

Lecture Notes in Civil Engineering

Giuseppe Amoruso *Editor*

Putting Tradition into Practice: Heritage, Place and Design

Proceedings of 5th INTBAU International
Annual Event


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Strategic Design for the Enhancement of Cultural Itineraries and Related Territories. “Via Regina”: A European Cultural Itinerary

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Abstract. The research aims at strengthening the common identity of territories in Northern Lombardy (Italy) and Southern Ticino (Switzerland) by safeguarding and enhancing their common cultural heritage, identified in the historical net of pedestrian routes that cross and connect the regions involved. Therefore, owing to the synergy among cultural itinerary experts, administrations, landscape designers, geomatics engineers, architects and designers, the project allows to strengthen the common identity of these “pathways,” safeguarding and enhancing their cultural heritage through integrated initiatives aimed at providing information and communication to the public, thus fostering a greater knowledge and use of said territories. The ancient routes were studied on the basis of various values expressed by anthropic structures (transit and migration routes of populations, art and faith devotional paths, connections between villages in the valley and high altitude pastures, forestry and rural micro-economies, local food and wine production) and through the extensive use of ICTs, survey systems and a computerized management of the territorial and environmental information collected. Moreover, a systematic and strategic design was carried out with the aim to enhance the territorial and environmental contexts.

Keywords: Urban design · Landscape design · Design for cultural heritage · Way finding · Communication design

1 Introduction, Context of Reference and Intervention Scenarios

This research falls within a wider cross-border programme aimed at safeguarding, enhancing and promoting historical and cultural heritage and related landscape. The project, led by the Politecnico di Milano, was developed by the following partners: Fondazione Politecnico di Milano, Associazione Iubilantes, Comunità Montana Lario Intelvese, SUPSI Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana, Ufficio Beni Culturali del Canton Ticino, Comunità Montana Valli Lario e Ceresio, Museo della Via Spluga, Comune di Cernobbio, Università di Pavia.

The “Via Regina Lariana” pathway, from Como to Sorico, is one of the most ancient historical and cultural exchange routes between Italy and Switzerland [1]. In fact, this wonderful Italian-Swiss pedestrian itinerary, together with its continuum given by Via Francisca and Via Spluga, is a fundamental transalpine sustainable mobility connection “system” whose potential for European development has not yet been adequately exploited. Indeed, it has all the necessary characteristics and requirements to be defined a great European cultural itinerary [2]. Therefore, it is a pathway and an area that deserves to be better known and safeguarded, and that should be entrusted to the people who walk it.

The project “I Cammini della Regina” (“The Queen’s Pathways”) - ID 33829732, Misura 3.1, PO Cooperazione Transfrontaliera - INTERREG IT- CH 2007–2013 – was launched owing to the collaboration among cultural experts, local museums, public administrations, landscape experts, architects, designers and geomatics engineers, with the aim to create an appropriate tool capable of fully developing this important cultural itinerary.

The Via Regina pathway is commonly identified in the road that, starting from Como and keeping to the West, follows the lake up to Ponte del Passo. Here, the route on the plane begins toward Chiavenna, a road opened in 1837, which, continuing up the mountain slopes, reaches Spluga and then Coira. Via Regina, though, is also the road that goes from Dongo, on the Lake of Como, up to the pass of San Jorio, reaching Bellinzona through Switzerland (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Panoramic view of the Lake of Como, with the peninsula of Balbianello, and, in the background, Bellagio, viewed from Via Regina in the area near Lenno - Ossuccio.

The road, known since the Middle Ages, is documented with various names: sometimes it is called Via Regia (256), other times it is Strada Regina, other times yet Via Regale (1352). Despite the various forms, the adjective (Regia, Regina, Regale)

highlights the fact that it was a main road, a “master” road. In fact, the term Regina (Queen) is thought to refer to Theodelinda, Queen of the Lombards, who, upon the Lombard occupation, took care of developing this region as well as restoring and adjusting many sections of the road.

Via Regina is also documented in the *Tabulae geographicae*, Roman military maps known with the name of “*Tavola Peutingeriana*.” Owing to these maps, the Romans marching toward the Alps were able to move easily from one point to another and to know the distances between stops and crossing points, starting from *Novum Comum*, the city built by Julius Caesar on the shores of the lake between 89 and 59 b.C., where 5,000 colonists were sent, among whom 500 Greek aristocrats.

Indeed, there is abundant evidence of inhabitation along the Regina route in the Roman period: most of it consists of landmarks, milestones and inscriptions, but there are also archaeological ruins, among which several beautiful mosaics and various fortifications built when the Roman Empire was in decline and the increasing pressure of the Barbarians was compromising the defence of the territory. These ruins are still visible in the area, or have been preserved at the Archaeological Museum of Como. In the XII century, Frederick Barbarossa passed along Via Regina both in his descent toward Milan, and in his return toward the Alps.

The *Statuti Comensi* (Statutes of Como issued in 1335) provided for maintenance obligations to which the various Municipalities located along Via Regina were subject, as well as those on the eastern shore of the lake and the hinterland of Ticino, witnessing the importance of the road for the entire region of the Lake of Como.

Paolo Giovio mentions the *Strada Regia* in his book *Larius*, written in 1537.

Taking into consideration such historical context, the project aims - through the synergy of cultural itinerary experts, administrations, landscape designers, geomatics engineers, architects and designers - to strengthen the common identity of these “pathways,” safeguarding and enhancing their cultural heritage through integrated initiatives aimed at providing information and communication to the public, thus fostering greater knowledge and use of said territories.

The ancient routes were studied on the basis of various values expressed by anthropic structures (transit and migration routes of populations, art and faith devotional paths, crest routes, counter-crest routes and valley routes, connections between villages in the valley and high altitude pastures, forestry and rural micro-economies, local food and wine production) and through the extensive use of ICTs, survey systems and a computerized management of the territorial and environmental information collected.

In such context, design played a strategic role in the census, recovery, protection, reuse and enhancement of the architectural heritage and cultural landscape with reference to building, artistic, documentary, historical and artisan elements. Particular attention was paid to the thematic itinerary of the ancient “*Via Regina Lariana*,” from Como to Sorico, between Italy and Switzerland, a fundamental transalpine sustainable mobility connection “system” whose potential for European development has not yet been adequately exploited (Fig. 2).

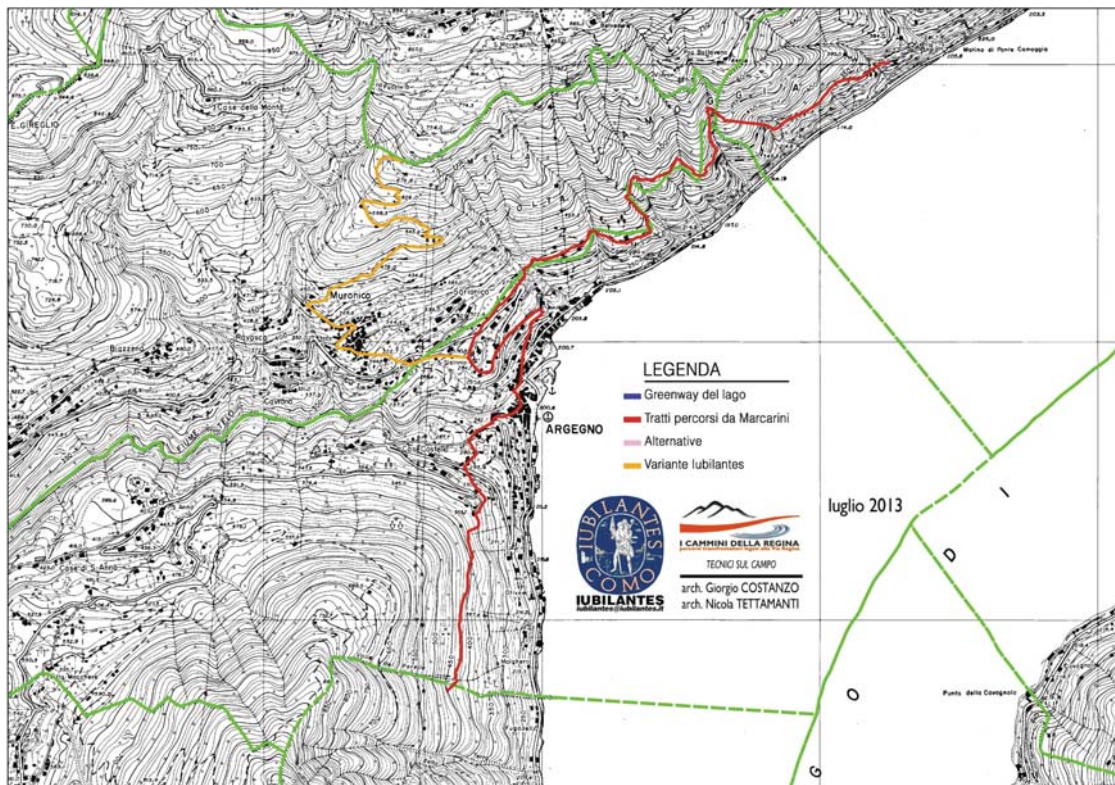


Fig. 2. Map of one of the areas into which the itinerary has been divided, with the identification of the Via Regina route (or its alternatives) which was used to carry out the various surveys. Particular attention here is paid to the route passing through the city of Argegno.

2 Research Objectives, Methodology Adopted and Activities Carried Out

The research group of the Politecnico di Milano, Department of Design, formed by Roberto de Paolis (coordinator), Maria Rita Ferrara, Silvia Guerini, Massimiliano Mandarini, Marina Parente, Umberto Tolino, Arianna Vignati, Francesco Zurlo, worked in coordination and collaboration with other two research groups of the Politecnico di Milano, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, coordinated by Maria Antonia Brovelli and Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering, coordinated by Stefano Della Torre, for the scientific-disciplinary contributions in the fields of geomatics and cultural heritage preservation, respectively.

The research group of the Politecnico di Milano, Department of Design, carried out the activities related to the strategic design of products/services, aimed at the enhancement of the routes, and the Integrated visual communication project. Specifically, the activities involved: the strategic design of products and services and the integrated visual communication (sign system, direction signs, information panels, totems, logos, first aid kit distributors); the planning of promotional graphics; the production of the map of Via Regina and Via Francisca pathways; the experimentation of tools (innovative and traditional) for the knowledge and protection of the Cernobbio case study; the introduction, within an experimental research path integrated in

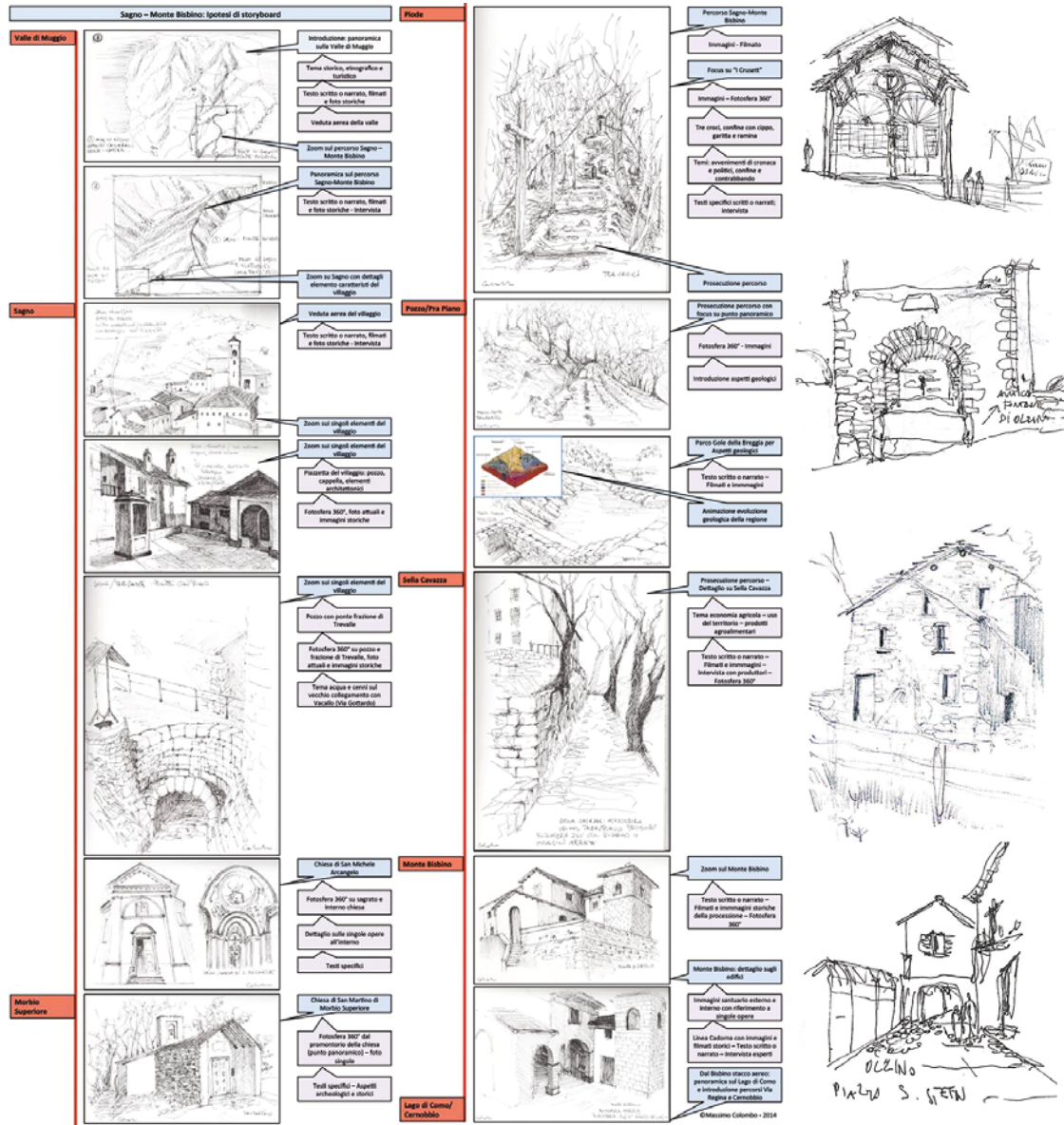


Fig. 4. Drawing from life as a cognitive tool for the representation of the territory. Storyboard assumptions for reading the environment during the itinerary of the event of MapParty from Cernobbio to Sagno. Sketches by Massimo Colombo and Massimiliano Mandarini.

Besides, it was decided to collect and include initiatives already started or ongoing, provided by various actors and institutions, including those developed in other INTERREG programmes. The research group participated in writing the integrated visual communication programme (brand identity) identifying the identity values expressed by the visual and material signs of the territories, by planning products, services and communicative artefacts also connected to public events organised specifically to promote the programme (creation of logos and brands, realisation of website, sign system, information points, visual identity manuals, gadgets, digital interfaces, paper and multimedia publishing products, headline boards, maps and promotional material for the MapParty, an entertaining multisensory excursion along the paths between Cernobbio (Italy) and Sagno (Switzerland) on the occasion of the

national event 6a Giornata Nazionale dei Cammini Francigeni), also keeping into account the regulations on the sign system for slow traffic diffused in Switzerland (Fig.5).



Fig. 5. Posters presented during EXPO 2015. Benchmarking on case studies and best practices. New models for developing local and rural tourism with in-depth studies concerning the definition of typological elements, and photorealistic insertions at route “junctions” of the solutions proposed for sign systems and furnishings. Drafting of the guidelines for the visual identity manual.

The activities were started in October 2013 and concluded in September 2015, and were developed within the following tasks:

- Design of products and services and Integrated visual communication (sign system, direction signs, information panels, totems, logos, first aid kit distributors, etc.)
- Design of promotional graphics
- Production of the map of Via Regina and Via Francisca pathways
- Experimentation of tools (innovative and traditional) for the knowledge and protection of Cernobbio case studies
- Realization of a design workshop (or laboratory) within the scope of the university degree paths.

Upon the conclusion of the project, the research group achieved the following results:

- Definition of territorial identity and geographical vocations;
- Development of integrated visual communication and definition of brand identity;
- Identification of integrated tourist paths, that can relate to the different territorial contexts of the areas involved
- Creation of a network and of a new brand for Via Regina as an integrated tourism experience (tourist and information services, further in-depth cultural and museum knowledge, contacts with productions and local cultural excellences, mobility and reception services, etc.)
- Definition of cross-border guidelines for the development of an international territorial network;
- Dossier providing instructions of the workshop/educational laboratory
- Project catalogue and publication of the experience
- Travelling exhibition to spread best practices and to promote the culture of cross-border territory enhancement
- Guidelines for the development of the sign system and visual communication.

3 Results of the Research and Conclusions

The solutions proposed recognise and demonstrate the key role played by design in promoting and developing cultural and environmental heritage and in enhancing territories crossed by Via Regina itineraries. On the basis of the information acquired during the various analyses and interacting with the Work Packages according to the chrono-programme, the work group integrated its research activity with the educational activity following a research-action methodology that entailed:

- the definition of a common theoretical basis (correspondence with a theoretical study) on the theme of design for the enhancement of territorial resources contextualised to the territories along the Via Regina pathway;
- the organisation of materials for supporting didactics (correspondence with the research of case and desk studies)
- the planning of activities, on the basis of the project's purposes and aims.

A series of elements were developed and assessed with the aim to provide solutions and artefacts capable of expressing the related values and identity: sign system, furnishings for outdoor spaces, events, services, characterisation of sensitive places (stop areas, observation points and exemplary places, entries and intersections) and their enhancement, definition of contents for on-line and off-line communication (evaluation of cases and day of work on the concept).

The Integrated visual communication project (brand identity) was realised through the elaboration of Guidelines, identifying the identity values expressed by the material and visual cultural signs present on the territory through the design of products and services and communicative artefacts (sign system, information points, visual identity manuals, gadgets, interfaces, paper and digital editorial products, first aid kit distributors). Moreover, a Visual Identity Manual of the Regina Pathway was realised establishing the guidelines for using the brand, the coordinated image and sign system

for the different interlocutors involved in the project (available on the website of the project - <http://www.viaregina.eu> – in the section “Attività”).

Particular attention was paid to an issue of social relevance emerged during the research, that is the perception and use of the itinerary by differently abled users (visually impaired persons, hearing impaired persons, persons with reduced physical abilities, etc.). In fact, an in-depth analysis was carried out aimed at investigating and providing answers in terms of the design of products and services with reference to sign system and visual communication.

The Visual Identity Manual was aimed at establishing the guidelines for using the brand, the coordinated image and sign system, and thus took into consideration the different interlocutors involved in the project. With reference to the sign system, the heterogeneity of the supports favoured flexibility in the use of visual identity through the insertion of a secondary chromatic palette and type characters supporting the institutional ones. A logo was created using three basic colours strictly connected to the territory (green, blue and orange) as well as three graphic signs that distinguish and identify its main geographical components (mountains, lake and pathway). Several sign supports were identified, diversified by form and function, defining a series of informative elements that allowed to keep a strong general identity. The panels were distinguished in information notice boards, direction signs, totems, banners, info touches, “roccolaio” and energy tree.

The materials used included natural wood besides aluminium, as connector or for the border of the structures, keeping a low visual impact on the surrounding environment. The system of pictograms supporting the route sign system includes a range of visual elements with a graphic style that recalls the fonts used on panels. The examples related to the use of the logo range from headed paper (with related indications of characters, sizes, alignments) to note pads and presentation cards, from window envelopes to B4 folders, to T-shirts for merchandising the activity to be distributed during the various events or along the actual route. In developing the project, various considerations were made even on the sign system for a broadened set of users with the aim to think of a final product that can be used by anyone who wants to follow the route, complying with project restrictions concerning ergonomic requirements and the use of paths also for differently abled persons.

The workshop (laboratory of final synthesis) was based on the realisation of a strategic project for the enhancement of cross-border “pathways” by networking territorial excellences within the cross-border “corridor.” The theme of the project was introduced and experienced in the university laboratories of the School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano – Course in Industrial Design (orientation Furnishings) at the Polo Territoriale of Como (Fig. 6).

This activity produced remarkable results as regards quantity and quality of proposals, with over 40° projects. Owing to awareness and dissemination activities, the projects were shown and exhibited on various occasions, among which the TRANS-GUARDI students’ day held in Lugano on 22 January 2015, at EXPO 2015 in the Cascina Triulza pavilion on 13 June 2015, and various exhibitions and conferences and seminars.

The project was realised within the institutional didactics of the laboratory of final synthesis (3rd year in Industrial Design (orientation Furnishings), of Como) held by

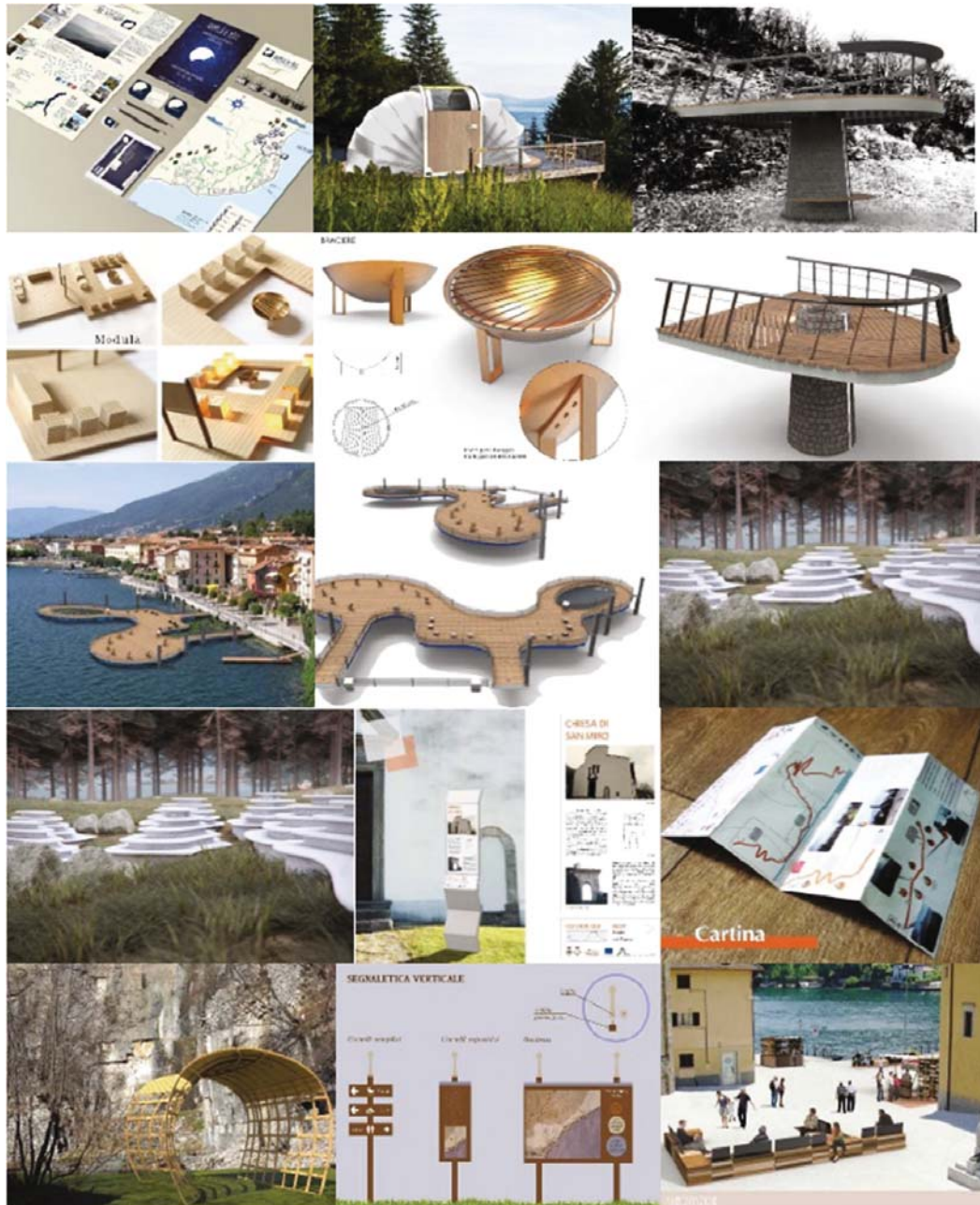


Fig. 6. University degree projects realised within the Laboratory of Final Synthesis of the Course in Industrial Design oriented to Furnishings, at the School of Design Campus of Polo Territoriale di Como of the Politecnico di Milano. Projects by Dania Barbin, Carlo Bianchi, Marta Carollo, Alessandro Consonni, Anna Borla, Martina Aramini, Elisabeth Conte, Fabio Ferrara.

professors Roberto de Paolis (person in charge), Maria Rita Ferrara, Nicola Crea, Gabriele Fumagalli with the collaboration of experts Giorgio Buratti, Luca Dellerà and Emanuele Lupidi, involving students for a semester from October 2013 to July 2014.

After the first phase, the work was broadened and defined during the Preparation of the Graduation Thesis, to be then concluded with the presentation of the projects during the various graduation sessions.

The research-educational activity allowed to carry out an in-depth analysis of the territory taking into consideration, besides physical resources (defined by the activities of relevance carried out by Associazione Iubilantes and of geo-survey), the architectural and monumental resources, the landscape, as well as the cultural and productive resources of the contexts crossed by Via Regina.

In fact, it was possible to identify:

- urban-architectural resources and connection infrastructure;
- churches and monuments of particular relevance, also with reference to the artistic works inside the structures;
- panoramic points
- typical products and productions (from agriculture to artisan production)
- fairs, festivals and other entertainment activities including existing services
- accounts and tales

The typical characteristics of the Via Regina pathway were analysed (with reference to particular contexts, as well as common contexts within the territory in which Via Regina develops) and a SWOT analysis was carried out to highlight limits and opportunities. The historical-cultural elements were analysed, as well as the morphologic and tourist ones identified as the basis to understand the contents of relevance.

Surveys were carried out concerning each stop of the route with reference to excursions, photographic documentation, researches in archives and local historic funds. Therefore, information was acquired on the local history, on the economy and culture, traditions, food and wine peculiarities, elements characterising the anthropized landscape and the natural beauties that characterise the various territories involved. The survey tools did not neglect local populations as “means” for analysing the territory: interviews and accounts were collected becoming material of the project.

Case studies and best practices were identified with the aim to create a context of reference within a common idea defined by the guidelines for the creation of an identity and product concept within a new tourist and cultural itinerary (WP5).

Following the various analyses, the briefs of the project were defined. Lastly, a series of project hypotheses were developed for system-product elements capable of reinterpreting and giving homogeneity to the identity and communication of the values of the itinerary.

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