

Sustainable Everyday Project

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Introduction

More than what is commonly understood as a Foresight, the *Sustainable Everyday Project* (SEP) is a participative scenario building process aiming at focusing new and more sustainable ways of living. SEP main objective was to set-up *Sustainable Everyday, Scenarios of urban life*¹ the core public exhibition from the Triennale di Milano programme: *The Memory and the Future, 2001-2004*. The effective preparation of this event last about one and half year from early 2002 to the opening in October 2003. But the SEP scenario building process benefit from an earlier European funded research project: *SusHouse. Strategies towards the Sustainable Household*² already focussing on scenario building for sustainable daily living and testing processes with users in five European countries and a series of short workshops hold in 15 design schools and universities³ all around the world focussed on imagining new everyday life solutions to support household shift to more sustainable practices. After the Triennale in Milano, the SEP exhibition travelled in various more or less elaborated forms in 12 countries around the world. The SEP web platform⁴ for research and education on sustainable future and later the international *DESIS network*⁵ on design for social innovation and sustainability emerged form these earlier initiatives. This short paper will focus on the process developed for the initial Triennale di Milano Sustainable Everyday exhibition keeping in mind that it is part of a longer and iterative scenario building process that took place around the SEP initiative in the last decade to progressively explore new and more sustainable ways of living, engage social conversation on conditions of adoption of the scenarios and support dissemination in the community of research and policy making for sustainable consumption and production.

The Triennale di Milano invited and financed the research process. It is a public cultural institution organising large public exhibitions in the field of design, architecture and urbanism and aiming at anticipating trends and emerging societal issues in these fields.

Strategic Design Scenario, a private innovation lab specialising in scenario building and participative co-design approaches based in Brussels and DIS Indaco, Politecnico di Milano, a department of the university of design in Italy were the two main players conducting the research. Their respective leaders François Jégou and Ezio Manzini were invited by the Triennale as co-curators of the exhibition. They are active in research and education in strategic design for new sustainable ways of living, social innovation and definition of new product-service systems to support transformative change toward sustainability at urban and regional level.

The motivations to launch this scenario building process were many folds for these three main players and represents a conjunction of interests and mainly: promoting sustainability through the development of pragmatic

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solutions able to support shift of users daily practices; exploring in the design field emerging trends questioning the paradigm of consumerism; developing the design thinking approach and the use of design knowledge in the construction of scenarios.

Outcomes

Before exposing the results of this scenario building process, it is necessary to precise what is intended by scenario building in the design scientific community. A distinction is made between Policy Orienting Scenario (POS) focusing macro-scale and aiming at orienting decision making in terms of policies and Design Orienting Scenarios (DOS) focusing small-medium scale and aiming at describing a local solution based on a new product-service system and a partnership of local stakeholders (Manzini, Jégou, 2004). In the following case, DOS have been produced.



Multi-service centres focusing 6 primary need areas of everyday living: How can we prepare food in the Food Atelier? How can we take care of our houses and things in the Handyman Shop? How can we work and study in the Connectivity Club? How can we move around the city with the Mobility Agency? How can we produce and use energy with the Energy Workshop? How can we look after vegetation in the Microclimatic Greenhouse?

The resulting Sustainable Everyday process is of a sustainable city, seen as a multi-local system and presented through solutions provided by six neighbourhood multi-service centres. The nature of each centre and the set of solutions they offer are different. Just as different are the modifications they call for to a given way of life. The Food Atelier and the Handyman Shop, for example, appear as externalisations of functions associated with food preparation and do-it-yourself, now normally carried out in the domestic space. On the other hand, the Connectivity Club and the Microclimatic Greenhouse propose bringing some activities, now normally carried out at a distance from home, such as work, or certain leisure activities, nearer to home. As for the Energy Workshop and the Mobility Agency, they introduce into the domestic sphere new questions of energy saving and the optimisation of transport in the city.

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Finally, some centres look original: hybrid places appearing as a new mix of situations already familiar to the user. The Food Atelier combines a small corner shop with the functionality of a supermarket, a cookery school and a neighbourhood restaurant. At the other extreme, the Energy Workshop, which is the realisation of energy saving in a commercial space, does not recall anything familiar. It looks like the development of a series of functionalities collected into one space to make them more visible (but which could also be accessible at a distance). The use made of each centre reflects this diversity. The energy workshop becomes useful thanks to its check-up, demonstration and training functions, whereas the food atelier suggests various uses of its own as a physical place endowed with its own particular liveability.

18 movie-clips of 60 seconds have been produced for the exhibition. Each of them shows how a specific user may benefit from the service while reducing environmental impact and regenerating social fabric around.

Each multi-service centre is designed to propose different new and more sustainable ways of living. Transversally to the 6 daily living needs areas covered by the 6 multi- service centres, 3 DOS for sustainable living emerged:

- The QUICK scenario is based on advanced public services offering carefree standard sustainable solutions. QUICK scenario addresses those who want to solve a problem quickly, with as little effort as possible and who are prepared to accept limited variety and customisation.
- The SLOW scenario is based on quality-oriented systems enabling amateurs to learn and evolve towards qualitative results. SLOW scenario addresses those who are prepared to bring their personal abilities into play and to commit the necessary time and attention to achieve a high level of quality
- The CO-OP scenario is based on collaborative networks of people offering each other mutual help. CO-OP scenario addresses those who want to obtain results based on collaboration between different actors. They require personal commitment and a spirit of enterprise and organisational capacity.

For each of the 3 DOS, a typical user experience of each of the 6 multi-service centres was presented through a short movie-clip. In total 18 movies-clips of about 60 seconds were produced for the exhibition. Visitors were then able to browse in different ways the material displayed: they could look at different sustainable ways to deal with food, mobility, energy, etc; they could review the quick, slow or co-op ways of doing proposed for sustainable living; finally, they also could follow Yan-Dee, Sam or Viviane, different characters combining the different 18 solutions exemplified according to their particular socio-economical situations.

Process

We will now come back to the description of the methodology followed to build these scenarios. Successful shift from mainstream consumption society to more sustainable ways of living requires a mix of push and pull measures, a complementary top-down and bottom-up approach and a good deal of creativity... Whereas most scenario building processes focus on policies measures and find limits in the resistance of users to change, we decided to proceed the other way around: we design a process of scenario building starting from the users and building with them both desirable and feasible solutions; progressively refining the solutions through social conversation in different socio-cultural contexts; and finally building the scenarios through a process of aggregation and hybridisation of promising solutions.



A process of on-line conversation with eight users situated in four different cities enabled us to verify how the proposed solutions were perceived by people with different socio-cultural profiles. A triangular dialogue between a client/user, a facilitator/interviewer and a promoter/designer of the proposed solution allow to both investigate users motivations and fine tune the solution.

Starting with a first showing of some of first tentative scenarios, this process of participatory design was begun, both to elaborate on the scenarios viewed with the users and, at the same time, assess the impact they might have on a wider public.

This was carried out in two stages. First, four users were involved in the co-design of a multi-service centre focused on the food need area, then eight users in four different cities (Chicago, Hong Kong, Brussels and Milan) together discussed and analysed the six multi-service centres put forward.

The aim of the first stage was above all to understand whether and how users were able to imagine externalising some domestic functions to a neighbourhood service centre and, following on from this, to stimulate reflection on their own current living habits. To this end, a dialogue procedure was set up which invited users first to explore and reconstruct their own behaviour patterns; for example, how they organised food preparation, shopping, family meals, meal preparation and so on. Given this framework of consolidated activities, they were shown a series of sequences presenting the proposed solution. They were encouraged to go in, explore the various services offered and imagine how they themselves would be able to use them.

In the second stage, each of the six service centres were considered in different socio-cultural contexts (Chicago, Hong Kong, Brussels and Milan). During a dialogue at a distance, lasting about two hours, users were able to 'visit' each of the six proposed centres and choose from the solutions offered. Then they were asked to imagine how their own everyday lives could be reorganised.

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The scenarios and the solutions which form them take material shape through their visual representation. This is the central objective of the participatory scenario building process we are referring to: an exploratory process that moves interactively from the visual scenes offered, to user reaction and the modification of the visual representation itself. Particular techniques of storyboard and video sketches combine the proposals' considerable 'ability to stimulate', with their necessary 'flexibility of representation', that is, the need for them to be modified easily in response to suggestions by those interviewed.

The tentative scenarios were proposed to the discussion in a visual form to facilitate dialogue and foster participation. Progressively along the dialogues, the tentative scenarios were refined and the visualisation more precise. At this stage the 18 movies presented above were produced and delivered to the Triennale di Milano.

Although these movies were considered as the final deliverables for this client who engage the process, they are not the end product.

The dialogue with users described above expresses the essence of the exhibition Sustainable Everyday, to which it also contributed. Indeed, this discussion of the scenarios and their respective solutions constitutes the first step in the wider dialogue that took place with the public at the exhibition. The activity of participatory design described here somehow anticipated the visitor's progress through the promising solutions he is shown, to be revised as he likes, giving rise to personalised stories.

In this sense, the moment when solutions are presented to the public at the exhibition prolongs the initial participatory scenario building activity. It generates a sort of enlarged focus group in which vast numbers of people (in theory all the visitors to the exhibition) were able to express their opinions on the proposed solutions and on the ways of life they imply, while taking into account their own individuality and the characteristics of their particular living context. Practically in order to achieve this interactive construction of the scenarios with the public, a specific design of the exhibition was proposed. Visitors were provided at entrance with special barcode tickets that enable them to choose between the different multi-service centres solutions and the different quick-slow-co-op scenarios. A final station at the end of the exhibition proposed them to read their barcode ticket, summarise and comment their choices. A print out was delivered to the visitors as record of their personalised sustainable scenario and the log of all visitors' choice was stored in the exhibition servers. This process allows to refine one steps further the scenarios with a larger sample of what could be called potential early adopters of more sustainable ways of living: the local visitors of the Sustainable Everyday exhibition. All these contextualised opinions put together, considering the itinerant nature of the exhibition, constitute in time an interesting source of information on the social acceptability of this sustainability scenario and its possible variations.



The exhibition was design so that the visitors could choose between the 18 movie-clip solutions using a barcode on his/her entrance ticket. Visitors' preferences were then stored in the exhibition server and used to improve the scenarios.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we would like to briefly discuss why we proposed this atypical process in this Foresight arena.

This approach to scenario building started with a creative phase: the initial tentative scenarios were in part the outcomes of the 15 preparatory workshops with young design students all around the world. The common focus on design of the 3 main partners involved in Sustainable Everyday (Strategic Design Scenarios, DIS Indaco Politecnico di Milano and Triennale di Milano) was lacking of others skills (sustainability assessment, sociology, business management...) and other scales (architecture, urbanism...) but it allows collecting fresh and sometimes disruptive ideas. This constitute a first assumption of the approach: the future has to be invented and could not only be extrapolated from inherited past in particular when focusing discontinuities as for sustainable transformative in-depth changes of the society.

In this scenario building approach due to the restricted budget derived from an initiative aiming at designing an exhibition, the co-design process was limited to the demand side lacking from cultural variety and socio-economical representativeness. But it was meant here to be a participative process, possibly involving representative of all stakeholders down to the very users that, most of the time, are only indirectly represented through the involvement of civil society, companies market studies or elected public authorities. This constitutes the second assumption of this approach: a scenario building process required the participation of users and cannot be restricted to an expert-based process.

The social conversation on the scenarios was here based on both an effort in providing easy accessible and understandable material (i.e. highly visual formats based on pictures, story-boards, movie-clips...) and in progressively expanding the dialogue with a growing number of participants (i.e. quantity, diversity and localisation of the users involved in the interaction with a travelling exhibition...). Here again, although an exhibition is an interesting context to filter a wide variety of users all interested from a different point of view and deepness into the same topic, the question of sustainability often triggers complex issues that would require more reflexive context and more time but, and this is the third assumption of this approach: scenario building should be a deliberative process which is to say with free and equal participation, reasoned argumentation seeking for a consensus (Cohen, 1989).

Notes

1 _ "Sustainable Everyday. Scenarios of urban life" exhibition, E. Manzini, F. Jégou, Triennale di Milano, Milan, 23 September ? 21 December 2003

2 _ SusHouse (Strategies towards the Sustainable Household), European Research Project funded by the Environmental and Climate Research Programme Theme 4: On Human Dimensions of Environmental Change ENV4-CT97-0446

3 _ Domus Academy, Italy; ESDI / UERJ, Brazil; Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, China; Hong-kong Polytechnic University, China; Hunan University, China; International Design School for Advanced Studies, Korea; Istituto Superiore di Design, Italy; Les Ateliers, ENSCI, France; National Institute of Design, India; Politecnico di Milano, Italy; The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA; Tokyo Zokei University, Japan; Tsinghua University, China; University of Alberta, Canada; University of Art and Design UIAH, Finland.

4 _ www.sustainable-everyday.net

5 _ www.desis-network.net

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