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School of Art and Design

Contents

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FOREWORD   Lou Yongqi

Designing the Young Creators for Better City & Better life

Lou Yongqi, Vice Dean of College of Design and Innovation, Tongji University, Cumulus Executive Board Member, Secretary General of CUMULUS 2010 Shanghai Conference

The Changing of Design and Design Education

In China, one of the biggest issues of the past few decades is the large-scale urbanization that has been taking place all over the country. In this context, "Better City, Better Life", the theme of the 2010 Shanghai Expo, represents the common wish that humans share for better living conditions in future urban environments. Diversity of culture, prosperity of urban economy, innovations, remodeling of communities and interaction between urban and rural areas have been identified as the main topics of this Expo. It is clear that all of these topics directly relate to the problems and challenges associated with the process of global sustainable development.

Where there are the problems, there is the need for design. For the design discipline, the socioeconomic changes and new societal needs likewise urge a change within the discipline. During these years, traditional aesthetics and function based design definitions have already changed significantly. These changes can be listed in brief as follows:

- from objective to strategy
- from disciplinary to interdisciplinary
- from design to design thinking
- from creation to innovation

These expanded roles enable design to become a unique way of thinking and an engine for generating innovation. Furthermore, these roles enable design to "think big". In this sense, design is becoming increasingly important.

Design education MUST change accordingly. Design schools should participate in the process of using design as a tool to meet current challenges through proactive methods. This transformation also presents a unique opportunity to further the development of design as a discipline.

The New Task For Design Education

New modes of innovation require breaking through the walls that separate technology, design and business, and applying innovation to the research and development process for the entire life cycle of a product. An innovative society not only needs designers who can be thorough problem solvers in their own discipline, but also needs those who are capable of interacting with, and understanding specialists from a wide range of disciplines and functional areas.

Given that the trends of design and design education are clear, the transition cannot be finished overnight. There are two general topics of new tasks for design education: one – how to educate these "T" shape young creators; two – in which ways design schools themselves can be a force to generate sustainable innovation.

The Theme of the Conference

University has two missions: one is creating and transferring knowledge and skills, and the second is shaping the vision of the future for society at large. How design can fit the new needs and lead society's sustainable innovation is the biggest mission for the discipline. The CUMULUS conference 2010 organized by Tongji University during the world Expo 2010 in Shanghai provided a platform to discuss and rethink the design discipline and the world in which we are now living.

The theme for CUMULUS Shanghai Conference 2010, "Young Creators for Better City and Better Life", aims to explore how the young generation of designers can be involved in shaping and improving our lives creatively in a global context. The emerging trends, missions and visions of future design education, research and practice, together with the economic, political and social impacts of the era, will also be reevaluated during the conference.

The conference has set up four subthemes:

- Sustainability & social innovation
- Local wisdom & globalization
- Socio-economics & design
- Old & young

All of these topics are crucial issues in our current society. Hopefully the discussion of the future of design and wellbeing can be integrated with national, regional and even global economies, societies, and cultures.

Outline of the Sub-themes

Sustainability & social innovation
Ezio Manzini *

The transition towards sustainability asks for the most careful use of all the available resources. On a small, densely populated, highly connected Planet, *social resources* are the most abundant ones. Their valorization is therefore the most effective strategy towards sustainability.

Today, looking at the complexity of contemporary society, we can observe that people's creativity, entrepreneurship, knowledge and skills are generating new and sustainable ways of living and producing. This represents a large *social innovation* process where solutions are conceived and developed by actors directly involved in the problems to be solved.

Facing social innovation, the *design community* must use its specific design knowledge to support it. That is: to trigger new ideas, to orient the resulting innovations and to conceive enabling solutions. In this framework, a particularly important role can be played by the *design schools*. In fact, in the knowledge society, schools should be the living laboratories where diffuse creativity can be catalyzed and social innovation enhanced.

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Local wisdom & globalization
Lorraine Justice *

Very often we believe the ways of another culture are better than our own. Americans look longingly toward the luxury goods and relaxed lifestyle of the Europeans. The Americans and Europeans embrace the preventive medicine of the East. American Indian cultures look seven generations into the future to help make major decisions that affect their society. The obsession with quality of machinery of the Germans can match the obsession with quality of food of the French, and so on. We all can benefit from these local cultural practices.

Sometimes we find and that certain products, practices and services in one culture would help another. Refrigeration units in one country can help keep snake bite antidotes in a remote village in India. Wind power developed in the Netherlands is helping local communities on small islands generate power. So local wisdom and globalization can go hand in hand to make the world a better place through matching need to existing solution.

The rich knowledge that exists at the local level, combined with the global telecommunications, manufacturing and distribution, and worldwide economy sets the world stage for a huge leap in assistive products and services of all kinds. The design field can help through their approaches to local, ethnographic design research, which studies indigenous peoples and then the application on a worldwide scale.

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Social-economic & design
Yrjö Sotamaa *

Human-centred design thinking, when rooted in universal and sustainable principles, has the power to fundamentally improve our world. It can deliver economic, ecological, social and cultural benefits to our societies and to all people, improve our quality of life, and create optimism about the future and individual and shared happiness.

Design is a unifying force for creative thinking, something that forms a link between individual dreams and the future. Technology is no longer the sole driver for development. Development springs from a profound understanding of people's needs and hopes and new applications made possible by technology.

We have become aware of the importance of design innovation in building sustainable, human centred, creative societies. The paradigm shift currently underway has expanded the applicable scope of design to all activities of society, cities, companies, education and individuals. Design is becoming embedded in all planning processes. Embedded Design aptly describes this shift, which is testing the boundaries of design and is powered by openness, hope in the future, and the courage to change and renew. Embedded Design also describes a systematic approach to applying design.

The conference will discuss this paradigm shift, the new opportunities it opens to applications of design and the challenges it is presenting to the design profession, education and research.

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Old & young
Jeremy Myerson*

Design stands today on the fault line between old and young in societies around the world. In the drive to improve our cities and create a better quality of life in urban areas, designers will increasingly find themselves acting as mediators between the old world and

the new – between institutions, ways of thinking, educational models and practical methods that belong to the 20th century and those that are fast emerging in this, the new century.

Tensions between old and young are most visible in the impact of changing demographics on design, as the proportion of older people in the world population grows and the proportion of younger people shrinks. The implications of this profound shift for design are enormous. Population ageing presents challenges in every design discipline from transport, furniture and communication to fashion, architecture and urban planning. This is now well understood by a great many design educators and practitioners. What is less well understood is how design must negotiate between the different ends of the age range – between old and young.

However, the trade-offs between old and young extend beyond demographic change – to technology, where new networks and systems afford new opportunities, to organisations, which are casting off the old hierarchies to become more flexible and democratic, and to industrial practice itself as new forms of design thinking challenge established models of production and consumption.

In a world in which the welfare costs of the elderly will fall on a shrinking working population of younger people, in which many institutions and organisations require reform, and in which new technologies must be put to genuine social purpose, the urgent need to mediate between old and young requires designers to develop new skills, new tools and new approaches, many of them cross-disciplinary in character.

As a Cumulus Shanghai theme, Old & Young will seek speakers and papers that explore this theme of transition and transformation between the old world and the new.

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Anna Meroni

Design for services and place development

Interactions and relations as
ways of thinking about places:
the case of periurban areas

Services are a constituent element of urban planning. Nevertheless, a new perspective arises when considering regional contexts, and when considering services as an approach to design and subject matter for design.

The essay presents reflections raised by a group of projects in various parts of the world, conducted by local research partners within the international DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) and dealing with agricultural *periurban* territories. These projects are methodologically related to one currently in progress in Milan conducted by the Politecnico di Milano, Slow Food and Università Scienze Gastronomiche, which is expected to generate a scenario of sustainable local food production and consumption for the region.

Service design here aims at introducing a service-driven vision influencing the approach to regional planning, with the objective of strengthening the role of sustainable agriculture by creating a network of services supporting production systems and de-meditating offering and demand. Short food chains, *multifunctionality* of the systems and mutual collaboration between the stakeholders are the concepts framing the project. Fostering social innovation is considered a crucial action, since local creative communities can play a major role as potential engines of change.

The essay discusses the methodological framework through which these projects are conducted, the role of design schools and researching-teaching activities in the factual promotion of this kind of design issue, and a first set of design results of the ongoing projects, making connections among them.

Radical changes in the everyday life of communities

We claim that designing for sustainability with a strategic perspective means facing and promoting radical changes in ways of living (Manzini & Jegou, 2003). This assumption informs the way we use strategic design and design for services to tackle the sustainable development of places and regions.

Design for Services is an essential component of strategic design when the aim is to move from a framework of values and characteristics into specific solutions, and when we need to make manifest possible future behaviours that require new ways of interacting and producing value within a community and its environment. Services in fact exemplify systemic changes at the level of everyday experiences (Meroni & Sangiorgi, forthcoming 2011).

Strategic Design is an approach whose goal is to interpret ongoing situations, where problems are open and ill-defined, tasks unclear, processes experimental and where knowledge is something that emerges step by step, by continuous interactions with other players. Any strategic decision is the consequence of interaction with the environment, its actors, constraints and opportunities and, according to Game Theory the behaviour of players can be driven by the comprehension that favouring the interests of the community can be strategic to favouring one's own interests (Zurlo, 2004 and 2010). Therefore, strategy can result in win-win solutions, where the interests of the individual (a person, a company, an enterprise) can converge with those of the environment and of the collectivity. In compliance with Bateson's concept of ecology (Bateson, 1979), affirming that the minimum unit of survival in evolution is never simply an individual organism, not even a species, but always species-plus-environment, win-win strategies appear to be those with this potential for causing them both to evolve. Any strategy to achieve a radical but successful change must, consequently, consider both eco-efficiency and social behaviour (Brezet & Ehrenfeld, 2001; Vezzoli, 2007) in a brand new approach.

Investigating and promoting social innovation (innovation that moves from emerging behaviours in society) takes us in this direction: by working with innovative social parties, searching for, exploring, observing and involving in the design activity the most pro-active and creative social, economic and productive resources of a context, we believe that we can start a project with a

reasonably good chance of successfully causing a situation to evolve. It is here that social innovation becomes crucial, especially when a project is about communities and territories. We call these emerging social behaviours creative communities, groups of people who creatively organize themselves to obtain a result in ways that are promising steps towards sustainable ways of living and producing (Meroni, 2007), and visionary ventures, meaning enterprises that challenge the conventional ways of doing in the market, in the name of a fairer, more sustainable and valuable production and consumption system. This kind of social innovation is actually prototyping innovative ways of doing that can be seen as a driver for technological and production innovation. The practices they propose combine a high degree of feasibility and an impressive visioning; they have the power of transmitting to us their ideas, feeding our imagination about the future and becoming the source of inspiration for new solutions and services rooted in existing assets. They embody in a positive and fashionable way the contemporary interpretations of jobs which we believe can become the basis of a truly *green economy*: they try the unprecedented with remarkable bravery, they risk, they learn by doing, they apply a trial-and-error approach that is costly and often apparently reckless. They are led by visionary individuals who have been able to gain the support of the community, attracting and motivating people by the strength of their ideas (Manzini, 2007; Leadbeater, 2007; Drayton, 2010) All together, these phenomena of social innovation create a strong pattern of local *changemakers* (Drayton, 2010)who we believe can become the drivers of innovative projects.

Bateson's concept of ecology shows us the profound and vital relationship of a community with its environment, which means for designers two fundamental factors to be investigated: the community's sense of belonging to the (private and public) space, and the relationship that exists between local people and local resources. These two issues are, with different shades of meaning, the focus of investigation for some schools of urban and regional planning around the world (the Scuola Territorialista in Italy; the New Urbanism movement in North America; the INTBAU – International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism in UK) that we like to acknowledge as scientific references when speaking about sustainable place development. They actually affirm that the valorisation of local heritage (environment, urban settlement, culture and society) is the only possible approach to producing the lasting enrichment of an area, because places are the result of a historical co-evolution of human settlement with environment, nature and culture, whereas the functionalistic approach tends to consider the territory as a kind of technical support for activities organised independently from the local means, resources, potentialities and qualities. Therefore, sustainable development not only refers to the reproducibility of natural resources, but also to the way in which urban systems are established; to the coherence of production systems with local resources and entrepreneurship; to the development of capability and self government by local communities. In short, to community sovereignty (Magnaghi 2000).

We take this multilayer definition of "place" as the result of the interaction of the community with the environment and believe that Design for Services, which has recently taken up the debate about regional development (Meroni et al, 2008; Meroni, Simeone & Trapani, 2009; Jégou, 2010) can significantly contribute with conceptual tools to research on these topics. In fact, Service Design looks at the interrelations within a community and at the relations of the community with its territory with a distinctive approach, as we will discuss in this essay.

We also believe that, on one hand, this disciplinary approach can complement those of planners, architects and sociologists and, on the other, it can shape the competences and skills of a new profile of designer.

New generations of designers and new skills

A new generation of designers needs to grow up, be trained to develop new skills and equipped to contribute in solving new kinds of problems that are both systemic and wicked (Manzini in Meroni, 2007; Buchanan, 1992). At the same time, a new generation of entrepreneurs needs to flourish, oriented to the so called *green economy* and commit to jobs that are potentially the engine of this economy, but that ought to be reinvented in the light of contemporary lifestyles.

In the most established design schools all around the world, interdisciplinary curricula oriented to train students to design for services, or to develop a strategic approach to design are flourishing. The Politecnico di Milano has matured over 10 years experience in master level courses in Strategic Design, Product Service System Design and Service Design, being one of the schools pioneering these approaches. We believe that new design profiles should address the abovementioned new design demand, and therefore students can beneficially be challenged with problems of a systemic dimension. And, even more, we believe these students can significantly contribute to "warming up" research thinking in this field, and prototyping tools for intervention in systemic problems. Actually, their involvement can result in a double achievement: practising on real cases helps them to develop awareness towards sustainability and systemic thinking, and approaching these themes in design studios allows teachers to begin exploring new research topics with more freedom and creativity. Therefore, we systematically combine research

and training, setting up design processes where training activities are synergically integrated with action research, and giving students the opportunity to measure themselves with similar topics, in dedicated studios or workshops. This is a unique chance for cultivating in young people an alternative awareness of design and business, where emphasis is laid on the environmental, social and ethical issues of the community, and for testing the preliminary hypothesis of research with initial ideas.

Investigating a community in its own environment means paying primary attention to the ethics and values of the project, so as to orient design actions to make these values tangible and to develop an approach that connects design to human dignity and human rights (Buchanan, 2001). In doing this, a shift from the concept of *User Centred Design* to one of *Community Centred Design* is implied (Meroni, 2008), where understanding behaviours and collaborating with the most active social communities in conceiving and developing solutions (Ogilvy, 2002, Jégou & Manzini, 2008) is the distinctive work of the designer. Community Centred Design refers also to an approach that upgrades the consolidated methods and tools of User Centred Design to the scale of community, in order to understand its behaviours, needs and network of relationships.

As a consequence, this approach requires two kinds of competences: one related to knowledge of the context, the other to creative collaboration with non-designers.

The former results in field immersion, so as to pursue a direct experience of the contexts and develop empathy with the community. It produces a de-mediated knowledge of people and places that leads to empathic design: an approach where designers are pushed to move in real contexts so that projects benefit from the emotions of both users and designers (Leonard & Rayport, 1997). To activate people, to spur them to take action and collaborate in doing things, designers must be aware of the kind of behaviours a community will be willing to take up. Understanding the pivotal assets to rely on in order to design solutions that propose radical changes in everyday life is, thus, as essential as knowing the unexploited assets and unmet needs of a given context. Moving from here, designers can work with local communities to develop scenarios, or hypotheses with some chance of finding the right humus on which they can flourish as future solutions (Ogilvy, 2002).

The latter, which results in designing scenarios for and with local communities, requires the designer to be able to manage collaborative processes and transdisciplinary skills. Helping collaborative design practices to happen, fostering conversations around systemic changes exemplified at the level of everyday experiences, and materializing big shifts in tangible lifestyles and business opportunities are actually some of the peculiar

capabilities that we believe a designer for services today must have (Meroni & Sangiorgi, forthcoming 2011).

A critical context for urban development and food sovereignty

Periurban areas are, today, among major critical contexts in regional development projects: lying between a town and its rural surroundings, they are mainly used for agricultural activities (sometimes sustainable, often conventional), but subject to urban expansion where formerly separate cities and towns merge into vast urbanised zones: the way this comes about is crucial for the sustainable development of a region (Donadieu 2005 Viljoen, 2005). We take them as *metacontexts* (Manzini, Collina & Evans, 2004), that is widely found typologies with analogous characteristics in different contexts. *Periurban* areas are the thresholds where urban and rural dynamics meet, creating unique opportunities (or risks) to improve the quality of everyday life and make a decisive step towards sustainable development. The reflection developed in this essay arises from a cluster of ongoing projects around the world (Milan, Shanghai, New York and Porto Alegre) within the DESIS Network[1] which, notwithstanding the different progress of the work, can be seen to rest on similar bases and hypotheses.

Initial field observation, supported by theoretical and empirical research, led us to recognize the following main needs, resources and design challenges:

Needs and critical factors:

- agriculture is managed through both sustainable and conventional methods: in the absence of alternative and more direct channels of sale, agricultural practices become gradually less profitable year by year (Fleury, 2005; Donadieu 2005)
- the proximity to town is a real threat for these areas, given the unquestionably higher value of urban exploitation compared to agricultural use of the land, in the current mainstream market (Viljoen, 2005; Petrini, 2005) and in the limited perspective of the present day;
- the aging population and the progressive lack of motivation for youth to work as farmers are the reasons for the massive exodus from these areas. This is due to several factors, among which : the meagre profitability of the work; the industrialisation of activities and the "downgrade" of the role of farmer to one of industrial worker; the lack of appeal of agriculture-related professions due to their apparent

1 Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability: an international network launched by a group of researchers gravitating around the Politecnico di Milano (http://www.desis-network.org)

obsolescence and inadequate social-recognition in mature economies.

- the overall quality of life in the areas is perceived as low because of the scarcity of services, entertainments, infrastructures, social opportunities.

Resources and local assets:

- sustainable agriculture can become a recognised added value, thanks to the demand for "clean and fair produce" (Petrini 2005) which comes from the city and is usually bigger than the offering;
- proximity to town can be seen as an advantage for these agricultural areas, because of:
  1. the ease and convenience of food transportation and delivery to town;
  2. the possibility of inventing local tourism formulae connected to agri-culture, taking advantage of easy and fast connections with the city;
  3. the opportunity to mix functions and activities so as to complement and match urban ones;
- the quality of the life in these areas is, in terms of health, unquestionably better than in town, because of cleaner and fresher air, vegetation, less noise and pollution, more open spaces;
- the presence of creative communities and visionary ventures, challenging the traditional way of living and producing in urban and rural settings, is noticeable here and has a relatively high impact: the sizable number of initiatives operating in the agricultural field is likely to be due to the application of urban-like creativity (Florida, 2005) to agricultural issues. Actually, the diffusion mechanisms of creativity and activism which are often accelerated in cities and rely on emulation, find in these critical contexts a natural area of application. These kinds of initiative offer a good picture of the lively humus characterizing these contexts, despite scarce support from the Institutions and even the apparent obstructionism of policy against these small actors, to the advantage of big territorial players (agribusiness, builders, big retailers).

Design opportunities and challenges

- to increase the regional self-sufficiency of the food system through various forms of local food sale and de-mediation (Meroni, 2006) of agricultural production. This still remains the most important function of periurban agriculture (Petrini, 2005);
- to foster multifunctionality of systems and differentiation of offering over specialization, in order to increase the economical profitability of enterprises, while enhancing the attractiveness and feasibility of services;
- to conceive new cultural meanings for agricultural jobs by creating added value services and produce,

build over the quality of products, services and activities;

- to strengthen the relationships between rural areas and the city in terms of material, economic and cultural flows, and rationalize then according to a sustainability assessment;
- to invent new forms of agritourism, agriforestry and proximity leisure to take urban inhabitants into the nearby countryside, and to intensify relations between agricultural activities and urban life by imagining new services supporting urban farming;
- to find creative interconnections and new forms of collaboration and synergies between farms and other local activities, so as to save resources and create closed loop systems, connecting inputs and results of rural activities within a logic of service symbiosis (Mirata & Ristola, 2007);
- to implement new communication technology as support for collaborative services (Manzini & Baek, 2009);
- to create an imaginary around the place and its produce: branding products and services in the name of quality and values.

These design challenges, focused on delivering services and relations for a more ecological food production, distribution and consumption, represent the core of the innovation demand expressed by *periurban* areas, and have different specifications in the different geographical contexts.

Approach and method of work

As mentioned, a Design for Services perspective to Place Development shifts the design focus towards the investigation of interactions and relations. In the specific context, these are represented by the network of services supporting the agricultural business and the new forms of de-mediation between offering and demand.

Shortening the food chain, fostering multifunctionality of the systems and implementing collaborative practices are the key concepts in common that shape the design briefing of the projects, which is based on the following hypotheses:

- using local resources to develop a distinctive offering (Mirata & Ristola, 2007; Magnaghi, 2000) and activating collaborative practices of work (Cottam & Leadbeater, 2004) can produce tangible and effective improvements in the quality of life and environment;
- sustaining local collaborative patterns, which involve inhabitants and enterprises, can create the conditions for social innovations to flourish and change settlement models by changing underlying practices (Latouche, 2004);
- supporting social innovation is therefore crucial, be-

cause *creative communities* can play a major role as potential engine of the change. This assumption implies an approach to transformation that, borrowing concepts from Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Inghilleri, 2003), relies on and enhances the positive assets of a system or a context in order to produce a change;

- bridging divisions between disciplines, institutions and public, private and voluntary sectors is, today, the most advanced way to innovate in production and particularly in service provision. According to Landry (2000), new forms of alliances have to be set up, while Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan (2010) speak about overlapping fields of the social economy, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise.

Therefore, the method of work currently being experimented starts by observing local assets, goes on to create specific projects shaped by/oriented towards a scenario and ends up with the creation of a network of synergies:

1. *Resources and assets mapping*: finding, analyzing and visualizing the "place capital" (natural + artificial + social) and the relative potentialities.
2. *Social innovation mapping*: finding, describing and representing the local creative communities and their initiatives.
3. *Scenario and solutions design*: co-designing a set of scenarios for the context, exemplified in specific solutions connected to the existent social innovation.
4. *Defining pilot projects*: finding the most promising initiatives and developing ideas about how to replicate them or start up new initiatives using existing assets.
5. *Project networking*: linking projects in a local system, creating mutual connections and relating them to the external environment.
6. *Project communication*: communication of single projects and of the whole scenario.

One crucial point of scenario-building is the connection of the projects into a network organization, or more specifically, the way the different services are connected to support one another and to frame a consistent scenario. The strong sense of community that we have observed in cases of social innovation leads us to assume that the social and relational basis for the network is likely to be the need to enhance actors' perception of a coherent community where everybody (the local "changemakers" – Drayton, 2010) contributes to collective success. This is facilitated when a shared vision confers the network with a sense of identity, claims values, creates trust and orients motivations, actions and strategies (Van Alstyne, 1997). The functional basis for the network is the need to share or complement the

various assets and operations of the different activities, so as to make beneficial synergies. As a consequence, three forms of synergy can be investigated:

- Synergies between analogous activities: economies of scale and scope of similar solutions that can benefit from sharing some operations and infrastructure, and creating critical mass.
- Synergies between complementary activities: economies of scale and scope between different solutions which, while delivering different products and services, have many common elements since the outputs of one activity become the inputs of another.
- Synergies between compatible activities: economies of scale and scope between solutions which, when combined, can generate mutual virtuous savings and reinforcement.

Synergies allow collaborative problem solving to happen, meaning that they create the condition for breaking tasks into sub-tasks and sharing them (Van Alstyne, 1997), activating collaborative services (Jégou & Manzini, 2008) and collaborative entrepreneurship (Dayton, 2010). Altogether they outline different scenarios of *Community Supported Agriculture*, where food production, trading, hospitality, leisure, cultural and social activities create a unique mix of functions.

The six-step process here described aims to generate ideas for activities and services based on the creative use of local assets and to establish a direct connection with local creative communities and ventures. We propose that regional planning be informed by these ideas and by the network structure of city and its *periurban* area that they imply. Having said this, we believe that the specific contribution of design for services consists in offering a methodological toolbox to support a new paradigm of urbanisation based on this approach, and in engaging a continuous, strategic dialogue with the community (van der Heijden, 2005; Manzini, Collina & Evans, 2004; Landry, 2000; Kahn et al., 2009).

Ongoing projects

The process presented in the previous paragraph has been applied, in different stages, to the aforementioned projects. While the ones in New York and Porto Alegre are still in the proposal phase, Milano and Shanghai have already developed to a stage that allows more than a few reflections about their outcomes as design and training experiences. For these two contexts the opportunity to share some design thought arises from a couple of applied research projects for the local *periurban* areas: the Agricultural South Park in Milano and Chongming Island in Shanghai.

The process has been reiterated more than once in the two situations, upscaling the substance and impor-

Fig. 1: The network of service models developed for the *periurban* area of the Parco Agricolo Sud di Milano, Italy.

tance of the projects. In fact, in both cases an extensive design experiment has been carried out involving students[2] in initial self-committed research. A couple of workshops have created the first scenarios and set of ideas that enabled the start of a strategic conversation with prospective partners and interlocutors for projects with real commitments. From here further professional research steps have recently been taken.

Milano

The Milanese project, in fact, started as methodological research, funded by the Italian government[3], and then evolved into a bigger, more specific project named "Nutrire Milano. Energie per il Cambiamento" (Feeding Milano. Energy for change, http://www.nutriremilano.it), funded by local institutions (Fondazione Cariplo – a bank foundation- Comune di Milano and Provincia di Milano). The project was proposed and is now being developed by a partnership between the Politecnico di Milano, Slow Food Italia and the Università di Scienze Gastronomiche. Students' contributions have been integrated in the process since its beginning, and currently other classes of service design students are participating in it: for them the topic has definitely become

their chance to face a real context of application, and for the School of Design a consolidated and recognised field of work.

The first ideas developed with students have evolved into a broader scenario built on the principles of direct relations (de-mediation) between producers and consumers, and collaboration among actors. Eight service models, inspired by the existing situation and taking it a bit further (Meroni, Simeone & Trapani, 2008), have helped the scenario to materialise into tangible lifestyles and business opportunities. These include the Collective Park Brand, the Farmers' Market, Public Green Procurements, Food Box Subscription, the Visitors' Centres, the Rural Cultural Centre, Horticulture and Urban indoor/outdoor agriculture (for a detailed description see: Meroni, Simeone & Trapani, 2009) (fig 1).

This scenario has then laid the basis for the project, Nutrire Milano, whose pillars are multifunctionality, de-mediation and collaboration.

The main actions undertaken in this project are:

1. supporting existing best practices and resources in the agricultural field;
2. activating resources not yet / no longer valorised;
3. creating new services. The project will systematically implement pilot activities to test and assess ongoing ideas: the local farmers' market is already under experimentation (http://www.mercatidellaterra.it/ita/network/milano) (fig.2)

Shanghai

The Chinese project started as a self-committed applied research project by Studio TAO of TEKTAO[4] and IDEO Shanghai, and then, by involving Tongji and Politong

2   students of Service Design and Product Service System Design from the School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano, and of Politong Master Program – a double degree program between the Politecnico di Milano and the Politecnico di Torino in Italy, and Tongji University in Shanghai, China

3   The first commitment for the project came from the PRIN, Miur, 2006–2007, Italian University and Research Ministry, then in 2009 Fondazione Cariplo, Comune di Milano and Provincia di Milano, have funded the project "Nutrire Milano. Energie per il Cambiamento" (Feeding Milano. Energy for change) where the Politecnico di Milano partners with Slow Food Italia and Università di Scienze Gastronomiche.

4   Studio TAO is a Shanghai based design "think-and-action tank" focused on sustainability

Fig. 2: The 'Mercato della Terra' in Milano: the first pilot project launched within the framework of the project Nutrire Milano for the Parco Agricolo Sud di Milano, Italy.
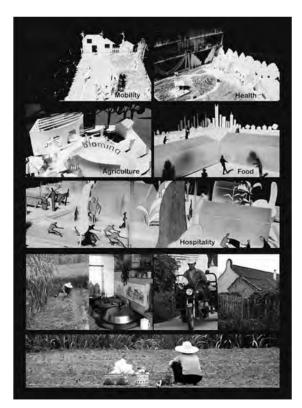

Fig. 3: The five new business ideas developed for the *periurban* Island of Chongmin, Shanghai, China.

university students, it has grown in scope and capability of creating connections with local and international partners. Currently the various seeds of ideas planted by the students have flourished into a comprehensive scenario which joins different services of food production / distribution and local tourism into a network, and proposes a hub (Design Harvests Hub) as a local engine for discussing the scenario with the local community and gradually implementing it. In particular, the workshop with the Politong students[5] has led to a proposed network of five new, creative business ideas dealing with food, agriculture, hospitality, mobility and health, to create an entrepreneurial community in the village of Xian Qiao, in Chongming Island. (fig.3)

Conclusions

The conclusions we would like to draw from the discussion of these experiences fit into two categories: results concerning the disciplinary approach of design for services applied to place development, and the involvement of design school students in similar activities.

The discipline: design for services

• The value of introducing a design for service perspective in place development processes, can therefore be summarized in the distinctive contribution it makes to the following points (Meroni & Sangiorgi, forthcoming 2011):

• Creating convergence: assuming that the key objective of scenario building is to generate convergence among diverse players on a vision for the future (Manzini & Jegou, 2003), design for services can help scenarios "materialise" into concepts and artefacts;

• Supporting design thinking: assuming that today, and more and more in the future, good ideas will come from both amateurs and professionals (Leadbeater, 2008), new approaches are needed to reverse top-down design processes and shape horizontal frameworks of collaboration where innovation is interpreted as a social, cumulative and collaborative activity. Design thinking represents an approach to idea generation and problem solving that both designers and non-designers can develop and apply: Design for Services can create the conditions for it to spread, offering specific tools to help (highly relational and multidisciplinary) co-design processes to target communities of innovators. This leads to

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5 The workshop was held by Anna Meroni and Lou Yongqi with the support of Miaosen Gong, Clarisa Diaz, Joon Sang Baek and Fang Zhong. Participants: Francesca Carnevale, Chai Zhi, Cheng Shuwen, Antonella Espro, Feng Mengyuan, Marco Grimm, He Xin, Emanuele Laviosa, Li Niaoniao, Li Xiaoyi, Luo Jie, Federico Mighetto, Simona De Rosa, Shen Siyuan, Song Song, Chiara Torti, Giuditta Vendrame, Wang Yun, Zhang Yang, Zhao Lulu

the concept of *community centred design*, where attention shifts from the individual "user" to the community, which replaces the role that was previously reserved for the "user in helping the designer to decode and interpret the emerging design demand;

• Building capacity: assuming that the very essence of designing strategically is enhancing and building capacities in communities and organisations to see problems better, while choosing the right strategies to act (Burns et al., 2006; Meroni, 2008; Zurlo 2010), design for services can contribute by conceiving services that enable new behaviours through the provision of competences and by appealing to people's individual motivations. In fact, social psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) teaches us that the systematic building of competency and skills is a way to prevent problems and facilitate collective wellbeing (Von Hippel, 2005). According to several authors (Parker & Heapy 2006; Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002) a new service enterprise model is emerging which is no longer centred on products or services, but on the provision of "the support" people need to navigate a complex world and to lead their own lives as they wish. Manzini (2007) speaks about "enabling platforms" and "enabling kits" as ways for designers to help people generate their own solutions.

The involvement of design schools

• Cross fertilization: assuming that design for service and design thinking are approaches that largely benefit from transdisciplinarity and extended strategic conversations, the systematic involvement of students becomes a real opportunity for "warming-up" thinking and creating a larger arena for idea generation and discussion. It is, moreover, an opportunity for them to practice systemic thinking, tackle wicked problems, develop and prototype ideas and get in touch with competences other than design.

• Links: for designers, and thus even more for prospective designers, the exercise of conceiving and developing ideas which are mutually interconnected into a local system is a way to experience the complexity of a real context and to trigger a mutual learning process.

• Empathic design: assuming the importance of stepping into the shoes of others in order to understand their positions and become more capable of designing for and with them, the social innovation led approach brings a distinctive value both to education and practice. Pushing students to work as "antennas" of social innovation (Jégou & Meroni, in Meroni, 2007) is a way of training young designers in field work while, at the same time, putting them in touch with extremely motivated groups of visionary, non-professional, designers, who reveal unexpected cre-

ativity, opening the mind and driving one to think-out-of-the-box. We have experienced in students what we have also noticed in our research team, viz. the development of emotional connections and empathy with the context that eventually also stimulate a real sensitiveness towards sustainability.

• New design skills: assuming the need for academics to respond to a new demand for professional design, place development projects offer the chance to build and test a new set of skills for designers dealing with services.

To conclude, we would like to acknowledge that similar research projects are opening to designers, and especially designers working for services, quite a promising area of operation which has been so far territory of architects, urban planners, sociologists and economists. Designers are here bringing to the table a kind of knowledge that is likely to be peculiar and therefore not exclusive of other roles, but instead complementary. This new role is connected to the rising impact of services on the way economies produce value, and to the increasing importance of network technologies as means of self-organisation and distributed creativity. Therefore these research projects are experimenting, in both professional and academic contexts, methods and tools for this new role of the designer.

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