

Cumulus Working Papers

Nantes

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Food de-intermediation

Strategic design for the creation of transparent food networks

Modern food intermediation is increasingly unable to cope with the demand for services from its constituent actors, particularly in the case of small scale, quality, local production. It is the protagonists at the beginning and end of the current chain that suffer: the producer and the consumer. On one side, local producers are no longer able to access the market and on the other side, consumers have a reduced possibility of understanding, judgement and choice. This situation is the expression of a serious difficulty suffered by a large number of local food producers who run the risk of disappearing, with huge damage to cultural heritage and quality local economies. Industrial design, which is increasingly involved in the food sector, can intervene in this situation, supporting new models of innovation that shorten the chain between producers and consumers. Service design, particularly, has the proper skills to start re-thinking food intermediation in order to create the conditions for a new quality local based food-chain, in which actors can fully find answer to their needs in terms of effectiveness of the service and quality of the exchange of the goods.

Key words

Service design, Strategic Design, Food Chain, Food intermediation, Local produce chain.

1. The workplace

This essay focuses on the problems involved in the valorisation and commercial intermediation of small scale, highly localised, quality, agro-food production, carried out by traditional methods that give the food particular organoleptic and socio-cultural qualities. These are products that stand out for their:

- distinct local character and, frequently, traditional roots;
- production models based on family firms, where the work is mainly carried out by the owner, his or her family and the people they live with;
- production by meticulous processes, respecting the territorial system and paying careful attention to the organoleptic qualities of the results, carried out in limited areas with diversified, seasonal farming.

They are, for the most part, fruit of the labour of single nuclear or extended families, who cannot compete on the market with the rules of mass distribution, but represent the soul and heritage of a local culture.

Mainly with reference to this produce, the modern food intermediation, i.e. the chain that brings food from producer to consumer, is increasingly unable to cope with the demand for services from its constituent actors, particularly in the case of small scale, quality, local production. It is the protagonists at the beginning and end of the current chain that suffer: the producer and the consumer. On one side, local producers are no longer able to access the market and on the other side, consumers pay a lot but have a reduced possibility of understanding, judgement and choice.

In addition, because of the modest quantities, seasonal nature and the fact that they do not form part of the aesthetic/organoleptic standards of mass production, small productions tend to be excluded from the assortments of organised distribution.

So, modern food intermediation demonstrates with increasing clarity the inadequacy of a series of factors, both on an international and a local level:

- the pattern of excessive costs that raises the end price, but pays producers inadequately

- over-standardisation of products, which drastically reduces variety, above all to the detriment of small scale production and small producers;
- growing dissatisfaction among consumers who do not have transparent access to information about the source of the product;
- logistics conceived for large quantities of produce and long distances;
- indiscriminate disassociation from season and region that leads to a lack of food awareness and unsustainable environmental costs.

At the same time, it is possible to find in society an increase in sensibility towards environmental issues, health and fair retribution for work: in a word, towards aspects of *sustainability*, with special attention to the food sector, or rather, to how, where and by whom, food is produced and how it gets to us. This means talking about *transparency* and *ethics*.

2. Demand for innovation and research aims

If we look at local quality production rather than at large-scale mass production, the concepts of intermediation, transparency and ethics intertwine, generating a *problematical knot*. Consequently, they also generate a demand for *design innovation*, launched from several directions:

- the European Commission points to the issue of “Reversed food chain” as a research priority for the coming years. In other words, a rethinking of the food production chain from the end-consumer’s point of view. This entails reflection on such issues as: traceability, transparency, new forms of sales and purchasing and demand for knowledge. It also promotes diversity based on quality (“Dai campi alla tavola” 2005), trying to safeguard traditional food and food typical of specific zones, through legislation and attempting to encourage awareness and competence in consumers through informative action;
- organisations such as Slow Food, Organic Agricultural associations, fair trade associations, and certain large distribution chains, act by promoting services that shorten agro-food chains, to the advantage of both producers and consumers.
- Consumers look for and find alternative solutions, demonstrating a marked “entrepreneurial” and creative capacity. Solutions that spring from the impulse of single individuals or small enterprising groups who organise themselves in order to buy quality food at fair conditions.

This demand for innovation requires multidisciplinary responses that integrate technical-scientific and socio-humanistic skills: a rethinking of the local production chains based on *platforms of service and infrastructure* able to support more sustainable intermediation models that are advantageous both to producer and consumer.

We believe that design, in particular *strategic service design*, can contribute positively to formulating these responses. To verify this we have started a series of convergent research activities, all characterised by a significant initial phase of research and analysis of case studies (innovative solutions and best practices), which has been, or will be, followed by a design proposal phase.

This essay seeks briefly to present the results of this case study and the design orientation that can be outlined so far, with the purpose of facilitating the creation of transparent food networks, i.e. systems that:

- support small producers and small scale, regional and quality food production through various strategies;
- safeguard biodiversity and the heritage of local food lore and expertise
- safeguard both producer and consumer, rendering them more transparent to each other and fostering relations of trust
- establish a fairer system of costs, prices and earnings;
- help consumers assess the value of what they buy and purchase more economically

3. Work hypothesis: the network model

The research activities are driven by the hypothesis that, in a situation of growing globalisation of offer, demand and distribution, it is necessary to start *networking* (between producers, between consumers and between the two), i.e. to set up networks to safeguard small-scale producers and offer greater advantages to the actors involved in the small-scale food chain.

Such a model is evidently not exclusive, indeed it is complementary to, and can be integrated with, some of the more conventional ways of organising distribution. This hypothesis is based on:

- the observation of phenomena and ventures already in progress on contemporary society: innovative relationships between producers, consumers and between actors in the chain.

- the corpus of studies dealing with Distributed Economies (see the activity of “DeLabs”, on behalf “The International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics” of the Lund University): an economic model that fosters diversity and the small scale (wherever this makes sense for the type of product and production system), and the distribution of knowledge and action capacity as factors in sustainable development. The concept calls for networking, i.e. the building of an inter-regional network of small scale complementary production units, in order to achieve effective economy of scale. This is a vision of a production and consumption model that, while looking to optimise systems as in an industrial perspective, enhances the value of production diversification from area to area (Manzini, 2005). For example, if we consider the potential currently offered by the most widely used information and communication technology, it is immediately evident that even small-scale producers can not only easily interact together, but can also make their presence felt on the local and global market, interacting with consumers, in an open, active service model. All this is also in tune with the evolution of behaviour in a growing segment of the population, which is calling for personalised solutions and the possibility of taking a more active part in the system of supply and demand.

The emergence of cases of de-intermediation and the concept of distributed economy speak to us of networks, conceived to achieve economy of scope and scale, of :

- 1 complementary actors, e.g. producers of goods that can be integrated and give rise to a possible solution;
- 2 similar actors, e.g. producers of the same food items, so that they can share technology infrastructure and plan promotional activities; or consumers in order to reach a critical mass for the purchase of particular items.

Awareness of these network models is the fruit of cases studies (already undertaken or still in progress) in three different research activities:

- *EMUDE (Emerging user demand for sustainable solutions)*, a 2 year (2004–2006) EU funded research project, in the 6th F.P., involving 9 main partners in several European Countries. The aim of this project was above all to draw up a concep-

tual map of promising solutions for sustainability, produced by creative communities scattered over various European countries. And, from here, to draw up scenarios and technological roadmaps to support and disseminate them;

- A course of Service Design (AY 2004–2005) conducted by the Design Faculty of Milan Polytechnic, the design theme of which was the small-scale food chain;
- A research project, still in progress, funded by the Italian Ministry of Scientific research (2006–2008) entitled “The farm park: a new tool for the district planning of open spaces” seeking to draw up guidelines for the support of agricultural production networks in out-of-town parks.

We consider the case studies identified during these research activities as examples of promising food networks in the direction of social and environmental sustainability.

4. Food networks: existing, promising ventures

We can define food networks as the (physical or virtual) links between different types of actors, that exist for the purpose of carrying out activities associated with the production/exchange of food, and the development of food related knowledge. If we look at society, we can see that various types of network exist, where producers, or consumers, come together to achieve a mutually advantageous result:

- *Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)*: is one of the most fitting examples of what we may call a network organisation, to be found in the agro-food sector. It is a widespread international movement that links producers and consumers together on a local basis. Groups of consumers purchase a farmer’s seasonal supply of fruit and vegetables in advance. This is then delivered weekly. It is not only a way of purchasing, rather it is real form of co-operation with shared advantages and risks, according to a relationship model that may vary, but that supports small-scale producers in an effective and crucial way, and even takes an active part in activities that respect the environment and labour, according to principles that motivate the consumer to join the system and generate direct personal ties between members. The Community Supported Agriculture movement is very widespread in North America and in northern Europe: among the organisations

seeking to spread the culture of CSA and extend access to purchasing groups in Italy is the Associazione Italiana Agricoltura Biologica (www.aiab.it); in the United States there is Farm to City (www.farmtocity.org), Visible Food (www.visiblefood.org); Land Stewardship Project (www.landstewardshipproject.org); in Canada there is Food Share (www.foodshare.net), Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (www.sare.org) and many others.

- In Italy, CSA is active in the form of “*distance adoption*” ventures for fruit trees, grapevines, olive trees and animals (e.g. Agritime, a society that enables a sort of virtual cultivation of apple trees and grapevines over the Internet, at a fixed cost with extras depending on the choices made by the virtual farmer (www.agritime.it). Or the co-operative movement “La Porta dei Parchi”, in Abruzzo, that offers the adoption of sheep in exchange for products obtained from the milk or the lamb itself “for consumption” (www.laportadeiparchi.it). These ventures also offer the possibility of visiting and staying on the farms, checking up on one’s tree or animal, and naturally of meeting the farmer “in the flesh”. Against a fixed annual payment the supporter receives the fruit from his adopted tree, which is sometimes produced according to choices made by the supporter himself. CSA is an example of alliance between similar actors (consumers at one end and farmers at the other) to make direct contact with their trade reciprocate: the purchaser or producer of the goods;
- weekly or monthly *subscriptions* to a supplier of agricultural products are organisational variations on the CSA theme where, however, producers and consumers do not really share the risks. These ways of selling fresh fruit and vegetables are very widespread, particularly in the north of Europe where they have now been common practice for decades: for examples see Apfelbacher Gemüseabo, in Germany (www.bioland-apfelbacher.de) or Ökosahver in Estonia (www.sahver.ee);
- *Ethical Purchasing Groups* are self-organised consumer networks that aim to buy collectively (wholesale) directly from producers who are selected according to ethical and quality criteria. This form of organisation aims to order goods in sufficient quantities to be able to purchase wholesale from the producers, but above all it seeks to select its own suppliers according to ethical and

quality criteria (and therefore of solidarity), and also to satisfy the needs of a small elective community motivated by common reasons. A national group of purchasing groups has been set up in Italy: www.retegas.org. Ethical purchasing groups are examples of a network of similar actors on the demand front.

- *Consortia and Associations* are the most common forms of network on the offer front. From a legal point of view their infrastructure and production are shared, so they promote their products on the market through common advertising and direct sales. There are numerous examples: in Italy we have huge consortia like the Parmigiano Reggiano consortium, and small associations of high quality local producers. They are both examples of networks of actors offering similar products;
- *Farmer markets* are forms of direct sale by producers who bring their goods to market, fostering product visibility and the web of privileged relationships with consumers. They are considerable different from neighbourhood markets where goods arrive after several stages of intermediation. In Italy, in Milan for example, there are activities of this kind organised both by the AIAB (Associazione Italiana Agricoltura Biologica), and by VAS (Verdi Ambiente Società, <http://vaslombardia.org>), in the Biomercatino (market for organic goods in Milan);
- *Direct selling* on the farm or via internet is common and often consolidated practice. The consumer goes to the place of production where, according to the season, he finds freshly harvested or prepared products. There are numerous examples: in Scotland, the Cream o’ Galloway dairy farm (www.creamogalloway.co.uk), or the collective distribution networks of farmers on the Isle of Skye (www.foodlinkvan.co.uk). Often farm sales are combined with different kinds of explanatory visits to the fields or production points, sometimes along the lines of *didactic farms*, especially aimed at children;
- *Local events* are activities of various kinds that look to promote products and their places of origin simultaneously. From the point of view of the experience they offer the purchaser, they are very attractive producer-consumer relationship patterns (Pine, J.B., Gilmore, J.H., 1999) and it is not by chance that they are one of the main appeals of wine and food tourism (Paolini, 2000). Local festivals, specific events and fairs, often linked along

“strade” or routes (e.g. of wine: “strada del vino”), can be listed in this category along with museums that tell the history of production processes (e.g. the food museums in Parma, www.museidelcibo.it). Since a variety of actors are often included (food producers, craft producers, hotel and restaurant managers...), in this case we can speak of networks of complementary actors who enhance the value of each others’ production activities;

- The great national and international *promotional events* are ventures that take place in locations outside the geographical areas of production: these are activities that seek to unite producers or experts from a given production sector or with similar characteristics. Organised and sponsored by associations of various types, one of the most important in Italy is the “Salone del Gusto”, run by Slow Food in Turin, where *Terra Madre*, a world wide event that bring together 1200 “food communities” coming from all the world, also takes place (www.slowfood.it);
- the *Presidia*, which are actions of support and communication promoted by Slow Food in order to safeguard a certain local production. Slow Food’s Ark of Taste has catalogued hundreds of extraordinary products from around the world.: the Presidia is the working arm of the “Ark of Taste”. Presidia are small projects to assist groups of artisan producers, which operate by creating associations and organising communication campaigns: a network of actors of the same kind.

These networks are possible answers to the demand for shortened food chains: they are the way in which (small) producers on the one hand and (individual) consumers on the other get into direct contact with each other, deciding themselves how to behave and choosing who they wish to set up relationships of trust and transparency with. They also foster a food consumption pattern that is mainly based on seasonal, local produce to the benefit of both health and environment.

5. A strategic design approach

How can design contribute to developing this type of solution, which benefits small scale food producers?

It is becoming more and more common to talk about a convergence between industrial design and food chains: we believe that design need not necessarily be one of the agents that today press for the total industrialisation of this sector, rather we believe

that it can promote different agricultural and food systems based on an advanced industrialised vision that pays special attention to the quality deriving from local variables.

The designer works in society turning social behaviour into products and “services”. An industrial designer thinks and acts according to a logic of opportunity in relation to needs and context, and of reproducibility.

By *service design* (or *product-service-system design*) we mean a discipline that designs solutions, i.e. articulated bodies of integrated products and services designed to meet a demand that is altogether similar to the one we are considering here. In such a solution both the interaction patterns and the products used may be totally or partially innovative: this means that the designer can also concern himself with rethinking the forms of intermediation (or de-mediation) for home produced or handmade products, in the light of a global competitive and technological scenario. This also means that design can intervene to improve an existing system just as it can generate radically innovate ideas.

When we then talk about *strategic design*, we refer to a way of seeing product-service-system design that hinges on aspects associated with value, culture, and evolution in our ways of producing and living. We refer not so much to single products (food products in this case) but to a “food system” (Meroni, 2004). A food system can be defined as the technical footprint given by a society’s food culture. Thus, talking about the design of food systems means focussing on the strategies by which to plan new solutions within existing structures that are part of a society’s cultural heritage. On one hand, the strategic dimension of a project is given by the need to define long term goals: starting from an interpretation of the present we then sketch possible, desirable scenarios. On the other hand, it arises out of the ambition to introduce innovations able to generate long-lasting, shared realities that are both self-perpetuating and able to adapt flexibly to changes in the system of which they are a part. That’s to say that the strategically designable aspects of a food system are mainly those associated with values, in so far as they define the identity of a solution within its socio-cultural context.

Thus, the intent of a strategic design project, by establishing conditions for a transparent and correct relationship between producer and consumer, is also to reach certain value objectives, such as

- supporting natural methods and conditions of cultivation and preservation;
- safeguarding and enhancing the local identity of products as demonstrations of the cultural heritage of an area, triggering a constructive confrontation with the modern food industry;
- promoting the quality of products as an expression and recognition of particular skills and expertise;
- promoting better informed, healthier, eating styles linked to local area and seasons as well as to an awareness of one's own nutritional needs.

6. A contribution from strategic design

However, defining the intentions and possibilities of a strategic design approach to the food sector has still not enabled us to say what it can do for the specific issue of de-intermediation between food producers and consumers.

The vast collection of case studies collected during the various research activities have enabled us to grasp certain fundamental concepts (Meroni 2005) that are the necessary premise to any design action:

- first and foremost, the way of collecting (by direct, quasi-ethnographical, observation on the field) and interpreting these cases was a project in itself, with autonomous scientific value, because it was probably one of the first times that these situations have been looked at from the point of view, and using the tools, of design. Furthermore, the collection and public communication of these cases is the first concrete step towards disseminating them;
- the specific nature of the context (its networks of existing social relationships, cultural breeding ground and the presence of highly determined people) and the dimensions of the solution (territorial area, number of actors involved) are not easily replicable or extendable factors. They are not authentically replicable because they are generated by the intrinsic motivation (Inghilleri, 2003) of the people involved; they are not extendable because, if on the one hand they need a critical mass, on the other hand this mass itself is of a limited size, above which the intensity and effectiveness of the relationships risk being diluted;
- the profound quality of the solutions analysed (and therefore of how and why they exist) lies in factors that are by no means obvious: time after time we understood that what may appear "uselessly laborious" or even a "waste of time" to the

eyes of an external observer is actually a source of happiness and satisfaction to those who put the solution into practice. For example, for a purchasing group, periodically meeting together in person to discuss producers and decide on orders is a pleasure, just as, in other cases, is contributing to the cultivation of some of the products they buy.

Having said this, it seems evident that the role of strategic designer as "facilitator" or "multiplier" of good practices is not to be taken for granted in these cases. It is possible to imagine three types of intervention, each with widely differing final goals and operative tools, but all aiming to enhance the value of the intrinsic qualities of the network under observation:

1. support existing activities and foster similar ones, by designing a series of modular, co-ordinated (communicative, technological, operative, logistic) tools for the actors to use at their discretion to "facilitate" some of the phases in their work or to activate new ventures;
2. re-work promising ventures that propose certain values, in different ways and on different scales, in order to make them more feasible for actors who are less ideologically motivated or who may be less prepared to invest time and energy;
3. elaborate and propose new intermediation patterns for the actors in the chain, both starting from those analysed, and fruit of creative inductions and conceptual transferrals from other production sectors with similar characteristics.

This is equivalent to designing service platforms that enable many, small or tiny production situations to be linked in a network, in a subsidiary and complementary fashion. Given that these situations are economically fragile, but are often still compensated by a strong social structure, these platforms must rely on creative combinations of technology and people, volunteers and resources, passion and necessity (Bogliotti, 2006).

This is tantamount to creating shared visions among different actors, whether producers or consumers; visions able to incentivize networking and introduce new ways of acting on the market.

7. Support promising activities

The main goal of the *EMUDE* project was to identify and get to know promising solutions in order to outline scenarios and technological roadmaps to sup-

port them, in other words, enabling platforms (Manzini, Jegou, 2003) of infrastructure of various kinds. Given the territorial and social identity of these solutions and the communities putting them into effect, we have understood the importance and uniqueness of the human and personal motivation factor, as well as their delicate quantitative balance with context (Meroni, 2006). This is the reason for our conclusion that a designer wishing to design useful enabling services (Cottam, H. & Leadbeater C. 2004) for these situations must:

- facilitate user-friendly access to information that is relevant to a given activity, when required and in appropriate form, by creating platforms for sharing and exchanging ideas;
- plan “modular” services, in other words services able to perform at different levels so that each user can easily understand and choose the desired kind of relationship, and make use of the required support;
- put individuals in contact with others in similar situations, voicing similar needs, for the purposes of mutual help and support. Making something visible and putting people with the same motives in contact, as the event *Terra Madre* teaches us, is the first step to reinforcing it;
- facilitate interconnection between producers with a view to reinforcing the identity of the numerous entities distributed throughout local areas, whose single identity is weak. To do this, technological solutions can be used, but also creative forms of organisation based on the network of interrelationships existing in the local community;
- facilitate interconnection between (intermediate and end) consumers, to bring demand together and organise it into a coherent voice towards producers. Again this can take place through technological facilitators, but also by generating occasions, products and solutions that make consumers transparent to each other.
- help users to map out in their own minds the solution and the system in which they are interacting, in order to help them grasp the various behavioural options open to them.

8. Re-work promising activities

The scientific debate engendered around the *EMUDE* project and the considerations already made in the previous paragraph have led us to understand that, most times, replication or expansion of the cases analysed would profoundly modify their nature, and

cancel their motivations. However, we have also understood that some of the qualities of these networks could become part of new, partially different solutions, promoted from the most advanced point of current agribusiness.

The *advanced agribusiness model* is an industrial system that adapts and rethinks the needs, methods and processes of large quantity industrialisation according to rules dictated by environmentally, socially and economically sustainable local development.

It is an industrial model that: applies biodynamic, organic or integrated cultivation methods, rationally, wherever local conditions require or allow; applies advanced technological systems of pre-treatment and *minimal processing* to facilitate the arrival of food rich in nutriment, fresh to our tables; reintroduces seasonal and regional recipes and food solutions; shapes relationships with intermediaries and distributors on principles of collective value building, correctness and respect for specific characteristics; and operates on the market basing diversification on contexts of use (Jégou, F. & Joore, P., 2004).

National and international legislation aiming to safeguard and guarantee organic products, or products typical of a specific region, area, tradition or production process (DOP Denominazione di Origine Protetta (guaranteed origin), IGP Indicazione Geografica Protetta (guaranteed geographical area), STG Specialità Tradizionale Garantita (guaranteed traditional speciality) constitute the legal umbrella for this industrial model.

The motives for its development arise first and foremost from an awareness of a demand from society: industry has acknowledged a request coming from a growing segment of consumers, for goods of guaranteed quality that safeguard at the same time both product and producer.

Re-working promising solutions means rethinking them on a different scale with different means, in the framework and with the support of advanced agribusiness that, along the lines of medium size enterprise, is able to assume some of its qualities and at the same time generate the economies of scale necessary to produce them, making them accessible and appetising to a larger producer base on the one hand, and to consumers on the other.

9. Elaborate new hypotheses

The intention of the Course on Service Design on the theme of food de-intermediation was precisely to stimulate young designers to creatively rethink the

chain of small-scale, local, quality production, creating platforms of services and infrastructure that support more sustainable intermediation patterns that benefit producers and consumers..

The didactic aim was to make young designers more aware of, and arouse their interest in, a salient issue that is normally far from the average sensibilities of this age group but, probably, not far from their values. And get them to understand the importance of imagining sales patterns other than supermarkets, where consumers and producers are also able to play unprecedented roles.

The projects developed grew out of two different ideas of service that can be summarised as follows:

1. the direct involvement of consumers in the manufacturing and distribution chains of the product itself: active user participation in the preparation of regional specialities sold in local supermarkets ("Da buone mani" by: Aletto, Bernabè, Cammareri); creation of a network of private citizens, to support local produce, united by the desire to share experiences and diffuse common interest in a tradition throughout the community ("I custodi del gusto" by: Brigandi, Colciago, Di Pilato); self-production of bottled preserves for self-consumption or exchange ("Io Bio" by: Andreoni, Manera, Rogel);
2. unprecedented forms of intermediation (often borrowed from other sectors of merchandise or derived from daring concept transferral) to sell small scale local production in cities at advantageous conditions: the train functioning as distributor/sales outlet bringing agro-food products from the country to the urban consumer, ("Mercando" by: Sironi, Spagnuolo, Vezzani, Zocca); the promotion of products that have obtained the De.Co, brand, Denominazione Comunale di Origine (common denomination of origin) through the constitution of a place where they can be discovered ("Non solo sapori" by: Castiglioni, Colagrossi, Donadini, Fantoni); the street-distribution of single, local, washed, ready-to-eat organic fruit in highly transited locations of large cities, the personalised, monthly supply of high quality eggs ("La Gallina ha fatto l'uovo" by: Ballerani, Cantù, Citterio); temporary seasonal fruit shops open for a few hours a week in the centre of the city ("Guerrilla food" by: Macchi, Micheli, Occhipinti).

10. Conclusions

Finally, the research activities carried out up to now have enabled us to identify certain macro-issues that concern design activities falling into this particular area of work.

These are issues that concern the market, offer patterns and consumption behaviour and are targets for specific strategic design actions:

1. The localisation of production, sales and consumption:
 - set up situations within the territory of origin that offer visibility to local produce, highlighting its natural collocation in the context;
 - design sales solutions focused on the figure of producer-seller and the socio-geographical context of origin;
 - promote a food consumption style that is attentive to season and place of origin, through the communicative appeal and accessibility of the products;
2. The involvement of producers in promotion and sales activities:
 - set up simple, transparent ICT interfaces for communication and direct trade with consumers;
 - design services and infrastructure that facilitate the "display" of produce on the part of the producer, and the management of sales outlets;
 - design packaging and containers functional to the production process and also useable for retail sales.
3. Consumer involvement in production and sales activities:
 - design accessible physical (spaces) and virtual (information) conditions that facilitate the learning of production techniques, and self-production;
 - design easy-to-use interfaces, located in everyday public places, that facilitate joining production ventures and purchasing groups;
 - valorise the initiative of people who pass on skills and expertise, by sanctioning their role and creating opportunities for them to spread their knowledge;
4. The configuration of public and semi-public trading spaces in cities:
 - design hybrid spaces for trade and social relationship, able to house collective and public activities;
 - design flexible, light solutions to occupy new spaces for food trade: spaces inside the urban fabric, along the pedestrian pathways of the residents.

5. The awareness and capacity of the two ends of the chain to act effectively and define their own economic-social behaviour:
 - identify and offer visibility to critical consumption activities and virtual agro-food ventures, helping promoters to get to know each other, i.e. placing them in a network.

These design actions, together, enable us to ascribe even the issue of small-scale quality food production to the discipline of strategic service design. By so doing, we can offer a preliminary outline of the contribution that a designer can effectively bring to a design table where experts in the disciplines most directly linked to the issue, i.e. food technologists and packaging, logistics and marketing experts operate.

Furthermore, thinking in strategies means thinking in the long term: thinking up self-fuelling and self-improving systems and solutions able to prosper and improve their context in the future. In contributing to building scenarios of more sustainable situations, such projects go hand in hand with the capacity to adapt to socio-territorial realities, and changing life and production styles. In the end, they are so able to mould themselves with a context that they naturally find there the reasons and resources for their own productive complexity theory, can be called sustainable adaptive systems. In other words, they are able to adapt, they are open and interactive, they "learn" from events that happen, and on the basis of what they learn, they find inner resources to organise or re-organise themselves. They are based on the interaction of local actor subsystems, linked by interests of various kinds but able to act autonomously.

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