

URBAN DESIGN

Madalina Ghibusi
Federica Marchetti



SPACE

IDENTITY

POLICY

PROGRAM

projects for city environments
ECOLOGIES

MAGGIOLI
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ii inclusive interiors Peer Reviewed Book Series
#05 | **Urban Design Ecologies: Projects for City Environments**

A cura di / Edited by
Madalina Ghibusi Federica Marchetti

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ISBN 978-88-916-2707-0

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Azienda con sistema qualità certificato ISO 9001:2008

Maggioli Editore is part of Maggioli S.p.A

ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company

47822 Santarcangelo di Romagna (RN) • Via del Carpino, 8

Tel. 0541/628111 • Fax 0541/622595

www.maggiolieditore.it

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Complete catalogue on www.maggioli.it/university area

Il catalogo completo è disponibile su www.maggioli.it area università

Finito di stampare nel mese di Luglio 2018 nello stabilimento Maggioli S.p.A, Santarcangelo di Romagna (RN)

Printed in July 2018 in the plant Maggioli S.p.A, Santarcangelo di Romagna (RN)

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ii inclusive interiors 05

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ISBN 978-88-916-2857-2
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Pubblicato da Maggioli Editore nel mese di luglio 2018
Published by Maggioli Editore in July 2018

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ii inclusive interiors Book Series

ii inclusive interiors is a series of studies that – in the attempt to build the foundations of an adaptable environment that meets the need of intercultural dialogue – aims at outlining the most relevant architectural experimentations on collective interiors, in order to highlight the most innovative strategies and tools of “inclusive design” in this regard. In doing that, it collects multidisciplinary critical contributions focusing on the new spaces and architectures that respond to the change of social sphere in a society marked by the intensification of the mobility of people as well as information.

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Volume 05

This volume of the inclusive interiors Book Series collects the scientific outcomes related to the design workshop “Up_Citying: Urban Design Ecologies Project”, held within the PhD Program in Architecture Urban and Interior Design (coordinator prof. Luca Basso Peressut), Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano.

Research Group

Francesca Berni, Veronica Ferrari, Madalina Ghibusi, Luyi Liu, Federica Marchetti, Gianfranco Orsenigo, Jing Sun

Coordination

Imma Forino, Politecnico di Milano
Massimo Bruto Randone, POLI.design
Pierluigi Salvadeo, Politecnico di Milano

With the participation of

Marco Boffi (Università degli Studi di Milano), Alberto Francini (Studio Metrogramma), Tommaso Goisis (Comune di Milano), Paolo Inghilleri (Università degli Studi di Milano), Andrea Minetto (Comune di Milano), Stefano Mirti (IdLab), Erika Noren (IED), Nicolò Ornaghi (Hublab), Nicola Rainisio (Università degli Studi di Milano), Demetrio Scopelliti (Comune di Milano)

Acknowledgements

DAStU

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AIMAC

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Introduction

What does it mean living in an urban environment? Are the cities the product of their inhabitants or are the inhabitants the product of their cities? What are the ingredients for a successful method of planning the urban habitat of tomorrow? These are some of the questions that start building a picture of the practice of today in urban design, planning and management. The different natures of the challenges anticipate the operating system around which the speech of this book is constructed. It both encloses and discloses investigations of the relations between the space, its builders and its users that find themselves in a phase of overwhelming exponential growth of population in the urban habitats. Added to this, the growth is also an intensive one, so the pressure and instability is experienced from micro to macro levels intertwining and exceeding the physical one illustrating how the space is now the product of this tensions, both representing and molding them beyond the physical requirements. This is the trigger that enabled this cross-disciplinary collaboration in the pursue of covering a range of understandings of the urban environments in order to bridge new strategies for the urban tomorrow. Throughout the diversity of points of view, it is still identifiable the common investigation of the relation between actions and space that are each generating and reinforcing the other depending on the contextual premises and evolution in time. Around this principle, the various positions taken by each author intersect, overlap, compete, juxtapose and contrast in a generative formula: the *Urban Design Ecologies*.

The urban system materializes in the form of the city. The limits of the cities are dilating and stretched dynamically but consistently, both physically and in terms of influence on the quality of the life of inhabitants. Global versus local, top-down versus bottom-up, immediate needs versus long term results, public versus private investments: the challenges of

today need a shed of light upon the right proportional balance between these demands that the city deals with. This as well as reaching the right distribution of the amount and speed of the flows of energy, people, information, technology, services and transportation capable of shaping up the life in the city of tomorrow. Furthermore, the present conditions of the space reveal everyday how a personal expression of the architect or urban planner is no longer answering the needs of the hyped-up society solely by itself. Today that recalls a narrowed perspective. The socio-spatial mutations are proving how the places build and enforce their sustainable nature by starting from an open dimension and accumulating influences more and more about the individuals colonizing them rather than about the specialists accountable for their planning and administration. The role of the latter is to rather unriddle, translate and interpret the needs and pleasures of the ones that consume their project, taking a step back and listening rather than promulgating their specialized actions without a certain degree of proneness to a constructive “degradation”. This is how the process of urban planning could engage more and more stakeholders that must be able to enrich the knowledge of the contemporary challenges and aspirations of the transcultural society. In this particular ambit, the intention of Urban Design Ecologies approach is to show how nowadays the boundaries between the disciplines are blurred in a sustainable goal. And this can be seen as an ecological attitude that is emerging in the new century. The inclusive responsibility is a shared goal if we make an attempt toward a more responsive city. Therefore, throughout its content, this book marks, both directly and indirectly, the contributions of several actors that have a role on the urban scene seeking to become a start for a dialogue platform or at least to sparkle interest into such initiatives.

The contemporary condition of the space is no longer confined in the physical realm, but it is tested, altered and proofed by the dynamics of the virtual space, by the overwhelming speed of the innovation cycle, by the continuously changing conditions of the global phenomenon. This reality requires the profession of the architect to be contaminated by the surrounding disciplinary concentric circles, where the center is the ambit of the project as commonly set and accepted by all the stakeholders, from the targeted population to the investors, planners, markets, policy makers and other potentially involved specialists and beneficiaries. This gravitation of the multidisciplinary thoughts is the process that relates to the background of the Urban Design Ecologies strategy proposed in this publication. In the book the discourse is articulated around four main

“pillars” Space, Identity, Policy and Program, that are also used and referred to as “factors” or “operational perspectives” throughout the language of the Urban Design Ecologies approach. Their role inside this book is to organize like some magnets that attract a series of points of view upon the contemporary urban condition underlining the cross-disciplinarity of the design process that defines the current practice in the urban field.

The debate starts with setting the framework of the Urban Design Ecologies speech by defining and explaining the strategical approach and the terminology, and then presenting some case studies of the strategy applied in the educational field to show how it can be interpreted and applied on different levels of culture and specialization. Afterwards, presenting theoretical and historical precedent is what supports furthermore the understanding of the general framework. Then the speech opens toward the desired debate upon the environment of the city and so the heterogenous interpretations are clustered around the above-mentioned “pillars”. Moreover, the interviews that mark the end of each section are articulating commenters and practitioners, enriching the spectrum of viewpoints and emphasizing again on how architecture is part of a wider mechanism.

The Space section starts with addressing the questions of the contemporary space in the form of a rhythmic succession of keywords reciprocally validated as a result of accumulations and intersections of concepts and phenomena that are common throughout the other pillars and so, essentially, overall, generate the *space*. Subsequently, the following chapters stress more on the “slowness” as the pulse of the growing city through the natural system as a slow urban infrastructure and the use of slow mobility like the bicycles that consequently have added results in the overall benefits for the city and inhabitants, in terms of health and experience. The interview with the renowned architect Stefano Boeri presents a scenario developed on the re-use of abandoned areas in the city of Milan based on the same structuralizing concepts: slowness, nature, reforestation, density, re-use.

The discourse of the Identity section is centered around psychosocial issues of the urban environment that have a direct impact on the citizens. The concepts are meant to coagulate some tactical actions to deal with the potentially negative consequences that the urban settlements project on the people and that are noticeable in their behavior as rather passive actors on the stage of the city. Tools risen from the field of environmental

psychology focus on how participative behavior is fundamental in a healthy functioning of the city overall and it can be stimulated throughout several initiatives developed around the concepts of wellbeing, experience and enjoyment, place identity and attachment, sense of place and sense of community, and, nonetheless the basic joy of play. The intention of the relatively topical sections is to reframe both the challenges and achievements of nowadays and to recast them in the light of Urban Design Ecologies.

The Policy section frames the importance of the urban policies as tools that should be integrated in the design process to allow new social interactions in the urban environment. Starting from the ambiguities inside urban transformation – and considering bottom-up and/or top-down approaches – policies can assume a relevant role, allowing feedback during the process and directing the next phases. This is a peculiarity of our time, looking at the mutable aspects of the city space, the stakeholders involved and the expectations of the inhabitants. The best result is obtained when fluidity and awareness in the interaction between designers, clients, institutions and people allow them to pursue final collective scopes.

In the end, the Program section underlines how the activities in the urban space are the element that relate space with the identity of the inhabitants. In the contemporary city, new networks and communities can develop uses, initiatives and innovative projects, activating the public domain thanks to creativity, collaboration and shared knowledge. Co-design and co-creation become important instruments to elaborate common uses, rules and visions. In this scenario, the inhabitants are not just spectators, but active participants in the satisfaction of their requirements and needs. It is a new perspective to fill the lack of unused and unattractive places that are spread around our cities.

The combination of all these elements can generate qualities in the city environment. The integration of the aspects creates a complex system that differentiates itself from an unsolvable and complicated structure.

This system can give new meanings to the urban space thanks to its ability to link different fields. It contributes to determine the “sense of the place”, working on various levels of the urban transformation and thanks to the analysis of all the issues related to the city. This global vision influences the future city livability taking into account transversal aspects: architectures and urban spaces are more connected to uses and activities, stakeholders and the management of the city increase the possibilities to take into action their needs, people can develop more awareness according to this new situation in the city that they have contributed to produce.

In conclusion, the contemporary city, produced by the interrelation of the four *ecologies*, appears more and more inclusive, livable and shared. The complexity factor, considered at the beginning of the design process, allows the designers and other actors to find new open solutions for the general quality of the lifestyle of the people. This approach, for the fact that it is cross-disciplinary, influences a large sphere of issues giving new sense to the complexity, avoiding unwanted results. In this way, ambiguities and contradictions become opportunities instead of problems, producing innovative ways to inhabit the city space.

For all these reasons, the aim of this book is properly to trace and define topics about these new possibilities, describing and envisioning – through argumentations and examples – how the city is and could become.

MG, FM