

## 2 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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# THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE DOMAINS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

**A tool for assessing the health of existing conditions and a framework for designing sustainable solutions based on principles from the natural world**

## Abstract

The interconnected issues facing humankind at a global scale must be addressed at the level of the everyday. A framework is needed within which an ecological critique of everyday life can be made and new sustainable initiatives can be realized. The framework that this paper proposes seeks to establish a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice and provides a context within which community-based and grassroots initiatives can realize their full potential. Knowledge within both academic disciplines and professional areas of specialty does not directly or logically correspond to everyday life, *as it is lived*. Therefore tools and methodologies for understanding and addressing the complex and interrelated issues that arise out of the social fabric of everyday life are not available to people working in the area of design for sustainability. This paper will draw on practical examples in support of its theoretical contentions.

The framework I propose is based upon the nested structure of robust and sustainable natural systems in which each level is at once a networked whole in its own right and a part of a larger whole. If we apply this concept to everyday life, we can see a relationship to how traditional sustainable societies have been organized. In traditional societies different needs were satisfied at different levels of scale, that corresponded roughly to the household, the neighbourhood/village, the city, and the region. These nested *Domains of Everyday Life* are archetypal emergent social forms that have manifested across cultures and throughout history as humans have gone about the business of satisfying their needs. The domains can be thought of as nested webs of relationships (between people, nature and artefacts), although the nature of these relationships changes at different levels of scale (see visualization). When the domains of everyday life are relatively 'healthy', they are emergent, self-organized and whole social forms that come into being as people meet their needs. Within any given domain, many different needs would have been satisfied and this gave each domain some degree of autonomy. One of the unique challenges of our own time is to learn to live sustainably within the domain of the planet.

Modern society, however, is not organized like this. The satisfaction of needs is controlled by institutions that are external to the domains of everyday life, such as the nation-state and large corporations. As a result the domains have become vestigial, they have lost their autonomy and wholeness, and have become fragments of larger, often globalized systems, on which their inhabitants are dependent.

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This framework focuses on: **1)** understanding the nested structure of society that manifests in archetypal domains of everyday life, **2)** the relationships between nature, people and artefacts, **3)** everyday life as the emergent consequence of needs (which are universal) being satisfied (in a place/culture-specific manner). Its application will enable practitioners and activists to more appropriately critique/assess existing situations, conceive new, more appropriate solutions and bring coherence and direction to the multitude of green/sustainable initiatives being conceived worldwide.

The domains of everyday life must be reconstituted and redesigned if we are to evolve a decentralized and participatory culture—a holistic society. For this to happen, communities must recover control of the satisfaction of their needs, and practitioners from all disciplines, from economics to architecture, and from anthropology to psychology, must work with them in this task. Design, as the realm within which many disciplines converge and are applied is uniquely positioned to lead this process. In short, the reconstitution of the Domains of Everyday Life would constitute a new kind of planning in which communities are redesigned from within.