



Reasons
to Research
in the
Mediterranean
Area



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Research and Reasoning in the Mediterranean Area

Marinella Ferrara, Design Department, Politecnico di Milano, Italy



After generating an interesting debate thanks to PAD 13 “Design for Territory” issue, edited by M. Parente & C. Sadini and awarded with the ADI index selection 2017, we are now glad to launch PAD 14 in partnership with AIAP, the Italian Association of Visual Communication Design, as our new publisher.

This new release focuses entirely on the strategic Design Research tracks across the complex Mediterranean scenario, investigating reasons and perspectives.

The choice of the topics to be tackled refers to our commitment to join the cause of activism due to the progressive decline of Western culture as well as the crisis of liberal democracy, in the framework of a continuous “metamorphosis of the world” destabilizing the certainties of modern society. We recall on this basis the considerations by German sociologist Ulrich Beck, author of *Risikogesellschaft* (Risk Society) and of the above mentioned “Metamorphosis of the world”:

“Risk reverses the relationship of past and present, present and future. The past loses its power to determine the present. Its places as a cause of the present-day experience is taken by the future, [...] the presumed risks are the spur used to ensure that everyday life goes on a gallop.” (Beck 2000, p. 330)

Such a picture of the current situation shows how all the tools we have credited so far to cope with crucial times have been now used up. The response strategy prefigured in the book by the German sociologist goes beyond the now obsolete, though still operational “Zombie Institutions”, which are no longer

suiting to contemporary social needs and economic challenges and consequently stand as an obstacle to the understanding and making processes.

The condition which is essential for seizing the positive aspects of change is instead that of letting creativity think the unthinkable, envisioning a better future while containing the dystopias hindering as yet the awareness of the current condition and causing us to shape a world we don't want to live in. The vision we get as a reference to our context of choice is that the Mediterranean area is now induced to abandon a certain historicism already considered dangerous by Predrag Matvejevic (2009), renowned as the great scholar of the Mediterranean, in favour of a new perspective set on current times, consisting in a constructive realism capable of facing reality in a relevant way. Only by providing answers - even if yet partial and temporary - to the big problems of our time - while imagining how technology may support humans instead of drastically reducing their role, we can reset a future vision of the Mediterranean area. "The metamorphosis of the world includes the metamorphosis of the image of the world, the metamorphosis of general framing and the metamorphosis of practice and taking action."

The Mediterranean basin is indeed a geographic area consisting in a set of regions characterized by physical, social and cultural peculiarities that cannot be reduced to a single unity or a precise definition. Considered in its wholeness, it discloses as an active and dynamic mosaic of cultures and identities. It is not just a place of divisions and conflicts, but also a place of co-existence, hybridization, and multiplicity. Today, as in the past, it represents the "junction of the expanded geogra-

phy of flows” disclosing as an emblematic reality of the contemporary condition though in a sort of continuous modification (OMA, 2018).

Just like many other territories and geographical regions, the Mediterranean area is irreparably compromised. Environmental pollution, climate change, strong migratory flows, social and economic inequalities, local negligence, lack of dialogue and sharing attitude among sub-cultures are some of the degradation signs, that disclose at the same time as the stimulus to push further the design culture, especially in terms of scientific knowledge and digital skills to be effectively connected to Mediterranean cultures and traditions.

As a continuously transforming reality, the Mediterranean area needs to be reconsidered through a creativity-driven innovation approach, which could be pursued by a “restorative design” as a remedial practice, as suggested by Paola Antonelli (2018) for the activities related to *Broken Nature XXII* Triennale Milano 2019. Alternatively, also an explorative and multidisciplinary approach could also be implemented, just like the one applied by OMA at *Manifesta12*, currently developing in Palermo an incubator of global conditions and a cross-pollination lab for a new world’s next paradigms.

While starting such a process of investigation of meaning and reimagining the future of the Mediterranean area, we launched a call for young researchers, though not only, expecting in return innovative solutions and methods to deal with old and new problems.

Taking up the concept of the inadequacy of the “zombie institutions” we open then this issue with the article “The Island of the Possible” by Barbara Predan. This text generates profound considerations on the need for the coexistence of different and alternative model of territory occupancy and experiences that can generate new organizing principles. It presents a case history of urban occupation, the *Rog Factory squat* in Ljubljana, Slovenia, existing in an autonomous form since 2006. Defined as a case of civil disobedience by politically active citizenship in the era of globalized capitalism, this “unregulated islands of activity” represents the most extensive community (as a space occupied) for alternative content in a heavily institutionalized Slovenia. The author highlights the issues related to the tension between renewal and resistance to the change of rigid systems and raises a deep critical reflection on the possibilities of transformation that can be opened in a world of experimentation and peaceful coexistence of different models.

In the *Contemporary Panorama* section, we issued three theoretical-methodological articles on research activities that started to identify the “problem areas” related to the management of the tangible and intangible resources of the Mediterranean, behaviours, ecologies and human needs, deserving consideration throughout the different Mediterranean contexts and identifying operational strategies for problem-solving design.

Within this section the article “The development of the Circular Economy materials in the Mediterranean: organic waste as

a valuable resource for the economic and social development of the area” by Chiara Catgiu is addressed to one of the most critical and complex contemporary problems, such as environmental pollution of the Mediterranean sea and lands. Acknowledging the unbalanced combination between natural and human-made living and production system, generating all the big problems we currently face, the author suggests a Circular Economy Model as a possible strategy to innovate the production of materials and consumer products, while restoring at the same time the economic-social system by contributing to the environmental problems. In particular, the author refers to the production of innovative materials from organic waste and shows some case studies of new entrepreneurship developing and applied this strategy in some Mediterranean contexts such as Egypt, Italy, and Spain, indicating possible models to follow.

The article “A Human Centred Design integrated approach for the inclusive valorisation of Mediterranean UNESCO Cultural and Natural Heritage” by Paola Barcarolo and Emilio Rossi, addresses to the valorisation of what can be defined as the most substantial resource of the Mediterranean: the UNESCO Cultural and Natural Heritage sites. The image on page 49 is particularly impressive for the number of sites highlighted. So it is easy to imagine that their maintenance and relative services require many economic resources. For this reason, the strategies to maintain the attractiveness of the sites by increasing the number of tourist visits are of primary importance.

The strategy proposed by the authors is the Human Centred Design Integrated approach for inclusive valorisation that can

autonomously enable and involve the use of historical heritage, widening the offer of cultural tourism including users with sense-perceptive deficits, thanks to projects of visual communication and haptic. Then this article opens to user experiences related themes to promote sites and cultural heritage.

The article “Design Approaches and Methodologies for the Valorization of Places Experiences from the Western Mediterranean Area” by Marina Parente, Eleonora Lupo and Carla Sedini deals with “Design as place maker” design culture. This design strategy can play a very important role in creating spaces, networks, and engagement for a collaborative understanding and a redefinition of the Mediterranean area. With the aim of systematizing the theory and developing a methodology for the design focused on places, they present four strategies resulting from already developed and chosen projects from Italy and Portugal. Those strategies metaphors are: Regeneration, Renovation, Replication, and Representation.

In the *Historical Panorama* section, we propose two articles based on two extremely different approaches. The first one “The Italian design history from a different perspective: the case of Ico Parisi”, by Chiara Lecce presents indeed the multifaceted figure of Sicilian designer, architect, photographer and artist Ico Parisi, who lived his artistic life in Como, in the north of Italy. Between the Thirties and Forties of the Twentieth Century, he fully represented a part of the culture of Italian rationalism, that was openly inspired by Mediterranean design with its unique expressive languages and structure typologies. The article opens a new line of research, warmly

encouraged by PAD, aiming to drive attention on those authors with a relevant experience throughout the Mediterranean area, but somehow often neglected by official history due to their rowing against the mainstream, or only for their peripheral geographical position compared to the centres of major artistic and design production, such as Milan in Italy.

The article “E-1027: Shifting Paradigms and Aesthetic Outcomes in a House by the Mediterranean Sea” by Anna Cecilia Russo takes us to Côte d’Azur French Riviera, and exactly to Roquebrune Cap St. Martin, where the E-1027 villa designed by Eileen Gray is located. According to pragmatism and applied aesthetic approach, this article argues the Mediterranean experience generated by a total architecture and the original furnishings, contributing to create a warm and welcoming nest modelled on the needs of a modern, dynamic body, melting with the Mediterranean landscape and lifestyle, defining a sublime fusion of functionality and senses. Together, those two articles let us bring back some visions from the historical timeline, without however falling into the trap of the historicism. Showing a speculative tension that proceeds from the present and roots back to the past, they help us to open up new prospects for the re-imagination of the Mediterranean regions, observing how the Mediterranean area itself has been in the past a model of reference.

We do hope this issue and the following ones may promote a discourse about design research in the Mediterranean area, launching a new way of looking at the Mediterranean problems and next perspectives.

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