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Entanglements and Flows
Service Encounters and
Meanings

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Larissa Farias, Manuela Quaresma



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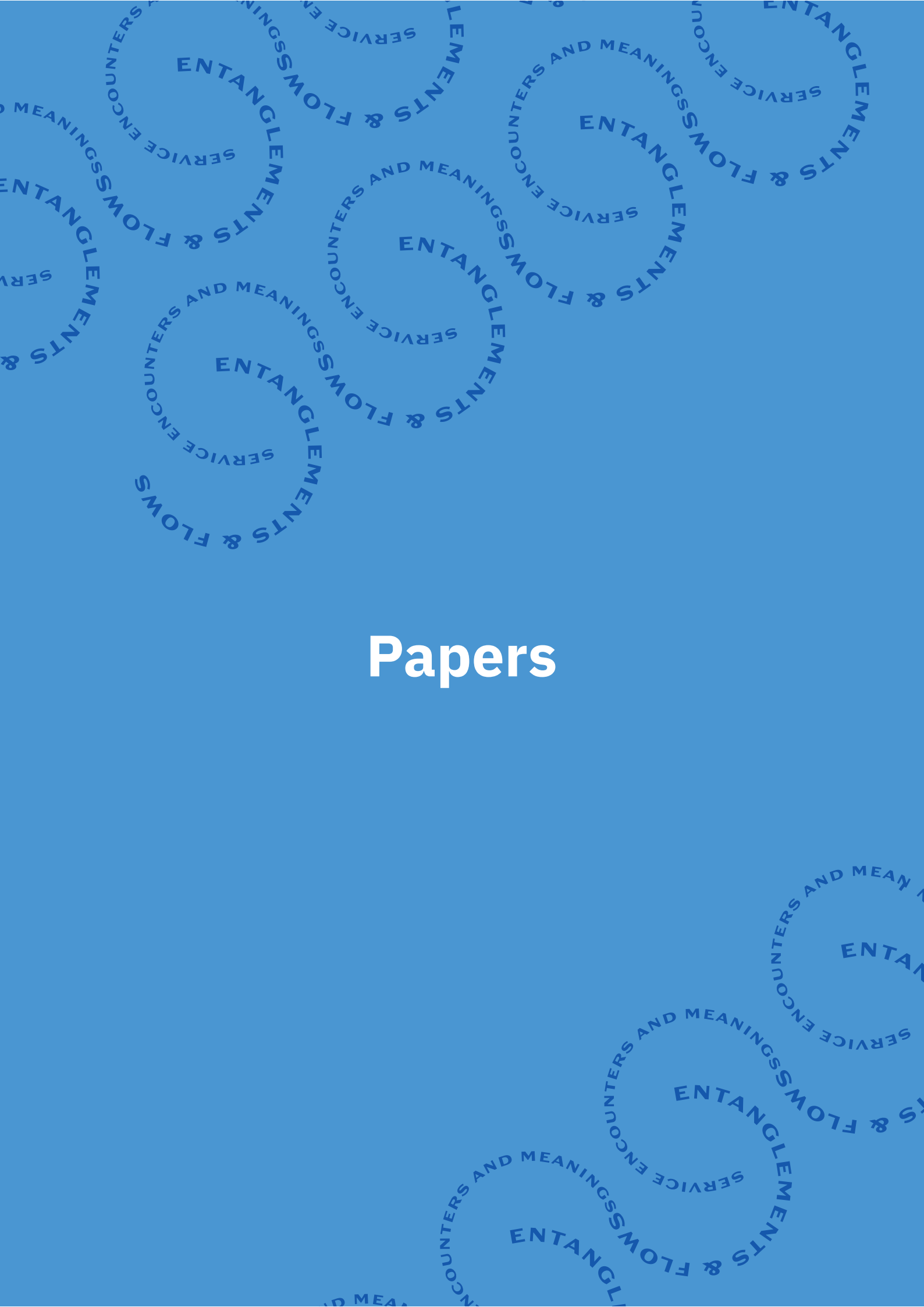
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Social innovation, localities and transformative processes

Social innovation processes may reveal the emergence of new service ideas, or services may be designed to support local transformative processes. These changing processes may be referred to and impact neighbourhoods or cities. This situated dimension may include new service encounters and new local ecosystems, which may be supported or hindered by digital technologies and platforms.



Papers

Co-design as a public service to support social innovations in city making

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Abstract

This paper discusses the conditions and some possible ways in which co-design can be regarded as a public service offered by public administrations to city dwellers and organizations to foster social innovation in city making projects. It starts by discussing the theoretical and operational entanglement of public services, co-design and place making, in order to understand the background that generates the research question on the opportunity to consider co-design as a public service and set up the conditions for it to be so. Then, the paper presents a case study of a co-design process developed for the city of Reggio Emilia by the authors, to support a huge urban transformation project, and discusses against the context of the advanced participatory policy of the city. Finally, it proposes the conceptualization of '*permanent vs transient*' public services of co-design and discusses their similarities and differences, to open the debate for further research.

Keywords: co-design, scenario building, public services, service design, city making

1. Background knowledge: public services, co-design and place making

The collaboration of users in the design and implementation of public policies and public services to address complex societal problems in the public sector is a well-known and widely discussed topic in service design as well as in public management research (Trischler et al, 2019). Within this collaboration, the ideation phase in which needs are turned into new service ideas is recognized as the most challenging and abductive one. It requires a well-guided, iterative, exploration of combinations of problems, conditions and solutions, involving different actors of complex service ecosystems. This becomes even more challenging when assuming public policy to

be “a means to enable service by coordinating multiple actors’ value cocreation activities to address public problems” (Trischler and Charles, 2019 - p.19). The entanglement between the several actors with an interest in a public service and, thus, the strategic role of its early-stage collaborative design makes co-design of public services a sensitive and crucial activity, that public administration is increasingly subsuming under its mandate. Therefore, if public services cover collective needs that are considered essential and that cannot be satisfied simply by matching supply and demand on the market, the need for fair and inclusive participation in the design of public interest services can be viewed as a need that must be satisfied by public services. Such perspective implies that, for some governments, covering this collective need that ensures democratic, ethical and empowering participation (Wollmann and Marcou, 2010; Corubolo, Meroni and Selloni 2021) is considered a duty of any public administration dealing with urban commons. In fact, there is a long story of participatory processes set in place by local public administrations for civic engagement on relevant urban transformations.

Contemporary practices across the world show several cases of bottom-up and multi-stakeholder collaboration processes for urban planning, spatial planning, city-making, urban setting design, and reconfigurations of public spaces and services (Meroni and Selloni, 2022). Thus, these forms of civic engagement can be regarded as modalities of political participation within the representative democracy that are guaranteed through a public service and that expand the sphere in which citizens can exercise influence, while fulfilling other democratic functions, such as educating, integrating individual voices, deliberating, and legitimating. In other words, these more contemporary forms of participation contribute to decision-making and policy-making on specific urban issues, while activating other processes that foster social innovation and are themselves public social innovations. Practices that exemplify these forms are, for instance, defined as ‘place making’, with an emphasis on producing liveable and sustainable places by linking development management to housing, transport and community services provision (Palermo and Ponzini, 2015). They can also be defined as ‘spatial planning’, with an emphasis on collaborative processes for improving accountability of planning, integration across sectors, and ability to think and act long term in pursuit of the public good (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2013). Their key idea is involving the end-user as early as possible in the ‘master planning’, from the pre-design and briefing phases (to better focus needs, problems and desires of citizens) to the professional design and production phases, which implies the set up not only of the built environment but also of the services and solutions that will inhabit the place (Meroni and Selloni, 2022).



From a service design perspective, this discourse becomes very relevant, because it shows that collaborative place making is today becoming more and more: 1) a public service and 2) intertwined with the design of the services that will serve a territory and its population, in a social innovation logic.

This paper presents a programme of co-design consultations promoted by a public administration to enable communities to actively contribute to co-develop and eventually co-produce a territorial transformation project, so that people's inputs were accounted to define a problem area, a vision, and tentative proposals. The programme was delivered in 2018-19 for the Italian municipality of Reggio Emilia, a middle-sized city in the Emilia-Romagna Region of northern Italy, and got the name 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta', which can be translated as 'Re-value Rivalta'. It was an extensive co-design process developed by the authors with the objective to imagine the future of a public space (the Rivalta ancient ducal complex) and its related services. As POLIMI DESIS Lab, we received a mandate by the municipality to ideate and carry out a multistakeholder co-design programme, being expert researchers in the field of service design, social innovation, methods and tools for co-design.

We will discuss this programme as a public service to enable place making and foster social innovation.

2. From social innovation to city making

Since the 2000s, the scholarly debate around social innovation has been wide and articulated, as it is an umbrella concept with several interpretations (Murray et al, 2010; Westley & Antadze, 2010; Moulaert and Van den Broeck, 2018; to name a few). For our discussion, we adopt a definition of social innovation that refers "to both a process of the transformation of social practices (i.e., attitudes, behaviours, networks of collaboration) and to the outcomes in terms of new products and services (i.e., novel ideas, models, services, and new organizational forms)" (Ravazzoli et al, 2021- p.2). Thus, we acknowledge the twofold nature of social innovation as both process and outcome. We move indeed from an intellectual position "in which the purpose of social innovation of meeting social needs, creating public value and social relations, is achieved not only through the services and practices actually implemented, but also through the collaborative process that takes place to design them" (Meroni and Selloni, 2022 - p. 13). This position places urban commons at the centre of the discourse, as manifestations of a public interest: according to a traditional definition, they include local parks, gardens, squares, streets, and public spaces (Foster, 2011) and a diversified number of services,



comprising public transportation, water services, urban health, gas and electric distribution and many others (Iaione, 2012). These all are considered 'community goods' or 'local common goods' (Harvey, 2012) in which design-driven interventions are proven to be potentially pivot of more radical transformations when led by place-based communities that, through co-design, reinvent and prototype urban places, leading to long-term transformations both in the physical space and in the relationships between inhabitants (Fassi and Vergani, 2020). From this perspective, commons are conceived not only as shared resources, but also as a process: a set of practices focused on how to create support and govern commons. Actually, Linebaugh (2009) makes use of the verb *commoning* to express the idea of commons as a process that requires participation, takes place in a specific local space, and continues over time. As such, the idea of urban commons encompasses the concepts of common ownership, participative citizenship and continuity, and here it comes the priority of some democratic public administrations to guarantee these features through a public service of co-design.

If we consider the specific application of co-design to city-making which may bring to innovation with social impact, we can look at bottom-up practices led by citizens, grassroots organizations or creative communities with the aim of making changes in the urban environment to better respond to people's activities. Grassroots social innovations often make alternative and creative uses of spaces for initiatives aimed at solving everyday problems with a care for relationship and collaboration. Examples range from guerrilla gardening to alternative mobility solutions, from neighbours' convivial feasts to improvised playgrounds, and much more. Another kind of collaborative practice is tactical urbanism: a set of temporary actions conducted by citizens and local organisations within a frame defined with and by local governments. Examples are temporary use models for squares, streets, or small urban areas in which new spatial arrangements implemented with transient, low-cost, technical solutions are experimented together with a programme of community activities. After assessing their impact, more permanent transformations are designed and implemented by the public administration.

While in the grassroots social innovation the role of public administration might range from none to fostering, supporting, or even incubating it (Galego et al, 2022; Smith et al, 2017; Meroni, 2019), in tactical urbanism it is almost codified through several cases (Silva, 2016) as one possible answer to the search for new paradigms in spatial planning and urban development. Thus, it can be seen as an action increasingly promoted by the public administration as a stable practice and therefore set up as a public service aimed at designing both a place and its activities in close collaboration with people. If, in tactical urbanism, the approach of local government is



getting progressively codified, the way in which grassroots social innovation is supported by public policies is more varied, yet generally referable to as incubation-like initiatives (Corubolo, Meroni and Selloni, 2021; Avelino and Witmayer, 2018; Oeij et al, 2018). Public programmes for incubating, scaling or funding social innovation, by offering economic and knowledge support, aim to encourage and steer citizens and organisations to be more eager and ready to experiment with sustainable and inclusive ways of living.

Both tactical urbanism and incubation-like programmes, when adopted by public administrations, often tend to become stable policy initiatives and consequently public services that adopt co-design to involve civil society and train civil society to do the same. Indeed, co-design approaches and methodologies offer ways to consider different and opposing interests and to coexist in complex systems where full alignment and sharing of visions is not always possible (Meroni and Selloni, 2018).

We shaped the 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta' project with the intention of combining the objective of imagining the future of a common space in the city of Reggio Emilia with that of paving the way for new services co-produced by civil society in various forms, from enterprises and organisations to grassroots innovators. We received the mandate of involving selected groups of social actors rather than single citizens. Aim of the municipality of Reggio Emilia was indeed to engage those who had an informed, competent, and relevant say on the Rivalta ducal complex and therefore the most active actors in the cultural and associative fields, the experts in technical sectors, the NGOs, the universities and the local authorities. 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta', thus, was a top-down action, involving a multi-stakeholder system of actors connected to specific urban commons.

The approach that we adopted put the service perspective prior to the landscape design of the park, focusing on the 'immaterial' dimension of future relationships and activities to be carried out in the park rather than possible spatial configurations. As totally inherent to services, service design was here applied to co-create the material and immaterial conditions for future interactions, experiences, and relationships to happen in the given place of the Rivalta's palace and park complex (Penin, 2018; Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011). The involvement of the selected stakeholders was thus aimed not only at making them participate in the building of service scenarios, but also at implicitly inviting them into the future management of the outlined services, attempting to support a broader social innovation in which participants in the co-design process also play a role in the implementation phase.



3. The context of Reggio Emilia and the case study ‘Rival(u)ta Rivalta’

Reggio Emilia has about 170,000 inhabitants and it is characterised by a prosperous small/family-business infrastructure of light industry and food production. It is well known for the so-called ‘Reggio Emilia Approach’, an educational philosophy that has made Reggio Emilia’s municipal infant-toddler centres a reference point throughout the world. This is a manifestation of the open-minded and forward-thinking attitude of the ‘cultural milieu’ of the city, which manifest in different sector as a collaborative, inclusive and creative approach. Over the years, the municipality of Reggio Emilia has developed policies for inclusion, integration and active participation, establishing close collaborations with a wide network of local actors operating for the general interest of citizens.

Some of these policies can be actually viewed as public services to foster social innovation. This is the case of the programme named ‘QUA - Il quartiere bene comune’ (that can be translated as ‘Neighbourhood as a Commons’), established in 2015, which aims to enhance the ‘protagonism’ of citizens, both in their associative forms and as individuals (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2020). The project supports a transition from simple participation to actual, responsible leadership of citizens, providing a platform to collaboratively address the social, environmental, and economic problems of the city. QUA is explained and regulated in the ‘Regulation for Citizenship Labs’ (Regolamento dei laboratori di cittadinanza), a regulatory framework inspired by the former well known ‘Bologna regulation on collaboration between citizens and the city for the care and regeneration of urban commons’ (Regolamento di Bologna). This is a handbook for civic collaboration in which citizens agree to enter a co-design process with the municipality that leads to ‘collaboration pacts’ to regulate single, short-term interventions and long-term care of urban commons. The programme ‘QUA - Il quartiere bene comune’ takes concrete shape in two main actions that manifest the strategy of the municipality: ‘Citizenship Workshops’ and ‘Urban Laboratories’. The first are participatory processes in which citizens try out a whole journey from collective discussion to actual co-design, co-production, management and monitoring on a specific issue. The ‘Urban Laboratories’ are similar processes dedicated to specific areas of the city, working on the maintenance of physical spaces, and the improvement of the quality of places and related infrastructures. What distinguishes the Reggio Emilia approach in the panorama of similar policies, is the establishment of a specific profile in charge of the participatory processes, the ‘Neighbourhood Architect’, a professional employed by the municipality who runs the public service of the QUA. In fact, the ‘Neighbourhood Architect’ can be regarded as a new type of public servant who works in close



contact with people, acts as a bridge between citizens and local government, and as mediator of conflicts between the top-down and the bottom-up in several decision-making projects, including city-making.

This sketchy description of the context in which the 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta' project took place as a very fertile context helps to understand its level of readiness and maturity, whereby civil society is not only engaged in collaborative processes, but already empowered to contribute and aware of its own role.

The project 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta' involved 6 design researchers from POLIMI DESIS Lab for around one year. Contrarily to 'QUA - Il quartiere bene comune' it was intended as an occasional, one-off initiative, not aimed to be repeated as such, even if it was not the only one process specifically designed and implemented in preparation for an urban renewal project. It was conceived as a sequence of 4 main phases: a set of conversations between the design researchers and the policy-makers and other activities to scope the action (phase 0); then individual interviews were conducted to collect information about the place (phase 1). The core part of the process consisted of a programme of co-design workshops with diverse stakeholders to explore multiple service areas. The results of these workshops were enclosed in a report to inform a landscape design competition concurrently launched by the municipality (phase 2). Once the winners of this competition were selected, they were engaged in specific co-design activities to converge towards a consistent spatial and service proposal which worked as basis for guiding the implementation of the project (phase 3).

3.1 Phase 0: A set of scoping activities

A scoping phase was necessary to start the whole process and to ensure favourable conditions for a positive development of the project. This stage consisted of a series of meetings with Reggio Emilia policy-makers and made it possible to understand, share and interpret their guiding vision for the area. Since the policy-makers already had a general idea of the future of Rivalta, our contribution was to enrich that idea, grasping the design principles that best interpreted the 'genius loci.' The guiding vision was to consider the ducal complex as a place with different 'identities' for its multiple beneficiaries: from the more local (the resident of the Rivalta neighbourhood), to the inhabitants of Reggio Emilia, to national and international visitors. The 'fil rouge' linking these identities was identified by policy-makers as a strong 'natural' character: the park was to be an oasis within the city, a 'green lung' for the people of Reggio Emilia, and this was the main recommendation that informed our work throughout the process.



3.2 Phase 1: Generative listening

The first phase was aimed at gathering information about the current local situation. Policy-makers proposed a selection of 26 relevant local stakeholders to be consulted and interviews were organized as interactive as possible, guiding people not only to convey information, but also to express desires and elaborate visions. We named this phase 'Generative Listening': we expanded the traditional activities of listening and information gathering towards the generation of fruitful conversations. Building upon the concept of 'active listening' developed by Sclavi (2008) that is the stimulation of a free flow of thoughts and the creation of empathy between individuals, we aimed to go beyond the role of the passive interviewer and set ourselves up as facilitators of a discussion and enablers of purposeful reflection, instead. For this scope, we conducted interviews with a semi-structured method in a two-part structure: one to discuss about the past and present of the park, to grasp positive and negative elements in terms of resources, barriers and criticalities; the other part was devoted to think about the future and perform an exercise of imagination.

Output of this phase was a 'sensible collection of insights' that created the basis for a conceptual map to then guide the subsequent co-design workshops.

3.3 Phase 2: Co-design workshops

The second phase was planned as a programme of 5 workshops with 42 participants, partially identified among the participants to the first phase, and partially among new relevant stakeholders belonging to NGOs, universities and local authorities.

Building upon the results of phase 1, we elaborated a conceptual map displaying 4 main design directions: the central one represented the core theme (Park of the Nature), while the surrounding areas supported the exploration of alternatives (Park of the Agriculture, Park of the History and Park of the Wellness). We called this map 'compass for envisioning': it was the central boundary object (Meroni, Selloni and Rossi, 2018; Johnson et al, 2017; Star, 1989) of all workshops, printed on a large board hung on the wall, it served as a physical and conceptual support for the co-design activities (figure 1).

In addition to this compass, another boundary object was ideated: it consisted of a deck of cards representing potential services and activities drawn up from a preliminary study of existing case studies and classified according to the 4 thematic areas presented in the map. Each participant was invited to select some services from the deck of cards: these activities, combined, resulted in a personal vision for



the future of the Rivalta's complex which could be a mix of agriculture, history, wellness and nature. Those visions were then positioned on the compass and discussed collectively.

As a final stage, participants were paired according to link between their visions and used a stakeholder map (a well-known tool in the service design community [Giordano et al, 2018]) to start thinking about the actors involved or impacted by the future arrangement. The map was also used to trigger a conversation about roles and power distribution, taking in consideration public, private and third sectors organisations and, thus, to initiate a reflection about the future governance of the place.



Figure 1. Use of boundary objects in codesign workshops: the compass for envisioning and the activity cards.

At the end of the 5 co-design workshops, we collected 42 personal visions and 21 stakeholder maps. Altogether a huge amount of material that had to be processed to create a report to be integrated into the brief for the international landscape design



competition and, thus, to inspire the participants in the competition for the renewal of the Rivalta complex.

The extensive work of re-elaboration to produce a synthesis of the visions was mainly in our hands, eventually reviewed by the policy-makers of Reggio Emilia municipality. While combining and expanding the personal visions, we considered all the main emerging elements, discarding those not in line with the municipality's intentions or too far from the project's values. Nevertheless, we decided to include some innovative aspects that arose from the co-design workshops: the sessions were actually effective in enriching the original compass for envisioning, adding unexpected ingredients.

The output of the second phase was 'a set of co-created preliminary scenarios': a catalogue of 6 collective stories about possible futures proposing new ways of doing and living in the park (figure 2).



01. The Mindful Park



02. The Active Park



03. Garden of Water



04. Climate Oasis



05. The Innovation Garden



06. Garden of Welcome



Figure 2. Visualization of the six co-created scenarios that resulted from the codesign workshops.

3.4 Phase 3: Integration to the spatial design

In the last phase of the project the winners of the international landscape design competition were involved. Thus, the team composed by Openfabric, Casana and F&M Ingegneria, participated in a co-design workshop with us to integrate the spatial and service features in a consistent solution.

As a preparatory activity, we combined the 6 co-created scenarios into 2 scenarios to be discussed during the meeting. We conceived them as 'sacrificial concepts' (Brown, 2009) to stimulate feedbacks, in other words, they were designed so to be changed. The core activity of the workshop was performed applying to these scenarios a service design tool named 'offering map' (Foglieni et al, 2018), useful to define the primary and secondary offering, i.e. the core service and the additional



ones to be provided within the Ducal complex. Then, we added to the map another level of detail: the distinction between temporary and permanent services, as this dichotomy was fundamental when considering outdoor and seasonal activities. Finally, all the services were associated to specific areas of the spatial project.

At the end of this phase, we delivered a couple of 'integrated spatial & service scenarios' (figure 3) named as follows:

- 'The Wellbeing Park' which elaborates the themes of health and living well.
- 'The Biosphere' which refers to the themes of landscape, nature, and harmony with the surrounding environment.



Figure 3. Visualization of 'The Wellbeing Park' (on the left) and 'The Biosphere' (on the right).

These scenarios formed the concept basis of a comprehensive plan for services and solutions (Meroni and Selloni, 2022) thought to orient the final design of the park and the implementation stage. Currently, after 3 years, Reggio Emilia municipality is managing the final development of the executive project.

4. Ways of setting up a public service of co-design

Both the 'QUA - Il quartiere bene comune' and 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta' can be discussed as public services of co-design, being different in terms of duration, ways, and purpose, but having several points in common. While the former project can be described as a *permanent public service*, the latter can be defined as a *transient public service*: they complement each other in the *modus operandi* of a city that is making participation and social innovation structural in its policies on urban commons. Moving from our experience with the project for Rivalta, we may discuss the common points and the opportunities of implementation of co-design as a public service.

4.1. On considering a plurality of views, creating commitment and empowerment

Main output of the 'Rival(u)ta Rivalta' process is a set of service scenarios: we applied indeed a scenario building methodology, which has roots in different disciplines and is part of the 'futures studies' area. As service design scholars, we intend scenarios as stories about the future conceived in a narrative and visual form, like what Ogilvy (2002) defines as plots characterised by distinctive factors, forces and values that shape a set of narratives. Manzini and Jégou (2004) developed the methodology of 'DOS—Design Orienting Scenarios': this defines a set of visions for the future that are motivated, illustrated and visualised through specific solutions, representing the different perspectives that the scenario-builder aims to discuss with the scenario-users. Hence, we employed scenario building as a key method for engaging multiple stakeholders and gaining over their commitment; by engaging the social parties in scenario co-design, public administrations can commit to the new visions, while sustaining the convergence of social creativity and innovation. Such process of 'thinking together about the future' is a way to support participants through the imaginative power of design, developing 'public imagination' (Selloni, 2017). In the Rivalta project, the explicit objective was to engage social actors by creating visions together, thus for the public administration to play a *super-partes* role. This activity of design-centred participatory forecasting has proven to be a good strategy for empowering participants, both on the side of subjective empowerment, i.e. the feeling of being able to influence decisions, and that of objective empowerment, i.e. actually being able to influence an outcome or a decision (McLean and Andersson, 2009). The social actors invited to participate in the co-design workshops were aware of bringing a competent voice on the Rivalta project, but through the co-design process they felt invested with a responsibility and provided with a real opportunity to contribute to defining the identity of the future park. This is even more true when the participants are selected stakeholders, rather than single citizens: compared to



previous experiences with individual city dwellers (Selloni, 2017), the Rivalta co-design process worked in a faster and smoother way, bringing to shared visions and contributing to an actual sense of commitment. This is not to say that it has been a conflict-free process, but the involvement of experts and knowledgeable people fostered engagement from the beginning. Their diversity of perspectives resulted in a multiplicity of scenarios rather than one that reflect the diversity of voices and visions. The way these scenarios are being turned into a built environment (a park with several infrastructures) keeps the traces of several of these visions and hopefully will create the basis for different things to happen reflecting the different interests.

We can comment that, while a permanent co-design service established in a neighbourhood may have to deal with a variety of issues and therefore needs to rely on a deep knowledge of the place, for which the presence of a dedicated and rooted professional (e.g. the neighbourhood architect) is likely to be key, a transient co-design service may benefit from being led by external professionals with a fresher and more impartial look at a place and topic. At least for the Rivalta project, this was the case, as we were perceived by the participants in the programme as not being influenced by prejudices: our work could be viewed as naiver on the one hand, but also more open to all people's ideas.

4.2. On enabling social innovation by infrastructuring conversation

The multistakeholder co-design process set up for Rivalta is a logical response to the need of generating outputs that are representative of different visions and of a democratic approach, as it is in the mandate of a public administration. In Reggio Emilia several social actors were thus involved in the design process, so that we took advantage of their experience to disentangle local needs and envision options for the future. The debate that flourished during the workshops evokes the reflective 'labs' for the city described by Binder et al (2008): platforms for collaborative enquiry that can provide an 'infrastructure' for thought, awareness, and networking about present and future issues. Here, the notion of infrastructuring appears as particularly appropriate: it can be described as a continuous process of building relations with diverse actors, to foster social innovation in the society at large (Hillgreen et al, 2011). Infrastructuring is indeed aimed at building relationships with stakeholders, enabling them to act and create networks. The intrinsic value of this practice, which acknowledges the design agency is not limited to designers but distributed among different stakeholders, lies in this enabling factor that can bring about collective experimentations and reflective thinking on communal issues. The Rivalta project aimed at setting the basis for a dialogue on the interest of all, and thus for the birth of services that could make converge different actors into joint initiatives and resources. The collaborative design of shared resources and the creation of the 'infrastructure'



that enables this collaboration can be seen, once again, as the goal of a 'public service'. In other words, public administrations should provide for innovation to be not only the production of new products or services, but also the opening up of room for questions, possibilities and processes for radical change (Bannon and Ehn, 2012; Selloni, 2017). We believe that this infrastructure can become the ground for multi-stakeholder social innovations that can be incubated through public policies and measures.

We can comment that, while a permanent public service of co-design may set the basis for a multistakeholder conversation over everyday circumstances, an extraordinary and larger scale transformation project might need a more extensive, focussed, and concentrated dialogue, to be orchestrated on purpose with specific strategies and tools that are *ad hoc* developed in a transient activity.

4.3. On creating the conditions for co-production

The purposeful encounters of the co-design workshops for Rivalta not only generated visions, but also allowed stakeholders to meet each other often for the first time despite their local proximity. Although there is no evidence yet of what these meetings may have brought in terms of joint initiatives, because the construction of the park is still in progress, we can say that the creation of opportunities to start businesses with a positive social and economic impact on the city is part of the objectives of a public administration. The Rivalta project methodology applies the assumption that the co-design is pre-condition for the co-production of services (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Nabatchi et al, 2017) and a way to innovate in public services by shifting the delivery of services to a range of different actors in an equal and reciprocal relationship, rather than relying on a unique (public or private) provider. Co-production emphasises the shared character of the production process, while co-design stresses the shared character of the creative process (Selloni, 2017): they both represent a specific interpretation of user involvement, which, in this case, can be intended as greater multi-stakeholder participation in both processes. According to our previous research (Selloni, 2017), it seems that participants who have already collaborated in a creative phase of envisioning services, are more inclined to extend part of this collaboration in their co-production. While we can consider this to be the first necessary step of a possible collaboration between different parties, still further levels of collaborations must be put in place to achieve and actual co-government of the place. Here there is room for further experimentation to understand ways, roles, and rules to access and govern a shared resource critically important for the city environment such as the Rivalta area.



We can comment that co-design public services, both permanent and transient, ultimately aim to form communities of purpose, i.e. people who do not choose each other but have a common desire to share a goal and a mode of operation. By doing 'things together' with design tools and a purpose, these communities achieve a form of cohesion, which we assume to be within the scope of public policy. However, while permanent actions have proven effective in activating small case initiatives (yet less effective in keeping them alive over time), transient ones can be more effective in creating the momentum for non-ordinary experiments, which can permanently change rules and modalities at scale, this including new forms of co-production.

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