
Anke Klitzing
*Technological University Dublin, anke.klitzing@tudublin.ie*

Brian Murphy
*Technological University Dublin, brian.j.murphy@tudublin.ie*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ejfds](https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ejfds)

Part of the Cultural History Commons, Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons, and the Sociology Commons

**Recommended Citation**
doi:https://doi.org/10.21427/1b0s-7m71
Available at: [https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ejfds/vol1/iss1/9](https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ejfds/vol1/iss1/9)

This Research Notes is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Publications at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in European Journal of Food Drink and Society by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)
RESEARCH NOTE


Anke Klitzing¹ and Brian J. Murphy²

¹,²Technological University Dublin

In early 2019 the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium Organising Committee settled on the theme of ‘Food and Disruption’ for its fifth biennial conference in May 2020. Little did the committee suspect how prescient this title would be as the descriptor of what was to happen during the Covid-19 pandemic that descended upon the global community right in the run-up to the conference. The lockdown instigated across many countries in March 2020 led to an early decision to take the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium 2020 online. This decision required considerable courage as similar events were being postponed in the hope that the crisis would be more fleeting than it eventually turned out to be. And yet the conference did proceed, virtually, and proved to be one of the most successful to date, with over 750 registered participants across the globe and a similarly burgeoning mailing list anticipating interest in future meetings. With this event, the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium consolidated its position in the international food conference universe as an exciting, multidisciplinary gathering of academics, practitioners from food production and tourism, researchers, scientists, writers, hospitality professionals, and journalists – in fact, anyone with an interest and enthusiasm for gastronomy, including both food and beverages.

Origins

The first Dublin Gastronomy Symposium can be traced back to initial engagements between the founding committee members in April 2011 at a Gastronomy Research Day hosted by the National Centre for Franco Irish Studies (NCFIS) at the then Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) in Dublin, Ireland. This event was attended by a number of interested parties including Dr Eamon Maher (ITT/NCFIS), Dr Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (Dublin Institute of Technology, DIT), Dorothy Cashman (Independent Scholar), Tara McConnell (Independent Scholar) and Brian Murphy (ITT/NCFIS). The purpose of the research seminar was to develop links between scholars within the gastronomic research community. Discussion on the day revealed a strong desire to develop an academic event that would allow like-minded individuals to come together in a convivial space to exchange ideas, academic papers and
discussion with the overall aim of advancing the gastronomic research agenda. Yvonne Desmond (DIT) came on board at this early stage and along with Maher, Cashman, McConnell, and Murphy became a member of the founding committee under the chairmanship of Mac Con Iomaire, the main driving force and founding chair of that first Symposium in 2012. Mac Con Iomaire would continue to steer the Symposium for the next ten years.

The Dublin Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Tallaght amalgamated to become the Technological University Dublin in 2019, but that initial co-operation depended on the development of strong personal relationships across both institutions. Following this early engagement, meetings began in earnest through 2011, resulting in the 2012 inaugural Symposium. Both Mac Con Iomaire and Cashman were strong contributors to and supporters of the renowned Oxford Symposium of Food and Cookery, and this experience in the field helped to frame how the DGS developed.

The inaugural Dublin Gastronomy Symposium, which took place on June 5-6, 2012 on the theme of ‘Gastronomy Past, Present and Future’, brought together leading international academics, chefs and entrepreneurs to discuss and debate the gastronomic world and its myriad impacts. The event resulted in the publication in 2014 of the landmark collection of essays ‘Tickling the Palate: Gastronomy in Irish Literature and Culture’, co-edited by Mac Con Iomaire and Maher.

Figure 1: Preparing the welcome lunch for the Symposium - TU Dublin School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology lecturers Diarmaid Murphy (left) and James Fox.
Conviviality and generosity at the core

The first DGS was hosted in the Dublin Institute of Technology in Cathal Brugha Street, and the event has been held there ever since. A sense of place is crucial to the success of phenomena like this. Not only was the DIT home to many of the founding committee members, but the School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology at Cathal Brugha Street professes a 75-year legacy as a centre for food and beverage excellence in Ireland and was a fitting home for this and subsequent DGS conferences. In addition, the strong family of culinary lecturers and staff in the School have always contributed generously to the organisation and success of the symposium (Figure 1).

Two important determinant principles of the Symposium were decided early on by the committee. The first is reflected in a defined ethos that anchors conviviality at the very heart of the conference. This was laid down during the planning stage of the inaugural event and remains a key feature of the DGS approach. It was outlined in the ethos from the very start that gastronomy forms an important part of our everyday life, and the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium provides a forum for those interested in gastronomy research to come together, network and engage in academic discourse regarding “all things food”. While academic rigour is crucial for successful outcomes, in an event such as this the Symposium places equal emphasis on providing opportunities for interested gastronomes to interact with each other outside of formal presentations (https://arrow.tudublin.ie/dgs/dgs_ethos.html).

This ethos has been integrated into everything associated with the DGS over the years, and while it has grown considerably, the symposium has always maintained opportunities for convivial engagement among delegates, with carefully planned conference lunches in notable local restaurants (Figure 1) and a conference banquet dinner held in the Georgian splendour of the dining hall of King’s Inns (Figure 2). A key event is the welcome lunch held in the Cathal Brugha Street building on the first day of the conference (Figure 3). This meal experience has been deliberately designed to encourage commensal engagement among delegates. Large communal tables are adorned with sharing platters of locally sourced Irish foods and drinks. Service is deliberately kept to a minimum as delegates are encouraged to serve each other by breaking bread, sharing platters and pouring each other drinks. The organising committee have, from the start, adhered to the concept that these meal experiences are a pillar of the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium’s success.
Figure 2: Lunch at Chapter One Restaurant, Dublin, 2014

Figure 3: Conference Banquet at King’s Inn, 2018
The second principle relates to the early integration and dissemination of symposium output through the TU Dublin Arrow portal, which provides open access to conference materials and papers. The crucial involvement of DIT/TU Dublin Library services in the committee through Yvonne Desmond and her team who manage the Arrow Portal has facilitated the academic output of the DGS to be widely accessible. A key motivator for participation is the opportunity to have submissions hosted on Arrow, and to date there have been over 75,000 individual downloads of the 234 academic papers currently hosted on the DGS arrow site (https://arrow.tudublin.ie/dgs/).

An important factor in the success of the DGS has been the continued expansion of its core organising committee. Recent years have seen the original committee joined by Diarmuid Cawley, Anke Klitzing, Elaine Mahon and John Mulcahy. These researchers and academics have added a vigour and enthusiasm that has broadened symposia horizons and encouraged the exploration of a new and exciting research agenda. Considering the multi-disciplinary nature of not only the symposium but the study of food, beverages and gastronomy itself, the themes of the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium are intentionally broad, allowing researchers from various fields and interests to join the conversation. The early themes of Gastronomy, Past, Present, Future (2012), Food and Desire (2014), Food and Revolution (2016) have in the last two symposia been reframed to reflect a broader gastronomic remit, with Food and Power (2018), Food and Disruption (2020) and the upcoming Food and Movement (2022). It is also without question that the most recent 2020 DGS event, with its many unique challenges due to the Covid crisis, would not have taken place without the
combined efforts of a committee further strengthened by this newer group of academics expanding the committee's technological capabilities. The unique nature of the latest conference is explored below and demonstrates how disruption, though difficult, can be embraced and moulded into something positive.

The Dublin Gastronomy Symposium 2020

The *Dublin Gastronomy Symposium 2020* took place two months into a near global shutdown due to a viral pandemic, now universally known as the Covid-19 Pandemic. The disruption to life – economic as well as social – was unprecedented as the highly infectious new disease swept from East Asia to Europe, North and South America to the Middle East; no populated corner of the globe has been left unscathed. That the theme of the 2020 DGS was ‘Food and Disruption’ was entirely coincidental, chosen long previously and elaborated through papers that were submitted weeks before the pandemic even reached Europe. The disruption wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequential shutdowns provided a backdrop to the event, articulated through keynote speakers who reflected on the current situation.

The Keynotes 2020

The DGS 2020 was framed by daily keynote events speaking to the theme of Food and Disruption. Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City, University of London, shared his thoughts about resilience and security in the food system. Australia had more than its share of disruption in 2020: in a video message, Professor Donna Lee Brien of Queensland University recounted how life and work there had been impacted by the successive catastrophes of bush fires and pandemic. In a live roundtable session, Catherine Cleary of The Irish Times spoke with Mary Farrell, executive chef of Morton’s Ranelagh, Olivia Duff from the Headford Arms Hotel in Kells, and Jess Murphy, chef / proprietor, Kai Restaurant, Galway, about the disruption that the Covid-19 pandemic had brought to the Irish hospitality industry with the first national lockdown from March to May 2020. Lastly, Fabio Parasecoli, Professor at NYU Steinhardt and Director of the PhD Programme in Food Studies, joined the conference for a live presentation about ways to reimagine our disruptive food system through systemic thinking.

Falling as it did within the time frame of the first wave of the surge, with the resultant countermeasures of social distancing and lockdowns, the speakers understandably reflected on this in their presentations. While the Irish Hospitality Roundtable as well as Lee Brien’s reflection on the Australian experience spoke about the practical and immediate reality faced by hospitality professionals and food systems actors, Lang and Parasecoli offered wide-angle perspectives shaped by their years of food systems analysis. But despite different starting points and indeed locations on the globe, common themes emerged across the four talks. The near-total social and economic disruption brought into view the usually hidden links and joints of the food
system as well as its fragility. The general public was suddenly and immediately affected by disruptions in distribution (such as empty supermarket shelves), processing (infection spikes around meat-processing plants in several countries, for example the US, Ireland, Germany and Italy), production (as the international movement of seasonal farm workers became a hot topic of discussion in the media of the United States, Ireland, Germany, or Poland) as well as consumption (rules and closures imposed onto restaurants and food shops).

The speakers highlighted that a response to such a disruption might be found in the creativity and adaptability that businesses, and particularly small businesses, have shown during the crisis. The greater awareness of the fragility of the system may have also led to a stronger sense of community. The Irish Hospitality Roundtable underlined, for example, that Irish consumers showed great willingness to support individual businesses and Irish producers. In this way, the disruption might arguably lead to a re-thinking and re-setting, a search for alternatives to outdated practices in the hospitality industry as well as remediating negative effects of other industry practices.

However, as both Parasecoli and Lang stressed, the complexity of the food system as well as the problems facing it require a multi-faceted, multi-criteria approach. The disruptions of 2020 have exposed the reality of global interdependence and raised questions of individual and collective responsibility. Parasecoli described the multivalent crisis of the food system as a “wicked problem” (Rittel and Webber, 1973), with no easy solution, where addressing one issue may well have unintended consequences in another area. The re-thinking and re-setting must therefore occur at a systemic level, considering long-term perspectives and common benefits to achieve the goal hailed by all speakers: a more resilient food system that is able to withstand shocks and bounce back in a world where disruption, not only through pandemics but also through climate change, may well become the ‘new normal’.

The Papers 2020

Nearly 50 papers were presented during the five days of the online event, approaching the idea of disruption and the future of food in a variety of contexts. Özden, Ranta, Rogers and Giannasio, and Buccini and Dahlstrom discussed the demise but also the survival and potential revival of traditional culinary systems – Turkish breakfast traditions, British pie and mash, classic wine and food pairings as well as the principle of culinary traditions in a globalised world.

Disruption may bring forth new traditions, new practices, and new identities. This is the case in the development of national and community identities, as Abrahão explained in the case of Brazil, Ni in the context of Anglo-Sino encounters in Canton, and Bell and Moran with the example of the common culinary identity emerging among Italian soldiers in WWI. Stewart spoke about the challenges of developing an individual culinary identity shaped by diet choices and restrictions due to health
requirements. Harding and Bregazzi discussed disruptive practices in dining, à la Russe-service in the 19th century and contemporary multi-sensory experimental restaurant practices respectively. Vincent reflected on using food as a weapon as a disrupting practice in political activism.

Not only the practices of eating, serving, and cooking may encounter disruption, but also the practices around teaching about food and cooking. McConnell outlined how the rise in veganism poses a challenge but also an opportunity for culinary arts education, while Dalton made a case for a new European curricular framework for culinary higher education.

The Covid-19 pandemic is not the first major catastrophe to disrupt cuisines and culinary practices. Cusack reminded us of the seismic disruption of the Columbian exchange and its long aftermath still felt today. The World Wars of the 20th century greatly disrupted life in many countries, as Claflin explained in her paper on WWI Paris, and Geddes and Keating on the impact of WWII on British cookery programming and Irish cooking respectively. Mulcahy recounted how a series of violent disruptions shaped Irish society and its emigrant community, held together in some part by food parcels sent back and forth. Environmental – though man-made – catastrophes were the focus of Kraig’s talk on agriculture in the US Midwest, and Walravens’ on post-Fukushima Japan.

The movement of people across the globe may be caused by but also itself cause disruption, as Naguib discussed in the context of migrant Sephardic Egyptian women. Even short-term movements such as tourism make their mark, for example in Rome on the question of ‘authentic’ cuisine, explained by Moyer-Nocchi, or in Thai tourist cooking schools, as noted by Mills.

Technological innovations are obvious disruptors, and in the papers of Hertzmann, Middleton, and Cherfas, respectively, we learned that toasters, canning, and the Chorleywood industrial bread process did just that. This may of course offer opportunities for the future. Aras and Öney Tan reflected on the promising ideas of a traditional culinary concept, the Turkish Tarhana desiccated soup. Traynor, Moreo, Bernard and O’Neill researched the rise and impact of digital delivery chains on the restaurant industry, while Cubasch and Neier investigated the clash between human food culture and NASA space food during the 1960s and what it may mean for the future of food in the age of space travel.

Disruption may be real but is also imagined and elaborated creatively in art and literature. Schiavone focused on a classic human fantasy of disruption in her talk on science-fiction literature and its visions of future culinary culture. Kasparian illustrated how an immigrant memoir did not only recount but also embody disruption in its disjointed format. Brumberg-Kraus looked at ancient and modern gastronomic myths of disruption, from the Bible to The Cooking Gene (Twitty, 2017).
Lastly, there are disruptions that we may need to embrace in order to foster a sustainable future of food. Food and gastronomic practices have shown themselves to be useful catalysts for the promotion of vibrant rural and urban communities, such as Italian food festivals (Fontefrancesco), food trails and agri-tourism (Monaldi and Ramsingh), and food tourism in the Greater Toronto area (Montoya-Guevara, Morrow and Benson). Traditional practices in food production and processing may offer resources and ideas, such as Austrian and Anatolian pastoralism (Heinzelmann) and Irish craft butchery (McHenry). We have to consider both our diet and our consumption practices, such as meat consumption. In this regard, Sen offered the example of Indian vegetarianism, Kenefick reflected on mindful meat consumption per se, Morgan introduced aspirational food projects in the US and Denmark, and Reynolds considered the environmental impacts of cooking habits. The papers of both Wilson and Pedtke and Pedtke took the view that change cannot happen without public involvement, whether to regulate big business and the food industry, or to reframe the question of food waste. Lastly, Sweeney posed the question as to whether positive culinary disruption could happen without creating a sustainable attitude and work environment for culinary practitioners such as chefs and chef students.

With papers that touched on the biblical era as well as the space age, individual responsibility and public policy, resilience in the face of catastrophe and on creative re-imaginations of the present and future, the speakers collectively showed recurrent patterns around food and disruption that resonate and also offer potential solutions for the current and any future disruption.

**Disrupted but far from discouraged**

The safeguarding measures implemented by governments in Ireland and abroad to stem the Covid-19 pandemic, which included travel bans and restrictions on gatherings and events, forced the organising committee to choose between cancelling or postponing the event, and exploring the possibilities of offering a version of the event online. At the end of 2020, most of us have become familiar with communication and virtual conferencing technologies. However, in the early days of the pandemic, the decision to bring a conference that had become so focused on personal interaction and conviviality into the online space was met with a somewhat nervous scepticism even within the committee. Yet the decision was taken to embrace the disruption, and the enthusiastic uptake and smooth running of the event proved the spirit of conviviality and collaboration in the gastro-academic community to be quite resilient.

While technological options set their own limitations, the committee was pushed to translate the mechanics of holding a conference in real life to holding a virtual version, which brought unique challenges. The conference speakers were located in seventeen countries across nine time zones, from Eastern Australia to the US Pacific Coast, requiring creative reconfiguration of the usual two-day conference into a five-day event with a timetable facilitating these time zones. At the same time, it opened the
doors to a much wider range of participants, and broadened access considerably, tapping into the ethos of generosity. Attending the event required neither travel nor accommodation expenses. The number of registrations were now unrestricted. The only requirement was the time to attend and a stable enough internet connection. This may well have been a reason that the symposium attracted a high number of students and scholars – 756 registered attendees from 156 institutions in 31 countries. Each of the twenty online sessions attracted an average of over 100 virtual audience members. This speaks to the growing global interest in “all things food”, as well as the by now truly global reach of the *Dublin Gastronomy Symposium*.

The impact and network of the DGS

The community spirit and ethos of goodwill that is at the core of the symposium ensures that the DGS organising committee have always striven to make the event accessible to seasoned academics, early career researchers, and postgraduate students alike. To that end, it has received support from a variety of external parties. In addition to the key support of TU Dublin’s School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology, there has also been input from a number of industry sources. Gallagher’s Boxy House has proved to be an important ally from the very early days of the DGS project, and they have presented the Boxy House Student Gastronomy Award at the beginning of each conference. Ireland’s national tourism authority, Fáilte Ireland, has helped to support curated Irish Food Culture Experiences for international DGS delegates that showcase some of the country’s best artisan producers. Many important relationships have developed among delegates due to periphery events like these and the other commensal elements of the conference programme. Since 2016, the DGS has also taken the opportunity to recognise the important work of domestic and international food scholars through the DGS Fellowship Awards. Each DGS sees two internationally renowned food scholars presented with a bespoke silver ladle designed by Irish silversmith Seamus Gill, in recognition of their contribution to gastronomic scholarship. Recipients of the DGS Fellowship to date have included Louis Cullen and Joseph Hegarty (Figure 5) in 2016, Darina Allen and Tom Jaine in 2018 and most recently Martin Caraher and Patricia Lysaght in 2020. Professor Caraher provided a pre-recorded keynote address titled ‘The Journey - Departures, Meetings and Arrivals: Reflections of 40 years working with Food Policy and Education’.
Figure 5: Dr Joseph Hegarty (right), co-recipient of the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium Fellowship 2016, with Dr Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (left) and Dr Eamon Maher

Conclusion

The DGS has become a unique and important aspect of both Irish and international gastronomic culture that has evolved and grown from the gathering of a few dozen enthusiasts into an international biennial event drawing participants from renowned institutions worldwide. It has also become core to numerous other developments in Irish food culture, a central axis around which a variety of research agendas revolve. In collaboration with the National Centre for Franco Irish Studies, the DGS was instrumental in the development of the Beverage Research Network, which has organised beverage culture research seminars in 2015, 2017 and 2019. Because of its close links with the NCFIS, the DGS community have frequently contributed to conferences organised by the Association of Franco Irish Studies (AFIS) both in Ireland and in France. Indeed, the French Embassy in Ireland has been a great support to the DGS from its early days. Many members of the DGS community have also contributed chapters and articles in AFIS publications over the last ten years. The launch of the European Journal of Food, Drink and Society, initiated by Michelle Share and Yvonne Desmond, marks the beginning of an important future path in the study of food, beverages, and gastronomy, rooted in the Irish academic community but with a European and indeed global outlook.

The Dublin Gastronomy Symposium has maintained its vigour through a decade of considerable change in Ireland’s foodscape. It has overcome many challenges in that time but few as formidable as the one posed by the Covid-19 crisis. Through the combined efforts of its expanded organising committee and the supports of a newly
amalgamated Technological University Dublin, the 2020 online DGS proved to be something very special. Although the online experience was considered a major success, the committee now looks forward to its next conference on Food and Movement with the intention that delegates will once again “break bread” in person. The original DGS set out to provide a forum for gastronomic researchers to come together to exchange ideas in an atmosphere of support and conviviality. The success of DGS 2020 has shown just how strong that research community has become both in Ireland and abroad. It has demonstrated an ability to succeed even when faced with the most difficult of circumstances. Such an ability will undoubtedly prove to be an important asset in the aftermath of the global pandemic as the food industry tries to chart a path through to recovery. Ten years on, research forums like the DGS are more important than ever in helping to foster a vibrant and resilient future of food.

References


