

Research Report:

A Latin American Migrant Foodscape in The Netherlands

Central, South American and Caribbean migrant citizens' foodways in Almere

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This anthropological research focuses on the culinary adaptation and cultural foodways of twenty Latin American and Caribbean women living in Almere. The research question is: “How do these women adapt their food sourcing practices to the Almere foodscape and how do they simultaneously change and influence that foodscape?” The aim of the research was to detect which products and services the citizens need to boost their cultural food integration and to what extent they adapt(ed) to the Dutch foodways.

Background: Flevo Campus and the multicultural city of Almere

Research institute Flevo Campus was founded in January 2017, with the aim to analyze Almere’s current urban food system and provide local citizens with accessible solutions to urban food issues. Initially implemented by Almere’s city council, this scientific hotspot has an innovative and young approach to designing projects and applying on-field research in the city. Flevo Campus acknowledges the cultural diversity of the city: Almere is one of the four most culturally diverse cities in the Netherlands (Municipality of Almere, 2023; van der Gaast, 2020). This multiculturalilty translates into rich and complex patterns of food sourcing, as migrant citizens actively shape the city’s food system. Their food choices ultimately translate into the diverse foodways of Almere.

The anthropological research I conducted for Flevo Campus as an intern, aimed to shed light on the foodways of twenty female migrant citizens in Almere, in order to understand how their food choices are influenced by - while also influencing - the foodscape of the city. The findings can inspire new services for these women, and helps us reflect on both current local Dutch foodways and the Almere foodscape.

Qualitative research: interviews and foodmaps

I had a qualitative approach to the research: the ethnographic fieldwork took place between March and June 2022 in Almere. I mostly relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews, but I also asked respondents to draw a visual representation of what academic Lidia Marte refers to as *foodmap*. A foodmap is a hand drawing of people’s food consumption and grocery purchasing. Foodmaps help understand where people buy, cook or share their food (Marte, 2007). Interviews took between one and four hours, depending on whether I also cooked and ate with the women.

Respondents were found through the network of Lyla Carillo Quan and her “Women of Almere” project. Being able to speak Spanish was key to connect with the majority of participants. Respondents originated from thirteen different Latin American or Caribbean countries. Seventeen of them are mothers; some have a Dutch partner. Most of them have spent more than half of their lives living in Almere, with some living in the city for up to forty years.

Results and conclusions

Three quarters of the women interviewed struggled to adapt to Dutch foodways and/or sourced ingredients from their home countries, such as corn flour, in the first years living in the city. Many of them had to adapt to consuming only one hot meal a day, to the simple and fast way of cooking in the Netherlands, to the early breakfast and early dinner, and to the simple lunch (*broodje kaas*). Indeed, some women add familiar ingredients like aji amarillo or avocado to their sandwiches. What the respondents miss most about food and eating in their home countries, however, is the social gathering and conviviality around meals. In fact, memories around food and nostalgia were very important to the respondents. Food helped them re-create a sense of home. For instance, Easter and Christmas festivities are the time where typical dishes would be prepared with family or friends during the whole day.

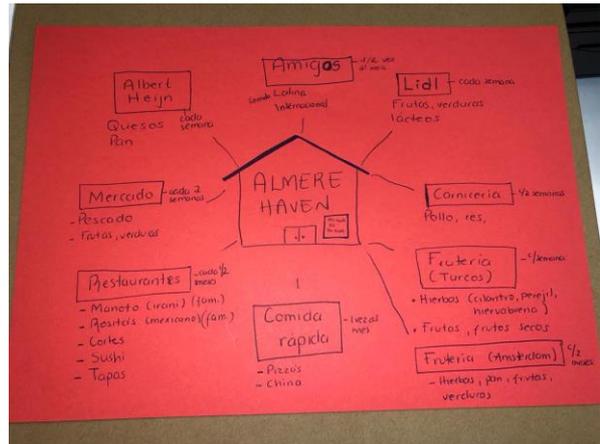


Figure 1. An example of a foodmap drawn by a respondent

Most of the respondents put a lot of effort in sourcing ingredients they are familiar with. Since a few years products like corn flour, ready tortillas and black beans can be found in many supermarkets. In earlier years respondents had to buy these products in specialized tokos or even had to go to the Albert Cuyp market in Amsterdam. When ingredients are impossible to source in Almere women buy them through online importing platforms or import the food directly from the country of origin. Some women substitute specific ingredients, such as tropical fish with herring to make ceviche, others rather do not cook the specific dishes at all when they cannot source the right ingredients, because it is emotionally too painful. The price, the proximity of the shop and the quality of the products are the biggest drivers to purchase specific ingredients in specific places.

In conclusion, Almere's migrant foodscape reflects a 'liquid society': foodways and identities are expressions of a dynamic process of recreating a sense of home and fusing it with perceived local Dutch foodways. This research shows that sourcing specific ingredients in Almere has become easier over the last fifteen to twenty years. However, the women who participated in the research are still missing the social aspect of sharing meals, the hot meal for lunch, tropical fruits of high quality, and street food vendors.

Sources

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