

Statement for “What Have We Learned?” Workshop

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IDENTITY

I identify myself as a new researcher to the area.

STATEMENT

I am a second year Ph.D. student under the supervision of Professor Bonnie Nardi in the Department of Informatics at the University of California, Irvine. I am interested in how to combine sustainability knowledge with information and communication technology (ICT) in creating and supporting sustainable communities. My research method is ethnography. Last summer, with my advisor Professor Bonnie Nardi's support, I conducted an ethnographic study of the Transition movement, a social experiment aiming to promote sustainable living and build ecological resilience in the near future at local levels, to develop understanding of the efforts of this global social movement and how they may build toward sustainability.

BACKGROUND

I study the global Transition movement, a social experiment aiming to promote sustainable living and build ecological resilience in the near future at local levels. "Transition" is defined as "transforming the place you live from its current highly vulnerable, non-resilient, oil-dependent state to a resilient, more localized, diverse and nourishing place" (Hopkins, 2011). This movement emphasizes "a goal of well-being, of happiness, of community and connectedness" to "meet the needs for jobs, economic activity, stronger and happier communities and community resilience" (Hopkins, 2013). It began in 2005 in Totnes, UK, a market town in South Devon. Today there are about 1130 registered Transition towns in 43 countries (Transition Network).

This social movement is based on four key assumptions:

- 1) That life with dramatically lower energy consumption is inevitable, and that it's better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise.
- 2) That our settlements and communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany declining reserves of oil.
- 3) That we have to act collectively, and we have to act now.
- 4) That by unleashing the collective genius of those around us to creatively and proactively design our energy descent, we can build ways of living that are more connected, more enriching and that recognize the biological limits of our planet. (Hopkins, 2008)

Participants in the Transition movement are designing tools, experimental projects, and socio-technical systems to build local resilience. For example, using local currency is a way to develop a production and consumption cycle within a local community so that the local community can support itself economically by keeping commerce local (Jayo, Pozzebon & Diniz, 2010). Some Transition towns have their own local currency as a means of building economic resilience. For example, Bristol has the "Bristol Pound" and Lewes has the "Lewes Pound."

Based on my ethnographic study, I identify that community-level activities, neighborliness, peer supports and local culture were critical for participants to carry out sustainable actions. There is a need to tackle local, social and cultural factors beyond simple metrics of people's energy consumption and conservation. In sustainable HCI field, using persuasive technology to convince users to behave in a more sustainable way has been a major theme (DiSalvo, Sengers, & Brynjarsdóttir, 2010). However, many psychologists and sociologists suggested a value-action gap: many people already possess knowledge and sustainable awareness, but they do not display sustainable behavior because of manifold barriers, such as lack of money and lack of information. Understanding the factors that can help bridge this gap might be inspiring for sustainable HCI practitioners using Information and Communication Technology to promote people's sustainable behaviors.

According to my interviews with the project leaders and members of Transition Town Totnes, achieving a local cultural shift towards local sustainability is the main theme there. Civic events led by the Transition Town Totnes organization combined "traditional community 'togetherness' with claims for social change" (Sampson, Mcadam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005). These events combined different types of civic engagement, such as community celebrations, festivals, and storytelling, with a claim for promoting the local community's resilience. These civic events increased the community's network capital, participatory capital and community commitment (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). The community reinvigorated its "collective efficacy" which refers to "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). People's collective engagement healed their community's brokenness and built solidarity to some degree, which in

turn encouraged more active civic engagement about local sustainability. People felt empowered to take real actions in such a social setting. Even newcomers could fit into the local community quickly and feel empowered through joining these events. I also found that the participants preferred to use face-to-face encounters rather than social media for outreaching and engaging more local citizens in civic activities.

I am currently working on framing my data. I hope my future works can contribute to sustainable HCI field.

QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY

1. How can HCI & Sustainability research effectively support social movements aiming to promote sustainability?
2. What can HCI & Sustainability research do to contribute to community-level sustainable efforts?

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