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Lift@Weimar: Sustainable Interaction with Food, Technology, and the City

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ABSTRACT

This workshop explores innovative approaches to understanding and cultivating sustainable food culture in urban environments via human-computer-interaction (HCI) design and ubiquitous technologies. We perceive the city as an intersecting network of people, place, and technology in constant transformation. Our 2009 OZCHI workshop, *Hungry 24/7? HCI Design for Sustainable Food Culture*, opened a new space for discussion on this intersection amongst researchers and practitioners from diverse backgrounds including academia, government, industry, and non-for-profit organisations. Building on the past success, this new instalment of the workshop series takes a more refined view on mobile human-food interaction and the role of interactive media in engaging citizens to cultivate more sustainable everyday human-food interactions on the go. Interactive media in this sense is distributed, pervasive, and embedded in the city as a network. The workshop addresses environmental, health, and social domains of sustainability by bringing together insights across disciplines to discuss conceptual and design approaches in orchestrating mobility and interaction of people and food in the city as a network of people, place, technology, and food.

THEME AND BACKGROUND

Human existence fundamentally depends on food intake. Therefore food security based on the condition of having access to stable availability and use of quality food [1] is a crucial element of human sustainability. However, our current state of food production and consumption does not ensure food security for the future. One of the key contributors to the problem is the acute urban-rural segregation and the subsequent lack of understanding of how food shapes the city by shaping the social, environmental, and health contexts of the individual and further, the community. Therefore, 'a coherent and coordinated strategy is vital' [2] not only amongst collective entities such as nations and regions but also individuals. Our first food workshop at OZCHI 2009 addressed issues of cultivating sustainable 'eating, cooking, and growing food' culture [3] through individual day-to-day practices. We build on the knowledge accrued from the OZCHI workshop to further explore the issue through the specific lens of 'mobility.'

As evidenced in initiatives such as *Slow Food International*, a non-profit group focusing on preservation of the cultural, culinary, and artistic local traditions [4], food industrialisation has been condemned for 'contaminating' the urban food ecology with unhealthy (and often unnatural) products; for social isolation; and detrimental environmental impact in many domains of business operation from product packaging to produce itself. However, convenience and economic advantage still attract many people around the world to taking the 'on the go option' of ready-made packaged food. The growing urban population, which has already reached the 50% mark on the global scale [5], presents new challenges for us to reframe the culture and practices of consuming food in the city. In urban environments where one-person households are the dominant form of residence, there is limited access to fresh produce and/or facilities to prepare quality food particularly for people with the low socio-economic status [6], and access to mass-produced goods is an embedded feature, what kind of contributions can we make from the perspective of interactive media in order to cultivate a sustainable food culture? Further, how is the city as a physical and abstract entity situated in relation to the information that flows through it? Willis and Geelhaar argues that 'the challenge is less a case of putting information back in its place, but of putting place back into information' [7]. This workshop aims develop conceptual and design approaches at the intersection of people, place, and technology, by bringing together expertise from various related fields of study including HCI, information technology, urban informatics, sociology, cultural, environment, and health studies.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

To respond to the main question posed above, the workshop focuses on three domains of enquiry: *Firstly*, what are the key determinants of current mobile human-food interactions (for example, outdoor eating may have different connotations and implications in Reykjavik compared to the Sunshine Coast in Australia during winter)? *Secondly*, where are the gaps that can be filled by interactive media in order to improve the health, environmental, and social sustainability of mobile human-food interaction? *Thirdly*, what are conceptual and design approaches we can provide pragmatic solutions in an imminent future? By examining these three domains, we hope to generate new actionable knowledge that can be applied to developing usable technologies in specific urban environments.

The workshop's contribution and outcomes will extend beyond the theme of food. The need to develop perspectives of designing interactive urban media is on

the rise as we enter the era of ubiquitous computing. Thus it is necessary to build a common language that allows fluid communication amongst researchers and practitioners in relevant fields in order to discuss and expand knowledge that can be effectively used to deal with actual life challenges such as sustainability – a term whose meaning varies amongst individuals, communities, and broader collective entities according to their value contexts.

WORKSHOP FORMAT AND PARTICIPATION

The topic of the workshop is innately transdisciplinary. Thus the workshop functions as an open and active forum for forward-thinking practitioners, designers, and scholars to address and enhance the role of interactive technology and media in motivating sustainable human-food interactions in the city. We very much welcome contributions from those who are not currently in fields that are directly related to food research. As such, we keep the workshop open to anyone who registers to participate as audience. There are four speakers, namely: Mark Shepard (Assistant Professor, Departments of Architecture and Media Study at University at Buffalo, The State University of New York), Katharine S. Willis, (Researcher / Artist / Architect at University of Siegen), Denisa Kera (National University of Singapore), Marc Tutueres (University of Amsterdam), Marcus Foth (Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology), and Jaz Hee-jeong Choi (ARC Australian Postdoctoral Fellow at Queensland University of Technology). Presentations will be followed by an interactive discussion with the audience.

Web:
http://liftconference.com/lift-at-home/events/2010/10/31/lift-workshop-weimar
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THE ORGANISERS

Jaz Hee-jeong Choi is an ARC Australian Postdoctoral Fellow (Industry) at the Institute for Creative Industries and Innovation, QUT. Her research interests are in playful technology, particularly the ways in which various forms of playful interaction are designed, developed, and integrated in different cultural contexts. In her doctoral research, she developed a new conceptual approach to urban sustainability that recognises 'play' as the core of transformative interactions in cities as ubiquitous technosocial networks. Her current research explores designing and developing playful ubiquitous technologies to cultivate sustainable food culture in urban environments. She has collaborated with leading international researchers and published in books and journals across various disciplines. Her website is at www.nicemustard.com

Marcus Foth is Associate Professor and Principal Research Fellow with the Institute for Creative Industries and Innovation, QUT, and team leader of the Urban Informatics Research Group. He received a QUT Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellowship (2009-2011), and a Smart Futures Fellowship from the Queensland State Government (2009-2011), co-sponsored by National ICT Australia (NICTA). He was awarded the inaugural Australian Business Foundation Research Fellowship on Innovation and Cultural Industries 2010 sponsored by the Aurora Foundation. He was an ARC Australian Postdoctoral Fellow (2006-2008), and a 2007 Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK. Dr Foth's research explores human-computer interaction design and development at the intersection of people, place and technology with a focus on urban informatics, locative media and mobile applications. The high quality of his research work has attracted over $1.7M in national competitive grants and industry funding since 2006. Dr Foth has published over 70 articles in journals, edited books, and conference proceedings. He is the editor of the Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics (2009), and is currently co-editing the book "From Social Butterfly to Engaged Citizen" for MIT Press (2010). He is the conference chair of the 5th International Conference on Communities and Technologies 2011 in Brisbane. More information at www.urbaninformatics.net

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