

Sustainable everyday — scenarios, visions, possible worlds

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The only thing which is clear about the future is that it will entail a profound break with the ways of being and behaving we have known up to now. Everything else, the ways and means, the timing and the implications of this vast phenomenon, is totally vague and will depend on a combination of a great many factors and, above all, on the behaviour of the various actors.

The transition towards the new state of things, which the pressure from various “drivers of change” are generating, will occur in the form of a grand *social learning process* through which, among mistakes and contradictions, we will all have to learn to live differently. More specifically, bearing in mind the fundamental themes of sustainability (environmental and social), connectivity and globalisation, we will have to learn to live better consuming less and regenerating our physical and social environment in an ever more closely and extensively interconnected world.

In order to address this complex social process a new skill is required: the ability to “put on stage” *possible futures* enabling them to be discussed democratically and for us to decide which of them are more desirable. This means that we need to learn to generate *clear, reasoned visions* of various life styles — visions which are able to indicate potentially feasible ways ahead and to stimulate a productive conversation between the various social actors involved.

In this conceptual framework the importance of developing *scenarios*, and particularly *scenarios of everyday life*, appears clear. What is needed are *scenarios* that constitute a good ground for discussion and comparison between the various social actors, facilitating the generation of shared ideas about the direction to take and the choices to make.

To this end, an exhibition, ‘Sustainable Everyday: Scenarios of Urban Living’ is being held at the Triennale di Milano from the 22nd of September to the 21st of December 2003. Linked to it will be an international conference ‘Visions of Possible Worlds: Scenarios and Proposals for Sustainability: A new social role for designers and design schools’ on the 28th of November 2003.

Both events are part of an ongoing international programme of activities aimed at building a widespread network on the theme of design for sustainability (Global Network on Design for Sustainability), through collecting case studies and generating design project ideas on the theme of sustainable lifestyles, in particular, on everyday life in sustainable metropolises. The exhibition presents the elaboration of results from workshops and research projects carried out over of two years in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Canada, Italy, USA, Finland, France, Brazil and India.

Sustainable Everyday — The Exhibition

What could life be like in a sustainable society? What features are common to any sustainable society we can imagine today? And how wide a range of choice could we have, starting from these common elements?

Sustainable Everyday lays out the state-of-the-art answers available to these questions today and, from this point, indicates possible ways ahead.

The ideas and proposals presented are, or seek to be, *cosmopolitan*: ideas and proposals which originate locally, but which are endowed with the energy necessary to spread throughout the planet and adapt to differing specific local circumstances.

All this is developed considering the wide, but not all-embracing, field of *the dimensions of our everyday existence* (the world seen by those who live in it), with particular reference to the *urban environment* (both historical cities and the new conurbations to come).

So the exhibition deals with the future of “dwelling”, but from a totally different perspective compared to the way many previous examples have led us to imagine the “house of the future”. It does not focus on new ways in which technology could redefine traditional functions, but rather centres on the new “living strategies” that are emerging, becoming possible and, for some at least, desirable today. These are living strategies which result from social and system, rather than technological, innovation. It is these forms of social innovation that are at the centre of attention paid to emergent new visions and to the possible futures which could derive from them.

Sustainable Everyday talks of the future, but it is not about the future. It is *an exhibition for the future*: a means of steering (or trying to steer) the future. It does not show “things never seen before” (these belong to a would-be future) but it presents “current signals” which seem justifiably promising. On this ground we can lay out “*tendency maps*” and *possible scenarios*, in other words, instruments by which to fuel social conversation about the ways, means and timing of a transition towards sustainability.

The exhibition presents a panorama of *proposals and scenarios* on what everyday life could be like in a sustainable metropolis.

In particular, the *proposals inform* about what we have so far been able to think up and put into act on this theme, while the *scenarios put forward* a new social picture. They foster the production of new shared ideas about how we could live, and if possible live well, consuming fewer resources and regenerating the quality of the environment.

The exhibition is organised in two main sections: *Workshops and Scenarios*.

The *Workshop* section contains a set of project ideas and real examples orientated towards resolving specific problems by following a road which is promising both on grounds of their environmental and social sustainability, and on that of their technical and economic viability.

The *Scenarios* section outlines contexts, lifestyles and potentially sustainable proposals which come out of an elaboration of the more promising solutions seen in the previous section. This section, in particular,

has been planned as an interactive area to encourage visitors to take an active role by expressing their opinions and making suggestions about the ideas presented.

The exhibition itself represents a sustainable exhibiting system: a complex communicative creation, *low in resource intensity* (a light exhibition, reusable over and over again) and *high in regenerative potential* (an exhibition capable of enhancing local social and cultural resources).

Consistently with the theme under consideration and the choice of display options adopted, the exhibition is presented in a *repeatable* form, i.e. it is transportable and adaptable to other locations, and it is *updateable*, i.e. capable of integrating new information and new proposals as they take place.

Conceived in this way the exhibition becomes an instrument for fostering, at an international level, the growth of a network of interest and expertise on sustainability. At the same time, since it is *repeatable* and *updateable*, it collaborates in the development of a *multi-local* social picture, capable of marrying creatively global ideas and local particularities.

The scenarios proposed represent *work-in-progress*: the result so far of activities at present underway (and which we presume to be long-term). What makes these scenarios interesting is not so much their extreme character or their absolute novelty, but rather their *plausibility* and their proposition as a *concise image* of what so far today, those who deal with these themes are able to think, suggest and, to some measure, share.

Visions of Possible Worlds — the Conference

As said, the transition towards sustainability is a large and complex social learning process, the dynamics of which are driven by a variety of forces. Fundamental among these are processes of social innovation for sustainability. By this expression we mean a kind of system innovation, where grass-roots behavioral changes are able to re-orientate the socio-technical system in which they take place towards more sustainable patterns.

The conference aims to debate these themes, by considering the role of “shared visions” as drivers of innovation, both as catalysts of processes and events and as facilitators of social conversation about the future.

The conference seeks to fill a gap left by two fundamental and consolidated areas of debate and experience: that of general principles (the concept of sustainability and its basic values) and that of practical applications (the technical, economic and managerial issues involved in the development of sustainable solutions). Discussion about general principles does not, in itself, give us any idea of what a world in which these principles have been adopted would be like. In the same way, discussions about practical solutions, generally do not say anything about the liveableness of the contexts they would generate. In other words, both these kind of discussions, for different reasons, are lacking in terms of “vision”.

The aim of this conference is to investigate this (relatively) empty gap, stimulate the creation of such visions, and clarify what the state of the arts is in relation to actors in this field, their experiences and their methods

In this framework, the conference will focus on the (potential) role of design schools as operators able to act within society, both as antennas to pick up new social demands and emerging life styles, and as catalysts for new ideas of well-being and new, practical solutions.

So a further specific objective of the conference is to promote networks of design schools interested in these topics and to connect them to other networks of designers and other operators with similar aims.

The conference and exhibition are being promoted by the Faculty of Design at the INDACO Department of the Politecnico di Milano and the Triennale di Milano with support from the United Nations Environment Programme. Further information at { HYPERLINK "<http://www.design.polimi.it/events/>" } - link to Visions of Possible Worlds.

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