



Figure 1. Refugee Food Festival in Cape Town. Source: Refugee Food Festival ©Cindy Helfer, 2018.

# FOOD DESIGN AS A STRATEGY FOR THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

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The paper aims to identify the role of Design Culture in adopting food and gastronomic practices as strategic tools to enhance dialogues between different cultures. The research analyses the cases in which contemporary Design Culture adopts food as a possibility of social inclusion, understanding of the global flows of people, transformation techniques, and novel rituals. Food and food cycles can be interpreted as "language", as well as an opportunity to create circular business activities based on the rediscovery and on the strengthening of the links between territories and communities in a globalised scenario increasingly attentive to the experiences of fusion between cultures. Design culture can become a mediator, a facilitator and a promoter of solutions and models of integration between cultural components we commonly consider "strong" and "weak", "host" and "settled", "traditional" and "modern", "slow" and "fast", "typical" and "atopic". Thus an "open" scenario is outlined in which projects and researches oriented to the diffusion of more sustainable and "community centred" food cultures are renewed and take on new meanings. New cultures emerge which, while keeping their cultural roots, evolve into a transcultural society. The Design Culture is called to recognise and co-design these new "food acts" of the contemporary transcultural societies.

food design strategy / shared citizenship / global communities / new models of social entrepreneurship / transcultural societies



Figure 2. Making of Ugastoves in Kampala. Source: Uganda Stove Manufacturers Ltd., 2019

In recent years, companies and organisations have oriented themselves in structuring services, “social” actions (Bujdosò 2019), business, and “open” (AAVV 2011) design strategies that affect the cycles of food sector (Bistagnino 2009). These dynamic patterns are able to move “from particular to general”, with multiple consequential “effects”; and they are able to look at the spread of local culture through the agricultural productions, processes and services chains connected to them. The result is a strong sense of sharing and hybridisation between cultures, the possibility of implementing new “interpretations” of local traditions, both in the technical-aesthetic modalities, with the creation of new specific trends, as well as in the structuring of new economic models based on social inclusion processes. The drive for evolution and growth is a natural mechanism that refers to the evolutionary processes of living beings and communities and is canonically associated with entrepreneurial dynamics. Design culture in the food cycles offers new cross-sections, new wide horizons, as it involves both the field of the project and that of distribution. This results in new visions linked to the business models shaped consequently to the reference contexts and which must take into account the new stimuli linked to multiple sectors. The adoption of the traditions related to the gastronomy from different cultures for design-driven entrepreneurial strategies is, on the one hand, a clear opportunity for sharing and creating bridges be-



Figure 3. Refugee Food Festival in Geneva. Source: Refugee Food Festival, 2019.

tween cultures; on the other, it is also a fertile incubation basin for new ideas which have the possibility of being capitalised by generating work and innovations encouraged by the kind of designers defined by David Kelly as “experts in the process that guides a specific subject in bringing innovation” (Kelly 1999)

In this sense it is possible to observe dynamic, fluid, non-linear trends that aim at design models characterised, paraphrasing Andrea Branzi, by a widespread and distributed nature capable of proposing an “expression of an idea of reform of the environment, of the city, of the habitat, to realize that it is a widespread avant-garde form.” (Branzi 2017)

Specifically, it is possible to note several international case studies that collaborate in a coordinated and interdisciplinary way, oriented towards social activation, inclusion, enhancement of the territories and, sometimes, to the reformulation of traditions, processes and cultures functionally to the generation of widespread, systemic, sustainable and supportive economies.

Design Without Borders Organization, born in 2001, has the aim to introduce product and service design skills and practices as strategies to provide “sustainable and long-term solutions in low and middle income countries” (Design Without Bor-



Figure 4. Les Petites Cantines in Lyon. Source: Refugee Food Festival, 2019

ders 2015). Among the organisation's initiatives, we can mention the Malaika Honey project; a beekeeping company, founded in 2005, with the aim of reducing poverty in rural communities through beekeeping. In this significant case, the food cycles are interpreted as elements that stimulate the creation of business acts and new economic models. The role of the beekeeper is reinterpreted as a subject that redefines the entire production process of honey and its derivatives, starting from the interaction between man and bee, based on deep respect for the living beings, communities, and territories. Simon Turner, the founder, describes his company as a new social economic model. "We buy expensive and sell cheap", he explains, "stimulating value chain growth while making profit on quantities of scale". (Turner 2015) Malaika Honey Ltd, in addition to honey production, also deals with developing specific tools for beekeeping. They designed a tool dedicated to cutting and collecting honey, locally manufactured. An example of "open product design" (Bassi 2017) inspired by the desire to enhance work operations, using local raw materials and labour.

Transcultural explorations in gastronomic cultures can be declined in the areas of research of artefacts, in cases where the product becomes a link between communities, services, old and new needs and possible business opportunities.



Figure 5. Refugee Food Festival in Paris. Source: Refugee Food Festival ©Mahka Eslami, 2019.

Innovations and strategies of evolution and development of project-entrepreneurship in the food sector can also be driven by issues related to the health of the individual.

This is the case of the reinterpretation of a cooking tool typically used in Uganda (Fig.2). As we can read on the official website: “Most households and small-scale restaurants in Uganda use charcoal cook stoves to prepare their daily meals”, the diffusion of which is highly harmful to the environment and to the health of people in the proximity. The Ugastove collaboration is “a project where positive impact was created in the entire value chain of the product. [...] The design team was able to help Ugastove meet their strategic goals through extensive processes that involved end-users, resellers and production staff. The solution was the new Frame Stove with highly improved quality and usability. [...] With a successful design in place, Ugastove and Design without Borders entered a new collaboration to increase the production capacity of the Frame Stove.”

Design practices can become an element of communication and sharing of cultural processes related to the world of professional catering and traditional cuisine, in which companies offer global communities the opportunity to get to know and explore local cultures, through community action processes. The English Nesta Foundation has developed—through the Mazi Mas social enterprise—a project

aimed at women from migrant and refugee communities to capitalise on their culinary skills through the “pop-up” restaurant model. The social-entrepreneurial project was launched in October 2012, offering authentic ethnic cuisine in the city of London. The founder, Nikandre Kopcke, has created a bilateral business model, which encourages new generations of women to professionalise their skills, capitalising them, while doing a work of dissemination of local cultures in the rest of the world.

A further case of community action linked to the definition of new collaborative models and restoration of the possible social role of food is the “Refugee Food Festival”, an annual event, started in 2016, which presents itself as a collaborative channel between community cooks of refugees and local restaurateurs, with a spread covering 15 cities worldwide (Fig. 1, 3, 4, 5). “The Refugee Food Festival is a citizens’ led initiative which aims to show that civil society has a fundamental role to play in the way refugees are welcomed. All organisers of the various Refugee Food Festival local editions are committed citizens who reached out to lead the project in their cities.” (Refugee Food Festival 2019)

Food Design Culture, working on different fields (products, services, systems, strategies, social actions, events, communication), can therefore represent a clear bridge between cultures. The hybridisation between typologies, human-centred initiatives, materials, manufacturing processes, methods and rituals of use, is a possible experimental design path that fuses multiple aspects in an interdisciplinary way, giving back results that are tied to traditions but aim at innovation, and they openly move from a local to a global dimension.

Reflecting on the processes of crisis and revolution that are influencing the dynamics of the food sector, one might wonder how companies, designers and different stakeholders, starting from traditional systems, have managed to adapt and are more and more adapting in an innovative and flexible way to scenario changings. So, in such contexts we can observe that equity, sustainability, creativity, flexibility, and self-organisation capacity are determining factors.

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