A Food Hub Zine: Imagining Good Food Futures

Abstract
This paper reports from a workshop about an ongoing food hub pilot project that aims at bringing local and sustainable food into a deprived neighbourhood in the UK. In the reflection and futuring workshop we invited participants to create a zine to imagine ideas on the future of the food hub. We reflect on preliminary insights and point to design directions for food hub technologies.

Introduction
In light of an unsustainable globalised food system, HCI has increasingly explored how technology can support efforts to positively change food practices on a personal, social, policy, and environmental level [1]. Alternative or civic food networks are self-organised groups that buy local and often organic food directly from producers at fair prices, thus rejecting neoliberal markets [5]. For the “Designing Recipes for Digital Food Futures” workshop, I can report preliminary results from an ongoing pilot project that tried to realise such a network in a socio-economically deprived neighbourhood in the UK, moving such networks out of an ‘elite’ niche market [4]. The network realised a ‘food hub’ at a community centre, supplied by five local producers of vegetables, bread, fish, meat, and fruit juice. Local residents use an online ordering platform to buy their weekly groceries. Five weeks into the pilot we
conducted a reflection and futuring workshop with local residents, organisers, and producers.

**Reflection and Futuring Workshop**

The aim of the workshop was to learn from the experiences of the pilot to develop and improve the food hub. In the first half, we brainstormed about current positive and negative food practices, as well as challenges and opportunities of the food hub. We then used a zine-making format to turn these topics into future food ideas. In four pairs, participants designed and created 2-4 pages of a zine, using paper, pens, cut-out images, stamps, stickers, and other tools. Each section addressed a specific challenge and focused on an aspect of the future food hub.

**Food Hub Challenges**

A challenge the food hub faces at the moment is limited participation and low order volumes. Spreading the word is hard, despite print and online advertising. On the one hand, this could be due to an unwillingness or fear to try something new. On the other hand, there seems to be a lack of awareness on the health and environmental aspects of food. Additionally, people living on a tight budget have difficulties to plan a weekly shop. They do, however, treat themselves and the family with takeaway food, as a proliferation of fast food restaurants indicates. Such unhealthy eating habits, which are common place among children and families, make the 'inconvenient' food hub offer that requires cooking from scratch less attractive.

**Food Hub Futures**

Analysing the final zine, we developed six themes of values a future food hub could enact. Across all contributions, food is seen as something that connects people, therefore community co-creation of the food hub is important. One pair focused on their pages on the enjoyment of great flavours in food. Food hub food simply tastes better. Two pairs focused on learning about food and where it comes from, both as a top-down educational approach and out of personal curiosity to become active. Another pair presented the food hub as a place to try out new food, to avoid always eating the same things from the supermarket. Two pairs presented activities around making food yourself, both as a way to build confidence in cooking, and as a practice to get satisfaction by creating something with your own hands. Finally, good food can become a family experience, particularly through school kids motivating their parents to cook.

**Conclusions**

These preliminary findings show implications for HCI in the design of future food technologies. Beyond facilitating the logistics alternative food networks, design can support such networks on several levels. On a personal level, HCI can design for the experience and joy of food [3], and the development of skills and confidence in making yourself and trying new things. On a social level, it can support commensality on the family table. On a policy level, it can support initiatives to improve learning about health and safety, and the economics of cooking yourself. Finally, on an environmental, it can facilitate learning about and trying of new sustainably produced food. I hope I can potentially turn some of these ideas into prototypes at the workshop.

**References**

1. Comber, Rob, Choi, Jaz Hee Jeong, Hoonhout,

