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Design for longevity: life-centered design

by Sheng-Hung Lee

In July, I stayed in San Servolo Island and enjoyed the beautiful sea scenery, especially the wind blowing my worries away. The Italian sunlight naturally made me become romantic and poetic toward my design speech and exhibition at Venice Innovation Design (VID).

My speech topic was *Design for Longevity (D4L): Services, Systems, and Sustainability*, part of my PhD research conducted in collaboration with the MIT AgeLab. Since this year the exhibition theme of VID focused on sustainability, I wanted to explore applying the D4L lens to discuss sustainability and the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) framework. Then I translated that into an exhibition to cover life-centered design.

Most of the time, people tend to think about sustainability in terms of material flow such as how to extend a product life cycle or calculate their carbon footprint.

We are interested in other aspects of sustainability, discussing D4L, ESG, and life-centered design to explore people's mindset and behavioral change as part of sustainability action.

Due to the development of advanced technologies, improved healthcare, and safe and stable social infrastructure, on average, people can and will live longer. How can we empower people to make strategic and sustainable decisions across different stages of their longer lives?

Life-centered Design is inspired by nature.

Life-centered design considers the broader scope of our target from people to people in context (e.g., the environment).

One of the key inspirations for life-centered design is nature. It reminds me of Luigi Colani's crazy and elegant masterpieces of re-imagining our transportation (e.g., speed, form, features, and services) through biomimicry.

Ross Lovegrove, a Welsh artist and industrial designer, also commits his design career to be a translator from nature to design. In one of his portfolios in 2013, he designed a Twin'z electric concept car for Renault Group demonstrating the idea of learning from nature.

I think not only about form and shape, but also modifying the creative process by integrating a life-centered design philosophy and framework, such as the toolkit designed by Jane Fulton Suri, Partner Emeritus and Executive Design Director at IDEO.

Many design disciplines such as architecture, product design, interaction design, and graphic design, have been inspired by nature in terms of philosophy, creative approaches, constructive frameworks, and even the design outcome.

What is Design for Longevity (D4L)?

Sustainability in a financial context often refers to ESG investing, including the screening of potential investments based on a company's behavior by socially conscious investors. D4L extends ESG ethics to people, products, and platforms. It embraces life-centered values by encouraging behaviors like meaningful consumption, preventative wellness, and cultivating renewable culture.

I collaborated with Sofie Hodara, a typology artist, interaction designer, and educator to brainstorm how to create provocative visuals and questions with different fonts, sizes, and colors to raise people's awareness of sustainability, longevity, and services. In this exhibition, *Design for Longevity: Sustainable Life-Centered Services*, we select and interpret 14 key lifestyle areas we believe sustainable action can focus on: care, education, aging, mobility, community, home, family, health, trust, risk, investment, future, communication, and technology.

We used 14 keywords paired with short phrases and followed by 3-5 provocative questions to help people understand the visuals.

For example, "care" is one of our keywords. We put an emphasis on the idea of "meaningful consumption," considering how we can demonstrate care for each other and the environment and celebrate people's behavior around meaningful consumption. How can we redesign the development process to focus on minimum desirable products (MDP) as opposed to minimum viable products (MVP)? Can we upgrade governmental policies to incentivize socially responsible enterprises?

To improve people's quality of life, "education" matters to us, especially to celebrate and promote the idea of "lifelong learning." How might we invest in educational products and systems to create access to lifelong learning? Can we transform current educational models to be accessible at any life stage, not just certain ages? Can we create a dynamic curriculum that evolves with social and professional needs?

We also redefine the way we view "future." It's about "embracing hope, envisioning yourself." We can ask ourselves frequently how we might raise public awareness about sustainable actions in the face of complicated, systemic socio-technological challenges. Can we design eco-solutions that build resilient, safe, and human-tolerant environments for future generations? How might we accept hope and envision a future where we are all agents of change?

We used the key word "aging" to re-emphasize the concept of "stage not age" by considering questions such as how we might build long-lasting services to satisfy evolving individual, institutional, and societal needs and desires. Can we develop products that help fundamentally transform cultural perceptions of aging? How might we stop seeing age as a number, but instead as a stage?

When we mentioned the key word "family," we wanted to focus on "generous leadership" by providing questions like how might we support healthy, viable chosen family structures? Can our platforms and products build foundations for systems of caregiving and wellbeing spanning across generations? Can we foster a culture of generous leadership within families and local communities?

These keywords are a starting point to empower designers, engineers, or people from other disciplines to better ideate the future of sustainability across the levels of individual, community, and society.

D4L and life-centered design are not just another new design methodology or framework. Instead, we try to curate a series of approaches and mindsets to celebrate how we improve our quality of life in a meaningful, enjoyable, respectful, and sustainable approach.

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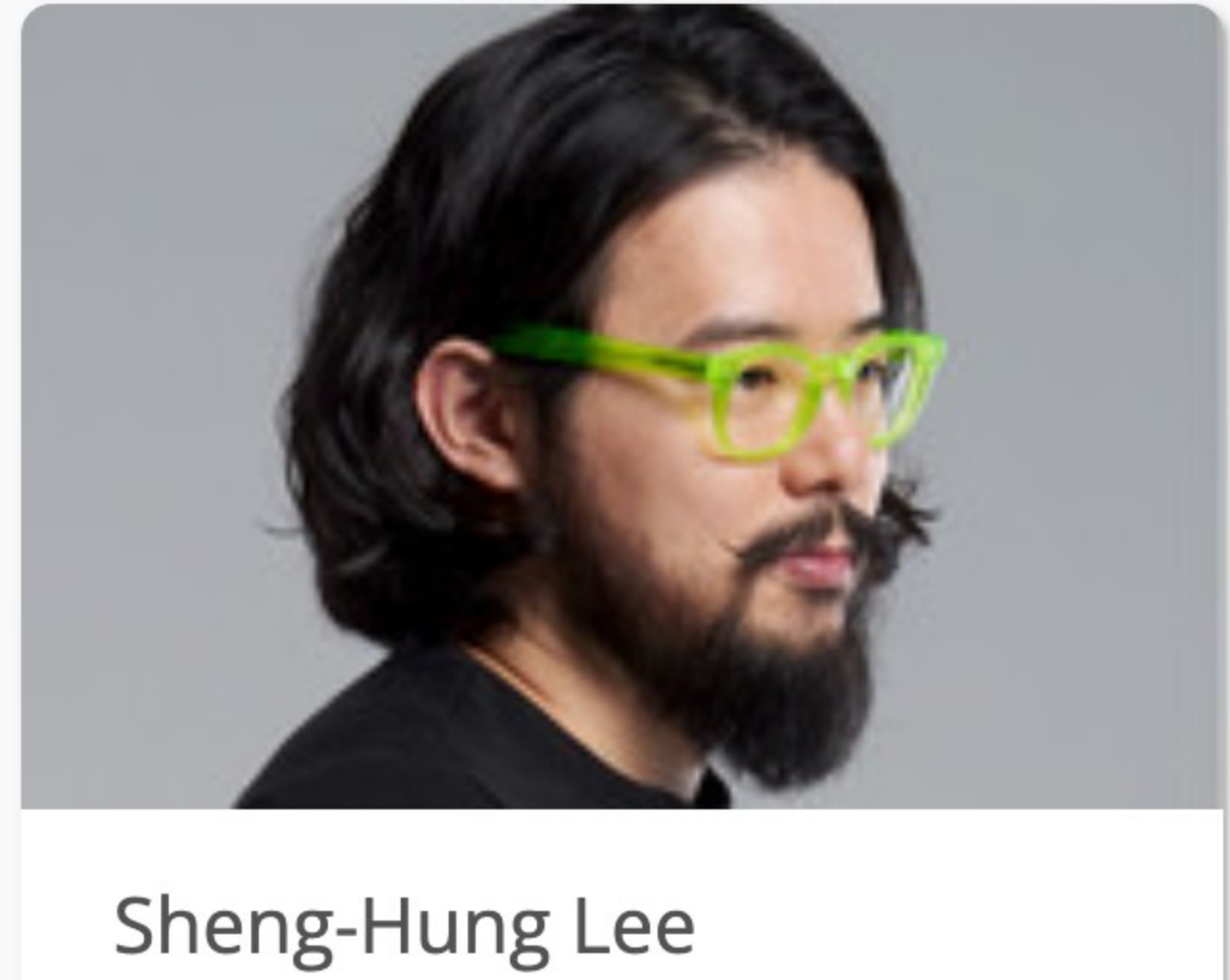
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