

Food sharing in a pandemic: Urban infrastructures, prefigurative practices and lessons for the future

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Infrastructures

- Infrastructures mediate between those for whom infrastructures are foregrounded and those for whom they tend to be understated, **making some aspects of infrastructural work more or less visible** (Star, 1999).
- '**Open-ended experimental systems**' (Morita and Jensen, 2017, p. 617) that create new, if fragile, affective relations, cultural practices and political imaginaries and foster alternatives towards socio-ecological transformations (Berlant, 2016).





Prefigurative practices

- Prefiguration is improvisational: ‘... typically proceed(ing) through an intensive commitment to improvising with available ideas, materials, spaces, and bodies, and affective states.’
- ...it creates structure, by institutionalising and strengthening some practices, which ‘often create protected spaces where counter futures can be further developed.’
- ...these practices then impact wider systems, for example by altering the momentum of dominant projects, changing values, or shaping spaces in society.

Jeffrey, C. and Dyson, J., 2020. Geographies of the future: Prefigurative politics. *Progress in Human Geography*, p.0309132520926569.



Questions

- How food sharing initiatives have been affected by, and responded to, COVID-19 outbreak in Dublin?
- What are the prefigurative ways of coping with infrastructural breakdowns?
- Whose work is involved in infrastructuring urban food systems?



Data Collection and Analysis

- Online data collection March-October 2020;
- 26 food sharing initiatives
- Non-for profit, charity, informal, associations, social enterprises
- Online data mining – Websites, News, Twitter, Facebook , Instagram
- NVIVO codes: access, mobility, care, challenges, solutions



Challenges

Type of Initiative	Challenge
Surplus food redistribution (e.g. food rescue, food banks, food charities)	Limited access to surplus food Scaling-up operations Diversifying food sources Transportation and storage New labour conditions i.e. social distancing
Shared food eating (e. g. community kitchens, soup kitchens)	Access to shared eating spaces and cooking facilities Access to healthy food ingredients Increase in meal demands Homelessness Mental health issues Volunteers
Shared food growing (e.g. urban farms, community gardens)	Closure of community gardens in Dublin Surplus of fresh foods Disruption of seed supply Mental health issues



Improvisation

Type of Initiative	Improvisation
Surplus food redistribution	Strengthening existing partnerships for access to storage, food and transportation
Shared food eating	Rearranging spaces of shared consumption Cooking at home Setting up mobile kitchens Trolley outreach taking [food] to the streets'
Shared food growing	Use of social media for plants and seeds swaps Arranging food gleaning within 5 km radius



Institutionalisation

Type of Initiative	Institutionalisation
Surplus food redistribution	<p>Collaboration with the Government (e.g. Community Call Campaign)</p> <p>Food For Ireland Nation-wide food emergency action</p> <p>Working together with corporate partners and businesses</p> <p>Establishing new Food Hubs in Ireland</p>
Shared food eating	<p>Gaining access to commercial central production kitchens</p> <p>Networking with surplus food redistribution initiatives</p>
Shared food growing	<p>Petitions to the Government</p> <p>Supporting government healthy eating programme</p> <p>Developing nation -wide movement to encourage grow your own (e.g. social media outreach)</p>



Impact

Type of Initiative	Impact
Surplus food redistribution	Emergency 'meantime' food provision infrastructures (Cloke et al. 2017)
Shared Food Eating	Relational networks of care and sociality – 'more than food' (Goodman 2016)
Community Gardens	Socio-political awareness and recognition of the interconnectedness of food with economic, political, and social systems (e.g. housing crises in Dublin)



Final Thoughts

- Although fragile, food sharing practices co-produced resilient infrastructures that have increased mobility, access and care during the pandemic.
- A nuanced view is however required regarding how food sharing infrastructures, that otherwise embody a high level of organisational precariousness and are often used as greenwashing opportunities to advance corporate interest in sustainability, can play a key role in governing urban food systems in the post-pandemic recovery.



Thank you

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