

On the traces of wasted food: a practice theoretical analysis of the food service sector

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Abstract

In recent years, the global issue of food waste has become increasingly important in public debate as it is responsible for a variety of negative impacts on the environment (Jepsen et al. 2016). A considerable amount of food waste is produced within the catering industry. However, current research has identified a high potential for reducing food waste, especially in this sector (Kranert et al. 2012). The following study explores this potential by examining professional kitchen practices of various restaurants and public catering establishments, all of which are part of the local food system of two small cities in southern Germany. Furthermore, it should be discussed to what extent these findings can contribute to governing sustainable transformation processes in order to promote significant changes within catering practices. A social practice approach is proposed in order to gain a full understanding of repeated operations in these kitchens and how they are connected to the food waste phenomenon. In contrast to classical social theories, which focus exclusively on individual behavior or on social norms (Reckwitz 2003) recognition is given to practical understandings, competencies, workspaces and the institutional context (Brand 2010) (Røpke 2009). For the purpose of this research, empirical data has been collected through semi-structured and informal interviews as well as participatory observations and document analysis. Initial findings indicate that the challenge of forecasting, preparing and serving appropriate amounts of food is addressed with the aid of experience, personal/informal customer feedback, menu planning, portioning tools and the development of standardized recipe databases.

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