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Research protocol for mobile research labs on food sharing

Tracing costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors to establish and maintain food sharing initiatives

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2023

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Voytenko Palgan, Y., & Sadovska, V. (2023). *Research protocol for mobile research labs on food sharing: Tracing costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors to establish and maintain food sharing initiatives*.

Total number of authors:

2

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CULTiVATE

Research protocol for mobile research labs on food sharing

Tracing costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors to establish and maintain food sharing initiatives

WP 3, T 3.1

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Technical references

Project Acronym	CULTIVATE
Project Title	CULTIVATE: Co-Designing Food Sharing Innovation for Resilience
Project Coordinator	Trinity College Dublin Anna Davies daviesa@tcd.ie
Project Duration	January 2023 – January 2026 (48 months)
Deliverable No.	Not a deliverable
Dissemination level*	Internal CULTIVATE project document
Work Package	WP 3 – Cost-benefit analysis of food sharing initiatives
Task	T3.1 – Costs, investments, challenges, drivers and success factors to establish and maintain FSIs
Lead beneficiary	11 (ULUND)
Contributing beneficiary/ies	All CULTIVATE partners
Due date of deliverable	30 November 2023
Actual submission date	No submission required (not a deliverable)

V	Date	Beneficiary	Author
1.0	10/10-2023	All partners	ULUND
2.0	30/11-2023	All partners	ULUND

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Background and objectives

Task 3.1 in Work Package (WP) 3 of the CULTIVATE project aims to investigate costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors to establish and maintain urban and peri-urban food sharing initiatives (FSIs). This investigation builds on the conceptual framework, which has been developed from a systematic literature review on the topic of food sharing and enriched with topics from several compatible disciplines (Section 3). The framework will be applied and refined in mobile research labs (MRLs) in three Hub cities of the CULTIVATE project, Barcelona, Milan and Utrecht, to capture business models, the evolution and experiences of food sharing practices.

A mobile research lab (MRL) is an innovative research method with roots in ethnography. It is a collaborative process of conducting in-situ analysis by a research team that allows analysis of a study object – in our case food sharing – in its context. The research envisions two levels of analysis in each MRL: 1) organisational analysis of single food sharing initiatives (FSIs) to understand their business models, evolution and experiences; and 2) institutional field analysis of key food sharing actors important for the establishment and maintenance of FSIs to understand how the decisions favouring or restricting the support of FSIs are made.

This research protocol aims to provide comprehensive guidelines for MRLs on how to study business models, evolution and experiences of FSIs as well as costs and investments, benefits and perceived value, challenges and risks, drivers and success factors to establish and maintain FSIs. It proposes:

- Conceptual framework with research themes, questions and initial analytical categories for each MRL;
- Guidance to select FSIs and key informants in each Hub location;
- Process and methods for data collection;
- Process and methods for data analysis;
- Guidance for writing MRL reports including report structure;
- Supporting documents for the field research (an information sheet and a consent form);
- Draft structure for MRL reports.

This research protocol has been co-developed with the CULTIVATE consortium including academic partners, FSIs and municipalities.

The outcomes of MRLs (Task 3.1) together with sustainability assessments of FSIs (Task 3.2) will inform the development of the key employable result from WP3 - the food sharing calculator (Task 3.3). The food sharing calculator is a holistic tool to assess the multidimensional costs, benefits, social return on investments, success factors and barriers to establishing food sharing initiative. The outcomes from Task 3.1 will also be used in WP4 to enhance the insights on the influence of policy, regulation, and wider external governance systems on FSIs to help transform urban and peri-urban food systems towards more just and sustainable.

Overview of research phases in Task 3.1

The research on Task 3.1 takes place over a period of 26 months with 8 months preparation and development of this protocol followed by 6 months of MRL in each Hub city. It is divided into three main phases (Fig. 1):

- Phase 1 - systematic literature review to develop an initial conceptual framework for MRLs;
- Phase 2 - selecting key actors and FSIs; performing preparatory MRL research (online) in a Hub city; conducting MRL research onsite with study visits to the Hub city;
- Phase 3 – analysis of MRL data and presentation of results in MRL reports.

Phases 2 and 3 will be repeated for each of the three Hub locations.

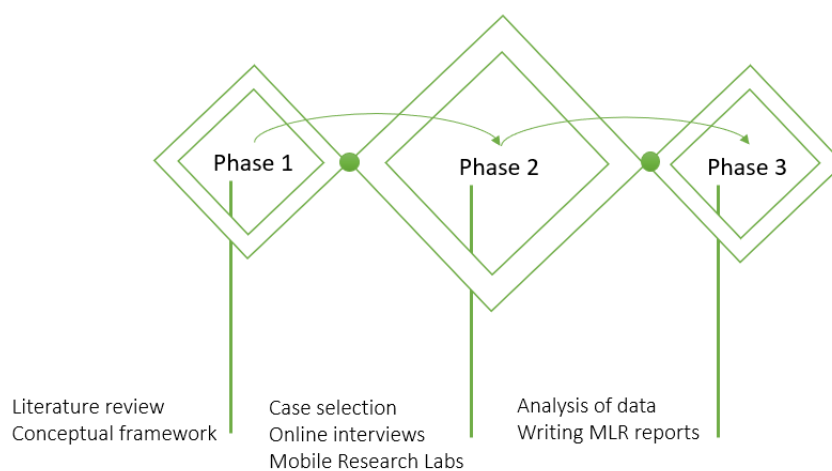


Figure 1. Phases of research activities in Task 3.1

The full timeline of Task 3.1 is presented in Figure 2 below.

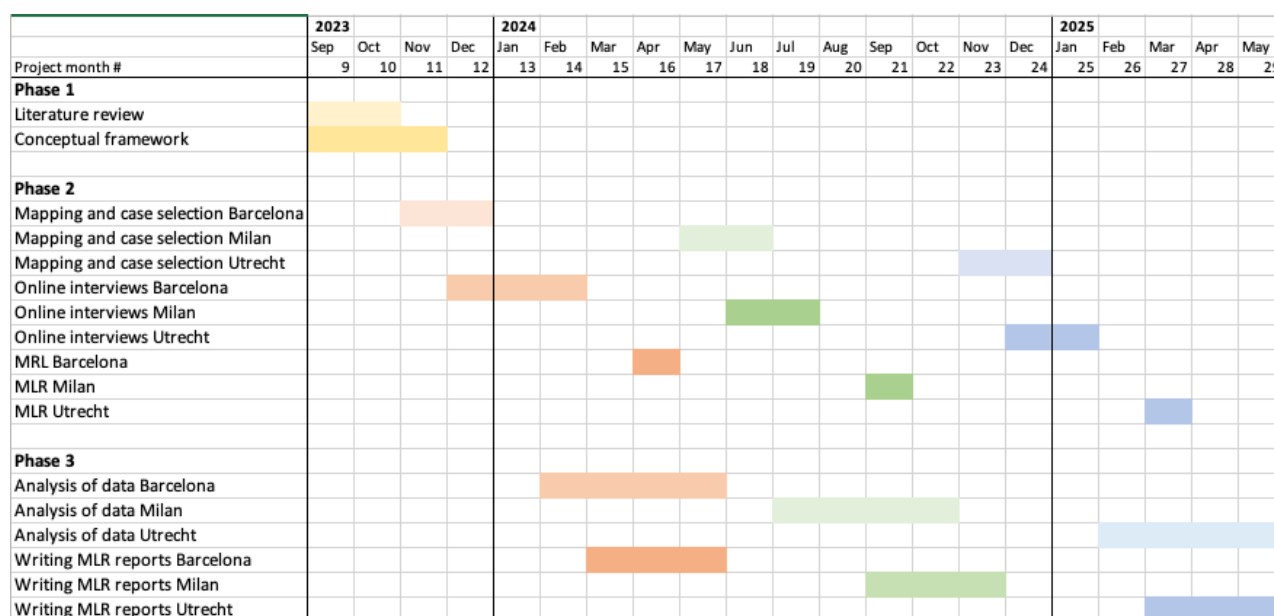


Figure 2. Timeline of Task 3.1.

Systematic literature review and conceptual framework

Systematic literature review

The initial overarching research themes for Task 3.1 are provided in the Description of Work in WP3 of the CULTIVATE project. These have been complemented with the systematic literature review to take stock of current knowledge on costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors to establish and maintain urban and peri-urban FSIs.

The literature review was performed in June-October 2023. It took a systematic approach based on keyword search of the peer reviewed scientific articles written in English. A combination of 14 keyword searches (Table 1) cover a variety of food sharing aspects and resulted in retrieving the articles from multiple disciplines (e.g., urban planning, urban commons, social sustainability, etc.). Scopus database from Elsevier B.V. was the main source for the articles search.

Table 1: Search strings for the systematic literature review on costs, investments, challenges, drivers and success factors to establish and maintain food sharing initiatives

#	Search request in Scopus database
1	TITLE-ABS-KEY (food sharing initiative*)
2	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing landscape")
3	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food commons" AND sharing)
4	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("urban commons" AND "cost-benefit analysis")
5	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND impact*)
6	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND cost*)
7	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND challenge*)
8	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND city OR cities)
9	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND sustainability)
10	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND urban)
11	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND local)
12	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND business model*)
13	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND driver*)
14	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("food sharing" AND governance)

The summary of the literature review process, which resulted in 55 articles for the full-text analysis, is shown in Fig. 2. During the review process, the article duplicates, which returned from the search using the 14 keyword combinations, were eliminated. After full-text screening, 12 articles were



excluded. The final set of 43 articles was coded abductively in NVivo QSR International software where the main categories of codes (costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors) were the departing point for the coding, and the exploration of the literature provided more detailed sub-codes for each main code.

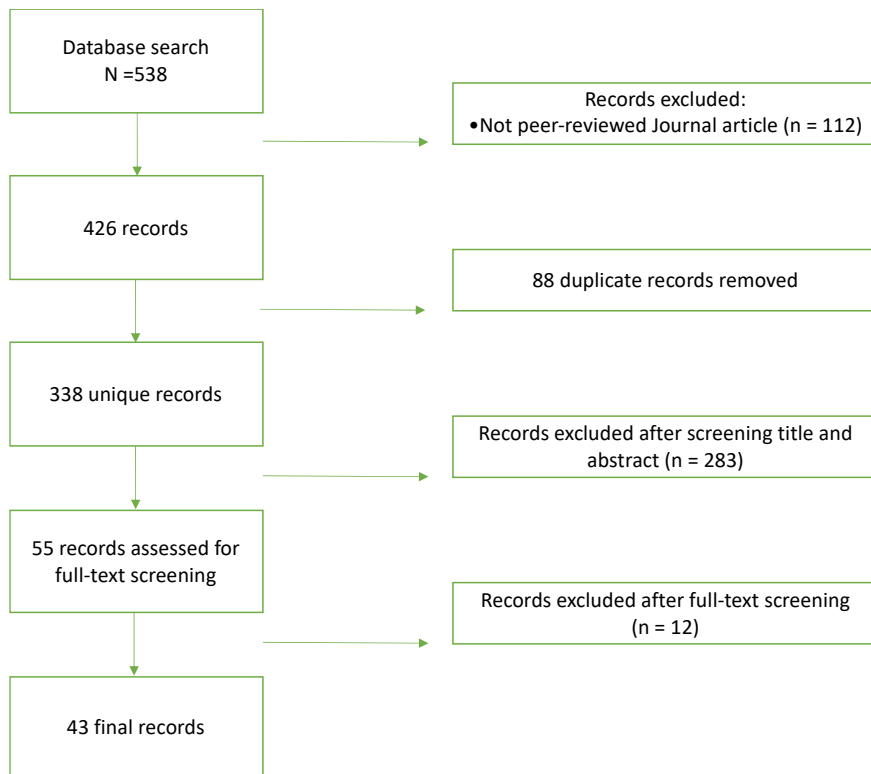


Figure 3. Summary of the systematic literature review process

The literature review informed the conceptual framework (Table 2) by proposing initial analytical categories for data collection and analysis during MRLs.

Conceptual framework

The first column of Table 2 contains the core research themes, which form the basis for data collection and analysis in MRLs. The second column contains the respective research questions associated with each core theme. The research questions aim to cover the depth of FSIs' experiences and practices in relation to each research theme. Data collection and analysis will take place around these research questions and responses will be summarised in MRL reports. The extent to which these questions will be addressed in each MRL will vary depending on the specific nature of the FSIs under examination. The third column in Table 2 contains initial analytical categories, which were identified from the literature review and informed by the earlier work of the CULTIVATE researchers and which will guide the design of interview questions. These analytical categories will also be iterated based on empirical findings allowing for theoretical advances of the conceptual framework.

Table 2: Conceptual framework for mobile research labs on food sharing

Research themes	Research questions	Initial analytical categories
BUSINESS MODELS of FSIs	How are FSIs organised? How do different business models vary depending on their institutional field and key actors?	Business model canvas, the Triple Layered Business Model Canvas, sharing economy business models by Curtis&Mont 2020
EVOLUTION & EXPERIENCE of FSIs	How did FSIs emerge and how were they supported? Who played important roles in supporting FSIs? What were the critical decisions/junctures in the evolution of FSIs? How far have the FSIs lived up to the variety of their ambitions?	Protagonists and envisioned users of FSIs; timelines of FSI evolution with key events
COSTS & INVESTMENTS	What resources are needed to establish and maintain FSIs? How are the costs to establish and maintain FSIs perceived and framed by key actors? In which ways do key actors support FSIs? What kinds of investments do they provide? How do key actors make investment decisions and set priorities about food sharing? What kinds of food sharing are (not) supported and why?	Material and non-material COSTS (e.g., money, infrastructure, labour, time, effort). Direct and indirect COSTS: administration, finance, messy management, lost land value for other uses. INVESTMENTS: allocation of tenure for gardens, kitchens, eating spaces, reduced rents, staff cost subsidies, coordination of participants, education.
BENEFITS & PERCEIVED VALUE	How do FSIs frame and communicate their value/sustainability benefits? How is the value/benefits of food sharing understood, perceived and framed by key actors? How visible is this value to key actors? How and by whom is the value/benefits of food sharing evaluated? Which value/benefits of food sharing are prioritised and by whom? Which value/benefits of food sharing are marginalised or not recognised and why? How and when has the value of food sharing been contested in the face of other demands, e.g., land use, housing issues etc.?	Enochsson et al. 2021 framework on framing sustainability of the sharing economy Actor groups benefiting from FSI activities; types of value/benefits experienced by key actors Value perceived by different actors related to FSIs
CHALLENGES & RISKS	What are the organisational challenges for FSIs to establish and operate? Which challenges do the key actors experience when establishing and maintaining FSIs? How are the risks to establish and maintain FSIs perceived and framed by key stakeholders? Which strategies do key actors employ to reduce these risks? How has the establishment and maintenance of FSIs been contested or resisted and by whom?	Institutional (e.g., power relations within and outside an organisation, network management), infrastructural (e.g., limited resources), organisational challenges (e.g., involvement and participation, governance), and regulatory (e.g., land rights, consumer protection rules). RISKS for FSIs related to establishment and maintenance of an organisation, such as regulatory uncertainty, health and safety risks, other operational risks.
DRIVERS & SUCCESS FACTORS	What drives the establishment and maintenance of FSIs and why? How is the success of FSIs understood, perceived and measured? Which factors ensure the success of FSIs to operate? What motivates different stakeholders to engage into food sharing? Which failures have occurred when establishing and maintaining FSIs and why?	PESTLE: political, economic, social, technical, legal, environmental factors that drive and support organisations SUCCESS FACTORS and enablers categorised as organisational, infrastructural, and knowledge-related

Mobile research labs

A transdisciplinary MRL methodology will be used to enact collaborative, in-situ analysis of costs, investments, benefits/perceived value and other factors of food sharing with actors directly and indirectly involved in food sharing practices. These include food sharing entrepreneurs and investors in food sharing, i.e., municipal representatives, volunteers, retailers and capital investors, recruited through CULTIVATE partner contacts and particularly the connections already existing in network organisations and partners ICLEI and MUFPP (see section 4.1).

Each MRL will focus on one location for a period of six months, with three months of preparatory work (desk study, adjusting the conceptual framework for data collection and analysis, developing an interview guide and conducting online interviews with key actors) and fieldwork, and three months for data analysis and writing up of results. The field work comprises semi-structured interviews with key actors (at least 15 per Hub city or 45 in total), and participant observation that will include immersion in the daily activities of at least 12 FSIs through site visits, official tours, field diaries, photography, and short video recordings, where permitted. Wherever possible, workshops in Hub cities with academic, municipal and FSI partners will be arranged for research exchange and knowledge co-creation. MRLs will be led by Lund University researchers but MRL activities will be open for other CULTIVATE partners and Advisory Board members to participate and contribute to.

Selecting key actors and food sharing initiatives

MRL research envisions two levels of analysis in each Hub city (Fig. 3):

- Level I: *organisational analysis* of single FSIs to understand their business models, evolution and experiences
- Level II: *institutional field analysis* of key food sharing actors important for the establishment and maintenance of FSIs to understand how the decisions favouring or refusing the support of FSIs are being made

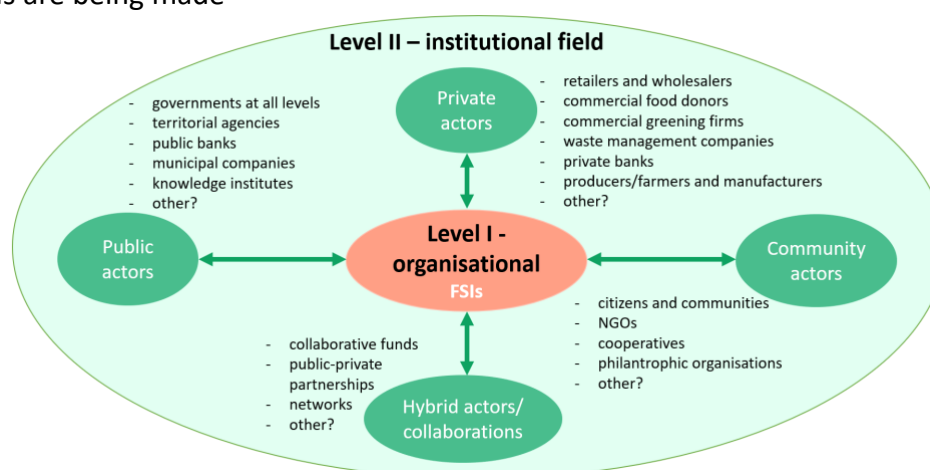


Figure 4. Levels of analysis and mapping key food sharing actors

Source: Inspired by Voytenko Palgan, Y. 2024. *Investing in Urban Nature*. Forthcoming textbook.

The initial categories of key actors include public, private, community and hybrid actors or collaborations of actors (Fig. 4). These have been identified from the literature review and previous research on investing in urban nature innovations. The mapping of key food sharing actors in each

Hub city will be led by Lund University and completed with support from the CULTIVATE partners, Advisory Board and through snowballing during online and in-situ stages of the MRLs.

One FSI (Espigoladors, Barcelona) and representatives from the three Hub municipalities (Barcelona, Milan and Utrecht) are CULTIVATE partners. Alongside information from the manual mapping in WP2 (Task 2.2), these actors will provide a bridge to other FSIs in each Hub location, ensuring a diverse range of food sharing foci are included in the analysis following the CULTIVATE definition of food sharing. The CULTIVATE project defines *food sharing* as collective acts around food across the food system, namely:

- cooking and eating together,
- growing or composting together,
- redistributing surplus food,
- sharing food space, tools, knowledge, and seeds.

These four broad categories of food sharing serve as a basis for case selection – at least one FSI representing each category will be explored. For each case, its business model will be mapped. Since the research on costs, investments, challenges, drivers, and success factors of food sharing is exploratory, it would be important to capture the diversity of food sharing business models in each Hub city while ensuring these are comparable across the geographical contexts. The concept of business model facilitates a wide array of economic activity and consumption practices including both for-profit and not-for-profit sharing initiatives. The exploration of a variety of FSIs allows capturing diverse business models. Moreover, some FSIs could have been active for some time, which will provide opportunities to studying their experiences and evolution. Alternatively, some FSIs may also be in an advanced planning/implementation phase when the decisions about their support and funding are being made, which will provide evidence on why certain FSIs are supported and others are not.

Data collection in mobile research labs

Each mobile research lab will involve data collection from multiple sources including:

- Desktop research;
- In-depth interviews;
- Site visits and participant observation;
- Workshops and seminars.

Desktop research will comprise collecting publicly available data on business models of FSIs and other key themes from the conceptual framework (Table 3). It will include a review of both academic publications (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar), and grey literature using traditional search engines and snowball techniques. Official documents, e.g., municipal, regional and national policies on sustainable/resilient food systems, food waste reduction plans and targets, strategies on solidarity and sharing economy, will be reviewed. In addition, newspapers, blogs, web-pages and social media pages of FSIs and other key food sharing actors will be analysed. The collected data from these sources will serve as supplementary inputs to the MRLs and will be used to further develop the conceptual framework (Table 3).

To fully encounter the object under investigation from a variety of perspectives, MRLs engage with both, FSIs and key actors outside FSIs who influence their maintenance and development. When mapping key actors this research departs from the theoretical sample of key actor groups (Fig. 4). The majority of key actors outside FSIs will be selected in consultation with FSIs, project partners

and the Advisory Board, and contacted before the actual MRL visits to Hub cities as they will be identified at the beginning of Phase 2 of the research (Fig. 1). At least 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with FSIs and key food sharing actors per Hub city will be conducted. The actors will be selected in relation to the food sharing landscape in the Hub cities (e.g., municipal representatives) and in some cases in relation to a specific FSI (e.g. an investor who supports certain FSI). Some of the interviews will be performed online in preparation to the MRL site visit to the Hub location while others will be held onsite during the visit. Specific interview guides with questions designed for each participant, depending on their role, will be developed before the interviews. Each interview will last 1-1.5 hours and will be recorded, whenever possible, as well as detailed notes will be taken. To comply with the ethical guidelines of the project, all interview participants will be briefed on the objectives of the CULTIVATE project and Task 3.1 (see Information Sheet in Appendix 1) and will be invited to sign the consent form (see Appendix 2). The researchers will make sure that the purpose of the research is understood by the participants before the research activities start.

An MRL approach implies site visits to the facilities of an organisation of interest. The visits will be performed by WP3 research team with support from Hub partners while other project partners will be invited to join, if they are interested, and when the time and resources allow doing so. During these visits, participant observations will take place through official tours and (optionally) workshops and seminars. Such workshops and seminars may be organised specifically for the purposes of MRLs, or data can be collected during the activities arranged by or for FSIs. The observations will be documented in field diaries/memos, photos and short video recordings, where permitted, and summarised during the reflection sessions by the core MRL team. All collected materials will be anonymised, stored in secure online locations, and shared according to the CULTIVATE policies.

Whenever possible, the MRL team will seek to co-organise half-day to one day workshops or seminars with local partners including representatives of academia, municipalities and FSIs for the exchange of preliminary findings and ongoing research, and knowledge co-creation.

Data storage, analysis and writing mobile research lab reports

The interviews will be recorded when permitted, transcribed or semi-transcribed, and analysed with NVivo QSR International – a computer programme for qualitative analysis and mixed methods research. All interview transcripts will be anonymised and treated as shareable data. They will be uploaded to CULTIVATE's Zenodo repository and will be kept for five years after the end of the project. Data will be managed according to the Data Management Plan of the CULTIVATE project (Deliverable 1.2), completed in May 2023 and to be updated in December 2024.

The initial analytical categories from the conceptual framework related to the research themes (Table 2) will be used as a starting point in empirical data coding. Further codes and analytical categories will emerge inductively from empirical data allowing to iterate the conceptual framework, and they will also be complemented through additional literature searches on a particular research theme or question.

Analysed data will be documented in MRL reports, one per Hub city. Prior to addressing the research themes and answering the research questions, MRL reports should include a short introductory section, which presents a general background of the city in focus, including a summary of the main urban sustainability challenges, an overview of the food sharing landscape (based on data from WP2) and a brief summary of the governance landscape of food sharing in the Hub city (based on



data from WP4). This introductory section should also include a summary table describing all FSIs in focus. For a tentative structure of MRL report see Appendix 3.

Limitations

As a qualitative type of research, this investigation has limitations in terms of scale (number of cases) and geography (location of the cases). The cases are limited to the Hub cities and their selection is justified by the variety and scale of food sharing activities in those arenas. The cases are in several European cities which possess favourable cultural and geographic conditions for food sharing. These conditions will be considered in the analysis and further scaling-up steps.

Within the pre-determined Hub Cities, the research activities of Task 3.1 aim to cover the diversity of FSIs' experiences and activities. To maximise the coverage of the varieties of topics and experiences, FSIs of different types and other key actors will be included. The effects of the inevitable time limitations will be reduced through the preparatory online research before the site visits to the Hub locations take place.

Appendix 1 – Information sheet

CULTIVATE : Co-designing food sharing innovation for resilience

Introduction and purpose of the project

Food sharing is identified as a transformative mechanism for sustainable cities: reducing consumption, conserving resources, preventing waste and providing new forms of socio-economic relations. CULTIVATE (2023-2027) is a solution-based project funded under the European Union's Horizon Research and Innovation Program that works to create resilient and healthy urban and peri-urban (UPU) food systems. The project involves 20 consortium partners, among which are research institutes, municipalities, food sharing initiatives, communication specialists and art collectives.

In this project, food sharing is defined as collective acts around food across the food system, namely:

- cooking and eating together
- growing or composting together
- redistributing surplus food
- sharing food space, tools, knowledge, seeds

To learn more about the project, visit the website here: <https://cultivate-project.eu/>

Procedures

As part of this research, we are conducting semi-structured interviews. We will ask you a series of open-ended questions about food sharing, costs and investments, benefits and value, drivers and barriers to starting and maintaining food sharing practices. You can respond to these in as much detail as you like. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes depending on your answers.

With your permission, we would like to record the interview and take notes. The recording will be used for transcription purposes only. You may choose not to be recorded and you may request that notes not be taken. The recorder can be turned off at your request and the interview can be stopped at any time if you do not wish to continue.

The information we gather will be used for academic publications, conference presentations, project reports and other communication. There is also a project website where we will post information about the research. Should you consent to being photographed and/or video recorded, some photos and/or video recordings may appear on the project website or in project presentations. We may also use some material for media and press releases pertaining to the research.

Data management and confidentiality

The information collected from this research will be reported in a manner that ensures confidentiality unless you request otherwise on the attached consent form. To ensure confidentiality, data will be stored securely (on password-protected Lund University servers) and will be viewed only by the project investigators. Additionally, pseudonyms, rather than your real name, will be used in publications — unless you expressly wish to be identified by name in these forums.

Participant Rights

To reiterate, as a participant, you have the right to:

- (a) Withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed/unpublished data, including images, previously supplied.
- (b) Be guaranteed that the project is for the purposes of research only.
- (c) Be guaranteed that any personal information you provide will be safeguarded and disclosed only where you have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
- (d) Be guaranteed that the security of the research data will be protected both during and after completion of the study.

Questions and Contacts

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Appendix 2 – Consent form

This form is to ensure that you have been given information about the CULTIVATE project (see Information Sheet on the reverse side) and to provide you with the opportunity to confirm that you are willing to take part in this research. For all activities below, please indicate which applies to you:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I have been familiarised with the CULTIVATE project, I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I have received satisfactory answers to my questions
<input type="checkbox"/>	As a research participant, I am aware of my right to withdraw participation at any time
<input type="checkbox"/>	I give my consent that the interview can be audio- and video- recorded, transcribed, and analysed
<input type="checkbox"/>	I give my consent to be identified by my organization
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand that the results of the research will be presented in such a way that no information can be traced to me personally
<input type="checkbox"/>	I give my consent that a record of my interview can be securely stored for future reference

Note: Your participation is voluntary. As an interviewee, you are not obligated to answer all the questions posed; you reserve the right to refuse or cease participation in the interview process without stating your reason and may request to keep certain materials confidential.

Please, sign below to confirm your consent:

	Participant(s)	Researcher(s)
Name(s)		
Signature(s)		
Date(s)		

Appendix 3 – Mobile research lab report structure

Title page

Name of the Hub City

Image

Authors

Date

Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the city and its food sharing profile

1.2 Objectives of CULTIVATE Task 3.1

1.3 Food sharing initiatives in focus

Section 2. Mobile Research Lab Approach

2.1 Desktop research and online interviews

2.2 Field research

Section 3. Results

3.1 Business models of the food sharing initiatives (FSIs)

3.2 Evolution and experiences of FSIs

3.3 Costs and Investments

3.4 Benefits and Perceived value

3.5 Challenges and risks

3.6 Drivers and success factors

Section 4. Discussion

Section 5. Conclusions

References

Appendix 1. Information about the interviews

Appendix 2. Visuals