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Design strategies for enhancing territorial legacy

The case study of a diffused art exhibition to revitalize specific territories in Piedmont region - Italy

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Synopsis

The contribution aims to shed light on the role of the design discipline in building or implementing development strategies for a territory. The text heads toward a practical case study carried out by a group of systemic design researchers of Politecnico di Torino who worked for a multi-layer action plan for Piedmont region, in northern Italy. For that occurrence design has been called to set up a series of guidelines, and then come out with outputs specifically addressed to improve or activate virtuous territorial policies. The points around which the study has been resolved were cultural and tourism promotion through the project of a diffused art exhibition, then developing participatory services, enhancement of local economies and strengthening the relations among districts. The paper turns this research activity providing the perspectives of an evolutionary process in design sphere with precise directions for new diffuse events.

Key words: Network, policy, design for territories, relational design, regional planning.

1. Introduction

The objective is to present some steps ahead toward the contribution of design in tackling territorial instances working on new visions of tourism, developing and strengthening economies and interconnecting governance policies. Our goal is to illustrate that starting from taking a look at the occurrences inside design discipline on the emerging sides of its applicability, then, validating these premises with an applied proof we carried out on design strategies for enhancing territorial legacy. Design discipline is living a phase of great questions about its identity and competencies. The center of the discussion is how design can carry out its original purposes according to the changes of time, societies and mentalities. The capacity to transform reality through better or new solutions, may in fact assumes different shapes and adopt various ways of acting, without the earliest principle does not change. We have dealt with the concept of “project” (from Latin pro-iacere: “throw ahead”) considering the subject of doing that with diverse orders. We have performed “project” in tangible terms, but we have largely left that vision in favor of more conceptual results. We are going to realize that we need to face faster, with the increasing complexity of our reality and of the world we inhabit. Therefore design cannot remain a restricted question focalized on tight, loosened points; it has to become one of the highest expressions of human intelligence and creativity, getting wider to every aspect of life to conceive differently, challenge current values, create new perspectives. It is getting clear that designers are called to evolve a marked capacity of understanding and interpreting our world, conceiving new senses for that dynamism. Design approaches are shifting their goals to more global impacts, no longer to single or defined necessities, they are intended to be responsible and able to guide human behaviors, devising more beneficial relations. It is by no means an easy task given the relative youth of design studies, the extent of cases where design could act as strategic tool and also the blurred borders of a phase that is currently being formed and daily interrogated from internally the discipline first. If design is starting to massively explore the world in its broadest sense, tending to topics inhered to economy, social sciences, territorial planning, artificial intelligence, environment and climate changes’ investigations, big data, it absolutely happens as part of a global and irrepressible phenomenon of big challenges.

2. Design approaches other fields

There is a peculiarity of design sphere that has conducted itself in a long-lasting and profound discussion on own being, in particular that has put it in contact with other circles. Design indeed is not assignable by nature to a unique area of study [Deserti, 2010: 48], it has been always on the border among many fields, except when it was included in a more exclusive manner in the material culture. As Victor Margolin observed, it does not refer to principles that specify its aim [Margolin 1992: 113], the subject is rather defined every time as the profession goes along. Design is not properly autonomous but rather actor and product of a collaborative process of implementation on existing studies; it works bringing inputs from diverse fields to develop further actions according to design methodology. If today design puts itself forward, building new links even with environments further away is due to our time that requires different

responses and often clusters of them. “Design is now becoming more about listening, asking, understanding, and drafting new possibilities and alternative realities” [Muratovski, 2016: 14], it is progressively turning to a cardinal way of thinking where a similar kind of contribution was not usual till recently. This is an hint of the reasons that asserts how design is not separable anymore to the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practices.

3. Methodological path

“The Renaissance of Gaudenzio Ferrari”, a Piedmont region project, was an art exhibition spread in three local towns, Varallo, Vercelli, Novara (March 14th – July 1st 2018) established especially to effect a wider initiative aimed at fostering the inlands. We were engaged to reach that at different stages from the communication plan to the arrangement of systemic strategies capable of substantial changes on people and economies. Our contribution has been supportive to other measures driven by the region, the municipalities, the tourism agency and the cultural association Abbonamento Musei that manages the accessibility and the valorization of a great part of the cultural sites in Piedmont and Lombardy.

We outlined three conditions to be actualized in engaged and bordering areas:

– activities as incentives for territorial productivity (what);
– creation of a thick relational tissue between territories (how);
– actions with impact rates in the long term (when).

Sequently, we looked at the territories with an holistic view following the systemic design principles, we approached the issue acting through these steps:

– identification of places
– holistic analysis
– evaluation of criticalities and motivations for change
– definition of guidelines
– project execution
– direct/indirect results mapping
– impact analysis
– definition of new guidelines

The outcomes conducted to, and are still producing, a network of answers in the levels of economic profitability, quality of life, perspectives of growth and government cohesion. We are currently elaborating these data in projection to reach the final planned steps and to resume the design practise.

4. Design deliverables and remarks

We came up with a range of graphic products settled for the communication plan, but already even conceiving the higher tasks, territorial marketing and development. The logotype (Fig. 1), the body copy, the advertisement (Fig. 2), the banners and other visual artifacts as part of the entire identity have been realized with the intent of driving people towards new ways of experiencing places, inspiring interest in different things respect

conventional attractions, and leading to behaviors able to spin lively and productive dynamisms. A more focused work has been made along these lines structuring a digital platform, an open access app (Fig. 3) to share excursions proposals and other initiatives. We fostered the connections among the main actors, including designers and governance agencies, opening promising perspectives of contamination (Fig. 4). We collected lots of signals testifying that design will be the system of thought unavoidable from any sort of inquiry of future realities.



Figure 1. Design phases of the logotype.



Figure 2. Visual advertisement of the diffused exhibition in Vercelli and in the region capital Torino.

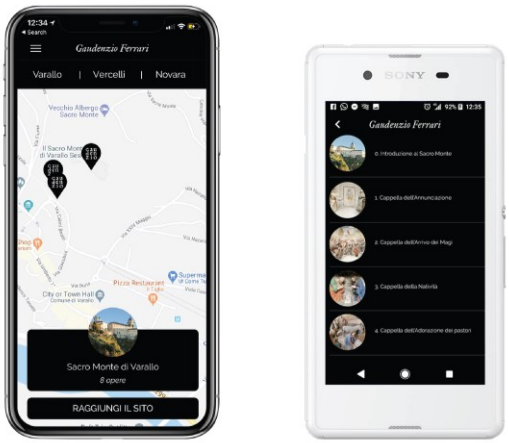


Figure 3. Screenshots of the open App “Gaudenzio”, currently downloadable from AppStore and Google Play Store.



Figure 4. Scapin, a traditional local footwear, realized in a special version in tribute of Gaudenzio Ferrari. Courtesy Moresco Cashmere, Varallo.

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Biography

Paola Menzardi. Paola Menzardi is a Ph.D. candidate at Politecnico di Torino, where she is attending the Management, Production and Design program within the departments of Architecture and Design. She is currently working on research projects focused on building and testing new design approaches effective to taking on territorial issues as economic and social relations challenges. The field of investigation concerns design for territories, urban policies, regional planning. Her project thesis is determined to explore how design can play a deciding role in planning territorial policies, exploiting the principles of systemic design for economic growth, employment opportunities and dynamic social relations.

Pier Paolo Peruccio. PhD in History of Architecture and Urban Planning; Architect and Associate Professor in Design at Politecnico di Torino. Peruccio is Vice Head of the Design School at Politecnico di Torino, director of the SYDERE (Systemic Design Research and Education) Center in Lyon, France and Coordinator of the II Level Specializing Master in Design for Arts (http://www.design4arts.polito.it). He is currently working on several research projects concerning history of sustainable design, systems thinking and innovation in design education. He is co-editor of book series (Umberto Allemandi and Electa Mondadori publishing houses), author of several books on design history and more than 100 articles on industrial and visual design published in International magazines. He has taught courses and workshops in Europe, USA, Latin America and Asia.

Maurizio Vrenna. Maurizio Vrenna is a Ph.D student at Politecnico di Torino who operated in China for more than 2 years. Being saturated with various environmental and social issues, has raised his awareness of the urgent importance of a sustainable development which cannot be realized without a profound change of the current patterns, concrete actions and targeted projects. His career objective is to serve as an expert in the field of Systemic Design, through the research of transdisciplinary design methodologies for the implementation of Blue Economy projects.