Clarifying sustainable food technology futures through technacy genre theory

Angela Turner, Southern Cross University
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Clarifying Food Education toward Innovation and Design for the Global Green New Deal

Angela Turner and Kurt Seemann
Clarifying Food Education toward Innovation and Design for the Global Green New Deal

Angela Turner, Southern Cross University, Australia
Kurt Seemann, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Abstract: There is an increasing need for food and beverage industries to develop a culture of innovation and sustainability around food practices. The increase in world population and demands of consumers contribute to the development of a diverse suite of food capabilities, and remains a significant issue in relation to climate change and staff education. For businesses it is important to develop new concepts and processes that combine purpose and contextual factors in association with sustainability knowledge and the choice of food hospitality tools, techniques, and materials for meal design. Technacy genre theory is explored as a framework applicable to the level of kitchen systems and skills that allows for sustainable and effective understandings of technological practice and innovation for a range of green new deal hospitality capabilities.

Keywords: Food and Beverage Industry, Climate Change, Staff Education, Innovation, Sustainability, Technacy Genre Theory

Introduction

HUMAN BEINGS AND the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about – “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity signed by more than 1,600 scientists, including 102 Nobel laureates, from 70 countries” (Meadows, Randers & Meadows, 2004, p. 15).

This paper raises the issue of sustainability and highlights the need to explore the role carbon knowledge associated with technology choice can play in promoting best practice in restaurants and food outlets. The objective is to advance literature in understanding the dynamics between supply and demand for staff so that they are appropriately skilled within a food supply chain that seeks better ecological balance in the industry. The backdrop to this paper draws on literature that explores the relationship between economics, ethics, climate change, and how these elements influence regional economies.

While the design and methods of Food Hospitality and Tourism industries are slowly reconciling their ecological responsibilities (Gossling, Garrod, Aall, Hille, & Peeters, 2011), the climate imperative adds a new design, social, technical and accordingly, a new educational dimension to the challenges before the sector. Meadows, Meadows & Randers (1972) projected the scenario of global instability through resource overshoot if practices were to con-
continue unchanged in a context where world consumption of food production resources continue
to rise, aided by growth in industrial methods that raise pollution management challenges. More recently the Stern Review (2007) commissioned by the United Kingdom Government presented the current scenario as having reached our sustainable limit. The thrust of the review projected the impact climate change will continue to have on a global scale through greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused by human activity. Scientists are quick to discern the greenhouse effect is a natural ecological phenomenon that protects the planet against extremities of cold and heat. Cook (2010) clarifies nature as a planet manager that balances natural emissions through giving off CO₂ and absorbing CO₂ (via sequestration) as part of the biological carbon cycle. However, while GHG emissions and sequestration processes are natural cycles, the additional production of GHGs associated with human population growth and our means of production has both added a higher than historically seen burden of GHG emissions into the natural cycle of sequestration. We are still heavily reliant on fossil fueled technologies, and are reducing key natural sequestration processes due in part to our accelerated equatorial deforestation. Our means of food production with high demand for growing beef and land clearing for monoculture have also compounded the challenge for the natural sequestration of GHG emissions. Meadows et al., (2004) painted a bleak picture between the ecological footprint of humanity and the carrying capacity of Earth requiring more than one Earth by the year 2000, with extreme weather conditions unfolding through anthropogenic global warming (Berners-Lee, Howard, Moss, Kaivanto, & Scott, 2010; Stern, 2007; United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2010).

Emerging green ideas of global market significance to the Food Hospitality and Tourism industry, such as the United Nations Environment Programme, ought now be considered as part of a new foundation to the sectors’ business plan (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011). The ‘Global Green New Deal’ represents a new era of green collar jobs that demand skills, knowledge and awareness development in food sustainability and innovation. Renewable energy, industry, transportation, building, agriculture and forestry sectors are areas, if fostered well through effective policy design, provide investment and incentives to reduce carbon dependency, create jobs, protect ecosystems and alleviate poverty (United Nations Environment Programme, 2008, 2009a). This initiative draws on the Stern Review (2007) that aimed to stimulate economic recovery through the reduction of fossil fuel emissions and emission-intensive goods and services, while also improving energy efficiency by switching to technologies and design of processes that produce fewer emissions and lower the carbon intensity of production. In the southern hemisphere, The Garnaut Climate Change Review Update (2011), commissioned by the Australian Government, declared an immediate shift in the ‘business as usual’ thinking and practice. The CO₂ emissions for Australia are nearly twice the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD, 2010) average and more than four times the world average (per capita). This is largely due to the high usage of coal in electricity generation and agricultural emissions from machinery (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Garnaut, 2011). The review warned that without mitigating energy dependence of fossil fuels, Australia would contradict the carbon reduction trend being led by other developed countries and as a result contribute significantly toward global warming. The main challenge for the Australian economy is that the mining sector forms the backbone of the country’s economic structure, with the most carbon intensive export earner being coal: coal exports in Australia represents 54% of the total Australian production of energy worth $24 billion in 2007–2008 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009;
NSW Greens, 2010). The country’s reliance on fossil fuels as an export faces an exceptionally high cost of mitigation and as such has been an ongoing contentious political issue. Conversely, Australia’s climate and geographic landscape offers exceptionally rich resources for renewable energy: solar, geothermal and wind (Garnaut, 2008). This natural abundance of renewable energy sources in Australia has raised the debate to expand research and development into a post mining, lower carbon structural shift in the nation’s economy. This would open up opportunities to improve economic growth through new ‘green’ market prospects that involve low-carbon energy technologies and other low-carbon goods and services.

From the time we wake up in the morning to a cup of coffee until we toast another day at sundown, the food and beverage industry plays a vital role in the lives of billions of people every day. Over the years, social and economic trends have had an impact on the industry, but ultimately it is the environment—which has been largely undervalued to date—that will decide the industry’s future (Lonescu-Somers & Steger, 2008, p. xvi)

The Food Hospitality and Tourism industry is a sector that is recognized as a noted consumer of energy and producer of GHG emissions due mainly to the technology systems it uses or relies upon to bring food and service to the market. The sector contributes approximately 5% to global GHG emissions (Dwyer, Forsyth, Spurr, & Hoque, 2010). It is also ecosystem dependent and as such is vulnerable to climate change due to extreme weather patterns, which have the capacity to affect tourist flow and spending (ibid). The overarching message from the literature is one of a global collective undertaking to slow down global warming. The significance the Food Hospitality and Tourism industry can contribute through the carbon footprint of menus for example would represent a starting point for planning sustainable food practice in mitigating fossil fuelled CO$_2$ emissions.

The international community is taking concerted action against climate change around a commonly agreed framework led by the United Nations. This UN framework will seek to establish a long-term post-Kyoto roadmap with rapid deployment and targeted milestones. The tourism sector has an important place in that framework, given its global economic and social value, its role in sustainable development and its strong relationships with climate (World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Environment Programme, 2008, p. 13).

‘Carbon footprint’ is a commonly used expression that refers to carbon emissions or greenhouse gas emissions resulting from global production and consumption of goods and services. For the Food Hospitality and Tourism industry, defining an overall picture of carbon emission is not easily defined due to the varied interpretations across the industry’s multifaceted structure. These involve three core sectors: 1) Transport-aviation, road, rail, boat; 2) Food and Beverage-café, restaurant & retail food outlets; and 3) Hotel-accommodation (Becken & Patterson, 2006; Dwyer, et al., 2010; Hoque, et al., 2010).

As with many sectors, the link between Tourism and Climate is only now drawing more detailed attention in the literature and practice of the sectors operations. Until the Djerba Declaration was implemented through the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) in 2003, the relationship between tourism and climate change was vague or not recognized. The planning of food as a highly interconnected sustainable system has an important role to play in reducing
the carbon footprint but has remained a largely neglected area by many individual tourism destinations and businesses (Becken & Patterson, 2006; Dwyer, et al., 2010; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000; White, 2007; Yang, 2010). A five-year survey of the Food and Beverage industry by Lonesue-Somers and Steger (2008) concluded that although managers acknowledged the importance of sustainability, they were uncertain of profitable outcomes with no measurable or tangible criteria for which to base any decision making upon. In this context, the biggest challenge will be nurturing a new habit of mind or ‘psychological adaptation’ for managers and workers in the economics of green skilling through the process of innovation (Reser and Gifford (2010). Although the science of measuring a food carbon footprint in detail is still in the early stages of development (Andrews, 2010; S Gaballa & Abraham, 2007; S Gaballa & Cranley, 2008; Harrington, 2008), the push toward green jobs opens up opportunities to educate and produce clever and creative people in promoting best practice in restaurants and food outlets.

**Method**

White (2007) argues policy frameworks do not consider a ‘systems-based’ approach for the reduction of carbon intensity, particularly in food production and consumption. Dwyer et al (2010) for example proposed a direct and indirect tool to measure a complete picture of tourism’s carbon footprint, while Becken and Patterson (2006) applied a bottom-up analysis involving industry and tourist analysis, and a top-down analysis using environmental accounting. Hoque et al., (2010) outlined a method to estimate carbon footprint based on a production and expenditure approach. All methods are adequate in a ‘whole industry’ context but fall short in the capacity to measure the carbon footprint in the restaurant and food outlet services specifically based on their form or typology of food processing practices. This paper proposes a contemporary research tool that identifies essential structures of technology knowledge as a ‘nested system’ capable of mapping key elements of the carbon footprint across different industries based on the typology (also referred to as genre) of technology systems practiced in the hospitality sector.

Recent research undertaken in Australia tested the empirical merits of Technacy Genre Theory through a nation wide survey of industry food technology and secondary school food technology perceptions about their form of practice in the profession. The research was modeled upon an existing critical theory known as Technacy Genre Theory (Seemann, 2009). The fundamental praxis of Technacy considers access and equity and ensures that social and environmental inputs are considered equally valid parts in decision-making processes for technological activities (Australian Science Technology and Engineering Council, 1996; Liew, Chang, & Yalvac, in press; Northern Territory Curriculum Corporation, 2009; Northern Territory Government, 2003; Seemann cited in Fleer and Jane, 2004; Seemann, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2004a, 2006b, 2009; Seemann & Talbot, 1995; Turner, 2010a, 2010b; Turner & Seemann, 2010; Walker, 2000).

In the Australian study noted above, perception grids (Provost, Martin, Hannan, Bath, & Lipp, 2007) were used to help clarify a dispute between school based teacher views of what constitutes the typology of learning known as Food Technology, and the wider food profession view of the same expression. The point of difference to be tested was framed as identical terms, referring to two different genres of food knowledge, purpose and technical practice: that is, to detect the degree of difference between two forms of food genre to help isolate
the cause of confusion in the sector. The context of this need for clarification was based on
the concern expressed by the wider food sector in Australia that while-ever the school view
of food knowledge was unaligned with the wider sector’s view, there remained a key imped-
iment to effectively educate society of the need to coherently redress such challenges as food
security, food innovations and technical system changes in efforts to adapt to the impact of
climate change. A clearer view of the forms of food technical practice can facilitate strategies
towards food innovation and education from a common conceptual base while simultaneously
servicing the diverse study and practice of food in the sector.

Technacy Genre Theory was selected as the conceptual framework to identify and measure
inter-relationships and subtle differences between typologies of technology practice assumed
under the banner of Food Technology. The degree of association between two forms of food
practice was defined by an index (noted hereafter as the Technacy Genre Index) of correlation
between three key elements identified under Technacy Theory. These three elements have
previously been argued to be core and systemic across all forms of technical practice
(Seemann, 2003). The core Technacy elements include the type of knowledge and techniques
embodied by the individual (summarized as their Agency); the technical systems and tools
used (summarized as Tool Systems); and the material ingredients transformed and consumed
(summarized as the Materials or eco-resource used in processes). A key advantage of the
Technacy Theory approach was its necessary inclusion of ecology and technical systems as
part of the human knowledge underpinning the processing of food. Of particular theoretical
interest was that the Technacy Genre Index could detect a high degree of association between
two hypothesised genres. The indexing system was able to demonstrate both: 1) The existence
of Technacy Genre systems [the existence of technology types by the comparative measures
of the Technacy Genre perception index] and 2) that the process of Genre identification
clarified how Food Technology portrayed in schools, was both qualitatively and systemically
different to the wider professional expectations of the same. Guided by Technacy Genre
Theory, perceptions were gathered around contextual and goal oriented aspects of practice,
with a specific interest in:

1. Human elements of practice (e.g. agency, knowledge, techniques, values, social organi-
isation)
2. Tool elements of practice (e.g. enabling technical devices and systems)
3. Material or ecological elements of practice (e.g. consumable ingredients, properties,
aesthetics, impact on ecology).

The above three elements represent, according to Technacy Theory, both resources and
constraints evident in all forms of technological practice (Seemann, 2003, 2009). Each element
exists in a dependent relationship with the other elements of practice, and is defined via the
purpose and context of application. The study also aimed to gauge relative attention given
to goals concerning sustainability, economic trends and innovation capacity building as these
areas remain topical in the wider context of the field of food technology research and emerging
world concerns. In understanding these dynamics, the framework identified meta-inferences,
perceptions and measured inter-relationships and subtle differences between typologies (genre) of technology practice for Food Technology.
Findings and Discussion

The research found that secondary schools and the wider profession of food technologists used the same labels of ‘food technology’ for food studies, but that their content and practice were significantly and substantially different. That this difference was so statistically and qualitatively different it was apparent there were two different genres of food practice at play, but being confused in educational discourse as being the same.

Thematic analysis of text for understanding the reasons why Food Technology should be taught in schools was framed using the Technacy Genre headings. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the dominant knowledge and practice for teaching ‘food technology’ in schools between secondary teachers and the wider profession of food technologists; the higher the number, the more participants registered their orientation towards the theme shown. The qualitative findings suggest teachers are more connected to social life skills, cooking and nutrition, while food technologists focused much more on food science innovation research, design and food quality.

Figure 1: Knowledge

Figure 2: Tools
A quantitative result through a Pearson’s 3x3 correlation matrix shows there is a very strong three-way interdependent pattern, as predicted in Technacy Genre theory. Figure 4 statistically validates that teachers perceived priority systems of Food Technology knowledge significantly differently to the wider professional community of food technologists. Knowledge-Tools (n=382, r=.823, p<.000, 2-tailed); Knowledge-Ingredients (n=382, r=.742, p<.000, 2-tailed); and, Tools-Ingredients (n=382, r=.790, p<.000, 2-tailed).
The ability of Technacy Genre Theory to effectively identify differences in forms of technical capabilities provides a key method for planning skills required to shift food hospitality education towards the global green new deal for the sector.

Proprietors of restaurants, food outlets and working staff need to be well educated in the complexities of the systemic form or genres of food preparation practices. Each form of food processing necessitates an ecological and technical choice that impacts on the carbon footprint of that process. In the food industry, technological activity involves nearly everything undertaken or made that involves the system of human agency, tools chosen for food transformation and material/ecological ingredients of food preparation. Further, the minimum genre system of food agency, food tools, and food ingredients, appear to act as interdependent systems: change one of these and a change is observed to occur in the other two systems to form a genre variation. If the purpose of the restaurant menu is changed to suit a lower carbon emission target, then the elements of the genre system have also been observed to change. If the purpose of the menu is changed to offer lower carbon footprint meals, the restaurateur can anticipate a need to also change key aspects of the tools and technical systems they use, the food ingredients stocked in storage, and the knowledge and techniques required to prepare and transform that food. For example, electric tools and equipment, ingredients and knowledge are Technacy elements a chef can control. As a professional collective, hospitality food sectors can also control the technology suppliers market by demanding lower carbon footprint tools and equipment for food design. Changes in tool use also produces new processes and techniques. Although locally sourced foods mitigate ‘food miles’, ingredient choice is now a key consideration in mitigating carbon emissions where meat and cheese are now considered high carbon foods (Steinfeld, et al., 2007).

**Conclusion**

This paper highlighted that the Food Hospitality and Tourism sector is both a contributor to climate change emissions, as well as a sector that can take climate change action to manage and reduce those emissions. While the literature includes research at a sector wide basis for how food production and preparation can reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, there has been little research published to guide how the technical forms of food preparation practice can be more carefully conceptualized to guide change at the food preparation level of the process. The conceptual and systemic framework of Technacy Genre Theory, by its method of embedding food practice in an interdependent ecological, technical and capability system, offers the restaurateur a new way to anticipate how systemic changes in food practice can be organized towards a greener form of operations. The restaurateur can also anticipate that ideas such as marking meals on the menu with a green rating, will mostly likely, in accord with the genre theory discussed, also demand a systemic change in food preparation, kitchen equipment used and food ingredients purchased for the menu. Technacy Genre Theory offers a useful conceptual framework to guide the food hospitality sector in the process of planning their systems towards a lower carbon footprint service.
References


Angela Turner

Angela’s research interest concerns food education, food sustainability, and food innovation research (regional foods and food education research). Her industry affiliation with the Australian Institute Food Science and Technology Incorporated aligns as a common interest to improve the direction of food technology curriculums in secondary schooling. Her affiliation interest with the Centre for Tourism, Leisure and Work involves regional food sustainability and food innovation research. Her doctoral thesis explores the evolution of food curriculum studies in New South Wales, Australia, and to what extent food technology in education is well placed to meet emerging policy and economic demand for food innovation expertise in the industry. A particular focus involves technacy genre theory as a conceptual tool to identify and measure inter-relationships and subtle differences between typologies of technology practices for food technology.

Prof. Kurt Seemann

Dr. Seemann’s research investigates the relationship between people, technology, and the environment as a complex adaptive system. The scale of his research has been focused at two levels: the human scale of holistic technology education and processes of innovation, and the larger societal scale of systems driving and defining the sustainability of human settlements.
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