossil fuel which is currently expensive, the system simply must be charged which only costs a fraction of the price.

Analysis

In the initial survey, a 3-dimensional model of the communal space was created for the group to access and see whether they would use it or not. The theme was based on Singapore as they are a leader in green energy and waste removal. As previously said in my findings the proposed layout was met with criticism as it was thought that it would not accommodate for larger groups of people. Other points were made that as a static space it would be viewed simply as a restaurant and wouldn’t encourage people to come back and use the space.

This completely changed shape from a static space for communities to eat at, to a vehicle resembling a food truck committed to a theme that would tour universities and provided a temporary area that would allow students to come as a group and eat together at and maintain existing friendships but also promote new ones that they may meet at the space.

Initial feedback from the group said to commit to a theme more. Therefore, a 50s style diner mixed with a futuristic feel was implemented to provide further incentive to use the space.

How does the solution solve the problems?

As shown from surveys, there are clear benefits to eating together in terms of your own wellbeing. However, when looking at students eating habits, the surveys showed that many still eat almost exclusively alone. Therefore, my idea for a new space dedicated to communal eating will solve these issues by hopefully bringing people to eat together more regularly. The way that this will work is by providing a space very close to where students are living, that will encourage students to eat there rather than eating alone. The worry however, would be that students simply walk past the space and go home and eat alone. One way the space aims to combat this, is through the novelty of itself. A system like this does not currently exist and being served food in this manor is extremely rare.

The other huge issue here is food waste. As shown from my surveys this is a huge environmental issue, therefore my solution needs to put in place a method for cutting down on food waste. The way this is going to be done is that when a food delivery company must throw food away or for any reason it cannot be delivered rather than throw it away, it is brought to my system. Here it will be reheated and made ready to eat again where students can purchase the food, for a much lower price, and eat it themselves. The worry here is that student’s may be deterred by the fact the food has gone cold and then been reheated. However, results from the survey suggest this will not be as big of a problem as originally thought, as most said they would eat this kind of food. This therefore provides the next big reason why people would use the space. The food would be far cheaper than

ordering a takeaway and as students are already tight for money, this would be an encouragement to use the cheaper system.

Services such as the one proposed do not already exist, however there are similar services that encourage people to share food for example "lets lunch". Let's lunch is a service that looks at a user's LinkedIn profile and arranges lunch with people of similar interests at a restaurant or café near to them. This therefore goes against the research I have found in that eating with strangers would be awkward and bypasses this issue by finding strangers it knows the user has common interests with. However, a service like this does very little to combat the food waste problem as it is the same as just booking into a restaurant with friends.

Another service I looked at was eatwith.com, this is a service that allows people to attend a meal at a host's house. Here they are welcomed to an atmosphere which widely differs from that of a fancy restaurant or bar. This is good as it provides an environment for people to interact and talk over a meal and would bring people of different communities together as anyone can use the app. However, an issue with this is that it may seem daunting at times to go into a stranger's house for a meal and this may serve as a deterrent in using the app.

Conclusion

Eating together has health and wellbeing benefits and should therefore be encouraged. Despite this many of us still find it more normal to eat alone rather than to share our meal times with others. The world is also seeing over half the food being produced going to waste.

This solution therefore may be a small steppingstone to inspiring people to finally combatting these issues.

References

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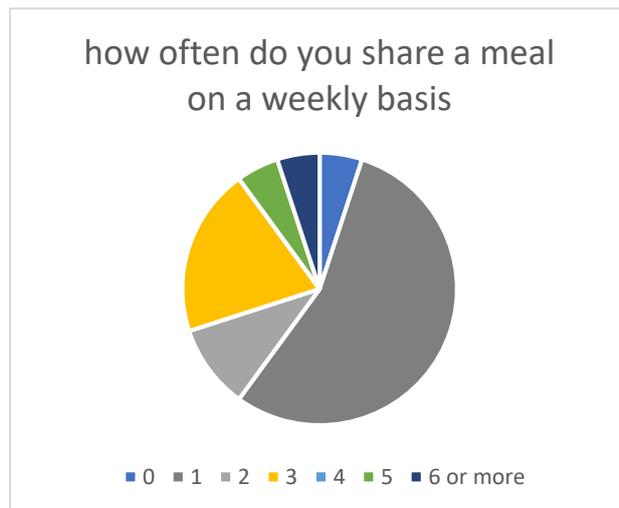
Appendix A

The focus groups

I conducted focus groups at varying stages of the research done for this project. These were comprised of students from two different societies, this was a beneficial demographic as it had people of varying different tastes



Is there an issue?



In my research what I found following primary research supported what I had found in secondary research which was that people rarely share a meal together on a weekly basis. But I also found that university students share meals a lot less than the average person.

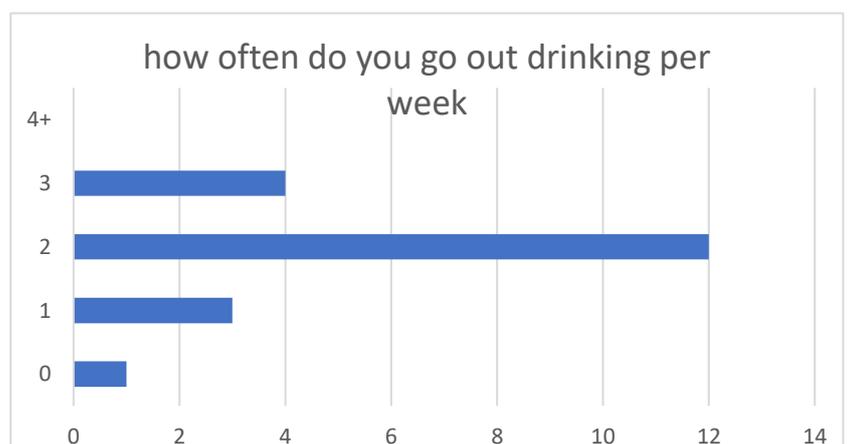
The average stated that only 10 out of 21 meals were shared. This therefore means the problem with is higher with students than of those outside. This was good as it means that my target group is more in need of measures in place than people in general

Therefore, there definitely is an issue here.

Other habits

I also wanted to see what else university students had as a habit, the reason being that if these could be included, they may provide a much needed incentive.

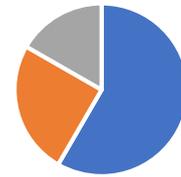
Therefore, I asked how often per week they go out drinking and most said twice a week this



The economics

I also asked them what they spend most of their disposable income on whilst at uni. For this they all voted for the main categories then after this I got them to say which one, they spend the most on. I then tallied this, and results are displayed in the pie chart. The reason I did this was to gauge whether the solution would be economically viable. The results show that 58% said that they spent most of their money on food. This means they would not only want to save money where they can here but also be very likely to use the scheme.

what do you spend most of your disposable income on whilst at uni



■ food ■ alcohol/ nights out ■ sports

All pre solution questions put to the focus groups

- How often do you eat with others?
- Would you consider it an occasion to eat with others?
- What do you spend most of your disposable income on whilst at university?
- Do you feel happier or more social following eating with others?
- How often do you order a takeaway on a monthly basis?
- How often do you go out drinking?
- How much are you normally willing to pay for a takeaway?
- Does the environmental impact of something you use matter to you?
- What platforms do you usually hear about news and new schemes on?

Appendix B

This was the initial solution for the space I gave to the groups. The feedback was that with the layout it denies large groups access to sit together and that if by yourself it would be somewhat awkward to use as social interaction would be forced rather encouraged.

