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Best practices in heritage
conservation and management
From the world to Pompeii

Le vie dei Mercanti _ XII Forum Internazionale di Studi

Carminc GAMBARDILLA

La scuola di Pitagora editrice

Carmine Gambardella (a cura di)

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editing:

Manuela Piscitelli

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Best practices in heritage conservation and management From the world to Pompeii

Le vie dei Mercanti
XII Forum Internazionale di Studi

Aversa | Capri
June 12th- 14th, 2014

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Scholars has been invited to submit researches on theoretical and methodological aspects related to Architecture, Industrial Design and Landscape, and show real applications and experiences carried out on this themes.

Based on blind peer review, abstracts has been accepted, conditionally accepted, or rejected.

Authors of accepted and conditionally accepted papers has been invited to submit full papers. These has been again peer-reviewed and selected for the oral session and publication, or only for the publication in the conference proceedings.

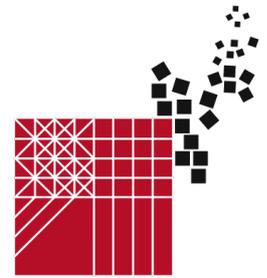
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Dynamic identities for the Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Today the rigid hierarchy of visual identity, which has been consolidated over time, has been placed into question. Various factors have contributed to this remix: the technological factor above all, but also others associated with the critique, aesthetics and ethics of communicating.

The world of cultural heritage has certainly not remained immune to all of this, and may even be considered fertile testing ground. In this regard, Nick Bell [1] questions the efficiency of an identity based on its branding which maintains that cultural heritage graphics must be determined by their content, and therefore suggests that we should accept the differences and incoherence that this approach may generate.

Sergio Escobar [2], attributes a fundamental role to communication in the process of legitimising and enhancing the value of cultural heritage places, however in order for this to occur it is necessary to resolve the problem associated with the impoverished language of communication. On one hand, that means that new forms of relations and communication are therefore necessary as well as new ways of establishing relationships with their public, on the other hand there are new ways of thinking and new approaches to design which similarly lean towards innovation.

This paper, starting from the observation of a series of case histories, wants to reveal those new approaches and directions in the field of visual and communication design, which we can name as post-logo, in the own area of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Visual Identity, Communication Design, Corporate Identity

(1) Identity as a multitude

The distinctive and peculiar trait of new forms of visual identity applied in particular within the context of cultural heritage places and assets, is that these seek to interpret a system of values and contents in a variable, dynamic, manifold manner, in order to communicate with a diverse range of publics, assuming different tones of communication.

The traditional logic of visual identity can be referred to the philosophical definition of identity, attributable to Aristotle, according to which this represents a unit of one or more things, provided the definition of their substance is identical, therefore making the logo the distinctive element; if this is true, this new form can therefore be referred to the definition by Waismann, which states that when speaking of identity, the important thing is to “declare the criteria adopted or to which reference is made” [3 p. 445], and therefore a base code or a method of managing a process. However, at the base of an identity there is always, in any case, one unit, a common factor amongst different elements belonging to the same group, to the same context.

The identity of a subject, its own unit, is reinforced by the differences in its attributes and methods of expression: a multitude of visual elements, their expressions, and therefore a richer visual language, is more likely to better express the diversity of contents and values which cultural heritage places now need to transmit. Although expected to be firm and confident, the overall institutional voice must be ready to modulate in pitch and volume, that means having at disposal a wide range of choices in terms of communication [4 p. 6].

2. Identity, image and communication design

Within the realm of the discipline of visual communication design, the term identity refers to the notion of image, or rather the representation of an organisation, or better still, a subject (defined as a personality), based on a certain code. According to Henrion & Parkin [5] and Anceschi [6] The system of reference is that of corporate identity, therefore the representation of a subject through a series of primary and subsidiary elements, whose normative expression is found in the corporate manual.

For cultural assets, in reality this means effecting a transfer, at least historically, from one world, predominantly consisting in goods, to another. About that Klanten, Sinofzik & Schulze wrote [4 p. 6]: “cultural institutions and organizations rarely focus on selling goods. Above all, they produce ephemeral constellations, intersubjective structures of experience and information (cultural approaches and exhibitions, directorships, ensembles and programs, heritage, site). Institutional identity, or cultural branding, in a more generous sense of the term, evolves from these structures”.

The identity of a cultural place, or a cultural asset, is no doubt constituted by the extent to which that asset represents something in a given context, as well as by its intrinsic and recognised value, and that which is attributed to it; or, reasoning from the point of view of communication, by that which the observer, (therefore the user or beneficiary), gains in terms of experience, memory, emotion, or in other words, in terms of image. But image is constituted by a variable number of elements: by a network of communicative artefacts, all coordinated with each other in the best of cases, and by numerous tangible and intangible elements. Image is also the user's impression and their experience with the efficiency of the channels or instruments which are the carriers of knowledge. In this sense, we once again find ourselves in the disciplinary context of visual communication design, which deals in particular with designing those artefacts and relative interfaces (traditional more so than digital), which will allow the suitable fruition of the asset itself. It is clear that when reasoning in terms of the asset's fruition, we are reasoning in terms of its identity.

Translating visually this identity is the role of visual communication design. That means – according to Baur [7] – constructing a unitary system (that of the visual identity, therefore reasoning in terms of language), which, through the linkage of the contents and their container, generates a cohesive image of the asset. Contents imply both recognised values, attributed in terms of relation and exchange [8 p. 42], and those intended by the strict sense of the word: objects, findings, signs – according to the definition provided by Eco [9 p. 22] –. These must be capable of transmitting the emotion and knowledge sought by the user, just like all those superstructures of an informative nature (and here the term is used in its most noble form as a carrier of knowledge, and not as a trivialisation or exemplification) and interpretive nature, without which the asset would not be understood.

It is therefore possible to identify various specific categories within the broad realm of communication in cultural place contexts. These include communication with the public (editorial products, services or events), object-user communication, communication as a form of orientation, educational communication and that transmitted via the new media. This system of elements, which can be defined as points of contact, is nothing more than a coordinated communication system where these points in fact contribute to defining the asset's identity, and subsequently from the point of view of the user, its image. It is not the asset itself, but rather the superstructure, the second skin, which allows, or in any case facilitates, knowledge and fruition.

The system must be consistent with the asset, or rather must reflect the true values carried by the asset, but also the expectations set by those responsible for its protection and management. Such expectations should be the same as those of the public which enters into relation with the asset (or perhaps it would be better to say the types of publics, from expert to generic types). That confirm the need of a dynamic form of communication, able to change tone and voice referring and appealing to different types of target [10 p. 222].

3. From static-logo to post-logo

In the corporate identity system the central element is traditionally the logo. At the beginning of the 1990s, this may have been the case for the identity of the renewed Louvre, for which the label-logo, superbly conceived by Pierre Bernard, is still invariably used today with a few dimensional modifications, in its various applications.

It is necessary to say that through time – since the 1960s, when the corporate design culture established – designers have affirmed the difficulty of manifesting an institutional identity for a cultural place through a singular logotype or graphic system. This was the case of Chermayeff & Geismar who were charged to design the Museum of Modern Art of New York logo. They had to admit that for such kind of institution was in no position to establish a symbol that was meaningful or not [4 p. 5].

Nowadays the traditional rigid hierarchy of visual identity – that we can name as static-logo attitude –, which has been consolidated over time, has been placed into question. Various factors have contributed to this remix: the technological factor above all, but also others associated with the critique, aesthetics and ethics of communicating.

The world of cultural places and heritage assets has certainly not remained immune to all of this, and may even be considered fertile testing ground [10 p. 218]. In this regard, Nick Bell [1 p. 16] questions the efficiency of an identity based on its branding, observing in particular the panorama of identities of various art galleries and museums in London. He in fact maintains that cultural places graphics must be determined by their content, and therefore suggests that the differences and incoherence that this approach may generate should be accepted. A tempting idea which presumes a higher level of public intelligence than that needed for the application of more homogenous systems. Clearly, as Bell himself admits, this idea about the post-logo does not belong exclusively to the cultural heritage sphere but is rather undoubtedly congenial.

Felsing [10 pp. 217-218] declares that one of the main reasons that dynamic or flexible visual identities appear predominantly in the cultural or public sectors undoubtedly lies in the transfer of basic content to the form of visual identity. And it is possible to add that the adoption of flexible visual languages is considered consistent to the contents and the activities of some kinds of organizations particularly devoted to contemporary arts, although not uniquely.

In an interview with Sergio Escobar [2 pp. 417-425], he attributes a fundamental role to communication in the process of legitimising and enhancing the value of cultural heritage places, however in order for this to occur it is necessary to resolve the problem associated with the impoverished language of communication. Escobar strongly highlights the different interpretations of the definition of public interest, previously attributed to cultural heritage places in an entirely spontaneous manner. During the last fifty years the meaning and sense of such kind of institutions and organizations has changed, and new forms of relations and communication are therefore necessary [4 p. 5].

Whilst on one hand institutions, in particular cultural heritage ones, need to find a new way of establishing relationships with their public, on the other hand there are new ways of thinking and new approaches to design which similarly lean towards innovation. About that Shaughnessy [11] affirmed “a brand is no longer simply a nice, clean logo that is attached in the same place every time. A brand is a platform, a brand is flexible, a brand is a place for exchange, it is not fixed, and therefore there is no such thing as a single brand. Methods exist which allow a shape to form, which allow communication and recognisable behaviour, but this is no longer about something inflexible and permanent”. In some spheres of visual communication design, the idea of imposing strict rules has been renounced in favour of more fluid and expressive languages, characterised by “variability, reference to context, process, performance, non-linearity, coherence and variety” [10 p. 13] that we can name with the term post-logo.

New technologies offer wider ranging possibilities for the design’s control, structure and development with respect to the past. These offer the designer the possibility to programme not only the second and third dimensions, but also the fourth, the dimension of time, which modifies the manifestation of an image, no longer in a simply controlled, but rather programmed manner. All this according to paradigms which are not necessarily new, but rather extremely current (cases of flexible visual identity can already be found in the second half of the 1960s [12 pp. 96-109]), which are more likened to diverging methods “focusing on the production of a multitude, of variety” and more removed from a converging, operational and pragmatic way of thinking. More likened to the Behrens house-style soft approach, where the designer often becomes jointly responsible, or at least the manager’s right arm, and more removed from the manual, intended as a technical and bureaucratic tool [13 p. 174].

4. Looking to the practice

Observing the panorama of international production, it is possible to identify two groups of cases where logo or visual system designs better interpret the idea of the multi-dimensional nature of cultural places and cultural heritage branding.

One group in which the logo, or rather the central element of the visual system, changes over time and in the various situations in which it is applied, according to established parameters of control (shape, colour, font...) and in any case according to a logic of controlled variations, with predefined limits of expansion, as may be the case for the British Tate Galleries, the Brooklyn Museum, the New Museum and the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York or the Historiska Museet of Stockholm.

The other group in which the design is aimed not only at defining a group of variations, but essentially at managing the process which manages such variations, and therefore the formalisation of a visual code, which when used becomes a genuine language, as may be the case for the Casa da Musica in Oporto, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis or the new brand for the city of Bologna. Those cases

use a specific and personalized software to manage and generate the visual code. Can be part to this second group the visual identity for the Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire de Le Mans in France too.

4.1 Logo variations

In the first group we therefore encounter those cases where modifications are made to a basic sign, the intention of which is to communicate the new idea of a museum or cultural heritage place, transmitting the sense of the diversity of contents, initiatives, and tones, aimed towards specific targets of publics. In this regard, the director of the Brooklyn Museum, Arnold L. Lehman, in the press release issued during the presentation of the new visual identity programme, declared to be convinced that a flexible graphic identity and logo “best reflect the objectives of the Museum focused on the visitor” and “emblematically represent the diversity of our collections and our public” in a new way.

The new logo is composed of a fixed capital ‘B’, behind which eight different seals or sketches in a brilliant blue colour (defined as electric cyan) continuously change. These eight seals are randomly used in order to emphasise the uniqueness of the Museum. The visual identity designed by studio 2x4 is used in all print material and is adapted to all promotional and web applications. Michael Rock, the creative director of the design, presented the logo in this way: “the new logo has been designed to reflect flexibility, change, surprise and accessibility.

The dynamic seal has been designed to represent a museum willing to scrape off the mould from a familiar and existing concept, in a process of continuous experimentation, open-mindedness, and most importantly of all, reinvention”. The continuous mutation of the seal depicts various forms each time: a stamp, a flower, something strong, a bubble, a spurt of water, leaving the possibility open to broaden the repertoire.

This is therefore a design based on a strong, shared objective, between the client and the designer, aimed towards renewal. Though not spectacular renewal, also because here we are dealing with an institution strongly tied to a specific context, rather than a process of reeling in a target public. In fact, the Brooklyn Museum is not a traditional tourist attraction, but is rather family-oriented and facilitates processes whereby visitors can easily form their own interpretation of all the history and art on display through a series of different, yet simple paradigms. A combination of intellectual authority and an alternative approach, insofar as it is intelligent and people can relate to it. When defining the image of the institution, Rock speaks of solidity destabilised, in the sense of a non-monolithic institution, open to change and comparison, therefore continuously placing itself into question.

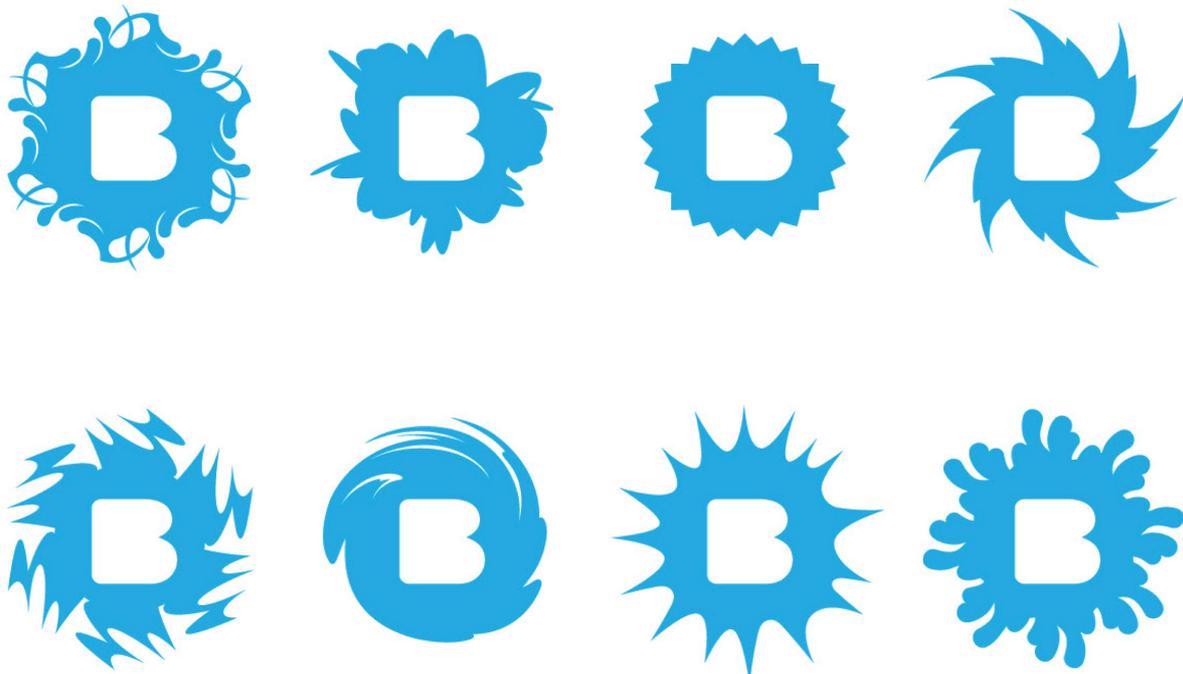


Fig. 1: Brooklyn Museum (New York), logo variations, design by 2x4, 2004.

This approach influenced during the last years a certain number of designs alike the one for the Swedish Historiska Museet, one of Sweden's largest museums with collections that include more than 10 million individual objects from a history spanning thousands of years. The museum is also a venue for lectures, concerts and activities for all ages. The new visual identity is based on a new

communication strategy that aim to make the museum Sweden's number one storyteller, arousing curiosity and interest in Swedish history and revitalise the museum. The Stockholm based design studio Bold created a dynamic and playful identity inspired by the museum's mission: to create curiosity and interest in history and to get the visitor to reflect on the link between past and present. The logo is a combination of a classic serif font (the past) and a modern sans-serif font (the present). The interesting aspect is that the serif part can be replaced with historical artifacts giving the museum an opportunity to be playful in their visual expressions and display the museum's breadth of exhibitions and activities. The result is a basic so far as an open system that allows for endless communication possibilities [14].



Fig. 2: Historiska Museet (Stokholm), logo variations, design by Bold, 2012.

4.2 Multitude based and flexible visual codes

The visual identity of the Casa da Musica conceived by Stefan Sagmeister allows us to introduce the second group. This design is in fact based on a software (Logo Generator) which allows the management of the logo, clearly inspired by the shape of the building designed by Rem Koolhaas, from different perspectives (six in total). The logo is transformed in its various applications, changing from media to media, and similarly its colours can change. As this is an institution whose objective is to host different initiatives tied to the world of music (from jazz to classical music and more contemporary expressions) which are each aimed at different types of audiences, its visual identity cannot be static. The system in fact allows a palette of personalised colours to be selected from thematic images, for each specific event or initiative. Various institutional applications are similarly managed: for internal staff for example, business cards are personalised with a logo whose colours are taken from a photograph of the individual person. The system therefore offers a variety of solutions for both those responsible for managing identity on a daily basis, and those who benefit from it.

A similar approach we can find in the visual identity design for Walker Art Center, a true container of initiatives and events open to a range of different publics, a generation utility of visual identity was designed. This is represented by a type of font or typographical character which makes it possible to compose a string of keywords relative to the Center's activities and its contents, accompanied by decorative graphical elements, making it recognisable. These "words" define the matrix of intonation with which the institution communicates with its public, tones selected on a case by case basis as the most appropriate for dialogue on one level as opposed to another, or for channelling one type of initiative as opposed to another.

The same concept of variations has been developed for the city brand Bologna. It is possible to include this case as visual identity for cultural place looking to it in a wider perspective considering a city like a complex systems of values, concepts, heritage, activities that through their interconnection are perceived like a unique cultural image. The context of visual identities for places or territories and the one of culture assets are both experimenting and experiencing flexible and dynamic visual languages. For Bologna the Italian designers Matteo Bartoli and Michele Pastore designed a software that generates the basic code inspired to signs and attractive elements taken from the city's material culture. This code allows to construct a visual narration that has the aim of narrating the multiple aspects of Bologna's personality.

Those are therefore examples of cases where the visual code is centred around a dynamic logo, whose variations are managed according to a markedly meta-design approach. The design of the

process is given priority in order to guarantee control of the overall identity and those “control knobs” which generate variety and guarantee the identity’s constants [15 p. 12]. Finally, in the case of the Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire de Le Mans, the visual language explores and shows the variety of the collection to present the Museum in a new and fresh manner developed on the idea of multitude. Contents inspired the signs, that allow to identify the different sections, the evidences, the different objects. At the same time this family of signs defines a unique visual language together with typography and colors. The visual code is the applied all over the information plan, from orientation signage to punctual identification, defining a continuous disposal that facilitate access to knowledge.

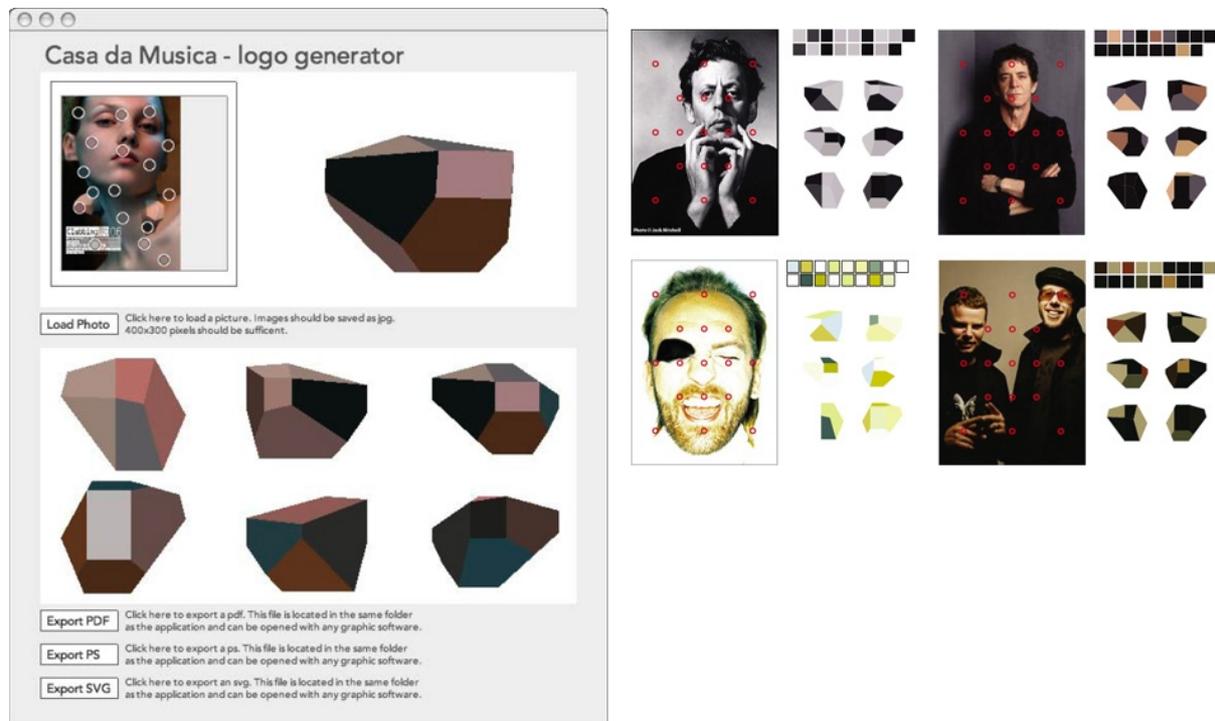


Fig. 3: Casa da Musica (Oporto), logo generator, design by Stefan Sagmeister, 2007.

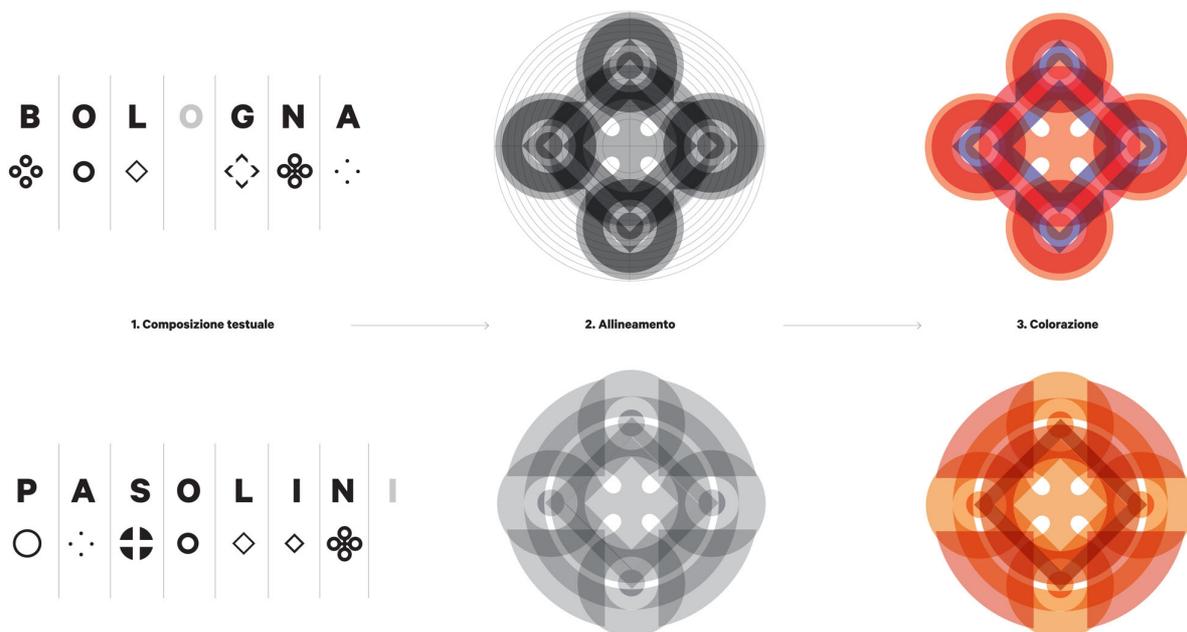


Fig. 4: Bologna City Branding, visual code, design by Matteo Bartoli and Michele Pastore, 2013.



Fig. 5: Musée Archéologique e d'Histoire de Le Mans, visual code, design by Voiture 14, 2009.

5. Conclusions

What both groups have in common is this strong sense of arranging a style, and therefore pre-organising a language according to controlled morphologies. When applied to communication or branding design, this approach in fact acquires information about the brand linked to its complexity and the fact that it has been generated through relations and interactions with the public (with interfaces intended as communicative artefacts or points of contact), and with the context. The invariable is nonetheless a common feature, even in stylistic variations, the idea of an open system which can be amplified, having clearly defined the constant elements which assume the role of ensuring the organisation, the personality, is always recognisable. When visions and concepts are formulated with genuinely and significant content of the cultural assets, places or organizations rather than attributes, general values, or clichés ideas, a differentiated visual identity emerges.

According to Felsing [10 pp. 220-225] what appear evident is that static visual identities have less potential to reference changing contexts because they run the risk of losing the coherency of the visual identity; the prevailing singular logo cannot refer to changing contexts but remains identical. With flexible visual identities, coherence is maintained as the constant aspects provide stability and only the variable aspects generate dynamics.

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