

CULTURAL EVENTS AS "COMPLEX SYSTEMS": THE CASE STUDY OF THE SALONE INTERNAZIONALE DEL GUSTO AND TERRA MADRE

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Abstract: Gastronomic and cultural events or festivals, though of great scope and complexity despite being limited in time, have a significant effect on the level of 'stress' of human activities and on the delicate balance between the territory and the community.

Starting from the analysis of the case study of the Salone Internazionale del Gusto and Terra Madre, an international event, based in Turin, for the exhibition and sale of high quality food and wine, the purpose of the paper is to offer some insights about the dynamics triggered by a "system event" in its material and immaterial flows and how the design of concrete actions to make it more sustainable can generate a new system of shared and enduring values among the involved stakeholders.

The methodology used belong to the theoretical framework of the systemic design, which has been integrated with the requirements of a sustainable fair manifestation according to the Slow Food philosophy of the "Good, Clean and Fair". Stand construction, waste production, energy, packaging, materials for onsite food consumption, the logistics for transporting goods, CO2 emissions, the mobility of persons and goods, water resources are some of the design areas considered for the improvement of the event environmental side. The result for the 2014 edition, was the creation of a system made of more than one hundred of concrete actions, which have significantly reduced the environmental impact of the event, and have increased its social, cultural and economic value, thanks to a active participation of more than 60 stakeholders too. This new system beyond reducing the environmental impact of the event, favoured the creation of a territorial network of relationships that become a sounding of its contents and keep them live once it ends.

1. Research question and aim of the paper

The boundaries of an event, such those one of a city, change over time and according to the problems that we aim to face, new structures of open relationships are able to change the territorial linkages that have been previously created (Bagnasco, 1986). This assumption, takes on a particular meaning when we face the issue of food-town and we are dealing with gastronomic events that have a strong educational value and aim to make us reflect on what are our practices and daily food choices. The following paper aims to analyze how the rethinking of some design aspects of an event in order to make it more sustainable from the environmental perspective through the adoption of the Systemic Design method, can change its boundaries, its matter and energy flows creating as a consequence a new system of relationships. The case study analyzed is the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, promoted by the International Slow Food Association.

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2. The case study

Slow Food is a global, grassroots organization, founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us. It coordinates projects that defend local food traditions, protects food communities, preserves food biodiversity and promotes quality artisanal products. Since its beginnings, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people, in over one hundred fifty countries, working to ensure everyone has access to good, clean and fair food.

Slow Food believes food is tied to many other aspects of life, including culture, politics, agriculture and the environment. Through food choices people can collectively influence how food is cultivated, produced and distributed, and as a result bring about great change. Salone Internazionale del Gusto and Terra Madre are two of the several events organised by the organisation. They represent, in the food fair field the answer to the homologation determined by a globalized market that penalize the small production of quality. It represents the idea that the safeguard of all cultural and environmental heritages linked to the gastronomy can revitalize the micro-economical level. Terra Madre is the international meeting of the Slow Food Communities, born to defend the fundamental right to share daily happiness offered by food and as a consequence to promote the collective duty of protecting the heritage of alimentary cultures that allows these pleasures. For five days every two years, the fair pole, puts up about 220,000, visitors in 75,800 squared metre, 125 institutional stands, 1,000 exhibitors, 300 stalls, 4,500 people belonging to the food communities from all the world and also spaces of restoration, sample, rooms for didactic, laboratories of taste and more else.

In 2005, Carlo Petrini, the International President of the Slow Food² Association states a new definition of food quality with the manifesto of "Good, Clean and Fair" (Petrini, 2005) where he outlines the criteria for a new quality that the food products should fulfil across the whole life cycle: a new holistic vision of the gastronomy that it has been further investigated by the University of Gastronomic Sciences³.

From the combination of the Slow Food manifesto, Good, Clean and Fair, with the principles of Systemic Design, was born the idea of developing a systemic event, with the purpose of associating quality content to a more sustainable "container" and with the ambition to educated the consumer to recognize a new concept of Systemic Quality about food production, distribution and communication.

3. Methodology: the systemic design approach

Food events can be considered as complex systems for several reasons:

- the dynamics of their continuous evolution position them at the cross-roads of the latest phenomena in the internationalization of the cities-countries system;
- they create a localized network oriented to territorial development;
- they provide an opportunity for dialogue with and education of visitors.

³ Gastronomy is defined as an in-depth understanding of the entire web of food production, from agriculture to processing to distribution, the knowledge about the material and immaterial relationship between man and food.

Acknowledging these reasons and with the intention of designing an event that will be less wasteful by harmonizing the content and making it conform to its container, the research was moved to adopt the systemic design methodology of investigation.

Systemic Design is a network of interdisciplinary knowledge that takes into account different design areas. It seeks to promote new, sustainable consumption and management of output (i.e. waste), making it usable for other processes and giving it a new economic value. The starting point of systemic design is, therefore, the knowledge of the principles of organization and efficiency that ecosystems have developed to survive for millions of years (Benyus, 1997). Each organism, animal, plant, microorganism or human being is a complex system made up of parts that are themselves smaller living systems, but not the less important for being so. In the living world we have systems within systems. They are related not only as a static configuration of elements, they share common properties and organizational principles created by the interactions between the different parts (Capra; 2002, Capra and Luisi, 2014). The whole is more than the sum of the individual elements (Forrester, 1974; Emery, 1989; Bistagnino, 2011). For this reason, nature does not know the meaning of the word 'waste' because each surplus is metabolized by the system, through the dynamics of the five natural kingdoms. By considering the event itself as a complex and living organism the research adopted the principles of systemic design to rethink and to shape the event according the mechanisms of a functioning ecosystem.

4. The applied research

From 2006 Slow Food, the Piedmont Region and the City of Turin, under the coordination of the University of Gastronomic Sciences and the Polytechnic of Turin, took up a road toward the progressive abatement of the environmental impact of the event in question (at first) with the aim of creating an exportable design model, through the application of the methodology of Systemic Design.

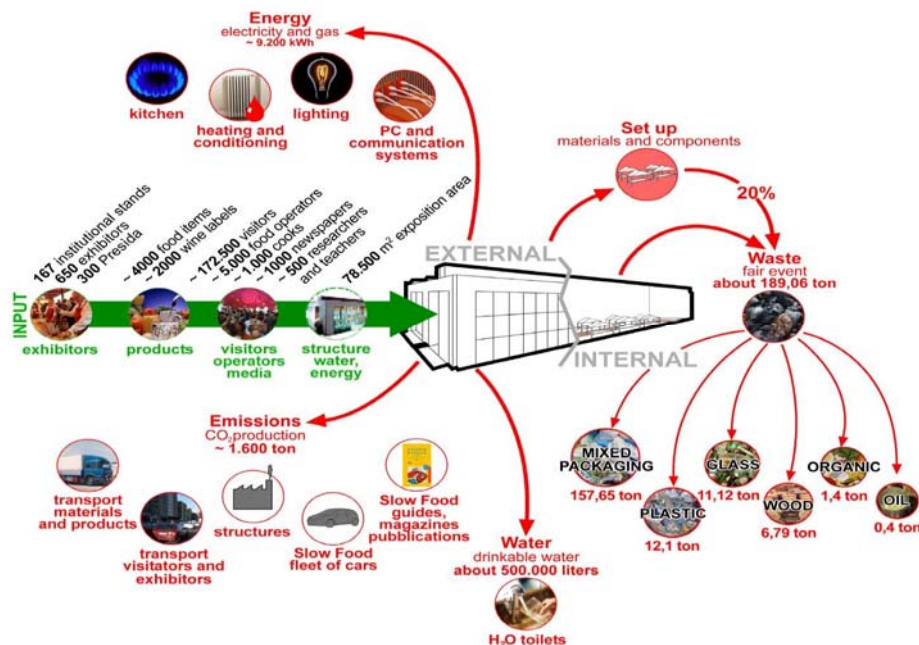


Figure 1. In this image, a part of the Holistic Survey developed for the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre 2006.

The first steps moved from the analysis of the life cycle of the event "Salone Internazionale del Gusto and Terra Madre 2006" considering the status quo relative to the incoming and outgoing flows of the trade fair system (Figure 1): stand construction, waste production, energy, packaging, materials for onsite food consumption, logistics for transporting the goods, CO₂ emissions, the mobility of persons and goods, water resources were considered as the main design scenarios that determine the environmental sustainability of an event.

By the "holistic relief" of the initial state (2006), the project outlined the first scenarios and the first concrete actions. The organizers of the event collect the data to promote a new model of "Systemic Exhibition" which considers all the incoming and outgoing flows of the trade fair system.

Several design experiments considered as intermediate stages of research were developed during the exhibitions of Slow Fish 2007 (Genoa) and Cheese 2007 (Bra), to identify innovative strategies with a direct involvement of the companies/expositors.

For each scenario a technical partner has been identified. Starting from the first edition of the project, we have begun to build a network of collaboration between companies of the territory and others at the national and international level for some specific products or services (Figure 2).

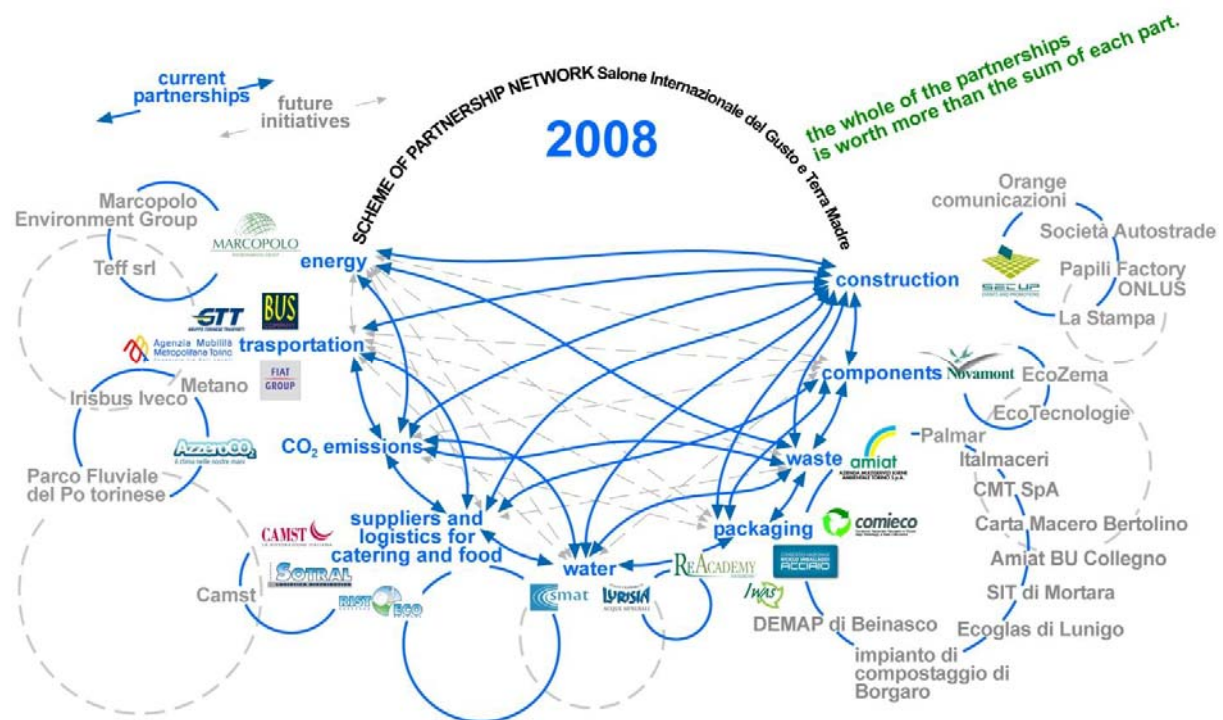


Figure 2. Highlighted in blue, the relationships built among the partner companies of the project in 2008, whereas in grey, the possible increase of the system. In the edition of 2014, the companies involved have become 60.

The choice of partners was based on their actual involvement in the status quo of the system or according to the contribution they could generate for the system. A memorandum of understanding has been signed with each partner to share the path of research to be implemented. Through the development of these partnerships the event was born and has grown as a system characterized by relationships built among the partner companies of the project. Today, we can say that the value of

these partnerships is more than the sum of each individual one (Fassio 2008b; Fassio and Balbo 2008).

5. Results

From 2006 to 2012, the environmental sustainability of the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre has grown by over 65% compared to the starting data. In 2012 the project areas considered were:

- equipment: selection of eco-materials/ or systemic solution for valorisation;
- real and virtual communication;
- waste and by-product collection and valorisation;
- eco-packaging;
- logistics of goods and people;
- energy supply and reduction;
- water management;
- emission reduction and compensation.

From 2006 we state that an event can be defined an event of quality, only if takes action into the direction of the environmental sustainability.

In the edition of 2014, the project enlarged a wider and more holistic definition of the event sustainability, considering beyond the environmental dimension also the social, sensorial and economical ones, according these definitions.

- **Social Sustainability:** the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs, creating new relationships and partnerships. Social innovation brings new answers to pressing needs that involve processes of social interaction. Social actions add value to society by increasing the capacity of individual action and community (according to the definition of Social Sustainability in the "Guide to Social Innovation", European Commission, February 2013).
- **Sensorial Sustainability:** it is determined by all those actions, design choices, which guarantee the functionality of the event and its perception through the five senses. What is being investigated is the attractiveness of the event or the "pleasure" caused by the use and perception of space, determined by factors such as aesthetic as functional, the arrangement of the areas, the choice of materials used, the functionality of the spaces and the 'ergonomics of the instruments, the clarity of communications and their educational potential (reproducibility of the messages in daily life), the presence or absence of "anthropological places" as opposed to increasing development in our cities of "non-places".
- **Economical sustainability:** is the economic impact generated on the territory by the event and its degree of accessibility for people and companies. It allow to consider the permanent income and work for the livelihood of the people belonging to the territory in which the event takes place and for companies that are involved. Definitely it is a key-factor in the spread of a new culture of production and consumption that transforms all the actors of the event in "co-organizers" (through their choices can determine the sustainability of the event), and in everyday life in "co-producers" (through their choices may be subject influencing the market both locally and globally).

The quantitative and qualitative factors identified in 2014, beyond determining a new concept of holistic sustainability of a cultural event, will contribute to develop new design strategies for the future editions.

102 concrete actions have been put in place for the year 2014, thanks to the involvement of more than 60 companies and finally, the project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Environment, since recognized as innovative and bearer of benefits in the territory. New activities and services dedicated to the family, baby pit-stop for mothers and their children during the age of breastfeeding, special itinerary for deaf people, laboratory based on all senses in order to overpass the linguistic barriers, are some exemplifying actions toward the social sustainability of the event. For example, to increase the sensorial sustainability of the cultural experience, all directional panels of the event are written with the font EasyReading which is a compensatory instrument for readers with the dyslexia; the conferences are translated in 7 languages; we use soundproof and sound insulating materials to improve the general acoustics of the event by preferring those which are of natural origins. For what concern the economical sustainability, discounts of 20% on the entry price, for those who came with sustainable means of transport or the creation of a series of free events in the City of Turin because everyone has the right to live the event. The whole project was finally explained in a stand of over 200 square meters, where with daily animations we have increased the awareness about the project action and their educational values. After five editions of the project, the applied research has profoundly changed the event. Considering matter, energy and emissions, people and territory, we have totally changed our concept of the quality of an event. The projectual content becomes a best practice, a replicable model for the design of other national and international events.

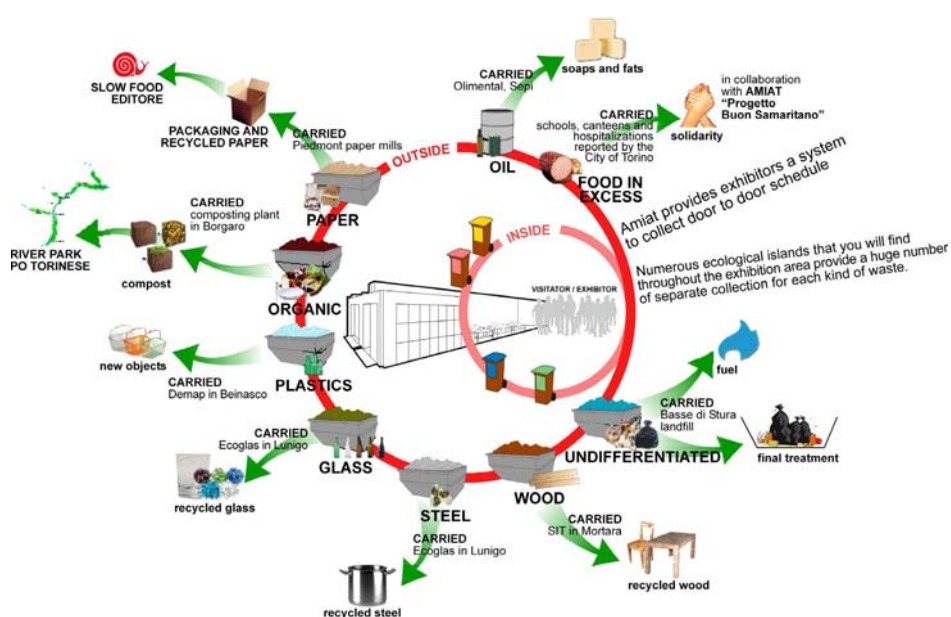


Figure 3. Iconographic schema of the system of the waste collection where are localized the place of collection respecting the logistic of the event, are identify the final destination of each waste and its final valorisation through the generation of a new product.

6. A focus on the waste scenario

One of the best design and cooperation practices among stakeholders is that one, relative to the waste management project scenario. In 2006 in an equal number of days the event has influenced the waste production of Turin and its suburbs of about 3%. It's important to consider that the inhabitants of the area are about two millions and the visitor of the event are only one hundred and

eighty thousand in 2006. This meant that if a due attention to the production of waste and then to their final use is not paid, the system of waste disposal of Turin with a pair of similar events within a restricted period, would risk to collapse.

A meticulous, constant and ever-more detailed waste collection, starting in 2006 with about 16,2% of separate waste collection, reaching a decrease of about 59,11% in 2012 with 92% of purity of separated waste. In this activity the role of participant has been crucial. The participants involved in the waste collect, transformed themselves in a co-organizer because they directly contributes to reach the goal of a good differentiated collect of waste. The amount of waste per capita has decreased from 1.1 kg in 2006 to 0.75 kg in 2012 as well as the associated CO₂ moved from 0.47 kg to 0.15 kg. The waste reduction and the increase of their value at the end of life, it is one of the factors that allow the decrease of CO₂ emission of a percentage of 60% compared to 2006.

7. Awards

The combined efforts for reducing the environmental impact of the event, led the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre in 2008 to be mentioned by the Jury of the Prize Biennale Italy for the innovation brought to the "Design of Events" among other 50 events for *"the capacity of the event to plan cultural activities for a site or a territory able to realize a direct, cognitive and emotional experience for the visitor"*.

In 2009, international experts that were working to the update and second edition of the standard BS 8901 selected the systemic design approach applied to the Slow Food events as a best practice and a case study. From the lesson learned thanks to the experiences and practices adopted during the first two editions, the standard has been integrated with elements regarding the sustainable management of the events according the perspective of the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA).

In 2015 the project has been inserted in the ADI Design Index, the publication of the Italian Association for Industrial Design (ADI), as one of the best Italian design product⁴.

8. Conclusions

Cultural events can be sees as the mirror of the continuous stream of changes that characterize the human reality and as a complex system, it is results of the interaction from many variables, that can hardly be inserted in a check list.

At the international level the mainstream approach regard the design of sustainable events is mainly oriented toward the creation of a scientific model, characterized by a monitoring period and then a series of verification experiments, which are designed, as they would be free from internal contradictions. When it is possible it is functional to formulate our model according a codified language. However in many cases, especially when it has to do with the dynamics of human society, this kind of approach is likely to be incomplete.

As Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi state in "Life and Nature, a systemic vision" (2014), *"to understand contemporary science is crucial to realize that all scientific theories and models are limited and approximate. The twentieth-century science has shown repeatedly that ultimately all natural phenomena are interconnected and their basic properties, in fact, derived from relations with other things. So to be able to explain each of them, you need to understand all the others and this, of course, is impossible"*.

⁴ <http://www.adidesignindex.com/en/ricerca-per-l-impresa/systemic-event-design>

In our case the design of a sustainable event is therefore always been characterized by a series of design choices, valid case by case, with the aspiration of approaching an infinite network of interconnected phenomena. As said by the biochemist Louis Pasteur "*Science advances through tentative answers that go down deeper and deeper in the essence of phenomena*". This kind of approach even it is not totally complete in its results, has led all the actors involved in the "system event" to reflect about its sustainability in its lifecycle.

This passage has been able to trigger a process of social innovation, to give people "new eyes" that observing the problem and not sacrificing the characterizing components, are able to optimize the event material and immaterial flows related to the promotion, organization, exhibition and dismantling, adapting them to the local quality of the territory.

The most striking result was to educate, protect and promote a new culture of environmental, social, sensory and economic, applied to the design of cultural events. A culture of project based in brief on the analysis and re-design of the relationships activated and that can be further activate by the event and on the ability to simplify this message to make it understandable and achievable for the most.

The event will therefore be well designed if the designer will be able to deepen the activated relationships until to imagine a replicable actions and gestures in the daily life of each of us, as to assume also an educational function.

By the attempt of creating more awareness and responsibility, it is thus possible to design actions for an event involving the co-evolution of a sustainable network of actors who cooperate for a common and shared welfare.

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