

# Linking design with sustainability



**M**OST of us are well aware of the complex and expansive nature of design for sustainability and likely tackle it in bite-sized chunks. The *demi* project not only offers ideas and information relating to these chunks but it also maps the links and influences of these micro issues on the macro level.

The project was set up in response to a number of Government reports which highlighted the dearth of knowledge and activity about sustainability in higher education design courses across the UK. *demi*'s aim is to address this gap and act as a spring board from which to explore the territory through a web-based medium.

*demi* is, in many ways, a politically radical resource. It links formal and informal information from outside the traditional remit of design. Formal links to disciplines such as ecology, development studies and economics support the sustainability context. At the same time, less formal information and experience from community and environmental groups provide a complimentary frame of reference.

*Demi*'s politics are evident in the way it approaches sustainability. Rather than taking a 'business as usual' starting point, *demi* propounds a more eco-centric perspective which emphasises design approaches which empower self-reliant communities based on renewable resources and appropriate technologies.

This article provides a brief introduction to the design process associated with building the links and the frame-

work of the web-based *demi* resource.

The illustration below is a schematic representation of the *demi* framework. It can be seen as a connection of two bodies of information via a series of links. The information in both bodies is about sustainability. However, one focuses on the generic debates relevant to all fields of study and the other on debates specific to design. The links act as an interface between both sets of information, on one hand providing a sustainability context for design decisions and on the other, making sustainability concepts tangible through design output.

The framework allows a user to access information embedded in *demi* at any point. This may mean that starting points vary from the general to the particular, i.e. from 'ecology' to 'the amount of energy needed to make 1kg of glass'. The different scale and scope of this

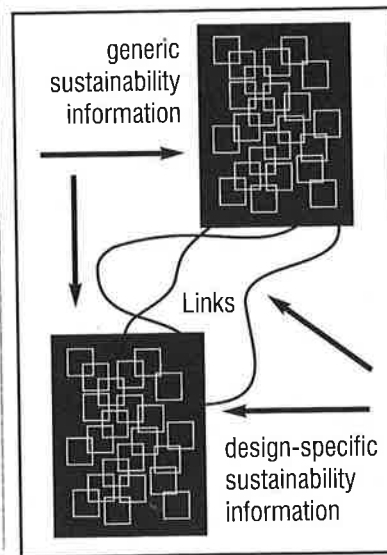
information is essential to understanding the diverse nature of sustainability and design for sustainability. In *demi*, this is underpinned by a holistic, lifecycle approach to information gathering and subsequent decision making, where a judgement made at one part of the process can affect all other parts.

The links or 'guidelines' redefine the sophisticated arguments and complex ideas embedded within sustainability in six more tangible, design-specific terms: efficiency; sufficiency; equity; appropriateness; scale and systems.

In the framework, these are explained by definition and example, with a wide range of case studies making the guidelines practicable. The guidelines act as context for, and connections to, the design-specific information. This includes data particular to individual resource types (for example, textiles, timber, plastics etc.) and that relevant to resources more generally (such as energy debates, pollution control, policy discussions and impact assessment methodologies). The information is organised in a non-hierarchical way, with no preference indicated for one information type over another.

In terms of the content that fills the framework, there is variety in the quantity of information available on different design approaches or resource types. This means that in some parts of the structure, there will be extensive and specific information (particularly regarding materials, for example), while in others, information gaps exist (such as design approaches focusing on alternative ways of satisfying needs).

These gaps are considered to be crucial to the framework as they highlight new areas for research and development. Just as the existence of information is an indicator of the origins of design for sustainability thinking, the information 'black holes' suggest possible new directions in which the field may travel. Thus *demi* is not only a guide to existing information on design for sustainability but it is also a guide to the subject's future. ■



## info

If you would like more information about *demi*, please get in touch with [www.demi.org.uk](http://www.demi.org.uk).

**Demi is a consortium project. Its membership comprises: The Design Council; Falmouth College of Arts; Forum for the Future; The Open University; Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce; Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College; University of Brighton; and Goldsmiths College, University of London.**