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Designing with More-than-Human Food Practices for Climate-Resilience

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Abstract

Climate change is an increasingly urgent, complex problem, with consequences threatening human and non-human lives across the globe. Legislative and citizen-driven responses are valuable but insufficient, and their practical feasibility is unclear. Emerging design research suggests embracing imaginative, creative approaches to support engagement with climate-change issues and inspire collective reflection. This workshop investigates how such approaches can be applied through co-creative design experimentation in the context of human-food practices, which are now recognized as a key driver of climate change. We will reflect on existing climate-change mitigation proposals by imagining their plausible implementations as climate-resilient food practices, emphasizing more-than-human concerns. The workshop is organized as part of a two-day program titled *Experimental Food Design for Sustainable Futures* inviting diverse participants interested in contributing toward sustainable socio-ecological transformations.

Author Keywords

climate resilience, climate imaginaries, more-than-human, food sustainability, experimental food design

CSS Concepts

- Human-centered computing~Interaction Design

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Workshop Schedule

(July 7 2020)

9-10am: Introductions & boundary objects

10:00-12pm: More-than-human food scenarios

12:00-2pm: Lunch & walk-shop

2:00-4pm: More-than-human crafting & prototyping

4-5pm: More-than-Human Food Futures Cookbook

5-5:30pm: Conclusions & future plans

5:30pm: Dinner & drinks

The workshop is part of a 2-day program *Experimental Food Design for Sustainable Futures*. Each day focuses on a distinct theme, using food as an accessible starting point from which to explore and articulate values, concerns, desires, and imaginaries associated with societal transformation towards sustainable futures. DIS attendees have the option to sign up for both workshop days or for one day only; two-day participation is encouraged. Details about the 2-day program: www.experimentalfooddesign.wordpress.com

Background & Motivation

Anthropogenic climate change is a multi-layered, complex problem, with increasingly urgent socio-ecological consequences affecting the lives of all living entities on the planet. Rising sea levels, increased occurrence of wildfires, severe storms, droughts, and other extreme weather events threaten human and non-human life, communities, and critical infrastructures [6][10][17]. Local and national governments [6][13], NGO's and citizen-led organisations [7][9], and others are responding to the imminent and impending consequences of these threats with proposals for climate-change mitigation. Such efforts are necessary and valuable but insufficient. The need to transform our societies towards socio-ecological sustainability is clear but how such proposals will work in practice is not. Many proposals lack the concrete economic and political scaffolding necessary to make their implementation feasible and cannot be assured of uptake. Emerging research in the area [2][2][12][15][16] proposes embracing imaginative, creative approaches to effectively communicate climate-change issues in order to enhance feasibility. Imaginaries of future situations can provide orientation in decision making to help people grasp how proposed climate-mitigation measures may affect their lives. Hence, imagination can support engagement with climate change issues and inspire collective reflection on the possibly radical effects that such measures may have [14]. Drawing on this emerging body of research, this workshop explores how such imaginative approaches can be applied through co-creative design experimentation in the context of food and food practices. Through speculative prototyping, a foraging walk-shop, and discussion we will reflect on existing climate mitigation proposals by imagining their

implementations as climate-resilient food practices emphasizing more-than-human interests. In this time of rapidly changing climates, food is a critical concern: human-food practices are recognised as a major driver of climate change and all 17 of the UN's sustainability goals can be linked to food [17]. Within the rich variety of research projects tackling food sustainability issues, we believe many fail to consider more-than-human perspectives. This human-centric approach is increasingly untenable: a more-than-human view acknowledging the interdependencies of life would allow for a more comprehensive consideration of proposals and their broader consequences [1][16][17].

The workshop is organized as part of a two-day program titled *Experimental Food Design for Sustainable Futures*; taking place on the second day, following on from the day 1 workshop *Fantastic(e)ating Food Futures: Reimagining Human Food Interactions*. The two-day program focuses on experimenting with food as bio-design material and socio-culturally potent, aesthetically rich starting point from which to critically reflect on social and ecological uncertainties. The day 1 workshop uses experimental food design co-creation to examine interdependencies between food and technology, and 'fantasticate' future food-tech practices navigated by diverse human and non-human stakeholders. The day 2 workshop (outlined here) experiments with food to explore climate change uncertainties and speculate how more-than-human perspectives might be included to support sustainability. The two workshop days are thematically intertwined and have been carefully designed to be complementary.

More-than-Human Food Futures card deck presents archetypes of more-than-human food practices. It is a generative tool designed to aid in the envisioning of climate resilient future food scenarios.



THE SCAVENGER

The Scavenger. Often seen as unclean, spreaders of disease. Opportunists who thrive on the death of others. Yet they play a crucial role in any ecosystem. Through the disposal and dispersal of dead tissue, they recycle and renew the value it contains, supporting new life and sanitizing the environment.

Goals

The primary objective of this workshop is to engage in co-creative, imaginative design explorations of climate change mitigation proposals and related socio-ecological uncertainties through the context of food systems. We will explore how various elements of climate change mitigation proposals may apply to food system contexts, craft and debate creative envisionments of climate-resilient futures, and speculate on how a more-than-human perspective can be included. Our goal is to contribute creative, actionable visions that can be taken forward to support positive societal transformations towards sustainability. We hope to create an interdisciplinary forum to share experiences, creative practices, and imaginations concerning climate change and discuss new ways of taking these visions forwards in our (organizers' and participants') existing work with policy makers, citizen groups and NGOs [1-3][16][18].

Workshop Theme

To facilitate a discussion about climate change mitigation and related socio-ecological challenges, we narrow the scope of our inquiry to climate-resilient food practices and processes. Our focus on food is motivated by three factors: (i) human-food practices are key drivers of climate change and play a crucial part in mitigation proposals; (ii) food and food practices are universally relatable, providing a viable starting point for interdisciplinary collaborations; (iii) food extends to more-than-human life as a key concern in creating sustainable living systems. Critically, while food gives the workshop focus, the discussions will transcend food-related issues to address broader contexts of climate change and related mitigation plans.

Workshop Structure & Activities

Organized as part of the two-day program *Experimental Food Design for Sustainable Futures*, the workshop involves participants in co-creating scenarios and prototypes for more-than-human food practices and climate-resilient futures. For morning introductions, everyone brings a food-related text or object capturing an existing or speculative proposal for climate-change mitigation (a snippet of media article, science-fiction story, bought or made artifact, etc). We will consider how these proposals interrelate and how they may be problematised in their human centrality, discussing what a shift to more-than-human perspectives might entail. Following in smaller groups, we will speculate plausible scenarios for more-than-human food practices supporting climate-resilience. This process will be guided using *our More-than-Human Food Futures card deck* to provide participants a starting perspective and aid imagination [see sidebars]. Over lunch, we will explore the Eindhoven foodscape to frame our speculative scenarios within local everyday food contexts. We will visit selected food venues to consider how they represent values of sustainability, and how our more-than-human scenarios could be implemented. On our way, we will forage for various ingredients – found and bought objects, food items, photos, etc. – to support our scenarios. Using the foraged items and materials provided by organizers, we will conduct an afternoon crafting session, materializing our scenarios through low-tech prototypes (edible dishes, artifacts, and more). Each group will supply a rationale for how their prototype could be plausibly implemented within existing food systems, how it corresponds with or challenges existing climate mitigation proposals, and might support a transformation towards resilience. The element of plausibility is critical, as we intend for the

**More-than-Human Food
Futures card deck**



THE RUMINANT

The Ruminant. Seen as docile, contemplative. The ruminant extracts its nutrients from plants that other animals are incapable of digesting, but many other animals are capable of digesting the ruminant. Highly social, critical to soil health and the lifecycles of many of the plants on which it grazes.

workshop outcomes to be carried forward in 'real world' projects, in which we are collaborators [1-3][16][18]. The proposed prototypes and imaginaries will be compiled together with outcomes of the day 1 workshop into a *More-than-Human Food Futures Cookbook* that will be self-published. Participants will be invited to contribute towards a special issue of the International Journal of Food Design, confirmed for early 2021. We aim to maintain a long-term collaboration with participants through future co-authored workshops, special interest groups, and more. The organizers have substantial experience in the area [1-5][8][11-12][15-16][17] and are able to foster such collaborations.

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