

# Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

An international conference on the role and potential of design research in the transition towards sustainability

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Torino, 10th - 11th - 12th July 2008

Organised by Co-ordination of Italian Design Research Doctorates with  
Conference of Italian Design Faculty Deans and Programme Heads.

In the framework of WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL TORINO 2008 | © ICSID  
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## DESIGN TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE: the Italian cohousing experience

This paper presents a specific approach to service design based on social innovations in urban contexts. Within these social innovations the focus is on creative communities, which are “groups of innovative citizens organising themselves to solve a problem or to open new possibilities, and doing so as a positive step in the social learning process towards social and environmental sustainability”<sup>1</sup>. From the signals emitted by social innovations and from the analysis of creative communities, it is possible to reinforce these new lifestyles through service design.

Our research focused on one such creative community: Cohousing.

Cohousing is a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighbourhoods. Cohousing residents are consciously committed to living as a community. Private homes contain all the features of conventional homes, but residents also have access to common facilities such as open space, courtyards, a playground and a common house.

Analysing this phenomenon raised the question of how design could help the development and organisation of these communities. The aim of this paper is to present some designing solutions to facilitate and replicate the creation of these cohousing communities whilst maintaining the quality inherent to the original innovations. This stage of project analysis is required in order to develop the instruments and guidelines to facilitate the implementation and replication of these same services in other scenarios. In this way, the designer of services becomes the contriver of instruments which promote the organisational dimension of services with high social and environmental content.

This approach is validated through the analysis of an on-going experiment – cohousing.it.

Cohousing.it is an initiative promoted by the social innovation agency Innosense with the scientific cooperation of Dipartimento INDACO del Politecnico di Milano; its purpose is the development of cohousing in Italy and the provision of professional support to spontaneous co-residential groups.

Both the strategy and the instruments of the services designed to facilitate and accelerate the process of participatory design in this case will be presented in the paper.

Within this still evolutionary framework, some enabling solutions especially devoted to the community building process have been designed in such a way as to make them suitable for replication elsewhere. The words “enabling solution” denote a system that provides those instruments which enable individuals and/or communities to achieve a result both to their advantage and to that of their living context.

As an example, one of the enabling solutions was designed to create conditions that favour interpersonal relations: from simply putting participants in touch to the offering of tools and promotion of events that allow them to relate deeply with each other, as we will see in the next lines.

The richness of these cases relies on the relationships between people and in the collaborative services they generate. The challenge when replicating these systems is how to maintain the relational quality they have in their origin.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the actual results experimented so far and to discuss the potential they could develop in future.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezio Manzini (EMUDE, 2006; Meroni, 2007).

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## Webgraphy

<http://www.cohousing.it>  
<http://www.cohousing.org>