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rate from architects and designers) by a dialectical one. This process leads to framing and challenging the professional positions, every decision being discussed in terms of its relevance for the new knowledge and understanding of the whole group.

On the theoretical level, our hypothesis addresses the notion of *participative democracy*. No one today would deny the members of civil society their competence in addressing public questions such as town planning. Nevertheless, the close study of our small project provides a paradoxically articulated set of ethical and political questions. On one hand, citizen participation in the political and administrative procedures in Geneva reveals a fragmented civil society, each stakeholder being affiliated to many micro-lobbies; on the other hand, the focus on sensorial experience seems to address a generic human being, devoid of cultural, social and economical peculiarities. These questions are central to design disciplines; when processes tend to replace objects, then citizens tend to replace experts; is co-conception the only logical consequence? How does the designer's responsibility interact with participation? What are the theoretical bases to understand "the design of experience in public space" in a way that avoids the pitfall of "disneyification"? Past experiments show that the Swiss system of direct democracy is insufficient to fully manage pragmatic matters such as town planning. We postulate that a concept of *concerted democracy* could be a way to fruitfully avoid the possible risk of simply understanding participation as "interactive" consumption.

On the practical level, our hypothesis is that the design of urban furniture is inseparable from town planning and building. The human body scale (small scale) of urban furniture must be taken into account from the very beginning of town planning projects (large scale). One of our experts insisted that urban furniture must not be added to the environment, but rooted in it. Our projects therefore are on one hand small removable elements that underline the silhouette and the close context of 19th century dinking fountains, and on the other hand a very large and partly flooded wooden promenade hung to the lake pier. Both kinds of projects renew the perception and experimentation of familiar elements. The fountains focus on new social interactions around water points, whereas the promenade proposes new leisure practices. The prototypes will be implemented in a central and limited area of the city. The second *in situ* sociological enquiry will be based on observation and questioning, as well as semi-directed interviews with volunteers who saw the first public presentation of UrbanMob New and agreed to participate in the project. Thus we will be able to study the reception of an urban furniture *project*, rather than simply test the acceptance of *objects*.

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Envisioning sustainable urban countryside

Service Design as contribute to the rururban planning *

1 Field of investigation

This work aims to present, from a Service Design perspective, a scenario of sustainable development for a critical and crucial context: the *rururban* territory (Donadieu, 1998), the *periurban* area that lies between a town or city and its rural surroundings. It is a critical context for the sustainable development of any urban area: actually it can be considered a *meta-context* (Manzini, Collina and Evans, 2004), a typology diffused with analogous characteristics in different situations.

The project takes as field of experimentation and reference the Agricultural Park South of Milan that surrounds the Southern part of the city.

The project is the result of the work of a multidisciplinary teams, as it is today considered to be the only possible way to working with territories (Landry, 2000; Viljoen, 2005), where designers collaborate with urban planners, agronomists, architects. It has been developed in 2006–2008, at the national level, under the auspices of the Italian University and Research Ministry[1].

Often called *fringe locations*, these territories are major sites of population change, economic growth, speculative pressures and dynamic social change, which blur the urban-rural distinction. Without a strategic vision and an effective policy, the consequence of this dynamic is that formerly separate cities and towns merge together into much more extensive urbanised zones, according to the Gottmann's concept of *Megaolopolis* (Hugo and Champion, 2003), a phenomenon that today appears to be as common in the less developed as in the more developed regions of the world.

As a result, there is now the need to reshape our thinking on human settlements systems, creating a new paradigm based on human behaviours and innovative market dynamics (Latouche, 2004; Meroni 2007).

Service Design can help us visualise empty or pending urban spaces as a rich, multifunctional territorial resources, where virtuous local interactions create a network of services that can support urban planners and architects in giving shape to the territory.

2 The scenario framework: hypothesis and objectives

The real problem of defining a urban identity of *periurban* areas is the apparent lack of profitable and practicable alternatives to production sites, housing or offices. However, increasingly supported by current reality, the researchers hypothesised the profitable feasibility of developing existing small agricultural concerns in a local network, taking into account local resources and opportunities offered by the local territory.

This means, first and foremost, creating a network of interconnected and complementary service models able to develop a different partnership between town and country. This partnership typology defines the scenario framework (Ogilvy 2002) that challenges the over-flow of urbanization by presenting sustainable alternatives: *periurban* areas are seen as places where the *network economy* meets the *collaborative service pattern* (Jegou and Manzini, 2008; Cipolla 2004), giving rise to a vision of an essentially multifunctional urban countryside.

This scenario

- aims to increase regional self-sufficiency through local food sale and the de-mediation (Meroni, 2006) of agricultural production (short food chain). This still remains the most important function of periurban agriculture (Petrini, 2005);
- proposes new perspective for the proximity leisure enhancing the agritourism activities;
- enhances relationships between rural areas and the city in terms of material, economic and cultural flows, and rationalizes them according to a sustainability assessment;
- generates income and improves labour opportunities in locally focussed, regional economies;
- closes loop systems, cycling the results of rural activities within a logic of service symbiosis (Mirata and Ristola, 2007);
- gives credit for good practises and soft policies

1 2005/2007 – project Prin MIUR, "Il parco agricolo: un nuovo strumento di pianificazione territoriale degli spazi aperti"; Università degli Studi di Firenze; Politecnico di Milano – Depts. DIAP and INDACO; Università degli Studi di Genova; Università degli Studi di Palermo.

- adopts traditional and new communication technology in order to foster the constitution of collaborative communities;
- assumes that agricultural activities can inspire new urban lifestyles by promoting the diffusion of technologies that allow urban farming (green walls and green roofs, simplified hydroponic and aeroponic systems), eases the spread of a new generation of urban cultivators and, at the same time, increases the quantity and quality of urban green (public and private)

3 The network of services

By adopting a collaborative approach and exploring the concept of multi-functionality as possible success strategy for weak economical and productive activities, the research has conceived and developed eight different service models, which we will describe briefly.

THE PARK COLLECTIVE BRAND

What shared identity can we attribute to this park which is able to characterise its activities? What does this identity entail?

The answer is a brand that denotes the short chain initiatives and activities that are the result of networked collaboration between different actors (e.g.: food box subscription with products from local farms; agritourism hospitality combined with other leisure services etc.)

FARMERS' MARKET: THE MARKET FOR THE PARK'S PRODUCE AND SERVICES

How can the Park and its produce be brought into the city? How can the city feed on its territorial produce?

To enable short sale from the producer to the consumer, the Farmers' market can be placed in dedicated areas within the most important street markets in the city, following a weekly rota. Here people can find "packages" to enjoy the territory, last minute offers of surplus produce and a refreshment point.

Organized by a consortium of local producers, it can support the de-mediation of both product and services.

PUBLIC GREEN PROCUREMENTS: GREEN PURCHASING

How to transform an administrative protocol into a landmark for aware consumers and enlightened producers? How to organize local windows for the exchange of high quality produce and services?

The solution works like an auction where the discount of the products increases with the increasing of the amount of people who join the auction, so building critical mass. Consumers can join the service either through a digital window or a local agent.

THE FOOD BOX SUBSCRIPTION

How to supply the city with local produce through a convenient and advantageous service? How to give commercial continuity to the producers?

The food-box is a de-mediation service promoted by a consortium of producers. It is conceived to be accessible in terms of costs, because of the cut in long distance transport, and in terms of convenience, because of the regular home or near-home, delivery. The consumer can personalize his/her purchase by choosing the products he/she wants, how much and how often according to his/her needs.

VISITORS' CENTRE: THE PARK POINTS

What could a "visitors' centre" look like in an agricultural park? What is it possible to find there? Who takes care of it?

Park Points are welcoming place, located at strategic

The farmers' market

The green purchasing
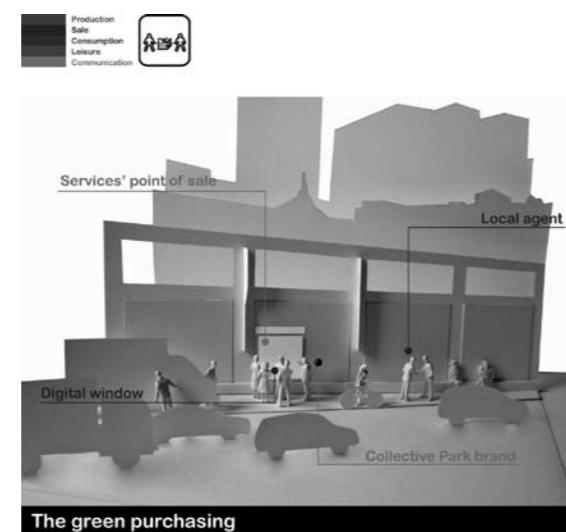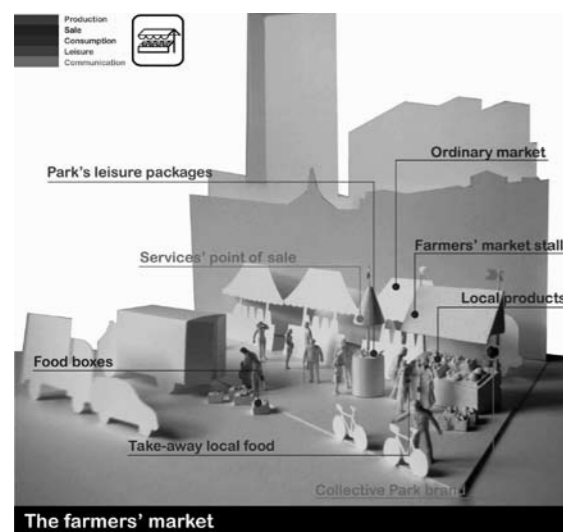
points in the Park. They combine physical access to the territory with access to its knowledge and its produce. Here it is possible to find an info point and local produce on sale at the same time; or it can also be the starting point for special routes and itineraries and offer agritourism hospitality, etc. A Park Point can also work both as a welcoming centre and as a logistic sorting hub linked to the Farmers' market and vegetable orders.

THE RURAL CULTURAL CENTRE (AT AN HISTORICAL BUILDING)

How to create an active cultural place in a Park? Where is it convenient to place it, what is it possible to find there, what is it possible to do? Who takes care of it?

The idea of a Cultural Centre is to enhance the value of local biodiversity through activities carried out by scientific researchers (from Universities) and experienced local farmers.

It is a place of knowledge and study of local cultivation and traditional farming techniques and is also a consulting window for local producers on advanced farming techniques (advanced organic and biodynamic cultivation, the use of indigenous species etc.). Since this is intended to become a point of attraction in the park, it should be located in a building of historic or other particular interest.

HORTICULTURE

How is it possible for an amateur to enjoy taking care of a vegetable garden in the Park? How can the Park be made more beautiful, vital and healthy with the help of amateur gardeners?
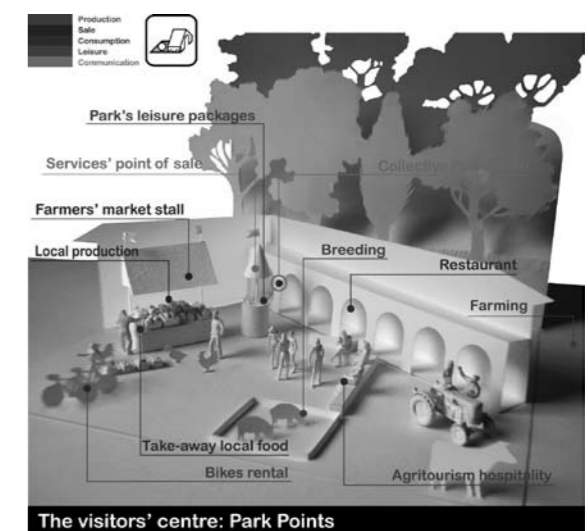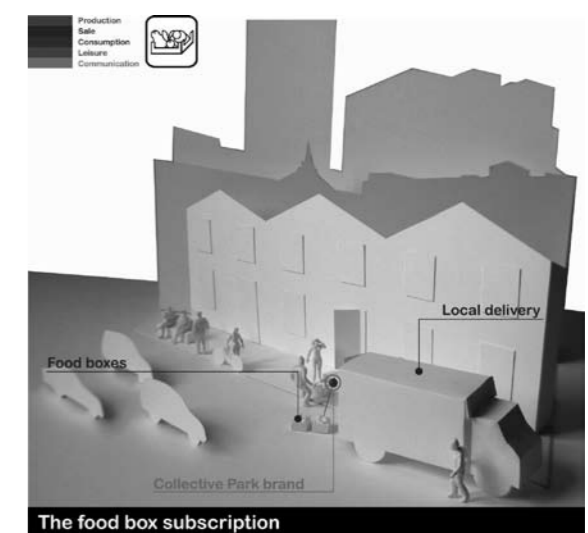
The service transforms available fields on the farms into amateur allotments to cultivate as small vegetable gardens. Amateurs can pay a rent to the host farm. The garden is hybrid space where individual and collaborative activities are connected, as for a time bank. When a farmer needs help in his/her activities he/she can rely on an internal exchange of favours and products, managed on a credit system.

The design of the service facilitates the internal exchange system, which needs to be organized and balanced to make collaboration as friendly and easy as possible.

URBAN INDOOR/OUTDOOR AGRICULTURE

How is it possible to enjoy cultivating a vegetable garden in the city? How can o mile fresh and biologic vegetables be produced?

Advanced building and gardening technologies can help urban farming: from great metropolises to smaller towns several solutions like green walls and green roofs, simplified hydroponic and aeroponic systems, are getting footing in urban environments to fulfil the need of citizens to cultivate their own food.

The food box subscription

The visitors' centre: Park Points

The rural cultural centre

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The horticulture

The urban indoor/outdoor agriculture

The service is intended to give advice on implementing such solutions, based on fixed parameters like the season, the space and the energy available, light and water requirements.

4 Conclusion: the network system

The services here described propose a vision where agricultural activities, and particularly food production and exchange on a local scale, become the means of sustainably developing *rururban* areas. They rely on direct relations between producers and consumers, and their collaborative nature blends the roles of the actors, highlighting the need for a local rural-urban production partnership to produce territorial value.

They become profitable precisely because they use the local resources to best advantage: as a matter of fact, the availability of such resources and the possibility of having direct control over them (Magnaghi 2000), as far as quality and quantity are concerned, is the distinctive and key factor that enables small business to use them in a beneficial way, making the difference in the market. This allows small enterprises to create the distinct features in their offer that attract the critical consumer; controlling these resources is the way to activate a quality market beside the mass one.

Nevertheless, without a network strategy able to share and complement assets and resources, they are unlikely to have sufficient power to influence the way the territory takes shape: only when and if these services become self-sustaining, will they be capable of creating social and economic territorial humus that can counter the building speculation.

The project was aiming to define this network strategy through service design, and has brought to a conceptual draft of how this network model can look like and work according to a coherent scenario.
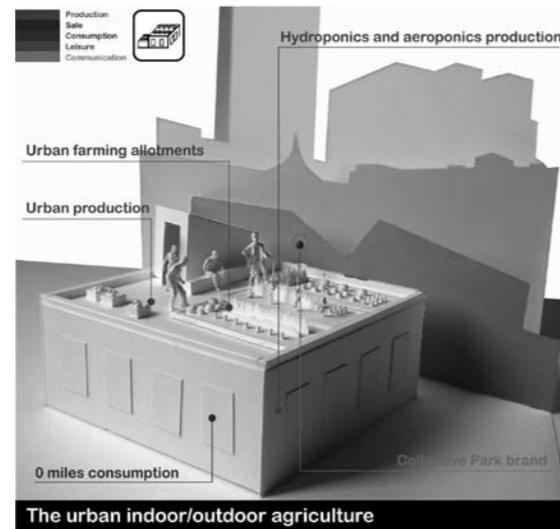
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