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KITCHEN THINK-OVER:
Towards an Architecture & Urban Design for Sustainable Diets

'Sustainable diets'[1] in practice would inevitably imply our cities to work in ways quite different from how we know them to function today. That is – spatial and urban layouts – actively facilitating the desirable shifts in our urban populations' food practices. But what exactly would those implications be, in future housing developments, or for architecture and urban design in general? In these fields - directly concerned with accommodating our rapidly urbanising world - the question of how any of the necessary shifts in urban food practices could be physically accommodated, is rarely discussed beyond the theme of 'urban farming'. The spatial implications of sustainable urban food logistics, storage, retail, food preparation, disposal and waste management do not feature in the dialogue in any significant way, and are even less frequently considered in mainstream urban development projects. I argue, this would be all the more urgent, given how significantly spatial logics - on all scales from the layout of one's kitchen up to larger urban configurations - dictate people's behaviours and implicitly define what is convenient to do, on a societal level. Studying the issue in the context of affluent Western cities, my research aims to demonstrate how their spatial development and potential new models of affordable housing could facilitate the necessary changes in urban food practices; what the design implications would be - the design traditions/conventions we should abandon, and where we would need to invent new solutions, so that our future food spaces could simultaneously respond to demographic changes, technological developments and environmental concerns.

My working paper addresses this question from two directions:
First, from the point of view of demographic change, analysing the everyday food practices of a diverse sample of urban dwellers, who all live in different forms of non-familial households. Based on a series of semi-structured interviews and mapping exercises conducted with them, my work highlights the multiple ways in which they are challenged to cook/eat healthy home-cooked meals, or to consider the broader environmental aspects of their actual food practices. My findings are partially aligned with recent work by social scientists, Bowen et al.[2], who draw attention to the significance of people's (lack of) resources in determining their food practices. However, my design perspective and agenda lead me to rather different conclusions: Beyond **money, time and**

[1] as understood by Mason & Lang in Sustainable Diets, 2017

[2] Pressure Cooker: Why Home Cooking Won't Solve Our Problems and What We Can Do About It, by Sarah Bowen, Joslyn Brenton, Sinikka Elliott; Oxford University Press, 2019

infrastructural-access, I suggest to also consider two additional factors, namely '**know-how**' and '**company**'. Furthermore, in my view, the more important question that follows from there, is how the city itself (through architecture and urban design) might become able to provide access to these factors, and facilitate ways in which their burden can be better distributed in post-familial societies. This leads me to my second angle for approaching the initial question: from the point of view of spatial and technological opportunities. Here, I focus on the phenomenon of '**the hybridisation of food spaces**' - a concept I coined to describe the current tendencies of urban food spaces diversifying their functional programmes physically, as well as merging their operations with virtual platforms. This part of my work is primarily based on spatial observations and the architectural analysis of a series of case study 'sites' from major European cities. Examples of this include the up-market supermarket with cafes, salad bars and cookery schools suddenly appearing between the isles; home-based technologies which increasingly lure customers to shop for their groceries online or have restaurant meals delivered; 'food waste cafes' connecting the issues of food waste with deprivation and social isolation. Or the homes of the eco-conscious, with re-emerging practices of home-growing and home-composting. Each of these are independent developments - many quite controversial -, some driven by economic pressures and new technologies, while others by concerns for the environment or vulnerable social groups. Yet, each of these developments implies spatially merging - or blurring the lines - between previously separate food operations and assumed domains. Therefore, collectively they can be understood as a new process of 'hybridisation' in urban food spaces. My aim is to first describe and analyse this phenomenon, understanding the forces giving rise to these developments, as well as mapping their further implications. And ultimately, to uncover the design potential that this phenomenon may hold - if consciously steered in a strategic way to shorten our urban food supply chains, to cut out waste, and democratise access to sustainable diets.