Disruptive technologies?
Scaling relational geographies of ICT-mediated surplus food redistribution

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CIG Session: Denial, deception and disruption: addressing the challenges and potential solutions to fix a broken food system?
CIG 2017, UCC, 4-6th May 2017
Food loss & waste: Emblem of broken food system?

“We all – farmers and fishers; food processors and supermarkets; local and national governments; individual consumers – must make changes at every link of the human food chain to prevent food wastage from happening in the first place, and re-use or recycle it when we can’t …

In addition to the environmental imperative, there is a moral one: we simply cannot allow one-third of all the food we produce to go to waste, when 870 million people go hungry every day.”

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, 2014
SHARECITY100: ifood sharing surplus

Top Cities

- London: 28 initiatives
- Melbourne: 18 initiatives
- Barcelona: 14 initiatives
- Milan: 13 initiatives
- New York City: 12 initiatives
- Adelaide: 11 initiatives
- Boston: 11 initiatives
- Berlin: 10 initiatives
- Brussels: 9 initiatives
- Hong Kong: 9 initiatives
- San Francisco: 9 initiatives
- Los Angeles: 8 initiatives
- Rome: 7 initiatives
- Seattle: 7 initiatives
- Washington DC: 7 initiatives
- Atlanta: 6 initiatives
- Frankfurt: 6 initiatives
- Kuala Lumpur: 6 initiatives
- Madrid: 6 initiatives
- Oakland: 6 initiatives

Average number of initiatives per city

- NORTH AMERICA
- EUROPE
- ASIA
- THE MIDDLE EAST
- AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Central & South America

Top Cities:
- London (28 initiatives)
- Melbourne (18 initiatives)
- Barcelona (14 initiatives)
- Milan (13 initiatives)
- New York City (12 initiatives)
- Adelaide (11 initiatives)
- Boston (11 initiatives)
- Berlin (10 initiatives)
- Brussels (9 initiatives)
- Hong Kong (9 initiatives)
- San Francisco (9 initiatives)
- Los Angeles (8 initiatives)
- Rome (7 initiatives)
- Seattle (7 initiatives)
- Washington DC (7 initiatives)
- Atlanta (6 initiatives)
- Frankfurt (6 initiatives)
- Kuala Lumpur (6 initiatives)
- Madrid (6 initiatives)
- Oakland (6 initiatives)
The what & how of sharing surplus

- 47% of activities are targeting food surplus at retail level
- 34% facilitate the redistribution of food from retailers to charities
- 68% of online platforms (connecting donor to recipient) and 62% of apps target food surplus at the retail sector

Source of food surplus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICT-mediation</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Supplier/Farm</th>
<th>Retail</th>
<th>Hospitality</th>
<th>Consumer (garden)</th>
<th>Public/Foraging</th>
<th>Consumer (household)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed online group (Facebook and MeetUp)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Platform</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First beginnings

Iseult and Aoibheann met in February 2012, when a group of students bonded over a love for food and distaste for waste.

By June 2012, they facilitated the first donation from the Honest 2 Goodness farmers market in Glasnevin to the charity, Don Bosco Teenage Care.

November 2012

Aoibheann and Iseult, in collaboration with other organisations, hosted the Feeding the 5000 event in Dublin.

They realised that they needed technology to make the process scalable and sustainable and developed the FoodCloud App.

August 2013

In August 2013, Aoibheann and Iseult registered FoodCloud as a not-for-profit company and were accepted on Ireland's leading tech accelerator programme, Launchpad.

May 2014

FoodCloud secured trials with Tesco, Supervalue, Fresh, Starbucks and some smaller cafes and bakeries.

July 2014

FoodCloud announced a ground-breaking partnership with Tesco that will see all surplus food from their 146 stores redistributed to charities across Ireland.

FoodCloud recruited a wonderful team to help scale the initiative across Ireland. Now they work hard to support our networks of businesses and charities and help us achieve a vision for a world where no good food goes to waste.
Disruption: ICT and Food Redistribution

- Professionalises food surplus redistribution
- Disrupts power balance
- Improves food access, quality and safety
- Reduces food going to landfill

"With the technology we could see if one store has had five collections not accepted that week and capture that, whereas I think previous organisations that would have tried the retail wouldn't have had that real time information without the technology." - FoodCloud Founder

"What Tesco were donating, we would have saved them a lot of money. But we ourselves would take on that cost, because we would have to waste all, say 80% of what they gave us. A large proportion was baked goods, pastries and things, and the rest were vegetables seriously looked like someone might have stood on them. And why would they donate that? Oh the homeless will eat it. What nonsense!" — Charity on receiving food donations pre-FoodCloud
Disruption: ICT and Scalability

- Scaling operationally
- Scaling geographically
- Improved visibility

“'We initially started by matching farmers' markets with charities around the corner, but realised that wasn't scalable. We started looking internationally at 'how do you scale that retail level solution?' and what we found was that you needed some kind of technology.” – FoodCloud Founder

“ Basically FoodCloud provides the technology and the kind of expertise and knowledge of rolling it out in Ireland. And FareShare kind of go out and do the kick off meetings and take that support function.” – FoodCloud Founder
Continuum: ICT is not a ‘silver bullet’

• Relational dimension continues to be key
  – “Technology is not an independent variable but is co-constructed by the social forces it organises and unleashes” (Feenberg, 2012:3)

• Charities rely on scheduling and routine

• Access to ICT can be problematic for charities

They are really sceptical about ‘flash in the pan’ apps, and everyone seems to have an app and they are like “it doesn’t work, we’ve tried it”, – FoodCloud founder on views of ICT in charity sector

“If you don’t understand the charity and the food business you can just give them an app like we did at the start. Just said “oh sure just put it up, somebody will accept it”. So if you don’t have the supporting processes it does fall down.” - FoodCloud founder

“Their lifestyles are chaotic enough. You might think ‘oh it’s just food coming in the door’, but it takes a lot of organisation... Any little bit of help is great, as long as it's structured.” - Charity Recipient
Continuum: Changes at surface level

• Retailer practices in generating surplus remain unchanged
  • No financial incentive to reduce waste
  • Accusations of exploitation and corporate ‘greenwash’

• Broad agri-food system is not changing
  • Not addressing supply-side issues
  • Continuation of retail ‘bottleneck’

• Socioeconomic status quo not addressed
  • “Impracticality, morality and distraction of redistribution surplus food” Caraher & Furey (2017)
Conclusions

Disruption?

FoodCloud improving **efficiency** and **efficacy** of existing redistribution practices in an imperfect present:

- Provisional activity operating ‘in the meantime’ (Cloke et al., 2016)
- Transactional rather than transformational sharing (Ede, 2014)
- Evolving and reflective strategy

Denial?

Need to avoid surplus redistribution becoming a waste prevention deterrent ‘in the meantime’

- Reframe campaigns to underlying causes as well as symptoms
- Recognise complexity - diverse motivations and goals

Deception?

Need to avoid casual conflation of reducing food waste with resolving food insecurity – the ‘win-win’ narrative

- Need more and better data on impacts
- Need strategic plans alongside ‘in the meantime’ actions
- Coalitions and collective actions
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