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Feasting on Participatory Methodologies for Regenerative Food Transitions

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ABSTRACT

Food is key to our lives. It nourishes us, shapes our social interactions and, as a quintessentially more-than-human concern, connects us to other species and the planet. The ways we eat both shape and are shaped by pressing social and environmental challenges that we must attend to if we are to collectively flourish. The purpose of this workshop is to gather researchers who use participatory and co-design (PD) methods, around a hybrid (virtual and real-world) table, to explore how we approach food in our transformational design research and practice aiming to nourish regenerative – socially and ecologically just – futures. In the workshop, we will share, feast on, and digest our methodological practices and approaches, with the objective to enrich each other's work, and co-construct a firmer methodological foundation for participatory food design and research.

CCS CONCEPTS

• Human-centred computing; • Interaction design; Interaction design process and methods; Participatory design;

KEYWORDS

Food system transitions, eco-social change, co-creative participatory design, more-than-human

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1 FOOD AS 21ST-CENTURY CONCERN

Human engagements with and through food are essential to the health of more-than-human communities, and present a key opportunity to foster positive eco-social transitions. The 21st century global food system is largely driven by the dominant ethos of extractivist capitalism. Many human-food practices in this system are troubling: the ways that people produce, transport, eat, and dispose of food are destabilising local and planetary ecosystems; contributing to biodiversity loss and a declining health of humans and non-humans alike [15, 21, 23]. Food practices, and the entangled web of social, cultural, ecological and economic relations within which they exist, thus need careful attention. This workshop brings together researchers, practitioners and others who use participatory and co-design (PD) methods for food design and research. Over the course of the workshop, we aspire to collectively envisage how we may leverage co-creative methodologies to consider and meaningfully respond to food-related 21st century concerns. Recognising that the inclusive, collaborative processes of PD offer ample possibilities in supporting positive eco-social change [1, 3, 4, 7, 14, 17, 19] the workshop offers a convivial space for diverse PD voices, practices and methods to come together and collectively address food sustainability issues.

Researchers and practitioners in and beyond PD have been addressing food-related concerns at various scales, from personal and local to communal and planetary [2, 6, 8, 14, 27]. Yet, in PD specifically, at least to our knowledge, these efforts have not been brought together in a concerted way, as a dedicated long-term initiative or venue. Food and food-related concerns have not been a focal workshop topic before at PDC, and very few food-focused papers have been published in the PDC proceedings or in the CoDesign journal. To address this gap, our workshop will bring together PD research and practice that seeks to deepen understanding of food-related challenges and concerns, and thereby foster positive eco-social impact. These may include challenges with food scarcity, biodiversity loss and weakening social cohesion, the pressing need to nurture human|nature connectedness and more-than-human care, as well as issues with vanishing food traditions and cultures. Through the workshop activities, we hope to plant seeds for long-term collaborations to enrich the landscape of co-creative food design and research that has been sprouting in the academic soil. A key workshop outcome we envision is a Special Issue on CoDesign, Food and

Regenerative Care (proposed for the CoDesign journal), or edited book.

We invite interested researchers and practitioners to contribute their situated research experiences as short case studies: methodological examples of creative collaborations with and among stakeholders across diverse more-than-human landscapes (e.g., including insects, animals, plants, microorganisms, AI, sensors and other technologies). At the workshop, we will bring together the cases in co-creative ways, by sharing food design ingredients (both edible and metaphorical) at a convivial methodological feast. We will taste and discuss these ingredients to consider what makes them unique in their distinct situated contexts (personal, geographical, disciplinary, etc.). The goal is to identify the nuances, possibilities and challenges of co-creative food design and research seeking to foster eco-social change at both local and planetary scales. Learning from each other's experiences, we hope to better understand how we – PD practitioners and researchers – can co-design food innovations contributing to more sustaining, regenerative and just food futures.

2 COUPLING (PARTICIPATORY) DESIGN AND FOOD

Food is necessary to life; food is culture. It has the power to sustain us personally and collectively. Foodstuffs are often sensorially, materially and aesthetically rich, and can be used to highlight cultural practices inherent in growing, preparing, cooking, eating, sharing, reusing and disposing of food. Whether individual or combined; growing wild, cultivated or genetically engineered, foodstuffs can be used to inspire co-creative thinking about food issues and beyond. Indeed, the very properties of food – its malleability, changeability (e.g., from gas to liquid to solids), transportability, sensorial, aesthetic and edible aspects, can be leveraged to drive innovative, playful, and experimental co-design activity. We recognise research that engages the senses in food-related inquiry; including how we visualise food (its colour, size, shape), what it tastes like, what it smells like, the sounds it can make, how it feels, the memories it triggers, the multi-species relationships it both embodies and shapes, and more [9, 11, 20, 24, 26, 28]. In our workshop, foodstuffs play a key role – as an edible, perishable, compostable and thus potentially sustainable tangible material for use in design research and practice, and as a critical topic of concern. Furthermore, we consider food as an inherently more-than-human concern: designing with food (whether as topic or socio-politically loaded material) invites all involved to move beyond limited human perspectives.

Much food systems innovation has been created from the top-down, by and for mainstream, mostly human, communities. The resulting 'innovations' typically privilege urban over rural locations, foreground human consumer needs and wealthier citizens' concerns, neglect the richly diverse multispecies reality of food cultures and tend to focus on business concerns, to the detriment of social cohesion and sustainability. Fostering collaboration with diverse actors who grapple with food-related issues may help bridge these divides and move sustainability narratives forward in productive ways. Such shifts are crucial if we are to take regenerative eco-social transitions seriously. PD, as a "process of investigating,

understanding, reflecting upon, initiating, elaborating, and supporting common learning between participants in collective reflection-in-action" [22] can provide means to nurture these shifts. Indeed, PD's capacity to enable co-creative involvement of diverse actors in the design innovation process [4, 17] as well as to nurture care-full, relational co-operations and alliances [5, 18, 19] can be a crucial contributor to positive eco-social change. At the workshop, we hope to gather PD cases that critically engage with diverse aspects of food-related activities, across the full value chain.

3 'BRING YOUR OWN METHOD' FEAST

This full-day workshop is envisioned to take place in a hybrid format, with in-person activities happening at the Nordic PDC Place in Helsinki (FI), and with participants joining virtually across places and time zones. We will carefully design the workshop schedule to accommodate online participants across a variety of time zones, and avoid long screen times. If international travel is not possible at the time of the conference, we will organise a fully online event with a half-day schedule to avoid screen fatigue. The workshop (whether online or hybrid) will host between 5 - 12 participants (plus 4 organisers).

At the workshop, participants will be invited to contribute their situated research experiences as short case studies: methodological examples of creative collaborations with and among stakeholders across diverse more-than-human landscapes (e.g., including insects, animals, plants, microorganisms, AI, sensors and other technologies). We will leverage experimental and embodied food design techniques [9] to bring together our cases in co-creative ways, by sharing various food and design ingredients (both edible and metaphorical) at a convivial methodological feast. To represent our case studies, everyone will bring a tangible ingredient – an edible foodstuff or other microbiological material, tool, utensil, technology. These ingredients should capture key methodological components employed in the case studies and will be presented with an accompanying narrative describing their origin: how they were applied (literally or metaphorically) within each specific case study; with whom, and why; how were they envisioned to make a change; for whom. At the workshop, the ingredients will serve as boundary objects [13, 25] to conceptually bridge participants and perspectives at the table, and as PD triggers [16] to facilitate co-creative knowledge production, reflection and imaginaries (figure 1). Aligning with the workshop's focus on sustainability transitions, our ingredients should be consumable or able to be returned to their original function after use, to avoid unnecessary wastage. The aim is to point towards eco-social and material sustainability, not only of the objects, but of the workshop PD process itself [30].

Gathered around a hybrid dining table (in-person for participants in Helsinki; virtual for those who Zoom-in), we will taste and discuss our ingredients – food-based design materials and boundary objects – to consider what makes them unique in their distinct situated contexts (personal, geographical, disciplinary, etc.). We will discuss how they unfold in their specific, situated contexts: highlighting which participatory, co-creative methods were employed; if and how they worked out; who participated, who could not. For this discussion, we encourage sharing using performative means (whether in person or remote; see past examples at [29]). We



Figure 1: Examples of boundary objects and co-created foodstuffs from our past workshops.

will work as a full group and in smaller sub-groups to bring cases together, sample and savour each other's methodological choices, and discuss what insights, opportunities and provocations they reveal for co-creative PD that aims to foster eco-socially just and regenerative food transitions. Throughout, we will make notes and sketches both on paper and in digital using a shared Miro board designed by the organisers as a convivial dining environment (see past examples at [29]). The aim with these activities is to collectively envisage how co-creative PD methods may be leveraged to consider social and ecological food-related concerns.

To run the workshop, we will need a room with tables and chairs to accommodate up to 16 people. Ideally, with access to running water and basic kitchen utensils (plates, cutlery, napkins) – if these are not available, we will secure them with support from local colleagues. A projector, or screen and internet access are also required to support hybrid participation.

4 WORKSHOP OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Throughout our methodological and sensory-rich feast, we will learn from each other's distinct, situated experiences and expertise to mutually enrich our transformational food design and research practices. We hope to help cultivate long-term collaborations among participants and grow new co-creative food alliances and adventures, thereby contributing to the contemporary landscape of food-oriented design research initiatives. As co-founders and custodians of the Feeding Food Futures (FFF) network [12] we provide an existing collaborative space for interested participants to propose topics of interest to be collectively worked on through participatory events and research publications. FFF serves as a decentralized, globally distributed network of contributors, who propose food design research activities and develop them autonomously, leveraging the network as a resource of knowledge and opportunities for collaboration [10]. A more concrete output of the workshop is a Special Issue that has been proposed for the CoDesign journal, or an edited book – all participants will be invited to contribute articles in various formats, including visual essays and pictorials. By sharing the creative outcomes and knowledge cultivated at our methodological feast, we hope to inspire other researchers and practitioners interested in investigating the possible roles of PD methodologies when designing, imagining, developing and employing ideas for futures that are regenerative, equitable and just.

5 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT; EXPERTISE OF ORGANISERS

The workshop invites contributions – case studies submitted as 1-page expressions of interests (pdf) – from designers, researchers, and others interested in exploring possibilities of co-creative collaborations to address food-related eco-social challenges. We welcome PD cases that respond to one or more of the following areas of interest:

Considering the impacts of using food-related co-creative design methodologies with and for specific communities and contexts.

Examining how these methodologies might help people to think about urgent eco-social challenges, e.g. resources extraction, biodiversity loss, weakening social cohesion, vanishing food cultures and traditions, and the overarching climate change.

Troubling what is at stake in food system transformation by bringing focus to situated concerns.

Highlighting opportunities and challenges of working with food-related materials in PD.

Aligning with the PDC 2022 theme Embracing Cosmologies, the workshop welcomes especially those cases that reach beyond the scope of human-food perspectives, to explore intricate, relational multi-species entanglements that constitute the global food web. Interested contributors shall submit their expressions of interest to feedfoodfutures@gmail.com no later than June 15th 2022 (AOE). The workshop will take place on 27th September.

The four organisers are long-term collaborators and co-founders of Feeding Food Futures [12]. Together and individually, we have organised over 40 food-oriented design workshops and other co-creative sessions including future enactments, salons and performative tastings enabling critical exchange among diverse food-oriented actors. Dolejšová organises experimental food design workshops and performative interventions at academic conferences as well as arts events worldwide (<https://materie.me/>). Wilde co-leads workshops, panels and performative actions involving food and Embodied Design Ideation at leading international venues in and beyond academia (<http://daniellewilde.com/>). Davis focuses on co-design for commensality both in person and across a distance, and when not co-leading food-related workshops can be found dining experimentally with her own and other people's families. Altarriba Bertran has facilitated several workshops – local and international; in-person, hybrid, and online – centered on food, play, and socio-cultural concerns (<http://ferranaltarriba.com>).

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