



Collaborative services | Social innovation and design for sustainability |
François Jégou, Ezio Manzini | with essays by: Priya Bala | Cristiano Cagnin | Carla Cipolla | Josephine Green |
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EMUDE _ Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions

EMUDE

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“Collaborative Services, Social Innovation and Design for Sustainability” is the second of two books resulting from the programme of activities EMUDE (Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions), funded by the European Commission, the aim of which was to explore the potential of social innovation as a driver for technological and production innovation, in view of sustainability. To this end it seeks to shed more light on cases where individuals and communities use existing resources in an original way to bring about system innovation. It then pinpoints the demand for products, services and solutions that such cases and communities express, and drafts lines that could lead to improved efficiency, accessibility and diffusion. The first book “Creative Communities. People inventing sustainable ways of living” focuses on the presentation of some of these cases and their providers: the creative communities.

This second book focuses on the possibility of these communities, supported by different enabling systems, to become the drivers of new welfare and a new model of local development.

Emude was promoted and developed by a Consortium of European universities and research centres. In order to identify promising cases, it set up a network of observers, known as Antennas, encompassing teams of researchers and students from 8 European design schools: who acted as researchers and disseminators of Emude findings both inside and outside their own institutions.

Consortium

Politecnico di Milano, INDACO Department – co-ordinator
National Institute for Consumer Research, SIFO
Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, TNO
Strategic Design Scenarios, SDS
Doors of Perception
Philips Design
Joint Research Centre - Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, JRC-IPTS
Central European University, Budapest Foundation, CEU
Consumers International, CI
United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP DTIE

Antennas

Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, Poland
ENSCI Les Ateliers, Paris, France
Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonia
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
School of Design, The Glasgow School of Art, Scotland
School of Design, University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Germany.
Eindhoven University of Technology, Department of Industrial Design, The Netherlands
University of Art and Design Helsinki, Finland

The Future Is Us



The project EMUDE was conceived in 2003, a few months after the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development when over 40,000 people, NGOs, businesses and institutions met to discuss their respective priorities and proposals to guarantee a sustainable future for our planet. Having had the luck to participate, I can say that People and their solutions were among the most interesting and fresh features of the event, and the call for more sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns, for innovative ways of living adapted to regional and local needs and cultures was among the priorities the Summit identified for the following years. In particular, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation called for governments to develop a “Global Framework for Action on SCP”, the so-called 10-year framework of programmes (10YFP) to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP), thus “promoting social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems by de-linking economic growth from environmental degradation.”

Such a formulation has a very clear macro-political connotation and it has its correlated language made of institutional policies, fiscal and legal measures and infrastructures to develop. The concept itself of a 10 years framework of programmes on SCP” may not be intuitively at the grasp of citizens who day to day live their lives, consume, vote, make choices and ultimately shape, with their aspirations and behavior the consumption and production patterns that define our societies. This does not mean in any way however, that the shift towards more sustainable lifestyles is something people do not feel the need for or even get involved with. On the contrary.

Several surveys made worldwide show a steady increase of interest towards more sustainable ways of leaving. This interest has long been more than a mere declaration of intent and it is more and more an action-statement made to the mainstream market by choosing organic and fair trade products, or ethical holidays, by the rise in organic clothing demand and sustainable fashion offers or the choice of green energy that is made by an increasing number of people where this choice is available. This trend goes at different speeds in different countries, but everywhere it has become visible to sociologists, journalists, policy makers and last by not least marketers and global companies.

What is interesting and new is that such active interest in contributing to steering the world towards a more sustainable future is globally present among the so called global consumer class and it is making the traditional developed/developing country dichotomy virtually absent. An other very interesting element of novelty in this trend is the “use” of market forces to make a statement as opposed to the “old fashioned” protest and boycott that characterized consumer/citizen actions in the 70/90s. It seems today that the global consumer class is perfectly conscious of its power on the market and of how to “play” with market forces to change the way companies behave. Internet and the ability of people to communicate and exchange news and messages with each other is a great contributor to this silent revolution that allows people to access markets

globally and to affirm their power not only on the domestic but on the global market at once. Born with these considerations in mind, the project EMUDE has since 2004 detected the most innovative forms of this new consumption/citizenship pattern. The project partners have searched for and studied cases of social innovation and stories of and by people who have been able to go beyond simply choosing more sustainable products and have jointly designed service systems that replace such products. By doing this, the Emude “creative communities” have invented their own responses to specific needs by putting their creativity, their time and their sense of innovation at each other’s service.

The innovative approaches of the creative communities are of great interest and concrete importance. They highlight new forms of responsibility and initiatives among citizens/ consumers able “manufacture” and think their own solutions.

The results of the project show an anti-trend to consumerism and individualism in European and more industrialised countries where people find their own solutions in close connection to others. In a more interdependent society such as the ones in developing countries or countries in transition, EMUDE communities may be more focused on initiatives aiming to promote materials sharing. The centre is however in both cases the person and his/her needs.

In some of the EMUDE cases the communities use technology (internet in particular) as an instrument, and in others they use more “human infrastructures” for the sharing of goods and services, but the core elements of these various services are mutual support, self organisation, trust and interaction. These creative communities do not suffer from technology (or the lack thereof) but use it; they do not look at institutions or companies to provide them with solutions but create them themselves and tailor them to their community.

What do these cases tell us? The members of the creative communities are people that have chosen not to delegate their future to the choices of policy or of the market, but they are willing to act in society (and within the rules of society) to make their own future. They have decided that the future is in themselves and that while society at large is still struggling with the idea of a more sustainable future, they can start here and now to create it for themselves, out of need, lack of appropriate alternative options or just the pleasure of joining forces in a common spontaneous project.

How far can such spontaneous initiatives be supported? Does it make sense to support the replication of spontaneous initiatives? The book will respond to these questions, from our point of view the creative communities are a growing signal, a sign of societies trying to rediscover cohesion, collaboration among members for a more interconnected and ultimately more sustainable way of living.

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Creative communities: a strategic view to innovation

Premises of the research approach

Some crucial conceptual hypotheses and assumptions, and a systematic collection of real cases by entrepreneurial groups of people, known as Creative Communities (Meroni 2007), lay the foundations of the idea that to design scenarios for a better future we can move from the observation of promising cases of social innovation.

The collection of cases, initially in Europe and then in different countries all over the world, led to a huge amount of examples of possible and promising innovation, where individual interests converge with those of society and the environment, creating conditions for a more satisfying use of resources and restoring meaning and value to everyday activities. Those examples often show common traits and organisational patterns that enable us to talk about the possibility of generalisation and replication.

In conceptualising the status and the attitude of Creative Communities, we have verified some of the basic hypotheses and learnt a series of fundamental truths that can be considered pillars on which to envision future scenarios with the same powerful character and spirit. The first is that creativity is a diffuse attitude, and the role of a designer is also to be able to uncover, recognise and enhance this powerful social resource. The second is that all these cases teach us about the importance of “relational strategies” (Latouche 2004) among people and communities, based on the “art of making do”. The third is the courageous entrepreneurial attitude these communities show: a will to self-activation that must find practical and psychological support if we want similar initiatives to flourish.

Finally, to build scenarios from these cases of Creative Communities, we have to see designers as agents able to contribute to the sustainability-orientated social learning process (Manzini 2007) by making these social innovations desirable and practicable for broader groups of people. How can these examples become inspirational behaviour for a broader population? How can a designer contribute in this?

Creative Communities

Under the definition of Creative Communities there is a broad range of

people and initiatives dealing with ordinary life activities, from housing to eating, from commuting to working, from socialising to learning. We call them “professionals of the everyday”: run-of-the-mill people with run-of-the-mill problems, who are different because they are able to see and face these problems in an authentically “creative” way, going beyond the obviousness of dominant ideas about how such problems are “normally” resolved. In other words they are able to look at common problems from different perspectives, and change the conventional point of view: they show a non-rhetorical view of reality, a positive even cheerful attitude, and an intrinsically entrepreneurial spirit (and courage).

By doing so, they conceive and put into practice such solutions as: time banks, home nursery playgroups, car-sharing, ethical purchasing groups, producer markets, self-help groups for the elderly, shared gardens, eco-sustainable villages, vegetable gardens in parks, weblogs, co-housing, neighbourhood self management, home restaurants, local micro-logistics, community supported agriculture, tool exchange, elective communities, small producer networks...

Solutions that constitute the heritage of ideas at the origin of the scenario building exercise presented in this book.

A strategic design approach

We believe that a scenario building approach moving from the Creative Communities is basically a strategic design approach: this, for at least a few very good reasons.

One reason is that, given the need to learn to live better consuming fewer environmental resources (Manzini, in Meroni 2007) we need to introduce systemic changes in our lives, just like the radical innovations introduced on a small scale by the Creative Communities. To replicate and make them effective on a macro-scale, the first step is to build a new collective representation of reality where these solutions create a new panorama of what could be “normal, possible and everyday”.

Another reason why the Creative Communities-based scenario approach is strategic lies in the fact that what matters, in an evolutionary perspective, is the power of an idea and the fact that it can work, not its current relevance, in terms of numbers. No matter how few the people who are doing something today, if we are good enough to make it appealing and

potentially feasible, it can shape the future. According to Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1980) a small accidental fact emerging from the chaos (of the natural environment or contemporary society) can create a discontinuity and become, if it fits with a particular environment, the driver of the evolution of the system. Small phenomena can be successful and grow large and important in the future, if they are capable of creating a dynamic equilibrium between a species and its environment, just as the Creative Communities' solutions seem to be able to do. Back again to Bateson, the minimum unit of survival in evolution is never simply an individual organism, not even a species, but always species-plus-environment. Evolution is the learning of a species and learning is a process of adaptation to one's environment, a process of trial and error, of perpetual innovation, followed by the selection of what is most fitting to a particular environmental niche, and by the reproduction of those innovations which the niche can best afford. Paraphrasing the words of James Ogilvy, it is the job of strategic planners to facilitate this process of evolutionary learning through strategic conversations among many members of a community and between the community and the whole society (Ogilvy, 2002).

Another definitive reason why it is strategic to design in this perspective, is that the community is the dimension of the change: to quote the famous sentence of Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people could change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Among others, one of the reasons why the community, or the dimension of "some", is the dimension of change, comes from social philosophy: elective communities (defined by interest, geography, profession or other criteria) are sufficiently larger than the individual to impose moral restraints that transcend the individual will, but still small enough to be recognised as representative of the individual interests. Through communities, even radical changes are legitimate and implemented by the individual. And this is what currently happens in the Creative Community dynamic, where a group of people breaks with the old order and moves toward the unprecedented by setting up some alternative anticipation of a possible future.

Work on the positive side

Affirming that fostering sustainability also means reinforcing the social fabric implies that designers who want to operate in such a framework have to work on the "beauty of relations"; relations among individuals, among communities, among different social bodies.

What we have learnt from the Creative Communities is that, according to a Positive Psychology approach (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), subjective well-being is related to a belief in interpersonal relationships:

the capacity to bring people together around an idea, to get people moving, to get together to resolve a problem, are therefore ways of building community values and also of instilling a sense of personal well-being. An attitude of this kind occurs when we stop seeing ourselves as "consumers" and discover that we are able to determine our own lives; when we make a creative use of objects in the plenitude of society, according to what Inghilleri (2003) calls "sense endowed materialism", using objects instead of being used by them.

This capacity to build positive relations, both with people and objects, can be enhanced by services designed to help people feel active and integrate with the external environment and with others, while the effort required procures a sense of well being. Working around this intrinsically positive attitude, systematically building competency also helps prevent the whole of society from losing meaning.

Risks and opportunities

To consider the designer, in such a process of collective, sustainability-orientated learning, as just a facilitator is reductive, because it means taking no account of his capabilities of imagining and influencing behaviours, conceiving visions, and bringing a professional viewpoint and experience. Actually it is more appropriate to see him as able to catalyse and orient the collective sensibility toward a shared interpretation of how the future might be, taking and elaborating the best from the present and transforming it into a paradigmatic shift for the future. Building scenarios from Creative Communities, nevertheless, is subtle and risky: the "heroes" cannot be replicated, the circumstances of certain initiatives are definitely unique and it is naïve to think that good practices can be replicated just because of a positive spirit of emulation. Good practices, to be widely adopted, must become convenient and appealing. They must fit with different tastes, capabilities and wills to do things, and even very committed people must be supported in keep up their efforts to balance individual and collective interests, while a large part of society seems to be going in another direction.

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is working in the development of a 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (so called Marrakech Process) at the global and regional level, including Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. She is also carrying out projects on poverty reduction, promoting the idea that the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns/systems provides new opportunities for development, as well as the opportunity to leapfrog to sustainability. Before joining UNEP, Adriana was a consultant with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the Environment Directorate, where she co-published the book “Towards Sustainable Household Consumption” (OECD, 2002).

What is a sustainable lifestyle? What will our daily lives become if we agree to change some of our routines? How do we reduce our environmental impact without lowering our living standards? Observations show that growing material wealth and levels of people satisfaction are increasingly uncoupled. Could the pursuit of more sustainable lifestyles also lead to better quality and more satisfaction? This book attempts to answer some of these questions. Mainly, it suggests a scenario: the Scenario of Collaborative Services.

“Car-sharing on demand”, “micro-leasing system for tools between neighbours”, “shared sewing studio”, “home restaurant”, “delivery service between users who exchange goods” ... The scenario looks at how various daily procedures could be performed by structured services that rely on a greater collaboration of individuals amongst themselves. It indicates how, through local collaboration, mutual assistance, shared use we can reduce significantly each individual's needs in terms of products and living space and optimize the use of equipment, reduce travel distances and, finally, lessen the impact of our daily lives on the environment. The scenario also gives an idea on how the diffusion of organisations based on sharing, exchange, participation at the neighbourhood scale can also regenerate the social fabric, restore relations of proximity and create meaningful bonds between individuals.

To implement this scenario a new, different and fascinating role for the designers emerges: they have to consider themselves part of a complex mesh of new designing networks: the emerging, interwoven networks of individual people, enterprises, non-profit organizations, local and global institutions that are using their creativity and entrepreneurship to take some concrete steps towards sustainability.

Collaborative services is based on a two-year study realised by a panel of universities, European research centres and international institutions within the framework of the EMUDE research project (Emerging User Demands in Sustainable Solutions) co-financed by the European Commission. In parallel to a first publication titled: Creative communities. People inventing sustainable ways of living it presents the main results of the EMUDE research project.