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Multidisciplinary Aspects of Design

Objects, Processes, Experiences and Narratives

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Introduction

This book is the result of a long research process. The work started in 2020 with an exhibition held in Parma (*Design! Oggetti processi esperienze*, CSAC Università degli Studi di Parma), and a book of the same title, edited by F. Zanella (with essays by G. Bosoni, E. Di Stefano, G.L. Iannilli, G. Matteucci and R. Trocchianesi) and published in 2023 (Electa Milano) centered on the role of archives as memory repositories and agents for contemporary design. This first period of reflection was followed by an international conference: *Design! O.P.E.N.* (https://www.designopen.it) held in Parma on May 5–6, 2022. The present volume contains most of the papers presented at the conference.

Starting from the first volume (*Design! Oggetti processi esperienze*), the research was always characterized by a multidisciplinary approach, which became even more multidisciplinary at the international conference held in 2022.

In fact, the conference was organized by a network of scholars from the world of design, philosophy and history of art, whose aim was to intertwine several types of knowledge. Consequently, multidisciplinarity is also the main feature of this second volume whose objective is to reflect, in an integrated manner, on the different dimensions of design, using competencies from the field of design and from that of humanities.

The aim of this project is to create a repertoire of opportunities of exchange and of relation among the culture of designers and the applied marketability of humanists in the project and in the innovation processes, in particular those design processes characterized by an important social and cultural impact.

In this context of exploration and experimentation in the territory of bordering subjects, stands the interpretative model in Fig. 1. It represents the potentialities in the interdisciplinary relations which verify the logics and dynamics in the "behavior" of a designer dealing with some project variables. On the vertical axis, humanities and techniques can be found, and on horizontal one, research and project.

Where these variables intersect, there can be four types of intervention:

- The intersection of techniques and research generates technological experimentation considering techniques and technology fields in continuous and fast evolution.
- Where research and humanities intersect, we are in the field of a historical/social/philosophical approach in which the analytical and critical dimensions of the research itself are developed.
- Between humanities and project, we are in the area on which our project focuses: here the meta-project approach becomes the synthetic expression of the relation among the two poles.
- Finally, between project and technique, we are in the area where the executive component of the project itself emerges.

There have already been significant studies which have stressed the importance of humanities for design and have shown that design can be a stimulus for humanities; this

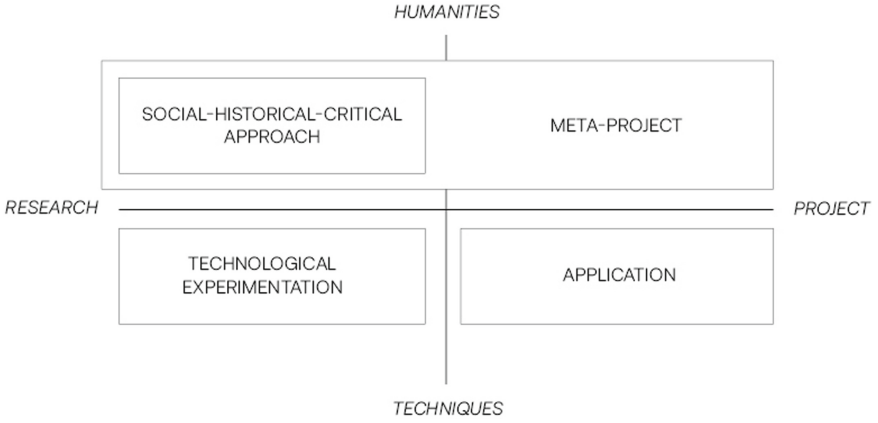

Fig. 1. Potential synergies between design and humanities [1]

is why the conference *Design! O.P.E.N.* intended to be an opportunity for research and debate with the objective of continuing this fundamental line of work.

Some crucial issues which interdisciplinary research must tackle are:

- The research of "new problems for design", that is, the collective need, as a scientific community, to find new directions toward which work must be periodically re-oriented, and this can be done only through a process of joint reflection.
- Research investigating the "meanings" that the product can have for design.
- Research that investigating the "value" that the design product shows.

As far as meanings are concerned, design and humanities integrated research can challenge, in a theoretically sounder way, "sustainability" by enhancing those concepts that are on the boundary between ethics and esthetics. Today, design cannot afford to dismiss ethical reflection, and, in this direction, humanistic culture can help to reinterpret the reflection on the mere functionality, in the more philosophically complex terms of the concept of "suitability for the purpose".

With regards to the analysis of the value generated by the action of design, it may be interesting to speak of "technology of value", which only humanistic investigation can help to process and fill with tools useful to produce not only ex-post critical knowledge, but first and foremost, oriented toward experimentation and to showing new corridors for contemporary design [1].

The volume follows the paths of reflection which structured the conference *Design! O.P.E.N.*, focusing on current themes and issues that are still at the center of the multidisciplinary debate on design, investigated through four keywords: objects, processes, experiences and narratives, which correspond to the book chapters.

The first chapter focuses on object-oriented design, enhancing its functional narrative and experiential values. In fact, objects, beyond their value in use, bear symbolic, anthropological, political and social meanings and worldviews. This section also develops a theoretical reflection on the esthetic categories used to interpret the design object

in relation to the classic dichotomy useful-beautiful, to the category of game, to artistic values and the relation between ethics and esthetics.

The second chapter is on the designer's self-reflective moment which is focused on the analysis and on the definition of processes in various contexts, spanning innovation, social engagement, reflection on emergencies or forecasting. This section investigates how designers develop and test their models, both at production, implementation and research levels. The areas of investigation are those addressing innovation, social engagement and pursuing a reflection on emergencies or forecasting. The section is intended as an arena for discussion on topics revolving around both the different moments in the history of design and the contemporary condition. The contributions collected in the Processes Section reflect the current condition of the disciplinary debate, which is strongly characterized by a profound transformation of design processes due to the comparison with scientific research methods, with a prevailing interest for methodologies and contemporary priorities as the environmental one, or to the dematerialization of processes.

The third chapter focuses on as a theoretical and practical strategy aimed at facilitating and fostering experiential interactions among people, between people and objects or environments. This section aims at investigating the foundations and the implications of a specifically experiential turn in design from various perspectives and in various disciplines. Due to the multifaceted nature of this turn, both theoretical and practice-based research are testified by contributors.

Finally, the last chapter is on narrative. The narrative vocation of design represents a crucial key of interpretation in contemporary cultural expressions such as making history, representing through different media, archiving and exhibiting. This section explores narratives in three different "dimensions": narrative as a scenario (envisioning new contexts, behaviors, uses, spaces); narrative as a tool (creating new ways to trigger innovation); and narrative as a process (framing new methodologies to face complex issues).

Each chapter reflects the results of the conference held in Parma and is constituted by the analysis of concrete case studies and theoretical and methodological proposals aimed at highlighting the "multiverse" character of design. It is organized in the thematic subsection defined for the conference program, just to emphasize the prevailing interpretative trajectories.

A special thanks to the institutions that have funded the conference and the present publication (The Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Industries and CSAC, University of Parma; the Department of Philosophy and Communication Studies, University of Bologna; the Department of Humanities, University of Palermo; the Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano; and the Department of Engineering Enzo Ferrari, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) and all those who, in different ways, have contributed to reach this result (particularly Alice Biancardi and Marta Elisa Cecchi, and also: Okuniev Avhustyn; Katia Botta; Gabriela Del Rosario Abate; Giorgia Ferri; Salvatore Martino; Serena Massimo; Diego Valle; and Laura Xhaja).

Without their help, it wouldn't have been possible to make this event and this volume happen. We hope that this book will become a useful tool of reflection on the theoretical and methodological aspects between humanities and design.

The scientific committee and book editors:

Giampiero Bosoni, Elisabetta Di Stefano, Gioia Laura Iannilli, Giovanni Matteucci, Rita Messori, Raffaella Trocchianesi and Francesca Zanella.

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Collaborative Dialogues Between Souvenirs and Territories: From Evocative Objects to Experience-Objects

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Abstract. Enhancing the widespread cultural heritages of our territories is not only a moral imperative and respect for the values established over time but an increasingly felt need to direct local development towards more sustainable strategies for the environment and communities.

The culture of design, especially in Italy, has questioned what its disciplinary contribution can be, in addition to the specialist approaches such as exhibition, communication or lighting design. In national financed research carried out precisely on these themes (D.Cult research: Design for the enhancement of cultural heritage. Project strategies, tools, and methodologies, 2002/04), two elements emerged that managed to briefly define the operational and strategic characteristics of design in this field: the planning of experiences and relationships [1].

In this contribution, the attention is to the role of souvenirs in these systems: from iconic objects, often of low material and aesthetic quality, they can instead play a significant role in the processes of use and design-driven enhancement [2].

From an evolved perspective, designing a souvenir means establishing a synergistic and cohesive relationship with the territories and their values. Not only with the tangible cultural aspects of the natural and artificial landscape, historical and artistic testimonies, and material culture but also with the rich intangible heritage made up of knowledge, traditions, and know-how [3, 4]. And it can take on different roles in product, storytelling, communication strategy and activation of experiences.

In this way, the souvenir becomes a "touchpoint" of a territorial development strategy that relates different cultural systems and brings value to local economic and production chains, even those not directly linked to tourism, such as the many forms of material and cultural production, typical of that context [5–7].

Through analyzing some exemplary case studies and presenting some design experiences, we will draw a map of the possible "connective" roles of meaning and actions that a new generation of souvenirs could interpret.

Keywords: Design for Territories · Souvenir · Experience Design

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1 Design for Cultural Heritage and Territorial Systems

The approach of design to the themes of the enhancement of cultural heritage and territories has been progressive and parallel to the passage of an interest from "cultural good" to the broader concept of "cultural heritage". This terminological updating process had been initiated by UNESCO as early as 1992 with the recognition of "cultural landscapes" in the World Heritage List and then in 1998 of the "Masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity".

In Italy, where attention to the protection and conservation of cultural heritage is prevalent since the text of the Constitution ("the Republic promotes the development of culture and scientific and technical research. It protects the landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the nation.", Italian Constitution art.9, 1948), the legislative update will take place starting from the "Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio" n. 42 in 2004 (Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape) and the cultural debate of those years.

In that same period, a network of Italian universities in Genoa, Milan, Turin, Rome, and Naples was conducting research funded by the Ministry of University (MIUR) entitled: "D. Cult research: Design for the enhancement of cultural heritage. Project strategies, tools, and methodologies" (2002/04), where the emphasis was placed on the contextual nature of cultural heritage, strongly linked to the territories, in which it seemed more interesting to consider complex and interconnected cultural systems than for single elements [1]. Even more if we consider the specificity of the Italian situation.

Salvatore Settis, a well-known scholar of archeology and history of art, describes it very well: "It is precisely this widespread diffusion that *makes* the special character of the Italian cultural heritage, its model of contextual conservation. In cities like Siena or Venice, it doesn't make the slightest sense to make a list of *important* buildings, since everything is. A church, a palace, is worthy of being preserved, but above all because it belongs to a very dense plot of which it is part together with a hundred other churches and palaces. In this coherent and harmonious whole, which is the product of a centuries-old accumulation of wealth and civilization, the total is greater than the sum of its parts. It is precisely from the binding force of the urban texture that every single monument, even the most important, takes on meaning and depth." [8, 269–270].

Two reflections emerge from this quotation: the first is the prevailing attention to conservation and protection rather than to the use of cultural heritage; the second is how today, after about 20 years, the reasoning for cultural systems rather than singularity is widely shared, together with the contribution of intangible cultural heritages connected to these contexts.

The D.Cult research has adopted this broader vision by developing a theoretical, methodological study and an applicative part on real cases. We also came up with a definition of what design meant for cultural heritage and what could be the contribution of the discipline in this area: "(…) Design acts as a mediation system between a context, a cultural asset or a system of goods and the user or the reference community through substantially relational and trans-scalar models and processes capable of mediating between specific emergencies and territorial contexts or district in a continuous movement of "focus" of the different scales and project needs, according to a logic zoom in - zoom out capable of concreteness and overall vision together. In this sense, design

for cultural heritage is not limited to planning the experience of using the goods. Still, it helps to facilitate the adoption of an innovative, systemic, and widespread vision of cultural heritage in all its forms, and in the making, through a participatory and shared process, socially sustainable and economically feasible for the community (by the user, the institution, the cultural operator), its setting-up and its activation." [9].

Creating a system and activating cultural heritage in a synergistic relationship with territories and local communities is the goal that design also pursues the protection of the heritage for its economic sustainability and the socio-environmental context in which it insists.

2 Souvenirs as a Touchpoint of Territorial Strategies

In design-driven territorial and cultural enhancement scenarios, souvenirs can play an important role, even if we are used, at least in Italy, to be surrounded by objects of low quality and of low economic value and meaning. If we look at the offer present in the main interchange points - stations, airports, ports - the souvenirs are mainly reproductions of monuments (such as the Duomo of Milan) or territorial icons (like the gondola of Venice) or religious icons (for example Father Pio), sometimes recomposed in creative or inventive ways (the gondola that changes color with changes in weather conditions, the classic snow bubble or refrigerator magnets, the coffee cup with the reproduction of the Gulf of Naples). Not only objects of poor quality and dubious taste, but above all objects without thought that re-propose a simplistic and stereotyped territorial or cultural idea.

Gillo Dorfles would also speak in this case of *kitsch* [10], warning us how this bad taste is an expression and mirror of the postmodern consumption society. A particular taste that has established itself as an aesthetic category, which the art world has always looked to over time, generating forms of collecting, such as the exhibition "Kitsch, kitsch today" at the Milan Triennale in 2012 highlighted [11].

Alongside this type of souvenir, products that tell a territory more deeply or evoke the memory of an experience in alternative ways to reproducing what has been seen are truly rare. However, when we come across these objects with a thought, we recognize their value and support in promoting a cultural, environmental, and social context and relationships. This paper aims to support a new generation of "advanced souvenirs" that can activate relationships and enabling a more profound and more synergistic knowledge of the cultural capital of a territory.

In Fig. 1, we start from the definition of souvenir from the Treccani encyclopedia as a "keepsake object", to analyze the different declinations, with increasing complexity: the "iconic object", or reproduction of reality; the "evocative object", which indirectly suggests the experience made; and the "experience-object" capable of deepening and connecting other cultural resources of the territory to the experience achieved. The evolved souvenirs are actively placed in weaving relationships with other cultural values, opening new doors of knowledge, in connecting stories and places. In this way, the souvenirs enable new cultural explorations, help to create a closer link with the territories and to reinforce local development strategies.

Let's try to make some compelling examples of souvenirs to promote the city's identity. We could define them as iconic objects, but in these cases, the iconography is

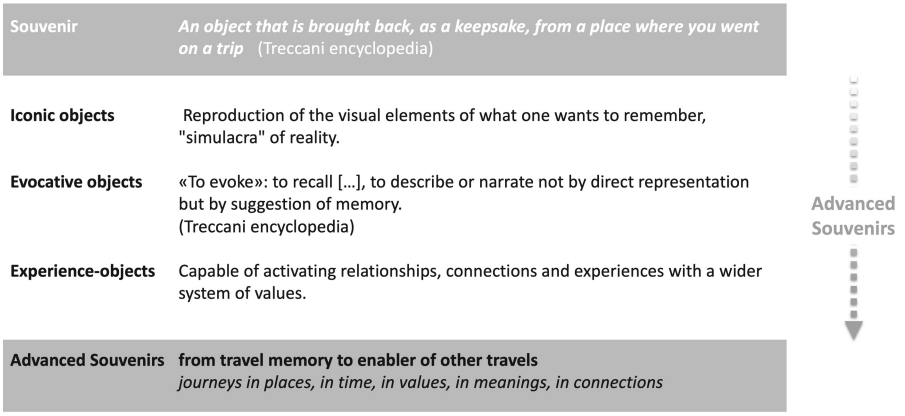

Fig. 1. Souvenir. From iconic objects to evocative and experiential objects.

not direct but is the starting point for other stories and other identities of the present and the past.

"Aria di Napoli", a souvenir produced by Enrico Durazzo for Napolimania [12], is a sort of three-dimensional postcard with all the canonical elements: the landscape of the gulf of Naples, Vesuvius, and the pine tree. But the image is applied to a metal can, in turn, contained in a box for mailing with string and parcel seal. Inside the can, there is nothing, only air. A piece of paper explains it is a remedy for nostalgia, to be breathed very slowly. But it is also an object that has its roots in an event suspended between history and legend: the can filled with air imbued with the scent of mandarin peels given as a tribute by the Neapolitan *scugnizzi* (boys) to the American soldiers who have just entered the liberated city. It is an object that tries to tell something indescribable, as impalpable as the air of a city, its atmosphere, its history, and the nature of its inhabitants [13].

"Bye Bye Fly", designed by Giulio Iacchetti for Pandora Design in 2007 [14], is a racket for mosquitoes that in the perforated part reproduces the shape and road structure of the Milan map. It is an ironic and courageous object in showing a weakness of the city of Milan, which is the annoying presence of mosquitoes in the summer, which nevertheless defines a trait of its identity, together with the concentric urban form that is equally characteristic also in the perception and the orientation during urban travel. An unconventional souvenir, as defined by its author himself, that does not convey glossy realities and fascinates for its frankness, and that entrusts the ability to adapt personal memories to the symbolic value of the shape of the urban structure [15].

"Angel Bread - Cristo Velato" is a project by Alessandro Cocchia, a brilliant Neapolitan designer and artist, for the souvenir competition held in 2010 for the Sansevero Chapel in Naples, where is the famous marble work of veiled Christ. Cocchia offers a kit consisting of man-shaped cookie cutters, icing sugar and sieve for the veil, thus avoiding trivial reproductions of marble sculptures and aiming instead, with a playful and joyful language that softens the drama, to attract an audience of children and young people. Alessandro Cocchia was also among the first to propose a different iconographic

representation of the city, through his posters and illustrations since the 1990s, with a language that draws on the linguistic world of Pop Art and the New York underground [15, 16].

"Twenty-five posters for Naples" (1984–86) is an initiative of the Napoli Novantanove Foundation [17] to promote the restoration of some monuments of the city damaged by the 1980 earthquake and represents a conscious and strategic choice of use of the poster and its reduced reproduction in postcard format to convey an updated image of the city, through the eyes of twenty-five of the most important artists and visual designers on the international scene. An external look that has reconstructed a non-oleographic but articulated and multifaceted vision of Naples, rich in references to cultural, historical, and traditional values, but also to the emerging contemporary ones, sometimes reinterpreting classic stereotypes such as the icon of Vesuvius (Pierluigi Cerri) or clothes hanging (Armando Milani), in other cases offering critical interpretations of reality (Alan Fletcher, John McConnel). The initiative, which was then also disseminated through national and international exhibitions (Naples 1986, Rome 1987, Los Angeles 1987, Dundee 1987, and Lahti 1988), proved to be particularly effective in spreading a positive idea of a new cultural ferment in a widespread manner. In addition, these posters and postcards by the author also went to cover an absence in the market of an updated and avant-garde iconography of the city. In this way, the Foundation managed to achieve its goal, which is to convince international financiers to believe in the creative and cultural potential of the city and to invest in its recovery.

These examples highlight how even iconic or evocative souvenirs can be full of meanings and values. It is more complex to design proactive objects and enable new experiences because it involves an in-depth research phase and a broader strategic vision.

The Genius loci project that the artist and designer Ugo La Pietra conducted in Italy from 1987 to 2000 can be an example of the approach for a different idea of souvenirs.

La Pietra's research is based on a personal reflection, a stance on the great transformations that the information and telematic revolution were bringing about. If in 1982 he had anticipated the scenarios of the telematic house, at the beginning of the nineties he concentrated his reflections on a return to reality, to material culture and its territorial variations, but also to the criticism of a possible homologation that the scientific approach and digitization could have led to the detriment of empathy, memory, and other forms of personalization.

These reflections take place on a personal level (studies on three-dimensional memory, the empathic role of objects and the search for a future material culture that interprets immaterial values) with repercussions at the territorial level (the theme of the new territoriality and the right to diversity of local cultures), anticipating issues that are still of great relevance today [18, 19].

"The works I have created in recent years allude to a society where *difference* is finally recognized as *normality*. The search for *difference* (in normality) led me to work in different areas and territories where cultural autonomies still exist and resulted in the images of *shattered territories.* They are works that allude to different cultures and their search for identity, but also to those forces (*nationalism*), which try to cancel, force and hold (*ethnic cleansing*) these diversities in a single territory.

On the contrary, the search for a great United Europe, which knows how to contain and enhance diversity, remained an aspiration throughout the 1990s that I underlined with various works and installations." [18, p. 216].

At the same time, he starts his travels around Italy and collaboration with the artisans of the homogeneous areas, with whom he experiments processes of valorization of traditional products and techniques - specific for each place and expression of resources, rituals and cultures - working on three levels: the resources of the territory preserved, renewed and redesigned. The first level is a phase of research into the types of local artisan products; the second is the experimentation of new decorative languages on traditional forms; the third is a joint project between designer and craftsman of renewal of types and shapes, enhancing the materials, the skills, and techniques of local craftsmanship. La Pietra recognizes a potential in these local products, a system of values that traces the identity of that geographical area - precisely the *genius loci*, the spirit of the places, in harmony with the thought of Christian Norberg-Schulz [20] - and interprets them as amplifiers to make people understand and promote the historical, environmental and cultural peculiarities of those contexts; at the same time, it makes them contemporary and therefore desirable objects, guaranteeing the survival and sustainability of local craftsmanship.

In the 90s, the Ronchey law also outsourced services to the public and allowed the selling of objects inside museums in bookshops managed by private entities. Ugo la Pietra identifies another possibility to extend his research on "significant works" and objects of memory in the museum, imagining a synergy between cultural institutions (distribution), local craftsmanship (quality production), territorial context (the system of relations) capable of covering the aspiration of the various visitors (significant products) [19, p.373].

At the end of the 90s, he will deal with museum merchandising for the ecomuseums of slate in Liguria and Lecce stone in Puglia and design souvenirs for the Umbria jazz musical event.

3 Advanced Souvenirs: Recent Experiences

Ugo La Pietra's experience, enriched by his sensitivity as a designer and artist, has traced an exciting path for a new design of souvenirs that intertwines a dense dialogue with the territories' resources, the skills of its inhabitants and the local cultural system. Putting these three components in dialogue allows you to have objects that induce you to go further, stimulate knowledge and broaden your gaze: the goal is to open the door to subsequent explorations in and for the territory.

Many other designers have tried their hand at the relationship between local craftsmanship and design to promote local identities, but there are still ample spaces for work and reflection, given the richness and diversity of situations that characterize the Italian territory.

Let's try to make some more considerations, analyzing some recent projects, recognized or awarded by ADI - the Association for Industrial Design, well known for the Compasso d'Oro Award (since 1954) and the annual selection of the best projects in the ADI Index.

"Pieces of Venice", awarded in 2020 with the XXVI Compasso d'Oro for the Social Design category, is a collection of objects that recovers the larch wood used in the Venice lagoon for piers and parapets or the oak of the *briccole,* the name of the poles immersed in water to signal navigable canals [21]. The recovery of these materials, deriving from necessary and frequent maintenance operations due to the environmental conditions in which they are used, is not only a value from the point of view of a circular economy but also a semantic value, connected to the signs of the histories of their previous use. All the objects designed by a group of designers - Paolo and Michela Baldessari, Mariapia Bellis, Carlo Cumini, Giulio Iacchetti, Cristian Malisan, Lorenzo Palmeri, Matteo Ragni and Marco Zito - are linked to a part of the lagoon and history of the city. They are objects full of value, of design and executive quality, made by a social cooperative for the rehabilitation of less fortunate people and contribute with their sale to social campaigns with associations for the protection of Venice.

"Ri-corda (Remember but also new cord). Community Binds" was selected in the ADI INDEX 2020 for Social Design. The project, included in the Matera European Capital of Culture 2019 program, was created to enhance the local cultural heritage of the processing of *libbàni*, the ancient plant cords representative of the local cultural and civic identity of Maratea [22, 23]. Before becoming a product, it is a community building and empowerment initiative, to trace the ancient traditions of working ropes used in boating from the memory of the last living testimonies and share them in a workshop open to all. Reliving the tradition and experiencing it becomes an experience of knowledge and belonging to a history of identity.

From this initiative, the "New Mediterranean Libbaneria" was born to produce handicrafts and design products for experiential tourism. The project is curated by Marialuisa Firpo, Angelo Licasale, Beatrice Avigliano and the Liberi Libri association.

"Paestum Experience" was selected in the ADI INDEX 2020 for Research for the enterprise. The project, curated by the designer Mario Scairato, is a strategic design and branding operation for the enhancement, recognition, and cultural communication of the territory of Capaccio Paestum (Salerno), known above all for the archaeological park and the production of mozzarella. It creates a network of local designers, businesses, and artisans to promote quality tourism through communication initiatives, design and production of souvenirs, cultural events, and exhibitions. A system action in which specially designed souvenirs play the very role of a touchpoint we have discussed so far [24].

These three examples, together with the didactic experiences conducted since 2011 in the Metadesign Studio at the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano on the theme of souvenirs for cities and cultural institutions, including the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan [16, 25], broaden the reflections on a new generation of souvenirs evolved towards other fields of interest and relationships, on which there is still a lot of project space: sustainability, the creation of communities, collaborative networks of productive and cultural enterprises, social innovation.

All of them are central aspects for strategic projects of wide-ranging territorial enhancement, whose new souvenirs could make their contribution.

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