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# Sustainability Community Workshop Proposal

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**Simple, Sustainable Living**

Recently, Phoebe Sengers described her experience on Change Islands [3] as an oasis from technology, prompting reflection on the value of simplicity for improving the quality of human life. In an altogether different context, Janlert & Stolterman [2] write about notions of positive and negative complexity in design. Neither paper targets sustainability directly, but both implicate design's potential for inducing both sustainable and unsustainable lifestyles through their discussions of simplicity, giving rise to a host of tensions. Even the act of trying to achieve a simpler lifestyle involves complexity, for example, in deliberating about our choice of which technologies to use and how to use them. How do we determine which options increase the sustainability of our own well-being? If we adopt new IT in response to stressful, complex lifestyles, does it actually exacerbate complexity, and in what ways?

This workshop concerns the sustainability of personhood as a matter of achieving simple living, addresses tensions between simplicity and complexity, and as such takes a different perspective on sustainability. Last year's Sustainability Workshop focused on the enterprise, exploring issues of influence, reach, scale, and responsibilities. Prior workshops and

much of the HCI literature focused on somewhat unequally represented genres of sustainability (see [1]): *persuasive technology, ambient awareness, sustainable interaction design, formative user studies, and pervasive and participatory sensing*. Our emphasis is neither solely on consumers, nor enterprise, but rather on discussing the possibilities of an alternative framing of technologies, economies, cultural norms, social mechanisms, and everyday practices that may be needed to achieve simple, sustainable lifestyles.

### Workshop Goals

The purpose of this workshop is to raise awareness, spark discussion, and start shaping a research agenda in the field of HCI about how to achieve simple, sustainable lifestyles. We propose three themes as a starting point for framing discussions and soliciting contributions for the workshop:

1. *Simplicity in society at large*: What are the obstacles and opportunities in research that addresses simplicity? What tensions exist between wanting/having a simple life and prevalent social norms of achievement, success, and overload? What is the role of technology?
2. *Simplicity in design*: How can we approach simplicity in design? Which design and evaluation methods are suitable?
3. *Simplicity in HCI*: What could this mean for knowledge generation, future work, and what counts as success/progress in HCI?

### Pre-Workshop Preparation

To recruit a diverse range of researchers and practitioners, a CFP will be sent to relevant mailing lists and posted on relevant websites. Potential participants will submit position papers describing their work on this

topic and identifying issues for discussion. The organizers will review position papers based on quality and originality. We expect to include about 20 participants.

Accepted position papers will be distributed among participants to read prior to the workshop and synthesized by the organizers to identify common themes, issues, challenges, and opportunities to set an agenda for the opening introduction.

### Workshop Day Schedule

- 9:00- **Opening:** Agenda, common definitions, issues, and topics identified from the position papers.
- 9:30 1-2 participants will give short talks to stimulate discussion.
- 9:30- **Introductions:** 2-minute 'madness': name, affiliation, disciplinary background, and a personal reflection on simplicity & technology.
- 10:15 **Brainstorming:** Issues, questions, challenges, and opportunities related to sustainability and simple living (familiar post-it notes, sorting, and grouping exercise).
- 11:30- **Breakout Activity (with lunch break):** Small groups will execute an activity stimulated by the brainstorming session. Examples:  
*Design exercise:* develop a design prototype that responds to issues of simplicity and human sustainability (e.g., storyboard, sketches, or paper prototype).  
*Research exercise:* develop and pilot a research plan that investigates notions of simplicity. (e.g., interviewing and observing other conference participants).
- 2:00- **Group presentations and discussion:**
- 4:00 Sharing processes and outcomes from groups

with time for Q&A.

4:00- **Final synthesis discussion:** Synthesis of  
5:00 day's issues and proposals, reflecting on key  
ideas and themes, discussing possibilities for  
future work, collaborations, and publications.

### Outcomes

A primary goal of this workshop is to raise awareness in the CHI community at large. We will document and disseminate activities (ideas, debates, designs) from the workshop through: 1) a poster for the "spotlight on workshops" session; 2) an overview article for the general HCI audience (*Interactions*); and 3) a proposal for a special issue in a journal related to the workshop themes and/or an anthology.

### Organizers

**Maria Håkansson** is a postdoctoral research fellow in Information Science at Cornell University, and is a member of the Culturally Embedded Computing group. She has recently begun studying families living more simply to learn about their views on ICT and sustainability.

**Gilly Leshed** is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Cornell University. Her recent work involves understanding everyday practices of busyness and designs that offer simplicity, slowness, and reflection. Gilly organized a NSF-sponsored symposium on the culture of busyness and IT in May 2011.

**Eli Blevis** is an Associate Professor of Informatics and director of the Human-Computer Interaction Design program of the School of Informatics and Computing at Indiana University, Bloomington. His scholarship and

creative activity engages sustainable interaction design, design theory, visual thinking and digital imagery, and design challenge based learning.

**Lisa Nathan** is an Assistant Professor at SLAIS, the iSchool at the University of British Columbia. Her work investigates: 1) the design of information systems that address societal challenges, specifically those that are ethically charged and impact multiple generations (e.g., sustainability, war) and 2) information practices that influence how these systems adapt over time.

**Samuel Mann** is Associate Professor at Otago Polytechnic where he combines interaction design with his responsibility for education for sustainability across the institution. His recent book "The Green Graduate: Educating every student as a sustainable practitioner" posits a sustainable approach to every discipline.

### Program Committee

**Phoebe Sengers** is an associate professor at Cornell University and leads the Culturally Embedded Computing group. Her recent design-ethnographic fieldwork in a subsistence fishing village in Newfoundland highlights issues around simplicity, pace of life, and environmental sustainability.

### References

- [1] DiSalvo, C., Sengers, P., & Brynjarsdóttir, H. 2010. Mapping the landscape of sustainable HCI. In *Proceedings of CHI '10*. 1975-1984.
- [2] Janlert, L-E., & Stolterman, E. 2010. Complex interaction. *ACM ToCHI*, 17(2), Article 8.
- [3] Sengers, P. 2011. What I learned on Change Islands: reflections on IT and pace of life. *interactions* 18, 2 (March 2011), 40-48.