

Neighbourhoods of contemporary cities are 'hypersensitive' and 'fragile' areas where dismantling and transformation processes generate fragmentation and displacement. Reconstruction and re-occupation of urban spaces guided by residents are becoming increasingly frequent in these places; inhabitants, claim local references to their identity and their daily lives. This book presents some reflections on the role of design discipline in this fertile and proactive context, proposing specific research methodologies and intervention strategies in close relation with the resident population, building new skills, creating original synergies, and new processes of inclusion and social innovation. The research done at the Design department in the Politecnico di Milano aims at generating future scenarios of hybridization of functions, places, activities that will provide an answer to the future development of neighbourhoods.

Two applications of the results have been done in the neighbourhood recently named as NoLo - North of Piazzale Loreto - in Milan - Italy, characterized by the existence of many associations and a social district. The process and results of them are described in this book by analysing the impact and the legacy they have: "ARNOLD - Art and Design in NoLo Social District", based on the set-up of exhibitions of artworks by 22 artists in 22 unconventional places of art through a co-design process with neighbours, artists and owners of the concerned sites, and "Zip Spaces" focused on the creation of interior design proposals through solutions of temporary reuse of dismantled commercial spaces that can display innovative aggregative formats of activities derived from existing business in the neighbourhood.

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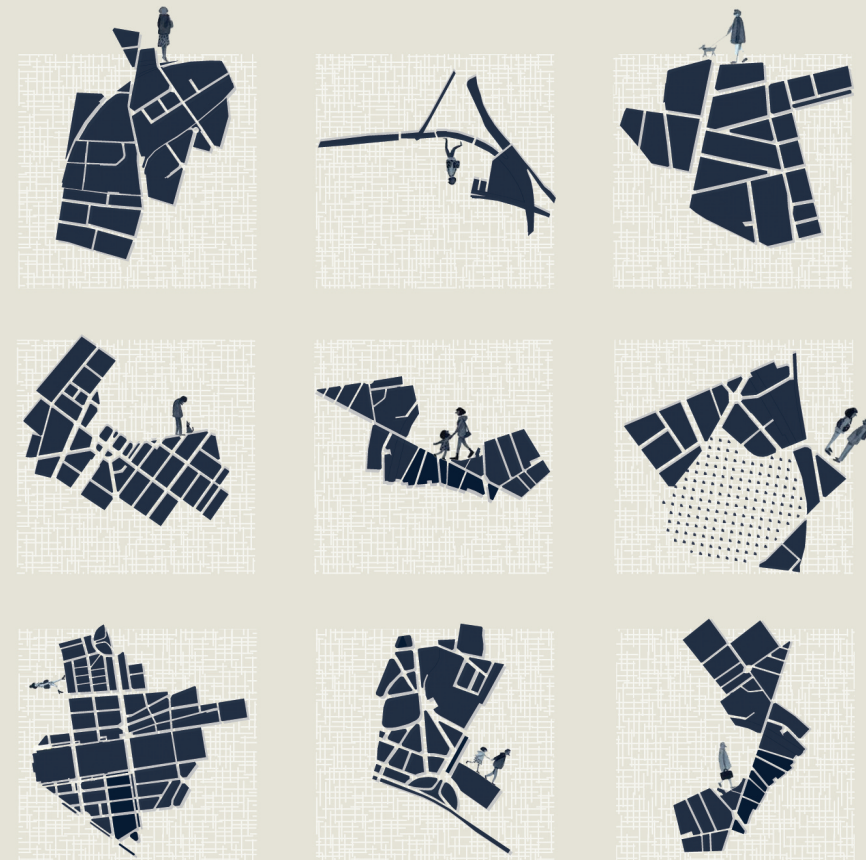
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IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Spatial Design and Urban Activation

edited by Barbara Camocini and Davide Fassi



D.I. FRANCOANGELI
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edited by Barbara Camocini and Davide Fassi

D.I. **FRANCOANGELI**
DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

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In the Neighbourhood. Spatial Design and Urban Activation

Barbara Camocini and Davide Fassi, Politecnico di Milano

Peripheral and semi-peripheral neighbourhoods of contemporary cities are “hypersensitive” and “fragile” areas, transit and stopover spaces of national and transnational migratory flows, areas of transformation and fragmentation, where dismantling and unbalancing processes generated by the “Global Age” arise.

Reconstruction and re-occupation of urban spaces guided by residents are becoming increasingly frequent in these places; inhabitants, both newcomers and existing residents, claim local references to which to report their identity and where to live their daily lives. The competence and culture of the people living in these contexts, getting closer to the city centre, allow them to trigger urban transformation autonomously or integrated into institutional activities.

This book presents some reflections on the role of design discipline in this fertile and proactive context, proposing specific research methodologies and intervention strategies in close relation with the resident population, building new skills, creating original synergies and new processes of inclusion and social innovation.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section establishes the cultural frameworks of research on new urban development trends, with insights into different project-specific areas. The second section provides a description of two field research applications at the NoLo neighbourhood in Milan (Italy).

The first two chapters are aimed at defining the thematic framework of the discussion, namely the role of design culture,

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specifically of spatial design, to increase the quality of the urban space and its relationship with the community that inhabits it.

The first chapter investigates the importance of the inner margins of urban space, interpreted not as borders but as narration devices regarding the functioning of the city and privileged places in the relationship between inhabitants and the materiality of the city. The second chapter, therefore, focuses on urban public spaces as enclosed accessible spaces, hospitable places of shared experiences, which can interpret the needs of the inhabitants, and support the urban changing processes. The following two chapters examine the theme of art and commerce as tools to trigger social relations and urban activation. These two themes are also the starting point of the two research experiences shown in the second section of the book.

The research activity will focus on a specific context of analysis and application: the neighbourhood recently named as NoLo – North of Piazzale Loreto – in Milan, characterized by the existence of many associations and a social district, a social street extended to a larger portion of territory. Social streets have become a consolidated reality in the city of Milan, recognized and registered by the Municipality.

While this new instrument has stimulated the re-activation and monitoring of neighbourhood spaces, apart from the communication and awareness of the inhabitants of being part of a community, NoLo remains marked by an evident cultural and territorial fragmentation that requires interventions.

Two approaches emerged from the surveys to enhance and further stimulate the regeneration activity of the neighbourhood, working together with the inhabitants and with the support of the social district:

- *Arnold - Art and Design in NoLo Social District* based on the set-up of exhibitions of artworks by 22 artists in 22 unconventional places of art through a co-design process with neighbours, artists and owners of the concerned sites.
- *ZIP Spaces* focused on the creation of interior design proposals through solutions of temporary reuse of dismantled commercial spaces that can display innovative aggregative formats of activities derived from existing business in the neighbourhood.

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These two activities have been constructed by imagining future scenarios of hybridization that will provide an answer to the future development of the neighbourhood. The uniqueness and high quality of craftsmanship activities are struggling to survive due to the new commercial and productive business formats: the rise of real estate development businesses led to gentrification the risks of which are faced by social districts and associations at every level of intervention.

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Introduction

Barbara Camocini and Davide Fassi, Politecnico di Milano

The first section of this book is about building the cultural framework of research done by the authors on spatial design trends dealing with public space and including focuses on urban inner margins, inclusivity and accessibility of urban space, public art/public spaces and retail and neighbourhood identity.

The first chapter “The City that Talks About Itself. Looking Beyond the Threshold into the Inner Urban Margins” by Barbara Camocini gives a wide view of the crisis of the contemporary city, its vulnerability and its growing risk of fragmentation. It also highlights the contemporary awareness of being able to intervene in the processes of urban transformation, also thanks to the increased power of Information Communications Technology and its ability to capture and display new energies of renewal. The analysis and the design of urban public space is confirmed, in the contemporary debate, as a privileged approach to intervene in this transformation process at the neighbourhood scale, involving human attitudes and sense of perception. In this field of research urban inner margins strongly contribute to generate a concise and updated representation of the city. Through urban margins inhabitants can physically perceive and interact with the city. Margins interruptions, such as thresholds or shop windows, overlooking the streets, convey and communicate its city internal dynamics of transformation, thus making inhabitants participate in this process.

Moving from the aforementioned margins, the second chapter, “Urban Interiors as Places of Inclusion” by Agnese Rebaglio, focuses

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on the importance of the redevelopment of the urban space due to its important role to foster innovation dynamics, besides the regeneration of the built environment and the social programs. The claim for new links with public space by the inhabitants is becoming more and more evident. Indeed, in a friendly and accessible public space, the inhabitants can recognize answers to both their explicit and unexpressed needs. The design of urban spaces is required to meet this new demand through intervention on human scale, designing sets to display renewed identities of a territory, promoting the relational dimension and including individuals and the community as references in the design process.

The chapter “Designing Public Spaces with Local Communities through Art” by Laura Galluzzo analyses the relationships among citizens’ initiatives, public art, public spaces and cities transformation. By the definition of public spaces and public art, this chapter focuses the attention on how street art is generating citizens involvement to improve the quality of contemporary cities. The author explains her research through the critical reading of several projects on public spaces through art including: *Giardino delle Culture* (Milan), *Borgo Vecchio Factory* (Palermo), *Favela Painting* (Brazil), *B.ART arte in Barriera* (Turin) and *Street art Ostiense district* (Rome).

Citizens’ involvement can be fostered through the enhancement of the neighbourhood identity. The chapter “The Role of Retail in Building a Neighbourhood Identity: The Isola Case Study” by Giulia Gerosa investigates how a transformation of a Milan neighbourhood (due to huge public and private estate interventions) could affect its identity and how a rooted tradition of craftsmanship and small shops has developed into the strongest feature of the area. According to the author, shops are increasingly becoming the new places for socializing (instead of public spaces) and since the Isola neighbourhood has been affected by a deep transformation, she underlines how a research project strategy could reinforce its image. The research presents three different approaches: the identification of highly characterized urban furnishing elements, a communication plan about the peculiarities of the neighbourhood and the definition of an event system to increase the neighbourhood attractiveness.

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This section introduces the second one where the results of research activities on the NoLo neighbourhood in Milan mirror the research background delineated here.

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The City that Talks About Itself. Looking Beyond the Threshold into the Inner Urban Margins

Barbara Camocini, Politecnico di Milano

Contemporary cities are studied by experts according to two different paradigms: on the one hand they are considered engines of innovation, models of economic and social progress; on the other, they represent the areas of gaping inequality and fragmentation (Florida, 2017). Over the last two decades, studies devoted to globalization and revolution have focused on urban organisms, as places where such transformations are particularly evident. In fact, new urban geographies have emerged. Some cities have gained global economic control positions – *global cities* – and others have seen a loss of functions and activities – *shrinking cities* – covering marginal positions in this system (Oswalt, 2006; Sassen, 1991).

These observations are part of a recent past, now well-analyzed and known, the effects of which are still ongoing, and are made more evident by the recent global crisis of 2008.

Urban regeneration linked to the so-called *Creative City* is now accompanied by the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, determined by an advanced digital culture, which attracts to the city a cultured and creative population with an economic level that allows access to urban goods and housing. This process tends to exclude residents who are not prepared to participate in these renewal dynamics, such as the elderly or groups of immigrants who escape due to the ongoing crisis and wars, and seek shelter and living resources in cities. Therefore, the contemporary disciplinary debate focuses on the need to include the population in the urban life experience with

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the aim of making all citizens able to recognize the public space as an extension of their own space. The aim is to enable them to interpret the messages communicated by the public space about modes of use and opportunities for social interaction. The strategies proposed to achieve inclusion lie at urban and metropolitan level, but also at global level, through the *Sustainable Development Goals* established by the *United Nations* (UN), the global organization that brings together its member states to confront common and global challenges.

The awareness of being able to intervene in the processes of urban transformation is also beginning to spread - even if the engines of these changes seem far from our field of intervention, both as citizens and as scientific experts - by stimulating innovation, creating synergies between existing resources and new technologies, enhancing the existing urban spaces, promoting the proper functioning of the city and its development. *Information and Communications Technology* (ICT) is emerging as a useful tool to monitor and direct the ongoing urban changes. It offers a sort of 'augmented vision' that allows to capture and interpret the energies of renewal, to see how they manifest themselves in public and private urban spaces, to recognize new or expanding networks, even when they have no physical evidence. Advanced technology is therefore recognized as an effective tool of inclusion and participation, used in the Smart City's strategic frameworks, to integrate bottom-up processes conducted by neighbourhood associations and by *Social Streets*, the network currently gaining importance in Italy.

The design culture is deeply involved in the inclusion of population in urban life; one of the fields in which research is now focusing more to pursue these goals is the regeneration of urban public spaces at the small scale, the one closest to the daily lives of the inhabitants, the neighbourhood. Interventions at this scale allow to affect the existence of a community that can use and share urban spaces. These spaces talk about their past and their future, and enable inhabitants to record, without fear, the changes taking place in their proximity. Through their neighbourhood, citizens feel immersed in contemporaneity, with its innovations and its challenges.

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The Changing City

Various studies, analysis and intervention processes contribute to build an up-to-date image of the contemporary city and its development. Different views intersect in the analysis of the contemporary city crisis, vulnerable to the growing risk of gentrification and to the increasing gap between citizens who participate in the urban experience and those who are excluded. Such processes, specifically in western economies, can be interpreted in a broader field of research through the UN global intervention plans to face the crisis due to the demographic concentration in cities of populations in difficulty. The observations surfacing from this vast literature on the subject allow us to build an image of contemporary urban life, the spaces in which it takes place, and to prefigure a future scenario.

By describing the contemporary city crisis, Florida sees in the urban regeneration led by creatives who have infused new strength and dynamism to the city – the same class of creatives, characterized by the three “t” of *Technologies, Tolerance and Talent* that he has identified – the risk of increasing the urban gentrification and the gap between people who can benefit the city and those who are excluded from this renewal: “the same clustering of talent and economic assets generates a lopsided, unequal urbanism in which a relative handful of superstar cities, and a few elite neighbourhoods within them, benefit while many other places stagnate and fall behind” (Florida, 2017, p. 21).

To imagine a future scenario of the city in relation to the changes that will affect it, we must consider how humanity can benefit from what has been defined the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*. It envisages the mutual strengthening of new applications of technology – *social media, mobile devices, cloud computing and big data* – supported by systems that combine physical, digital and biological worlds, impacting all disciplines, economies and industries, and even challenging ideas about what it means to be human. Schwab, a founding member of the *World Economic Forum*, argues that “these revolutionary factors could help shape a future that works for all by putting people first, empowering them and constantly reminding

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ourselves that all of these new technologies are first and foremost tools made by people for people” (Schwab, 2017). However, he warns against the threat of inequality and societies fragmentation, because this Industrial Revolution is likely to worsen the crisis of the suburbs, where poverty, insecurity and crime can increase, and economic and racial segregation may grow deeper, with the decline in middle-class neighbourhoods that had formed the structure of cities.

As the city, globally, is increasingly the site of humanitarian crisis, the UN-habitat – the United Nations program working towards a better urban future – identified the “sustainable development plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” as the 11th of 17 *Sustainable Development Goals*, in the 2030 agenda aimed at “making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UN, 2015). The sociologist Richard Sennett introduced the concept of *Urban Open System* – borrowed from biology – to achieve a certain porosity along city edges in order to secure spaces, even physical, to mend the urban transformations and the behaviour of its inhabitants, recognized as a matter of design (Sennett, 2015). This approach to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements requires systemic actions that integrate the interests of the various stakeholders, the operators responsible for the economic development of the city, the owners of the property, the inhabitants. The sociologist Saskia Sassen, in “Who owns our cities?” (Sassen, 2015), warns against speculative economic interests that can create a “loss of habitat in cities” and tend to homogenize urban spaces. Therefore, the debate on the contemporary city has fueled the research aimed at managing the risks associated with its development, seeking to promote systematic actions, also at international level, among several actors for long-term planning and regulatory frames in which participation, integration and sustainability are the driving goals.

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The Neighbourhood and Its Spaces

The city is the heart of the economic and social changes described above. Its vitality is proportional to its ability to absorb such changes and to respond to these stresses through continuous processes of adaptation and reinterpretation of spaces. If in the past, even recent, these changes were managed with architectural interventions, evident for conversion of use or expansion of the building heritage, today these changes of destination of use are increasingly widespread and specific to interiors (Zardini and Borasi, 2004). They do not cause deep alterations, but are carried out through *adaptive reuse* processes, which are often short-term, and can be repeated over time on an equational basis. These processes are carried out by staging intervention of “dry” procedures through modular and aggregate lightweight devices, which colonize existing interiors, giving them new meanings of use. Although these interventions rarely modify the physical aspect of the architecture, they determine new dynamics of the city's operation, new functions and services networks, often difficult to identify because they are not expressed outside and do not correspond to defined architectural typologies. Instead, they are increasingly recorded and communicated through ICT, social networks, web platforms and thematic web sites.

These conversions of use are the manifestation of the abandonment phenomenon, which affects the suburbs more severely. It is generated by relocation operations and by the global economy, as well as by the concentration of businesses in large sales structures at the expense of local stores. These dynamics of change affect the neighbourhood, which comes directly in contact with its inhabitants, in its vitality, in its urban pathways and in the public space. Because of this shift between function and figurative physicality of architecture – due to inaction in updating building heritage and architectural typologies – the margins between public and private space often become “mute”, they do not talk about the activities which take place inside them, generating discontinuity and loss of points of reference. A vast literature has been produced since the early years of the new century to search for new ways of representing the city, also using digital tools to collect and interpret data on its operations.

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Particularly well-known was the research aimed at the interpretation of the signals of mobile devices, like cellphones, to determine the geographical location of people, made by the *MIT SENSEable City Lab* team led by Carlo Ratti, to represent the dynamic use of urban spaces through aggregate data (Mitchell, 2005).

Neighbourhood, their own Space

The population experiences the city through its public space, which, as a space, is a margin-defined area, accessible to a person who gives it a meaning. The analysis and the design of urban public space acquire, in the contemporary debate, an increasingly complex and *human centred* connotation that involves the attitudes and sense of perception of humans. The concept of public space, meant as an urban void, broadens to include facades of buildings, all their segmentations, such as windows or *store fronts*, and everything that can be seen at eye level, and proceeding in the depth of the facades to perceive the function housed inside the buildings and to imagine the city operation, by linking its parts. The recent publication entitled *The city at eye level* introduces the concept of *plinth* to indicate such a place of relation (Karszenberg et al., 2016).

Urban changes are perceived more strongly at the neighbourhood level, as it is a specific location where the population can find a concentration of functions and services at a reasonable walking distance rather than spread to the big scale of the city (Mumford, 1961). The daily attendance of public open spaces and interiors accessible to the public, such as shops, promotes the creation of social relationships that strengthen over time. The inhabitants need to keep this bond with their own space, to know it and recognize it when it changes, finding part of themselves in the place they live in.

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Crossing the Boundaries of Urban Interiors: the Urban Thresholds

A public open space, for its very nature of “space”, is defined by margins that are, in the urban sphere, generally constituted by built surrounding. These margins are characterized by a geometric conformation, they are vertical surfaces perceived by the inhabitants as “stage scenes”, the backdrop of the “urban scene”. If they relate in an integrated way to the enclosed space, they contribute in communicating the identity of the public urban space and to stimulate its use (Bogoni, 2006).

The Margins and the Legibility of Urban Spaces

Urban margins, therefore, strongly contribute to generate a *cityscape* – a concise representation of the physical and visual aspects of the city – and have a strong impact on the inhabitants. By their visual characterization, they contribute to the *legibility* of urban form, to the formation of a *mental image* of the city, making its image more vivid and memorable, promoting the process of structuring and storing of spatial information (Lynch, 1960; O'Rourke, 2013).

Many directions and guidelines have been identified, even in the context of environmental psychology, to promote the *legibility* and visual quality of the urban setting. In particular, marginal elements, such as facades and fences, which define an “internal space” and contribute to giving it a meaning, are reminders of something typically anthropic for their inherent organizing role (Lynch, 1960).

Territoriality is an anthropological concept rooted in the observation of similar animal behaviors which is part of human nature. It designates the ways that humans communicate ownership, however temporary, of particular space. For example, people sitting in public places often place objects to mark the limit, talking loud, [...]” (O'Rourke, 2013, p. 113).

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Margins as Interaction Points Between Humans and Urban Physical Form

The strategy that operates at the *eye level* mentioned in the previous paragraph reinforces the *legibility* of urban space, which is made of open public spaces and margins. Margins between open public spaces and buildings contribute to create urban paths that form the structural part of the city's form. Urban pathways are the best places where inhabitants perceive the physical elements of the city, where citizens have “close encounters with buildings”, especially when space is perceived while walking, as in urban neighbourhood. Jan Gehl, an expert in urban design, identified three types of moves and proxemics relationships regarding “ground floor” and human's “close encounters” with buildings: walking alongside buildings; standing, sitting or being engaged in activities next to buildings, when people stand outside; seeing in and out of buildings (Gehl, Johansen and Reigstad, 2016). In the third type of city relationships he recognizes the importance of the visual contact and the perception of buildings on city sidewalks within people's urban experience. The inner margins of the neighbourhood are, in fact, a valid field of intervention to show the evidence, the traces of what happens in the interiors, where people and activities determine the real functioning of the city.

The Threshold, Interruption of the Margin, which Reveals the Inhabited Interior

Thus, from a point of view external of buildings, the inhabitants perceive the “linear” dimension of the margin concept and the corresponding “vertical surface” dimension linked to the building screens, which constitute the urban paths margins, our research topic. When margins are interrupted to allow transiting, either physically or visually, between open public space and internal space – which is usually private or allows access to the public, as in the commercial case – they reveal their volumetric dimension. The *threshold* interrupts the continuity of the “enclosure” of open public space and

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allows its crossing. According to this argument/reasoning/concept, even the *threshold*, which in the common language represents the portion of floor/pavement placed in the transition between one environment and another, can be considered a “three-dimensional space”. This space hosts complex and delicate relations between people as “threshold separates the public and private sphere, private and common property, self-determined and over-directed action. As an architectural element or spatial configuration, it highlights historically specific, culturally determined zones of transition, in which certain gestures and activities are performed. A threshold is something that is set between two situations, it amounts to an in-transit space and at the same time a space of demarcation and differentiation; it connects two places, two territories, two environments, and at the same time distinguishes them” (Bogoni, 2006).

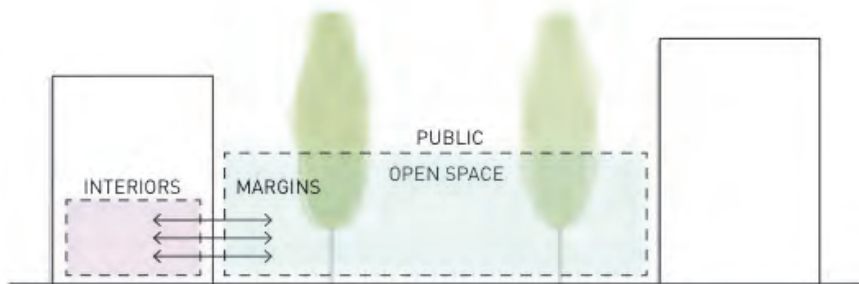


Fig. 1 – Margin-defined area diagram

The Threshold as a Point of View and Place “in Sight”

Regenerated interiors overlooking the streets requalify the open public space and make it safe. They are strategic observation and monitoring safe points. “Being watched” from the outside, they also allow an opposite visual flow, offering a narrative interpretation of what is happening inside. The crossing-margin space that defines an “inside” from an “outside” of the public space “becomes the natural place for a wide variety of potential activities that link inside

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functions with outside street life” (Gehl, Johansen and Reigstad, 2016, p. 30). The view changes totally while crossing the edge from one direction or the other, and seeing in and out of buildings visually connects activities. The activities and relationships that animate these spaces gain an increasing part in contemporary approaches to intervention for urban regeneration. The perception of human presence in urban, indoor and outdoor public spaces, the chance to see other people, but also the possibility to perceive sounds, voices and smells, increase the feeling of being in the “right” and safe place, designed for humans. “Even the modest form of contact of merely seeing and hearing as being near to others is apparently more rewarding and more in demand than the majority of the other attractions offered to the public space of cities” (Gehl, 2011, p. 29).

The contribution of Jane Jacobs, a well-known anthropologist expert in urban development dynamics, remains the basis of the contemporary approaches to analysis and intervention:

Streets and sidewalks are the most important public places of a city and are its most vital organs [...] sidewalks, their bordering uses, and their users, are active participants in the drama of civilization versus barbarism in cities. To keep the city safe is a fundamental task of a city's streets and its sidewalks” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 29).

These spaces should be kept alive and inhabited as they are the favoured places for social relations to reveal themselves, easing collective actions and what may be defined as *Social Capital* that is made of trust, norms, and networks, which gathers for a common purpose.

Boundaries, Open Edges, Open Systems

These observations allow us to introduce the concept of *porosity* as an important quality of our margins. In this sense, we can reference Sennet's observation of *city edges*, applying it specifically to the margins of urban paths. To illustrate his idea of *Open City*, Sennet introduces the difference between *boundary* and *border*, two types of *edges* defined in the discipline of evolutionary biology. If

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boundary is a guarded territory, a non-traversable wall, the *border* represents the cell membrane, porous and resistant at the same time. It can hold in some valuable elements of the city, letting other elements flow through. Metaphors from biology are confirmed to be the most suitable to represent the contemporary city as a living organism that changes, and the idea of a city as an open system made by incomplete forms and unsolved narratives (Sennett, 2013), rooted in the same nature of the city, as a meeting place, a place of diversity, of exchange, an *Open City*.

Conclusion

Numerous design strategies can be identified to enrich the meanings of margins and thresholds in the urban public space. The identification of signs, material and immaterial, which define the threshold character and communicate its porosity, those that foster to stop and those which help to form a city experience and the *legibility* of the urban space will be shown through the design research examples presented in the second section of the book. The most difficult challenge, however, is the need to provide directions and intervention guidelines that can make the whole set of public space elements work in an harmonious way, as illustrated in the previous paragraphs. This planning requires a systemic view of public space, a *place-making* action that integrates private interests with the public interests of the neighbourhood, starting from a deep knowledge of the city's development dynamics.

The importance of a permanent updating process of urban spaces was introduced at the beginning of the essay. The organic attitude to change, that characterizes the contemporary city, risks however to create in the inhabitants disorientation effects and difficulties in recognizing urban places as "their own", especially on the human scale of the neighbourhood. For this purpose, the opportunity to know and to participate in the making of their own history and the history of their space, strengthens the link with the neighbourhood. Depth, transparency and threshold dynamics contribute to an *augmented view* of the urban space, as they allow people to read

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what goes on beyond the margins and interpret the dynamics of internal modification of the city. This augmented view is made more effective and complete by the use of ICT in all its forms, including social networks – and social streets – and, on a larger scale, the Smart City attitude.

Smart City, acting through the development of a “strategic framework” for the coordination of heterogeneous intervention plans at different levels, provides for partnership and cooperation between people and institutions to make citizens active agents of the process. It allows to highlight local peculiarities by building an ever-updated place identity. In the urban population, an increasingly active use of the ICT tool is spreading in relation to the management of its urban space, which denotes a desire to participate, to track, to expose, and take care of its habitat. The interaction between government institutions and citizens, between public administration and private property, in the design, management and re-enactment of public space, of urban voids as well as of their margins, allows to maintain a systemic viewpoint in the city transformation. At the same time it ensures a more faithful perception to the actual and local dynamics of development in order to consider the needs and resources expressed by the inhabitants concerning the public spaces on the neighbourhood scale.

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Urban Interiors as Places of Inclusion

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Friendly and Accessible Interiors

In our human experience, finding ourselves outside a space is inconceivable: people could find themselves outside a place, but inside the one that contains it, like a sort of Chinese boxes game. It is a condition that occurs whenever a boundary, a dividing line between the inside and the outside, a distance, a margin enclosing a space and a larger space in turn containing it is identified¹. Space, bordered by margins, is what allows a man to settle in a place and live there. This space is the core of architectural design – “Architects-artists should be sculptors of emptiness because architecture differs from sculpture as you look at it from the inside. And the interiors are more important than the outside, because they are going to be used” (Friedman, 2017) – and is managed by skills referring to the scale of design, that of the object, the furniture, the detail, but also the scale of the service, meant as the ability to imagine proper user interfaces for the target user.

Space is defined as friendly when it is equipped and designed so that those inside it (passers-by, visitors, users, workers, residents) feel welcome and recognise in it what they need to carry out the

¹ This separation, in terms of opening of a space with respect to another surrounding space, is based on Heidegger through an etymological analysis, which connects the term *space* to the concept of opening: «Whereof does it speak in the word *space*? Clearing-away is uttered therein. This means: to clear out, to free from wilderness. Clearing-away brings forth the free, the openness for man's settling and dwelling» (Heidegger, 1984, p. 23).

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experiences and activities for which they are there².

Urban public spaces are friendly when they are accessible, open to everyone and able to offer a shared collective experience, but also when they propose original functions, capable of interpreting explicit and unexpressed, even unpredictable and temporary needs of the inhabitants of the same portion of the city. At the same time, friendly spaces can pass on the territory's inherent values and potentials.

The design of friendly spaces appears to be particularly important to support processes of change where areas of the city show weaknesses, lie on the margins, witness the presence of discomfort and conflict.

These spaces, for example, are the areas of the suburbs, which should not be seen only from a geographical perspective, i.e. as areas located far from a centre (the Italian word for “suburbs” is *periferia*, which literally means “brought around”). These are rather portions of urban areas that often fall into the deteriorated margins of cities – between urban and natural environment, between cities and countryside, between cities and large infrastructures – but also as internal enclaves somehow forming cut-out areas separated from the urban fabric, through more or less explicit or implicit margins, and endowed with their own features. Indeed, as Marc Augé says, if “globalization is nothing but the declaration of a planetary space opened to the free movement of goods, people, and ideas in a continuous space”, what we actually know is “a discontinuous world, in which prohibitions of all kinds proliferate”, that is a world of separations, distinctions, fractures to heal and stitch.

These are also the spaces marked by the presence of huge numbers of different ethnic groups, that question the project as to the need to translate place accessibility into the ability to meet multiple cultures of use and living, the capability to offer multiple sharing

² Starting during the second half of the 20th Century, environmental psychology has theorized the conditions for which a place generates such feelings, introducing concepts like affordance but also appropriation, attachment and identity. The main theories refer to “behaviour settings” (cfr. Barker, R. G. (1968) *Ecological Psychology: Concepts and methods for studying the environment of human behaviour*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press), the “environmental affordance” (cfr. Gibson, J. J. (1979) *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin), and the “theory of place” (cfr. Canter, D. (1977) *The Psychology of Place*. London: Architectural Press).

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platforms of collective experiences, but also the ability of belonging and identification in territories that often do not represent nor tell about their own home or roots.

In this respect, talking about space accessibility means talking about rights, democracy and citizenship, imagining cities that offer opportunities for the users to express themselves as able to act and co-build the environment in which they live. It is a process involving many local and international institutions, but also many movements of citizens who from below are committed to transforming not only the cities but also the society. As an antidote to denied citizenship, to loneliness, they build experiences of deep democracy, but also of design activism as tools that promote forms of active responsibility for citizens.

Designing Places, between Urban Regeneration and Proximity Actions

In urban environments lacking high-quality public spaces, where these are inhospitable and inaccessible, where there is no condition for a proximity sociality, many situations of suffering and marginality occur very often: “Sociality is a fundamental path creating the demand for happiness [...]. In its deepest core, urban discomfort is the poignant expression of the bonds that crumble, and the human loneliness is expressed by a desolate city” (Colmegna, 2012, p. 43).

Urban marginality is a multidisciplinary issue. To solve situations of disappearance or physical degradation of parts of the cities, urban regeneration works are mainly aimed at proposing *adaptive reuse solutions* (Camocini, 2016) for the built environment and giving back to the market and the citizenship restored and renewed architectures with new functions. Social innovation investments are equally important. Through shared, inclusive and cooperative processes between institutions and the vibrant network of local players (often called *city makers*), many actions are being experimented subsequently becoming practices and policies to improve the

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conditions and increase the opportunities for the integration and life of groups that inhabit the suburbs.

Among the reflections and options proposed with regards to situations of urban marginality and possible related innovation dynamics, besides the regeneration of the built environment and the social programs, the redevelopment of the urban space also plays an important role. Several research programs, networks and funds both locally and internationally aim to hinder the degradation features characterising many European peripheries³, recognising the enhancement of urban space at proximity scale as a positive element.

Declaring the dignity of urban interiors means acknowledging the possibility to consider them not as “the waste of the built environment, but as architectural spaces that must in turn be built and formalised” (Ottolini, 1987). Adopting a point of view and action on the city from its *interior*, i.e. placing it at close distance from the object of observation and on a human scale prior to an architectural one, is the approach brought by design, combining this vision and detailed approach with the ability to broaden the look to macroscopic horizons, to scenarios changing the meaning of the contemporary city, essential to understand the global context.

In their daily actions, individuals and social groups continuously reinvent the spaces they live in, “transforming, reprogramming, recontextualising, recombining spaces and creating new layers of meaning, knowledge, information, and practices” (Iaconesi and Persico, 2013, p. 132). We read many signals of repossession of urban spaces, of establishment of new links with them coming from the inhabitants themselves, also through extemporaneous actions aimed at organising and occupying such spaces for new forms of use. These behaviours tell us about a value inherent to the public space, an identity-building and symbolic value; they talk about the awakening of a collective creativity and an even urban sociality, a new demand for well-being and happiness, we could say. This restored link with the area where one lives, where one feels at *home*,

³ The 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, with its *Sustainable Development Program* (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>); or, at European level, the *Urban Innovative Actions Initiative* (<http://www.uia-initiative.eu>); recent actions in Italy are the *Call for social and cultural regeneration of degraded urban areas* (2015) and the *Special Program of intervention for urban regeneration and suburbs safety* (2016).

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suggests to the institutions the urge for re-lived and re-semantified places.

The design of urban spaces is required to meet this new demand brought by new ways of living the city and its spaces, with a new ability to write and narrate, adopting not only new languages and aesthetics but also updated tools and processes.

On a Human Scale

First of all, the dimension of scale: design can re-activate “mending” processes – using the term adopted by Renzo Piano⁴ – with small-scale interventions. In this way the project gets more and more specific, *acupuncture*, as it acts modifying the perception and the otherwise inactive status of a public space whose users are constantly changing and evolving through small actions triggering a reaction, a change. Little or slight modifications that proceed “through fragments that bind together *ex-post*, rather than proposing an *ex-ante* prefigurative framework” (Aymonino and Mosco, 2006, p. 19) and that support different ways of using the city, different kinds of relationship between individuals and between groups, fostering innovative and positive behaviours. These are the small interventions recalled in the 2008’s census made by *A12 group* for the city of Milan, of small urban places “to treat with kindness”: “they are *waste spaces*, apparently without any quality, small public spaces inside the city, but big enough to result in a resource for the neighbourhood; they are still recognisable, but unused or neglected. Everyone can see them everyday without realising how scarcely liveable they are and how little it could take to make them welcoming”⁵. Or even the interactive activities of the Canadian group *Daily Tous Les Jours*, an interaction design studio with a focus on collective experiences: transforming everyday life with enchanting scenarios in public spaces, their projects are opportunities to “enable change, stimulate engagement that sparks conversations

⁴ Retrieved from G124’s Report 2013-2014. G124 is the working group created by Senator Renzo Piano.

⁵ http://www.gruppoa12.org/psdtcg/piccolispazi_info_01.htm.

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amongst strangers, and create strong bonds between citizens and their environment”⁶. Their swings, for example, bring back to a human scale a huge and busy street in Montreal, encouraging passersby to stop and collaborate with each other (*21 Balançoires* is a musical installation from which certain melodies emerge only through cooperation between players).

Designing Sets

The design of a small, urban space often also takes a shape that makes it similar to setup design. From the latter it borrows the dimension of storytelling, that is the disposition to be the exponent of a content other than itself; the communicative ability, as bearer of messages and promoter of renewed identities of a territory; the dimension of temporariness, gaining the chance of reversibility or of a sequence of different solutions. Thinking in terms of set means imagining the space as reversible, both in its material nature and in its structural organisation, as temporary, in terms of both constructive and symbolic nature, and as symbolic and strongly communicative. Just like *Nevicata14*, the temporary installation that lasted the time of one Expo edition, set up in *Piazza Castello* in Milan in 2015. Designed by the group *Guidoni & Salvadeo + Snark*, winners of the competition *Atelier Castello*, a participatory initiative promoted by the Municipality and coordinated by *Triennale di Milano* to collect proposals for the rearrangement of the square for Expo 2015, the project included a “flexible and uniform square, ready to host different events, accessible to everyone, equipped as a stage thanks to an extensive network of technological services, equipped with seats, potted trees and furnishing elements able to shade and refresh during the summer thanks to vaporisers”. One single material covered all the surfaces, walkable like snowy mantles and removable at the end of their use. A series of mobile devices enlivened the square and provided refreshment, seating, shade and coolness, offering a different day-to-day landscape.

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.dailytouslesjours.com/>.

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Relationships at the centre

In his Manifesto for Happiness, economist Stefano Bartolini devotes extensive coverage to the desirable policies around the destiny of the urban form. He is not the only one arguing⁷ for the need to increasingly promote the relational dimension within cities, an essential element for an economy of happiness. One of the primary measures is the reorganisation of the urban space, making it usable and accessible, capable of fostering the encounter between neighbours and strangers. In particular, “the high-quality pedestrian public space, the parks, the squares and the sports centres are not luxury but an essential need. Their contribution to life quality can be greater than the increase in individual consumption, as what we need to be happy is to be able to walk and be surrounded by people” (Bartolini, 2010, p. 42). Thus the project finds new forms to design spaces of encounter inviting to rest, to play, to irony. But that’s not all. The report also recalls the dimension of participation: the boundaries between process and project are blurred, mainly thanks to the activation of participatory and inclusive paths where the individuals and the community are the objects of reference. More than user-centred design, community-centred design plays a crucial role and activates participatory processes among all the stakeholders of a given context (Manzini, Collina and Evans, 2004).

A typical example of relational space is the playground, which not only meets the need for playing spaces for young people and children, but also becomes a place for meeting and urban regeneration. This is what happened in the *Dutch city of Dordrecht*, with the NL architects’ project⁸. *The Oud Krispijn district*, designed in 1932 as a *Garden City* for the working class – a regular grid of small houses with front and rear gardens, alleys, many hedges and small squares – has witnessed a significant decay over the years, losing its original charm. Several ethnic groups have found a home there and opened many stores with exotic flavours. When the

⁷ See also Morace, 2015.

⁸ <http://www.nlarchitects.nl>; <http://www.play-scapes.com/play-design/contemporary-design/beetsplein-playground-nl-architects-and-ds-landschaparchitecten-dordrecht-netherlands-2003/>.

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municipality started working at the regeneration of the neighbourhood, the first action focused on the availability and the quality of public spaces and playgrounds. The project managed to offer specific functions but at the same time to be open to everyone's enjoyment: the concentric ring configuration, like the rings of a tree's trunk, provides more green and private areas on the borders and public and game areas at the centre. More than being just a set of game tools, the space is conceived as a new landscape, also thanks to a project working at multiple levels where everything is game: the square has become a meeting place, a benchmark for the neighbourhood, a non-discriminatory context for any age range.

We are (also) the Places Surrounding Us

The man-made environment finds in the urban form, meant as an aggregation of various types and dimensions of dwellings and public places, one of its first institutions in the history of mankind. The connection that permeates the life of the individual, the community and the city they experience is acknowledged: "we believe that we are made of the same flesh of the places and that, for this reason, there's a strange correspondence and similarity between them and us. We are the maps of ourselves and the places surrounding us, just like these become maps of our bodies and our senses" (La Cecla, 1988, p. 158). An issue appears to emerge in the recent debate around the tools and strategies put in place to support the resilience of cities, i.e. their adaptation, resistance, transformation and renewal skills, facing the challenges of contemporary economic, social and environmental crises. This is the question of designing public urban spaces suitable to meet new needs. In particular, we are referring to the need for places capable of interpreting on the one hand forms and ways of a constantly evolving social and community structure, and to take the challenges and opportunities brought by communication technologies but also artefacts production on the other. On this side, particularly equipped for the methods and tools that can put in place, is interior design as applied to the planning of urban spaces, interpreting them through new material facilities (materials, equipment, signs and

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symbols, light etc.) for new ways of use and new storytelling and dialogue skills on the scale of the relationship with the individual as well as the community.

Approaching the issue of quality and design of urban spaces through design tools means, first and foremost, reading and interpreting the set of values and the intrinsic potentialities of a place and the community of people living there as well as putting people and their action/reaction around space at the centre, it means to adopt processes that stimulate a sense of community and ownership of the space.

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Designing Public Spaces with Local Communities through Art

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Context: cities in transformation

In the last few decades the administration of our cities has completely changed and from a Fordist-type economy centred on production we have moved to a post-Fordist economy aimed to acquire new tourist flows mainly through the consumption of culture. (Judd and Fainstein, 1999)

City areas that in the past hosted the production of goods and the transport of the goods produced are increasingly being turned into places of “cultural production” – it is enough to mention the *Tate* in London, the *Hangar Bicocca* and the Bicocca neighbourhood in Milan, or the *High Line* in New York – and the post-modern cities we live in increasingly base their existence on their cultural economy and the production of cultural assets.

In the past, the image of a city was entrusted to the descriptions of writers and the stories of film directors; just think of the number of images of Paris, London or New York each of us already has before we visit them. The novels we have read, paintings we have seen and films we have watched filter the perception that we have of the places we visit, or at least they anticipate that perception. Of course, as Amendola writes, the story of a city is not the same thing as the city itself, but a city with no image is a paradox, as it is through its image that the city lives and meets people (Amendola, 1997).

Today, however, the image of a city is no longer given by poets, great travellers and writers.

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The image of the city is a variable to be placed under control and manipulated in a very short time, so what in the past was left to travellers and writers today is entrusted to men of marketing and media. The story of the city takes on the logic and structure of the story of advertising. (...) The postmodernist city tries (...) to control the impression it makes on others. The city is, in the words of Jukes, image-conscious (Amendola, 1997).

In these processes of territorial transformation and promotion of places, the “visibility” of the city becomes a strategic element, which has a direct effect on the change of the relationship between population and territory: as we have seen, the connection between resident, worker and user/consumer of the city is lacking and there is an increase in commuting, de-urbanization processes and flows of “city users”, who consume the opportunities and services that the city offers, but do not live there [(Martinotti, 1993)] (Guala, 2007).

Alongside the top-down image-building of the city or individual neighbourhoods, we increasingly see examples of bottom-up transformation and enhancement of urban areas. Some examples are the diffusion of *Social Streets*, designer collectives working on public spaces together with the local population through co-design and participatory public art. Underlying these phenomena we can see a new relationship between local residents and the city, between citizens and the area they live in, one that is different from the fast “consumer” relationship mentioned previously, between temporary users and the city.

Over the past few decades the relationship between the city and its inhabitants has radically changed and, as an “attitude of curiosity, desire for discovery, openness to surprise, the wish to experience something different” has been developing among the latter, they have acquired “the eye of the tourist”.

Every city can become – and aspires to be – a tourist attraction; everyone can become a tourist in his own city. (...) Beauty, variety, centrality, accessibility and safety are considered essential attributes (Amendola, 1997).

Also, echoing the famous words of Italo Calvino in a lecture he gave at Columbia University, on his work *Invisible Cities*: “A city is a combination of many things: memory, desires, signs of a language; it is a place of exchange, as any textbook of economic history will tell you – only, these exchanges are not just trade in goods, they also

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involve words, desires, and memories” (Calvino, 1978) Amendola says: “Today, the new, contemporary city is made of transactions and thrives on symbolic exchanges rather than the production of goods. It is oriented to the outside world and to interconnection, and its image and attractiveness are its most valuable asset. The demands and the needs of tourists, guests and curious visitors, or “city users”, are just as important to administrators as are those who reside or work there” (Amendola, 1997).

Within this context, this paper looks into the relationship between urban transformation, public spaces, art and local resident communities. We shall start by defining these terms.

Public Spaces

Adopting a morphological approach we can say that public space consists of “publicly owned” open and closed spaces that are open and accessible to all and dedicated to certain specific functions. They are therefore plazas, parks, avenues, streets, stations, local markets, stadiums, etc.

Various different actors contribute to the characterisation of such spaces: local administrators, architects, urban planners, local residents and other city-users. Each of them brings different ideas, tastes, needs and desires that are represented by the variety of public space transformation processes in action: privatising, aestheticising, militarising and guaranteeing safety, commercialising and reappropriation. In each of these processes some are active protagonists and others are excluded.

We talk about regeneration in these places when they are undergoing transformations that add value to the public space in question.

Regeneration can be defined as the transformation of a place (residential, commercial or open space) that has displayed the symptoms of environmental (physical), social and/or economic decline. Regeneration can have the effect of breathing new life and vitality into an ailing community, industry and area [bringing] sustainable, long term improvements to the local quality of life, including economic, social and environmental needs. We are looking for evidence of culture as a driver, a catalyst or at the very least a key player in the process of regeneration, or renewal (Evans and Shaw, 2004).

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A key theme that may run through all the different types of regeneration mentioned above is the identity of a place and the hospitality it offers to the various populations passing through it. In this regard the theme of urban interiors is interesting.

In the last few years the theme of interior urban spaces has gained more prominence within the discipline of interior design. “Talking about urban interiors implies matching two apparently conflicting terms, as they traditionally refer to spaces that have seldom been able to interact with one another, indicating respectively open and closed places. This theme was met with ever-growing interest: numerous competitions and public initiatives were promoted in order to rethink a few *urban bits* and redesign them to convert them into actual interior spaces. This term, usually related to buildings, conveys a sense of protection, hospitality, shelter, comfort, well-being and familiarity, typical of enclosed spaces” (Crippa and Di Prete, 2011).

And also “one inevitably wonders whether architecture is capable of elaborating such modernity on a solitary quest, and whether the world of design has the ‘means’ to transform portions of cities into places that attract, seduce and promote, as requested ever more frequently by administrations and citizens” (Colaci in Crespi 2011: 42). Art becomes an indispensable tool for designing such urban interiors.

Street art and Local Communities

The transformations we have been talking about also bring various changes to the management policies for public spaces: first and foremost, the growing diffusion of calls for proposals and applications issued by local administrations and the *European Commission*, who designate funds for the realisation of various kinds of urban development through cultural activities and citizen participation.

At the same time, there is growing interest from local actors such as associations, residents and stakeholders who are looking for funding to enable them to fulfil their ideas, desires and needs so as to transform the abandoned urban areas in their neighbourhood, near

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their homes, into attractive, welcoming places. Particularly through art and adopting bottom-up participatory processes, it is possible to trigger collaboration between the local population and artists invited to “redevelop” the areas in question using an inclusive approach, not working on the public space as a vacuum to fill, but rather as an occasion for dialogue, exchange and collective enrichment, and above all attributing greater value to the regenerative process rather than focusing on the end transformation alone.

In the case of *Giardino delle Culture*¹ in Milan, the resident community together with three local associations, *Comitato XXII Marzo*, *È-Vento* and *Teatro Laboratorio Mangiafuoco*, directed the development of an abandoned area in the zone of *Piazza Cinque Giornate* and, thanks to a private sponsor and the permission of the local administration, has transformed the area into an attractive garden hosting various neighbourhood activities, including concerts, markets, festivities and performances. In this case, two murals by the internationally famous writer Millo enrich the 1250 sq.m. garden, adding new identity and character to the new public space.



Fig. 1 – The abandoned area before the realization of Giardino delle culture

¹ https://www.facebook.com/pg/giardinodelleculture/about/?ref=page_internal

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Fig. 2 – The area after the realization of Giardino delle culture



Fig. 3 – Giardino delle culture during one event organized by the local communities

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*Borgo Vecchio Factory*² is another bottom-up project, run by the no-profit organisations *PUSH* and *Per Esempio Onlus* in collaboration with the artist Ema Jons, to redevelop the Borgo Vecchio neighbourhood in Palermo, by creating murals by different artists starting with the local children. The initiative has enabled the local residents to see their neighbourhood with new eyes and so to value it more. The project was funded through crowdfunding and the experience was followed by creation of *Street Art Factory*, a format replicable in other contexts which was selected as one of the forty finalists in the CheFare³ call for proposals.



Fig. 4 – Co-realization of one of the murales with the local inhabitants

² <http://borgovecchiofactory.tumblr.com>

³ <https://www.che-fare.com/i-40-finalisti-di-chefare3/>

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Fig. 5 – Co-realization of one of the murales with the local inhabitants



Fig. 6 – Co-realization of one of the murales with the local inhabitants

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Fig. 7 – Co-realization of one of the murales with the local inhabitants

Street art is a low-cost tool able to change and sometimes really revolutionise the perception of a place, as happened in the case of the actions carried out by the Favela Painting Foundation⁴, run by Dutch artists Dre Urhahn and Jeroen Koolhaas, which have transformed various Brazilian favelas, buildings and plazas in other contexts but always with the participation of residents and local communities. The premise underlying the actions of the two artists is that art can bridge diversity and that with a single, forceful message it can bring social change even to the most fragile of areas.

As we can read on their website: “By collaborating with locals, art is used as a weapon to combat prejudice, create sustainability solutions and attract positive attention. By ensuring that each step of the creative process is open, collaborative, and community driven, Favela Painting can effectively contribute to the education and empowerment of the community, particularly local youth, installing a sense of pride and community ownership”.

Street art is a forceful means of communication and is part of the

⁴ <https://www.favelapainting.com>

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dialogue between the artist and cities, urban spaces and residents.

In Rome, the *Big City Life*⁵ project, run by the city's public residential building utility, *Ater Roma*, the *Associazione Culturale 999* and the *Municipio VIII*, involved the over 500 social-housing residents in the *Tor Marancia* neighbourhood, together with twenty international artists from ten different countries who came to Rome to paint the neighbourhood. The work created by each artist is the outcome of meetings with the local residents. Together they total twenty monumental murals painted on the facades of the buildings in the district. At the same time, the artists held workshops and meetings with students at the neighbourhood schools, creating an even stronger bond between art and local community.

The project is part of the wider Street Art Ostiense District, which enhances and promotes the Ostiense neighbourhood. Totalling over 40 street art works, it has transformed the area into a real open-air museum.



Fig. 8 – The facades of Big City Life Project, Rome.

⁵ <http://www.bigcitylife.it>

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Another interesting example of urban regeneration through collaboration between street artists and local communities is the *Barriera di Milano* neighbourhood in Turin. The process was coordinated by *Urban Barriera*⁶, an urban development programme funded by the City of Turin, the Piedmont Region and the European Community. Its mission was to trigger an overall improvement process in *Barriera di Milano*, a historical neighbourhood in the north zone of the city of Turin. One of the actions promoted by *Urban Barriera* is *B.ART Arte in Barriera*⁷, an international call for public art project proposals that aim to improve the urban quality of the Turin neighbourhood through diffuse artistic activities. The theme of the call was a single concept to apply to 13 blind facades in the area. The writer Millo was selected and he built a story that crosses the city. The subject of the graffiti is the human-urban space relationship and through his work the artist expresses his hope for a new relationship between them. The jury which selected the winner consisted of both experts and local residents to enable citizens to take part in the transformation of places they lived in and guarantee a high degree of inclusion in the decision-making process.

While in the *Ostiense* neighbourhood there was collaboration between artist and local population at the generative stage, and in the case of *Praça Cantão*, a square in the *Santa Maria* favela in Rio, residents participated in the production stage of work. In this case, residents took part in the decision-making process of assessing proposals presented through the public call.

It is also interesting to see how the street art works in our cities can trigger new uses for and new ways of using public space. Guided tours of the open-air art works are on the increase, such as those of *Alternative Tours Palermo*⁸, which offers exploratory tours in the centre of Palermo in search of murals. In this case participation and sharing occur in enjoying the work. The presence of groups of tourists, residents and guides in the place brings a new quality to urban space and donates new value to the streets of our cities transforming them into contemporary art galleries open to all.

⁶ <http://www.comune.torino.it/urbanbarriera/index.shtml>

⁷ <http://arteinbarriera.com/online/it/alla-scoperta-di-bart/>

⁸ <http://alternativetourspalermo.it>

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Fig. 9 – Alternative tours Palermo.



Fig. 10 – Alternative tours Palermo.

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So we can say that collaboration between artist and local community, and the inclusion and participation of urban populations in regenerative processes may take place in different ways and at different times. In this chapter we have presented six different cases:

1. role of the local community in triggering interest in an abandoned area: Il Giardino delle Culture
2. residents take part at the decisional stage, assessing and selecting the artist and the work: B.ART Arte in Barriera
3. thanks to crowdfunding, residents manage the whole process from the bottom up: Borgo Vecchio Factory
4. the local community takes part at the ideating stage: Big City Life
5. the local community takes part at the production stage: Praça Cantão
6. the very presence of the art work in public space promotes new ways for the urban population to benefit from it: Alternative Tours Palermo.

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The Role of Retail in Building a Neighbourhood Identity: the Isola Case Study

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Within our apparently immobile cities, where nothing seems to indicate the existence of an ongoing urban revolution, there is however a phenomenon of great historic originality consisting in a sort of functional landslide of almost all the urban and architectural mechanisms deriving from the denial or overcoming of many even recent predictions. An urban revolution taking place “inside” architecture to re-functionalise a city that has got older than its supposed use. This process of re-functionalisation is not a simple update of the existing typologies, but rather implies the starting of an uninterrupted evolution process. This continuous re-functionalisation of the contemporary city is then carried out through the designing of its interior spaces, seen as an autonomous infrastructure that changes the existing architectural complexes’ social and production functions while respecting their nature, renewing their image creating those mental maps “within” the city (already mentioned in 1960 by Kevin A. Lynch in *The image of the city*, translated into Italian in 1964) made of signs and furniture, advertising communications and product displays, making the city recognisable to its own citizens and creating an expressive context going beyond any architectural macro-signs, increasingly far from daily experience (Branzi, 2010).

In this regard, interior design becomes extremely important for the development of the contemporary city and the definition of a precise neighbourhood identity, giving life to transformations that are not imposed from the top, as is in traditional urban planning and development, but rather resulting from the systematisation of tiny

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realities leading to a continuous and more spontaneous evolution of the city (Multiplicity, 2003). Indeed, the increasingly faster change in people's lifestyle finds in interior design a more diligent response to the change in urban space usability needs, a phenomenon which, especially in European cities, becomes clear in the growing spread of re-functionalisation projects and restoration of existing architectural spaces originally designed for already obsolete functions.

Retail Spaces as Opportunities for the Development of the Territory

Within such scenario is the debate on the role of retail with respect to the qualitative perception of public urban spaces.

The new places of consumption and distribution are more and more turning into spaces of sociality and interpersonal relationships, gaining the function originally attributed to public spaces (Castaldi, Mauri, 2005).

The quality of a place is no longer only determined by the shape or aesthetic value of architectural volumes (Lynch, 1960), but also by the quality of the products being sold, by the shapes selected to promote them and by the set of signs and colours corresponding to the individual identities of the public moving around urban spaces (Branzi, 2010).

Furthermore, distribution now permeates every aggregation space or crossing point, yet showing the ability to even change spaces that did not have such function (Zoppi, 1994).

The new nature of the point of sale thus becomes an opportunity for the organic development of the city, fostering social relationships on the one hand and leading to a new use of the existing architectural heritage on the other. Today, within such scenario of micro-changes retail spaces must not only fulfil the functional needs of business, but also be able to combine more complex environmental issues giving a positive response to the context of reference, contributing to it through the environmental quality of their spaces, turning from goods containers into moments of interaction, socialisation and communication (Benjamin, 1996).

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Retail spaces design can thus be read in relation to the inhabited space, becoming an opportunity for the qualitative development of the urban fabric at various scales through a precise yet systemic planning of retail stores, to turn them into a chance for urban redevelopment.

Indeed, the systematisation of small spaces may lead to the spread of shopping malls, giving new life to urban realities that would otherwise lose vitality due to the competition with large-scale distribution. Only through a community-based approach will retail survive and implement an urban dynamism linked to the vivacity of retail itself, where socialisation functions might be shared by the various players involved (Ferraresi and Parmigiani, 2007).

The Isola Urban Regeneration Project

This is the framework for the integrated urban regeneration project *Isola e le sue piazze*, promoted in January 2015 by Comune di Milano in partnership with Regione Lombardia, deriving from a Memorandum of understanding born in 2013 for Expo 2015, with the purpose of fostering local entrepreneurship through “the integrated development and relaunch of top retail, tourist, agro-industrial, food and wine and craftsmanship realities as well as of the urban-territorial system”.

The tender focused on the planning and implementation of events, communication and furniture for the enhancement of *Distretto Urbano del Commercio Isola*¹, identifying three main objectives: increasing the frequentation of the area offering activities and initiatives capable of attracting flows of citizens and tourists also through a greater incoming in retail stores; outlining a plan of strategic positioning of the area as an urban hub; developing a concept capable of giving a distinctive identity to the district, taking into account the relationship with the existing urban and retail

¹ “An area with homogeneous characteristics for which public and private players are proposing integrated-management, community-oriented projects to pursue the social, cultural and economic development and environmental enhancement of the urban and territorial context of reference”, established and recognised by Regione Lombardia on 7th May 2009.

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context and the connections between the various parts of the neighbourhood.



Fig. 1 – Isola district like a neighbourhood between heritage and innovation

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Over the last few years the Milanese district of Isola has been characterised by a strong dichotomy due to the recent urban transformations of the territory. More specifically the district, more than any others in Milan, has preserved a strong identity also deriving from the difficulty to access it and to create a dialogue with the surrounding metropolis. The district, with its 19th-Century urban planning approach and characterised by a strong production and craftsmanship tradition, had to deal with the new architecture of Porta Nuova, from Bosco Verticale to the Unicredit tower in piazza Gae Aulenti, one of the biggest redevelopment projects in Europe that brought three districts with different peculiarities and weaknesses back together (Garibaldi, Varesine and Isola), with an overall width of more than 290,000 sqm and representing a perfect combination between urban identity and European vision, leading to a new interpretation of the urban space not only from a local, but also from a metropolitan point of view.



Fig. 2 – An event at the Unicredit Pavilion where interior and urban space merge into a single element

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At Isola the “neighbourhood” vibe is still very strong. This is due to both the coexistence of residential buildings, services and retail spaces (in particular local businesses and artisan workshops) and the urban morphology of the district itself, with its network of public spaces and laybies where people use to stop over still nowadays. Furthermore, the presence of spaces occupied by artists and associations, the Verdi theatre, Fondazione Catella, la Stecca, housing several associations, a covered market and a biweekly open-air market build a mix of functions for urban communities with different profiles who use the neighbourhood for the whole day.

Therefore, this is an environment particularly rich in social and cultural capital that has preserved over time the local identity and territorial recognisability of the district, also guaranteed – as the name itself highlights – by its traditional distance from the rest of the city, today strongly reduced by the new pedestrian network. (Tamini, 2016)

In contrast with or, according to what was shown by the latest developments, in addition to the historic nature of the neighbourhood, the transformations of Porta Nuova have lead to a high recognisability of the area also at international level. The district's historical significance is today combined with the innovative approach characterising the new construction trends, giving life to a strong and peculiar territorial antinomy where two antithetical approaches coexist in a strong connection of proximity and where the challenge is the transition from a conflicting relationship to an integration of potentially complementary complex systems.

In May 2015, after the awarding of the tender, a temporary joint venture (ATI)² was assigned the development of the project *L'Isola. Un progetto di valorizzazione urbana* (“L'Isola. A project of urban enhancement”). The territorial marketing, communication, setup and furniture supply skills – key features of the two entities parties to the agreement – were supported by a monitoring process of the procedures for the activation of the public space of the Isola district

² Established by SEC Relazioni Pubbliche e Istituzionali and Plotini Allestimenti. In its very technical outlining, the project was already marked by the involvement of various players with different skills: the scientific skills of Politecnico di Milano resulting from the synergistic participation of the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies and the Department of Design, those deriving from the design of street furniture in urban spaces provided by studio ZPZ Partner and those related to the graphic and communication aspects offered by Curious Design.

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Fig. 3 – From Porta Nuova to the Isola district walking through the Bosco Verticale building

in Milan³, carried out by the Departments of Architecture and Urban Studies and the Department of Design of Politecnico di Milano with a twofold objective:

- understanding if and how the urban design works and the events organised could work as triggers for new relationships and new practices within the urban public space;
- developing a pilot project allowing to experiment a working method applicable to similar projects in other parts of the city and the territory.

In particular, the projects carried out to enhance the identity of Isola were oriented towards three different approaches: identifying strongly characterised street furniture elements, a communication plan describing the peculiarities of the district and planning a series of events and their systematisation to implement the local and supralocal attractiveness of the neighbourhood.

³ Research program *L'Isola e le sue piazze. Attività economiche urbane, cultura e spazio pubblico: come cambiano le tipologie d'offerta e le pratiche d'uso*, May-December 2015. Working group: Antonella Bruzzese, Giulia Gerosa, Luca Tamini with Elvis Meneghel, Ilaria Bollati, Lorenzo Brignoli, Flavia Trebicka, Giada Mascherin.

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Street Furniture as a Physical Expression of the Neighbourhood Identity

The furniture solutions⁴ saw the implementation of a set of elements aimed at supporting the building of the urban identity of the neighbourhood, designed to meet three main needs: helping visitors to the Isola district identify its most interesting parts, delimiting the area, indicating its existence and borders and providing a customer service to the visit such as support surfaces, seats, exhibition points and bike parking racks.

These are elements of an abacus capable of enhancing the identity of the place in harmony with the historic nature of the neighbourhood, yet also introducing contemporary details recalling the recent transformations occurred in the district, all sharing lilac as a common element.

In the squares and in some key places of the area a few elements were placed in two different sizes, marked by a lilac frame defining a microplace available for its users.

Some lighter works instead characterise the identity of the neighbourhood at smaller scale: street stencils with the Isola logo and adhesive films painting in lilac the street lamps scattered all along the borders of the working site.

Some meridians complete the project also made of films and stencils applied on new and existing poles as well as street-art works redeveloping deteriorated corners and walls of the district.

⁴ Designed by studio ZPZ Partners and made by Plotini Allestimenti Srl.

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Fig. 4 – One of the urban furnishings featuring the lilac frame.

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Communication as a tool for identity enhancement

The communication plan presented for the tender included elements aimed at expanding the area of use of the Isola district and at strengthening its identity.

From the digital communication perspective, the name and payoff, colour and image characterising the neighbourhood were developed through a review of the website carried out by Distretto Urbano del Commercio⁵ while the development and promotion of the activities was achieved through a strong presence on social networks and through several actions.



Fig. 5 – A stencil representing the Isola logo

The engagement of the retail spaces based in Isola allowed to use ad hoc channels for spreading the neighbourhood identity. To this purpose, some objects were designed that could on the one hand differentiate the “Isola inhabitants” and the district’s realities

⁵ <http://www.distrettoisola.it> based on a second-level domain linked to Comune di Milano (isola.milano.it).

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generating a sense of belonging and recognisability, and allow those visiting the area to “bring back home” a piece of Isola such as pins, magnets, shoppers and t-shirts on the other.

A crucial aspect of the communication plan was the creation of a name (*L'Isola*), a pay off (*Tutto un mondo dentro la città* - “An entire world inside the city”) and a logo⁶ - rigorously lilac – like the one chosen for the new underground line M5 that crosses the neighbourhood from North to South. Finally, the claim proposed *L'ISOLA. Tutto un mondo dentro la città* highlights the plurality of this urban context.

The Outlining Of the Events Programme

The planning of the events programme firstly aimed at enhancing the network of the existing players: indeed, the events proposal was built with some of the most representative traders and cultural associations of the district, with the support of professionals who helped systematise plans and initiatives already started in the past.

Four were the thematic areas identified: Art & Culture; Food & drink; Craftsmanship & Design; Fashion & Shopping.

These paths worked as a background for the various events, organised through the implementation of well-established events and initiatives or by planning new ones within the framework of the neighbourhood activities and developed to foster new business and cultural relationships following the thematic areas of food, design, fashion, shopping and culture.

⁶ “It is a colour that stands out among the rest of the *urban* colours: there are no lilac buildings nor signs of banks or retail chains, nor road signs or lilac traffic lights. (...) The only already existing lilac sign is that of the underground. The choice is then consistent with the integration of the new to the existing, yet adding a somehow ironic detail: if the neighbourhood adopts this colour, those getting here will have the feeling that it is the underground that fit the place and not the other way around”.

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Fig. 6 – A traditional selling format like the street market behind the new Porta Nuova skyscrapers

The events proved to be an effective tools for bringing many dimensions together, from the retail to the recreational, cultural and social ones (exceptional opening of stores as well as a high-quality music offer, parties for the making of murals that enriched the public spaces of the neighbourhood) and several users, targeting both the residents and a broader public in line with the objectives of the project.

The Role of Retail in Defining The Identity of Isola

The analysis of the neighbourhood and of the impact of the project highlighted that the retail fabric of Isola is characterised by a few key elements: the lack of medium and large-size surface areas available, which does not allow the establishment of big supralocal retail chains, the strong identity of the products and the presence of several grocery stores led to a sort of huge retail space all along the territory that, also according to what highlighted during the interviews,

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Fig. 7 – A typical shop window of a traditional grocery store

could become one of the distinguishing elements of the neighbourhood.

In particular, four main lines were identified that, if systematised, could help increase Isola's recognisability also at supralocal level:

- retail between heritage and innovation, developing the complementarity between the old neighbourhood and Porta Nuova;
- retail and culture, building a relationship between the prolific cultural fabric and the business context.
- retail and sociality, implementing the natural presence of grocery stores, Introverted and diffused retail, considering the prevalence of buildings with limited surface areas at ground levels which led to an increasing presence of indoor courtyards and of close yet not neighbouring spaces.

In such situations the image of the neighbourhood and that of retail spaces get mutually enriched, giving life to a virtuous cycle amplifying the users' perception of a well-defined retail identity (Codeluppi, 1989).

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Fig. 8 – An example of concept stores that develop into one of the typical neighbourhood courtyards

The analysis and monitoring of the project *L'Isola e le sue piazze* highlights the importance, in defining a strong and distinguishing image for the neighbourhood both at local and supralocal level, of an integrated approach systematising the designing of space, product, services and communication. The overlapping and combination of

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the above mentioned categories may lead, through the key role of retail, to the identification of a well-defined profile for Isola up to the clear definition of a territorial brand of which the elements proposed by the project (the environmental systems, the physical elements representing the district's identity, the communication through virtual artefacts and the planning of events) become a starting point for a complex system to be implemented and further updated. Only through a clear goal shared by all the players of the territory will it be possible to build a coherent set of proposals outlining the identity of the neighbourhood and supporting its ongoing internal recognisability, by also developing a readable image also outside of the district.

In a context where distribution plays an increasingly crucial role as regards the quality of the urban space, the retail space must take into account that, if properly organised, it might become a tool for pursuing a transformation and enhancement of the urban fabric not imposed by urban planning, but resulting and growing from the bottom through a bottom-up process.

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Section Two – Contents and Methods of Urban Reactivation in the Neighbourhood of NoLo

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Introduction

*Daniele Dodaro and Sara Atelier*¹

Using an online space to create socialization within the real/offline life seems to be a weird paradox, but it is the principle behind the Italian phenomenon named *social street*. It was September 2013 when a journalist named Federico Bastiani, who had recently moved in via Fondazza, Bologna, created an online community for his neighbours by using a Facebook private group. The aim was simple: building relationships, helping one another, sharing expertise and knowledge and creating social cohesion. The same social cohesion you can find in a village or a small town, but that is very rare in a city. This simple idea became a big success and started to spread throughout Italy.

In January 2016 this idea came to NoLo, recently renamed district of Milan in the North of Loreto that shares borders with the districts of Turro (to the North), Greco (West) and Casoretto (East). We (Daniele and Sara) had recently moved in NoLo like Federico Bastiani, we had no friends or contacts in the neighbourhood. We could not count on a community. So we created a social street covering the whole NoLo district and it rapidly became a success too due to a huge and active participation by local citizens. Today NoLo Social District has almost 4000 members. People use the online group to ask for information (eg. looking for an honest plumber, a good restaurant etc.), for help, to swap objects and expertise.

But the online group is only a means. The real purpose of a social street is meeting neighbours in the real life, creating friendship and

¹ Founders of NoLo Social District in Milan.

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social cohesion. That is why we organize almost every Saturday breakfasts on the street where everyone brings his own food and beverage, sharing coffee, sweets and cakes with the neighbours. It is a great way to get and keep in touch with the neighbours but also to live the public space. Speaking of real life, thanks to the NoLo Social District there are now a group of people who run together every week over the Martesana Canal, a knit club, a book club, a yoga group, a conversation group in Spanish and many other groups of people who now share their interest with the neighbours.

As we said before, using an online space to create socialization within the real/offline life seems to be a weird paradox, but NoLo Social District has shown that is not true, breaking down the stereotype representing Milan as an individualistic city and creating connections in NoLo between those who live or work in NoLo. It was because of this knowledge of the district, of the neighbours and of the resources of the NoLo district that researchers team of Politecnico di Milano – Design Department asked us for a support to their project here presented in the next chapters. It was a pleasure for us to introduce them to the students and collaborators who worked with them in our beloved district, telling them about its life and helping them finding artists and artisans living in the district, creating a collaborative environment to explore future scenarios in NoLo.

This section will explore how this collaboration has been developed, which results it took, the dissemination of the output and the enthusiasm and involvement of the several stakeholders.

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ZIP Spaces. Fast Tests of New Scenario of Uses through Adaptive Reuse Strategies

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The city is a place of human density and diversity, of cultural and economic vitality, a place of experimentation and innovation, in which the economic and social changes of the contemporary era occur in an early and evident way. The city is also a place of refuge, hope and opportunity, within which people pass, stand or settle to build their own future. These mutually interlinked observations explain the rise of urban living. The diffusion of digital technology, which characterises the contemporary age, contains the potential to form a common ground based on greater acceptance and understanding of differences, which could bring communities together (Schwab, 2017). However, this *hyper connectivity* does not naturally bring lead to tolerance and adaptability, it can also result in increasing urban fragmentation. We have a confirmation of this risk in our recent urban crisis. Therefore, the need to maintain control of the diffusion of technology effects, together with the awareness that it can be used with a sense of common purpose aimed at the human well-being, is becoming ever more important.

The digital transformation linked to the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, is witnessed in urban areas by the development and consolidation of a universe of high-tech hybrid activities, represented for example by *co-working*, *fab-labs* and by a variety of intermediate combinations. These activities are based on the sharing of equipment and spaces but mostly on synergies between different skills and professionalism fostered to develop innovative projects, with a typical craft lab experimental approach, which characterizes the

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contemporary creativity and which is a typical Italian attitude. Generally, these activities are based on interpersonal relationships that mitigate the difference between work and everyday life, and between individuality and community. Indeed, these aggregative forms for the production of goods and services, based on the advanced technology, are increasingly *human centred*; they are characterized by their attention to the physical and social human well-being. Thus, *social communities*, *social street* and a wide variety of urban associations emerge, to share goals and passions – including sports, food, music, reading, cinema – and the desire to take care of places or material goods, with the final result of mutual support and social solidarity. This synergistic and complex combination of technological factors and causes is always rooted in the local area, manifesting the needs and desires of the urban population in real time, evidence of a very current urban condition. These links with the local neighbourhood thus constitute a valuable resource but require a systemic vision to be interpreted, strengthened and functioned with shared goals, through a policy of urban management that can be traced within the strategic framework typical of *Smart City*.

Therefore, this essay presents possible strategies to encourage urban regeneration processes triggering and supporting these ground-level dynamic energies, already active in the city. On one side, specific attention can be devoted to the **preliminary stimulation of the process**, through a reinterpretation of existing activities and spaces, to promote new, heterogeneous and diffused poles that can include both community-based energies and those coming from the new social and sharing forms, which characterize the new advanced emerging activities. The other research topic, which is ideally placed at the opposite side of the process the final step of the exploitation of **the dissemination and influence of these regenerative activities**, to enhance their impact on the city, to retrain the spaces and to restore community relations at local, neighbourhood level. To this end, the materiality of these experiences has to be designed - although they often have an intense virtual nature - by intervening on their *legibility* and their *evidence*, promoting the modification of urban space and the perception by the population and

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administrations. This process would allow the community to recognise the neighbourhood as their own habitat.

The research titled *ZIP Spaces*, carried out on site in the NoLo district – North of Loreto – in Milan, by the Design Department of the Politecnico di Milano, was aimed at identifying a collection of new usage scenarios of spaces deriving from activities already existing within the neighbourhood (Manzini, Jegou and Meroni, 2009) through temporary *adaptive reuse* interventions.

These considerations lead to design strategies for the creation of complex innovative activities – *smart*, in this respect – enabling future scenarios to be imagined and, in addition to producing a result in terms of economic gain and new flow of goods, promote the formation of human relations, modifying the behaviour of people (Rosson and Carrol 2002), the safety of urban sites, the attention to the places of the city. Thus, regeneration processes of marginal districts can be initiated, restoring into inhabitants a sense of belonging to their related community referring to a specific place in the city, their own neighbourhood.

Strategic Places for Innovation and Urban Regeneration.

Sociality and digital technology, though appearing as distant concepts, are important drivers for change, typical of the new **functional aggregation formats** that arise in urban areas, based on the sharing of media and information. These new formats acquire over time heterogeneous directions and peculiarities, but have blurred boundaries due to the many activities they host. They are the manifestation of the on-going transition between work and daily life, between online and offline space that strengthens human relationships, stimulating the regeneration of urban space. These examples of bottom-up social dynamism, from the local citizens, are also recognised by urban administrations as important regenerative resources, especially in the fragile city areas, scarcely hit by contemporary stimuli, characterised by economic and social marginality, construction decay and lack of services. The multifaceted co-working spaces, fab labs and specialized maker

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communities, community hubs, and communities of people who recognize and support each other, do not adapt to already defined and self-evident spaces but are instead established through the *adaptive reuse* of the existing building heritage, creatively enhancing the qualitative opportunities offered by spaces.

The Fragmentation and the Re-concentration of the Workplace

The delocalisation of work, determined by the diffusion of *teleworking* and *home working*, its fragmentation and subsequent re-concentration (Camocini, 2011), has generated the **co-working** category of use, which is the most well-known one among the aforementioned aggregative formats. Over time it has acquired various levels of complexity, thematic specialization, integration of complementary functions, management organization, centralized reorganization in new creative platforms for professionals and corporations. The co-working format also assigns different degrees of importance to the formation of an integrated and solidary community, as well as varying levels of public openness to its spaces. So the co-working spaces are very articulated, provide different privacy gradients, highly specialised instrumental areas, and areas less defined in terms of use, open to any new characterisation, work and relationship settings designed to be continuously modified.

Concentrated Creative Ecosystems and Technology Delivery. The Reverse Direction

Along with co-working, perhaps as its specialised declination, **fab lab** has emerged as another big category of integrated activities, which is developed around the sharing of high-tech tools – 3D printers, numerically controlled milling machines, laser cutters, etc. – for the production and development of innovative projects, service and training activities. The fab lab is defined as a digital “workshop” because it is frequented by hybrid professional figures such as

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inventors and craftsmen, and different professionals who generate a strong community, based on the sharing of a complex knowledge and a deep passion for research and experimentation.

This second phase of the *Fourth Industrial Revolution* provides the availability of tailor-made advanced technologies, “deliverable on demand” through operations of technology transfer, sometimes supported by *competence centres* (Bartoloni and Fotina, 2017). This delivery can enhance skills, update and make the existing activities once again dynamic, both of artisanal and production-type, accompanying these operations with processes of urban regeneration and reactivation of the urban social fabric. The Municipality of Milan, in 2017 approved a five-year plan called *Manifattura Urbana 4.0* (Milano Smart City, 2014) to support – through actions of adaptive reuse of abandoned spaces – real artisanal workshops with start-ups working in the field of digital fabrication to enable new craftsmanship 4.0 activities.

Community Spaces, Cornerstones of Urban Regeneration

The **community hub** is the formula of aggregation of functions mostly oriented towards community-focused service, inclusion, and social cohesion, but still being characterized by a variety of services including access to welfare, production and work: “they are spaces of production and work where the craftsman and the young creativity station, the start-up and the social cooperative, the co-working, the fab-lab and the kindergarten, the café [...] and the web coexist” (Calvaresi and Pederiva, 2016). Since 2012, the City of Milan has begun an urban reactivation process by identifying small and medium-sized spaces in residential public buildings of suburbs areas – some included in strategic areas identified by the Administration through the *Suburbs Plan*: in particular Qt8 / Gallaratese, Niguarda / Bovisa and Adriano / Padova / Rizzoli – to be leased to non-profit organizations, onlus, social cooperatives, association foundations, to be assigned to social activities but also to be enriched with leisure activities, providing they are coherent with the project and not prevalent.

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All of these hybrid activities are located in the city through precise, often temporary, *adaptive reuse* operations of dismantled structures, in flexible spaces, often uncharacterized, colonised by lightweight, easily upgradeable and reconfigurable structures, such as “materialised software”. Urban administration institutions have been actively launching programs and intervention frameworks to enhance these activities, which, in addition to generating new resources for work and social solidarity, allow to test new aggregate formats. They also represent an effective strategy to create diffused cornerstones of regeneration, recognisable and accessible to the public in the urban fabric.

ZIP Spaces

The inhabitants experience their neighbourhood through their relationship with the urban public space, which is made up of buildings, people and things that cross themselves, see, hear and smell (Gehl, 2011). The construction and enhancement of these relationships can trigger urban regeneration processes. The Department and Design School of the Politecnico di Milano conducted a field research in the NoLo district – North of Loreto – in Milan, to identify a pool of new scenarios of use to reactivate abandoned shops through interior projects to be displayed in shop storefronts overlooking the public space, in order to communicate an up-to-date neighbourhood identity.

The project research activity aimed at two specific goals linked with a sequential logic. The first strategic goal concerns the definition of aggregate formats of activities that can generate original synergies between the emerging creative experiences, smart and interconnected, and production activities, such as handicrafts and trade (often in decline), that represent the historical local roots. The second goal is to apply these new scenarios through proposals for short-term *adaptive reuse* interventions on dismantled commercial interiors overlooking the street, to increase the impact of such interventions on urban space and on the population who uses it.

ZIP Spaces, the title of the study, refers to a web platform proposal conceived by the researcher Rebekah Emmanuel, answering

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to a call for urban regeneration tools launched by the design firm IDEO. The web platform *ZIP Spaces* – recalling the term *ZIP Car*, the American way to refer to the car sharing system – can gather a wide range of dismantled shops overlooking a street that can be rented for specific periods, with a format similar to *AirBnB*, and set up with fitting devices that do not modify the architectural container. This strategy of temporary reuse allows to sequentially undertake and test new activities, or to organize events that can rekindle spaces for a prolonged time with little cost, by initiating a diffused and disseminated urban regeneration process (Casagrande, 2011) and triggering dynamic energies that can reactivate other spaces nearby.

The regeneration project therefore concerns the area of urban interiors, which in this text is understood as all the perceptible space at “human eye level” (Laven, Glaser and van't Hof, 2016): thus, starting from the interior with new functions, the design interventions provide an extension beyond the architectural edges of the facade, through the building threshold.

The first phase of the research activity – **on site survey** – concerned the analysis of the neighbourhood, and was conducted through the elaboration of thematic maps, video interviews and surveys on local history. From this analysis an urban area image emerged, historically connoted as a popular neighbourhood with a strong identity, affected over the last fifty years by migratory flows, coming first from southern Italy and then from abroad, including the on-going migratory emergencies. The neighbourhood has been also touched by the new business systems, the opening of department stores, to the detriment of local convenience stores, the loss of importance of some craft activities and, with the global digital age, the delocalization of some services and production activities, the consequent abandonment or sale of the spaces, in addition to the new concentration of storage and transport logistics, typical of suburbs. The result is an urban image made of lowered shutters and of unsafe and unfriendly public spaces. Although located in the City of Milan, not far from the centre and well connected by means of transport, NoLo is considered a peripheral district and was included in the district “Adriano - Padova - Rizzoli” identified by the municipality of Milan as one of the five peripheral districts to which the

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municipality addresses action plans and a set of strategic activities aimed at urban and social development of the city.

The decrease of property value has attracted new flows of people, young, singles and families, professional and creatives who have brought new energy to the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is, in fact, an eminent case study, starting with its renaming as NoLo – North of Piazzale Loreto in Milan – a name created by a communications agency. Thanks to the *social district*, established by some existing associations, the inhabitants, both residents and newcomers, have been able to meet, to build a community and to take care of their urban spaces. The *social district* has had an important role in this first phase of on site analysis, promoting the involvement of some small shops and high craftsmanship activities (the furniture upholsterer, the tailor, the pendulum clock repairer), but also with local shops and municipal market operators, some of whom are likely to have little prospects for continuity and development in the future. On the other hand, new creative spaces, hybrids connected to art, co-working, catering and high technology have emerged in the neighbourhood, denouncing an initial gentrification of the urban area, but also a present and ready renewal energy to redeem the neighbourhood spaces.

The second phase – **scenario building** – has been developed through the identification and the reinterpretation of a local activity, an existing inspiration in the neighbourhood, called “father”, often characterised by a lack of prospects for future development, due to the changing market demand, technological change, and changing of the local customers. For the reinterpretation of this “father” activity and the definition of the new “daughter” activity derived from it, three tactics have been identified, which can coexist:

- *updating* consists in refreshing the existing business through the introduction of new technologies, new ways of work, or innovative stimuli such as the use of new materials, artistic contamination, etc.
- *branching* enhances a particular aspect of the source activity, with the aim to convey better than other similar activities.
- *hybridising* experiences an unprecedented contamination between different activities.

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Fig. 1 – Mode of operation of a new aggregation of functions: Spot on U. Sequence of actions and places

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The third phase – **concept and interior design** – has focused on designing the interiors of former retail spaces where to set up these activities. It envisages the definition of a concept, a unifying idea guiding the project, and a setting-up type approach to the realisation, through systems to clad existing interiors, aggregate macro furnishings, or small invasive elements, to create an interior design with a strong identity. As anticipated, the storefront project is an integral part of the project strategy, which provides several gradients of transparency and porosity, to obtain a real eversion towards the *public open space*, enhancing the display windows, using autonomous, lightweight furniture systems, located between the public and the private. Mobile elements of furniture and devices can export the activity to other areas of the neighbourhood and the city to convey the new meanings of spaces, making citizens familiar with the new activities and their spaces. In this respect, the results of the work regarding scenarios and interior projects were illustrated to the citizens through an exhibition organised at the municipal market with the sponsorship of the City of Milan, also concurrently with the neighbourhood breakfast organised by the Social District every Saturday.

Some project proposals emerging from the field research confirm the existence of a smart generation, able to use new technologies to introduce elements of innovation into reality, but also aware of the environment, the physical and social human well-being, and encouraging community formation.

The passion for cycling and all the culture that gravitates around the bicycle can easily represent the themes described above and emerges as a strong feature in some intervention concepts. **HybridUs** is a project proposal inspired by Morotti 75's furniture and design activity – in Viale Monza 75 – and involves the contamination – *hybridisation* – of small vehicles such as bicycles, skateboards and push scooters through incisive objects such as velvet seats or papered boards. The interior design of the new place originates from a reworked version of a bicycle frame, scaled to become the main structure of the design setting, and houses an artisanal workshop to contaminate the elements and also an augmented reality set, that allows visitors and customers to experience the new transportation means created.

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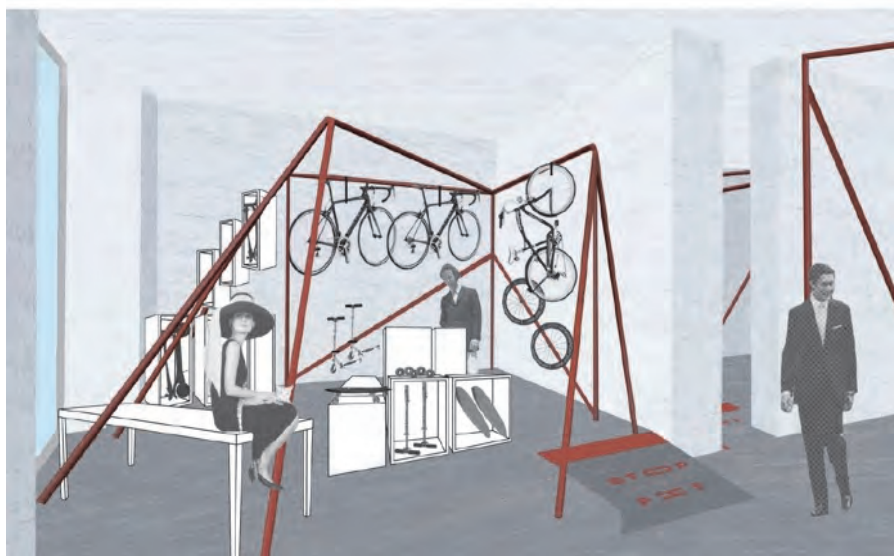


Fig. 2 – HybridUs. Contamination of small vehicles. Views of the design setting for the new format of service

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Thread Lab, instead, is a suggestion of *updating* strategy, inspired by the tailor shop Sartoria Arnaldo Marsilii – in Via Venini – at the corner with Via Dei Cybo, 1. The project involves the creation of a co-working space and a fab lab, dedicated to young fashion designers, featuring a storefront for a showroom, and integrated with new technologies such as 3D printing for custom pattern production. The inspiration idea is given by the concepts of frames and threads: the structure is a rigid element that can be used flexibly by assuming various functions and allows to extend the thread, creating different interior and exterior sets over the new feature space. The textile theme is also present in the project, which, starting from the skills of the historic upholsterer Stagnoli – in Via delle Leghe – interprets the concept of upholstery, applying it to objects and people. *Spot on u*, according to the hybrid approach, combines a wallpaper lab along with a tattoo studio using the ultimate technologies for digital previews and augmented reality sets. The internal space is shaped by micro-environments dedicated to individual experiences, “enlightened” areas, covered with decorated surfaces. The project also envisages a system of decorated inflatable furniture to create promotional settings outside the shop area and in the city. The historic cinematographic production activity that has disappeared in the district and the existence of a *Beltrade arthouse cinema* (the only one still in activity out of the three pre-existing ones) – in Nino Oxilia Street 10 – has led to a mixed idea of *branching* and *hybridization*. *Ocean Cinema* is a fluid, welcoming, refreshing environment, like an immersive sea where islands are provided, separate rooms for individual or small-groups screenings. In this case, the façade design highlights the aim to communicate the dynamism of cinema and the convivial aspect of the space.¹

¹ The development of project design research studies is the result of Bachelor's thesis carried out within the Final Design Studio of the Bachelor of Science in Interior Design, School of Design, Politecnico di Milano (2016/2017) titled *ZIP Spaces*. Professors: Camocini B., Rebaglio A., Brenna L., Colombo A. and tutors: Mainini M., Besani E., Ferrario P. *HybridUs* by Giulia Fregonese, Gianluca Rossi, Axia Zucchi; *Thread Lab* by Rubén Nieto, Costanza Russo, Martina Vincenzi, Roberta Zecca; *Spot on u* by Tullio Rota, Matilde Sambado, Daniel Volpi, Carola Zulato; *Ocean Cinema* by Flavio Moraldo Fenici, Beatrice Gravaghi, Filippo Lamera, Zoya Shirobokova.

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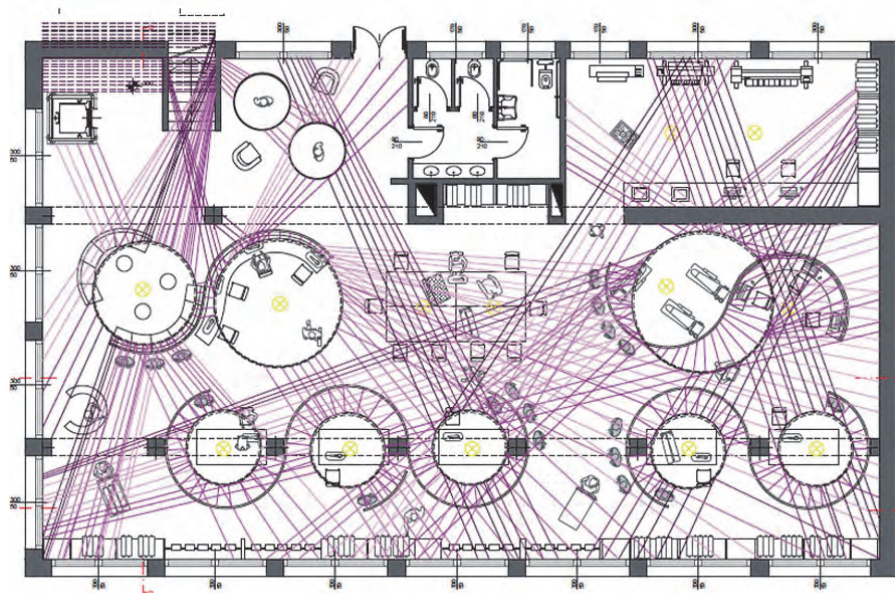


Fig. 3 – Thread Lab. Co-working and fab lab for young stylists. View of the interiors plan

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Fig. 4 – Spot on U. Project your imagination. View of the storefront and lay out of internal areas

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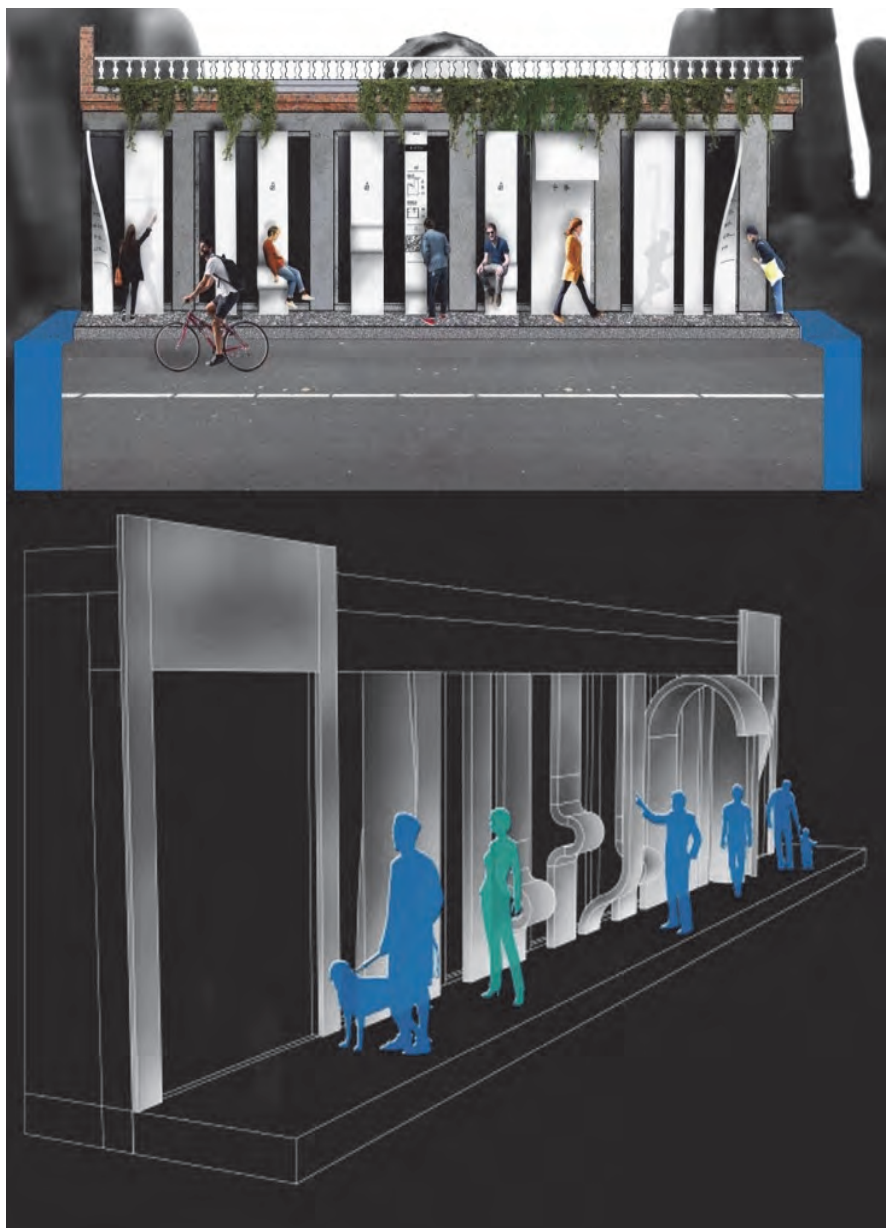


Fig. 5 – Ocean Cinema. Innovative spaces and behaviours to watch movies. Façade.

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Conclusion

The stimulation of the conception and development of innovative, hybrid and social spaces emerges among the urban regeneration strategies proposed by municipal government institutions. These are the cornerstones for the strengthening of local realities, accompanied by *adaptive reuse* processes on existing interiors. On the other hand, the smart city seeks the diffusion of technology and, following the development guides given by the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, contributes to the distribution of technology also in the manufacturing field, triggering new growth poles. Instead, less attention is devoted to the next intervention stages, to the communication of these processes, to their evidence and visibility in the city. To date, this legibility, the ability to detect, evaluate the quality and quantity of these spaces, their location and networking, is left to the ICT and especially to social networks that, as superpowers, through an augmented reality, allow citizens to look beyond the urban margins, to get into the interior of the city and bring to light their operation. Every positive consequence on the neighbourhood is due to the activities that are triggered and spontaneously created around this process. Less attention is given to define guidelines to intervene and activate urban “external” elements, which does not mean the study of new architectural and figurative typologies corresponding to the new internal functions, but the opportunity to transmit the liveliness of an environment, the growth of relationships and the potential for inclusiveness which they represent in the neighbourhood spaces.

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Recovering Historic Crafts. History in a Contemporary Regeneration Project

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An Overview

Urban knowledge in urban form, *Forma Urbis*¹ (Marchetti Longhi, 1932) is the fundamental starting point for dealing with any project in urban regeneration. Even in “minor” areas, i.e. those parts of the city outside the historic centres and unaffected by refined architecture or buildings of any remarkable quality, the city, and more to the point, the city of Milan is the result of a historical process, which has seen the birth and growth of urban fabric and a change in its forms and functions². Apart from the oldest, yet ever present traces in the suburbs, either in the shape of some religious or agricultural building, or even a chapel or a milestone, the tracks and paths followed by modern infrastructures reveal and tell the story of past events. They make important and interesting readings. In this sense, we are undoubtedly talking of urban, rather than architectural history (Guidoni, 1976). However, it is also a history of habits, customs and, above all, of activities which have affected the urban environment. In numerous cases, the presence of gardens and farms first of all, followed not only by factories and workshops, but also by

¹ Forma Urbis refers to the ancient plan of Rome, carved on marble slabs, fragments of which have been handed down to us. It dates back to the Flavian period and was redrawn under Septimus Severus. It originally hung on the wall of a room in the Forum Pacis. By extension, the term Forma Urbis means the shape, the planimetry of any city.

² Problems and policies adopted for the conservation and regeneration of historic centres can be traced to a method of intervention even in smaller parts of cities. *Ten points for the preservation and regeneration of the historic city* at www.ancsa.org, 10 November 2015.

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individual crafts, explains the layout of the streets, the nature of the buildings and especially the vocation of the area, the *genius loci*³ (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Even when these conditions change dramatically – such as after a war, or as the result of an economic boom or the latest de-industrialisation of the city – the fabric retains the “form” and memory of ancient usages. We can, and indeed we must use our knowledge of all these elements, in order to begin to consider any design, redesign or, indeed, any approach to urban regeneration. We believe this is the key to a better understanding of the process of regeneration, which will offer a greater chance of success: a process, which not only reconfigures spaces, volumes and relationships, but which can achieve everything, as it already contains the functions and the quality of the spaces it proposes. It is no longer, and perhaps never has been sufficient to propose new spaces to a market, which demands and intends to occupy those spaces. However, we need a bottom-up approach to create this need in a city which would otherwise be dead, overwhelmed by changes and devoid of functions, which will never return to affect it. To tackle this type of approach, we need first and foremost to “see and understand” the city⁴ (Zevi, 1948). It is clearly obvious that this attitude involves transversal knowledge, which is not so easy to acquire in courses of study which focus increasingly on vertical specialisation and which do not contemplate a horizontal view.

³ The concept of Genius Loci, a natural and supernatural entity linked to a place and object of worship in the Roman religion, is taken up by Christian Norberg-Schulz in architecture to define a phenomenological approach to the study of the environment. “Character is determined by how things are, and offers our survey a basis for studying the concrete phenomena of our daily life. Only in this way can we fully grasp Genius Loci, the spirit of the place that the ancients recognised as the opposite, with which man must come to terms, in order to acquire the opportunity to live”.

⁴ “Have you ever thought about your home, office, school, cinema, restaurants, the shops, the roads you frequent? Have you considered the specific value of architecture compared to other figurative arts? What is the difference between your home and a temple, or a triumphal arch? The judgment we give on a Bramante monument is based on criteria which differ from those on which the appreciation of a work by Le Corbusier is based? Is architecture an abstract art, or does it have precise content? The text analyzes these issues and wants to answer these questions: its purpose is to reveal the spatial essence of architecture so that everyone can see the environments in which they spend so much of their existence”.

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In this sense, the designer can become the link figure, capable of dealing with the design not only of the spaces and services within the current context of the city's transformation, but also of the ways to implement an apparently modest change, but which can trigger significant transformations, precisely because of its widespread, bottom-up nature.

By the turn of the millennium, Milan had already seen several cases of “spontaneous” transformation, where restrictive planning had been unable to keep up with the changing social and employment conditions resulting from the closure and relocation of the majority of the industrial activities in the urban agglomeration, with the consequent demise of once major productive sites. This is the case, for example, of the Ansaldo area and of the Riva Calzoni steel mills with the entire area southwest of Porta Genova, which for years had been one of the most active Design hubs⁵. Even Via Ventura in Lambrate or the former Richard Ginori area along the Naviglio, areas of small and large industries, industrial areas from the point of view of the *PRG*, “general zoning plan”, which have changed their nature despite, or in the absence of a clear indication by urban planning. It is no coincidence that the regeneration of the B2 areas - the famous areas left by the 1976 Regulatory Plan adopted in 1980 (and which, in turn, replaced that of 1953) in a sort of indefinite state - came years later, almost as though it were “chasing” the evolving and prospering life of the city, at least until the last great crisis, which arrived in 2008 from overseas. A sort of convergence of urban planning, urban design and interior design of the city evolved, which was able to assert itself in what we might call the design of the city's interior regeneration.

Our research began with this analysis and general vision, and was applied to the urban areas north of Piazzale Loreto in the city of Milan.

⁵ See for example *Milan, Tortona District, Creative Production District*, AIM, Milano, 2016.

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The Particular Case: NoLo

Precotto, Gorla, Turro, NoLo, the neighbourhoods of Milan's historic layout follow the axis of Viale Monza with old and new names.

In an almost inverse process, the history of urban development in Milan⁶ has led the city to expand along its radials, incorporating the municipalities of the outer belts, from the 19th century Corpi Santi district⁷ to the last great annexation after the First World War⁸ (Denti, 2000). It then retraced its steps to rediscover and rename places, such as NoLo (Vicentini, 2016), to denote the new, polycentric urban layout.

The wave of urban regeneration was on an entirely different scale⁹. These almost spontaneous, bottom-up movements testified the vitality of a city, which had too often been betrayed by the lack of programming and urban planning ideas. They sometimes found reasons for renewal on a very small scale, which were then amplified according to the scale of the city. NoLo, known somewhat snobbishly as the North of Loreto neighbourhood, is the latest and, we believe, certainly not the last of these phenomena.

The reasons for this are deeply rooted in the flow of new inhabitants to the city in recent years and in the Universal Expo –

⁶ Numerous texts are available on urban development in Milan. We wish to draw particular attention to the historic texts of Reggiori, F. (1947). *Itinerario Urbanistico-Edilizio*; De Finetti, G. (2002). *Milano, Costruzione di una Città*. Cislacchi G., De Benedetti M. and Marabelli P. (Eds). Milano: Hoepli.

⁷ The Corpi Santi of Milan was an autonomous municipality established in 1782, which included the farmhouses and agricultural villages around the city of Milan, just beyond its ramparts. Originally joined to the city in 1808, during the period of the Kingdom of Italy, they were restored in 1816 with the return of the Austrians and later annexed to the city in 1873. See also the Corpi Santi in <http://www.archiviodistatomilano.beniculturali.it>.

⁸ The annexations of 1923 gave the city very similar dimensions to the present ones. The mayors of the suppressed municipalities became municipal councillors in Milan. The suppressed municipalities were Affori, Baggio, Chiaravalle Milanese, Crescenzago, Gorla-Precotto, Greco, Lambrate, Musocco, Niguarda, Trenno, Vigentino.

⁹ In April 2017, the Municipality of Milan launched the Tender for the suburbs, funds for urban regeneration projects in the five strategic districts, which envisaged the allocation of EUR 540 thousand for the areas of Giambellino-Lorenteggio, Corvetto-Chiaravalle-Porto di Mare, Adriano-Padova-Rizzoli, Niguarda-Bovisa and Qt8-Gallaratese. See http://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/it/news/primopiano/tutte_notizie/sindaco/riгенера_zione_urbana_quartieri_strategici.

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EXPO2015¹⁰ – which, at the turn of 2015, put us at the centre of world attention. This was clearly an opportunity which, contrary to what had been commonly thought, has had qualitatively positive implications for some of the city areas. We refer to that multi-ethnicity which, when grafted on a minute, non-aulic, yet significant urban fabric, led to the rediscovery of streets and districts, thanks to a new use of existing commercial businesses, now at the end of their historic cycle and otherwise destined to certain oblivion. It moved from a panorama of closed windows to a new perspective of local trade, which revitalised streets and squares. It was almost a small revenge on the great shopping centres, the malls of modernity that had shifted the public, investments and attention beyond the historic city centres¹¹. It was a revenge on mass marketing, which flattens and standardises everything in the name of large numbers, in order to enhance those historic activities which, nevertheless, remained miraculously alive and open, to constitute the driving force of this very social, “street” urban regeneration¹². The “ground floor” localisation of the phenomenon was also extremely significant in terms of the failure of a renewal of the urban model. Instead of new, large neighbourhoods without a live urban fabric at street level, (see nearby Bicocca), it preferred to maintain the eighteenth/twentieth-century structure of the city, with businesses constituting true places of socialisation, development and prospects for the future of our city (Irace, 2010). Some of the neighbourhood's historic shops of the newly created NoLo, around Viale Monza, were highlighted in *ZIP Spaces*¹³ – the theme of the last unit of the Design School of

¹⁰ The 2015 Universal Exposition also had beneficial economic effects estimated at over €30 billion. See http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2016-05-05/expo-2015-ha-generato-affari-316-miliardi-225018.shtml?uuiid=AD3hdWB&refresh_ce=1

¹¹ As regards the problems of natural shopping centres - commercial areas of historic centres, see Zandreggi, L. (2004). *Commercio urbano e nuovi strumenti di governance*. Milano, I: Il sole 24 ore. ISBN 8883636724; VV.AA., (2015). *Exporting the historical centre*. Albrecht A. and Magrin A., (Eds). Milan, I: Catalogo della Triennale.

¹² For example, see Luca Molinari *Ode on the ground floor. Some Milanese experiences* in <http://www.ilpost.it/lucamolinarini/2013/03/08/parish-days-spaces-pubblici-alcune-esperienze-milanesi/>

¹³ *ZIP Spaces* refer to disused or underused interiors, designed to accommodate various temporary, time-varying functions. The expression *ZIP Spaces* comes from a project proposed by a young researcher (Rebekah Emanuel) and indicates an on-line platform, which can promote discarded business spaces with a street showcase to make them available

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Politecnico di Milano in 2016/2017 – as tiny, yet significant epicentres of renewal with wonderful project opportunities. To tackle these types of issues, it was also necessary to develop a “social” and commercial sensitivity. This sensitivity needed to understand the shop or the existing business in terms of its impact on the lives of the citizens of the neighbourhood and of its commercial offers, in order to imagine the proposals which, together with new places, would also identify complementary, additional functions for the old business. What arose was the work not only of interior design in the broader sense, but also of the design of a commercial offer, of a new vision to be delivered even temporarily in these spaces.

This aspect, coupled with the temporary nature of the proposal seen as an opportunity and not as a restriction, was perhaps the most significant figure of the projects presented and, we think and hope their best chance of acceptance and success in the neighbourhood.

Once again, the plans regarding these issues, delivered in recent years on a large scale for new businesses in the city, have always seen little chance of success and unacceptably long completion times, whereas a bottom-up movement to even temporarily reuse the spaces appears to show better chances of success as a “ready to use” and effective method of intervention, yet simple and sustainable. At first, our area, NoLo, saw its urban layout as the completion of the city north of the third belt of the well-defined ring road in the *Beruto plan*¹⁴ (Grandi and Pracchi, 1980). A necessary completion after the annexation of *Corpi Santi* (Oliva, 2002) and even more so with the incorporation in 1923 of the surrounding neighbouring belt, which turned these once peripheral areas into now almost central areas (VV.AA., 1992). What was once a secondary part on either side of the former tree-lined street of Viale Monza¹⁵, the great link between

for temporary use, thus reducing the risk of degradation of some urban areas". From the Program of Final Synthesis Laboratory, Luigi Brenna, Barbara Camocini, Alessandro Colombo, Agnese Rebaglio, Academic Year 2016/2017, Design School, Politecnico di Milano.

¹⁴ The Beruto Plan was the first governing body of the city of Milan, drafted by the engineer Cesare Beruto in 1884. The plan was developed over a long period and was entirely revised, before it was finally approved and enforced in 1889. A fundamental step in the urban history of modern Milan, the Beruto Plan has been the subject of many studies.

¹⁵ Built in 1825, Viale Monza was meant to replace the old street that Porta Nuova developed parallel to the Martesana. The first railway in Milan (and the second in Italy) was

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the centre and the royal residence of Monza, was definitively circumscribed by moving the Central Station from what is now Piazza della Repubblica to its current position, a displacement which also coincided with the moment it changed from station to head station. The change was almost dramatic, as the engineers designed an imposing embankment that culminated in a monumental building, designed by Ulisse Stacchini and inaugurated in 1933 (Angeleri, 1985). The railway embankment was actually a wall that divided the northern part of the city into two and formed the western border of our area. The well-defined borders of the station to the west, the ring road to the south and the central axis of Viale Monza were completed and defined in the *Parco Trotter*¹⁶. This had been a horse-riding and sports complex which, during the twenties, had been converted into a nursing and recreational area for young children with state-of-the-art facilities, including a large swimming pool, traces of which are still visible today. The layout was completed before the Second World War and saw no major changes, except for the construction of the large infrastructure of the first subway line, the red M1 (Alferini and Cirenei, 1964), which brought the area even closer to the centre and interconnected with the rest of the city. However, the great opportunity provided by the underground transport system has curiously not triggered any renovation or building speculation, and apart for some minor replacements has left the fabric unchanged to this day. The minute, yet interesting features of this part of town and the persisting layout of shops, workshops and laboratories can be seen in these historic transitions. Starting from this urban history value observations, the research has led to the identification of some design proposals for new functions.

Milan-Monza, inaugurated in 1840; in 1864, just after the unification of Italy, the first Central Station was built in the current Piazza della Repubblica. In 1876, Viale Monza welcomed the Ippovia - a horse-drawn tram - which remained in service for decades. The line was electrified at the turn of the century and remained, with minimal modernisation, until 1964 and the inauguration of the MM1, the red line, which decreed the disappearance of the almost one hundred-year old surface line.

¹⁶ Following the decision to dismantle the original complex, the Trotter was moved to this area, where the headquarters of the Central Station stand today. However, the Trotter did not stay long: in the mid-1920s, it was again moved to its current location in San Siro.

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Design Proposals

The types of design discussed can be summarised in three major topics:

- abandoned or no longer used historic landmarks;
- currently active historic commercial businesses with potential for development;
- de-commissioned historic business activities.

The three types sometimes overlap or merge. However, what we find interesting is the innovative approach that has led to unexpected, yet at the same time convincing results.

Let us take a look at some examples proposed during the last unit of the Design course at Politecnico di Milano¹⁷.

The first design proposal concerns the great railway embankment in via Ferrante Aporti which has been the theatre of activity linked to the presence of the “new” station for over half a century. The arched profile of the embankment along the road led to one particular theory of warehouses sitting side by side which, on the one hand, gave the infrastructure and the street architectural dignity, whereas on the other, they provided spaces of a remarkable size extending backwards. The changing economic, social and urban conditions led to the gradual dismantling of these activities, which have only partially been replaced, in some cases with equally popular premises. At number 47 bis, one of the old *Magazzini Raccordati*, “historical warehouses” became the theatre for the *Prism & Co project*.

Prism & Co began with the idea of proposing eco-sustainable jewellery made of waste materials, such as wood and plastic, from some of the commercial companies in the district, particularly from *Marta Netti Frames*, a historic workshop located in Via Pasteur 25. The business was situated in Via Ferrante Aporti, in one of the *Raccordati* warehouses, which exploited the large volumes of the embankment. The formal, compositional layout was sought by

¹⁷ Some Bachelor thesis have been developed within the Final Design Studio of the Bachelor of Science in Interior Design, School of Design, Politecnico di Milano 2016/2017 titled *ZIP Spaces: Prism & Co.* by Davide Stanga, Luca Tomasin, Stefania Visentini; *H2.CO* by Alice Odoni, Brunilde Patti, Cristina Pepe Danique Krijin; *Enchanted Garden* by Sofia Caldera, Giulio Fasiello, Roman Maranov, Ezgi Burulday; *BiSTrAGE* by Arianna Bellantuono, Natalia Bavosi, Nikol Lebbink, Anne van Bakelen.

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breaking down the prism into its geometric, spectral components, so that the geometric shape divided the light into its spectrum. It was as though the prism had exploded into triangular splinters to invade the space, by combining geometric shapes with the effects of light and reflections to create a bright, open environment. The project raised the challenge of transforming a large, undifferentiated space, featuring a wide, vaulted roof into a place where the public could experience a journey through the world of jewellery, revisited with the use of not only new, contemporary materials, but also of materials coming from skilful reuse. What had normally been a small, precious, hard-to-access jeweller became much more like an exhibition gallery equipped with a workshop, where potential customers could watch the creation of jewels from unconventional material.

Another disused space of a completely different kind was the old water house located on Via Giacosa and part of the Trotter complex, once equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, including a children's swimming pool. The fortunate presence of the Colour Factory, a shop where colours were produced, overlooking the same street, allowed colour and water to combine artistically and become an exhibition space, by imagining a new type of space. The name of the project was, therefore, *H2.CO*, an amusing new formula. The project wanted to create a unique place in NoLo, a place where everyone could have the chance to create their own "work of art". The idea behind the proposal was the interaction between water and ink: when the two elements come into contact, they create organic shapes, "explosions of colour". This led to the idea of a main room used as an art gallery/studio that developed through a passage of stairs and metal walkways, continually restrained, yet separate from the existing architecture, leading to micro-exhibition environments, cased in coloured, metal mesh to animate the central space. In this case, intuition not only proposed a new exhibition space with excellent sustainable features, but also outlined a light, reversible method of intervention which, together with the display, enabled new life to be given to a building without altering its character and indeed leaving the field open to future interventions. Re-designed in this way, the water house became a hinge and point of dialogue between the city and the Trotter Park, providing the neighbourhood with a new, rich and interesting opportunity.

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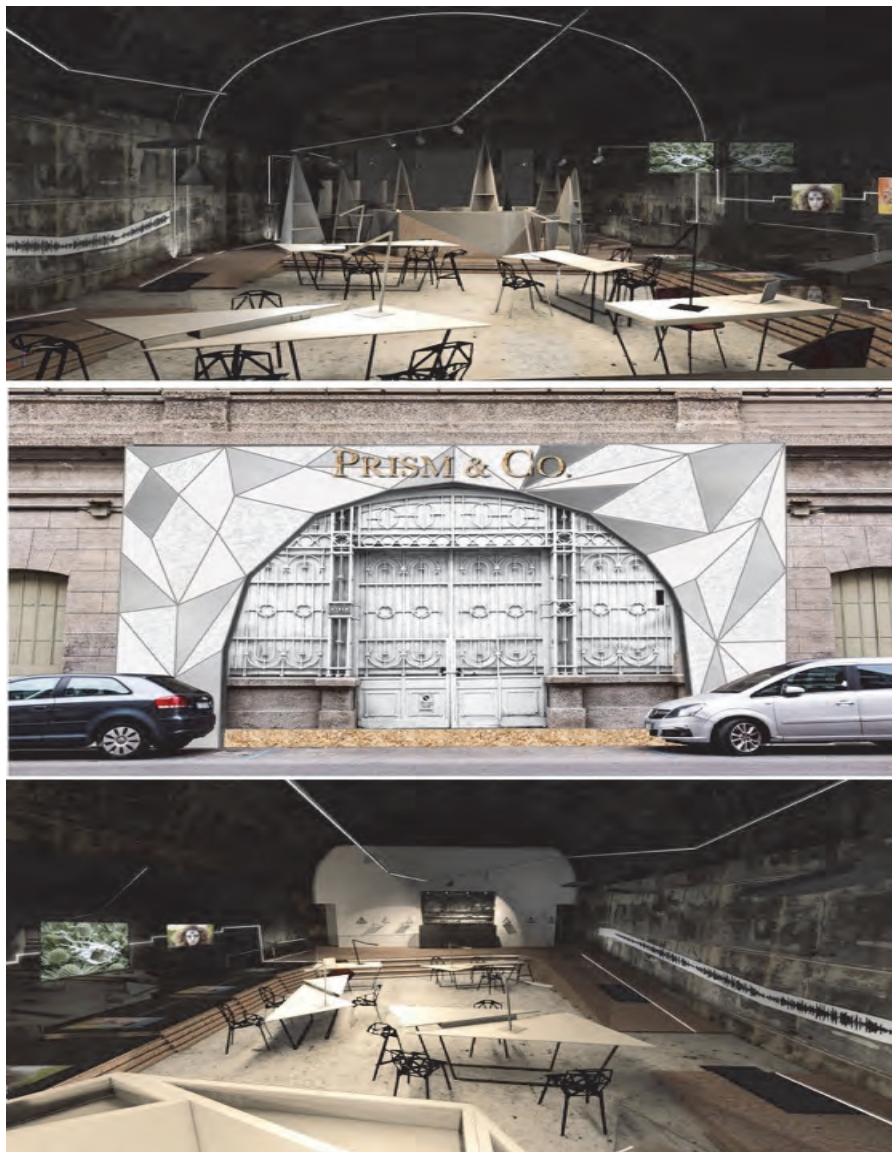


Fig.1 – Prism & Co. eco-sustainable jewellery made of waste materials form a picture framer

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Fig. 2 – H2.CO micro-exhibition environments where everyone could create a “work of art”

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One of the best-known commercial activities in the area is the *Pasticceria G. Cova & C.*, Viale Monza, 91. The place is popular with those with a sweet tooth, and the cake shop also offers a comfortable space to spend time watching passers-by on Viale Monza. Starting from this pleasurable place in which to linger, attention was paid to the inner courtyard to imagine possible synergies and additions to the existing business. *The Enchanted Garden* with its attractive name is a multi-ethnic confectioner's hidden within a Milanese courtyard: it is a secret, magical place, accessed through an "enchanted garden", where a passion for ethnic specialties combines with the narration of traditional tales: customers experience new cultures, participate in culinary workshops and attend theatre performances. The central core of the space consists of a stage, surrounded by a display counter for sweets. Around the main structure, two pedestals draw a landscape, to identify a children's area, adaptable to temporary needs, and an area with seating areas in various styles. The proposal involved a low, initial investment and was easily implemented, as the affected areas were unused or under-used. A simple and effective idea to open up new perspectives for a historic business.

BiStrAGE, a project to rethink the relationship between audience and cinema, took on a historic business in crisis, once the district cinema fell into total crisis. The proposal arose from the idea that cinema is not the real world. It is a world in which the illusion of reality is recreated, bringing you back to true emotions. The illusion is created behind the scenes, it explodes amidst sets brought to life by actors and you see your reflection in the cinema. Emotions are translated at the project site and you can watch movies and share experiences and food, within the atmosphere and flavours that each scene brings with it. The suggestive places created by the director are recreated, so that our protagonists are living deconstructed, real life scenes: drinking coffee in America in the 1950s and watching a movie in Truman's living room. A world totally based on experience, recreated in old commercial spaces which, thanks to the ostentatious use of theatrical scenery, allows us to immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of our favourite movies without resorting to virtual reality. On the contrary, we can experience the tricks of cinematic fiction firsthand, which adds nothing to the mystery of the fourth art, but rather enhances its charm.

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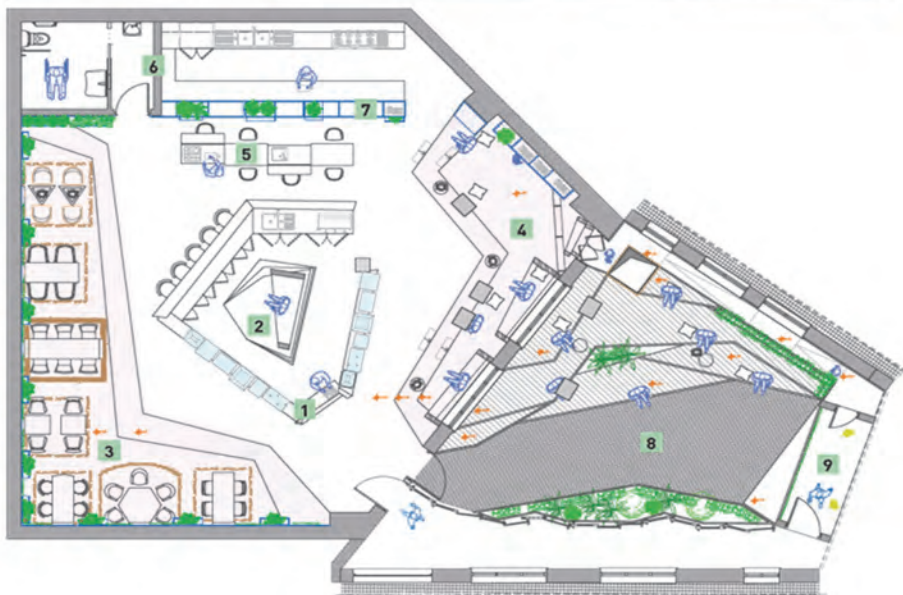


Fig. 3 – Enchanted Garden multi-ethnic confectioner's hidden within a Milanese courtyard

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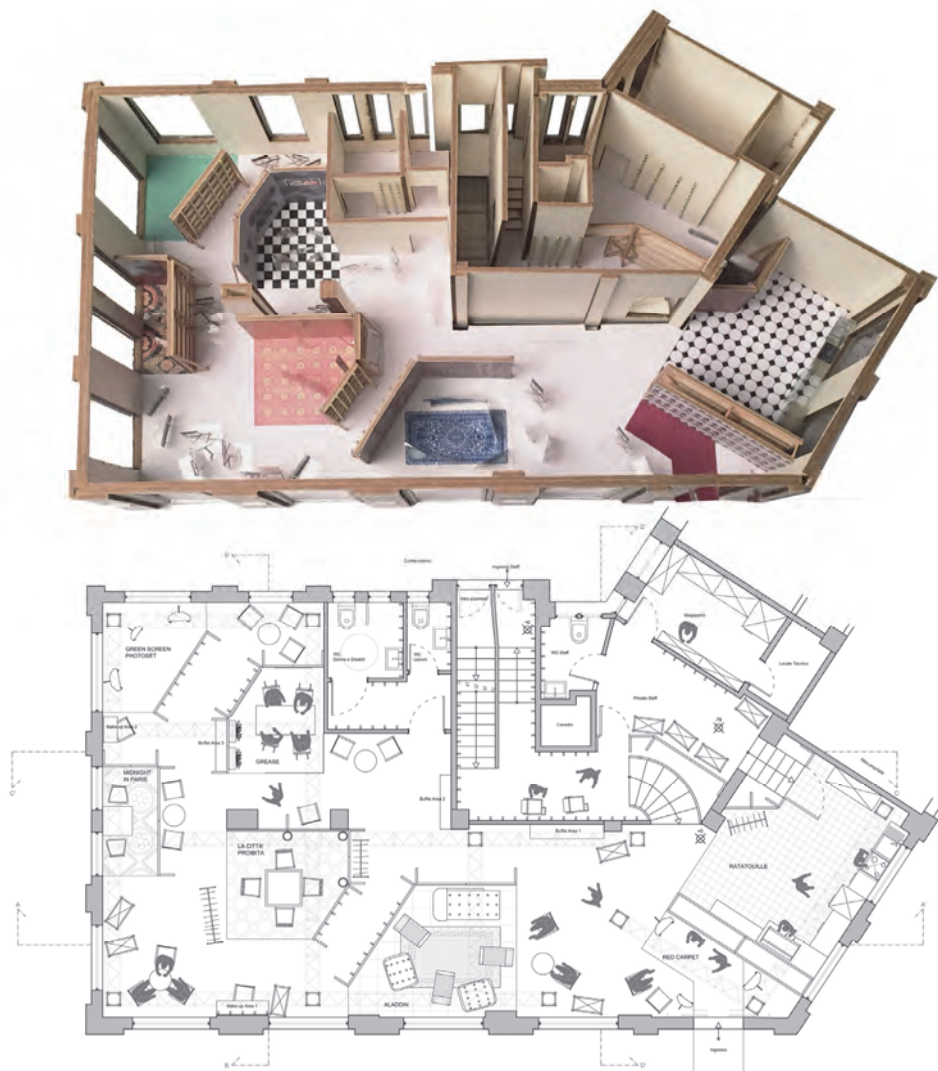


Fig. 4 – BiStrAGE a project to rethink the relationship between audience and cinema

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Unconventional Spaces for Art and Design: Enabling Community Synergy. A Methodological Approach

Annalinda De Rosa, Politecnico di Milano

Framing the Activities

The design process of the studio described in this chapter focuses on public spaces, both indoor and outdoor, by establishing connections and relationships with the local citizens – connected to shops, associations, informal groups and neighbourhood committees – and with a specific local community: contemporary artists who own their art gallery, exhibition and work spaces in the Milan NoLo District.

The focus of the studio resonates with the most advanced fields of research and experimentation that the European Commission is now fostering through research and innovation programmes. More specifically: 1) how “public spaces” both shape, and are shaped, by, cultural activity, including art, and how this can bring about integration of people, including at the political and economic levels; and 2) how the co-creation of public goods (services, spaces and strategies) can actually become a way to engage citizens and stakeholders of all kinds in shaping the European identity.

As stated in the chapter “Designing Public Spaces with Local Communities through Art” by Laura Galluzzo, the connection between contemporary arts and the bottom-up transformations of urban spaces has a multi-faceted role in establishing brand new social innovations and place-making processes. The key point of this shift is the active engagement of local actors; the studio enhanced this concept in its process. This chapter focuses on how these broad

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fields of research have been transferred into “Arnold – Art and Design in NoLo Social District”, the MSc Interior Design Final Studio held by Davide Fassi, Laura Galluzzo, Anna Meroni and Xiaocun Zhu helped by Annalinda De Rosa and Martina Mazzarello, in the academic year 2016/17 at the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano. The academic staff is part of the Polimi DESIS Lab¹, a research team of the Design Department; the Lab, part of the worldwide DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability)² involves a group of researchers adopting a strategic and a systemic approach to design, particularly focused on design for service and spatial design³. The Lab runs research projects at local, national and international levels and often combines its research with several educational programmes and courses. Hence, the academic activity is a field of experimentation and practice for research topics and theories of education and design methodologies, nourishing the development of the theoretical research and supporting the link between theory, research and practice.

In the methodological process of the studio there has been the possibility to integrate interior design, urban space design and service design, by having the chance to approach the projects in a holistic way and by nurturing the design steps with key aspects borrowed from social sciences methodologies and interlacing them with specific approaches and design tools to develop an educational process based on a contextual design approach. As described in the following paragraphs, key concepts from Grounded Theory and Participatory Action Research have been reframed into interior and

¹ www.desis.polimi.it. This team includes design experts in service, interior, spatial and strategic design. We use a community-centred design approach and our objective is to explore how design can enable people, communities, enterprises and social actors to activate and manage innovation processes, aimed at experimenting with sustainable, convivial and collaborative ways of living and doing

² www.desis-network.org DESIS Network, born in 2009 from three international activities, is a no-profit and cultural association since 2014 and an evolving network of Design Labs based in more than forty international design schools and design-oriented universities operating with local, regional and global partners to promote and support social change towards sustainability.

³ Alongside contributions from strategic design, user-centred-design, design for territory, communication, economics, planning and sociology. The Lab is involved in several local and international research projects and the group runs also post-graduate courses and design studios.

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service design approaches and tools: from the needs of the research to the design opportunities; from the preliminary proposals to the technical executive ones; from the understanding of the “personas” to their involvement in the prototyping activities; and from concept to the final settings.

During the research, the continuous relationship with the stakeholders and the citizens has been maintained through on-field co-design processes, by the integration of the service perspective and by prototyping the ideas. The output can be linked to the discipline of landscape design, intended as design of complex urban landscapes where design for social innovation and participatory design play a crucial role.

The description of the various phases of the studio is structured to focus on the methodological approaches adopted. The first – *Investigation* – embraced notions of *Constructivist Grounded Theory* as a qualitative strategy of inquiry together with an in the field approach. A dialectic in the data collection has been effective in opening a range of design possibilities. The second – *Designing Concept* – has been based on *Participatory Action Research* and design tools to iterate the design process⁴. The final course step – Prototyping – sees a cross-pollination and communication among different fields of design for the project definition, which are then realized in the Event phase (See chapter “Events and the City: When Arnold Meets NoLo”, by Davide Fassi).

⁴ The projects developed during the course and the authors: 1. “Martin – Marathon of art in NoLo”. Students: Alessia Concato, Marica Magnifico, Sara Petrini, Yang Yeqiu, Zhu Qinyue. 2. “Discovering artistic soul”. Students: Dinullah Bayu Ibrahim, Vera Irawan, Hangkan Jin, Yaqi Zhang. 3. “Esaball. Non andare nel pallone”. Students: Athulya Anil Pillai, Fan Chen, Gioia Corrado, Paola Mignogna, Susu Zhang. 4. “W.H.A.L.E. Where All Leave their Experiences”. Students: Milena Gasparetto, Barbara Grassi, Stefania Iannelli, Ilaria Papotti, Yimu Yang. 5. “Beyond NoLo. Arnold’s Master Plan”. Students: Minghong Ou, Irene Sarlo, Martina Sciannamè, Andrea Sodero, Francesco Vergani. 6. “Tutto NoLo è paese”. Students: Flavia De Meo, Andrea Moret, Alejandro Nùñez Plaza, Martina Sartor, Ambra Seliziato. 7. “The other sight of Nolo”. Students: Alessia Bellomo, Ofelia Fornaciari, Hou Jie, Marta Milazzo, Daniele Tomasin. 8. “Un-plug fest”. Students: Mine Kelleci, Leonardo Ruiz Melo, Magdalena Bober, Carlotta Magagnoli, Zeng Fansheng. 9. “Art in NoLo”. Students: Nicolas Alarcon Orjuela, Altea Bacchetti, Elisa Desole, Carla Salami, Wei Zhang. 10. “Fan. Festival of Art in NoLo”. Students: Arim Colombo, Elisa Invernizzi, Ilaria Lambri, Elena Martucci, Hejie Zhang. 11. “Bepart”. Students: Pierluigi Abati, Matteo Bracelli, Francesco Cardillo, Nina Nikic, Xu Ruimin.

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A Context-based Approach: Investigation Phase

This phase aimed to become familiar with the area through field research so as to map out the existing system of indoor and outdoor art-related spaces within an understanding of the neighbourhood through:

- A spatial representation: freehand drawings event during a one-day *flashmob* action (*Sketchmob*, in collaboration with <http://www.sketchmob.it>)⁵;
- A personal and physical exploration of the district without any particular goal or time constriction to deconstruct and communicate the inner perception of it through a map of experiences: experiential maps (related to the Situationist approach). It is a way “to study the precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously or not provided, which acts directly on the affective behaviour of individuals”⁶. This exploration enhances the correlations between psyche and environment, contrasted with classical geography, putting at the heart of its purposes the re-creative definitions of urban spaces;
- A first direct contact with the local inhabitants: video-interviews⁷. This is a way to deeply engage with and learn from people to get a rich understanding of their thoughts and behaviours through a scheduled meeting;
- A critical essay analysing the district around some given topics (such as commerce, associations and third sector organisations, social inclusion, cultural life, newcomers, sharing economy, etc.) and having the whole city of Milan as a point of comparison.

The exploration of the context is fundamental during the design process because it inspires and informs the creative team. The context awareness does not only concern the designer (i.e. the students), but contributes to the growing awareness of specific

⁵ <http://www.sketchmob.it>. A *sketchmob* is an informal meeting of 2/3 hours between people (architects, designers, artists, students, design enthusiasts in general) who gather in a special place to draw. The sketch is a tool to look at, understand and (re)discover the space around.

⁶ First issue of International Situationist bulletin, 1958.

⁷ In collaboration with ImagisLab, Design Department, Politecnico di Milano. <http://imagislab.it>.

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problems in the local inhabitants. In fact, the methods applied in this phase required the students to immediately get in touch with the physical and human-socio-cultural environment: contextual factors need to be holistically explored by designers in the front-end of any design. At this stage, a collection and simultaneous analysis of data was essential for the students to lay the foundations for a comparative investigation of concepts. In fact, the first outputs required – listed above – are conceptual analysis to generate ideas and the comparison of the data collected, which is a way for students to sample and refine the emerging theoretical ideas step by step.

The video-interview tool is a reprocessing of on-the-spot filming and interviews to present an initial vision of selected interpretations of the social environment and in which most of the concepts are gathered and elaborated during the collection itself. In fact, the filming needs to be designed: the physical and conceptual point of view; the video frames; the location atmosphere; the questions and ways to enrich the conversation⁸. Then, after the post-production process, the final output is a sort of recreation and communication of an experience to enable reflections, and to present research questions, topics and findings to be explored in later design phases. The videos were not only a description of the artists' works and approaches, but they disclosed their reflections and thoughts towards their relationship with the workspace and with the city as a source of inspiration. Students were able to show the concepts gathered through the filming typology; for example, in the project *W.H.A.L.E.*⁹, the video-interview with the artist Andrea Tarella – an illustrator in the fashion, editorial and retail fields – shows him being interviewed in his atelier while drawing, surrounded by his books and objects of inspiration. The attention focused on his work environment, while in the project *Hope in the Dark*¹⁰, the video-interview with the photographer Eugenio Marongiu was filmed while he wandered about the district, exploring and photographing as he

⁸ See also: IDEO (2015). *The field guide to human-centered design: Design kit*. San Francisco. p. 39.

⁹ “W.H.A.L.E. WHERE All Leave their Experiences”. Project by: Milena Gasparetto, Barbara Grassi, Stefania Iannelli, Ilaria Papotti, Yimu Yang.

¹⁰ Project by: Arim Colombo, Elisa Invernizzi, Ilaria Lambri, Elena Martucci, Hejie Zhang.

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went, then superposing the artist's approach to the urban environment in his work to the reflections gathered from the interview itself.

Through these context-based tools, the students have been able to explore a set of spatial-temporal elements related to the physical area and the human interaction with it, in order to get inspiration in the early phases of the design.



Fig. 1 – Frame of the video with the artist Andrea Tarrella in his atelier. Video by Milena Gasparetto, Barbara Grassi, Stefania Iannelli, Ilaria Papotti, Yimu Yang

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Fig. 2 and 3 – Frames of the video with the artist Eugenio Marongiu: a travelling interview in the NoLo district showing his approach to the urban context. Video by Arim Colombo, Elisa Invernizzi, Ilaria Lambri, Elena Martucci, Hejie Zhang

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Deconstructing or understanding the context layer is fundamental to the design process to characterise the product-user interactions as a pre-cursor to developing a design solution. The context layer does not describe the technical dimensions of a product, but rather contains ideas, views or other considerations about people, their lives, culture, nature, society and technology. (Aranda Jan, Jagtap, and Moultrie, 2016, p. 44)

Thus, users have been involved with an increased level of connection since the beginning in the process.

Studying the context of product use helps designers to gain empathy with users, to avoid fixation on preset assumptions about the user or the product, and to create innovative concepts on how a product can be experienced. (Visser, Stappers, Van der Lugt, and Sanders, 2005, p. 121)

For this reason, the didactic process has been informed with key notions from a constructivist approach to *Grounded Theory*. It is a strategy of inquiry for qualitative research and consists of “systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analysing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). It relies on two main principles: a context is not static but continually changing in response to prevailing conditions; and the responses to these contextual factors depend on people, who have the means to be influenced by and influence them (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 419). For that, the approach is far from formulaic; instead, it is sequential and flexible since it is framed through the flow of data, it is durable since it accounts for variation and it is open to refinement. With a constructivist approach, the strategy “assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretative understanding of subjects’ meanings” (both respondents’ and researchers’ meanings) (Charmaz, 2005, p. 510).

These theoretical notions have been reframed into interior and service design tools through desk and field analysis. The design outputs required and the tools provided aimed at supporting a data collection that varied according to the approach to the context (desk and field-based) and for the typologies of midway assessment; students were encouraged to implicitly systematize the data during

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the collection, to help their interpretation of a multifaceted environment and to validate the data themselves from the source's point of view thanks to a human-centred design approach and qualitative inquiries. For example, the experiential map realized by Francesco Cardillo overlaps the visual experience to the sounds in the district, trying to communicate the effects generated by walking, while the sketch activity connected the urban experience to that of drawing. This has created a dialectic in the acquired: both subjective (experiential map) and objective (essay) by considering the researcher-student as a subject; both direct (video-interviews) and indirect (video and sketch observations) by considering the relationship between the subject and the object of investigation.



Fig. 4 – Sketchmob activity in the NoLo district, October 2016. Photo by: Ilaria Argenziano and Lucia Calliari

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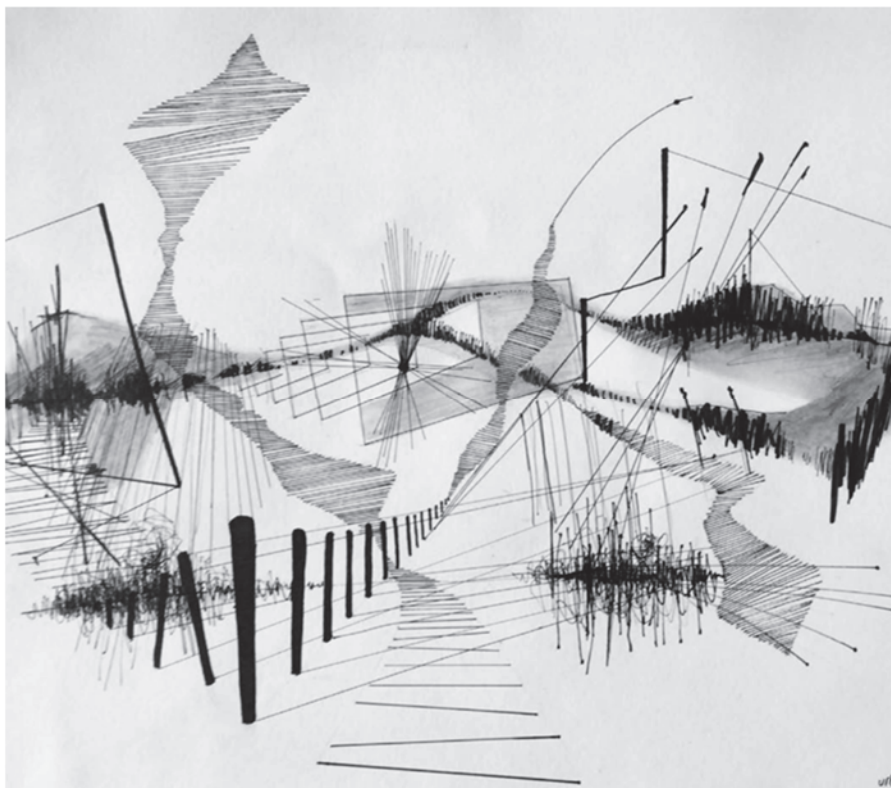


Fig. 5 – Experiential map by Francesco Cardillo

Designing Solutions with Local Community: Designing Phase

This phase aimed to co-design spatial solutions for an exhibition about local artists in unconventional spaces for art. Each design team was teamed with two artists and two locations. Twenty-two unconventional places (piano shop, butcher's shop, cinema, co-working space, tavern, etc.) and their owners and twenty-two local artists were introduced by the research team leaders to the Master's students to work with and co-design the spatial solutions. Students were required to do:

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- a background analysis of the spaces through diagrams (2d/3d/models), study of spatial flows, dimensional drawings, space visualizations and mock-ups;
- a “getting to know” process through video-interviews of owners and artists;
- co-design activities with artists, owners and communities;
- a consequential concept definition of the exhibition through diagrams (2D/3D/models), study of spatial flows, dimensional drawings, space visualizations, mood board / colour board / material board /tech board and mock-ups.

The Designing phase revealed the interdisciplinary character of the course, breaking the silos of design approaches and adding a diversity perspective. As stated in the first paragraph, the research team who run the studio is particularly focused on service, systemic and spatial design, and on experimentation in design education. Considering the reflection around the ongoing repositioning of design thinking and its interconnection in contexts of application and in theoretical orientation with a wider range of socio-cultural, political and commercial implications (Buchanan and Margolin, 1995; Krippendorff, 2005), the systemic nature of the design discipline and the mutual shifting among its domains are becoming increasingly irrefutable. Our research team explores the relationship between service design and the design of physical environments. The main aim is to examine how the systemic logic of service design and its peculiar focus on interactions influence the shaping of spaces, in private as well as in public contexts. The spatial experience of human beings is rooted in architecture and urban planning. This experience is explored and developed by the discipline of spatial design, which deals with the transformation and manipulation of a space, the perception of the space as well as the actions and interactions that take place, and the experience of passing through the space. Spatial design frequently encounters the redefinition of contemporary life parameters and exposes the new configurations of a changing society (Branzi, 2006): the physical realm enables interactions among people and enhances a sense of shared ownership and the engagement of people with contexts. That is why the design of public and private spaces meets the relational nature of services, in a mutual influence that affects the creation of meaningful social environments.

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Approaching an iterative and adaptable process, constructed and reconstructed over time, the inner temporariness of a specific spatial context is so integrated in a complex system to support diffused (space - time) opportunities.

In the Designing phase, the ideas generation occurred as well with a methodological dialectic: the findings of the Investigation phase informed first the objective spatial analysis, then the critical representation of the spaces with interpretive diagrams, expanded by the spatial experience with the owners and the artists. All of this was supported by the design of co-design activities based on Participatory Design (PD): the direct involvement during the design process of the users, i.e. those who will be affected by the design output. PD is a qualitative research method aiming at contributing to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation: it studies a system and concurrently it collaborates with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction (Gilmore, Krantz and Ramirez, 1986, p. 161). The students hoped to make contact with users and other stakeholders by setting co-design activities, a design process within the iterative design cycle leading to getting insights, to revealing needs and to building awareness and capacities in the participants by making them “agents” of the change. Sanders and Stappers (2008, p. 6) define co-design as “to refer to the creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process”. It aims at including users-citizens in the design process, because they are “experts of their experiences” and therefore they can be part of the solution. Co-design activities are planned meetings in which the designer uses open-ended artefacts (such as issue cards, scenarios, brainstorming games, conceptual mock-ups) to represent, visualize and focus on a specific topic or challenge. These then allow for reflections and idea exchanges. The outcomes collected are then conceptualized and reported through photos, diagrams or videos that inform the conceptual definition of the spatial solution. Users are therefore fundamental resources in the design process and co-design activities trigger a growing awareness of specific problems in the citizens. Thus, this methodology, together with the dialectic data collection of the Investigation phase, expanded the generation of ideas throughout

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Fig. 6 – Co-design activity with “Fatto da Yo!” Lab. Project by: Arim Colombo, Elisa Invernizzi, Ilaria Lambri, Elena Martucci, Hejie Zhang

the process, avoiding preconceptions and embracing iteration and self-correction.

Interior design students tackled the project by taking into account the soft, strategic and systemic components of service, event and communication design. The aim was to come up with outputs to prototype and to test solutions intended to be hybrid artefacts, “made up of things, places, systems of communication and interactions, human beings and their organizations” (Manzini in Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 1). Thus, flexible and open-ended, and with a focus on a service design approach for spatial design. These components are the guidelines for a systemic and integrated approach, fundamental for the final course phase.

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Fig. 7 and 8 – Banners showing the preliminary analysis: a representation of the artistic world of the painter and sculptor Gaetano Fracassio and the project's location highlights. Project by: Alessia Bellomo, Ofelia Fornaciari, Hou Jie, Marta Milazzo, Daniele Tomasin

Prototyping the Output as a Mean of Dissemination: Prototyping Phase

Being systemic means having a complex vision of interacting components, put together in a structured way and influencing each other. During the whole course, students observed, interacted and got inspired with and by a complex system – the human-socio-cultural environment of the district – approaching step by step many of its parts, so as to define a design solution fully integrated with its hard and soft components.

In the *Prototyping phase*, students were asked to start approaching the event from the vision/perspective of the district, which was developed after the course and illustrated in the following chapter. The last phase aimed at designing the final event of the course: a travelling exhibition for all the district's inhabitants and stakeholders to explore the twenty-two projects through drawings, visualizations, diagrams and mock-ups displayed in their twenty-two locations. Students were asked to design the set up itself, and the interactions with the visitors through the space experience and specific activities

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to get to know the project and the wayfinding system throughout the district. The didactic outputs also included:

- the definition of a general concept of the event;
- the definition of the “offering map” (a visual tool representing what the service offers to the users), “personas” (the archetypes built from the very close observation of the actual potential users) and the user experience (a journey of the user across the service);
- the definition of the timeline of the set-up and dismantling of the event;
- the design of an info-point and of the so-called “totem” (a display system to advertise the exhibition on the front of the locations).

Students were asked to concentrate specifically on the following aspects:

- components “What are the elements of the activity? Do they have a cost? How to store them during the activity?”;
- timing “How long does it take to prototype the idea? How long are people engaged in the activity?”;
- number of elements “How many people are supposed to be involved? How many pieces are prototyped?”.

The final event was a way to prototype some components of the designed project, to test its interaction with the space in a real- life situation. The “Unprivate Privacy” exhibition set-up of the project “Bepart”¹¹ gave a good overview of the input collected from the video-maker Lorenzo Picarazzi and from the owner of Rovereto House&Lab, a space for public and private events. Interactive devices highlighted the main concept of the artworks exhibited while inviting the visitor to listen to and to read the contents in an unusual way. The interaction between the visitor and the artwork became the key elements in designing the space.

¹¹ “Bepart”. Project by: Pierluigi Abati, Matteo Bracelli, Francesco Cardillo, Nina Nikic, Xu Ruimin.

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Fig. 9 – The design of an interactive exhibition: a board showing the exhibition plan, the concept, the spatial visualizations and the design of the components. “Martin – Marathon of art in NoLo”, project by: Alessia Concato, Marica Magnifico, Sara Petrini, Yang Yequiu, Zhu Qinyue.

Thus, the systemic approach has been essential in the interdisciplinary process as well as in the final design output. Of course, the final course output has been much closer to the event and systemic design than to a strategic design, since it lays the basis for a product service system design and suggested the innovation, which is peculiar to a strategic action (Meroni, 2008). However, the studio process supported the idea through an interdisciplinary and

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qualitative approach to a design project, which is not unsystematic compared to more traditional and quantitative methods; indeed, it is a structured foundation for integrated solutions, which in fact require multiple and associated inputs and a systemic view.

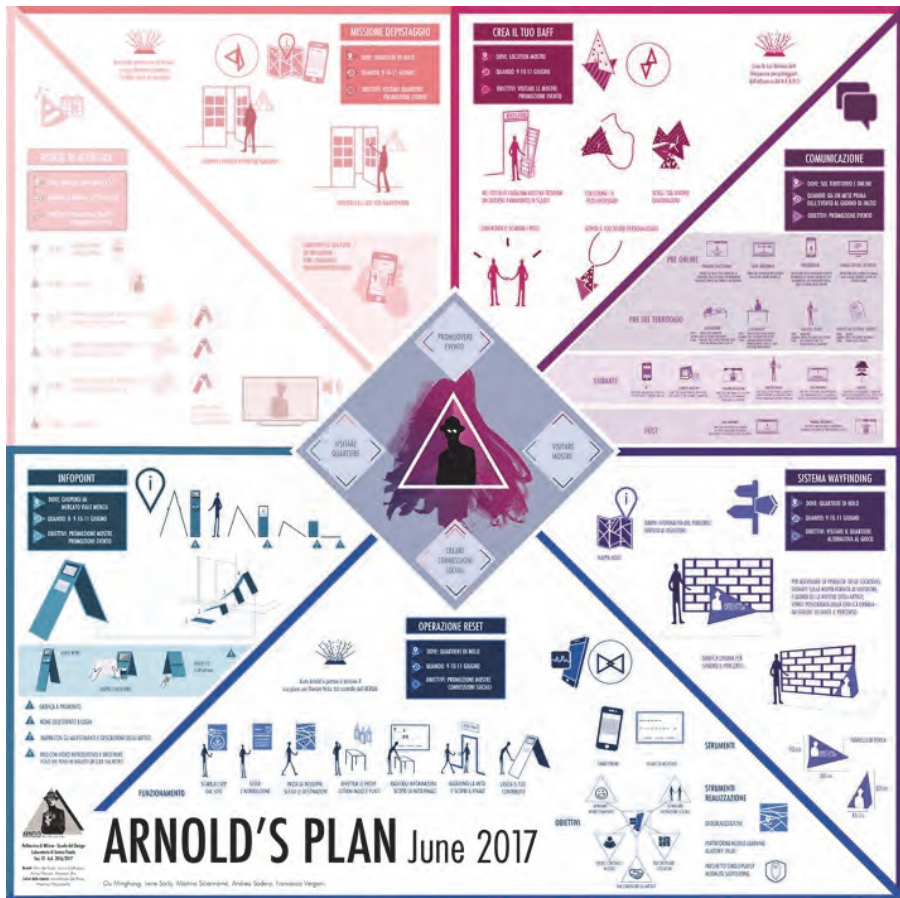


Fig. 10 – The design of the event: a board showing the concept, the planning and the timing, the design of the components, the wayfinding system and social interactions generated. “Beyond NoLo. Arnold’s Master Plan”, project by: Minghong Ou, Irene Sarlo, Martina Sciannamè, Andrea Sodero, Francesco Vergani.

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Conclusion

The design education approach employed between the university environment and the social one is a strategy that enables community synergies. By breaking the silos of design approaches and connecting through the use of all the tools presented “what people say and do” (contextual design) and “what people make” (participatory research, co-design and event design), this diversity adds perspective and a cross-pollination and communication among different fields of study.

Considering the presented process, the relationship between theory and practice is carried out by our research group on two levels: at the researchers' level by avoiding an arbitrary division between research and didactics, which becomes a field of experimentation for topics and methodologies in design education, and which nourishes the very development of theoretical research; and at the didactics level itself, where the link between theory, research and practice is taught.

Finally, considering the specific context of design, the growing urban area of NoLo in Milan has been the appropriate place to experiment with new frontiers (new societal needs - inclusive and participative, and new forms of citizen interactions) to implement the positive aspects of the gentrification in progress.

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Events and the City: When Arnold Meets NoLo

Davide Fassi, Politecnico di Milano

Activating Cultural Events in Local Communities

According to Florida (Florida, 2005) “the distinguishing characteristic of the creative class is that its members engage in work whose function is to create meaningful new forms. He states that there is a super creative core composed of those professionals who are involved both in creative work (designers, novelists, academics, entertainers etc.) and in a wide range of knowledge-based occupations (high-tech sectors, legal and health care professions etc.). This creative class is involved in “creative placemaking” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010) that “make substantial contributions to local economic development, liveability and cultural industry competitiveness”. This can happen in a variety of ways; the focus of this chapter is how a cultural event designed by the “creative class” together with active citizens can improve the perception of an emerging neighbourhood in the city of Milan.

When local communities are willing to participate in collaborative actions, it makes it much easier to design, produce and activate solutions for a better way of living. There is a level of eager proactivity that facilitates the creation of several activities, including small events that have a strong connection with the neighbourhood's needs (e.g. community gardens, running team etc.). Among these we may find cultural events that, when designed *for*, *in*, and *with* the city, help make the social and spatial environments more hospitable and attractive. They can also improve social cohesion, when the neighbourhood is made up of a social and cultural mix of all ages,

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traditions and nationalities.

There are many examples of cultural events that have improved the quality of life of a city, even by using their temporariness (due to the intrinsic nature of the event itself) as a mean of designing scenarios for long-term use (Fassi and Motter, 2017). Some of these events are considered below as potential strategies for interventions in urban public spaces.

How to Strengthen Neighbourhoods through the Transformation of a Public Space

*Magic Carpet*¹ is a project that combines documentation of daily life, community engagement and urban design. The project transforms public space into an outdoor cinema for people to enjoy films about the neighbourhood while sharing ideas and memories, and re-envisioning and remaking community space collectively. The team engaged local secondary school students in the production of video interviews with different community members in Sai Ying Pun, an inner city district in Hong Kong, to capture their life stories and views on the district's development. Serving as important oral history resources, these videos were screened in the district as an open platform for the community to interact and envision a better future for their neighbourhood (Tieben, 2016). The mobile set-up of *Magic Carpet*, comprising a grass carpet and colourful beanbags, was designed to allow easy adaptation to different places in Hong Kong and beyond. A follow-up placemaking event, *Magic Tables* saw our further attempts to collaborate with Sai Ying Pun's community to create bespoke furniture for the steeply sloped Centre Street, incorporating urban design, food sharing and musical performance into the *Magic Carpet* setting.

¹ A project developed by the School of Architecture, City University of Hong Kong, School of Journalism and Communication, City University of Hong Kong Neighbourhoods in Sai Ying Pun, Tin Shui Wai and To Kwa Wan.

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How to transform and Reuse neglected urban spaces

The International Sustainability Institute (ISI) identified the alleys of *Pioneer Square* in Seattle (USA) as some of the city's great pedestrian spaces although the neighbourhood felt empty, and the alleys reflected the barrenness and neglect. So, they started the Alley Network Project² in 2011 together with the local business improvement association, the *Alliance for Pioneer Square*. Drugs, crime and rubbish made them off-limits to most people. ISI set out to change this perception by putting people back in the alleys through a series of events. Since the first one in 2011, more than 6,000 people have attended alley events, giving a new face to the spaces. Now, the alleys are entering a new phase as businesses move in (restaurants, bike shops etc.). With support from the City, ISI sponsored an alley design process to create a design that makes the alleys accessible to everyone with an easy-to-maintain surface and energy efficient lighting.

How to Connect Several Places in a City through Diffuse Citizens Actions

*Green City*³ is an annual event organized by the Municipality of Milan (Italy) involving the public green areas of the city. The idea is to network the green spaces through several small events and activities for the citizens. Community gardens, public parks, schools, and local association sites are some of the actors engaged in the event that has taken place during a weekend in October since 2014. The activities are developed by citizens (in associations or informal groups) and are about: increasing the awareness of environmental sustainability in the cities; the valuing and appreciation of the spaces; and the implementation of a network of places in the city dealing with "green" issues. Each initiative is self-funded and also benefits from extensive advertising on the part of the municipality through its communication channels (official website, social networking etc.).

² Alley Network Project, Pioneer Square, Seattle USA organized by Alliance for Pioneer Square, International Sustainability Institute (2011). <http://allianceforpioneersquare.org/>

³ For more information <http://www.greencitymilano.it/>

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From Prototyping to “Mise en Scène”

As explained in the previous chapter, “Arnold – Art and Design in NoLo Social District” was developed in two main phases. The first one lasted from July 2016 to February 2017 and the second one from March 2017 to July 2017. The *Arnold* project began its second phase just after the exhibition of the results of the co-designed projects at the local market on February 4th 2017. The research analysed the results and defined further steps to be taken. The goal was to select those results with a high degree of possibility of being transformed into real actions during a three- day cultural event in the neighbourhood planned for June 2017. There was a shift from “action prototyping” to project development and building (“mise en scène”). Both the prototyping and the mise en scène referred to PAR (Participatory Action research) methodology and creative placemaking to generate social innovation.

The application of such a qualitative methodology in design research and practice in the context of social innovation is appropriate, since all the actors involved collaborate in an inclusive way for a transformative process and for (systemic) change. It is important to stress that these actors, researchers and practitioners do not have the same role and PAR does not aim to make them equal. The “double challenge” of combining both practical action and research potentially leads to conflict where the roles of the collaborative members of the research team are different (Avison et al., 2007, p. 20). Researchers and participants influence each other in a mutual exchange. During both phases the involved artists had a crucial role in developing the final exhibition. The input they gave to reach the action prototyping was the shift from being object maker to maker of experiences (Spayde, 2012) or better as “placemakers”. The collaboration among artists, designers and location owners underlined the very different approaches to the creation of the output. If designers were guided using some design tools and methods to come to a result in both phases with a systems approach (guided brainstorming, mind-mapping, functional spatial layout, customer journeys, technical drawings), the artists offered important input to allow the designers to understand their “world”, the meaning of their

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artworks and how to add value to them in the exhibition. While on the one hand, the location owners underlined some restrictions to the use of the space (due to ongoing activities at the locations), on the other hand, they helped the artists and designers to make the exhibitions achievable (by letting them make slight changes to the space layout, offering their time, and giving small financial aid).

From the analysis of the results of the first phases, some significant inputs emerged. First, the research team acknowledged that some artist-location owners-designers collaborations were inefficient due to the different levels of involvement in the project. Some location owners realized they did not have time to attend the co-design activities even though they were initially enthusiastic about the idea of using their spaces for artist exhibitions in collaboration with the university; and once they saw how the space could have been transformed for the exhibition they did not agree. At the same time, some artists were not enthusiastic about the results of the co-design activities and nor were they totally satisfied with the final exhibition project, even though they greatly appreciated the collaboration with the young designers and the approach they used. Furthermore, some of the young designers decided not to continue with the second phase due to the low amount of interest in it. That is why, from the twenty-two projects developed in the first phase, the research team had to make a decision as to which ones were worth developing further and actually building in the “mise en scène” phase.

When Arnold Meets NoLo

After five months, “Arnold – Art and Design in NoLo Social District”, the research activity that included an Interior and Spatial Design studio at the Politecnico di Milano, has been further developed by a smaller team of young designers and researchers as a cultural event in collaboration with local unconventional location owners, artists, and citizens in NoLo (Milan). Small-scale events in the neighbourhood originate within the community in response to a need or desire to celebrate their unique identity (Douglas et al., 2001,

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p. 357) and the focus on the art realm in NoLo is one of these. They may be defined as themed public occasions designed to occur for a limited duration that celebrate valued aspects of a community's way of life (Douglas et al., 2001, p. 358; Schlenker, Edwards and Sheridan, 2005). Even if in this case, the valued aspect is an emerging one due to the current low awareness in the neighbourhood of the cultural richness related to the atelier, artist, and handicrafts located in NoLo⁴.

The event was based on the idea to develop some of the exhibitions co-designed during the first phase, not only to physically build them, but also to make people interact with them. "Social interactions between event visitors are an important part of the event experience and the level of satisfaction for the individual attending an event" (Nordvall et al., 2014). *Arnold* met NoLo not only to display pieces of art in unconventional places but also as a mean of improving the relationships among the different kinds of users (local inhabitants, city dwellers, art-events fans, occasional visitors). Each location was provided with a small activity to be carried out, with the double aim of connecting with the artist's realm and having a personal experience through the visit.

The making of *Arnold* took four months. To make the shift from the prototyping at the beginning of February 2017 to the event planned for June 2017, the research team started a simulation of a real job environment by activating three internships. The team was enriched by three full-time junior practitioners⁵ who helped to achieve the expected results (the "core-team"). As well, a network of young designers was established (the "diffused-team")⁶, composed of

⁴ Primary data collected through more than 50 video-interviews, surveys, informal chats revealed the lack of awareness about the presence of artists, ateliers, and handicrafts in the neighbourhood and the small amount of knowledge about it.

⁵ The "core team" was composed by Elisa De Sole, Barbara Grassi Carla Salami and coordinated by Martina Mazzaello.

⁶ The "diffused team" was composed by Milena Gasparetto, Barbara Grassi, Stefania Iannelli, Ilaria Papotti, Vera Irawan, Dinullah Ibrahim Hankang Jin, Irene Sarlo, Martina Sciannamè, Andrea Sodero, Francesco Vergani, Flavia De Meo, Andrea Moret Alejandro Nunez Plaza, Martina Sartor, Ambra Seliziato, Carlotta Magagnoli, Mine Kelleci, Magdalena Bober, Leonardo Ruiz Melo Jeffry, Zeng Fansheng, Elisa Desole, Carla Salami, Nicola Alarcon Orjuela, Arim Colombo, Elisa Invernizzi, Ilaria Lambri, Elena Martucci, Pierluigi Abati, Matteo Bracelli, Francesco Cardilo, Nina Nikic.

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a number of those who had been in charge of the projects developed in the first phase so as to make them authentic. They mostly worked independently with continued and direct contact with the “core-team” and with an ongoing connection with the artists and location owners involved.

The guidelines the “core-team” provided were:

- four weeks to define the budget for each location
- four weeks to finalize the project both with the artist and the location owners
- two weeks to get the materials and deliver them to the location
- one week to set up the installations
- three-day event (June 9th-10th-11th, 2017)
- three hours to dismantle them after the event.

The “core-team” working plan was:

- four weeks to design the corporate identity of the event
- four weeks to select twelve out of twenty-two locations involved in the first part, according to budget availability, the project's feasibility and the artists/owners availability, and to discover small local sponsorships mainly for materials.
- two weeks to manage the collection of materials for the “diffused-team”
- one week to coordinate the set up
- three days to supervise the event
- one day to coordinate the dismantling

The results of the planned activities made the event a success. Once the locations and the artist were confirmed, the corporate identity of the event was designed by the core-team. It was used to advertise the activities within the neighbourhood through tangible outputs (ad-postcards, small banners in the shops, maps etc.) and intangible ones (Facebook event).

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Fig. 1 – Map of the locations

The event was designed to have thirteen locations with artists' exhibitions and two info-points to get information about the opening⁷, the planned activities and the exhibitions themselves. One info-point was the local market where, in collaboration with the NoLo Social District, the official opening was held during a regular Saturday neighbourhood breakfast. During the breakfast within the market, the local citizens took food to be shared and the core-team designed an activity to be done: a participative art installation that involved sewing some ropes to three panels of reinforced metal grids

⁷ The involved artists and locations were: Info point: Mercato Comunale in Viale Monza 54, Ghe Pensi M.I., Piazza Morbegno 2, Vicolo del Fontanile (via Zuretti), with Andrea Salpetre @ZuArtDay & Looper Fest, Rovereto House & Lab - via Rovereto, 10 with Lorenzo Picarazzi (Timmerman Collective), Grafica & Stampa Snc, via Termopili, 25 with Eugenio Marongiu, Drogheria Creativa - via Marco Aurelio, 46 with Roberto Amoroso, Ci vuole un drink - via Martiri Oscuri, 3 with Antonio Radice, Cinema Beltrade - via Oxilia, 10 with Patrizia Emma Scialpi, NoLo75 - viale Monza, 75 with Walter Paganuzzi (Timmerman Collective), Autorimessa Spoleto - via Spoleto, with Barbara Colombo, T12lab - via dei Transiti, 12 with Andrea Q, Officina del colore, via Giacosa 39 with Andrea Tarella, Carrozzeria 900, Via Padova 29, with Massimo de Caria, Angela Maria Capozzi, Via delle Leghe.

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to draw a big whale, which is the mascot of the social district.⁸ The result has been donated to the social district for settings for future events.

Neighbourhood Heroes and other Stories

A small event like *Arnold* created synergies with other parallel events to increase the cultural value and impact on the neighbourhood (e.g. *ZuArt & Looper Fest* and *CineMart*) even in collaboration with the “Nolo Social District” (e.g. *GiraNolo*).

Bottom-up initiatives find their home in NoLo Social District (see Preface) since it is a fertile field of online and offline interactions among local citizens (Pasqualini, 2016). These initiatives usually start online with a shared interest in a topic described through a post on the social district's Facebook page. Then, an offline meeting is usually planned among the people who are keen to follow it up. During the preparation of *Arnold* a group of twelve local citizens⁹ started to share their interest in developing a guided tour of the neighbourhood, showing its highlights. This event belongs to the “How to connect several places in a city through diffuse citizens' actions” strategy (see the first par.). It reinforces the potentialities of the creative communities of being able “to act in a situation driven only by the desire to be, or the enjoyment of being, there and for the pleasure of doing something we are able to do” (Meroni, 2007, p. 10), and to be based on the “freedom of choice” organizations (Manzini, 2015, p. 83).

They organized themselves to do research in books, to collect information from the local inhabitants, and to investigate interesting stories connected to local spots, in order to develop a six-stop tour to be carried out during the *Arnold* event and that would be connected with it. Its name was *GiraNolo* (“Exploring Nolo”).

⁸ The “Whale” was a street art work in one of the neighbourhood streets that, since the establishment of the social district, was adopted as its main symbol. Even though it was later deleted by another street art work, it remains as a mascot of the social district.

⁹ The group members are: Greta Carniel Mauro Carta, Maria Elena Dicorato, Davide Fassi, Francesca De Finis, Floriana Gentile, Barbara Lazzari, Marika Menta, Orsola Pizzichemi, Alfredo Roccato, Ornella Rossetto, Anna Vezzoni.

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GiraNolo took into consideration *Arnold's* thirteen event locations together with citizens' choices about the most interesting places of the neighbourhood. They included: architectural masterpieces (such as a Terragni's rationalist house and a Castiglioni's brothers' church); places with a unique history (the former brothels in via Venini, famous during the Second World War); and others with a strong cultural relationship with the neighbourhood (the "Santa Maria Beltrade" churchyard, the local market and the "Trotter park"). It gave an historical architectural and design dimension to the *Arnold* activities based in the neighbourhood, mainly focused on the works done by contemporary artists and designers. While *Arnold* was an ongoing event during the three-day weekend, *GiraNolo* was planned to include four tours at pre-set hours (10am and 4pm) on both Saturday and Sunday. Each tour lasted two hours and each stop was curated by one or two local citizens who told the stories to the audience. More than 100 people joined the tours and that was a good opportunity for a mutual (*GiraNolo* and *Arnold*) link since the *GiraNolo* stops were close to *Arnold's* locations so this allowed the people to visit the artists' exhibitions.



Fig. 2 – *GiraNolo* tour (Ph. Gabriele Caroncini)

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Arnold also had the chance to merge with the activities of another parallel event: *ZuArt & Looper Fest*, a street-art festival created by a “local hero”¹⁰, Petra Loreggian, a famous Italian radio DJ who lives in NoLo and is very active in generating well-being solutions together with a small group of neighbours in an abandoned public space (Via Zuretti/Vicolo del Fontanile). This event belongs to the “How to transform and reuse neglected urban spaces” strategy (see the first par.). The research team created a synergy with *ZuArt & Looper Fest* in order to have a larger impact on the neighbourhood, to increase the potential audience and to ease a system of events in the neighbourhood. *ZuArt & Looper Fest* aimed at renewing the perception, the quality and the use of a narrow and dead-end street, looked onto by a residential building and a nursery. The street was used mainly as a parking area. There is a small green area at the end of it where large trees provide welcome shade and dogs nose around the bushes from time to time. For a long time, the space was only used by people who went there to get drunk, take drugs or to have sex even during the daytime. This meant the space was filled with unpleasant and dangerous rubbish drunk people screaming and causing a nuisance, and obscene behaviour in a public place. For some bureaucratic reasons the street was not legally recognized by any institutional body (neither local nor regional) until a taskforce of local citizens pressured the Milan Municipality to allow it to become a proper Milan street with the aim of being subject to the local rules in terms of cleaning and use. In spring 2017, the street was paved and the green strip at the end of it was better defined with a specific boundary and has hosted one of *Arnold*'s locations. A public space project was developed by a team of young designers with an artist and co-designed with local citizens.¹¹ The idea was make that green area be more hospitable and to avoid the antisocial behaviours that had previously existed there. The design output was temporary but it has been useful to suggest alternative use of that space even for the long term. It benefited from a network of donors created by the

¹⁰ “Hero” is a word used in Service Design and is given to those citizens who are active in designing new solutions for a better and communal way of living, mainly at the local level. (Selloni, 2017) (Meroni, 2007).

¹¹ Gioia Corrado and Paola Mignogna (designers) with Andrea Salpetre (artist) together with a small group of neighbours including Petra Loreggian.

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“local hero” including a sponsor for some building material and the Milan Municipality that offered a large quantity of remains from unused public spaces (mainly stones and rocks). The space was co-built during two working sessions, when it was first cleared of garbage and weeds, and then set up with garden boxes filled with soil and stones at the edges, and where citizens planted flowers and green plants. The artist created an installation called “180” to cover the wall at the end of street composed of 180 pieces of art designed using a special printing technique on aluminium.



Fig. 3 – “Arnold” and “ZuArt & Looper fest”: vicolo del Fontanile green public space installation (ph. Gioia Corrado)

The space was opened during the *ZuArt & Looper Fest* where ten or more street artists took part in a painting session all weekend to donate pieces of art to that place, including a 40m wall facing the street, six panels (3x3m) relocated in several schools of the neighbourhood and two building walls.

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Fig. 4 – ZuArt & Looper fest: street art installations

ZuArt & Looper Fest improved the quality of the street a great deal and nowadays it is considered one of the best places in Milan to find street-art masterpieces. The use of the space is slightly changing: although some of the previous problem behaviour still goes on, people are coming to the location more and more to see the pieces of art and to use the small green area to relax and enjoy the calm.

Conclusions

After the event at the end of June, the research team produced a list of conclusions referring to legacy, impact, sustainability and management of *Arnold*. They are based on direct analysis (by interviews, observations) and indirect data (desk research).

The legacy left to the neighbourhood

At first, the importance of the legacy to the neighbourhood is in terms of replicability and scenario building. *Arnold* created a system of actors related to art and design in the area, including

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unconventional locations to host art exhibitions and local artist ateliers. This system could be used in future different versions of the event and it could be amplified or modified depending on the needs of the events themselves. The NoLo social district could profit from the research and its output by using the event format as an annual festival for the city. *Arnold* created a scenario on how to use public/private spaces through art and design by including a participatory process together with professionals and local citizens.

The Impact

The impact of the research is considered here from a quantitative point of view. We may take into account several indicators, including:

- the number of stakeholders: more than fifty, including artists, location owners and sponsors made the event a complex system to be managed with a solid infrastructure (the “core-team” and the “diffused team”).
- the visitors: each location had at least fifty visitors throughout the event, with some totals reaching around 100 during individual openings. It means that we can estimate almost 1000 visitors for the whole event (not including *GiraNolo* with 100 participants and *ZuArt & Looper Fest*).
- Articles via blogs, magazines and newspapers: the interest from the press was high and over ten articles were published in national newspapers and blogs. This was due both to the large amount of attention towards the emerging neighbourhood that even in the previous months had caught the attention of the media, and to the event itself as a mix of university/citizens/artists collaboration, and to the *ZuArt & Looper Fest* press agency¹² who widely publicised the event.

¹² NoLo press created by Fania Alemanno and Riccardo Poli, two local citizens.

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Sustainability

The event had an economic and environmental sustainable approach. From the beginning, the budget was set as one of the challenges of the research. The whole event was supposed to be done with a low budget including settings, advertising and working hours. Settings were partially paid through some research funding given by the Design Department of the Politecnico di Milano and through some small sponsorship from local suppliers. Advertising was mainly online through free channels (social networking) and articles published in blogs and magazines (thanks to the press interest). Working hours were included both in the internships offered through the School of Design at the Politecnico di Milano and the full-time researchers involved.

With regards to environmental sustainability, all the settings were designed considering their end of life through two main approaches: reuse and recycle. The reuse approach considered how to take advantage of the February event settings (materials and objects) and how to create storage for the elements (products like lights, balloons, screens etc.) for future events after the dismantling. The recycling approach encouraged the designers and artists to use dry-connection settings (nails, snap-fit connection etc.) so as to ease the process of dismantling and enable separation of the materials for garbage collection.

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In the Neighbourhood and Beyond

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Framing the Research Activities: Lessons Learnt

This book has explored the topic of spatial design and urban activation at the neighbourhood scale including the role and collaboration between designers and people/groups of individuals not trained in design research and/or practice in this process. The essays of the first part present an overview on the relationships between design and inclusion, urban interiors, arts and transformation of public space, retail and community identity has been pointed out by the authors.

In “The City that Talks About Itself. Looking Beyond the Threshold into the Inner Urban Margins” by Barbara Camocini describes the role margins play to define the urban public space and stimulate its use (Bogoni, 2006). The meaning of margins is not limited to the concept of border, margins are also interpreters of the potentiality of the space by making it ductile and adaptable. In fact, the margins have a privileged relationship with residents helping to create a mental image of the city (Lynch, 1960; O'Rourke, 2013). Thresholds, showcases and edge breaks light up urban spaces, contagiously; they highlight it and make it safe. Margins can narrate and shine through the interior, hosting social proximity relationships and communicating an open, transparent, interpretable idea of the city. These spaces speak of their past and of their future, by putting the inhabitants able to read the changes. The upgrading and the future of the city depends on this ability of change.

“Urban Interiors as Places of Inclusion” by Agnese Rebaglio invites to reflect about the connection between the life of the

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individual and the community, and the city they experience. Citizens of the contemporary cities continuously reinvent the spaces they live in, both individually or in informal/formal groups by «transforming, reprogramming, recontextualising, recombining spaces and creating new layers of meaning, knowledge, information, and practices» (Iaconesi and Persico, 2013, p. 132). Public city spaces face the economic, social and environmental challenges that characterize the contemporary crisis, brought about by the communication technology and arising in the production of artefacts. Along with it, the author investigates how the spatial design thanks to its tools and methods can help to satisfy the demand for public urban places able to answer to the new and evolving needs, through new material features and behaviours, narrative skills to take local challenges and opportunities.

When “Designing Public Spaces with Local Communities through Art” investigates how public spaces could be designed through art and with local communities, the author Laura Galluzzo underlines a widespread process of urban activations by art interventions in several international towns. She focuses on the role of the interior urban spaces in this transformation (Crippa and Di Prete, 2011) and how art becomes an indispensable tool for designing such urban interiors. According to the author, the collaborations between artists and local communities and the inclusion and participation of citizens in urban regenerative processes can take place in different times and modes: with the local community’s main role in promoting interest in an abandoned area; with residents taking up the decision-making process, evaluating and choosing the artist and the work; through citizens who, thanks even to crowdfunding operations, manage the whole process from the bottom; with the participation of the community in the creative phase of the work and/or the realization of it, and finally when the presence of work in the public space promotes new forms of fruition of it by the urban populations.

In “The Role of Retail in Building a Neighbourhood Identity: The Isola Case Study” by Giulia Gerosa, we could see how the design of spaces, products, communication settings and services could become something triggering a complex system to be implemented and updated. In the Isola case study the author introduced, it is clear that

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to obtain that complex system, the involvement of a larger group of stakeholders based on the area is needed and it could create a coherent network of proposals to define the neighbourhood identity.

In the *Isola district* there is an environment particularly rich in social and cultural capital that has preserved over time the local identity and territorial recognisability of the district (Bruzzese, Gerosa, and Tamini, 2016). In this framework, the retail spaces could be seen as a tool to get a process of transformation and valorisation of a small/medium portion of cities. This process is not always imposed by the governance of the city itself but can also develop through a bottom up process by the citizens, professionals, activists in the neighbourhood.

Acting in the Neighbourhood

In the second part, the book focuses on a Milan neighbourhood called NoLo with texts about two research projects dealing with its urban activation through design interventions on abandoned retail spaces and through co-designed solutions in unconventional locations for art and design, with the aim of exploiting the huge potentialities of the neighbourhood itself and the fertile collaboration with local communities.

“ZIP Spaces. Fast Tests of New Scenario of Uses through Adaptive Reuse Strategies” invites to reflect on the digital transformation that brought in urban areas the development and consolidation of a multitude of high-tech hybrid activities based on the sharing of equipment and spaces but mostly, on synergies between different skills, with a typical craft lab experimental approach. The diffusion of digital technology, which characterises the contemporary age, contains the potential to form a common ground based on greater acceptance and understanding of differences, which could bring communities together (Schwab, 2017). Those synergies are built on interpersonal relationships between individuality and community, always rooted in local areas, fostering important processes of regeneration in the neighbourhood. Among all, Municipality is also investing in triggering these

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aggregative formats of activities and spaces; starting from the local energies, it fosters new forms of entrepreneurship also providing new spaces for them. With these premises, the author Barbara Camocini describes the research and training-on-site activity called *ZIP spaces* aimed to build and propose new scenarios of uses to be tested through adaptive reuse strategies of dismantled urban interior spaces to promote the formation of human relations (Rosson and Carrol, 2002). The research specifically focuses on the settlement of new aggregative formats of activities in the abandoned shops in order to increase their communicability and legibility in the urban tissue. The goal of this research is to make these come out of the hidden folds of the city.

“Recovering Historic Crafts. History in a Contemporary Regeneration Project” focuses on the recovering of historic crafts in the contemporary urban regeneration process. It refers to the urban history of Milan, its radial development, incorporating the municipalities of the outer belts, its contraction during the latest de-industrialisation of the city, till the several cases of “spontaneous” transformation of its interiors since the turn of the millennium. The author Alessandro Colombo describes the rediscovering and renaming of neighbourhoods, such as NoLo, by taking into account the analysis traced by the field research *ZIP Spaces*. He underlines how the contemporary retail shifted the public investments and attention beyond the historic city centres to big shopping centres (Zanderighi, 2004) and, at the same time, he discussed how some historic shops, despite their small size, could be significant epicentres of urban renewal through project opportunities fostering a “social” and “commercial” sensitivity. It is a revenge on mass marketing, which flattens and standardises everything, in order to enhance those historic activities which had remained miraculously alive and open, to constitute the driving force of this very social, “street” urban regeneration.

“Unconventional Spaces for Art and Design: Enabling Community Synergy. A Methodological Approach” by Annalinda De Rosa introduces the “Arnold - Art and Design in Nolo Social District” project by underlining the design education approach employed between the university environment and the social one as a

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strategy that enables community synergies. The author explained how the relationship between theory and practice is carried out by the *PoliMi Desis Lab* research group (who dealt with the *Arnold* project) on two levels: at the researchers' level by avoiding an arbitrary division between research and didactics, which becomes a field of experimentation for topics and methodologies in design education, and which nourishes the very development of theoretical research; and at the didactics level itself, where the link between theory, research and practice is taught. In this framework, NoLo neighbourhood has been the appropriate place to experiment with new frontiers (new societal needs - inclusive and participative, and new forms of citizen interactions) to implement the positive aspects of the gentrification in progress. By the use of co-design tools and methods, it has been possible to include users-citizens in the design process; thus, designers (the students) and the people involved worked together across the whole span of the design process (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Despite the selection of specific core-groups for the co-design activities, due to the course topic and scope, the field exploration and output involved a wide audience, avoiding a strict focus on group of experts for a more democratically-oriented application of Participatory Design (Björgevinnsson, Ehn and Hillgren, 2010).

In the last chapter “Events and the City: When Arnold Meets NoLo” by Davide Fassi, the author presents the result of *Arnold* second phase, “from prototyping to mise-en-scene” and collateral initiatives, with a strong emphasis on the role of the temporary event (and its construction) as a mean of creating scenarios for long term and creative use of spaces to improve the quality of the neighbourhood. The input artists and designers involved gave to reach the prototyping stage was the shift from being object maker to maker of experiences (Spayde, 2012). The output of the second phase were read through the legacy left to the neighbourhood, the impact of the actions and the sustainability of the event making. *Arnold* created a system of actors related to art and design in the area, experimenting an event format to be possibly used in the future as an annual appointment for the city. It involves a substantial number of stakeholders including professionals, artist, citizens and

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caught the attention by several media thanks to the synergy with collateral event such as *ZuArt - Looper fest* and *GiraNolo*. Further it was a sustainable event from the environmental and economic point of view and let the visitors have a social interaction aided at improving their level of satisfaction (Nordvall et al., 2014).

Comparing and assessing the *ZIP Spaces* and *Arnold* research projects, we may find two different but complementary approaches. Both of them deal with the creation of possible scenarios for a better living in neighbourhoods using design tools and methods.

As regards to *ZIP spaces*, the scenario has been created merging the information acquired by interviewing the local shop owners and craftsmen with the analysis on potential development of contemporary local advanced activities. This scenario of synergy has been conceived to open new trends of development and to retrace a future for the existing and historic activities of the neighbourhood. The Social Street network has been an important mean to analyse the local context in the first phase of the research and the importance of its pivotal role has been confirmed also by its cooperation during the public event conceived to present the final results to the community. Nevertheless this latter step could have been developed further with some specific dissemination plans of each scenario to the local stakeholders, since they provided the inspiration of each process. This direct and individual feedback could have triggered more effective processes of update and innovation for the existing activities and spaces.

Arnold, instead, took advantage of an interdisciplinary approach – employing theories and tools from spatial, service and event design – and of a systemic design method both to involve local citizens in the scenario development and to reach a fast prototyping of the results. Community-centred Design, which means considering the perspectives and needs of all the key subjects of a community (Manzini and Meroni, 2014), and *Participatory Design*, which is systematically involving the future users in the active design of the solutions, laid the foundations for a context-based approach and structured the data collection and analysis for a systemic view. The open-ended artefacts and outcomes generated along the process allowed the design students and the citizens to start debating and

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reflecting around ideas and how to put them in place with a prototype. Therefore the final event represented a 1:1 test and mise en scène on the field of the co-designed ideas and of the capacity and the willingness of the local actors to make them happen and work.

We can see the work done in *Arnold* as the first step of a much longer neighbourhood process: an activity that potentially paves the way to long-term strategies and alliances for NoLo. These kinds of experimentations, in fact, contribute to increase in the inhabitants the awareness of specific problems and opportunities in the short-term, while acting as a trigger for the birth of future networks, including larger groups of stakeholders and also public institutions, to carry out more structured and progressive development programmes. In other words, we can see *Arnold* as an attempt to start a maieutic debate in a complex environment: a process that doesn't try to solve problems but, first, to open up new issues, in order then to be acknowledged enough to set up future strategic actions (Meroni, 2008).

Finally, some weaknesses and potentialities emerged from *Arnold* and *ZIP Spaces* regarding different ambits connected to the design, as discussed here below.

Stakeholder engagement: a first issue regards the lack of multiculturalism in the engaged audience. Even if NoLo is a melting pot of several ethnic groups, there were difficulties in involving the local communities of immigrants. This was mainly due to the role the *Social District*, as a local “gatekeeper” has played in connecting the researchers with the citizens. The *Social district*, in fact, has nowadays almost 4000 participants but with just a small percentage of non-Italians or belonging to foreign communities. This is ascribable to several reasons connected to some problems of integration among these communities.

Sense of belonging: another issue regards the fact that, as in all participatory actions, it is very hard to engage everyone. In fact, not all citizens are actually interested in being engaged or approachable. Some might not be part of a digital community because of the digital divides or might simply be living their community in other ways.

This could be the case of many people from foreign cultures who live in very small social circuits, having a strong sense of belonging to the native country that pushes them to live a life separated from

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the others and to do business specifically targeting their communities.

Relationship building: the design decision of creating occasions for people to sit together and co-design ideas for the neighbourhood has been a way to intertwine unexpected connections between them. For instance, the idea of linking artists and owners of unconventional locations to envision ideas and share thoughts has created a mutual awareness that was missing before, turning strangers into a community of intention and action for the time of the projects.

Managing egos and competences: the process of co-creation has not always been smooth. On the contrary, deadlocks, discrepancies of visions and incompatible egos have emerged, thus some actions or steps. This is normal in any collaborative practice, but it is particularly instructive for (young) designers who have to learn to deal with other creative minds and find their way to make things happen beyond the professional ego or perception of their own job.

Exit strategy: finally the issue of managing the conclusion of a participatory project deserves a reflection. The expectations of a local community are high once informed that activities will be undertaken to improve the neighbourhood. During the design process several co-design sessions were held, and the engagement among researchers, students, citizens, artists and location owners was high. The outputs have shown how the neighbourhood could be slightly transformed by some adaptive reuse strategies (*ZIP Spaces*) and art/design related events (*Arnold*). These scenarios were supposed to focus the attention of the citizens and the Municipality and provide glimpses on possible future actions to be carried out by the people. In order to enable them to act without being guided by the researchers, the stakeholders were encouraged, through progressive engagement, to take up the outcomes of the projects so as to independently continue the design process. This way, by empowering some of the local actors (public servants, associations, informal groups etc.) a true legacy of the research activities can be left to the neighbourhood to enable them to take the guidance in further initiatives (Manzini and Meroni, 2014).

These are issues to discuss throughout the research process when dealing with local communities in the neighbourhood so as to

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reinforce the process, to add quality to the results and to give continuity to the actions after the end of the research itself.

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