

# Alimentation – Course 4

## MOOC

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*FOOD PACKAGING AND WASTE*





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## INTRODUCTION

When referring to sustainability, the problem is not only to be a responsible producer and/or consumer (looking over the production chains, checking the quality and compliance with social and environmental rules, reducing waste) but we need to rethink our eating habits or rather, our food practices.

Food practices such as the choice of fresh, local and unpackaged food could have a much more positive socio-environmental impact than the consumption of packaged food coming from large distribution chains and fast-food restaurants. These food practices should always be adopted, both in everyday domestic life and when travelling. These practices should, in turn, be adopted by tourism professionals by avoiding offering packaged food to tourists and opting for local food.

### 1. Lesson 1- How to avoid packages and “junk food” in tourism and moving towards bulk

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The production chain of junk food has indeed a big environmental impact and generates a lot of wastes difficult to dispose.

**Junk food refers to an ultra-processed food**, that is high in calories from sugar or fat and low in nutritional value. Although there is not a unique definition by the World Health Organization about what junk food is, we can generally define it as food high in energy, low in nutrient content and high in fat and it is in general low in satiation value so that people can easily consume it and in large quantities.

The healthiness of this kind of meals is not the best. Still, it is strictly connected to the process of production and purchasing of them, since the way raw materials are used and transformed, profoundly influence the quality of the meal at stake.

Junk food, needs an enormous amount of natural resources to be made and its production is considered to be one of the leading causes of natural disasters and global warming (Nature, 2019)



The whole junk food production chain, from the distribution to the purchasing phase is far from being sustainable. Tons of junk food are packed and delivered every day through trucks and trains. The packaging, in particular, is another critical determining factor of the unsustainability of this production system. Junk food is often served in tiny or single-use food packs, full made of plastic or stuck onto other envelopes, making these boxes very hard, when not even impossible, to recycle.

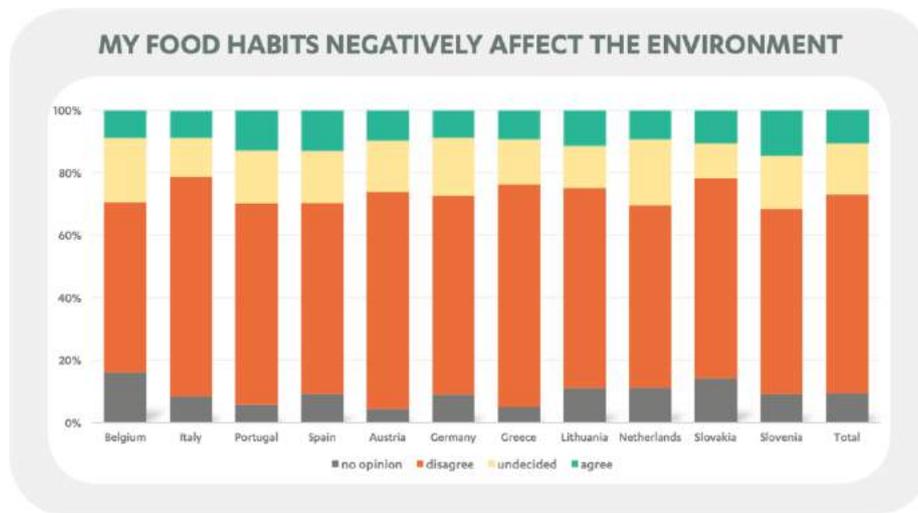
In the business sector, among the biggest purchasers of junk food, there are tourism professionals: from snacks and cookies served during breakfast to meals. Especially during breakfast and lunch, we usually find mono-portion food, covered by packages hard to dispose and its quantity doesn't always fit the need of the guest. The solution



could be to provide unpackaged food, through therefore the provision of both snack and beverage distributors for bulk products, where the tourist can supply himself/herself independently, according to the quantities he/she wishes and without producing further plastic and wastes.

However, the consumption of junk food is also the result of **bad consumption choices** and **bad eating habits**.

In order to understand how people, perceive their eating habits correctly or incorrectly, the European Consumer Organisation - BEUC did a direct survey on consumers, the results are shown in the graphic here below. It emerges that Spain and Slovenia have a great awareness on how food habits negatively affect the environment.



Source: The European Consumer Organisation – BEUC, 2020

How to counter this negative trend, avoid junk food and adopt good eating habits? Which strategies should be adopted by tourism professionals to make their service greener and at the same time, raise awareness and empower tourists when consuming food?

We can identify two main strategies:

- ❖ Change the eating habits and choose bulk products
- ❖ Prevent, investigate and know the eating habits



## CHOOSE BULK



It means buying big amount of the same product, normally a specific ingredient or a ready to use product (spices, sugar, cereals, marmalade, juice), instead of several tiny quantity of it, sold as single-use/single-dose packs.

First of all, bulk is cheaper per unit. It might appear not relevant per unit, but the savings can increase exponentially if we consider a hotel or b&b ordering the big amount of snacks or juices locally produced, instead of single tiny packages.

- Buying in bulks means that tourists operators have to pay fewer deliveries, saving costs. They will be forced to offer a smaller variety of meals, but they can have higher quality, if coming from local producers.
- The environmental impact of smaller purchases might seem not significant considered it alone, but when we have a look at the enormous amount of small purchases and waste made every day, we can understand how important is to move towards bulk.

Today, there are several types of packaging-free products and supermarkets where to buy in bulk. The products are usually cheaper, where the packaging costs are zero and it is often possible to buy them by yourself using self-service, thus also reducing the costs of the employees involved in their sale. In bulk products, the sale of simple, basic and lightly processed foods is also preferred, therefore beneficial for human health, as well as food produced locally and 0km ones.

## KNOW THE EATING HABITS

Changing the tourist's eating habits is not easy and adopting the bulk model may also take time, especially for tourists. That's because all eating habits can also be influenced by cultural and personal motivations that tourism professional cannot know and modify. Therefore, a solution could be instead of changing habits it is better to know them, so to anticipate tourist needs and food preferences. All that in order to adapt supply to demand and avoid food waste.

It is therefore necessary to prevent, investigate and understand the choices of tourists and know their tastes and eating habits when travelling. There are many differences among tourists (in terms of their origins, socio-demographic factors etc.) and many cultural and/or psychological factors that can impact their local food experiences, including their perception of local foods. On the contrary, junk food has the advantage of being a product sold in large-scale distribution and therefore eaten by almost everyone and accessible at moderate prices for tourism service providers. It is an easy product to handle because it is distributed in packs, already cooked and therefore does not require further steps. However, the use of fresh, seasonal and km0 products could easily replace junk food, especially for those tourism service providers who have the opportunity to work closely with local producers and provide high quality food. In addition, there is a greater awareness of the tourist who is getting closer and closer to being a critical consumer as underlined by The European Consumer Organization - BEUC-



BEUC: *“When asked on a general level about their willingness to change, on average two thirds of consumers say they are open to changing eating habits that are harmful to the environment...66.7% disagree with the statement “I’m not willing to change my eating habits, even if they are not environment-friendly” (The European Consumer Organization, 2020)*

Understanding tourist perspective is very important to counteract junk food phenomenon and ensure the promotion of local and high-quality food among tourists, so to:

- Take care of the safety and the high quality of the food;
- Increase knowledge about local territories and their peculiarities, including food, as well as create new economic opportunities of connecting tourists to local producers, farmers and all other local stakeholders;
- Create substantial opportunities for all, while promoting food and tourism relationship for a sustainable economic development.
- Promote a positive image of a territory because of its local food and quality products. Food plays an important role in the “Cultural Heritage” of a territory. Gastronomy and typical dishes from different countries are also included in the UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

## 2. Lesson 2 - How to manage food in a sustainable way? (tips for professionals, including tourism professionals)

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- Collect and distribute unsold food to local associations and relief charities. The everyday meals that are not used by clients or that are about to expire, can be donated to local solidarity markets.
- Collect and donate food that is good to be eaten but not enough “good looking” for customers. Professionals can donate it to local relief charities and/or reuse it as compost to generate other products;
- Reuse food waste, for instance by creating “compost” as well as “biomass” for energy production;
- Invest in compostable material. Compostable materials can include: food waste; leaves; fruits, vegetables; bones etc.
- Provide silicone or biodegradable bowls to the consumer (the tourist in our case) to take leftovers home;
- Promote expiring food, close to the date and with discounted prices;
- Promote local foods and km0, in order to avoid too many food packages;
- Promote “zero impact” initiatives while recovering food and leftovers;
- Promote fresh food instead of junk food, in order to guarantee high-quality products.

However, tourism professionals are often worried about time and costs to be spent when differencing a service and introducing environmental and sustainability criteria in it. Therefore, there are many economic advantages linked to the possibility to start collaborations with local producers and local municipalities in order to create circular economy practices and benefits for all.

## TIPS FOR TOURISM PROFESSIONALS



- Promote local food and start collaborations with local producers to invest in **km0** and provide healthy and tasty **farm-to-table products**. Local producers might represent an ally for many tourism professionals, because they can guarantee high quality ingredients, that attract more tourists for their specificity. Involving them, can make easier to buy in bulks and prevent any waste.
  - Raise awareness among tourists about waste reduction, by encouraging them to choose local and not exaggerate when asking for food that they will never consume
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- Raise awareness among tourists about **responsible food consumption**, by avoiding buffets and preferring choice on the menu, as well as avoiding packaged products and choosing bulk, fresh and locally grown products if possible
  - Raise awareness among tourists about the **seasonal availability of the ingredients**. Fresh and seasonal products have higher quality, are healthier and protect the natural life cycle of plants and animals, therefore alleviating climate change.
  - **Rearrange the production** of food, according to the number of people hosted. The host, along with the staff of the kitchen should settle down a system to fix the production of meals according to the number of people they host but also according to their good/bad eating habits. Free starters like crackers and breadsticks for instance, should be avoided, because people order a lot of food when they are hungry, but they get satiated waiting for the main meals, eating those starters.
  - Recycle fruits and vegetable to create **compost**. Compost is an organic material decomposed in a process called composting. This process **organic materials** such as fruits and vegetables and produces soil conditioner. Once the process is completed, the compost can be used in gardens, horticulture and even in the organic farming, that can belong to the local suppliers of the tourism professionals (virtuous circle)

### 3. Lesson 3 - How to raise awareness among consumers and tourists? (tips for professionals)

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- Make the consumer aware by teaching him how to purchase, store and make a sustainable disposal of his goods, including food;



- Make the consumer aware and informed about the negative aspects of traditional food packages, including the use of chemicals and low-quality products;
- Promote buying and consume in bulk among your consumers, while using dispensers rather than single-use food packs, sachets. Offer fresh food whenever is possible;
- Use of alternatives and reusable food storage containers (avoid plastic and choose other type of materials, biodegradable ones or silicone bowls) when selling and/or providing food to your consumers;
- Buy directly from the supplier to avoid packaging related to the transport and storage of goods (you can also save money when buying locally from the supplier). Buy proximity products and km0 that are of better quality, safer (for your consumers) and they also have less packaging because they are not subject to long transports.

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