Participatory Design for Sustainable Campus Living

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Design context: EcoHouse

EcoHouse is a student residence at Grinnell College. In their proposal, students committed not only to live sustainably, but to educate the community, raise a garden, and test new resource conservation technologies and practices for use on campus. This participatory design work approaches EcoHouse as an “opportunity space” [7] and aims to design and deploy technologies in support of that mission.

Ethnographically-inspired methods

To better understand the house’s mission, concerns, projects, procedures, and social dynamics, along with individuals’ interests and concerns, I used the following ethnographically-inspired methods:

- Interviews of each of the house’s ten residents
- Review of the house proposal and other documents
- Participant-observation of house meetings

Generative tools

Though similar in form to cultural probes [4], generative tools such as the above are meant as “primes” to start engaging participants’ creativity and reflection, while also providing inspiration and information to feed into design [9]. Participants responded well; they completed most materials, told many stories, and had fun.

Workshop results

The two workshops resulted in a total of 26 design concepts. All represent persuasive technologies, and all but two are related to EcoHouse’s mission. As Halskov and Dalsgård found [6], many of the concepts are straightforward applications of a Technology Card to the new domain (for example, “100 Acts of Green for Grinnell”, above). However, others are more novel in their combinations, and even introduce other technologies from participants’ experiences, such as using key cards to control electrical appliances (“Room Off-Switch”, above).

Discussion questions

- What other persuasive technology domains have a natural group of potential users to participate in design? Should users always be included?
- How might domain experts fit into participatory design of persuasive technology?
- What participatory methods might be effective for designing, e.g., mobile or online persuasion?
- How might participatory methods directly engage with the ethical issues of persuasive technology?

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References