INTRODUCTION: Make bread, not war!

I was surprised at not being surprised when during the protests in 2013 against the government corruption in Bulgaria various people, organizations, and journalists suggested to me to set a table in front of the Parliament and invite politicians, protesters and policemen to make and break bread together! These protests in Bulgaria were the culmination of
over two decades of what people in the country called with irony “the Transition” from Communism/socialism to democracy. The period was marked with large popular disillusionment and resentment towards the falsehood, hypocrisy and corruption of both systems, which claimed to be one thing, both supposedly very different, and ended up being the same rotten structures offering to the common person no real improvement of quality of life. In 2013, a lot of young people, ignited by large protests in the main universities in the capital Sofia, rose to protest in front of the Parliament building, joined by thousands of others. People wanted real “transition”, real change, real life in the vacuum of so many false promises.

I was admittedly not surprised with the suggestion to set a kneading table and bake with the feuding sides in front of the Parliament, since for the past three years my action research and applied development work in Bulgaria had been experimenting and proving successful new methods for community engagement, dialogue, and cooperation – all centered around forms of collective bread-making. These community activities are “not by bread alone”, for they always include “kneading with metaphors”, or a way of engaging all participants to share about their lives, fears, and hopes, and discuss their community, society and the future – again, all by thinking through the bread ingredients (flour, yeast, salt, water, etc) and the bread-making processes (sifting, mixing, rising, shaping, proofing, baking, breaking and sharing).

The baking events quickly grew from one city, Gabrovo, to more than a dozen other cities in Bulgaria. They became catalysts for local creativity, as locals started shaking off their embarrassment and undertaking the initiative to present their art and engage others in co-creation (music, painting, pottery, theater, etc.). What was surprising to me and is striking in general for the context of Bulgarian society, which has been highly divided and divisive since the fall of socialism (and as many would argue has been so for centuries as a national cultural trait), is that people of all walks of life tend to come and mix freely in these events. People come because they have heard by word of mouth or in the media, others, indeed those who are vulnerable or isolated from mainstream society, often come as a collective, organized by the social institution that takes care of them (orphanage, rehab center, hospice, etc.). The important thing, however, is that bread-making ultimately results to not be the main goal or focus for people, but it becomes a vehicle for communication and friendships: very diverse groups come together and engage in the same simple act of baking and sharing, which makes hardly any distinction among the diverse abilities, skills, or educational backgrounds of the participants.
From one town to another, around 20 cities in Bulgaria currently have initiated their own community baking activities, asking me to train them at the beginning and then continuing on their own. Beyond Bulgaria, the network of people and organizations who have embraced the vision and have used the baking-with-metaphors and bread therapy methods includes (chronologically) Italy, Peru, South Africa, Israel and Palestine, Russia, Brazil, Hungary, UK, Scotland, USA, Spain, Mexico, Switzerland, Serbia, Tadzikistan, Thailand, Portugal, New Zealand, and it keeps growing (for more information see www.breadhousesnetwork.org). Across these diverse countries, the groups that have been engaging in collective bread-making are even more diverse and often hard to imagine making and breaking bread together: former prisoners and local families, gang members in low-income ghettos, women war veterans and university students, orphaned children and elderly people from hospices, foster families helping to inspire girls escaped from trafficking to keep their unwanted children, women victims of domestic violence and their children, young men suffering drug and alcohol addictions, sight-impaired and deaf people, people with various physical and mental special needs (Down Syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy) and with mental derangements (depression and mild schizophrenia), businessmen and women and low-income immigrants, refugees, university students, professors and the university janitors…just to mention a few, but it is indeed sometimes hard for the participants to believe their eyes that some of these people are at all making bread, let alone making it shoulder to shoulder with others whom they would probably never even speak to.

If we are to summarize why the activities and methods spread so quickly, what I have gathered as my participant observations and personal opinions from the participants across countries is that the most appealing aspect to all is the simplicity and yet inspiring creativity of baking with metaphors – anyone can make it and break it, but at the same time it nurtures not only the belly but even more so the mind and the heart. Bread-making triggers intriguing, unexpected and rich meaning-making processes out of the memories, associations, and stories that the multi-sensorial experience catalyzes.

When I set off in 2007 to study the effects of national and transnational (UNESCO) cultural policies in Bulgaria, Cuba, and Brazil, I never expected that I would end up making bread or studying bread and bread-making as a locally-meaningful cultural practice and symbol. Yet, indeed, bread proved to be a particularly relevant analytical tool, both phenomenologically and semiotically, to help me observe and understand otherwise largely invisible or unspoken cultural schemata and process in
community building and development. In fact, bread proved to be as important a symbol of cultural, social, economic, political, and ecological issues and transitions as was salt in India related to the British salt monopoly that Gandhi first rose against.

The Salt March, also known as the Salt Satyagraha, was an important part of the Indian independence movement in 1940. It was a nonviolent protest and direct tax resistance against the British salt monopoly in colonial India, and triggered the wider Civil Disobedience Movement. The Salt March began on 12 March 1930, lasted almost a month until Gandhi reached the town of Dandi, and after making salt in Dandi, Gandhi continued southward along the coast, engaging in making salt and simultaneously political discussions and community meetings on the way.

The symbolic act of making salt with the people and sharing it freely was as powerfully symbolic as is baking and breaking bread with someone in the Bulgarian cultural context, or, for that matter, in many of the other wheat-based European, North American, and Middle-Eastern cultures. As a sign of sharing and friendship, on the one hand, bread has also been, on the other, a highly politically charged symbol of protest, struggle for change and hope for peace. “Bread and Roses” was the slogan that acquired an idiomatic and iconic value after the workers’ protests in 1912 in the USA, when people called for dignity not only in terms of working conditions and wages (the “bread”) but also in their striving to secure leisure time and access to the arts (the “roses”).

In the case of Bulgaria, bread is used in many popular expressions and idioms, for it is also the main element present in key religious rituals marking the central rites of passage in one’s life. This is so in the general practice of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, but in Bulgaria there is also a long pre-Christian bread tradition that makes bread such a recognizable cultural sign. Thus, the wide affection of people towards bread as a key religious and social symbol in Bulgaria was one of the reasons why I got interested in it as a topic of research and, later on, it evolved as a tool for community engagement and discussions.

As a researcher alongside a community activist, I envisioned collective bread-making at its inception as an auto-ethnographic project, in which the shared space, time, and action could serve as a forum for discussions and dialogue, a form of improvised focus groups to discuss the social and cultural transformations in Bulgaria during the so-called “transition” period. In the process over months and years, however, these gatherings became so popular and spread in other cities that they evolved as a form of civic fora geared towards local development.
These baking sessions were often used as platforms for civil society to voice its plea to the authorities, as sometimes members of the local authorities, mayors, school masters, even once the President of Bulgaria, took part in the baking events and got involved not only in “dialogue” but also in collective “doing”. Instead of purely discursive “roundtable” discussions these became engaged experiences around a tangible round table where the hierarchical structures of power and communication re-aligned temporarily through the breaking of bread. Though to some extent this might appear utopic, it has turned out to be quite simple, applicable, and successful in bringing people together to talk to each other – quite often even people who otherwise traditionally feud with each other, such as different ethnic groups or socio-economic classes.

Again, similar to the way Gandhi used salt, both as a concrete contested issue and as an important symbol and trigger for civic activism, the enthusiasm and civic initiatives inspired by collective bread-making in Bulgaria reflect the hunger for unity and change of the many diverse groups of people and communities, divided by the harsh economic and social inequalities of “the Transition” period. What is so important in the cases of bread in Bulgaria and salt in India as tools in social activation is that popular symbols turned out to be very powerful in organizing and uniting people, but also in having a lasting emotional effect on people, sustaining the momentum towards longer-term engagement with transformation at the community-level rather than short-term protests. In this sense, I argue that when discussing issues of sustainability in social change, it is crucial to understand the signs, symbols, idioms, and thus the subtle ranges of sensitivity of a culture or a group of people in order to comprehend what is meaningful for them in “development” or “sustainability”, and what symbols or ideas inspire them to imagine new paths in those directions.

In this auto-ethnography, I analyze and frame what I call cross-sensorial learning processes in informal “communities of practice” and the role of co-creative activities, with the main case study of collective bread-making, as catalysts for social transformation and community development. The observations reveal the importance of such co-creative activities in generating what in previous works I have defined as community creative capital (Savova 2007). Community creative capital defines a wide range of community-arts-driven social relations, networks, and forms of cooperation that are at the crossroads of various types of “social capital” and “cultural capital”. The intriguing effects of the arts and creativity on people and communities examined in the generation of community creative capital give these two widely accepted concepts of
social relations new perspectives and important understanding of the dynamics of human behavior and social psychology.

Here I analyze in particular the role and effect of the senses and various sensory experiences on the ways people engage with each other and build sense of belonging and community, of meaning and purpose. The study examines how people involved in sensorially-stimulating, experiential informal learning dynamics develop various channels of transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, values, and cooperation. The main question it poses is: “Does the sensorial engagement in co-creation affect and change the structures of power, communication, and cooperation across socio-economic, ethnic, or cultural boundaries?” The role of the senses in community engagement and development dynamics is understood through the processes of production and circulation of social capital, cultural capital, and community creative capital in the particular case of collective bread-making.

The overall theoretical frameworks I developed in my dissertation defended at Princeton University’s Anthropology Department and titled *Bread and Home: Global Cultural Politics in the Tangible Places of Intangible Heritage* (2013), to which a part of this research belongs, examined more broadly the meanings of production of cultural capital and cultural policies fostering arts centers as spaces for integrated social development. While the main research method at the outset of my dissertation research was the classical anthropological “participant observation”, as the study evolved I started actively being engaged in creating with the communities occasions and activities leading to the birth of a non-governmental organization, the International Council for Cultural Centers, that I later analyzed through “action research” methods (Torbert 2001).

This paper analyzes in particular the Bread House project I developed in Bulgaria as an auto-ethnographic project. In many ways such endeavors are much more complex than a standard ethnography, because in action research the researcher faces various issues of self-reflexivity and subjectivity. In either case, however, anthropologists have widely agreed that the ethnographic field is always affected and in varied degrees constructed by the fieldwork, leaving aside as unrealistic and unnecessary any claims to pure “objectivity” and “non-interference”.

Nowadays, more and more anthropologists see the benefits of action research, as well as that of multi-sited and multi-locale ethnographies (Amit 2000, Marcus 1995). The field of engaged, applied anthropology is also growing for its potential concrete contributions to society. I certainly support this group of engaged scholarship, for I believe it is a field in
anthropology that can bring very interesting and useful observations, new perspectives on common issues, and most importantly it can contribute new ways of addressing social problems, in particular when related to the wider sphere of research on sustainability that this book examines.

**Liminality in Community Transformations: Sustainable Development from the Hearth**

My hands-on community development work and action research led me to found in 2008 the organization called International Council for Cultural Centers (I3C). I3C started off as a slow process of connecting community cultural centers, starting with the centers I was visiting and studying for my PhD dissertation in Latin America and Europe, and then connecting people to people from directors of regional NGOs to representatives of Ministries of Culture from around the world whom I got to meet during my work as a consultant for UNESCO’s Culture Sector in Paris in 2008. People representing national networks and the actual networks started getting associated with I3C, country after country, and the International Council is now connecting in an informal platform more than 50 countries with their national networks of community cultural centers offering arts-based life-long learning. I3C held the first World Summit of Community Cultural Centers and Networks in Bulgaria, when these people and networks from different continents met for the first time, and it is currently one of the largest platforms for community arts in the world.

While developing the I3C network and researching community arts networks in Bulgaria, I started delving into the locally significant metaphors, symbols, and ritual practices around bread-making, since people often mentioned it when discussing cultural heritage and the meaning of creativity. Then I got the idea to start organizing collective baking sessions, but I never found the courage, having never made bread myself before. But the right moment came in a very unusual place with a very unusual kindred spirit.

In 2009 I found myself in the heart of the Peruvian Amazon jungle, in one of the most isolated by land cities in the world, Iquitos, at the “First Global Forum on Arts as a Bridge towards Wellbeing” organized by the World Health Organization. Side by side with Patch Adams, famous with his clown nose and doctor’s garment, founder of the global movement to heal people with humor (humor therapy), Patch gave me the inspiration and the push to test my idea of using baking to unite and inspire people, which he perceived as a potential healing – already back then I started thinking of it as a “bread therapy” similar to his “humor therapy”.
One of the Forum’s days dedicated to community workshops, I organized an event announced to the local community as an evening of making and sharing bread, nothing more than that. To everyone’s amazement, especially mine, men and teenagers also came in addition to the women and children, and the male participation had not happened in any of the other workshops on different art forms that were being held and open to the community the whole week! The breaking of gender roles, stereotypes, and divisions that took place during this very first test workshop showed clearly how collective bread-making, mixed with spontaneous sharing and stories told, and the shaping of dough as a sculpting material was a form of collective, co-creative activity not only appealing to all but with the potential to help people rethink their social roles and behaviors. Already in those first experiences around bread, what was evolving was the Theater of Crumbs method, which we currently use in Bulgaria and in other countries, described further below.

One of the main reasons for the appeal of this type of collective event, expressed by many of the participants in these baking sessions, is that unlike other arts, bread does not require special skills and is not limited to certain level of education or profession, neither gender nor age, and at the same time it inspires creativity and sharing. With time I, indeed, observed how the experience breaks socio-economic boundaries and fosters naturally integration and cooperation in a multi-cultural context because it is both something very traditional and known and at the same time a very new kind of collective experience for mixed ages and backgrounds.

Many people who participate have shared that baking together with others is deeply healing and empowering for them, or, in the case of people with mental disabilities and psychological derangement who cannot verbalize well, it is easy to notice significant improvement in their communication and self-confidence over time.

The touch of dough and, in particular, the aroma of hot bread unlocked hidden memories and soft emotional states in people with deep traumas. A young woman war-veteran suffering mental trauma after the fights in Afghanistan and currently housed at a shelter for homeless veterans, looked with scepticism at the baking when professors and students from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst (USA) invited the women to bake. Then suddenly, the aroma of the other breads make her eyes water – she remembered the aroma of her grandmother’s biscuits when she was a child, which was “one of the best times in my life”! She then went to imagine a home and a new life after the horrors of war.

Similarly, another woman, victim of domestic violence who regularly attended Bread House gatherings in Bulgaria, in the town of Plovdiv,
shared how they not only help her cope with the deep emotional traumas but even gave her the strength to strike out on her own. She wrote once:

I was desperate and I had no direction. I did not have the courage to think of life improvements or turning a new page in my life. Baking therapy gave me more confidence and self-esteem to make responsible decisions…. Thanks to the talks and discussions during our meetings, I thought about the different stages of my life. It helped me a lot! Finally, I took the decision to buy my own home. All of my life I lived in rented space.

Fig 4-2. Bread puppets expressing the vision and hopes of the traumatized women in Plovdiv for a better future life, in a home where the aroma of hot bread is a marker of peace and love.

A foundational conceptual framework I found relevant in my analysis of these co-creative dynamics often affecting personal and communal transformations is the concept of the “liminal,” or borderline, in general, and more particularly the notion of “liminoid” space developed by Victor Turner in analyzing play as a ritual practice (1979). While “liminal” denotes the state of transition and the ambiguity between categories of a person’s position in society, “liminoid”, from Greek, means “resembling liminal.” It defines ritual re-enactments that are framed as leisure and are open to choice and re-structuring. Turner argues that the key element that distinguishes leisure and play from traditional rituals is not the lack of
seriousness (since we can “seriously” learn categories and norms through humor and game). Rather than seriousness, what distinguishes the “liminoid” from the “liminal” is the freedom of choice as to whether to participate in the activity, how to participate, and what to take out of it as applicable to one’s daily life.

It is precisely this freedom of choice yet regularity of engagement in collective co-creation that I observed negotiated and enacted first within the spatial and symbolic domains of the community cultural centers and later around the kneading tables of the Bread Houses. Within the community cultural centers the particular “framing” of traditional arts and modern arts as informal leisure activities allowed much space for bargains over meaning, substance, form, behavior, etc. Around the bread-making table, that open space for creativity was created by the lack of defining categories such as “art” but a simple, open, free collective bread-making. A particularly intriguing aspect of the relative freedom in these interactions is the opening of space and time for the sharing of intimate information among strangers, which in many cases is information kept away from close relatives and friends because of the many ties and webs of relationships that the information could affect and/or disturb.

The personal rethinking of one’s role in society – thus a form of liminal role transition « in-between » already determined social categories – propelled wider communal transformations towards accepting and including previously excluded, feared or scorned people and groups (ethnic minorities, mentally and physically disabled, orphans, the poor, the homeless, in short, the “Other”).

One such story of the importance of the “liminoid” states and the shift of categories in the community happened with a young man with Down Syndrome, Julian. He started coming regularly to the weekly community baking gatherings at the first Bread House community center, and very soon the work with dough inspired him to work more and more with his hands, and Julian offered to give others massage. At first, the other participants were worried and a bit scared, because he usually rushed to strangers to hug them and people in town used to run away and tried to ignore him. But a few old ladies around the table finally agreed that he give them a massage, and – what a surprise for all! – Julian turned out to be very good at it! (later on I discovered that one of the aspects of Down Syndrome is that physically the hands can be extraordinarily strong). Overnight, Julian got to be liked and respected, and the old ladies would look forward to each weekly baking when they would also receive a free massage. The self-fulfillment visible on the young man’s face could simply not be described! Indeed, overnight and through the regularity of
community baking gatherings he got to acquire a new status, a new category in the community, and the “liminoid”, play-like context of the informal and entertaining collective baking further facilitated all these transitions.

Fig.4-3. Julian, a young man with Down Syndrome, like many others found accepting environment and friends around the wood-fired oven and kneading table. People of all ages and all walks of life mixed without any unease, as if this is the most natural thing, and perhaps it is when the right conditions are at place.

To return back to the history of how the baking-with-metaphors method evolved and spread after my life-changing meeting with Patch Adams, after Peru other conferences and projects took me around the
world from New York to Japan, South Korea, South Africa, and Barcelona, and I took time beyond the conferences to organize bread-making evenings at local organizations I happened to come across. This is how more and more organizations and individuals started joining what was already growing as an informal social network and we could even call it an informal movement around bread as a widely accessible art form and a universal symbol of peace. At the COP15 ecological summit with a group of kindred spirits we called this simply the BREAD Movement, but filled the acronym with the meanings of what collective bread-making strives to achieve: Bridging Resources for Ecological and Art-based Development.

The first Bread House in this network, the first grain in the granary (a metaphor I further examine below), was an experiment and a collective volunteer undertaking that evolved when I donated for community use the old, uninhabited house of my great-grandmother to be turned into a local cultural center where people could regularly come together for bread-making events. The idea of reviving the aroma of warm bread reminded many people of the old-time community bakeries, called furni in Bulgarian (similar to the words in Italy (forno), Spain (horno), and France (four), and similar tradition to the community baking spaces in those countries and in Germany, Austria, and perhaps most European countries).

The memories and nostalgia for the community bakeries that disappeared under socialism in Bulgaria and the growing hunger for places for people to meet and interact without the requirement of financial transactions (which limits people from going to cinema, theater, restaurants, etc.) inspired many volunteers to help me fix the house, rebuild the old roof, donate old furniture and animate the whole space as a community center. In just a month, in December 2009, the Bread House was inaugurated, and since then more than 20 other communities across Bulgaria and more than 15 countries on 5 continents got inspired to try similar activities.

The second place that was quick to create a Bread House was the small town of Zlatariza, about an hour from Gabrovo. A teacher in Zlatariza, hearing about the community center in Gabrovo mixing all kinds of people around bread, imagined that bread-making might also help heal her community, which had been chronically suffering for centuries now from divisions and even conflicts among the five main ethnic groups (Roma, Turkish, Vlah/Romanian, Pomak/Bulgarian Muslims, and Bulgarian Christians as the majority). Thus step by step, starting with children from the different groups and then slowly inviting parents to informally join under the pre-text of helping their children in kneading the dough, adults
who previously would not speak to each other started rubbing shoulders and kneading friendships around the kneading table.

**Sensory Houses: Cross-sensorial Learning in Inter-generational/cultural Doing**

Other cities and countries were inspired by the bread methods as a starting point to infuse with innovative yet appealing to a wide range of people activities—this was done both to further revitalize already existing community cultural centers or create new spaces with specially-built traditional wood-fired ovens, when people were particularly inspired to fully engage all senses. An intriguing case was one high-school in the Bulgarian town of Nova Zagora, whose Principal had the initiative to build the wood-fired oven in the school yard and, seeking locally people in need of socialization, she discovered a village with a refugee camp (full due to the Syrian refugee wave) and facilitated the meeting of the refugees with the students and other local people.

![Students from the different classes at a high-school in Nova Zagora get united by their Director and vision to build a communal wood-fired oven, which becomes a focus of multiple inter-generational and inter-cultural gatherings – a perfect case of “cross-sensorial learning”](image)
The inspiration that cross-sensorial experiences and the spaces meant to stimulate and host them provoked in people is the reason why I refer to these community spaces as sensory houses. Many people participating in the community-baking events have shared that they love the aroma of the wood-fired oven and the hot bread, its taste, the tender dough touch, the sculptures made of it, the stories and often songs shared around the table – in sum, all 5 senses that the experience stimulates and engages, all at once.

While these deeply sensorial experiences are new to the conceptualization of culture and arts, introducing touch and taste, a kitchen space or a kneading table and an oven, to the space of a cultural center or a community center helps shake the often stagnant, old-time programming of these spaces. And it is precisely the sensorial, as much as the semiotic, analysis of these communal spaces that is crucial to understanding their potential for fomenting sustainable community development, in particular because they manage to bring together diverse and often marginalized groups that would hardly otherwise interact.

At different international conferences where I presented my doctorate research or non-profit work with the International Council for Cultural Centers, during my presentations or in informal conversations with cultural workers, artists, and politicians from various countries, it was invariably the Bread House model that inspired them most to comment, share, envision, and want to try the methods in their cultural organizations and promote it through their cultural networks. As expressed by the President of the European Network of Cultural Centers, ENCC, the continental network of a dozen countries with networks similar to the chitalishte, “tastes and aroma lack widely in our cultural centers, and at the same time they are crucial in attracting and connecting people, so we should really re-think the role of food alongside the arts.”

I would define the Bread House as a type of community cultural center engaging all senses as a sensory house, building on the formally accepted term “sensory room”, which is a specially organized and outfitted room used to stimulate the senses and help the learning processes for children with various types of disabilities. However, sensory rooms are usually outfitted with mainly artificial materials to touch (plastic, rubber, various artificial substances), lights, and sounds. Who has decided and why that these artificial sensory stimuli are better and more healing than natural elements? Why not touching wood and clay, plants and stones, flour and water (dough and bread), listen to birds singing and the wind whistling, or observing the natural play of the lights through tree leaves?

Most modern forms of therapy and therapy settings/spaces are created around various contemporary, artificially created materials (for example
play-dough and sculpting clay, but not natural bread dough) and artificially designed processes (for example, sitting on a couch and trying to retell your life, or drawing or playing instruments as if to represent your inner world, rather than working the land and caring for plants and animals as a direct way to help you restructure and order your inner world). Having observed as anthropologist traditional small-scale cultures and their traditional ecological and cultural knowledge, I am amazed that the increasingly “developed” world is coming up with new substitutes for things that have proven most useful and helpful to humankind for millennia!

The senses, which compose and affect most deeply our bodily and emotional states, are perhaps a main starting point for any healing process, whether called officially “therapy” or a process of community healing and building. Thus, the sensory house as a concept, though inspired by the concrete case study of the Bread Houses, could apply to any community center or communal social space – a “third space” beyond home and work – where the activities stimulate a few or all human senses. Importantly, the sensorial stimulation should not be limited to reactionary experience (for example, watching a performance or listening to concert), but through active engagement in creation. This engagement takes place through some form of co-creation rather than passive consumption of a cultural, educational, or other products or services.

Out of the collective bread-making activities for mixed ages, professions, and ethnic groups, evolved a series of methods and processes of engagement, which I would define as cross-sensorial learning dynamics. These are based on the observations that when all senses are involved – different from the case of other artistic activities where especially taste is usually missing – people are additionally stimulated to open up and share intimate experiences, knowledge, emotions, and talents and thus learn together and from each other. To better understand these mixed-group learning (as an aspect of informal life-long learning) dynamics but not in a didactic context but an informal community setting, I analyze them through the theoretical framework of “experiential learning” and the formation of “communities of practice”, developed by anthropologist Jean Lave (1982) and by Etienne Wenger (2002).

Many of the ways we have of talking about learning and education assume that learning “has a beginning and an end; that it is best separated from the rest of our activities; and that it is the result of teaching” (Wenger 1998: 3), but in the late 1980s and early 1990s two researchers from different disciplines, anthropology and pedagogy, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger developed a model of “situated learning” that proposed how
learning involves a process of engagement in a “community of practice” in various spheres of our daily lives and with various communities of people, but all these diverse kinds of knowledge are transmitted in direct personal contact and interactions, and best registered through hands-on engagement with things, people, and places.

An article on the various approaches to learning (Smith 1999) summarizes well Wenger’s (c 2007) three elements distinguishing a community of practice from other groups and communities:

*The domain:* A community of practice is something more than a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

*The community:* In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

*The practice:* Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

The key here is that a community of practice involves much more than the technical skills and knowledge of a task, and what ultimately matters more, even most, to the members is their involvement in a set of relationships and common values and ways of coping with reality (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98).

I have been observing similar processes at the Bread Houses and through the Bread and Art methods in different communities and countries. People are coming together at first sight interested in the particular “domain” of knowledge of bread-making – traditions, recipes, stories, the Theater of Crumbs creative method, etc. Yet very soon it becomes clear in their comments, in the committed coming to the events where different recipes or skills are not necessarily introduced, but rather more and more personal stories and dreams are shared, thus it becomes clear that collective bread-making gives them a sense of collective identity and a constant source of informal learning much more than concrete bread-related knowledge.

The ultimate goal in these forming “communities of practice” is not bread-making itself, or bread as a food or product, but while the interest in bread has initially been the trigger to joining the community, in the long run what becomes more valuable to people is the shared “practice” of the
mixture of bread-making and story-telling. I have previously referred to the relationships and networks triggered by community co-creative activities as the generation of *community creative capital* (Savova 2009). In fact, the generation of such *community creative capital* is interrelated with the formation of “communities of practice”. They are a form of self-organizing system that has many characteristics of the associational life, as analyzed mainly through the concept of “social capital” by Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, and others. However, the one main aspect that distinguishes *community creative capital* from other types of social or cultural capital is the regular *co-creativity*, a form of “liminoid” state that is both ritual and non-binding, and the unusual mixing of people of all walks of life inspired to engage in artistic creation out of love and searching for meaning and belonging. This is why such communal activities easily help transcend social barriers like class, economic limits, education, and different modes of behavior, thinking, and relating to others. Arts, and here I include bread-making as both an art and as a broader community creative practice, are liberating for they take people out of their standard categories, out of their comfort zone, and set them within a “liminoid” context where relationships and status categories are fairly flexible and prone to on-going restructuring.

Some art forms, in fact, emphasize specifically the need to shake people’s comfort zone and let them enter zones that are often unknown and uncomfortable, such as the case of theater and even more so psychodrama; in many cases dancing as well. But other art forms, and this is particularly the case for bread-making as a form of sculpture, enable people to leave their own individual comfort zone and to collectively construct a new comfort zone that is comfortable and pleasant and stimulating to all. And this is also due to the way the smell, taste, and warmth of hot bread activate important archetypes (as Jung’s psychological categories define them), or powerful associations with home and family and all of their derivatives — love, care, safety, sharing.

Communities of practice in Lave and Wenger’s analysis also tend to create their own shared “reertoire of ideas”, which include memories, vocabulary, symbols, tools, documents, and rituals that in affirm the identity of the group and strengthen its shared practice (or a whole ritualized *praxis*). This is what happens also at the Bread Houses, where people have started developing their own language and gestures, related to the bread-making ingredients, the stages of kneading, and baking and sharing – all evolving as metaphors and idiomatic expressions in daily life, pointing to processes and stages of relationships, of people’s characteristics, and of issues in society and the potential ways to cope with
them. For example, a common phrase circulated among bread-making participants is that a personal or often political and social issue or situation needs to be allowed to “rise/proof”, i.e. to evolve and get resolved with time.

Lave and Wenger further develop their concepts of the stages of learning, from “legitimate peripheral participation” to “full participation”, through ethnographic observations of different apprenticeships (US Navy quartermasters, non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous, meat-cutters, Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors). They found how initially people have to join the periphery of the communities of practice and gradually become more engaged with the main, core processes of the community. This is how they move from “legitimate peripheral participation” to “full participation” (Lave and Wenger 1991: 37), and in this sense, the key measurement indicator of the learning process is not the degrees or quality of knowledge acquisition but the degrees and quality of social engagement and participation. The main factor for participation is the situation, or the whole environment, of the learning process, and thus they define the “situational learning” process.

Similar to Lave and Wenger, over the years since 2009, I have been observing and analyzing how the Bread and Arts methods help form “communities of practice”, inspired not only by the collective activity but, intriguingly, by the interesting to them diversity of the participants. At first, participants who are from minorities (such as the Roma in Bulgaria) or stigmatized communities (such as the low-income Afro-American neighborhoods) might remain at the periphery of the group and yet even then their participation is “legitimate peripheral participation” – they usually remain a bit to the side mainly because of their own self-awareness and insecurity rather than the others’ negative behavior. However, usually only one subsequent bread-making gathering is enough to pull the previously peripheral participants to “full participation”, because the informal, playful environment is conducive for people to quite easily let go of prejudices and fears, and in fact, often the diverse groups are themselves pleasantly surprised and excited that they can so easily feel free from previous stereotypes.
Fig. 4-5, 4-6. A young woman war-veteran in Massachusetts (USA), suffering mental trauma after the fights in Afghanistan, participates with enthusiasm in the baking after her initial skepticism – bread touches her because it reminds her of her grandmother. A young man from Harlem, NY, a hip-hop fan and possibly a gang member, also joins and becomes like a child around the dough, joking that it’s better than the monetary “dough”.

The role of the engagement of the senses in the stages and degrees of acquiring proximity, exchanging and thus learning and building social relations, from “legitimate peripheral participation” to “full participation”, gives substance to my framework of cross-sensorial learning. The case of collective bread-making is a particular, in a way exemplary, case of cross-sensorial learning, for it engages not only all the physical senses - touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing – but also triggers memories and associations, which could be referred to as a type of a “sixth sense” experience. As pointed earlier, it is connected to most people’s archetypal associations with home, family, and childhood memories. Intriguingly, sometimes people express what I analyzed in my dissertation *Bread and Home: Global Cultural Politics in the Tangible Places of Intangible Heritage* (2013) as non-memories.
Non-memories refer to cases when people share that “bread reminds them of home,” yet it turns out they had no actual such experience in their childhood or at present. Therefore, the cross-sensorial learning processes with other people seem to be producing and multiplying images and imagined scenarios for a happier past and more meaningful future.

Bread is clearly the one food that, when hot and fresh, does not leave people dispassionate, but, in the words of a mid-aged man in the USA engaged in the Princeton Bread House gatherings: “nothing can be more innocent but also more passionate than bread”! He used to describe the experiences of collective bread-making as “high-touch, rather than high-tech.” In a society that is increasingly dependent on technology and often suffers distancing of real human relations due to disguised virtual proximity in online social networks, he pointed to bread-making gatherings as very much needed and useful in order to help people rediscover the meaning and joy in the basic things in life.

Observing the collective bread-making activities in particularly inter-cultural and inter-ethnic contexts (such as the USA, UK, South Africa, Peru, Spain, Austria, Tadjikistan, etc.), I realized that a key element of what makes these activities so well fit to engage diverse people is the collective doing rather than “dialogue”, and the possibility for sharing food, which is universally a symbolic act and tangible experience of friendship. The activities foster both inter-generational and inter-cultural co-creation of both tangible objects and civic initiatives, projects, etc. Such processes can be defined as inter-cultural and inter-generational doing, rather than the concept of “inter-cultural dialogue”, which is used as a common term – but often empty of substance and results – in policies and projects.

Building on the observations and lessons learned from the baking-with-metaphors activities, I started developing together with anthropology students a cross-sensorial educational program called « World Cultures: Cultural Anthropology for Children and Youth» to teach anthropology to the younger generations by taking them on a journey across countries in the world where I have done research and community projects, exploring their cultural characteristics from an anthropological perspective and with ethnographic tools at hand. In Bulgaria, but also as far as I know in the rest of world, anthropology is not part of the core subjects studied in primary or high-school, and young people often have not even heard of the discipline until they reach university.

However, it is precisely anthropology, I would argue, that can help the young generations develop a wide, rich, open worldview, trying to understand with analytical tools and emotional intelligence the « Other »
and embrace with joy that diversity from early age onward. A key distinctive component of the educational program and what makes it a cross-sensorial learning experience is the baking of traditional breads or pastries (and sometimes cooking) for the particular culture. The baking/cooking take place at the beginning of the lesson for about half an hour and then during the baking time the cultural information and exploration of the country and its people engage students to think and analyze, while the culminating sharing of the country meal enables students to taste, touch, and smell the culture and its people and thus connect to them not only through mental but also emotional, sensorial, and bodily memory. At various levels, the participants in the learning process incorporate the information and as such it becomes personal.

It is important that the cross-sensorial learning and the inter-cultural doing dynamics are analyzed with attention to the distinct and culturally-specific human perceptions, experiences, and reactions to distinct sensorial stimulations and situations. If research is done to analyze how the artistic and out-doors education help children learn more and develop emotional intelligence, such studies involve only a certain age group – children and youth – and do not consider situations where such cultural, creative, and culinary activities could engage very different ages, professions, and ethnic groups, as well as mixed groups, as is the case of the Bread and Arts methods and their related sensory houses physical spaces.

I thus want to further contextualize the cross-sensorial learning processes and programs analyzed in this auto-ethnography within the dynamics of the typically Latin-American cultural tradition and on-going movements fomenting community development through the arts, framed as “arts for social change” (artes para la transformación social). The innovative practices towards liberating and democratizing education, both formal and informal, in Latin America were catalysed by Paulo Freire (1970), similar to the way John Dewey (1916) fomented new discourses in education in Europe and North America. Freire’s last works gave birth to the concept of Ecopedagogy, developed as a project for new planetary values and eco-social civilization based on cooperation instead of competition, balance and harmony of human beings with themselves and with nature, towards a global culture of peace (Grigorov and Fleuri 2012). The baking-with-metaphors methods also evolved in the spirit of these global movements for social justice, and in 2012 were selected and included in the International Handbook of Ecopedagogy (Grigorov 2012).

The Latin American concept and movements of “arts for social change” find many modifications around countries and cultural institutions when it comes to link between arts and community development. The terms vary
among CA (community arts), SAP (social art practice, focused on social change), Art Education, Applied Art, Amateur Art, Voluntary Arts, Public Art, Mainstream Art Outreach, Art therapy, Talent Development, etc., but all ultimately point to a shift in aesthetic thinking from “art for art’s sake” to community-driven art (sometimes also created by professional artists but with communities) that emphasizes the tools and the process rather than the form and the product. However, the key problem in most community arts projects is the short-term duration and the project-based funding, which rarely allows for sustainability after the end of the project (examined in more depth by the research group at the Social Impact of the Arts project at University of Pennsylvania).

The need for locally-sensitive and long-term policies and approaches to secure any sustainable development project is what I have previously termed hand-shake policy (Savova 2011a) approach, founded on long-term basic financial and methodological commitment on part of the public authorities. The hand-shake policy approach applies to both formal educational and cultural institutions and informal community learning/cultural centers. Development funding institutions, whether governments, the UN and EU, or private foundations, are however often locally disdained for their strict requirements for “hard data” and “quantitative indicators” to “measure the outcomes” of the projects and policies, and such data is very hard to obtain particularly when it come to soft community engagement and empowerment processes.

One conceptual framework I developed to critically analyze this outcome-measuring approaches is what I define as the need for income-based approach (Savova 2011b) in any development work. The so-called personal “income” for people in these cases is measurable (always partially, of course) mainly through anthropological, ethnographic methods and this long-term engagement: qualitative methodologies grounded in one-on-one interviews, informal conversations, focus groups, and perhaps most importantly, keen observations of what people do not say but how they begin to interact with the situation and the community of practice in which they participate.
Rehearsals for Sustainability: Edible Public Spaces through the *Theater of Crumbs*

Would you deny for others  
What you demand for yourself?  
Where you live should not decide  
Whether you live or whether you die

(*U2’s song “Crumbs from your table”*)

U2’s song *Crumbs from your table* uses the image and metaphor of crumbs to call for equality. Bread crumbs have, in fact, for long been employed in contexts of social injustice, rooted as a cultural sign back in Biblical times in the parable about poor Lazarus eating the crumbs off of the rich man’s table. During the rising discourses around the economic crisis in Bulgaria and the world since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I noticed how people in Bulgaria often started using the metaphor of the bread crumbs as the little, if anything, left over for the poor off of the rich ones’ table – the politicians and the corporate oligarchs – after having appropriated most of the available “bread”/ “dough” (money, resources, power).

In the famous fairy tale of Henzel and Grettel, one of the key elements are also the bread crumbs, which the abandoned children keep shedding along their way through the forest so that they would not lose their path to return home. In this case, the semiotic aspect of the crumbs is linked not so much to social inequality (even if the children are abandoned, indeed, because of poverty) but more so to the second main association of crumbs – rooted in the symbolic connection between the signifier bread and the signified space of the home/the hearth. The association is deeply engrained in the European cultures heavily dependent on wheat and bread as basic staple foods but also basic religious symbols in Christianity.

In the fairy tale, the simple bread crumbs end up having much greater importance than the whole house made of fancy sweets inhabited by the Witch, since this space remains simply a house – even if unimaginably beautiful and delicious – but not a home. On the contrary, the sweet castle becomes a prison for the two siblings. What is key in the lesson the fairy tale strives to teach is that children – and in general humans – need emotional fulfillment and not simply visual (aesthetic) and material satisfactions to fill in the vacuum of intimacy. It is a vacuum that back then, but perhaps even more so now, is growing due to the decreasing role models of the parents and the disappearing sensation of home and safety.
Child psychologists have proven the crucial importance of early-age feelings of home warmth and safety for the future emotional and intellectual development of a person, and one key ritual that strengthens the experiences and memories of home is the ritual of family commensality (literally, “sharing the table”, or eating together). Anthropologist Richard Wilk (2010) from Indiana University importantly points out how the ever decreasing time spent together around the table has multiple negative and much broader social, cultural, and economic implications. He discovered how the gradual disappearance of the kitchen table is a phenomenon mostly observed among low-income and immigrant families, losing ties with their traditional cultural backgrounds and engulfed in the stress of providing for their extended families in the country of origin. Wilk observes how the lack of time to share a meal produces people who are unable to develop and sustain stable and meaningful social relations.

The same phenomenon of lack of time for commensality and thus growing alienation is growing in post-socialist Eastern Europe due to the imported forms of capitalism that imposed long working hours and high competitiveness in education and at work. It is in this socio-cultural context that the Bread House community spaces flourished in a few towns precisely for they seem to help people rethink their life and their consumption habits (more on new consumption communities is examined in the work of Caroline Moraes, Isabelle Szmigin and Marylyn Carrigan, 2010). At the Bread Houses people often seemed to wake up, themselves surprised at how easy it is to forget the important things in life you are locked in the vicious cycle work-home, and how in a third space like the Bread House it was somehow easier to appreciate again the importance of home, sensed through the hearth and the hot bread, both as a tangible experience and as powerful symbols.

It is in this context that people started telling stories, which then also gave birth to improvised theater plays. Similar to U2’s song Crumbs from your table, people’s discussions employed bread crumbs to signify the socio-economic inequalities in Bulgaria and these improvised “scenarios” born in the discussions around kneading inspired us to call this evolving method Theater of Crumbs.

The Theater of Crumbs’ improvised scripts offered a fertile soil for observing and analyzing local meaning-making processes, as people discuss, enact, resolve, and digest (figuratively and literally) important issues in the politics of their daily lives and the life of the nation. The Theater of Crumbs is an innovative, mixed-media theater form, which spread from the Bread House in Gabrovo to other countries and continents
as more and more got interested in being trained. The *Theater of Crumbs* started at the round table inside the Bread House and it later exited in the public space outside the Bread House walls, evolving as outdoors performances in various festivals and public events and celebrations, where the stage is a portable table. The communal table changes the public space and turns impersonal city places into personalized spaces, in particular due to its association with the private kitchen and the home. Other such “personalized spaces” are analyzed by Michelle de Certeau in his « Spatial Stories » in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Intriguingly, people of all ages started taking part and thus animated the public spaces by making, performing and consuming these edible street puppet performances.

The dynamics of the street *Theater of Crumbs* events remind of the processes in the trans-national project *City of Children* by Italian Francesco Tonucci. Tonucci engages children to themselves design and present before municipalities their visions for their city and in the particular the needs of children for public playgrounds particularly adapted and open for interactivity.

The *Theater of Crumbs* method inspires all “spectators” to become “makers” of the dough puppets and the narrative. People often choose to address issues related to real-life cases – thus naturally evolving in the way Augusto Boal directed his *Theater of the Oppressed* and the forum theater methods. The bread puppets open the space for creative solutions and imaginations of alternative realities. Once the puppets are baked (in a small mobile electric oven), the actors arrange the breads into puppets on strings or simply holding them in their hands, and the table becomes the stage. The table itself is often covered in flour and the props or the setting of the play are depicted with fingers and wheat stalks in the flour to create for a truly appealing vision. The table then becomes a stage for performances of struggles, identities, social negotiations and hopes, but it is also a stage and space of commensalities and rehearsals of coexistences as the puppet makers span all generations and socio-economic groups.

When the performances take place inside the first Bread House Cultural Center in Gabrovo, the fire in the oven is usually used as the background props and the bread puppets are brought to live performing on the round table in front of the oven, through long strings that the actors control from above, where a few meters above the table is the location of the small stage perched on top of the beams holding the rooftop. This unique “flying stage” also transforms the table below into a stage around which the “spectactors”, as Boal defines all improvised actors, are sitting and interactively directing the play.
The key participation of the senses of taste and smell in the *Theater of Crumbs* performances produce a dynamic edible experience that has proven to help people open up and share problems as well as dreams, which assume a kind of material form in the performance and thus a much more tangible and achievable perspective for how they can happen in “real life”. The important element of food in theater where food is being prepared, shared, and/or related to the theme of the play adds the two additional senses of smell and taste, usually lacking in classical theater and thus enriching the actor-audience reciprocity.

In order to achieve maximum mobility of the community baking and *Theater of Crumbs* events, the *Mobile Bread House* prototype was developed and built at Princeton University in the spring of 2013, using only recycled materials on a second-hand trailer. The MBH visits mainly low-income areas around Princeton (such as Trenton, NJ) and strives to engage local people in rethinking their daily lives and visions for the future.

![The Mobile Bread House](image)

**Fig. 4-7.** *The Mobile Bread House built by students from Princeton University (NJ), regularly traveling to low-income neighborhoods to engage people in breaking bread and in talking about values and non-violence.*
A powerful example of the particular environment conducive to peaceful dialogue that the mobile structure could inspire took place during the launching of the Mobile Bread House in Princeton in May 2013. The Princeton Mayor was invited to come, and instead of giving simply a speech, she liked the extraordinary space and the activity of bread-making so much that she sat at the table to knead dough together with anyone who happened to be there and pass by. The people ranged from Mexican immigrants janitors at Princeton University to professors and students, low-income African-Americans and prominent businessmen, children with autism and adults with physical disabilities. People got inspired to create out of the dough their visions of a better Princeton and the larger county, more inclusive and less economically unequal and extreme in its divisions. People imagine new public buildings, parks, social institutions, services, and infrastructure that they wanted to have access to. In the words of the man who called this experience “high-touch”, bread unites because “we all knead joy” – and that day with the Mayor people of walks could openly and directly voice what they needed for joy to rise.

Instead of voicing their complaints in a negative and conflictual manner, all people somehow softened their voices around the dough and the fire oven, and spoke with calmness but also engaged in quite serious conversations about what has not been fulfilled and what needs to be done. The Mayor did make some concrete promises that day, which those people would have probably never felt the courage or found the access to plead for, and would have never been able to be that unified and also multifaceted in their pleas – simply because there was a table around which to sit for hours and knead.

**CONCLUSIONS: Breaking bread and boundaries for sustainable development**

In March 2013, the President of Bulgaria Mr. Rossen Plevneliev visited the first Bread House community cultural center in Gabrovo together with the Gabrovo Mayor to make bread with local people and discuss their vision of a better town and of a better country. What was intriguing to all of us is that the reason why the President came was not because I had some special high-level connections, but due to a simple invitation letter I had once sent to the Presidential cabinet, inspired to try (and having pretty much no faith that it would happen) to facilitate an informal meeting like the one with the Princeton Mayor so that the local people could voice directly their complains, shared regularly around bread-making. And the President had liked so much the invitation and the idea, that he came
asking specifically that no media is invited or is informed of the event, so it is really something that he does from the heart. Again, bread must have spoken to the President in very personal ways – as it does for pretty much everyone.

People noted afterwards that though they had previously not supported the President politically, on that occasion they felt they got to meet and know the person Rossen Plevneliev, not the “President”, and that this gave them much more tangible sense of connection to the government and certain self-confidence to continue voicing their needs – regardless of the fact that noting really changed after they voiced the pleas to the President! I point in particular to the aspect of “feeling”, because people kept emphasizing in their words feelings and senses that inspired and empowered them, pointing at the shared hot tasty bread with someone they only saw on TV, at the welcoming and soothing aroma of fire, bread, and roundtable that somewhat naturally created a sense of equality and cooperation, even if only imagined when it come to shaping the national policies.

The shared sensorial experiences with the President, rather than a formal dry conversation that is what usually happens in formal public discussions with any authorities, immediately made people feel empowered and much more conscious of their positions as citizens with value and also with rights. The shared senses created an experience of “affect” between those in power and those without, and at least for some time enabled people to gain a tangible sense of self-worth, of strength to strive and hope for change, no matter if concrete changes were to take place.

The complex, multi-faceted issue of sustainability addressed in this book embraces diverse and often seemingly disconnected challenges faced by people in various parts of the world, yet we can also often note a connecting thread of shared questions, quests, and hopes. These quests go much beyond the standard political, ecological, and economic dimensions of the standard notions of sustainability. We can note this particularly at the very local, communal and family level, and this is precisely the sphere where anthropological ethnographic research and approaches to people, data, and issues is so crucial to comprehending what sustainability really means to people.

As we observed in the Bread Houses and growth of the informal BREAD movement, and what is in fact evident in most social movements, both international and local, is that more and more people and communities develop new forms of consumer behaviors and structures of
community organizing around a cause, usually mediated through powerful symbols and discourses.

In many ways, what this research shows is how community cultural centers and in particular those spaces we referred to as sensory houses could play important role in local communities and serve many more purposes than informal education and artistic expression, in particular when it comes to civil society activism and community development. Year-long director of arts centers across the UK, John English, is arguing in his Case for the Arts (1982) that “every neighborhood should have a community arts centre”, with “broad programmes of socio-cultural education“ (21) to help nurture civic values and empower people as citizens. His claims and hopes are carried forward in Lane’s Arts Centres: Every town should have one (1978), in the on-going (since 1994) Social Impact of the Arts research project at University of Pennsylvania, in Clover and Stalker (2007), and in reflected practice in the vibrant Latin American movement of arts for social transformation. As shown in this chapter with the case study of the Bread Houses, community cultural centers can vary in their activities across artistic genres, cultural traditions, social services, and mixed/inter-disciplinary activities, but the most important aspect of their work and mission is to attract and engage people across all walks of life.

When people have access to experiential learning – whether in leisure, education, or work - and importantly within a group, a “community of practice” and wider community contexts that stimulate people’s creativity and engage the senses, the cross-sensorial learning and inter-generational doing processes enable people to feel the concepts and strategies for sustainable development much more present, tangible, real, and plausible - and as such, the senses simply make them make much more sense.
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1 See more at <www.international3c.org>.

2 “Culture (Not) for Everyone”, European ShortCut Meeting of the European Network for Cultural Centers. Warsaw, Poland. November 16, 2011. Interview conducted by Dr. Nadezhda Savova-Grigorova.