

Designing new spaces of know-how Ex-Filanda: a creative hub for the meeting between next generations and entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

The contribution focused on the renovation projects of spaces as a fertile field for the generation of the public good. The research goes through a case study, which offers an investigation of the commingling between cultural and productive activities as a driver for growing social intentions. The case study shows a development where the research phase has created a productive laboratory born by the collaboration of the territory young talents. A makerspace placed inside a project of architectural regeneration and reviewed by the intervention of Politecnico di Milano. The project history showed the difficulties in balancing cultural and productive activities, preventing the construction of a network capable to generate incomes. The absence of heterogeneous knowledge couldn't make possible the relations with institutions and entrepreneurship hindering by consequence the generation of economies for the sustenance of the project. The paper means to comprehend which kind of model can sustain the makerspace development in a low-density context, evidencing the necessities of a self-analysis process for its revaluation. The article proposes a strategic renewal of the ex-industrial complex's goals and studies how new ways of young creatives engagement might attract a network of companies offering them the opportunity to innovate processes and products.

Keywords: Regenerated spaces, Collaborative economy, Systemic innovation, Generational empowerment, Open innovation lab.

INTRODUCTION

The analysis spans across the intersection between the Italian architectural patrimony, new workplaces, and an artisanal and business district. The study originates from a research process of a new strategic model for makerspaces, potentially able to lead to economic viability. In the study of the maker movement in Italy, a known reality, second only to France e USA, the analysis of the model of business on which, these spaces, build their offer assume relevance. In fact, Fab Labs and Italian makerspaces present a services proposal focused on the education and rent of co-working spaces. Although it's the design services that

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constitutes the most important income activity. Also, in Italy, makerspaces are less used as service for digital fabrication on demand, thus making them multi-disciplinary centers able to aggregate the designers and programmers communities (Maffei et al, 2015). In Italy the majority of the makers, 54.4%, assure that making is a secondary and complementary economic activity, while in 19.4% of the cases is just a hobby (Bianchini et al., 2015). The greatest difficulties in achieving economic viability is in the involvement of entrepreneurship. If, in terms of training and qualification, every makerspace has built his network that allows the recognition from a socio-cultural point of view, the greatest complications are revealed in the relationship with the companies. This happens because it is not clear to the industrial production world how digital fabrication can sustain the development of the company (Schiavo, 2017).

A similar situation can be found in the analysis of the calls coming from the third sector. From the study of the winning projects of the Culturability call for proposals from the Unipolis Foundation, it is possible to deduce multiple common problems that affect their development once the funding is over. The projects do not ensure the due economic dignity and a professional development recognized by the market, complications that arise from the difficult definition of relations between culture, art, social value and work. The same founding teams are forced to a continuous turnover, owing to the difficulties in reaching the economic viability and the variety that the offer assumes over time. Partnerships with external public and private institutions collapse in face of the request for a grant that only leads to a temporary return in terms of communication and image, causing wage uncertainty that leads to divisions within the project team. From this point of view the *Ex-Filanda* project represents a unique case study for the choice of using the making as a guideline and glue of the cultural and social activities within it.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1. Origin and financing

The following analysis refers to Ex-Filanda of Sulbiate, where the regeneration of an industrial building led to a design-driven project built on an anticipatory model where design played a key role in development (Arquilla & Barbieri, 2017). The project, which started with an action called “Distretti Culturali Evoluti di Monza e Brianza”, was born thanks to a funding from the Cariplo Foundation which covered around 50% of the restructuring costs. In 2013 the supporters of the intervention entrusted the Design Department of the Politecnico di Milano with a review of the project to redefine a service model compatible

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with the territorial capital. After a few months, the new project was presented: *Innovazione e impresa: la Filanda di Sulbiate, un recupero ad alta sostenibilità energetica per l'artigianato, le energie rinnovabili e le nuove tecnologie* (Innovation and business: the Filanda of Sulbiate, a highly energy-efficient recovery for crafts, renewable energy and new technologies). With the renewed project, the group participated in a regional call (Programma ASTER) obtaining a further allocation to cover financing costs. With a residual part, *MakeinProgress - Verso la Filanda* (*MakeinProgress - Towards the Filanda*) was created, a program that allowed to prototype the innovation support model designed for the area, in order to verify the feasibility of the project before the services provision (Arquilla & Zinzone, 2017).

1.2. Ex-ante development

Design played a fundamental role in the implementation of the strategic plan, through the deployment of various actions. In the first phase, was essential a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the territory for the identification of the subjects that could be involved in the plan. The main aim was to verify whether and how, design, social innovation, and public policies could define an "ecosystem or innovation ecology" (Manzini, 2013) and configure a model of "resilient innovation" (Manzini, 2015).

The first contact with the territory originates from a simple and deliberately non-technological tool to enable the active participation of citizens: a postcard to be compiled according to three articulations: i. Do you have an idea? Suggest it! ii. Do you want a space? Create it! iii. Do you have skills? Prove it!

The territory responded to the provocation and gathered a total of 34 ideas in five months.



Figure 1. The renovation of the civic center: (a) the civic center (b) citizens at work

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In the second phase the concept proposed an offer potentially capable to generate work and social capital through the reflection on 4 themes: making (spaces for doing for citizens and businesses), art (new models of contamination and cultural growth), food (reflection on local productions) and work (mainly co-working and collaborative spaces). The third phase consisted in testing the scenario to verify the validity of the concept. The "demo experience" allowed the performance of various activities on the territory such as laboratories and events held inside the civic center, restored by the citizens themselves in two thematic workshops. This operation enabled the identification of a group of local talent intending to start their own "social business".

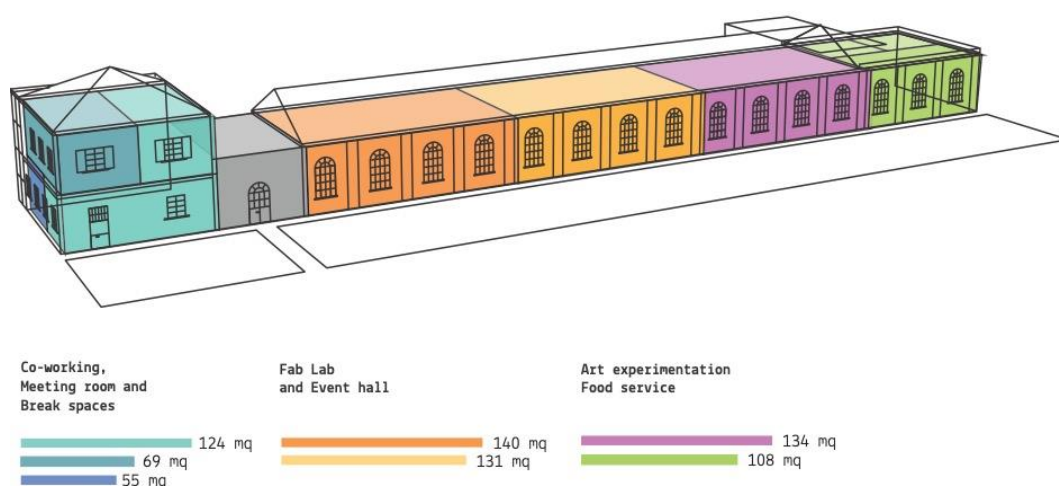


Figure 2. The initial asset for Ex-Filanda: how the spaces were organised in 2017.

This up-bottom generative dynamic gave birth to the MakeinProgress association (MiP). The project was subsequently materialized, giving rise to an association for social promotion (APS). MiP has therefore proposed an integrated service model, which differs from the classic Fab Lab management model, where making is not the goal, but the glue of the processes generated. Ex-Filanda, with its 900 square meters, was inaugurated in 2016. From 2017 the working group, headed by the leader of the project Consorzio Comunità Brianza (CCB), a partner involved following the constraints of the ASTER call, has begun to bear the costs. Thanks to the Chamber of Commerce of Monza and Brianza, the makerspace was equipped with a large fleet of machines.

1.3. Limits of the model

Despite the model designed, three years after the inauguration, the project has changed, suggesting that the ability to adapt and change over time based on the needs of the territory represents one of the crucial elements for success of hybrid projects between the third

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sector and the maker world (Parente, 2016). The purpose of this paragraph is, therefore, to try to understand what limits came forward in the management of economic viability and what strategic design can do to recover part of the goals of the MiP business model.

The constraints imposed by the modalities of the ASTER call, with the consequent inclusion of third sector partners with business models far from the culture of design and production, contributed to fragmenting communication, projects, and paths. The lack of strategic coordination between the activities and the subjects involved was probably the first factor that did not allow a coherent development. The project has relied on different realities to achieve common objectives but there has not been the unity of purpose necessary to achieve the development of internal microeconomics. This caused the abandonment of the project by several members of the MiP team, attracted by work contexts that offered better economic conditions.

The consequent lack of technical and designing skills within the Creative Lab did not allow MiP to activate collaborations with local companies and institutions, thus making it impossible to create an active network. Further difficulties arise from the territory's reluctance to digital fabrication. The open discussion about the relationship between companies and the spaces of know-how remains a central issue even in the most developed workplace focused on making. In the peri-urban context, MiP, not having a case history of projects available to explain its potential to the company, has lost the opportunity to build its partnerships.

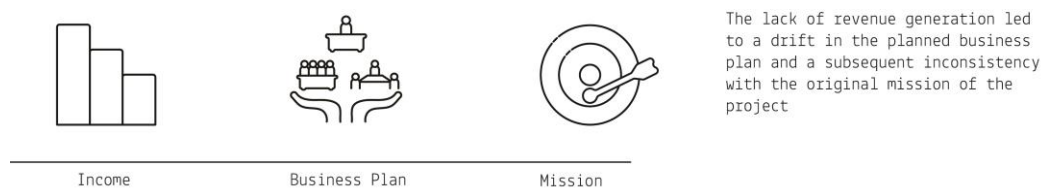


Figure 3. Limits of the model through different phases.

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2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Strategic reassessment

In 2019, in the light of the problems encountered, MiP became the head file of the project to manage a coherent recovery of the objectives. The first step towards this direction has been made bringing into the Filanda two start-ups linked to two of the initial reference themes of the project: digital fabrication and alimentary experimentation. The first start up, linked to advanced digital fabrication, brought machinery and new expertise and the second one, thanks to an agro-industrial hub with a closed hemp production, created a direct selling point for food, beverages, semi-processed products and artefacts.

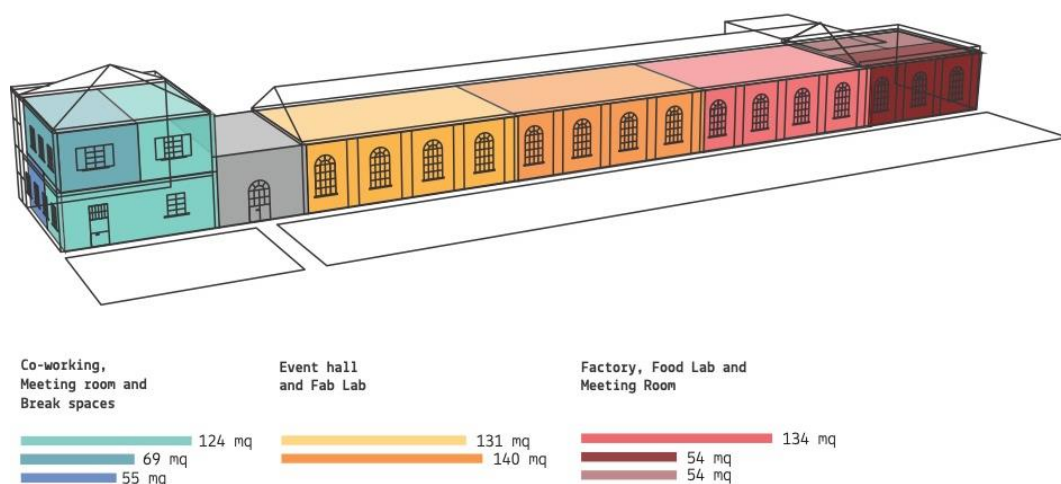


Figure 4. The new asset for Ex-Filanda: how the spaces are organized.

The evolution of the objectives, however, needs a gradual development able to verify the conditions for the change. Therefore, the project's mission retrieves some of the initial strategic fundamentals changing some elements. The objectives became: i. Build competencies while maintaining learning as one of the main focuses and acting on multi-level educational processes for professionals, companies and citizens; ii. Put the young at the centre of the process, relying on recent graduates and professionals for a confrontation with entrepreneurship; iii. Promote the region involving the network of entrepreneurial and artisanal realities to offer a physical space designated to foster a continuous exchange of knowledge.

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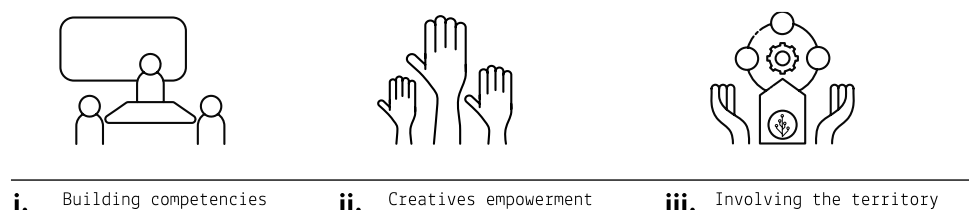


Figure 5. Three main points of the new mission.

2.2. Generation empowerment

In the reconfiguration of the MiP proposal, design played a fundamental role through the implementation of various actions: i. Analysis of the limits and reluctance of the territory; ii. Package for the involvement of young professionals; iii. In-depth analysis of a pool of local companies; iv. Strategy for business engagement.

The renewal of the activities passes through the need to define coherent resources management. In the case of the Creative Lab, the development of the activity depends on the technical and design skills available for the project. Therefore, it is important to try to understand how MiP can be attractive for the talents of the territory by drawing on the reasons why people choose these workplaces. 48% of those who prefer these environments try to feel part of a community; 34% seek contact with other professional figures and 13% try to increase their knowledge (Arquilla & Zinzone, 2017). The objective is to formulate an offer capable of attracting young graduates and professionals, to form a heterogeneous workgroup, the Team Resident, able to tackle the different scale and thematic projects. The strategy relies on a suggestive and contaminated makerspace, which offers the possibility to get in touch with a network of companies and craftsmen otherwise unreachable for youngsters. MiP as a promoter of collaborations held the position of facilitator providing contacts with companies and contract management. Specifically, the offer, consists of a period of training in digital manufacturing technologies, after which a workstation is assigned and access to machines for personal experimentation is permitted.

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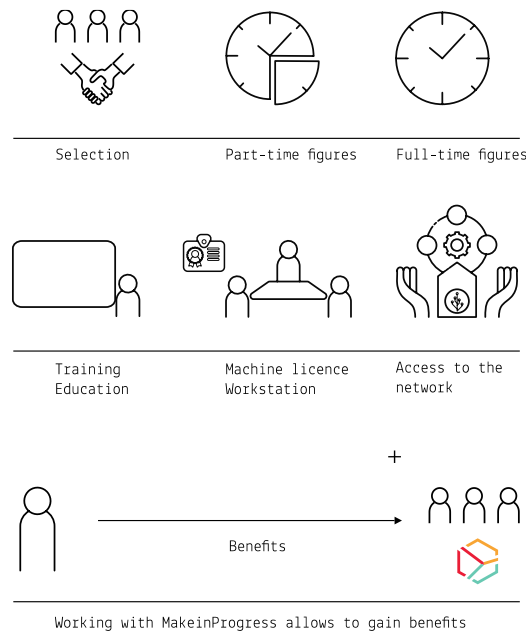


Figure 6. Phases of Team Resident involvement.

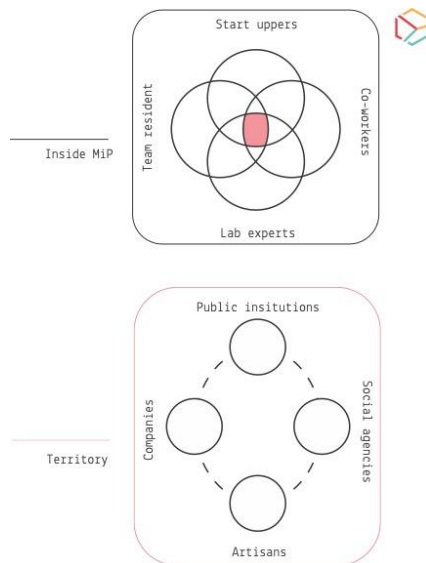


Figure 7. New management model.

The objective is to encourage independent work and joint work with MiP, guaranteeing, in addition to a project remuneration, a series of benefits linked to the collaboration with MiP. By designing or holding training courses it is thus possible to obtain either a standard salary or a virtual credit that can be spent within the structure. A fixed-term employment relationship that allows young people to gain experience, presenting themselves to

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companies no as freelancers but as part of a Creative Lab, and that allow to MiP to create a mass of creative people that are renewed according to demand.

2.3. Building the network

It was necessary to create a strategy capable of involving stable and occasional business partners for the development of the project objectives. The first operation linked to the construction of the network was to recover the qualitative and quantitative map of the territory around Vimercate: MakeinProgress - Verso la Filanda (Arquilla & Zinzone, 2017). From that initial variety of companies, a total of 170 different forms of entrepreneurship were analyzed, drawing from the Assolombarda report on the excellence of Brianza (Assolombarda, 2018). The analysis involved around 25 municipalities, leading to categorizing companies by sector, processing materials, and final output. The outputs were classified according to Products A, a design-oriented multi-material finished product, Products B, non-design-oriented multi-material finished products, Products C, small parts or supplementary elements that do not have a separate function from the whole, Semi-finished products, Raw materials or companies who deal exclusively with Processing. The survey showed that 41.5% produce a Product A with a prevalence of Furniture companies, 25.6% present in the study. 52.4% of companies work with more than one material, while 15.9% only with Polymers, 12.2% with Metals, and 14.7% with Fabrics, Woods and foods.

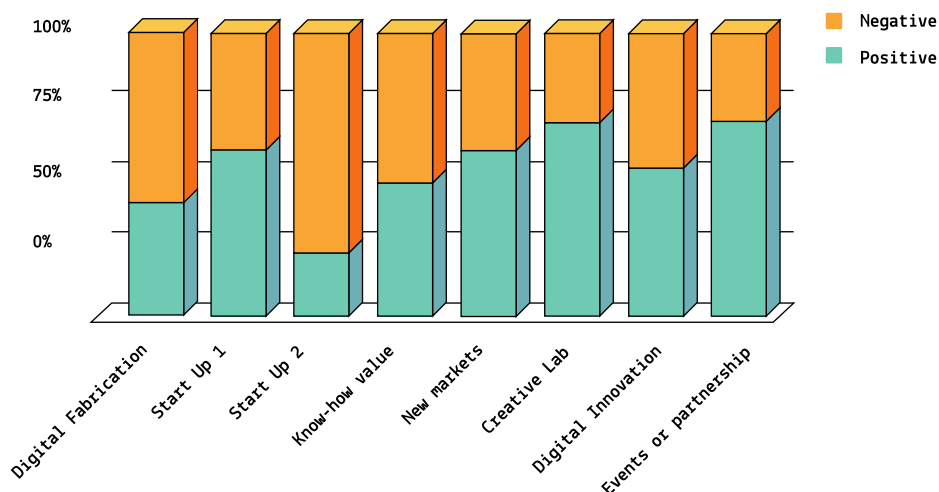


Figure 8. Companies evaluation through 8 Tags linked with the possibilities to work with MiP and its partners.

The companies were then categorized with a score from 1-8 based on the positive correspondence to precise tags concerning: the interest in digital manufacturing technologies, the possibility to co-design with the start-ups, the value of the company

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knowledge from a manufacturing and design standpoint, the potential for new markets, the possible interest in collaboration with the Creative Lab, the need to digital innovation process and finally the possibility of events or partnerships based on the workshop or hackathon formula.



Figure 9. Map of the 77 companies resulted positive to the Tag rank.

From this further evaluation, 77 companies with a sufficient score were characterized, which could represent possible partners for MiP. 15 companies were therefore selected, of the 77 suitable, based on relevance with the current skills present in the Creative Lab and active communication channels. To formulate a campaign for effective engagement, various tools were examined, trying to understand which were the most suitable for conveying the contents of the strategic renewal. It was decided to proceed with physical and digital solutions, alongside a LinkedIn campaign, conveyed by a video presentation content, a package for companies formed by multi-material lasered tables concerning the context, the structuring of MiP, the potential of the Creative Lab and finally the development of collaboration. A material tool, potentially, capable of communicating with different degrees of detail about how the skills of the Lab can be reconciled with companies. The goal is to generate a subsequent contact that allows you to meet, present the project in its entirety and develop the terms of collaboration.

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Figure 10. The physical tool: (a) packaging and multi-materials boards (b) packed boards.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The final considerations about the paper path brings to a new model of professionalization of young creatives based on the analysis of the relationship between the maker world and entrepreneurship. A strategic project whose main resource was the restored building complex. Ex Filanda, in fact, with its historical value, represents an economic and cultural potential to be developed through the active and interdisciplinary collaboration of experience and professionalism. A collaboration that led to reorganizing the functional areas by defining a thematic configuration necessary for the development of the project.

Ex-Filanda begins to come to an Open Innovation Lab with the general objective to enrich the internal development process with external knowledge, provided by partners, professionals, start-ups and coworkers. An environment capable of transmitting a body of heterogeneous skills by adopting a concept of controlled openness, which allows selecting the professional figures involved (Schmidt & Brinks, 2017).

Lastly, by summarizing the share of learning generated by the project, fundamental elements emerge that recover and enhance the process of the initial research model:

The continuous adaptation of the process to the territory has allowed MiP to reconfigure itself, understanding the centrality of offering a model capable of attracting firstly the professional figures necessary for confrontation with the companies. It is extremely interesting how MiP has been pushed, to overcome the constraints found, to formulate an atypical package for a makerspace by elaborating a suggestive offer that opens up new scenarios for young professionals.

The same lack of relationship with the company has also been transformed at this stage into an opportunity to propose a new offer based on the analysis of successful collaborations between makerspaces and companies in the Lombardy region. An offer that is outlined in the possibility of paths and collaborations focused on digital innovation and research and

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development. Ex-Filanda becomes a context in which to understand how the adoption of technologies can help the company to innovate thanks to a consultancy process for business analysis and development.

An advanced research project which has not to stop reading the weak signals and adapt itself to manage relationships at the local level and not, creating an active network involving the institutions in a strategy of governance capable of forming mature and enabling local contexts and attracting a diversified pool of skills.

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