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# Food-related well-being in times of crisis: Conceptual considerations and empirical findings for Syrian refugees in Germany

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## ABSTRACT

Migration to a new country generally entails a variety of social and economic adversities, often reflected in food practices. This paper aims to explore the hedonic dimension of well-being in a food context among a diasporic Syrian community in Stuttgart, Germany. A conceptual framework that integrates the three aspects of well-being (hedonic, psychological and social) with goals for food consumption (functional, symbolic and hedonic) was developed as a guide for the exploration. The research design used semi-structured interviews with 34 Syrian refugees and content-based analysis to obtain a detailed and profound understanding of the relational links between food and well-being. Findings reveal the affective and cognitive components of hedonic well-being and the overall perception of a good food-related life concerning food purchasing, preparation, eating and post-eating. Satisfaction in food-related life was found to be associated with food availability and accessibility, physical health and body functioning, positive emotions, sensory experience, social relationships and overall life satisfaction. The insights gained from this research help to elucidate the concept of food-related well-being in the case of conflict and displacement and to find strategies to promote the well-being of refugees.

## 1. Introduction

Migration has always been a part of human history. Currently, the Syrian conflict is most relevant in this regard, with 5.3 million fleeing to neighbouring countries, and around 970,000 seeking asylum in Europe (UN-OCHA, 2017). Forced migration typically entails adapting to a completely different lifestyle and confrontation with economic and social adversities. Consequently, a large share of refugees and asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> could fall prey to post-traumatic stress, difficulties in adjustment and emotional problems resulting from loss of family and social support (Carswell et al., 2011; Rosenblum & Tichenor, 2012), which undermines their well-being (Baltatescu, 2005; Bobowik et al., 2015). Moreover, refugees often encounter multiple food-related challenges, such as long periods of reduced food availability, low-quality diet, forced changes in dietary habits or little knowledge on how to use available resources. Experiencing these difficulties makes the integration process into the host society more challenging. With integration, we refer to the extent of intercultural interactions and exchanges among refugees and the host society. The effect of food in building cross-cultural relation-

ship is well documented. As an example, Parasecoli (2014) found that immigrants cope with dislocation by recreating a sense of place around food production, preparation and consumption, which is shared and reinforced by the host community itself. Considering the recent refugee influx in Europe, many initiatives developed that centred on food as a way of altering perceptions regarding refugees, accelerating their integration and fostering their inclusion in the community, such as food festivals. In this regard, food proves to be an avenue for boosting the resettlement and integration of refugees, since food is not merely about nutrients, but has various social, symbolic and hedonic functions, which are central to human identity and culture (Bublitz et al., 2013).

The current research on food-related well-being has targeted individuals living in their home country during peacetime. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have previously investigated the dimensions that underlie the concept of food-related well-being in the case of conflict and diaspora. Therefore, this paper investigates how literature conceptualizes the well-being of individuals in the context of food and aims to answer the vital unanswered question: How do refugees perceive their food-related well-being? Adopting a holistic approach which aims to explore all the different aspects of the food and well-being nexus, this study analyses how Syrian refugees in Germany perceive their well-being in a food context, as they are confronted with a new food environment and dietary changes. Enhanced understanding of the underlying roots

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<sup>1</sup> Our understanding of the term 'asylum seeker' is someone who claims to be a refugee but whose claim has not yet been evaluated in juristic terms, while 'refugee' is someone who got official recognition. Nevertheless, in this paper we use these two terms interchangeably.

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of food-related well-being of refugees should enable us to advance academic thinking, but also to promote refugees' overall well-being and enhance their integration.

## 2. Background and theoretical considerations

### 2.1. Conceptualizing well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic approaches

Well-being is a term that provides a thorough conceptualization of a good life which is not only characterized by the absence of disease, but also by a positive subjective experience of the state of being well (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Cronin de Chavez et al., 2005). However, well-being is a complex and multifaceted construct (Dodge et al., 2012; Meiselman, 2016). Well-being studies follow two streams of research: the hedonic and the eudaimonic approaches (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2008).

The hedonic approach (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984) emphasizes the feeling of pleasure, and thus equates well-being with happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being is defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluation of life (Diener, 1984; Diener & Suh, 1997). The affective component is defined by the presence of positive affects (moods and emotions) and the absence of negative ones (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999). The cognitive component is represented by life satisfaction which is the overall evaluation of an individual's life as a whole or according to a specific domain of life (Diener, 1984), which is assessed by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985).

The eudaimonic approach, in contrast, considers well-being to consist of more than just happiness and accentuates the subjective emotional experience that stems from achieving one's potentialities and leading a meaningful life (Waterman, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Bauer et al., 2008). Hence, eudaimonic well-being refers to the effectiveness of an individual's psychological functioning. Ryff's (1989) measure of psychological well-being assesses how good one feels about life in six ways: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.

Humans as social beings have a psychological need of a sense of belonging with other individuals or social groups. Therefore, Keyes (1998) suggested that well-being should be addressed by dividing life into public and private tasks, as both shape 'self'. Thus, he suggested studying social well-being, the public facet of eudaimonic well-being, which represents 'the appraisal of one's circumstance and functioning in society' and embraces five domains: social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization and social coherence (Keyes, 1998: 122).

Accordingly, well-being is best regarded as a complex and multi-dimensional concept that embraces both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

### 2.2. Well-being and linkages to food

Food is a key factor influencing our health and wellness. Precisely, a low-quality diet is responsible for a wide array of non-communicable diseases. However, food has several functions that go beyond nutrition and place attention on the emotional, social and symbolic values (Rozin, 2005). Block et al. (2011) advocated a shift from the existing paternalistic and normative model relationship of 'food = health', towards a more holistic and integrative model of 'food = well-being'. The authors defined food well-being (FWB) as 'a positive psychological, physical, emotional and social relationship with food at both individual and societal levels' (Block et al., 2011: 6). Research has shown that factors related to food consumption can enhance well-being (Macht & Dettmer, 2006; Blanchflower et al., 2013; Conner et al., 2015; Mujcic & Oswald, 2016; Conner et al., 2017; Otake & Kato, 2017; Warner et al., 2017), thus, well-being in a food context constitutes a part of people's overall well-being. Understanding how individuals perceive the relationship between food and well-being contributes to understanding peo-

ple's food choices and thus to developing effective nutrition interventions (McMahon et al., 2010; 2014).

One of the approaches to assess the relationship between food and well-being concentrates on individuals' perception of their well-being in a food context. Grunert et al. (2007) associated food with the cognitive part of hedonic well-being. They consider food as a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in day-to-day living. Consequently, they developed a measure of Satisfaction with Food-related Life (SWFL), inspired by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) measure (Diener et al., 1985), and they defined it as 'an overall assessment of that part of a person's life comprising procurement, preparation and consumption of food and meals according to his/her chosen criteria' (Grunert et al., 2007: 487). Ares et al. (2014) assessed individuals' perception of well-being with respect to food. They found that well-being was mainly related to physical health as well as to hedonic and emotional aspects of food consumption. Since food consumption has a strong cultural component, people in different cultures may evaluate food-related well-being in different ways, suggesting the cultural nature of well-being in general and in a food-specific context (Diener et al., 2003; Ares et al., 2015). In a cross-cultural study on five countries Ares et al. (2015) found that all participants associated well-being with complex and multidimensional aspects, such as positive moods and emotions, physical health and body functioning, global life judgements and social relationships, despite differences between various cultures. Guillemin et al. (2016) defined several factors influencing food-related well-being classified in two broad areas: pleasure- and health-related well-being, as a way of including aspects related to physical health, emotions and social aspects of well-being. Recently, Sulmont-Rossé et al. (2019) studied individuals' perspectives on feeling good in a food context with the aim of obtaining a holistic understanding of well-being, i.e. going beyond physical health. They found that feeling good was associated with specific foods, including the sensory and hedonic properties at present, and with health and nutrition in the future.

### 2.3. Integrative framework

People's relationship with food usually has different underlying goals, which are either functional: to achieve physical and psychological health; symbolic: to nurture social relationships and to express identity or affiliation to specific groups; or hedonic: to have varied sensory experiences and emotions associated with food (Bublitz et al., 2013). Building on the current research and providing a holistic understanding of food-related well-being, the following framework shows the integration of different food goals with aspects of the overall well-being concept (Figure 1).

Due to the complexity of this framework and the extensive amount of corresponding data, this paper focuses on the hedonic dimension of food-related well-being, precisely on the affective and cognitive components in a food context, whereas the psychological and social dimension of food-related well-being will be discussed in a separate paper. Focusing on the hedonic dimension and using Syrian refugees as an empirical case allows us to extend the current paradigm to reveal the impact of conflict and displacement on people's food-related well-being. Our argument is that when food achieves its functional and hedonic goals, this promotes the hedonic well-being. In this paper, we aim to address the following questions: How do Syrian refugees rank their Satisfaction with Life-Scale (SWLS), Satisfaction with Food-related Life (SWFL) and quality of food-related life? How do they describe the different aspects of their hedonic well-being? And how do they imagine a good food-related life?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Study design

In 2017, we conducted a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews in Stuttgart, Germany, with Syrian refugees to explore their per-

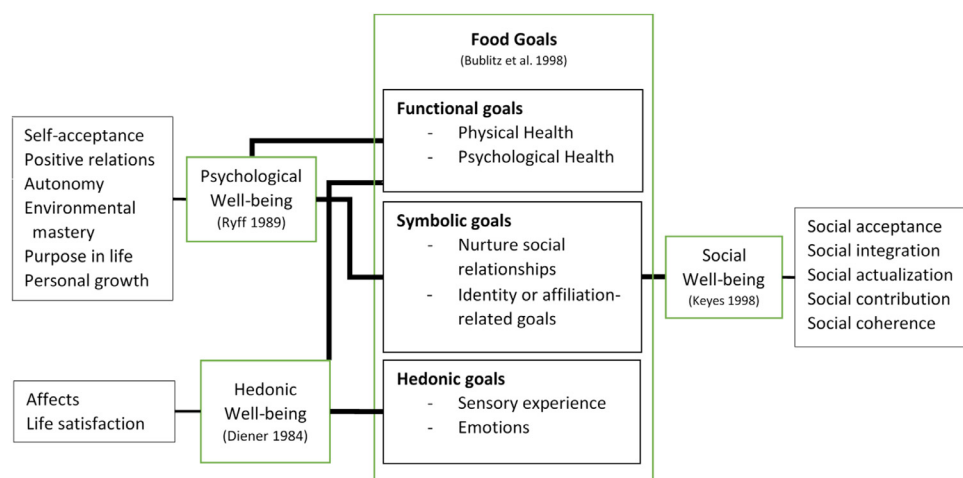


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework integrating food goals with subjective, psychological and social well-being.

spectives of well-being in a food context, and to learn more about their personal experiences during war, migration and after arrival in Germany. Interviewing is the best tool to reveal participants’ feelings, experiences and stances towards a complex and multidimensional topic (Kvale, 2007), such as well-being. The conducted interviews explored all aspects related to food procurement, preparation, eating and post eating. The first author is Syrian herself and could easily connect to the target population.

Participants were recruited formally through purposive sampling and informally through social networks to cover a wide array of age groups, educational background, ethnicity and religion. Thirty-four interviews were conducted within three months (August-October). The sample size was not predefined, but according to data saturation, i.e. the interview campaign stopped when no essential new information emerged any longer (Saunders et al., 2018).

Ethical approval for the protection of human subjects in this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of Hohenheim, Germany.

### 3.2. Participants

Eligibility requirements were being a Syrian asylum seeker who arrived in Germany after the uprising in 2011, being 18 years old or over, participating to at least some degree in procurement or preparation of food, and being resident in a camp or resettled in private house in Stuttgart, Germany. The study focuses on a single geographical area as the food environment could be entirely different depending, for instance, on the availability of oriental shops.

The sample was balanced in terms of sex, marital status and place of residence, but had an unbalance towards relatively young and educated persons (Table 1). However, this unbalance represents the group of Syrian refugees who arrived in Germany in 2015/2016<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.3. Interview Process

All interviews were carried out by the first author in Arabic, the native language of the participants. In nine cases, the interview was conducted together with spouses (wife and husband), as each one was

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of study participants

		n	%
Sex	Male	16	47.1
	Female	18	52.9
Age	18–30	18	52.9
	31–40	12	35.3
	41–64	4	11.8
	Enrolled at university	1	2.9
Education level (Home country)	No formal education	5	14.7
	Primary school	7	20.6
	Preparatory school	4	11.8
	Secondary school	17	50.0
	Enrolled at university	17	50.0
Previous work	No work	10	29.4
	Student	6	17.6
	Employee	10	29.4
	Self-employed	1	2.9
	Worker	7	20.6
	Refugee route	29	85.3
How arrived in Germany	Legally	5	14.7
	Unmarried	16	47.1
Marital status	Married	17	50.0
	Divorced	1	2.9
	Camp	18	52.9
	Private	16	47.1
Accommodation	Family	22	64.7
	Alone	12	35.3
Living with whom	3 years	19	55.9
	1 year	12	35.3
	No permit	1	2.9
Current residence permit	Other	2	5.9

responsible for different activities related to food. Men usually are responsible for procuring food, while women oversee its preparation.

At the beginning of the interview, respondents were asked to fill in a short questionnaire including socio-demographic questions and the SWLS and SWFL indices (Table 2). SWLS evaluates overall cognitive judgements about a person’s life (Diener et al., 1985), whereas the SWFL evaluates the person’s food-related life (Grunert et al., 2007). For both scales, participants had to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement using a 7-step Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). During the interview, participants were asked to evaluate the quality of their food-related life (QoFL) using a 7-step Likert scale (i.e. very bad (1) and very good (7)). A value higher than four indicates a good quality of food-related life and vice versa.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 61.6 % of the adults arrived in Germany in 2016 were between 18 and 29 years old, 25.1% were 30–39 years old and 19.2 % were above 40 years old. Concerning the educational level, 5 % were with no school education, 18.9 % attended primary school, 30.3% attended lower secondary school, 25% high secondary school and 20.9 % were enrolled at university (BAMF, 2017).

**Table 2**  
Satisfaction with Life Scale and Satisfaction with Food-related Life Scale

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)	Satisfaction with Food-related Life Scale (SWFL)
In most ways my life is close to my ideal	My life in relation to food and meals is close to ideal
The conditions of my life are excellent	With regard to food, the conditions of my life are excellent
I am satisfied with my life	Food and meals give me satisfaction in daily life
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life	Food and meals are positive elements
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	I am generally pleased with my food

Based on literature and the integrative framework, we designed the interview guideline to explore all the different aspects related to well-being in a food context. The framework was used as a guide to collect, analyse and interpret the findings. The interview's guideline was pilot-tested and revised accordingly. Participants were asked about the meanings and importance of food, goals of eating and the barriers to achieving them, perceptions of the impact of the diet on their physical and psychological health, changes in their dietary habits and emotions, satisfaction with their food-related life in Syria and in Germany and the causes of changes if any, and their envisioning of a good and happy food-related life. During the interview, the sequence of the questions could change in case interviewees moved spontaneously from one subject to another. It was made sure that all the topics were explored by the end of the interview. In addition, new questions were added to obtain a better understanding of the participants' intended meaning.

The interview sessions lasted 30 to 105 minutes and were conducted at various locations according to respondents' preferences. The interviews were digitally recorded with the permission. Later, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

### 3.4. Data analysis

A qualitative content-based analysis (Schreier, 2012) was used for coding and analysing the interview transcripts. The interview statements were treated as a direct representation of participants' beliefs and thoughts. The data was explored simultaneously through deductive and inductive coding. In deductive coding, data were coded by themes derived from literature (e.g. food goals, food-related life satisfaction, emotions). The inductive coding emerged from the narratives and was not linked to the theoretical concept until the final stage of analysis. A combination of structural coding, sub-coding and line-by-line coding was used as a coding grammar to obtain an exploratory and detailed investigation (Saldaña, 2015). To ensure coding reliability, three interview transcripts were coded independently by two native Arabic researchers, then a coding frame (in English) was developed through discussion and consensus. After finishing the coding process, all codes were revised by the two analysts.

A nonparametric test was used to descriptively analyse the quantitative data, because the sample is small and does not have a normal distribution. We run the Kruskal–Wallis test using SPSS statistics 22. This rank-based test is used to determine statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable (such as the SWLF, SWFL and QoFL indices in our dataset).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Satisfaction with life scale, satisfaction with food-related life and quality of food-related life

Participants' scores of the SWLS, SWFL and QoFL scales according to their main characteristics are shown in Table 3. We notice that the SWLS index is a bit higher for male participants, but no significance observed, whereas the SWFL is higher for female participants and married persons in comparison to male and single participants. Moreover, an

increase in the value of SWFL can be noticed in older participants. Regarding education, there are no clear differences in the average of SWLS and SWFL scale data, except for those enrolled at universities, where they report low SWFL, but with great discrepancies (minimum score is 6 and maximum score is 34). Concerning accommodation, those who live in private accommodation have a higher SWLS score, and counter intuitively lower SWFL. However, during the qualitative part of the interviews, most participants highly appraised having private accommodation in terms of having more autonomy in preserving, preparing and consuming food. The statements of the SWFL scale apparently led participants to focus on food per se and not on the location where food is prepared or consumed. Participants who live with their families show higher SWFL values compared to those who live alone. Moreover, the SWLS index is higher for the participants who obtain asylum and so receive a three-year residence permit compared to those who only get temporary protection and receive one-year residence permit. Concerning QoFL, no clear differences exist between the different groups.

### 4.2. Food and hedonic well-being

#### 4.2.1. The affective dimension of hedonic well-being in relation to food

To explore the affective dimension of food-related well-being, we asked participants to describe their emotions during food purchasing, preparation and consumption (Table 4).

All the food sequences occur in a variety of different circumstances, which impact the kind of emotions felt by participants. For instance, some participants consider food purchasing as a source of gladness while it is a source of worries and stress for others, especially upon arriving in Germany where absence of social connections and language barriers create difficulties in making food choices. A few respondents reported that after forming new relationships and being familiarized to the new food environment, these emotions become less intense, and the process of food purchasing becomes routine.

Food preparation is a source of enjoyment and gladness for most participants, but the process of preparing food might trigger some negative emotions, such as a feeling of loneliness and deprivation:

*'I always wish it would be better the next time I cook and prepare food. I wish that I was not alone but with other people and that the food would be different.'*

Food purchasing and preparation create positive psychological benefits when they are done for others, because satisfying people's needs and making them feel happy lead to achieving self-satisfaction and building intimacy and connections:

*'When I prepare food for others, I think that I cook for them because I love them. I hope that they will like the food and will be happy [..]. This gives a feeling of satisfaction.'*

For those who live with their families, eating is a source of gladness and happiness, but other participants associate food consumption with a feeling of sorrow because of family dispersion:

*'I don't feel comfortable because my children are far away. Suddenly, you have lost everything, and you sit and eat because you have to.'*

Moods and general feelings have an impact on the triggering of food-related emotions, i.e. having negative feelings related to hardship and

**Table 3**  
Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Satisfaction with Food-related Life (SWFL) and Quality of Food-related Life (QoFL) for participants according to sex, age, education, marital status, accommodation, living with whom and the current residence permit situation (Kruskal-Wallis test)

		n	SWLS					SWFL					QoFL				
			Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Sig	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Sig	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Sig
Total		34	21.7	6.2	10	34	-	26.4	6.5	6	35	-	5.4	1.3	2	7	-
Sex	Male	16	23	5.5	16	31	.276	24	6.9	6	35	.077*	5.1	1.4	2	7	.184
	Female	18	20.4	6.6	10	34		28.4	5.4	16	35		5.7	1.1	4	7	
Age	18-30	18	21.2	6	10	31	.888	23.8	6.6	6	34	.030**	5	1.4	2	7	.104
	31-40	12	22.2	6.8	12	34		28.3	5.3	19	35		5.9	1.1	4	7	
	41-64	4	22	6.5	15	30		32	3.5	27	35		6	0	6	6	
Education <sup>2</sup>	No (formal) education	1	15	-	-	-	-	27	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-
	Primary school	5	21.6	5.4	15	29	.610	31.6	3.7	26	35	.015**	5.6	1.5	4	7	.207
	Preparatory school	7	24.1	8.4	10	34		29	5.2	21	35		5.9	1.3	4	7	
	Secondary school	4	19.8	6.9	15	30		29.3	2.6	27	33		6.3	0.5	6	7	
	Enrolled at University	17	21.5	5.4	12	31		23	6.8	6	34		5.1	1.2	2	6	
Marital Status <sup>1</sup>	Unmarried	17	21.5	6.2	10	31	.945	22.6	6	6	28	.000***	5.1	1.4	2	7	.173
	Married	17	21.8	6.4	12	34		30.1	4.5	19	35		5.8	1	4	7	
Accommodation	Camp	18	21.2	7.2	10	34	.478	28.9	4.4	20	35	.045**	5.6	1.2	3	7	.423
	Private	16	22.1	5	16	30		23.5	7.4	6	35		5.3	1.3	2	7	
Living with whom	Family	22	22.6	6	15	34	.219	28	5.6	16	35	.041**	5.7	1.1	3	7	.160
	Alone	12	19.9	6.4	10	29		23.3	7.1	6	35		5	1.4	2	7	
Current residence permit <sup>3</sup>	3 years	19	23.6	6	16	34	.012**	26.8	7.3	6	35	.415	5.5	1.5	2	7	.213
	1 year	12	18.1	5.6	10	29		26.8	5.3	17	35		5.2	0.9	4	6	
	No permit	1	29	-	-	-	-	26	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-	-
	Other	2	21	2.8	19	23	-	19.5	0.7	19	20	-	5.5	0.7	5	6	-

\*\*\* p<0.01.

\*\* p<0.05.

\* p<0.1. The possible score range for both indices is between 5 and 35, and the neutral point is at a score of 20. The higher the number the greater the satisfaction and vice-versa.

<sup>1</sup> From this table on, we combine the one divorced participant with unmarried participants.

<sup>2</sup> The total number of sample (n) is 33 instead of 34. We excluded the group “no formal education” since it contains only one participant.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, we excluded the group “no residence permit” and “other” since they include a small number of participants. The full table of the result of Kruskal-Wallis test is available in the supplementary material.



**Table 4**  
The list of affects that participants usually experience in different food sequences

	Food Purchasing	Food preparation	Eating
<b>No affects</b>	(5)	(8)	(9)
<b>Positive affects</b>	Gladness (13) Psychological comfort and relaxation (6) Satisfaction (2) Hopeful to satisfy others (1) Feeling alive (1) Enjoyment (1)	Enjoyment (10) Gladness (9) Enthusiasm (2) Hopeful to satisfy others (2) Self-satisfaction (2) Relaxation (1)	Gladness (10) Happiness to have family around (5) Pleasure (4) Intimacy (4) Relaxation (1)
<b>Negative affects</b>	Tiredness and worries (5) Stress (3) Unpleasant feelings (3) Annoyance (2) Boredom (1)	Duty (3) Tiredness (2) Loneliness (1) Deprivation (1) Boredom (1)	Sorrow because of family dispersion (6) Psychological discomfort (3)
<b>Mixed affects</b>	Nostalgia (1)	Nostalgia (2) Responsibility (1) Mixed emotions (1)	Nostalgia (3)

Numbers between brackets indicates the number of participants mentioning each emotion.

war experiences evoke corresponding emotions such as psychological discomfort, loneliness and sorrow. These emotions manifest themselves in food preparation and consumption. Some refugees who experienced protracted hardship expressed being exhausted and emotionless:

*‘Because of the psychological pressure, there are no longer any feelings.’*

A nostalgic feeling manifests itself in the three food sequences. We classified it as mixed emotions because it fuses both positive and negative emotions. Whenever it was mentioned by participants, it often elicited positive feelings of enjoyment with family and friends. However, at the same time, it may also provoke negative feelings of loss and deprivation.

#### 4.2.2. Satisfaction with food-related life

When we asked participants about their satisfaction with food-related life back in Syria and in Germany, and the causes of changes (if any), they associated their satisfaction with the following aspects:

##### - Emotions and their link to food-related life satisfaction

The general positive and negative emotions that refugees have translate into an echo for their food-related life satisfaction. Participants who have more positive feelings reported greater food-related life satisfaction:

*‘My satisfaction and appetite have increased here, but I do not know why [..], I feel happier and more comfortable here.’*

On the contrary, those who have negative emotions due to family separation or bad living conditions of their relatives remaining in Syria expressed lower life satisfaction:

*‘Every one of us has family and friends in Syria and thinks about them. When you sit down to eat, you worry about them, you do not know whether they have something to eat or not. You feel depressed, and this affects [us] a lot.’*

##### - Food availability and accessibility

Regarding participants’ perceived satisfaction with food-related life, they emphasize food availability and accessibility; this is particularly evident for those who experienced food shortages and difficulties in accessing food during the war in Syria. Experiencing food insecurity in their home country has caused them to assign a higher satisfaction with food-related life in the host country, where food is better accessible, and they are able to fulfil their food needs more easily, as explained in this statement:

*‘I think [we have here greater satisfaction] because of the increased availability of food [..]. I was a teacher, but [the prices of] everything increased [..]. It was a vast, vast difference, but salaries did not increase [..]. For this reason, the food here is more accessible in comparison to Syria.’*

Having an increased accessibility to food was linked with having positive feelings towards living in Germany. Participants expressed their sensation of gladness and gratitude to the Germans for hosting them:

*‘I feel so glad, that everything is available’; ‘I thank Allah and the German government that they have hosted us. In terms of food, we do not lack anything.’*

On the other hand, although people’s accessibility to food has increased, experiencing financial stress is shared by participants who have large families and those who send remittance to their families elsewhere, which has arguably affected their dietary patterns. For example, the consumption of fruit and vegetables was reported to be less than it was in Syria because fruit and vegetables are more expensive:

*‘We don’t buy fruit and vegetables every time we go to supermarket. We always [buy] tomatoes and basic stuff, but many things are expensive and as we have limited income, so we have to limit them.’*

##### - Physical health and body functioning

Some participants expressed that adopting a healthy dietary behaviour is linked with having higher satisfaction with food-related life. The high awareness about the importance of a healthy diet can be observed for the participants who started to adopt a balanced diet with structured meals (in number and in time) accompanied with a healthy lifestyle by increasing their physical activity level, as expressed by this interviewee:

*‘I was not aware of these things [healthy dietary behaviour]. I discovered that it plays a big role in life [..] and influences your body. I am now more aware of this and how it can affect the person’s future life.’*

On the contrary, the adoption of unhealthy dietary behaviour causes lower satisfaction with food-related life. Relying on fast and processed food is a main issue reported by unmarried men, who were not used to cook in Syria. The limitation of time restricted them from preparing the traditional food that they used to eat. Consequently, they adopted unhealthy eating practices that, for some of them, led to health problems or a feeling of weakness, as in this case:

*‘I look for things that are quick, such as pizza [..]. But frankly, I have suffered, and I was ill because of it. Fast food does not contain a lot of vegetables and this leads to indigestion [..]. When we were in Syria, [..]’*

*think we relied mainly on vegetables. Here, I am forced to eat fast food, because I do not have time.'*

#### - Sensory experiences

The new food environment is for many participants devoid of the taste of 'home' and this has a negative impact on their satisfaction with food-related life:

*'[Our satisfaction has] decreased because we don't find everything, and the taste is different.'*

Hence, finding food that tastes like 'home' triggers positive emotions according to participants, as traditional food satisfies emotional needs. They serve to connect with oneself, and to recall the food tastes and people at home:

*'Today, I found a farm with cows where they sell fresh milk and I bought some. When I came back home, and boiled the milk, I felt like I was drinking [real] milk [...]. I felt happy, and I told everyone to go and buy from there'; 'When I find something similar to [what we have in] Syria, I feel happy and I remember the days in Syria, the togetherness, this is why we look for these foods.'*

#### - Social relationships

Participants have made the connection between their satisfaction with food-related life and family and social support. The absence of social support is a cause of lower life satisfaction in a food context for them:

*'Everything has changed: sleeping, sitting, eating! In Syria we had Makdous<sup>3</sup>, cheese, hot baked bread, and olive oil with Zaatar<sup>4</sup> for breakfast[...]. I used to open my eyes, to find myself between my family and my brothers. But here where are they? [...] I wake up in the morning and ask myself, where am I?'*

#### - Overall life satisfaction

The sense of instability was prominent for some participants due to major life changes. This instability reduces their satisfaction with food-related life:

*'Instability. When one is unstable, his diet is unstable. So, one's mind is busy.'*

Thus, time is needed to adapt to the new lifestyle:

*'Surely, we as Syrians need so much time to adapt to this new world where there are many differences, and one needs to get used to so many new things.'*

The living conditions are one aspect participants related to their overall life satisfaction. Persons who still live in collective camps explained their lower life satisfaction with the uncomfortable living conditions, in addition to the unemployment and the financial situation:

*'The first thing, here we are not at home, I cannot cook as I want. Also, I do not have work, and thus I do not have enough money [...] of course my satisfaction is less.'*

Instable financial and social relationships, absence of taste and the resulting unhealthy food habits, and the absence of psychological comfort are the main challenges that undermine the quality of food-related life of participants:

*'It would be better if my family were with me and if I had a job.'*

<sup>3</sup> Tiny, tangy eggplants stuffed with walnuts, red pepper, garlic, olive oil, and salt.

<sup>4</sup> Spice mixture contains thyme, toasted sesame seeds, dried sumac, as well as other spices.

### 4.3. Ideal food-related life

To get a deeper understanding on how Syrian refugees perceive food-related well-being, we asked participants to imagine how a good food-related life looks like in each step of the interaction with food (purchasing, preparation, eating and post-eating). An overview of the results is provided in Table 5.

#### - Food purchasing

The analysis reveals five aspects that influence the quality of the food purchasing process:

**Retailers:** An ideal food environment requires that shops are close and easily accessible. Currently, the location of grocery and ethnic stores is problematic. The participants have to travel long distances to reach Arabic or Turkish stores. An ideal vision of the food environment implies that enough ethnic shops are available in the vicinity of their accommodation or that dominant suppliers provide ethnic food that is compatible with their cultural preferences.

**Products:** The availability of the food items is regarded as very central. All food items should be available abundantly and with high quality. The participants mainly highlighted the availability of traditional food that they used to buy in Syria, in particular halal products. When everything is available in one place, this gives participants a feeling of comfort and gladness. Further, the quality of the food is another feature that shapes good food-related life. Quality means overall quality of the product, product safety, its freshness, and being free of chemicals and GMOs. Moreover, some participants mentioned that an ideal food environment has to take measures that ensure credibility and build trust regarding how healthy the fruit and vegetables are (since the difference between conventional and organic products, for example, is not always recognized). The same applies to halal products, which should have some labels/certifications that provide more security than just the ingredients lists.

**Social aspects:** These are vital for participants and extend along all the sequences of the interaction with food. Having a companion, whether family or friends to go food shopping with, is an essential element of a good food-related life which makes the whole process more enjoyable.

**Financial aspects:** Participants consider them as an indispensable part of the good food-related life and highly ranked them. Suitable prices of food products, as well as promotions are considered essential to ensure participants' access to a wide range of food items and so promote their food-related well-being.

**Personal aspects:** In an ideal food-related life, participants are psychologically comfortable and live in private accommodation. These two elements are substantial not only for food purchasing, but also for food preparation and consumption. The idea of having private accommodation is often mentioned by the participants who live in camps. Private accommodation has advantages over collective camps in terms of space and facilities. Being in a private accommodation allows people to have for example enough space to store food.

#### - Food preparation

Four main aspects emerged from the interviews to determine the ideal vision of food preparation:

**Kitchen:** This aspect is more relevant to those participants who live in collective camps, where having a private and well-equipped kitchen is paramount and highly ranked by the interviewees. In the current circumstances whilst sharing a kitchen, cleanliness is essential.

**Cooking aspects:** Here, participants pointed to the availability of good quality ingredients and learning new cooking methods that are easier, healthier and require less preparation time, along with learning new recipes that are tasty and incorporate ingredients from the new food environment.

**Social aspects:** They are mainly mentioned by men who live alone. For them, a good food-related life is represented when there is someone else who either cooks with them or for them.

**Table 5**  
The elements that constitute a good food-related life

Food Purchasing	Food preparation	Eating	Post-eating
<b>Retailer aspects</b>	<b>Kitchen aspects</b>	<b>Food-related aspects</b>	
Distance (9)	Private kitchen (15)	Tasty (8)	Drinking (tea, coffee, infusions, soft drinks, etc.) (13)
When German supermarkets offer everything (2)	Equipment availability (11)	Healthy (7)	Go for a stroll (8)
Cleanliness (2)	Cleanliness (7)	Hot (temperature) (3)	Eating sweets or fruits (4)
Workers behaviour (2)	Privacy (1)	Everything is available (4)	Togetherness (3)
Decoration (1)	Storage capacity (1)	Accompaniments (appetisers) availability (6)	Smoking (2)
Tidiness (1)		Favourite food (4)	Hoping to have everyone satisfied (2)
Familiar to me (1)		Self-prepared dishes (1)	Relaxation and serenity (4)
Having more Syrian shops (1)		Like home (1)	Having help from children (1)
		Good appearance (1)	Cleanliness (1)
<b>Products aspects</b>	<b>Cooking aspects</b>	<b>Eating conditions</b>	
Availability (17)	Ingredients availability (15)	Watching TV (3)	
Availability of Syrian products (13)	Freshness of the ingredients (1)	Taking time (3)	
Quality (6)	Using spices that give the taste I am used to (1)	Table arrangement (2)	
Halal products (5)	Preparing colourful food (1)	Cleanliness (3)	
Credibility & trust (4)	Learning new recipes and using new ingredients (2)	Accommodation and open place (3)	
Freshness (3)	Learning tasty recipes (2)	Organised meals (2)	
Free of chemicals, hormones & GMOs (3)	Easy preparation methods (2)	Receiving compliment (1)	
Food safety (2)	Having experience (2)		
Gardening & home-made (own production) (2)	Less preparation and cooking time (3)		
Pre-prepared products (2)	Learning healthy preparation methods (1)		
Arabic labelling (2)	Prepare food by myself (1)		
Taste (1)	Learning German's habits (1)		
New products (1)			
<b>Social aspects</b>	<b>Social aspects</b>	<b>Social and psychological aspects</b>	
Family (2)	Having someone else to cook (5)	Family (17)	
Friends (2)	Preparing food with someone (3)	Eating with others (friends, people) (6)	
Companion (1)	Having visitors (1)	Being psychologically comfortable (3)	
		Reassuring family in Syria (2)	
		Better financial status (1)	
<b>Financial aspects</b>	<b>Surrounding environment</b>		
Suitable price - not expensive (17)	Having enough time (4)		
Promotion (2)	Being emotionally comfortable (3)		
Having a job (1)	Without bothering (3)		
	Securing children (1)		
<b>Personal aspects</b>			
Knowing what to buy (3)			
Being healthy & psychologically comfortable (2)			
Having a private accommodation (2)			
Learning German (1)			
Having time (1)			
Being independent (1)			

Numbers between brackets indicates the frequency of reporting each constitute of a good food-related life.

*Surrounding environment:* The comfortable surrounding environment for cooking is characterized by having enough time to cook, being psychologically and emotionally comfortable, and having a safe environment for children.

#### - Food consumption (Eating)

Three aspects related to food consumption are revealed from the interviews:

*Food-related aspects:* They are largely concentrated on food and its aesthetic and sensory features, such as being tasty, healthy, and hot, as

well as having a pleasant appearance. Besides, the availability of varied food, favourite food and accompaniments is of importance.

*Eating conditions:* The ideal eating conditions include having enough time to eat, watching TV, table arrangements, cleanliness, being settled in private accommodation, and having organized meals in number and in time.

*Social and psychological aspects:* These are highly ranked elements, particularly eating with family members or friends is highlighted. This motivation is vital for both participants living with their families and those who are alone. In ideal food consumption conditions, interviewed



persons are psychologically comfortable and have nothing to worry about. This includes family reassurance for those who have families or relatives in Syria.

#### - *Post-eating*

The ideal vision of the post eating is simple and characterized by having a drink (e.g. coffee, tea or soft drinks), smoking, eating fruit or sweets, or going for a stroll and having a relaxing time.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical considerations

The proposed conceptual framework is only a starting point towards understanding the food-related well-being in general and in the case of acute hardship as a result of conflict and displacement. Integrating the overall structure of well-being (hedonic, psychological and social) with goals for the consumption of food allow us to elucidate the concept of food-related well-being and to gain a deeper understanding of each characteristic of the FWB paradigm, 'a positive psychological, physical, emotional and social relationship with food' (Block et al., 2011: 6). In this section, we use the empirical findings to reflect on the linkages between food goals and hedonic well-being as proposed by theory. We have seen from the interviews that hedonic well-being and the functional goals of food (physical and psychological health) are connected. Following a healthy and balanced diet and being psychologically comfortable and relaxed are linked with higher life satisfaction and more positive affects. Moreover, well-being in a food context manifests itself through the sensory experiences resulting from the intake of food which has a taste similar to 'home', and from enjoying the aesthetic aspects linked to the consumption setting. These findings are similar to existing literature. However, among the diasporic Syrian community, there is a stronger emphasis on food availability and accessibility, seeking stability, and family presence. Experiencing food security, namely having access to food with sufficient quantity and quality, which meets people's cultural preferences, is linked with higher satisfaction with life and it is a source of positive emotions. Similarly, having a high overall life satisfaction and stable financial and social relationships are a prerequisite to the satisfaction with food-related life. Further, family presence and social relationships are indirectly linked to experiencing positive or negative emotions and higher or lower satisfaction with food-related life. Here, the social aspects expressed by interviewees are linked to experiencing certain types of emotions (hedonic goals), rather than expressing identity, affiliating to a certain group, or nurturing social relationships (symbolic goals). Our empirical findings confirm the link between hedonic well-being and the hedonic and functional goals of food consumption. Similarly, psychological well-being is strongly connected to the functional and symbolic goals, whereas social well-being could be associated with the three goals of consuming food (functional, symbolic and hedonic).

### 5.2. Food and hedonic well-being

#### 5.2.1. The affective dimension of hedonic well-being in relation to food

Food is known to be a precondition for individual contentment. Interviewed persons linked food to a wide array of positive and negative affects. They mainly mentioned positive moods and emotions associated with purchasing, preparation and consumption of food, whereas most of the negative affects resulted from the hardships they experience, such as sorrow because of family dispersion, nostalgia and psychological discomfort, and the circumstances of their present living conditions, e.g. stress, tiredness, worries and loneliness. It is well-documented that the relationship between food and affects goes both ways; they influence eating behaviour and vice versa (Köster & Mojet, 2015). The extent to which people feel pleasant emotions, rather than unpleasant ones, has been reported to be key determinant of hedonic well-being

(Diener, 1984; Diener and Suh, 1997; Diener et al., 1999). In the present work, participants referred to both positive and negative emotions associated with their food-related lives. Our findings here differ from the results by Ares et al. (2014; 2015) concerning the emotional aspects, where participants did not refer to negative emotions. The divergence of findings could be explained by two points. First, a different prop question used to explore this aspect: Ares and his colleagues asked participants to write the first words coming to their minds when thinking about well-being (i.e. a general assessment of well-being), whereas we asked participants about their emotions associated with each step of their interaction with food (i.e. a more direct and detailed exploration). Second, the past and present experiences and the current living conditions of our participants in their diaspora situation can explain the difference. It is worth noting that emotions and affects are neither static, nor individualized concepts, but are socially constructed and informed by both past and present experience, and our relations with others (Horton and Kraftl, 2013: 222–243). Their meaning can only be understood through a simultaneous engagement with socio-cultural context, relationships and place (Davidson et al., 2012), which explains the observed large variability.

#### 5.2.2. Satisfaction with food-related life

The associations between food and life satisfaction were found to be related to physical health and body functioning, emotions, social relationships and overall life satisfaction (Ares et al., 2014; 2015). The participants in this study indicated similar connections between food and their well-being. In addition, they emphasized the importance of food availability and accessibility.

#### - *Emotions*

One element that emerged from the interviews was the experience of pleasant and unpleasant emotions which influence satisfaction with a food-related life. Participants who are happier with their new life circumstances reported higher satisfaction with life in general and with food-related life, whereas those who experience more negative emotions resulting from family separation expressed lower satisfaction. The connection between positive and negative emotions and life evaluation is explained by Kuppens et al. (2008). They found that experiencing positive emotions is strongly related to the judgement of how people are satisfied with their lives especially when their basic psychological and safety needs are met. However, experiencing negative emotions was more negatively related to life satisfaction in individualistic than in collectivistic nations (Kuppens et al., 2008).

#### - *Food availability and accessibility*

As evident from the interviews, food availability and accessibility are considered as a proxy for perceived well-being of participants who have experienced a shortage of food in their home country during the conflict period. Tay & Diener (2011), like Maslow (1954) before them, suggested that health and happiness are achieved through the fulfilment of universal needs. In other words, a mix of daily activities that include the satisfaction of physical needs, social relationships, autonomy and mastery are essential for the achievement of well-being. In this sense, food is considered as a physical need, and thus, the fulfilment of this need enhances the individual's feeling of well-being and more specifically it promotes life evaluations and reduces negative feelings (Tay & Diener, 2011). Accordingly, food availability and accessibility is a central pillar of the FWB and FWB in poverty paradigms (Block et al., 2011; Voola et al., 2018; Bublitz et al., 2019). However, qualitative studies (Ares et al., 2014; 2015; Guillemin et al., 2016) on the perception of food-related well-being are oriented on perspectives in Western countries, where food availability is taken for granted, and therefore this element is not of relevance in this case.

### - Physical health and body functioning

Following healthy eating habits and enjoying good physical health are a source of satisfaction, whereas unhealthy dietary habits form a source of dissatisfaction. Time limitation and having little cooking experience lead particularly male and young participants to rely on processed and unhealthy food, and thus to be more susceptible to suffering health problems, accordingly they express lower satisfaction with food-related life. This could explain part of the quantitative results of the SWFL (Table 3). As in Syria, the preparation of main meals is usually the province of women (mothers), and men and children know little about it. In line with our finding, previous studies (Ares et al., 2014; 2015; Andersen & Hyldig, 2015; Guillemin et al., 2016) found an association between physical health and hedonic well-being; so, this element is regarded as a basic necessity for well-being.

### - Sensory experience

It is considered a primary determinant of hedonic well-being in a food context (Ares et al., 2014; 2015; Andersen & Hyldig, 2015; Guillemin et al., 2016; Haugaard & Lähteenmäki, 2017). Similarly, in this study, participants reported that experiencing the taste of 'home' is a prerequisite to obtaining higher satisfaction with food-related life. Pierre Bourdieu has best-described taste in his book 'Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste' (1984):

*'It is probably in tastes in food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it.'* (Bourdieu, 1984: 79)

Hence, tasting food that has a flavour of the home could trigger positive emotions and a feeling of satisfaction resulting in a higher level of well-being.

### - Social relationships

Social relationships, more precisely family and social support, are a crucial element of satisfaction with a food-related life. This aspect was mentioned several times by the participants in multiple contexts and was perceived as an indispensable element to enhance their food-related well-being. This explains the higher SWFL score for participants who lives with their families in comparison to those who live alone (Table 3). As having the family around provides feelings of comfort and intimacy and promote the divisions of labor in relation to food. This is consistent with other studies. For instance, several social aspects such as family, friendship, social contact, and sharing were found to contribute to well-being in a food context (Ares et al., 2014; 2015; Guillemin et al., 2016). Moreover, social interaction during food consumption is found to influence hedonic food perception (Andersen & Hyldig, 2015), and to increase the feeling of belonging (Haugaard & Lähteenmäki, 2017).

### - Overall life satisfaction

Having financial and marital stability are an essential element to a food-related life evaluation. Other studies found that quality of life and personal fulfilment (plenitude, safety, education, stability, equilibrium, balance) have an impact on people's perception of their well-being in a food context (Ares et al., 2014; 2015). Adapting to new living conditions, encountering social and economic adversities, and a different food environment are perceived as challenges that need time to be overcome. Therefore, these challenges undermine the satisfaction with life in general and with food-related life. For instance, we have seen in table 3 that participants with three years residence permit have higher SWLS compared to those who have only one-year residence permit. Long-term residence permit apparently gives the participants greater feeling of stability and security, particularly due to the right of family reunification. Similarly, Schnettler et al. (2013) found that life satisfaction could change as a result of several life turns. They found a decline in the sense of well-being when one experiences major financial problems or relationship breakdowns, similar to that which Lucas (2007) found earlier.

## 6. Conclusion

This study provides an insight on refugee's conception of well-being in a food-related context. According to our interview-based findings, food-related well-being is a complex construct, which stems from the past and the encountering of current challenges. Hedonic well-being in a food context is strongly linked with functional and hedonic food goals. The main points which can enhance the well-being of refugees are following a healthy diet with the aim of achieving better physical health, promoting psychological health by experiencing positive emotions, and having social support and stability. In addition, enjoying the sensory experience of eating and experiencing positive emotions when consuming food in company are equally important. Food-related well-being is a process rather than a positive outcome (Mugel et al., 2019), thus promoting it requires improvement in multiple aspects over time and engagement of the refugees themselves. Although it is impossible to change the situation in the country of origin and end corresponding conflicts, many other things can be done to improve the current situation. Food-related well-being of refugees can only be improved when the overall structure of well-being is considered. The hedonic approach provides us with some insights on this. Refugees experience a wide range of negative food-related emotions and they are quite passive regarding the new food environment which undermines their satisfaction. Thus, we argue that refugees should be encouraged to be more active in the new food environment by exploring the existing options of food supplies, such as farmer-to-consumer markets. Besides, adhering to existing consumer networks, e.g. intercultural gardening, or creating new ones to assist local farmers and to participate in farming could empower refugees to access food that is authentic and has gustative pleasure, plus being affordable and sustainable. The strong emphasis on family and social relationships suggests that refugees should be encouraged to build strong connections to people in the host society which requires openness and engagement, and language skills. Learning the language quickly and finding work that provides financial stability would at the same time facilitate family reunification. However, this cannot be realized without the support of policymakers. Public policy could support refugees' wellbeing by adopting more positive discourses that enhance their feeling of belonging, facilitation of family reunification and reduction of the period that they live in collective camps. Moreover, public health units and non-profit organisations could play an important role in building refugees' capacity for food literacy, which consequently promotes their well-being. Educating refugees on how to make their current diet healthier and the integration of other available options into the new food environment, while acknowledging and empowering their agency will accelerate their integration and foster the inclusivity of the community.

Further research is necessary to overcome the limitations of the present work and to better conceptualize food-related well-being in the context of conflict and displacement from the refugees' point of view. The present work focused only on Syrian refugees living in Stuttgart city where the food environment might be completely different from smaller cities or rural areas. Therefore, more qualitative studies addressing cross-cultural and urban-rural differences among refugees are required in order to recognize how food-related well-being should be defined in the context of diaspora. It would be important to conduct a longitudinal study to follow how the perspective of food-related well-being changes over time. A quantitative study to measure the level of well-being of refugees in a food context would also provide a valuable complement to this study.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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