REALLY ETH(N)IC

Operational guidelines

Patrocinated by

PATROCINIO Comune di Milano

COMUNE DI BRESCIA

BERGAMO CITTÀ DEI MILLE COMUNE DI BERGAMO

Funded by

Fondazione CARIPLO

NOVAMONT

Partners

ESTÀ Economia e Sostenibilità

Amsa

Aprica

adl zavidovici

cooperativa Ruah

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE, LETTERATURE, CULTURE E MEDIAZIONE

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UN SACCO ETNICO

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MILANO FOOD POLICY

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Associazione Nazionale Imprenditori e Professionisti Tintolavi

ASCOM BERGAMO
CONFCOMMERCIO
IMPRESE PER L'ITALIA

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1

Why you should read this text

The project Really Eth(n)ic uses intercultural and linguistic mediation as an approach to engage some “ethnic” restaurants (by “ethnic” we mean restaurants that are owned or managed by people whose first language is not Italian) in the cities of Milan, Bergamo, and Brescia to reach two specific objectives. The first one is to inform restaurant owners about the newly introduced restrictions by the European Directive “Single Use Plastics” (hereafter SUP Directive), which has banned various single use plastic products from being placed on the market, and many of these items are frequently used by restaurants, especially for takeout and home delivery services. The second objective is to improve the quality of the waste sorting that takes place in restaurants. The interaction with restaurant owners is carried out by intercultural and linguistic mediators, who are key actors in the project, together with a member of staff of the waste collection companies of the involved cities. As an incentive for participation, around 1,000 compostable food bags have been given for free to restaurants that have decided to take part in the project, so they could try them out in their takeout and home delivery services.

Really Eth(n)ic is easy to replicate in other areas and this text is aimed at giving all the basic information to whoever might decide to implement a similar project, so that they do not have to start from zero. The text contains detailed information about the operational steps of the project and the lessons we learnt, with the aim of making project design, management, and implementation easier.

To read about the project, the target choice, the stakeholders involved and the final results, and to see the infographics that summarize the data we collected, you can download the dissemination report, titled **“Really Eth(n)ic. Intercultural and linguistic mediation for sustainability. Single use plastics and separate waste collection in ethnic restaurants in Milan, Bergamo and Brescia”**, at the following links: www.assesta.it and www.unsaccoetnico.it. We suggest reading the dissemination report before you read the following operational guidelines.

Interaction with restaurants is carried out by intercultural and linguistic mediators, who are key figures in the project, accompanied by staff from waste collection companies. In fact, the project experiments with mediation as a nudging tool, based on the "nudge theory", which seeks to steer people towards more environmentally sustainable choices without restricting their freedom (e.g., through bans) or substantially altering economic incentives (e.g., by taxing certain products). The mediation approach, which is typically used in education, health, or law, is here applied to the issue of environmental sustainability, in an economic field as important as the restaurant industry. Restaurateurs are trained in one-on-one meetings on restrictions on single-use plastic products, more environmentally sustainable alternatives, particularly compostable products, on how to recognize them (through certifications) and their proper disposal; they are also trained on proper waste sorting methods and how to facilitate customer activity in the cases of restaurants where customers themselves are responsible for waste sorting. Training for both topics (single-use plastics and waste sorting) is carried out both with the support of written materials (posters and guidelines), translated into different languages, and through practical examples: operators and workers carry single-use products of different materials with them to show to the restaurateurs, and through the visual analysis of waste sorting they can correct any mistakes and answer to doubts.
The project results indicate that intercultural and linguistic mediation can be used to address other issues, such as food waste, food sustainability and supply chain, and the circular economy. Mediation becomes the tool to communicate local policies, verify their effectiveness, and establish a better relationship between institutions and communities or economic actors.

THE REALLY ETH(N)IC PROJECT TIMELINE

YEAR 1

PREPARATION OF FIELD WORK

months 1-2

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Analysis of the SUP Directive and of the difficulties in waste sorting

months 3-4

TERRITORIAL ANALYSIS

Mapping of target restaurants

months 5-6

PREPARATION OF INTERACTION WITH RESTAURANT OWNERS

Writing of questionnaires, construction of the website and preparation of the communication materials
Customization of the app for data collection
Selection and training of mediators

YEARS 1-2

FIELD WORK

months 7-10

PRE-ENGAGEMENT

First meeting with restaurateurs to present the project and ask for participation

months 11-13

ENGAGEMENT

Second meeting with restaurateurs to train them and interview them about the SUP Directive and waste sorting

months 14-16

MONITORING

Last meeting with restaurateurs to verify whether there was an improvement and to award them the certificate of participation

YEAR 2

FORMALIZATION, SHARING AND DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

months 17-18

Presentation of the project to the Municipalities who granted their patronage

Workshop to discuss the method and the results with some selects actors

months 19-20

Writing of the final report aimed at the general public, and of the operational guidelines aimed at actors willing to replicate the project in other areas

→
This infographic shows the steps in the process and their timelines, which can vary significantly depending on the number of restaurants involved.

Action plan and objectives of the project

2

1. Preparation of field work

    a. Context analysis: analysis of the SUP Directive to understand its contents and possible issues in its implementation; understanding of the main mistakes made in waste sorting and the resulting critical issues (through interviews with waste collection companies).
    b. Territorial analysis: construction of the database and map of restaurants to present the project to (the number is decided according to the size of the city and the number of restaurants in the area); identifying the backgrounds of each restaurants is critical for the selection of mediators
    c. Preparation of interaction with restaurant owners: writing of questionnaires; preparation of the website and communication materials to be handed out (translated into all the languages of the project); customization of the app for data collection; selection and training of intercultural and linguistic mediators.

Objectives: attainment of an in-depth understanding of the themes addressed by the project and its opportunities; overview of available alternatives to non-compostable single-use plastic products; construction of a map of possible target restaurants; selection and training of field operators; language simplification with the aim of making translations easier.

2. Field work (interaction with restaurants)

    a. Pre-engagement (information): initial contact is made with all potential target restaurants to introduce them to the project, provide them with basic information and ask if they're interested in participating to the following phases (often this is done through a phone call or email, but in many cases, it is necessary to show up on site); leaflets with a description of the project and guidelines for waste collection are handed out at this stage.
    b. Engagement (training): mediators and waste collection companies staff visit the restaurants that have accepted to participate and engage them in a training session on the project themes. This is done by using the previously written questionnaires and with the support of posters that explain the SUP Directive and the compostable alternatives to non-compostable single-use plastic products. Restaurants receive the promised incentive (in this specific case, the incentive is free compostable food bags to be tested in replacement of the non-compostable plastic products they were already using); some restaurants are offered an in-depth material analysis of their waste (this is an expensive activity done by specialized companies which takes time and resources to be organized, but it provides detailed data that can be valuable for possible information campaigns). During the engagement meetings, various information is collected, both about the context and specific to the project issues, the latter being necessary to verify the effectiveness of the project.
    c. Monitoring: at least two months after the engagement meeting (in this case, two months are considered necessary to test the food bags provided), mediators and waste collection companies staff meet the engaged restaurant owners again in order to assess the replacement rate achieved in the products banned by the SUP Directive and whether improvements have been made in the management of waste collection. Feedback on the project is collected and restaurants are given the certificate of participation and the results of the in-depth material analysis (if they have taken part in it).

Objectives: a decrease in the use of single-use non-compostable plastic products and an improvement of the quality of waste collection (a target must be set); understanding of the impact; improvement of the relationship between restaurants and waste collection management companies.

3. Formalization, sharing and dissemination of results

    a. Meetings and presentations: achievements and evidence gathered are discussed with experts from different fields during open meetings and workshops to be organized in the municipalities involved.
    b. Final report: the model is formalized through the writing of a report that summarizes and analyses the main results with the aim of communicating them externally.

Objectives: drawing an overview of the conclusions from the projects and collecting possible suggestions for the future; institutionalization of the approach tested through the endorsement of the involved municipalities; replication of the model in other municipalities; collection of useful information for the waste collection companies; communication of the importance of the project to all stakeholders and the public.

Practical information

3

Actors to involve

This is a list of necessary actors within the partnership for the project to be successfully implemented in other cities and areas:

- A lead actor that coordinates all actors and is responsible for data collection, data analysis and dissemination
- Mediators who are active in that area (knowledge of the area and previous ties to the communities are considered an asset)
- Partners with expertise in the project themes (in this case, plastics and waste sorting)
- Funders

Other desirable actors who could make the project more successful are:

- Municipalities, among other things through the granting of a patronage
- Trade unions and associations or similar entities that can act as intermediaries with the restaurants, to facilitate their engagement
- Funders or institutional partners willing to offer additional incentives to participants

Database construction

There is no "ethnic restaurants" database (by "ethnic" we mean restaurants that are owned or managed by people whose first language is not Italian), so the first step of the project was to construct such database, with the aim of identifying the restaurants to contact in the pre-engagement phase.
Given the large number of ethnic restaurants in Milan, in this specific case the project partnership decided a priori to focus on those located in three specific neighborhoods, which are characterized by the presence of many ethnic restaurants and communities: Paolo Sarpi (predominantly Chinese communities), NoLo/Via Padova (predominantly South American communities) and Porta Venezia/Buenos Aires (predominantly African and Middle Eastern communities, but extremely heterogeneous). As for the cities of Bergamo and Brescia, the entire municipal area and all non-European cuisine types were considered.

To build the first database to start from, two pre-existing databases were taken as source for this specific case:

- an extraction (provided by Amsa and Aprica) from the TARI (waste tax) database of the cities: the extraction concerned businesses with code 22 (restaurants, trattorias, taverns, pizzerias, pubs) for Milan and Bergamo, and with code 24 (restaurants, trattorias, taverns, pizzerias, canteens, fast-food restaurants, delicatessens) for Brescia;
- an extraction (via Application Program Interface) from the TripAdvisor database, in which the "type of cuisine" is also indicated.

The lists obtained through these two extractions were submitted to the local project partners (Amsa, Aprica, Associazione ADL a Zavidovici, and Cooperativa RUAH) to find out if there were any particularly critical restaurants they wanted to get in touch with for specific reasons, or restaurants of interest to the project that had not been included. This resulted in three lists (241 restaurants in Milan, 99 in Bergamo and 129 in Brescia) that were then checked through a field reconnaissance, to verify primarily their actual existence (the database construction and reconnaissance took place during a lockdown period) and the geographic-linguistic area of origin. The final lists were thus reduced to 200 activities in Milan, 62 in Bergamo, and 76 in Brescia. These were the activities contacted by mediators.

Survey tools

Questionnaires uploaded on the KoBoToolbox app (a data collection, management, and visualization platform used globally for humanitarian actions and to support data systems and open-source technologies for global development, peace, human rights, and humanitarian actions) were developed for data collection to be carried out during the field reconnaissance, restaurant observation, and interviews with restaurateurs. Multimedia files (e.g., photos and voice recordings) can also be uploaded to this app, which can also be used without an Internet connection.
The questionnaires are specific to each step of the project, and they include both closed and open-ended questions. These are the questionnaires we prepared:

- a field reconnaissance questionnaire, dedicated to collecting information on the actual existence of the restaurants listed in the database and details such as their closing days and hours, and location; its aim is to make it easier to contact restaurants;
- an observation grid, to be filled in during the pre-engagement phase to collect information about the restaurants such as size, presence or absence of elements that might suggest sensitivity to environmental sustainability issues, presence or absence of single-use plastic products on display; its aim is to make it possible to select restaurants that are more appropriate to target, in case there are too many requests to join the project;
- a pre-engagement questionnaire, intended to collect basic information about the restaurants, such as the actual nationality of the owners or managers, and whether or not they are interested in participating in the project; its aim is to verify some information and to engage restaurants in the project;
- engagement questionnaire, to be administered during the second meeting with restaurateurs and aimed at collecting detailed information on the single-use plastic products

(compostable or not) they use, on their waste sorting habits, on the division of labor within the business, and other elements that can impact the project themes, such as the weight of takeout and home delivery services on the total restaurant activity;
- questionnaire for the visual inspection of sorted waste, to be filled out twice (during the engagement and monitoring phases) by Amsa/Aprica staff, with the aim of detecting any mistakes in the way restaurants sort waste: it is filled out twice to assess whether there has been any improvement after taking part in the training session offered by the project;
- monitoring questionnaire, to collect feedback from restaurateurs on the project and on the food bags (for those who received them), as well as information on whether single-use non-compostable plastic products were replaced with durable products or with single-use compostable products.

Writing the questionnaires correctly is very important, as the wording of the questions leads to the collection of a certain type of data. It is important to be very clear about the objectives of each questionnaire, and to use closed questions as much as possible, so that the freedom of open-ended answers does not lead to data that cannot be used or that is too vague. When this is not possible, it is necessary to train mediators by explaining exactly what kind of information they need to gather through that question. Lastly, it is important to test the questionnaires during trial interviews with restaurants who make themselves available, to check the performance of the questionnaires and have a chance to change them before fieldwork begins.

Communication materials

In this specific case, six types of communication materials were written and translated into the languages of the project (English, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Turkish, Urdu):

- a manual with sorted waste collection guidelines, different by city, to be given to all contacted restaurants in the pre-engagement phase, regardless of whether they decided to join the project or not;
- a leaflet with an explanation of the project and some information on why the issues it addresses are important, to be handed out during the pre-engagement phase to encourage participation;
- a pair of posters representing graphically the non-compostable single-use plastic products banned or subject to reduction by the SUP Directive and their alternatives, such as compostable plastic or pulp products, to be handed out during the engagement phase and used in support to the training session;
- a sticker with the name of the project to be attached to the shop windows;
- a participation certificate to celebrate the participation and commitment shown, to be handed out during the monitoring phase;
- a website with all the information about the project and with the downloadable version of all materials in all languages, as well as with the possibility to fill a form out to receive more information in case you are interested in implementing the same project in other cities.

Selection of mediators

Some desirable assets to look for in mediators are:

- Interest towards sustainability issues
- Willingness to work on a schedule that varies often and with long breaks throughout the duration of the project (for example, there is a gap of a few months between the engagement and monitoring phases)
- Skills in both written translation and oral mediation (these are different jobs: not all translators are good mediators and vice versa, so it is important to look for people who can do both jobs or, instead, hire two separate people)
- Basic digital skills are required (they will be asked to use tools such as the app for data collection, collaborative platforms such as Google Drive, basic tools such as Microsoft Word, videocall platforms for prompt communication).

Training of mediators

Training mediators appropriately is a key step in making interaction with restaurants effective. Mediators can have very different backgrounds and be experts or knowledgeable in different language areas, but they will all need to be able to convey the basic information related to all project themes to restaurant owners and to collect data in a way that can be easily analyzed. The training course, designed together with the Department of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Mediations of the University of Milan, was delivered by professionals and professors coming from the different partner organizations.

The course covered the following topics:

- elements of environmental history: history of plastics and waste management
- collection and recycling chains for different fractions of municipal waste, with a focus on waste produced by food service activities, and field visits during waste collection activities in the three cities involved in the project
- compostable bioplastics, their role within the circular food economy, European Single Use Plastics Directive
- knowledge of participatory mapping tools
- basic elements necessary to study sustainable waste management practices in a cross-cultural context

Amsa and Aprica staff in charge of interacting with restaurants also took part in the training.

Strengths and criticalities

4

Strengths

- Availability of the TARI database to base the database of target restaurants on
- No sanctioning intent
- Availability of partners with expertise in project issues to train field staff (mediators, staff of waste collection companies)
- Knowledge of the area by field workers and operators
- Prior knowledge of some restaurant owners by mediators
- Absence of formal commitment requests for restaurants (no contracts to sign)
- Materials translated into all project languages and also available online
- Contact with restaurants was kept by mediators throughout the project duration even during breaks
- Availability of the app for data collection on mobile phones during meetings with restaurants
- Presence of the mediator and staff from the waste collection companies at all meetings
- Awarding of certificates of participation

Criticalities

- Preparation of field work and field work itself take a lot of time
- Need to simplify the language of communication materials for an easier translation process into the many languages of the project (some of which are non-European)
- Lack of certain information while building the database of target restaurants
- Mediators:
  a. Selection of intercultural and linguistic mediators (language skills needed for written translation, interest in sustainability, flexible working hours)
  b. Very different backgrounds and skills of selected people (criticality during training)
- Interaction with restaurants:
  a. Getting an initial appointment to present the project is hard (pre-engagement phase)
  b. Restaurateurs fear receiving sanctions because of the meetings
  c. Lack of time on the part of restaurant owners (meetings are held at the restaurant, during business hours, and take about an hour in the engagement phase)
  d. Time distance between pre-engagement, engagement, and monitoring meetings (restaurateurs lose interest in the project, especially in the monitoring meeting, but it is essential to assess the results of the project)
  e. Staff turnover in restaurants preventing interaction with the same person in all the phases
- Need for a "strong" incentive for restaurateurs, both at the engagement and monitoring stage

5

Analysis of the results

The results collected through the app were downloaded in an Excel file. We conducted analyses covering the following aspects:

- the types of cuisines that engaged restaurants offer
- the single-use plastic products, non- and/or compostable, used in the restaurants (which plastic products are used most in the participating restaurants? Do all restaurants use plastic products? How many of these are compostable? Do the compostable ones have the necessary certification? Which ones are banned, and which ones are subject to reduction?
- Takeout and home delivery: do restaurants offer these services? What weight do they have on the total activity of the restaurant? What are the most used platforms to perform these services?
- Knowledge of the SUP Directive: were restaurants aware of the SUP before the project? If yes, how did they get the information?
- Separate waste collection (analysis divided by waste fraction): presence or absence of the bin, how many mistakes are made and what kind
- The above-mentioned data is compared between the situation found during the engagement and the monitoring phases: has there been an improvement in the quality of sorted waste collection and the use of non-compostable single-use plastic products? How much is the rate of replacement of these products with more sustainable alternatives?

Would you like to implement the project in your area? EStà can support you

We have completed of the second edition of the Really eth(n)ic project. The first edition was a pilot action focused on the topic of separate waste collection carried out in 2019 in two Milan neighborhoods, while the current edition expanded the scope to include the topic of single-use plastics, one more neighborhood in Milan and the cities of Bergamo and Brescia.
We believe that the value of the project lies in talking about environmental sustainability, in a simple and concrete way, to target subjects (in this case, non-Italian speaking restaurateurs) who have very different languages and sensitivities, not only if compared to the same Italian-speaking subjects, but also among themselves. We also believe that the relationship built during the training and monitoring meetings, if cultivated, can improve the dialogue between these subjects, their clients, local institutions, and the operators who offer services of various kinds in the city – in this specific case, the companies that take care of waste sorting. The approach can be applied to other environmental sustainability issues (renewable energy, circular economy, waste, responsible purchasing...) and to other economic actors (traders, small entrepreneurs...). We also, obviously, believe that training on environmental sustainability issues is very useful for these same actors but Italian-speaking.
We have written these guidelines to facilitate the replicability of the experience in other territories, but we are also available to support you in different ways: support in project design, training of project partners, involvement in operational phases, project coordination.

EStà is an independent and nonprofit centre for research, education and consulting which promotes innovation in environmental, socioeconomical and cultural systems. It works with public institutions, the third sector, univerisities and research centres, foundations, trade unions and companies and it connects their themes to sustainability, while providing them with useful elements to understand the context in which they operate, to make decisions and to promote active citizenship.

ESTÀ Economia e Sostenibilità