

A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality

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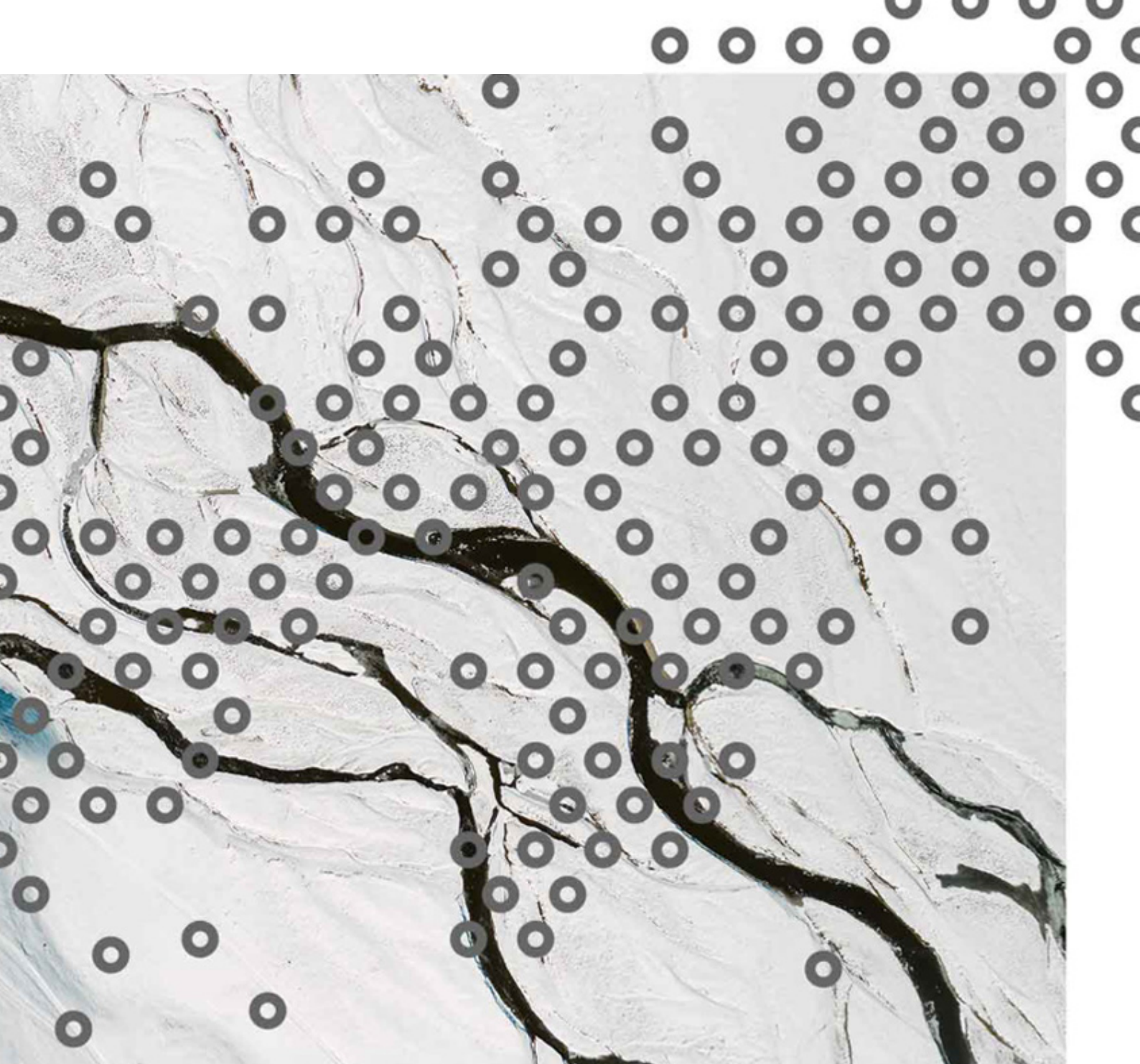
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*Report delle attività
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BEYOND
ALL LIMITS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINABILITY IN ARCHITECTURE,
PLANNING, AND DESIGN
11-12, 13 May_2022

*edited by
Claudio Gambardella*

V: Università
degli Studi
della Campania
Luigi Vanvitelli

*Dipartimento di Architettura e
Disegno Industriale*
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on Sustainability in Architecture,
Planning, and Design

edited by Claudio Gambardella

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della Campania
Luigi Vanvitelli

*Dipartimento di Architettura e
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CONTENTS

BAL 22 INTRODUCTIONS

- 17 *Foreword. Presentation of NEB - BEYOND ALL LIMITS*
Massimiliano Smeriglio_ Member of the European Parliament
- 19 *Introduction*
Ornella Zerlenga_ Italian President of the conference
- 21 *Preface*
Claudio Gambardella_ Italian Chair of the conference
- 23 *Design in/for complexity. Engendering a care-oriented society*
Ezio Manzini_ Keynote Speaker
- 27 *Perpetuum mobile. Identity and value landscapes of contemporary design*
Patrizia Ranzo_ Keynote Speaker

BAL 22 CONTRIBUTIONS

01 Survey and Representation as system of monitoring and action on the risk factors and conditions of the context

- 35 *Digital images for the knowledge of bell towers and their ornamental signs*
Ornella Zerlenga, Rosina Iaderosa, Margherita Cicala
- 40 *Naples, Leopardi, and the Artist/Inhabitant Project. Practices of aesthetic resistance*
Alessandra Cirafici, Caterina Cristina Fiorentino
- 46 *Representation of territorial identities of Panagia Paraportiani in Mykonos*
Gennaro Pio Lento, Rosa De Caro, Fabiana Guerriero
- 51 *Digital narratives for cultural heritage: new perspectives for accessibility and inclusion*
Alice Palmieri
- 56 *The identity drawing of places. Bell towers in sixteenth-century Naples by Antoine Lafréry*
Vincenzo Cirillo, Riccardo Miele
- 61 *New technologies for the city and the landscape. A versatile application example*
Valeria Marzocchella
- 66 *Knowledge and representation of the civic tower of Tora and Piccilli*
Rosa De Caro, Fabiana Guerriero, Gennaro Pio Lento

- 71 *The photogrammetric survey of the Tvrdalj Fortress in Hvar*
Luigi Corniello, Angelo De Cicco

02 History, resilience, and green transition

- 79 *The enhancement of Biocultural landscapes: history, heritage, and environment driving sustainable mobility in internal areas*
Elena Manzo, Marina D'Aprile, Antonella Violano
- 84 *Conceptual framework for adaptive reuse of cisterns to cope with climate change and global warming: case of Safranbolu*
Irem Kahyaoğlu, Timuçin Harputlugil
- 89 *Patrick Geddes in Naples. The beginning of his ecological thinking*
Chiara Ingrosso
- 93 *Klampenborg: between local identity and territorial development. An example for Campania's spas*
Monica Esposito
- 98 *Vlorë, the ancient city of Albania and its history in Giuseppe Rosaccio's travel diary*
Felicia Di Girolamo
- 103 *New culture of mobility between flow of people and flow of ideas. Two examples of Metro's transformation: Naples and Copenhagen*
Federica Fiorillo

03 Restoration: a sustainable answer to uncontrolled urbanization

- 111 *Restoration of the architectural heritage. The cemetery hill of Poggioreale in Naples*
Paolo Giordano
- 116 *Restoration as a sustainable resource for urban regeneration. The case of the Forte di Vigliena*
Corrado Castagnaro
- 121 *Recovery of the abandoned heritage towards new fruitive horizons: the case of S. Maria della Pace*
Domenico Crispino
- 126 *Harbour heritage protection: sustainable practices for the enhancement of the Balkan Coast*
Enrico Mirra, Adriana Trematerra
- 132 *Abandoned heritage between restoration and valorisation: Mirine Early Christian Basilica in Croatia*
Adriana Trematerra, Florian Nepravishta, Enrico Mirra

04 Urban transformations: projects, strategies, actions

- 141 *Learning from Covid 19. Sustainable strategies for the regeneration of peripheral areas*
Paolo Belardi, Valeria Menchetelli, Giovanna Ramaccini, Monica Battistoni, Camilla Sorignani

- 146 *Historical city and urban voids as elements of cultural heritage: theory and projects for Aversa discontinuous city*
Francesco Costanzo, Gaspare Oliva, Michele Pellino
- 152 *Architecture from rubble. To "rebuild the imaginary"*
Raffaele Marone
- 158 *Sustainable Recovery and Urban Public Transformation of a Former Military Park*
Luisa Collina, Laura Galluzzo, Claudia Mastrantoni, Elisa Cinelli
- 164 *The man who designed his city. The Matteotti village in Terni by Giancarlo De Carlo as a socially sustainable method.*
Barbara Bonanno
- 169 *Rereading of the Process of an Idea Competition for Obtaining a Sustainable Urban Environment*
Rabia Çiğdem Çavdar
- 173 *Urban environments regeneration. Technological issues for adaptive re-use*
Caterina Frettoloso, Rossella Franchino, Paola Gallo
- 178 *A Scattered Courtyard: rediscovering the Historical Palimpsest of Xi'an for regenerating the urban texture along the City Wall*
Maria Giulia Atzeni
- 184 *Second-hand Architecture. For a new theory of reuse. The case of the EX IDAC FOOD*
Concetta Tavoletta
- 188 *Resonant void. Play and interaction in architecture*
Marco Russo

05 Circular Technological Design for a carbon neutral approach

- 197 *How to pursue the Whole Life Carbon vision: a method to assess buildings' Embodied Carbon*
Jacopo Andreotti, Roberto Giordano
- 203 *C2C as a reference framework for circular buildings. Implementation on an existing settlement in Rome*
Serena Baiani, Paola Altamura
- 211 *Digital-green transition of knowledge buildings*
Antonella Violano, Nicola Barbato, Monica Cannaviello, Souha Ferchichi, Imad Ibrik, Ines Khalifa, Jose Luis Molina, Antonella Trombadore
- 216 *University communities for the green/digital renovation of buildings*
Antonella Trombadore, Gisella Calcagno, Giacomo Pierucci, Lucia Montoni, Juan Camilo Olano
- 222 *Metamorphosis_{vs} Transformation: innovating the process in the regeneration technological design of heritage-built environment*
Antonella Violano, Antonio Maio
- 228 *Slow tourism and sustainable mobility: infrastructures for a smart use*
Marica Merola, Chiara Tosato

06 Structural engineering

- 235 *Seismic vulnerability assessment of ten bell towers in Naples*
Corrado Chisari, Mattia Zizi, Daniela Cacace, Gianfranco De Matteis
- 241 *The role of the epistyle on the dynamic behavior of multi-drum columns*
Androniki Christodoulou, Olympia Panagouli, Athanasios Kozanitis
- 246 *Seismic Retrofit of Masonry Structures: the Lancellotti Palace in Casalnuovo di Napoli*
Claudia Cennamo, Concetta Cusano, Luigi Guerriero
- 250 *The CLT panels: a sustainable response for existing buildings*
Giorgio Frunzio, Mariateresa Guadagnuolo, Luigi Massaro, Luciana Di Gennaro
- 255 *Conservation state and structural issues of existing infrastructures: the case of stataal road bridges in Campania*
Gianfranco De Matteis, Pasquale Bencivenga, Angelo Lavino, Francesco Rosselli, Mattia Zizi
- 260 *Use of structural steel in cultural heritage and for the strengthening of existing structures*
Euripidis Mistakidis, Olympia Panagouli

07 Occupants and their interaction with the built environment related to Multisensorial and Indoor Environmental Quality

- 267 *Inclusive design and the multisensory interactions in public spaces for well-being of visually impaired people*
Samiha Boucherit, Luigi Maffei, Massimiliano Masullo
- 271 *Natural Ventilation Strategies in Buildings as Part of Indoor Air Quality and Healthy Environment*
Merve Coşar Güzel, Gülsu Ulukavak Harputlugil
- 276 *Compared spatial interpretations in the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art*
Alessandro Meloni
- 282 *Head Mounted Displays for lighting in Virtual Reality: Review on Measurements, Advances, and Limitations*
Ainoor Teimoorzadeh, Michelangelo Scorpio, Giovanni Ciampi, Sergio Sibilio
- 286 *The role of the subjective assessment in lighting research using virtual reality*
Michelangelo Scorpio, Davide Carleo, Martina Gargiulo, Pilar Chias Navarro, Yorgos Spanodimitriou, Parinaz Sabet, Giovanni Ciampi
- 292 *On the use of low-cost thermohygrometers for wearable application in the built environment*
Francesco Salamone, Giorgia Chinazzo, Ludovico Danza, Clayton Miller, Sergio Sibilio, Massimiliano Masullo

08 High Performance Components & Buildings

- 301 *Prefabricated movable modular building solutions exploiting renewable sources: energy systems review*
Luigi Maffei, Antonio Ciervo, Dorian Diodato, Antonio Rosato

- 307 *Second-skin façades and usage of textile materials in the building envelope: literature review, limitations, and future opportunities*
Niloufar Mokhtari, Giovanni Ciampi, Yorgos Spanodimitriou, Sergio Sibilio
- 314 *A research on thermal defects in building envelopes for mid-rise houses to develop retrofit strategies: a case study in Sivas/Turkey*
Ahmet Ethem Çulcuoğlu, Timuçin Harputlugil
- 320 *Review of 3D Printing in Architecture: applications, limitations, and future developments*
Giovanni Ciampi, Yorgos Spanodimitriou, Michelangelo Scorpio
- 329 *From climate change to the development of adaptive building envelope*
Evelyn Grillo
- 335 *Advanced manufacturing processes for emergent architectural systems*
Michela Musto

09 Public policies for inclusive and sustainable cities

- 343 *The environment: from limit to economic opportunity*
Scilla Vernile
- 346 *The role of sustainable disclosure and reporting in the public administration: the AdSP case of the western Ligurian sea*
Floriana Pollio
- 350 *The impact of COVID-19 on Piedmont Circular Economy policy roadmap*
Cecilia Padula, Silvia Barbero
- 355 *Urban regeneration through an integrated urban planning approach: towards a new paradigm. The Italian experience*
Laura Pergolizzi
- 359 *Brand urbanism and future scenario to promote sustainable buses public transport. A case study*
Benedetta Terenzi
- 366 *Common goods: an instrument for citizen inclusion and urban regeneration*
Marco Francesco Errico

10 Re-shaping planning approaches, tools and processes for a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient future

- 373 *Museum and the Community: a case of Participatory Intervention of an Old Community in Shanghai*
Penghan Wu, Yedian Cheng
- 378 *Improving learning capacity to enhance resilience: the community engagement process in the RI.P.RO.VA.RE. Project*
Adriana Galderisi, Giuseppe Guida, Giovanni Bello, Giada Limongi, Valentina Vittiglio
- 382 *To a sustainable redevelopment of illegal settlements*
Claudia de Biase, Salvatore Losco

- 387 *Spatial Planning and Energy Transition: The role of public participation*
Elisavet Thoidou, Miltiadis Toskas-Tasios
- 392 *Risk-connect: a secure and ecological path in the east side of the Vesuvius National Park*
Claudia Sorbo
- 397 *Cultural Heritage in Resilience Planning: Evidence from 100 Resilient Cities Database*
Deniz Altay-Kaya, Damla Yeşilbağ
- 401 *A framework for socio-ecological urban co-design: Lessons from two urban parks in the Atacama Desert*
Macarena Gaete Cruz, Aksel Ersoy, Darinka Czischke, Ellen Van Bueren
- 409 *Spas, new possible scenarios for human and city's well-being*
Adriana Figurato

11 Beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive places: the role of appraisal and evaluation

- 415 *Nomad Management of Urban Development: the complex value of temporary communities*
Maria Cerreta, Chiara Mazzarella, Hilde Remoy
- 419 *The value of change: towards social impact assessment in Scampia*
Luciano Lauda, Fabiana Forte
- 424 *Pays Aimables: visual storytelling and landscape values*
Adriana Ghersi, Silvia Pericu, Federica Delprino, Stefano Melli
- 429 *Evaluation issues of cultural heritage impact-led regeneration processes. The case of Italian inner areas*
Federica Cadamuro Morgante, Alessandra Oppio, Chiara Sumiraschi
- 433 *Con(temporary) urban regeneration processes and real estate market: evidence from the case of Milan*
Leopoldo Sdino, Francesca Torrieri, Marta Dell'Ovo, Marco Rossitti
- 438 *Turkey is the Leading Housing Producer in Europe with Dominating Equity Finance in Housing Transactions*
Ali Turel
- 442 *A Decision Aid and Social Impact Co-Assessment Approach for Urban Regeneration Processes*
Maria Cerreta, Ludovica La Rocca, Ezio Micelli
- 448 *Beauty as value: evaluation issues in the NEB perspective*
Fabiana Forte, Alessandra Oppio
- 451 *Creation of a Pseudo-Vernacular Architecture and the Unintentional Attainment of Sustainability: The Case of Akyaka Town Development*
Zeynep Çiğdem Uysal Ürey
- 457 *Using evaluation tools in urban regeneration processes*
Fabrizio Battisti, Giovanna Acampa, Mariolina Grasso

- 462 *Unesco heritage and spatial analysis in a GIS environment*
Fabiana Guerriero, Rosa De Caro, Gennaro Pio Lento

12 Design for Sustainable & Safe Communities

- 469 *Slowork, room with view. Behaviors, Heritage, Design for new lifestyles*
Francesca Castanò, Luigi Maffei, Raffaella Marzocchi, Maria Dolores Morelli
- 475 *Living Hub: setting up a living lab for Simulation based Design activities*
Niccolò Casiddu, Claudia Porfirione, Annapaola Vacanti, Francesco Burlando, Isabella Nevoso
- 481 *S.I.A.R.C. Sustainable Improvement for Aerial Rescue and Control*
Patrizia Ranzo, Nicola Corsetto, Francesco Fittipaldi
- 486 *Sustainable design in urban renewal: a case study of waterfront landscape shared infrastructure of Shanghai, China*
Xiaowen Wu, Claudio Gambardella
- 491 *Beyond current limits: building occupants and climate change*
Timuçin Harputlugil, Pieter De Wilde
- 496 *Design for sustainable behavior: strategies for understanding behavior change*
Wellington Minoru Kihara, Aguinaldo dos Santos, Ana Lucia Zandomeneghi, Alexandre de Oliveira
- 500 *Analyzing sustainability of green product certification systems using indicators of sustainable product*
Gülser Çelebi, Meron Belay
- 504 *Building Trust to Level 4 Autonomous Trucks for Environmental Sustainability and Road Safety*
Ayça Odabaşı Uyanık

13 For Nature / With Nature: new sustainable design scenarios

- 511 *Game Experience: A Fun Form of Cultural Sustainability*
Güniz Sağocak, Gülru Mutlu Tunca
- 518 *ADHEREND - Research and teaching design on the integration of old and new urban spaces*
Feifei Song
- 524 *Sustainability in the 3D printing of housing and settlements codesign processes*
Fabio Naselli, Anna Yunitsyna, Claudio Gambardella, Valentina Sapio
- 531 *A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality*
Chiara Lorenza Remondino
- 536 *Collaborative services as trigger for a sustainable culture: two case studies*
Claudia Morea, Sofia Collacchioni, Francesca Falli, Chiara Rutigliano
- 543 *Revived Vintage objects: Designing and Recycling as a bridge connecting Period Products to contemporary functions*
Giulio Giordano

- 548 *Nature-based design methods and practices for bathing activities sustainability*
Ivo Caruso, Vincenzo Cristallo
- 554 *Design for social innovation: a proposal for an holistic design approach*
Mario Bisson, Stefania Palmieri, Alessandro Ianniello, Luca Botta, Riccardo Palomba
- 558 *Beyond the XX century's object: 12 keywords from the international design scenery*
Francesca La Rocca
- 564 *Design for and with visual impairments through 3D printing: a case study from the covid-19 pandemic*
Alessia Romani, Federica Mattiuzzo, Marinella Levi
- 571 *Design and craftsmanship for urban regeneration*
Simona Ottieri

14 Next Consciousness. Fashion innovative scenarios, processes, and products

- 579 *Metamorphosis with(in) fashion: futuring through a new fashion design framework*
Elisabetta Cianfanelli, Margherita Tufarelli, Maria Claudia Coppola
- 584 *DENIM_DECONSTRUCTION. Industrial garments/random garments. Up-cycling processes*
Carlos Campos, Alessandra Cirafici
- 590 *New bio-based textiles productions increasing new circular economy models*
Maria Antonietta Sbordone, Carmela Ilenia Amato, Alessandra De Luca, Venere Merola
- 598 *Alginate Materials for Circular Fashion: from Consumptive to Regenerative Systems*
Sabrina Lucibello, Lorena Trebbi
- 603 *Smart jewels for inclusive fashion*
Patrizia Marti, Annamaria Recupero
- 609 *Platforms, algorithms, and new media in the prosumer era. The evolution of tailored production in Fashion and Cosmetic field*
Rosanna Veneziano, Michela Carlomagno
- 614 *Seven Bodies. Parametric design dialogues around the body*
Chiara Scarpitti, Flavio Galdi
- 621 *Linen Storylines in Procida. From memory to con“temporary” project, between diffusion of knowledge and sharing of practices*
Ornella Cirillo, Andrea Chiara Bonanno, Caterina Cristina Fiorentino, Roberto Liberti, Giulia Scalera
- 626 *New scenarios of conscious fashion system*
Valentina Alfieri
- 632 *Designing a Conscious Fashion Experiences: strategies for Generation Z*
Cristina Marino, Sara Bellini
- 638 *Futurable fashion state of mind. Sustainable projects and theories for new fashion system scenarios*
Maria D'Uonno

642 *Responsible Italian Fashion. An open brand for sustainability in fashion*
Giulia Scalera

648 *Collaborative sustainable innovation improving inclusiveness and value adding capabilities*
Dalia Gallico



BAL 22
ROUNDTABLE

659 *Introduction. The Future of Sustainable Fashion*
Aguinaldo dos Santos

660 *Positive impact of fashion: value system beyond consumption and improving design processes*
Anikò Gàl

662 *The future of Sustainable Fashion. Interview with Anna Pellizzari, Materially*
Emma Gambardella

664 *The future of work in fashion from the perspective of technologies: a prospective study*
Janice Accioly Ramos Rodrigues

666 *Fast to Slow. New visions for the future of conscious fashion system*
Valentina Alfieri, Silvestro Di Sarno



BAL 22
CONFERENCE

671 Universities

672 Patronages

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676 Scientific Committee

680 DADI Organizing Committee

681 Venue

684 Services Companies

685 Program



A renewed poetic practice. Rethinking the role of packaging design to boost New Normality

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Abstract

Packaging is a complex artifact characterized by the subtle balance between safety, protection, innovation, communication, and sustainability. There are different perspectives from which this artifact can and must be considered, first of all, the traditional meaning that considers it an object with specific operational and performance features.

From these brief premises, this contribution stems from a reflection of the controversial relationship between form and function, investigating the contemporary need - New Normal - to totally rethink action-research and design practice, in favour of a more communicative, experiential, and poetic design. A design that today must also take advantage of technology and digital resilience to pro-actively respond to the emergency.

Keywords

Packaging, Design, Technology, Poetics, New Normal

1. Introduction and scenario

Whether it is definitively the so-called New Normal, we still cannot know.

The complex contemporary scenario has distinguished a packaging sector particularly prone to growth and innovation; particularly resilient especially given the recent regulatory updates relating to the introduction of specific environmental labels, or given the new environmental investments through so-called corrective taxes. Among the key points of the discussion, then, we must mention a specific attention for the conversion of the economy in a more circular sense - green economy - taken as a supporting objective, to be translated into a skillful mix of provisions regarding the availability of necessary resources and infrastructures, incentives and measures to contribute to the reduction of pollution of the terrestrial and marine environment, and last but not least, all the strategies and action lines on social inclusion and accessibility policies starting from an intersectoral approach.

At the same time, statistical surveys qualify the packaging artifact - from the point of view of the final consumer - one of the discriminating factors when purchasing a product, to the point that approximately 60% of Italians will increase the choice of products with sustainable packaging and 28% believes it is necessary to have devices capable of informing oneself correctly and changing daily consumption habits in a greener perspective. This is because, the post-lockdown consumers are already recalibrating their lifestyle, requiring that most of the services of the pandemic era become - officially and definitively - the new normal (Nomisma 2021).



Fig 1. Black-figured amphorae (The British Museum, 2022)

2. Form and function: a controversial relationship

At this point, the question arises spontaneously. The sector in question has shown to own a particularly proactive attitude and thus be able to deal with global restrictions and difficulties that go beyond the design of a simple container. This sector has seen and often has been able to manage the opening to unprecedented opportunities, in the direction of a new literacy that is involving the entire packaging sector as well as the role of the project in the strict sense. But in the new normality, is the concept and the intrinsic meaning of the packaging function (Ciravegna, 2010) - in its most traditional sense - still a value that can distinguish us, as designers? Isn't it outdated, as it is anachronistic, to consider packaging as an operational aid in the first place? Wouldn't it simply be unusual to buy or receive a packaging not able to contain?

The controversial relationship between form and function, between content and container, is very ancient history. There are actually many cases in which the packaging has failed, for one reason or another, to perform its primary functions, namely those of protecting, maintaining, and containing. One among them is the striking case of the Franklin expedition. We are in 1845 when the British officer J. Franklin started the expedition aimed at discovering the controversial north-west passage. Two ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*. Two sturdy, well-equipped, state-of-the-art ships. Inside there was canned food sufficient for years, and for all the crew. The decision to supply the ships from a discounted supplier, however, was fatal. The more than eight thousand packs ordered were sealed with lead solder, solder later defined as "crude and coarse", to the point that some of the lead-contaminated the food, causing illness and death of practically all the crew. Little is known about the two ships, or rather the disappearance of the Franklin expedition. However, much richer is the scenario that has seen – over the centuries - poetic performance as an element, perhaps an anthropological tool, fundamental to living and habit. Think of the vases of ancient Greece: they were designed to narrate the myths of the gods, to bring people together - through the spontaneity of religious sentiment. Only later they were used to safely store the olives [fig. 1]. This contribution - based on concrete practices and best practices - is



Fig 2. Her / She campaign for International Women's Day (BETC Sao Paulo Agency, 2021)

proposed as a reflection and review - in a broad sense - of the Sullivanian legacy, highlighting the contemporary need to rethink the overall practice of the project, in favor of a more - however not exclusively - poetic, experiential and technological design. A conversion in favor and also in support of the emergency.

3. A renewed and technological poetic practice

But what does it mean to reconsider the continuous research and above all the design practice towards the exploration of what we can define the new forms of technological poetry?

Thus we come to talk, in the setting of the New European Bauhaus (NEB), of exploration in the field of storytelling and historytelling, research of social impact, qualification of new ways of interaction and augmented reality, of multiverse and creativity. Furthermore, of the birth of e-commerce services increasingly oriented to the final consumer, simple and at the same time experiential (from social commerce to voice shopping, to name a few), of the importance of traceability in terms of accessibility, authenticity, and safety, and the upstream application of the design of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Shopify, 2022). Recalling that what has really changed today is the level of consumer expectations; increasingly critical, demanding and resilient consumers, who will ask for sustainable experiences and artefacts no longer as a passing phenomenon, but as a basic rule. As a convention (Bucchiatti, 2020).

From these opportunities, the packaging sector today finds itself appealing to the intrinsic and characterizing capacity of digital and environmental resilience on the one hand, and of the "new normal customers" on the other, qualifying a systemic approach applied to sustainable innovation which sees the new technological possibilities as a fundamental design input. Hence the importance of a "naturally" qualitative output; an output that finds its answer in the creative capacity as an aid to enable new



Fig 3. Sustainable Sports Drinks and packaging with integrated AR experience (Barcode, 2022)

educational practices, tangible and shared. Practices fundamental to inclusion as opposed to exclusion, in favour of uniqueness in response to diversity [fig. 2]. Practices helpful to create a sense of belonging, to create community [fig. 3].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, taking up what was stated in the book "La costruzione dell'interazione: il ruolo della narrazione nel processo dell'interaction design" (The construction of interaction: the role of narration in the process of interaction design): "The process of construction of the interaction is based on a relationship capable of understanding the needs of the person and the implications of the use of technologies, opens the way to a visible narrative that becomes an integral part not only of the use but of the very relationship that is established with artifacts and services" (Di Salvo, 2020).

In this scenario, design is proposed as a flexible and dynamic tool for interpreting the transformations of today's society and today social challenges: cultural value, a tool for enhancing skills, a mediator of needs, a tool for always tracing new routes in terms of sustainable innovation, inclusion and accessibility. Still, a tool for exploring new contexts and for reading social and cultural changes (Germak, 2008). A design capable of renewing the value of human connections as a primary need for people in the New Normal. As a tool and method to bring the person back to the center of design practice - also - through technology. Still, as a process mediator, able to use technology to democratize the project - the packaging - and to establish value creation processes based on aggregative dynamics (Ranzo & al., 2017).

We thus speak of a renewed centrality of human beings enclosed in the assumptions of digital humanism, as the only and discriminating way to qualify the transdisciplinary approach useful for facing the challenges that this historical moment presents to us. A way to re-embrace a design process in the context of – once again – poetic packaging.



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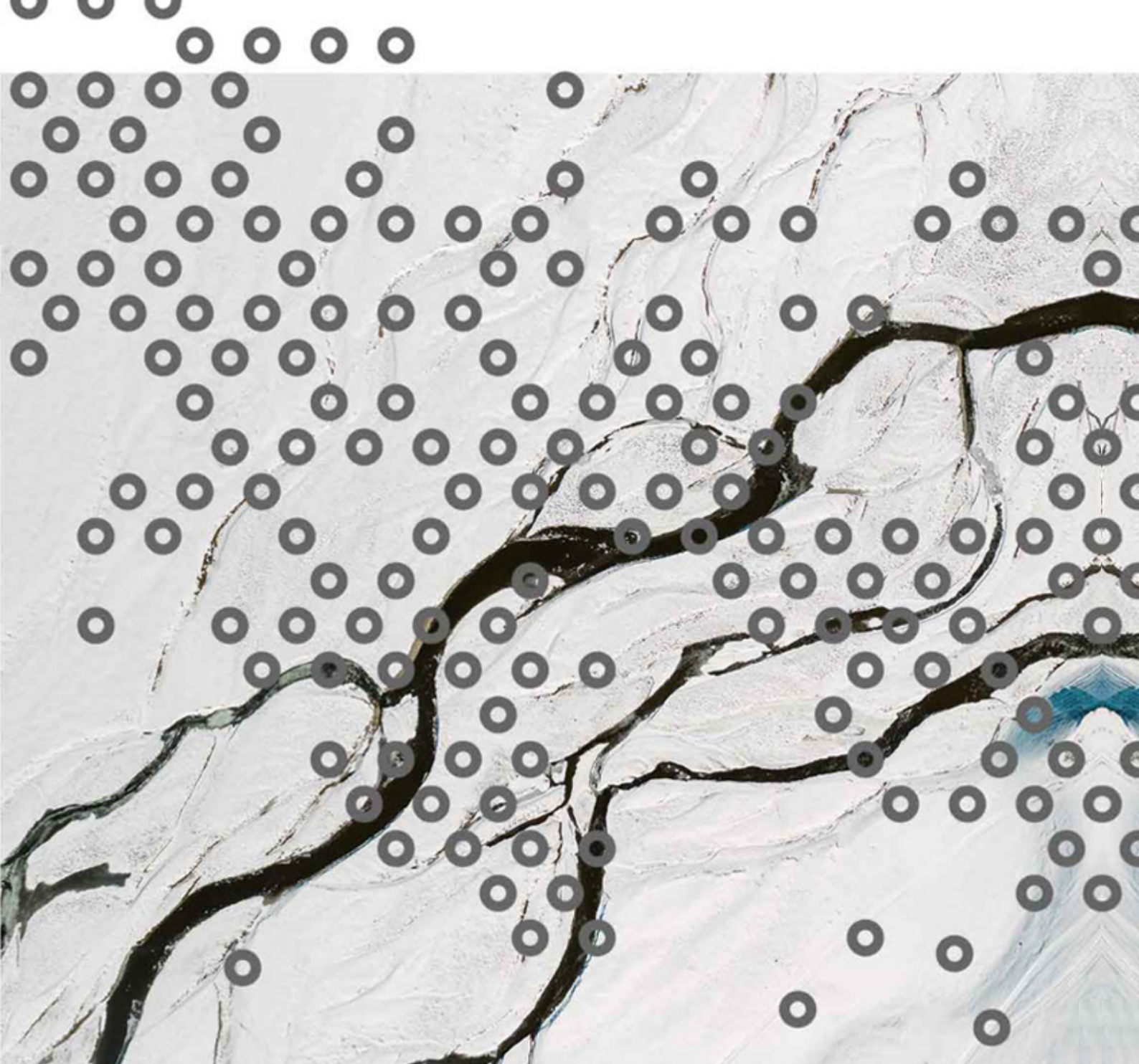
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