



FERMENT F LAB

Ferment Lab is a participatory space for food and social fermentation. It has been an ongoing project at Pixelache, a Helsinki-based transdisciplinary platform for emerging art, design, research, and activism, since 2014.

Ferment Lab incorporates research and experimentation into food fermentation as well as into social interpretations related to this concept. Overall, Ferment Lab aims to be operated in various locations in order to collect parallel stories on food and social transformation. It transfers acquired recipes into other contexts, and creates new knowledge and meaning through experiments in social fermentation.

CONTACT US: fermentlab@pixelache.com | www.pixelache.ac/projects/ferment-lab

WHY STRASBOURG?

Strasbourg and the Alsace region have a long history and deep relationship to fermentation practices, traditions, and innovations. It is widely known for a number of fermented specialties made with local varieties of wine, beer, cheese, and choucroute (sour-cabbage). It's also home to significant scientists that have achieved important discoveries and developments that benefitted the region's economy. The most famous is biochemist Louis Pasteur, who lived and worked in Strasbourg in the mid-1800s. His research on fermentation led to the industrialization of rural and agricultural practices through "pasteurization", a process named after him. The effect of his work and the work of his contemporaries led to successful breweries and companies in Alsace during the Imperial German and French Republican periods of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

In contrast, the fermentation performed in the context of Strasbourg invites us to reflect on the sanitization and homogenization of food production induced by European Union regulations. These policies have made it hard for many traditional food practices, producers, and products to survive. As a result, the food industry is more powerful than ever. Through our research on local practices related to fermentation, Ferment Lab aims to reinterpret this heritage and rejuvenate traditions that are disappearing. With the use of grass-roots approaches, we encourage civic action via hacking, digital fabrication, citizen science, DIY (do-it-yourself), and DIWO (do-it-with-others).

These interests are aligned with Le Shadok's desire to be in constant dialogue with various actors of the region, and its spirit to be a space for experimentation, where things can emerge, develop, and be shared. Le Shadok's facilities, and the upcoming 2017-exhibition 'Laboratory of the Future' create a perfect context for Ferment Lab's process-oriented developments.

We are interested in working with neighborhood and special-interest food associations, as well as cultural associations focused on sharing cultural heritage, collaborative making, and urban gardening.

WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY GOING TO DO?

The first step will be to contact cultural and social-change organizations working with groups and individuals from various cultural backgrounds in Strasbourg. With the help of these organizations, we're looking forward to finding people familiar with recipes for fermented food and beverages of various origins. Furthermore, we wish to share them and the context they are from with the widespread of the city. The participants' expertise will be shared in the context of workshop events and as part of the creation of an open source cook book encompassing fermentation.

Once our group of fermenting specialists is formed, we plan to organize a 'meta-workshop' where we will discuss a fermentation workshop series. This would unfold from March to September 2017 to co-create a unified toolkit to perform and document the workshops' events. The toolkit will allow the workshop hosts to organize their events independently during our absence. We will encourage and support them to perform fermentation workshops at Le Shadok with their own personal recipes.

The process of socialized fermentation will go hand in hand with the development of other activities. One is the "DIY detector for bacterial cultures", aimed to enable the detection of harmful bacteria in fermented samples. Moreover, the bacterial starters cultivated during the workshops will be stored and disseminated on handmade paper via the "Bacterial Love Letters".

The final exhibition will present fermentation recipes, the contexts they originated from, and the documentation of the workshops where the recipes were applied. The fermentation culture starters will also be available in the form of handmade bacterial paper, meant to serve as a starter for personal experimentations. In addition, the recipe-book, the workshop toolkit, and the prototype of DIY spectroscope will be open-sourced and available to the public.