

The Birth of the ‘I Love Food’ Club

Telling the story: City Lab Sofia

The FIT4FOOD 2030 project started in Sofia with a lot of unknowns. But our Lab team got lucky and had the chance to work with a group of bright young people willing to be part of a real change, as you soon will see.

At first, as the project aimed to develop and deliver educational trainings, we contacted a school we usually partner with. Our collaboration worked really well and we quickly started to build the foundation of City Lab Sofia’s first educational module for young primary school children. Our team communicated frequently with one teacher – Lambina. She was eager to teach real life skills to her students and at the same time had previous professional experience in the field of food innovation. Still, we were amazed at how many different ideas Lambina came up with every time we spoke. Little did we know that she had a lot of helpers!

Behind the scenes, Lambina had brought on board a bunch of high school students, who were interested in the food system, to participate in the preparation of our course for young pupils. And that’s how the ‘I Love Food’ Club started! Formed by all the boys and girls who helped throughout the process of the module preparation and piloting, its members searched for pictures, printable materials and - the best part - facilitated the module implementation themselves, stepping into the shoes of teachers and mentors. They found it really fun and all were happy as the piloting of the course build with joint efforts was a success. But I, as the Coordinator of the City Lab Sofia, hoped to see people engaged not only for a few weeks, but empowered in the longer term with a variety of knowledge and skills. At this moment, I hoped but couldn’t know for sure whether ‘I Love Food’ Club would continue to exist.



Primary school students try the activity ‘Traffic light of food’ from the educational module ‘I Love Food!’

“We are participating in the national statistical competition” – Lambina excitedly told me. Wait, what? Statistics, competition? Great, but how was the City Lab connected with it? It seems the ‘I Love Food’ Club not only continued to meet, but decided to further deepen their knowledge of the food system. The students researched nutrition, preparing and sending out a survey in their school to obtain precious information the eating habits of their classmates. The boys and the girls had to learn a lot about infometrics and how statistics work, but after processing the data they were ready with a poster showing current students’ eating habits and making recommendations on what could be done to make their school environment healthier. The club was ready for the national contest. And yes, you guessed it, the first national award for the ‘I Love Food’ Club made us all so proud and so glad, mainly because these students achieved success by themselves starting from just their interest in how the food system works. For them it was a powerful experience to see how efforts and knowledge are rewarded and appreciated. So, the ‘I Love Food’ Club received their congratulations and small prizes, and its poster was sent forward to the international competition – all national winners participated in it, so we didn’t think about it further.

It was summer, the school year was far behind all of us when I got another call from Lambina. “They came second!”. This time, I knew what she was talking about. “No way! From among how many competitors? More than 35 countries?”. If the first national prize felt special, the second place in an international competition was a complete surprise. No one expected it – it was the club’s first attempt at statistics and the first school semester learning about the food system. And while the students weren’t able to go to Kuala Lumpur for the award ceremony, we could feel that something had really changed: they started to believe that their voice matters. What more could we want?



Food Club students with their winning poster ‘How do I eat?’.

After that summer, I didn’t worry so much about the ‘I Love Food’ Club. The next school year, it continued its work and although Lambina was often ready to point out in what ways the students could improve, they didn’t stop learning and experimenting. FIT4FOOD2030 continued to be present: by implementing one of educational modules developed by the City Lab Athens, they were able to start an enterprise for their school, actually registering it and - what is more - finding a way to fund it. I was especially glad to be part of this whole process as through the City Lab Sofia the students were able to

meet different specialists, learn a lot about what is being done in their city, build and operate a website, see how PR and marketing could work, and so on. The awards continued to come their way – this time from the Junior Achievement Bulgaria’s student entrepreneurship competition, but what I am most happy about is that, in its third year of activity, students will be able to build their enterprise’s idea in practice: several green zones at their school where everyone could sit and enjoy a homemade snack and learn something new about the food system. It’s clear we lit a spark which set young people’s hearts and minds on fire.