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

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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Initiative</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
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</table>
| **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 heath 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

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Improvisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surplus food redistribution</td>
<td>Strengthening existing partnerships for access to storage, food and transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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

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

<table>
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<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surplus food redistribution</td>
<td>Emergency ‘meantime’ food provision infrastructures (Cloke et al. 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Food Eating</td>
<td>Relational networks of care and sociality – ‘more than food’ (Goodman 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Gardens</td>
<td>Socio-political awareness and recognition of the interconnectedness of food with economic, political, and social systems (e.g. housing crises in Dublin)</td>
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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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