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Changing the change proceedings

Edited by
Carla Cipolla
Pier Paolo Peruccio

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Changing the Change
Design, Visions, Proposals and Tools
Proceedings

Edited by Carla Cipolla (Politecnico di Milano), Pier Paolo Peruccio (Politecnico di Torino)

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Changing the change
DESIGN VISIONS PROPOSALS AND TOOLS

Crafts_Community_Design

The strategic role of design to promote local production systems

Claudia De Giorgi[1], Claudio Germak[2]

Abstract

Design can connect Crafts and Communities. Case studies from the Piedmont's region offer the opportunity to discuss roles, modalities and exportability of the model as a global/local action. Crafts, Community and Design are the three key-word to describe various design driven actions in relation to a community. Process design, in its strategic and productive forms is the medium.

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Introduction

Critical are the relations between communities and actuality, with serial and standard production methods which are now breaking on through, while trying to organise their territories. We have to go beyond the aesthetics to address the current conditions of where we live and the possibilities to build, in a globalized age, a production economy that is worthy being called culture. In sum, the stakes are the possibility to get a connection between a community, its material culture and the working procedures this community makes use of, in order to make its own living.

Objectives

The Objectives are:

- definition of approach models to typical crafts that represent diverse material cultures
- definition of accepted protocols of initiatives in agreement with the community
- definition of strategies and sustainable processes to provide this sector with autonomy, far from institutions constant assistance.

Crafts

Manufatto: manually made or even manufactured? The question might seem meaningless today, given that any craftsman, whether dealing with technology or with art, makes use of advanced technologies and works on products that were created thanks to the contribution of technology and machineries, not just one but many of them, far from the factory where each worker had his/her own task and apparatus.

In his essay *Éloge de la main*,1934, Henry Focillon claims that the hand is a universal symbol of basic men's work, *"... it grabs, it can even create, we would say it is thinking"*.

It is the tenet on which the importance of modern crafts is based: adaptation and diversification, in contrast to the standardisation of serial production. Tools, later turned into machines, have always been used to ease labor. That was precisely the task of the original lathe for woodworking in Strona Valley at the beginning of 19th century.

Riccardo Dalisi writes that *"...the hand comes from the heart: each impulse of ours activates arms and hands. Our hand is between us and the sky, between the heart and the stars. With their own two hands, people have changed the world and Giordano Bruno used to say that without the hands there would have never been any civilization."*

Our contemporary society is keen on rediscovering values in manual production and in the creation of unique pieces and, as such, it cannot discard traditional objects even in a technological future.

Crafts, the "typical and artistic" objects which we are dealing with today and which are the main topic of this research, still play an essential role in society.

They are key in a process that aims at strengthening traditional and sentimental values thus fostering a sense of belonging as well. In so doing, they attest to the central role of community and material culture.

One difficulty is to define whether these processes depend on historical and/or productive contexts.

Traditional crafts typically oscillate between isolation and reaching out to communities: this is on account of the excessive power of industrial markets and leads the system to copy its models, as long as it can. It finds comfort, however, as the market proves, in that its range of quality, reliable and long-lasting products, is keyed into direct relationships, often trough a friendship relationship with the customer.

These relationships get consolidated from generation to generation; the customer expects full responsibility from the craftsman, from the design to the maintenance of the product, and, honoured by this privileged relationship, he or she will always call the craftsman "master".

Yet typical craftsmen often complain about that when the demand decreases, as it happens, this is due to the competitiveness of serial products, as the latter are supported by a distribution chain that craftsmen cannot replicate, and a level of technological updating that a crafts workshop is not fit for.

Hence we get to the ill state of crafts: the one in which craftsmen, “try to get things done” as it is commonly said, by imitating the products that apparently rule the market, thus losing their local and special production identity. This should be the starting point for policies in support of crafts, from where to propose effective strategies.

This analysis also invites to bring the figure of the craftsman into focus.

He is originally an author and an independent figure in every specific process, very susceptible, mistrustful of his own community and third parties’ advice. Yet he acts as a mediator between material culture and innovation for the whole community.

He is not ambiguous by any means, and the analysis of the crafts system proposed in the latest conference on this theme, conversely painted a portrait of craftsman with many different facets. This is obviously not unprecedented: these taxonomies date back to the early eighties, and Enzo Mari explored them amply with a book and exhibition entitled "*Dove è l'artigiano*"- Where the craftman is (1981). Andrea Branzi also followed this avenue of research, while Ugo di Pietra carried out a series of fieldwork experiments .

More in particular, some craftmen profiles can be delineated:

The artist-craftsman. More keen on hands-on experiences rather than scholarly fabrications, Ugo la Pietra, who worked as a craftsman for long, describes the *artist-craftsman* figure as a creative person with manual skills, who cannot accept any role in the indefinite crafts sector, rejected both by art and design systems. In other words: an isolated figure.

The typical craftsman. It is the central figure for this research project; work carried out locally and with elements found on the field; he/she commands techniques, processes and languages but he/she merely reproduces past objects, without a specific project and he/she sometimes re-arranges its traditional image. A figure that has been often exploited by the touristy system of folkloristic street markets, that could not make any distinction between the independency of its own work and the will to create a community, an association, a consortium.

The industrial craftsman. He/she contributes to create an industrial product with parts that make the artefact more prestigious; or, as for Twergi, a collection of crafts products from Cusio Valleys and distributed by Alessi, which is a total substitute for the industrial process, so that skilled craftsmen can work within the company itself and focus on a part of the production chain creating a serial, more than industrial, product.

The technical craftsman. At the beginning he/she is in charge of the production of special and complex parts of projects, based on someone else’s design. Then, he/she turns out to be a service provider (models and prototypes) for the industrial system, companies and designers as well. Now he/she is interested in a new dimension: the realization of highly technological products (as for lighting technology) using serial parts, sold on the market but that can be assembled according to a person’s necessities.

The luxury craftsman. He/She works in specific sectors (jewellery, fashion, old books, restoration of precious works) where the manufacturing skills must be proportioned to the value of the artefact. Considering this highly differentiated scenario, with the preservation of some interactions, the research project presents some examples of shared action which are different in their approach, for their processes, productive and economic contexts, results and time constrains.

These regional examples have one thing in common: they are the expression of an entire community and not of a single craftsman.

Community

It may seem odd to talk about community after suggesting that one of the most important characteristics of being a craftsman is being the author and maker of the whole process, from design to product. This problem is addressed differently by those, institutions and researchers for example, who do care about crafts. Actions like Piedmont's Regional Council establishment of a brand of "*Eccellenza Artigiana-that is* Best Crafts Production" has a twofold purpose:

- it is centered on craftsmen's satisfaction, by including him/her in the most popular system.
- It satisfies the public as well, as the label confirms the quality they expect to find in a product. This is not of minor importance, conversely it is a much needed desideratum.

On a different note, processes are different if they move from the quality brand outward so as to crate a community. The actions we are interested in are bottom-up movements, with the starting point in crafts, as our research proposes. Craftsmen who gather around to form associations, consortiums, communities do not so because of any pending difficulty, but, as a craftsman from Varaita Valley used to say on his first ever community meeting *"because of the need to invest for future purposes when one can do it, not just during difficult times "*. Are we to believe him? The answer is yes, and this philosophy is in harmony with the basic rule of entrepreneurial activity.

The reasons why a craftsman needs a discussion with communities remain constant.

First, in forging relationships, communities are outlets from physical and cultural isolation, something which naturally affect craftsmen. The second reason lays in the pride of belonging to a category and sharing a project. The Italian traditional tendency to form associations, "guilds" in other words, clashes with hierarchical frameworks, and too bureaucratic and structured entities, incapable to meet individual needs. Furthermore, if the local community level enables a way to check what the others are doing, we must not forget that a certain degree of competitiveness among craftsmen is one of the system's main rules, while the association offers visibility, advertisement and ultimately communal strategies. This is the spirit according to which the main Italian and Piedmontese communities were born, even if they were initially concerned with funds allocating problems.

Communities need to share their opinions about projects, which cannot be invented. This requires an initial support from public institutions, as these initiatives must receive aid. There will not be any cultural benefit if there is no social and economic progress. Is the system sharing this vision? And, if so, to what extent?

According to François Burkhardt, crafts production methods can be re-launched on the base of recovered local identities. The problem is to match universal patterns with local culture and make them attractive. A well-known datum is helpful: a centrally planned monolithic culture, based on uniformity (industrialization), is immediately followed by a culture based on differentiation and specifity (post-industrialization). By all accounts, the opportunities are at hand .

If the community is considered as a crafts team, this is a way to present possible alternatives to serial and mass production; this will however create various responses from the craftsmen, ranging from envy to admiration.

It can be suggested that the solution is mass productions.

The "typical" crafts production can count on its own clientele, one which buys expensive but high-quality and valuable artefacts. The problem is how to reach to a wider public. The team must be investing in the research on its own origins, on projects and technology. It has to develop ideas which originate from the protection of local culture and collective interests. Schools are key in this perspective.

Design

This research assess the strategic role of design to promote the local production systems.

In particular, it presents actions related to "typical" crafts in Piedmont, where some craftsmen's communities have carried over traditions, skills and material cultures from generation to generation, despite rare occasions for innovation, visibility and market.

According to this vision, the research is the first step to investigate, analyse and promote possibilities to "create a system" where crafts, community and design coalesce.

Design, that could be the new way to "bind" them together, is the fil rouge of a tale that passes through the promotion of traditions (proper languages for local material), skills (product quality) and actions regarding the production chain.

Design plays different roles time after time: the most common is the "mediator" between the request for design by the craftsmen's community and crafts itself, when products lack a sort of identity or must be recovered (this is the case of Mondovì, Varaita Valley, Lanzo Valleys).

A more unusual role, however, is that of the "promoter" of researches generating new crafts communities or strengthening them (Turin-Marrakech, Cambiano Ecomuseum of clay, Cusio Valleys with Alessi-Twergi); and finally it is also the final target, in the close future, for local crafts productions that, once joined up in a community, can advance to the creation of a more robust identity or exportable (Castellamonte, Valenza) identity.

Some of the collaborations between craftsmen's communities and designers have created exportable models for the re-organization of processes and for the re-designing of products; some other analyse the interaction between cultures and movements towards sustainability (artefacts and food, artefacts and cultural goods ...); some others introduce environmentally-friendly solutions for the working process.

Some products are interesting because they originate from open projects, considered as "guide-lines" that the communities are free to interpret in synchrony with some shared rules: sustainable working protocols and market environments where the consumer is part of the cultural action.

Therefore the home district is the first customer for the typical crafts product: bars and restaurants, the offices of the institutional communities, shops of other typical products, like food, can be equipped with new products, thus becoming a showcase.

In the following part, a selection of case-studies in Piemonte region.

Valle Varaita

Community_DesignServiceCenter_Crafts

Craftsmen, associated to form a Community, and the local Authority make a request for Design and company assistance to re-launch local craftsmanship. The action consists of the creation of a Service Center for local and regional craftsmen.

Over 60 companies are now working with wood in Varaita Valley, mainly to manufacture furniture, doors and windows but also toys, coffins and music instruments (the famous harps by Salvi company), a supply chain system of companies cutting down trees, sawing, painting, carving, lacquering, restoring operations; they even transport and assemble furniture. An exceptional case in Piedmont and nominated Wood District in 2002 by the Regional Council of Piedmont, thanks also to the presence of a paper processing company (Cartiere Burgo) in Verzuolo.

The Valley is poised to exploit its traditional manufacturing processes again, in order to get a renovated identity for traditional wood crafts, by making use of more sustainable and technologically and culturally updated working procedures. In 1999, the local *Comunità Montana* (an association of the local alpine municipalities) in collaboration with Agenform - Consortium, was entitled to participate to a European economic project the main goals of which were technological amelioration and company logistics, activities that the Agenzia del Legno-Wood Agency was in charge of. The search for new sharable guide-lines for furniture that may combine tradition and sustainable working procedures, coordinated by the *Politecnico di Torino– Dipartimento di Progettazione Architettonica e di Disegno Industriale* –- Department of Architectural Planning and Industrial Design, and the discovery of new markets, by CSIL Centro Studi Industria Leggera – Study Center for Light Industry, provided the necessary analytical framework.

The turning point was in 2005, with the realization of a *Centro Servizi di Lavorazione Leggera del Legno* – Service centre for Light Woodworking. This center, the only on of this kind in Piedmont, was financed by European Structural Funds and it is set in an abandoned plant now organized as a campus. The area is 4,500 square meters including a manufacturing shop equipped with numerical control machines, a workshop in experimental design (with the collaboration of the Politecnico di Torino), a document center for Alpine furniture, classrooms, and finally, industrial incubators. Actually, 35 enterprises received *Eccellenza Artigiana* – Best Crafts Production brand by the Regional Council of Piedmont.

With the guidance of external advisors (Politecnico di Torino – DIPRADI for the design of new products, CSIL Milan per for marketing and distribution), in 2001 the Varaita Valley's community presented a selection of prototypes representing three new collections inspired by old styles, where design was combined with traditional material culture.

Thanks to a careful philological work, the original models were re-discovered, appropriated and illustrated. They were very different from the cliché, redundant *rustic furniture* made in pine-wood that was, somehow or another, the hallmark of the local production between the 60s and the 80s.

The old furniture in the high valley houses was extremely different, as it was influenced by a wide geographical and social area that could export and pass on typologies and languages, production and decoration processes. (In fact it is called transalpine furniture).

It is no coincidence that one of the new lines under the name of *Mezzolegno* include, (like the old wood joint technique), basic and small-sized furniture, where the main characteristics are being function and light. Prominence is also accorded to expressive details (visible joints, key-shaped elements, tension members, latch closures) as for the original models in mountain-shelters.

These furnitures were manufactured for a small series production so as to comply with the capabilities of producers from Varaita Valley. No craftsmen but small sized companies, set a

system which is open to evolution and easily usable in different home contexts, not just mountain houses.

On the contrary, the other two lines interpret *engraving and clipping* decoration systems*.*

In the first one, also called *Geometrical decoration*, the old crafts traditional engraving technique consisting of geometrical images and symbols is re-interpreted in technological terms. To do so, companies that could count on technologically advanced equipment (pantographs and numeric control machines), and Service Center, were asked to produce semi-manufactured products in solid wood with mill decorations representing enlarged transalpine symbolic themes; the panels that the craftsmen from Varaita Valley carefully assemble together.

In the second, called *Scontornatura (clipping),* the innovative idea is the re-interpretation of side decorations, a constant theme in Varaita Valley's style, to be used as a handle now, for the whole furniture. The result is a real catalogue, rich in updatable and interpretable references that was created with the aim to manufacture "expressive furniture, that can be produced on a modular basis".

A further differentiation in the production is provided by the use of solid wood, an extraordinary, changeable and living material, in its indigenous species (pine, cembran, larch, oak, cherry and walnut), not painted but treated with environmentally-friendly products only (water paints, oil, wax).

Valli di Lanzo

Community_Design_Crafts

A Community of craftsmen makes a request for Design, to give the typical local craftsmanship an identity

The history of Lanzo Valleys is one of lack of means, without any high-quality production, made up of old material cultures linked to the extraction of gneiss stone, woodworking (mainly regarding chestnut and coniferous wood) and iron working.

These activities were very flourishing in the past and now a few craftsmen continue the tradition so as to produce high-quality items that, however, are extremely similar to those produced in many other alpine valleys. This is why common goals are to be re-interpreted and a cultural and commercial reconfiguration is particularly needed.

The same craftsmen started considering this in 2005, when thirteen, now eighteen, units, which are now the High-Quality Piedmont's Crafts Products brand, formed the Artimont-*Associazione Artigiani di Montagna*- Montani Craftsmen's Association. They sought design to establish strategies, guide-lines and a new identity of Lanzo Valley's crafts.

This was the occasion to take the trditional items from those Valleys into consideration, thanks to a survey and some projects designed to support the craftsmen's community and encourage communication.

Design contribution consists of an analysis of the typical Valleys' processes, identifying their peculiar elements, strong points (the "distinguishing elements" with respect to similar working procedures in other alpine valleys) and weak points. It follows that an agenda based on "showcase products" must be included, thus advocating the following strategies:

The need to promote chestnut wood, an indigenous species which is difficult to manage (this knotty wood often cracks), is now evident, but has to be reconsidered according to the incentives (coming from the Regional Council of Piedmont) for chestnut growing in the Valleys; the expressive results of which are remarkable, where the "value of defect" is accepted. Also local companies are very helpful, in fact they are employing chestnut wood in a series of very

interesting ways - fiber processing methods that would eliminate the main defects for which it was bound to be a marginal and under-classed species: the fact it usually cracks, twists and releases tannins.

This is the first response to a Community project in favour of natural processes, to reduce working procedures and promote wood as a live material.

"Naturally", this is the temporary name for the experiment, provides products which are realized with *trunk sections and boards* looking as they were simply “sketched” or used just the way they are (for bookcase supports, for instance), with knots and parts of barks, but that may adopt new technologies (working procedures and treatments that could improve the results from poor materials).

So the level of attention is constantly high, interested in all the solutions, and in a cultural heritage that is recovered and reinterpreted in a very expressive manner: the collections of *mirrors*, minimally designed, supported by big *iron nails*, an enlarged simulation of what used to be a key - product for Lanzo Valley’s economy, where large quantities of nails were produced for a range of different uses and for military boots in particular; *hat stands and domestic accessories* in wrought iron whish are designed to look unsteady; *patchwork*, a technique that wood craftsmen are free to perform, by using the waste (fragments and small axis) to be carefully assembled, in accordance with the highly complex crafts manufacture processes and fulfilling the desire not to throw or burn anything away. The small wood, stone and ceramic objects are then used on the table and in the kitchen, created to promote local gastronomic products. These objects will be exposed in fairs, gastronomic shops, bars and Valley’s restaurants, according to a program that was drawn up together with institutions.

Valli del Cusio

IndustryDesign_Community_CraftsIndustry

Two entrepreneurs understand the Design (and Re-Design) potential for products coming from the Community’s material culture, then they commission craftsmen from Cusio Valleys with the task to manufacture and distribute them through the channels of a famous Company.

Twergi is a brand involving a large community of carpenters, carvers and cabinet-makers from the Alpine Valleys in North Piedmont; Valle Strona, Cusio and Mottarone in particular. A craftsmen’s community that has always worked to produce household and work objects with two manufacturies that had the ability to disseminate their products beyond local borders.

The first firm was Piazza Battista, founded in 1865 in Loreglia. It then moved to Pettenasco in 1888, after the mill the original factory were torn down by a heavy snowfall It thus began to get a wider range of craft products, including mainly lathe products such as pepper-grinder, mortars, coffee grinder, grater, bowls, and pots. The company with the Twergi image in its catalogues (the gnome of Walser legends) kept on working untill Ubaldo Piazza’s death, in 1972, the year the company closed down. But in 1989 a second factory, Officina Alessi, leader company in the area of Cusio and a giant in Italian design by and large, rescued the firm’s fortune by restarting the activity., in agreement with the founder’s great-grand-children.

Since that year, thanks to Alberto Alessi’s passion, the small wood or wood/metal objects (another kind of material constituting sinks and household objects, the main products for the flourishing economy of Cusio-Verbano-Ossola district) have been styled by great designers according to the spirit of Twergi and produced by the turners from Strona valley, coordinated by Piazza Battista, Alessi’s supply company for Twergi products. The products were included in the Alessi catalogue and, thanks to the company’s large distribution capabilities, they reached the whole world and they smelled like different kinds of local wood as pear-tree wood, apple-tree

wood and cherry-tree wood, and were as resistant as alder-tree and walnut-tree wood and the as fresh as beechtree wood.

These are Objects which attest to an alpine material culture that has always been shared by a whole community whose special attention for high quality production has always been remarkable. These are basic objects in technological terms, but they preserve details and features that time has not changed and if anything, improved.

Alessi, a company which is strongly connected to is roots, has made a very important choice for the current economic craft landscape. It proves that craft activities may combine with industrial processes and strategies for the future, through design mediation. In this case, craft production could be a crucial element for the industrial sector, in order to set a new global position on the market, and craft activities could also find a way to abandon the culture of dependence, at last.

Turin/Marrakesh

Design_Crafts_Community

A Designer believed that his passion for Maroccan craftsmanship could be turned into an initiative for a new inter-cultural Community of Italian and Moroccan designers in conjunction with Moroccan craftsmen.

The invitation made by Milli Paglieri in 1995 to Italian and Moroccan designers to (re)interpret Arab living style (lights, textures, furniture, decorations…) was the starting point for an intercultural project on expressiveness and semantics, materiality, and the will to recover the old Moroccan working techniques to produce the items of Hafa Collection. A collection to be “Ethnical” but immediately “cross-breed”. “Double” objects – simple and complex, spontaneous and cultivated because they inform social history and material culture.

Hafa Collection was born in 1998: some Italian and Moroccan designers and artists (Manolo De Giorgi, Marco Ferreri, Lorenzo Prando e Riccardo Rosso, Italo Rota, Jeannot Cerutti, Karim El Achak, Farid Belkahaia, Elie Mouyal, Mohamed Nabili, Charles Boccara, Massimo Morozzi, Guido Drocco, Paola Navone) were asked by Milli Paglieri to re-interpret Arabic furniture and accessories with western taste.

A real and virtual artists’ community altogether, some members of which were close and others very far away, having discussions on the best products of Moroccan crafts, one of the richest and liveliest production in African and Mediterranean areas, and studying their potential over national borders.

The Marrakech’s branch office is in charge of the objects made in Morocco – Babnet Sarl, founded in 1997 with an office in the craft district of Sidi Youssef Ben Ali, a part of the city that was consistently improved thanks to traditional craft activities that, now thanks to Hafa is becoming an on-line community.

The fieldwork conducted by Babnet consists in contracting out a number of craftsmen, finding agreements on the production and organizing it in their workshops, supporting craftsmen on the different steps of their work, and finally carrying out the quality tests on their products.

Most objects are drawing-based: the result is a mix but is never the same twice, moving from the designer’s open contribution to the craftsman’s ability to interpret a project where they are free to express their skills.

The following step, granted by Babnet, is the possibility to have tailor-made productions in every sector of Moroccan crafts, to develop drawings and projects according to the customer’s request and to cope with big orders, assuring a short-term final delivery.

The goods arrive in Turin's stocks in a few days, and they are subsequently dispatched to different destinations. In Turin the Hafa Collection products are sold in the Hafa Space, adjacent to Hafa Café, a popular milieu in the Old Roman district of Turin. There one can taste both European and Maghreb food and drinks, sitting on traditional Moroccan dining chairs and reading books on Arabic literature and history; it also organizes Arabic language and cooking courses, live music evenings and meetings to promote the culture of Maghreb. In 2001 the Hafa Hammam Collection was born; in 2006 the Hafa Hammam was opened within the prestigious NH Santo Stefano hotel in Turin, in the heart of the old city.

Mondovi'

Community_Design_Crafts

The local Community, formed by craftsmen and local authority, makes a request for Design to explore new directions to re-launch typical local craftsmanship.

In the Mondovì area, the heritage left by the ceramic production is quite conspicuous. Now picked up again by locals through different types of products, it finds applications in a wide range of media such as the re-elaboration of traditional decorative patrimony of the 19th century, clay works, training centres, and finally, important public and private collections.

Collectors, decorators and heirs of the entrepreneurs of this specific field were the first who worked on the creation of a common awereness which could give more value to this ceramic heritage. Hard work paid dividends and resulted in the release of the first book entitled "The old Mondovì ceramics" by Carlo Baggioli in 1972, followed by an exhibition the following year.

In 2006, an agreement called Manufatto Monregalese between the municipalities of the former industrial district was signed, but including also also the Municipality of Mondovì, which granting the Community requests, has been strongly committed to providing value to its ceramic heritage. This commitment will result in the building of a museum dedicated to the Old Mondovì ceramics which will open its doors in 2009.

It is therefore essential to renew the role, the outlook and the identity of the typical Mondovì ceramics. Thanks to various cultural and experimental initiatives, such as the research project which is being carried out by the Politecnico di Torino – Industrial design course – this will be possible. The course is in fact oriented toward the exploration of the first possible forms, functions and expressions through which the Mondovi ceramics will challenge themselves in the world of renewal.

In 2006 the cooperation between the municipality of Mondovì and the Politecnico di Torino - Industrial design course, academic year 2005-2006, started. As many as 150 students, coordinated by the speaker and Gabriel Adriano, were involved in the project.

By combining tradition with the new functional characteristics required by home furniture, around 40 objects were created to demonstrate the potential of the Mondovì ceramics. These projects were also the starting point for further considerations, research and deeper re-designing actions. The proposals of the students are products rich in memory and meaning, that could be produced at reasonable prices using the local traditional techniques or by starting from semi-finished existing products.

The students were highly synthetic and selective. The identity features of the ceramics could be summarized in the following elements:

one colour: blue

one form: dish

one subject (if there is one): rooster

one decoration: lace

main function: eating

An expert in traditional ceramics would be quite surprised by the disappearance of the rich decorative elements made up of animals, flowers, landscapes and characters of many different bright colours. Design had to choose the best decoration in order to strengthen the shift. As a consequence only the rooster, the most distinguishing mark in the Mondovì ceramics, is able to survive, even though sometimes the rooster is nothing more than a blue imprint marking a rapid passing.

The cobalt blue laces, which according to traditions used to decorate dishes, are made with carved sponges; they become the true features of most of the products, sometimes by exaggerating their dimensions, sometimes by reducing their presence.

Through new products, Mondovì ceramics has to cooperate considerably in order to integrate the rich local food and wine sectors, and by complying with the contemporary rituals of the consumers (food and wine tasting, happy hours…). Their role must be finessed however, to contribute to the esthetics of modern domestic space (creating or evoking relaxing ambiences, enjoying moments of conviviality...) and of the outside world (feasts, fairs or relaxing surrounded by nature). The Community becomes therefore the key to promote the typical local handicrafts, thus becoming also also become the first customer: bars, restaurants, institutional bodies, shops selling other typical products such as food and wine shops, for instance which can become the starting point for promotion.

Cambiano

Design_Crafts_Community

A Designer styles and self-manufactures handicrafts in his own furnace; this experience becomes the springboard to create an Ecomuseum working to share a culture and create a new Community of Craftsmen.

The “pioneer” is Cesario Carena, architect and furnace operator who, when employed for the construction of the new furnace, started considering clay as an expressive material to design furniture in the 80s. Carena thinks of clay and of his childhood places in his own terms, fascinated by the creative possibilities that the non-working furnace provides, which is in fact an infinite supply of raw material and interesting semi-manufactured products, and by the working furnace as well.

The individual’s experience soon turns to be, in the 90s, a group’s adventure: it includes the architects/designers Guido Drocco, Luca Barello and Simone Carena and also a former employee of the brick factory, Romano Bravo, collaborating for prototype production and small productions.

The group plays with clay peculiarities (the starting size and shrinked size after baking clay, shapes, cracks, clay powder, colours, consistency, baking phase, waste) and deepens the research on the role and identity of industrial clay products (bricks, quarries, roof tiles, briquettes, etc.), and on the possibility to use them for construction sector.

Moving from a small objects to big ones, the semi-manufactured products, part of a “product-based system”, with new additional expressive and emotional values, gain new dignity and become even more valuable.

Some new series of furniture were born thanks to the work group, one of them was “Fornace&Officina” – Fornace and Shop, the main prerogative of which was to use only elements from the construction sector: industrial clay products, iron rods to reinforce concrete, shadow

gaps and metal sheets. “rude” and poetic products that led to a renovation of clay craft products and thus promotin the unexpressed potential of that material.

The group eventually founded the association La Fornace Spazio Permanente in 1993 and bean to inform the public about their work experiences through articles and publications in specialist magazines and exhibitions/events in the evocative environment of the furnace. The Hoffmann type clay burner room where the clay products were baked was turned into a show-room to display the prototype collections, which found vast consens from the public.

The following step, in 1999, was the creation of a small craft company, Clayart, to produce, special-order, and sell selected product lines, starting from prototypes.

However the goals were more and more ambitious. The association took up a project to recover the consumed part of the clay pit; anticipating the legal norms, they invested part of their revenues to transform the consumed clay pit, thanks to the advise of a group of hydraulic engineers, agronomists, landscape architects. In so doing they recreated salt marsh ecosystems, typical of the local countryside.

The real investiture of this project, however, came about in 2000 with the foundation the Munlab-Ecomuseum of the Clay, project, supported by the Provincial Council of Turin and the Regional Council of Piedmont.

A second generation of specialists and enthusiasts altogether was to be involved thus according the association new perspectives. This new combination of material and local components gave birth to a new education-based group. In the meantime, the local *Proloco* (local associations aiming at promoting their district) associations and entrepreneurs were now the essential actors to organize complex events and projects.

The Ecomuseum was created and developed to be used as an open archive, a meeting place, an experimental and collaboration workshop where one could research industrial and craft clay products production and local “know-how”, by and large.

Next case studies that we have the aim to develop:

Valenza

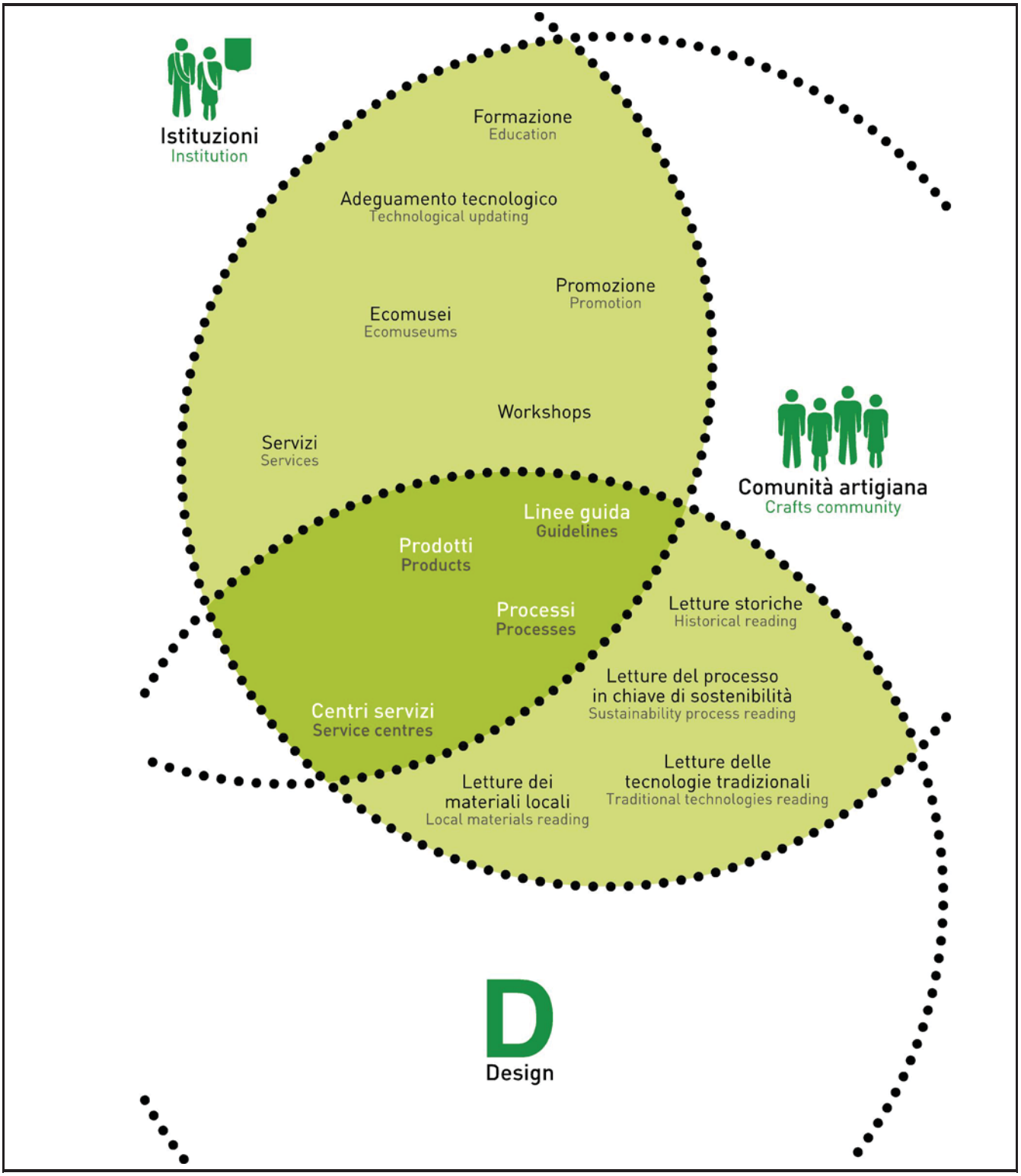
Crafts_Community_Design

Craftsmen get together in the new Community for Valenza’s Brand, to improve the traditional identity of jewelry making. Design could introduce this research into the process in a more analytical way, thanks to an open strategic project.

Castellamonte

Crafts_Design_Community

Where Crafts live based on a true icon, the ceramic stove, Design could give its contribution to exploit the market potential, perception and demand, through a new Community of companies interpreting different aspects of the same open project.


Istituzioni
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Adeguamento tecnologico
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Promozione
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Ecomusei
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Workshops
Servizi
Services
Comunità artigiana
Crafts community
Linee guida
Guidelines
Prodotti
Products
Processi
Processes
Letture storiche
Historical reading
Letture del processo
in chiave di sostenibilità
Sustainability process reading
Centri servizi
Service centres
Letture delle
tecnologie tradizionali
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Local materials reading
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Design

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